Integrating CSS in Planning and Project Development

CSS Quick Facts – Project Description

Defining CSS

Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility.

Introduction

Nationally there has been considerable success in the implementation of individual CSS activities, particularly within the project development process as it relates to highway design and incorporation of multimodal options; but few state DOTs have fully integrated CSS into the planning process. To maximize success, CSS principles must be integrated into the full range of planning processes (long range, area wide, sub area and corridor) that feed and inform project development. This is implicit in the concept of CSS, and has been a driving force in the broadening of the concept from context sensitive *design* into context sensitive *solutions*. CSS is not just a matter of adjusting physical designs, but should take a broad perspective on the range of solutions addressing mobility, social, and environmental issues within a community and region.

Integrating CSS requires that transportation agencies understand and manage both agency-wide organizational change and implement specific changes that impact policies, processes, functional areas, and relationships. Therefore State DOTs that want to accelerate integration of CSS into their organizations need a compilation of CSS best practices, and a more comprehensive framework that provides guidance on the wide range of practices, activities and responsibilities needed for this integration.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop technical guidance on CSS integration in planning and project development. The guidance is built on the foundation of a comprehensive integration framework that addresses the various elements that are needed for effective integration. FHWA anticipates that it will lead to the following changes within transportation agencies and in the transportation project development industry:

- Organizational change that embeds CSS thinking into all aspects of planning and project development.
- Agencies will begin to assess their organizational strengths and challenges related to CSS and evaluate their progress toward the goal of CSS integration.
- Agency executives and mangers will better understand and communicate their roles and responsibilities in integrating CSS and creating the vision, overall strategy, accountability structure and resources required to support integration.
- Practitioners will better understand the relationship between the CSS vision, strategy and accountability to the detailed changes necessary to integrate CSS.
- Agencies will use the self assessment tool to measure project level versus organization wide factors that influence the integration of CSS.
- Agencies will have the ability to implement and then measure the effectiveness of open, early and continuous communication with all stakeholders, multidisciplinary input; and tailored public involvement – all of which will help to integrate CSS into planning, designing, building and maintaining transportation systems.
- Project outcomes ultimately will reflect community values, be sensitive to scenic, aesthetic, historic, and natural resources; and be safe and financially feasible.

Purpose of the CSS Integration Guide

The Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) Integration Guide offers technical guidance to executives and practitioners in State Departments of Transportation (DOTs), Federal Lands Highways (FLH), tribes and regional and local agencies seeking to integrate CSS principles in planning and project development. The Guide includes technical guidance supported by an integration framework to assist agencies in addressing the organizational changes

needed to integrate CSS principles into transportation planning, project delivery and operations. The Guide also includes instructions for the application of an internal organizational self-assessment activity that can be tailored to the user's specific organization. The information in the Guide focuses on identifying, prioritizing, coordinating, and managing CSS best practices so that integration efforts can be tailored for each user's specific organization.

Who Should Use the Guide

The Guide is designed for DOT staff seeking a framework to guide the process of incorporating CSS principles and practices in the overall planning and project development processes of their organizations. Specifically, it will be useful to agency executives as well as practitioners charged with day-to-day implementation of the organization's plans, programs, products and services. Principles and activities in the Guide are applicable at any organizational level as well as at the individual project level. The concepts and actions included in the Guide can be modified and adapted for use by a wide range of agencies and groups involved in transportation project development and delivery.

How the Guide is Organized

The Integration Guide consists of ten chapters and four appendices. Chapters 1-3 provide the background and foundation for CSS Integration. Chapter 4 focuses on CSS integration from the executive perspective. Chapter 5 focuses on CSS organizational competencies, and Chapter 6 includes performance measures to build accountability into departmental CSS initiatives. Chapters 7-10 provide guidance on integrating CSS from the practitioner's perspective in area-wide planning, sub area and corridor planning, project development, and CSS in construction, operations and maintenance.

Each chapter includes examples of successful CSS integration, along with links to additional information and sources. The appendices include examples of tools that agencies can use to conduct an internal assessment of their status in implementing CSS into their agency, an organization-wide CSS implementation framework, a questionnaire agencies can use to assess CSS within their organizations, and a comprehensive list of resources addressing different elements of CSS.