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How Can the Effectiveness of Community Livability Programs Be Determined?

Mineta Transportation Institute's free report analyzes programs in five US metro areas.

San Jose, Calif., July 23, 2013 – Whether people live in urban or suburban areas, the livability of their communities is becoming more important. How easily can they access transit? How close are essential shops and services? Are homes affordable, and are jobs nearby? More important, how effective are public programs that address those factors? The { HYPERLINK "http://transweb.sjsu.edu" } (MTI) analyzes the criteria for success in its newest research report, { HYPERLINK "http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1126.html" }. The peer-reviewed study, available for free download, was conducted by Peter J. Haas, PhD and Lisa Fabish, MSTM.

“Livability programs are a broad set of approaches to create communities with coordinated transportation, housing and commercial investments,” said Ms. Fabish. “They have specific goals and objectives based on local priorities and conditions. Because of their broad variety, is it possible to measure the success of these programs? The report analyzes what did and did not work in these programs and their measurement methods. Then the report makes recommendations for future programs.”

To learn how agencies should measure their overall performance, the research project analyzes five regional livability programs in Atlanta, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Portland OR, North Central Texas, and the San Francisco Bay Area. Within that broader question, the researchers also asked: 1) What can new livability programs learn from existing programs' performance measurement approaches? 2) To what degree are those approaches aligned to their own objectives and stakeholders, and to recommendations for good performance measurement?

The report compares and contrasts these programs by examining existing research in performance measurement methods. The resulting “best practices” are examined for their key characteristics. The goal was not to critique the programs, but rather to provide insight into good and potentially effective program practices and potential pitfalls that other programs might learn from, according to Dr. Haas.

Four specific measurement types were called out by interviewees as particularly useful in supporting program decisions: delivery of project commitments (did we get what we funded?); the percentage of the region's development that occurs in targeted development areas (are we developing where we want to develop?); leveraged funding (did we close the development financing gap?); and transportation access factors such as induced ridership, cost per induced rider, and bicycle and pedestrian access (did we achieve a transportation land-use link?).

Considerations for applying performance measurement to livability programs gleaned from the analysis are: 1) an agency's structure does not dictate its measurement focus; 2) measuring the nature, not just the volume, of development is critical to understanding the program's impact; 3) meaningful measurement of livability need not be costly; 4) a focus on decisions pays off; 5) reporting on affordability and land value appreciation goals prevents measurement imbalance from leading to program imbalance; 6) performance reporting should be tailored to the many

audiences of livability programs; and 7) agencies must balance measurement of quantifiable factors with subjective factors such as “quality of life.”

For a PDF of the 109-page MTI research report (no cost, no registration), go to { HYPERLINK "http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1126.html" }

ABOUT THE PROJECT INVESTIGATORS

Lisa Fabish, MBA, MSTM, has been a transportation management consultant, working across multiple modes, including transit, aviation, and high speed rail. She also consulted for more than a decade to commercial, not-for-profit, and government clients across multiple sectors, including energy, technology, financial services, health, security, telecommunications, agricultural products, automotive, and education. Her work has spanned a broad range of functions, including strategy, organization, financial management, risk management, mega-project management, and operations. Ms. Fabish earned a Bachelor of Arts in sociology from Tufts University, a Master of Business Administration from Yale University, and a Master of Science in transportation management from San Jose State University.

Peter J. Haas, Ph.D. is education director at the Mineta Transportation Institute at San Jose State University. He is also a faculty member of the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program in the Department of Political Science. He earned his doctorate in public policy and public administration from the Department of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1985 and has also taught at the University of North Carolina, East Carolina University, and Virginia Tech. He authored many publications, including a co-authored textbook on policy analysis and program evaluation, *Policy Research: Concepts and Cases*. As education director for MTI, he administrates a statewide program that prepares transportation professionals for upper-level management and executive positions throughout the transportation industry.

ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE (MTI):

MTI conducts research, education, and information transfer programs focusing on surface transportation policy and management issues, especially related to transit. MTI was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and won national re-designation competitions in 2002, 2006 and 2011. The Institute is funded by Congress through the US DOT Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through Caltrans, and public and private grants. In 2006 the US Department of Homeland Security selected MTI as a National Transportation Security Center of Excellence. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI is the lead institute for the Mineta National Transit Research Consortium, an affiliation of nine university transportation research centers. MTI is affiliated with San Jose (CA) State University’s College of Business. Visit { HYPERLINK "http://transweb.sjsu.edu" }

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