

Contact: Donna Maurillo
MTI Communications Director
831-234-4009
donna.maurillo (at) sjsu.edu

Free report investigates best practices for Context-Sensitive Solutions policies to increase successful community involvement in transportation projects

Mineta Transportation Institute publication recommends ways to expedite projects while including public input

San Jose, Calif., January 3, 2012 – The [Mineta Transportation Institute](http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu) (www.transweb.sjsu.edu) has just published a report to help transportation agencies and planners include community input in their projects while making timely progress. [*The Nature of Context-Sensitive Solutions, Stakeholder Involvement and Critical Issues in the Urban Context*](#) addresses those conflicting demands by investigating how stakeholder involvement is currently carried out in four urban projects (NYC, Denver, Grand Rapids, and Orlando) and making recommendations for best practices. Researched by Marta A. Panero, PhD, and Jan L. Botha, PhD, the report is available for free download from <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/2610.html>

“While community involvement in public projects can help avoid future problems, it also can slow progress, lengthen delivery times, and increase costs,” said Dr. Panero, the lead investigator. “This study examines the issue in the context of a relatively new policy framework – Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) – which supports the early integration of stakeholders into the planning process. The report pays particular attention to stakeholders’ involvement in projects within urban centers, where there is likely to be more complexity, both in terms of the number of stakeholders and end users affected.”

CSS is a relatively new process not consistently interpreted or applied across states and/or agencies, according to Dr. Panero. The literature suggests that, when applying CSS principles to community involvement processes, stakeholders are empowered through clear policies and procedures regarding their participation. However, researchers found inconsistent application. The extent to which public agencies apply the CSS framework and involve and respond to stakeholders depends on each agency’s particular interest in involving the public to find the best-fit project for a community.

According to the report, it is likely that increasing stakeholders’ integration will not become common practice until agencies clearly understand the benefits. Standardizing CSS policies and directives across the country will help people discuss and understand those benefits while relying less on expert-based designs. In addition, if a number of stakeholder involvement practices are adopted, it could help integrate communities’ views and values in the decisions while minimizing the chances of lengthy consultations, time delays, and additional costs.

Those practices include:

- Adopting CSS policies and practices, starting with state DOTs so consistent application flows to the local agencies;
- Coordinating across agencies to support collaboration and consistent application;
- Building multi-disciplinary teams so a variety of viewpoints can help anticipate and address any problems in the planning phases;
- Integrating stakeholders early and continuously to solve problems before they crop up during more costly later phases

The report's recommendations for how CSS practices may be standardized across regions are based on information obtained from the available literature and several case studies as well as from the four cases analyzed in further detail and the research team's interviews on the following projects:

- Edgewater Drive Project, Orlando FL
- Route 9A, New York City NY
- US 131 S-Curve Replacement Project, Grand Rapids MI
- T-REX Project, Denver CO

The complete report is available for free download at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/2610.html

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marta Panero, PhD, is a research scientist and deputy director at the Rudin Center for Transportation Policy & Management at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University. She is also a research associate at the Mineta Transportation Institute, San Jose, CA. Her research interests include stakeholder consultation processes, mitigation of environmental impacts of transportation systems, greening the supply chain, and assessment of megaprojects, among others. Prior to joining NYU, Dr. Panero directed a New York Academy of Sciences' project that involved multidisciplinary research guided by a consortium of stakeholders from approximately 75 regional and national institutions and organizations. She received her PhD in economics from the New School for Social Research with a concentration in sustainable economic development and environmental economics. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Fordham University with a BA in social studies.

Jan Botha, PhD, is a professor at the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at San Jose State University. Dr. Botha has nine years' experience in transportation engineering practice and has been a faculty member at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, and at SJSU for a total of 24 years. Dr. Botha received a PhD and MS in transportation engineering from University of California Berkeley, and a BSc and BSc (Honors) in civil engineering from the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) conducts research, education, and information and technology transfer, focusing on multimodal surface transportation policy and management issues, especially as they relate to transit. MTI was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and was reauthorized under TEA-21 and again under SAFETEA-LU. The Institute has been funded by Congress through the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and by other public and private grants and donations, including grants from the US Department of Homeland Security. DOT selected MTI as a National Center of Excellence following competitions in 2002 and 2006. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI's focus on policy and management resulted from the Board's assessment of the transportation industry's unmet needs. That led directly to choosing the San José State University College of Business as the Institute's home. Visit transweb.sjsu.edu

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