



# Measuring the Performance of Livability Programs

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MTI Project 1126

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Livability programs are an inherently broad set of approaches intended to create communities with coordinated transportation, housing and commercial investments, with specific goals and objectives subject to local priorities and conditions. The great variety of such efforts calls to question whether and how such programs can measure their success. This research project analyzes five regional livability programs to determine how agencies should measure their performance.

*“What can, and should, new livability programs learn from existing livability programs’ approaches to performance measurement?”*

The study is based on case study analyses of data from five livability programs: Atlanta Regional Council’s Livable Communities Initiative, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s Transportation for Livable Communities Program (San Francisco Bay Area), Portland (OR) Metro’s Transit Oriented Development and Centers Program, the North Central Texas Council of Governments’ Sustainable Development Initiative, and the Metropolitan Council’s Livable Communities Act Grant Program (Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area). The case studies consisted of two parts: analysis of program documentation, and interviews with program leadership. The interview responses provided deeper insight into the initial findings of the program documentation analysis and supported the development of recommendations based on agencies’ experiences. The intent was not to critique individual programs, but rather to identify trends and lessons that can be applied broadly.

## Study Methods

The study is based on case study analyses of data from five livability programs: Atlanta Regional Council’s Livable Communities Initiative, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s Transportation for Livable Communities Program (San Francisco Bay Area), Portland (OR) Metro’s Transit Oriented Development and Centers Program, the North Central Texas Council of Governments’ Sustainable Development Initiative, and the Metropolitan Council’s Livable Communities Act Grant Program (Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area). The case studies consisted of two parts: analysis of program documentation, and interviews with program leadership. The interview responses provided deeper insight into the initial findings of the program documentation analysis and supported the development of recommendations based on agencies’ experiences. The intent was not to critique individual programs, but rather to identify trends and lessons that can be applied broadly.

## Findings

The case studies reveal that livability programs embrace a healthy variety of approaches to measuring performance. Each program has a unique set of goals, objectives, strategies, customers, and stakeholders. Therefore, no single set of performance measures should be applied to every livability program. New programs can learn a great deal from the performance measurement approaches applied by the five mature programs analyzed for this research. Each of those programs demonstrates good practices and potential pitfalls, and each provides examples of measures that new programs can consider adopting.

## Policy Recommendations

The in-depth analysis across all five programs supports a broader set of lessons that new livability programs can apply when developing a performance management approach.

- The structure of an agency does not dictate the focus of its performance measurement
- Measure the nature, not just the volume, of development
- Meaningful measurement need not be costly
- A focus on decisions pays off
- Report on both affordability and land value appreciation

- Tailor the reporting to the intended audiences
- Balance the quantifiable with subjective factors, such as quality of life



### About the Authors

Lisa Fabish has been a management consultant to the transportation industry, working across multiple modes, including transit, aviation, and high speed rail. She 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.

Dr. Peter Haas is Education Director at the Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) at San Jose State University. He is the author of many transportation-related publications, as well as the co-author of a textbook on policy analysis and program evaluation, *Policy Research: Concepts and Cases*. He directs a statewide program for MTI that prepares transportation professionals for upper-level management and executives positions throughout the transportation industry.

### To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1126.html](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1126.html)

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