

KEY ISSUES: MANAGEMENT STEERING COMMITTEE INTERVIEWS

Healthy Rural Roads project Management Steering Committee members were interviewed at the end of October, 2005, to assist project staff in identifying issues and suggested solutions for addressing transportation equity. Interviewees included:

- Spencer Clifton, HCAOG Executive Director • Chris Whitworth, Deputy. County Public Works Director
- Ann Lindsay, County Public Health Officer • Brian Cox, County Environmental Health Director
- Doby Class, Arcata Public Works Director • Jerome Washington, Caltrans Title VI Planning coordinator
- Tom Hofweber, Humboldt County Community Development Supervising Planner
- Jan Bulinski, Caltrans District 1 Chief, Local Assistance & Regional Planning
- In addition, Cheryl Willis, Caltrans District 1 Chief of Planning

How do you see this project assisting your area of discipline?

- Improved integration between economic development, land use and transportation
- Tools and strategies for addressing Title VI requirements, particularly for identifying transportation-disadvantaged populations and their needs, particularly need better information than census provides
- Transportation demand management: consider feasibility of taking more services (health, community markets, waste management) to outlying communities instead of making them travel to Eureka
- Better methods for public participation in RTP process and identifying “Unmet Transit Needs” in TDA process
- Make sure non-auto project elements are more central to design so they don’t ‘fall off’ at end of planning process
- Assist in prioritization/justification of projects for grant funds
- Health is a justice issue: access to health care/good food and healthy mobility options
- How can governments build more when they can’t maintain what they have?
- Autos are responsible for the most pollution-related issues in the County: reducing auto use means less pollution.
- Information to feed Caltrans transit and ped studies for state and District
- Elevate importance and interest in health impact assessments

The current transportation planning process....

What is working well?

- Context-sensitive design starting to be more integrated into planning and implementation, particularly at Caltrans
- More emphasis on non-motorized needs than five years ago.
- Project Development Teams (*with opportunities for improvement*)
- Transportation Enhancement Funding – integrating grassroots needs and small scale local improvements into larger projects – *Willow Creek example*
- Environmental Justice grants – Hoopa charrette example (local input and “buy in”), Manila public participation
- Grant programs starting to integrate efforts with Caltrans more so that results can actually be implemented.
- Strong Arcata General Plan
- Efforts that show how systems ARE working and highlight solutions

- Caltrans' public participation process, especially in relative context.
- Planners and engineers *starting* to communicate better (much room for improvement).

What could be improved?

- Public outreach and education: reaching to outlying communities, providing more accessible information, help bureaucrats become better communicators,
- Communication, cooperation between planning and public works (as well as health) departments: especially need to consult each other for and allow time for input to long-range planning efforts
- Funding constraints - separate funding pots, limited and fluctuating funding inhibit good project development; constantly operating in 'windfalls and wipeouts' mode
- RTP is conducted by agency with no land use control; land use planning by agencies with no transportation control; integration between RTP and GPU
- Unmet Needs process
- Generally operate in reactive instead of proactive mode; struggling to maintain facilities in place.
- Function of HCAOG committees.
- Car-centered 'freedom' culture
- Politics control many decisions, not well-founded, often overrides policy.
- Hard to grow old and stay in place here: need to plan for elders.
- Title VI audits: state/feds unclear about what they want; guidelines unclear.

Proposed New Approach to Transportation Planning....

What are the major challenges and opportunities?

- Increased efficiencies: delivery of projects, reducing hurdles
- Reluctance to change
- "Murray Method" has been the standard approach: comfortable, predictable, would be hard to change it
- Limited and fluctuating funds: focus on rehab, so little ability to get creative with capital projects
- Developing process that is based "outside the box": don't marry ourselves to traditional process, what parts of the box are immobile, what parts are moveable?
- Regulatory environment for rural counties
- Public might not want what's actually best: often in reactive mode, thinking personally rather than for greater good.
- Not in practice of/trained to design projects that work well for *people*.
- Political process often hijacks good planning.
- New process needs to come from/go through the 'top' (of Caltrans) to actually happen; conversely, would be great to have opportunity for the opposite.
- Process might well serve redevelopment efforts, too.
- Transportation demand management: costly to provide services in nether regions.
- Many state directives are not practical, and actually mean increased difficulty for rural regions to compete for funding.
- Include more health data sources in planning.
- Caltrans system weights design/construction, not planning: can be very hard to track a planning element through the process and keep it in the project.
- Justify transit decisions to make sure 'experiments' don't fail.
- Identify 'disincentives' for equitable planning: e.g. STIP process focuses on 'congestion reduction', and if a community's goals are different, don't have access to funds

Proposed Evaluation Criteria for assessing “equity” of a transportation project

- Approach needs comprehensively to attract varied fund sources
- Access to healthy food, health care, active living opportunities
- Public support/ownership of project
- Reduce fuel consumption and vehicle miles traveled (e.g. by mixed uses)
- Corridor approach (related to needs and organized by funding availability) rather than specific project/program approach
- Include health and equity checklist
- Consider all impacts including spillover and unintended impacts
- Must have community support and “buy in”
- Provide mobility for *all* segments of the community
- Include both qualitative and quantitative analysis
- Involve team of inter-disciplinary evaluators
- Look into what Hoopa EJ project has produced.
- How do you technically implement criteria? Reduce collisions by 5-10-20%? Improve safety within a certain radius of a school?
- Project design equity checklist a good idea. Name it something engineers won’t laugh at.
- Need a process that addresses state prioritization, beyond RTP process.
- Mobility for all population groups
- Linkages

Necessary Elements to Support a more inclusive Transportation Planning Process

- Do not create burdensome process – “no additional work”!
- Revenue, of course
- Checklist to ensure “all bases covered”
- Consider some non-transportation solutions and bring in “other” types of funds
- Include all integral elements early on in the process
- Public health more integral role in process: disciplines need ‘cross-cultural training’
- Incorporate needs of transportation disadvantaged populations
- Shared approach in cobbling together required matching funds
- Public education: public must be behind it to fly
- Reduce ‘logistical impairment’ of bureaucracies
- Require balanced multi-modal approach/funding vs. current agency and individual staff perspective: e.g. very little collective energy/money going into transit
- Education, education, education
- Outside the box
- Rural areas need more services, they’re left out of many things.
- Better evaluation of rehab projects

Other Issues and Considerations

- Limited goods and services in rural areas creating transportation problems
- Re-evaluate process for developing projects/programs based on identified needs
- Public input process can not be a “one time thing”, keep connections and momentum going
- Role of county in setting the stage for local entities - serve as model for cities
- Need for “political clout: to secure discretionary funding
- Strong facilitation and meeting management skills critical
- Provide incentives for public participation