



Fundamentals of Context Sensitive Solutions

Stakeholder Engagement

Early and continuous stakeholder engagement is important to successful CSS implementation. Any person or group that has an interest in the outcome of a project can be considered a stakeholder. Stakeholders are important because they can help identify unique aspects of a project area as well as potential transportation problems and solutions. Stakeholder involvement also may provide opportunities to forge partnerships that provide funding assistance or lead to maintenance agreements after a project is complete. For example, MDOT partnered with the city of Taylor and the Detroit Regional Gateway Advisory Group to improve the aesthetics of the I-94/US-24 interchange reconstruction. The city and advisory group helped pay for the additional costs of the tied arch bridge at the I-94/US-24, which will become a regional focal point.



Meetings with residents and local officials provide opportunities for stakeholders to share their concerns and ideas with the transportation agency. From a transportation agency's point of view, meetings provide an opportunity for interested parties to ask questions and increase their understanding of potential design and construction constraints. Communication with stakeholders has helped MDOT understand community values regarding safety, aesthetics, and non-motorized transportation options.

Flexibility

Design flexibility involves a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to balance safety and mobility needs with community values and road context. Flexibility in design fosters a customized approach to projects. Design standards often present a range of options for the designer to apply using engineering judgment and knowledge of the project area. Stakeholder engagement enhances the designer's knowledge of the project area. Working with an interdisciplinary team can help the designer arrive at creative solutions to problems and making use of design flexibility increases the range of possible solutions. By applying design flexibility, impacts to sensitive cultural or natural resources near the roadway may be minimized or avoided. For example, reducing lane or curb widths can help preserve historic resources or avoid removing trees.

Effective Decision Making

Effective decision making balances stakeholder needs with the need for safe transportation systems and the overall public good. To make effective transportation decisions, transportation agencies need to consider community values while making sound design choices that follow federal standards and meet or exceed regulatory agency requirements. Although stakeholder input is a key component of CSS, transportation agencies have the final decision-making authority. CSS is not about giving up safe roads for pretty ones. The approach empowers designers to be creative problem solvers by involving the right people at the right time.

Success

Spending time early in the planning process to gain an understanding of community needs and values can save time and money in the long run. A clear vision of the social and environmental concerns of stakeholders can avoid costly efforts in redesign. Successful application of CSS builds community trust and paves the way for smooth project development and implementation of current and future work. In addition, an awareness of community interests can result in the ultimate goal – better projects that fit the surroundings in which they are built while effectively serving transportation needs.