

# CSS

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## What is CSS?

## Activities

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## Assistance

## FHWA and Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)

The Federal Highway Administration is committed to the advancement of CSS nationwide as one of the objectives of its [Vital Few Goal on Environmental Stewardship and Streamlining](#). The objective is to improve the environmental quality of transportation decision making by incorporating context sensitive solutions principles in all aspects of planning and the project development process.

The purpose of this FHWA website is to provide information about FHWA's involvement with CSS and is not intended to duplicate the contents of the FHWA sponsored context sensitive solutions website. This external website is being developed in partnership with [Project for Public Spaces](#) in collaboration with [Scenic America](#) and [Federal Highway Administration](#) to assist FHWA in accomplishing the CSS objective of the Vital Few Goal. Other partners include:

- [American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials \(AASHTO\)](#)
- [Federal Transit Administration](#)
- [Institute for Transportation Engineers \(ITE\)](#)
- [National Association of City Transportation Officials \(NACTO\)](#)
- [National Park Service](#)

The best place to go for detailed technical information about CSS is <http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/>

Focused efforts to achieve the FHWA objective of incorporating CSS into all aspects of transportation planning and project development include; the development and delivery of CSS training through the [National Highway Institute](#) and [FHWA Resource Centers](#); initiatives to integrate CSS concepts into university curriculums; support and sponsorship of research projects, technical guidance handbooks, competitions and conferences; management and coordination of contracts and internal and external partnerships to link CSS with planning and project development.

The continued planning, funding and implementation of these activities is referred to as the FHWA CSS Program. Management and coordination of contracts and partnerships directly or indirectly related to the advancement of the implementation of CSS are considered [FHWA CSS Program Activities](#). This list of activities is updated quarterly and represents recently completed and current CSS projects and initiatives. Contact information is included for each activity.

### More Information

- [CSS Objective](#)
- [CSS Primer](#)
- [Building CSS Knowledge and Skills for Successful Project Delivery](#)

## More Information

- [FHWA Environment](#)
- [FHWA Planning](#)
- [FHWA Safety](#)
- [Office of Program Administration](#)

## Contacts

**Keith Harrison**  
[Resource Center, San Francisco](#)  
 415-744-2657  
[E-mail Keith](#)

**Keith Moore**  
[Office of Planning, Environment, & Realty \(HEP\)](#)  
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- [Performance Assessment](#)
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## Environment

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### ► Program Overview

- Environmental Streamlining and NEPA: A History
- Executive Order 13274
- SAFETEA-LU
- TEA-21
- Interagency Funding Guidance

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## FHWA's Vital Few Environmental Goal

FHWA's Vital Few Environmental Goal is Stewardship and Streamlining. Environmental Streamlining drives us to improve project delivery without compromising environmental protection. Environmental Stewardship helps demonstrate that we are mindful of the natural and human environment while addressing mobility and safety needs of the public. FHWA promotes actions that show we are responsible stewards of the environment. We take advantage of opportunities to enhance environmental protection and encourage partnerships that promote eco-system conservation or encourage broader mitigation strategies that seek corridor or watershed based approaches. Environmental Streamlining is an outcome or result of a multidimensional complex process; therefore, there is no single self-contained measure that adequately reflects Streamlining progress. Environmental Streamlining solutions must go hand in hand with principles of stewardship.

The Vital Few Environmental Streamlining and Stewardship goal (Environment VFG) sets expectations, measures, and methods for advancing an improved and efficient environmental review process and for demonstrating environmental stewardship. The success of this goal is focused on improving processes that influence outcomes. FHWA oversees how the environmental processes are carried out; the project sponsors and other practitioners determine the final product, i.e., the project. Therefore the performance objectives for the Environment VFG measure process improvements and benchmark the results of significant stewardship activities.

### Related Information

- [Overview and Objectives of the Environment VFG](#)
- [Exemplary Ecosystem Initiatives](#)
- [Negotiated Timeframes: Questions and Answers](#)
- [Integrated Approaches: Tips and Tools](#)
- [Tool Kit for Integrating Land Use and Transportation Decision-Making](#)

**Negotiated Timeframes "Wizard"** — The Negotiated Timeframes Wizard (the Wizard) is software designed to help State Departments of Transportation and resources agencies negotiate timeframes for completing environmental reviews of proposed transportation projects. The Wizard also allows agencies to set project-specific timeframes for completing requirements, track the progress of meeting timeframes, and maintain a history of events. [Download the Negotiated Timeframes Wizard.](#)

**NEW!** An updated version of the Negotiated Timeframes Wizard is currently being developed. Check this site for updates on when the updated version will be available to download. This update will address provisions in [Section 6002](#) of [SAFETEA-LU](#) that affect the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Environmental Assessment (EA) review processes. [Read](#) a list of provisions that will be addressed in the Wizard update.

**Check back on this page often for more information about the Wizard update or register below to receive updates by email.**

- [Register](#) to receive Wizard updates and news! (Registration is optional.)
- For questions about installing the Wizard, contact Gerry Flood at [Gerry.julianne.schwarzer@dot.gov](mailto:Gerry.julianne.schwarzer@dot.gov) or 617-494-3848.
- [View Questions and Answers about the Wizard.](#)
- [Submit your comments](#) on the Wizard to tell us what you think about the current version and what future changes you would like to see.

For questions or feedback on this subject, please contact [Ruth Rentch](#) at 202-366-2034. For general questions or web problems, please send feedback to the [web administrator](#).



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[CSS Videos](#)

[Specialized Technical Assistance for Context Sensitive Solutions Implementation](#)

[Improving Public Outreach For Transportation Projects By Use Of Citizen Coalitions](#)

[Integrating Context Sensitive Solutions into Transportation Practice](#)

[Environmental Justice Small Grants Program](#)

[Livable Communities](#)

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04/12/11: [Investment in High Speed Rail Could Spur 1.3 Millions Jobs](#)

04/12/11: [Vancouver Considering Highway Removal](#)

03/28/11: [\\$4 per Gallon Gas – Are We Ready?](#)

03/10/11: [Urban Bikeway Design Guide released by the National Association of City Transportation Officials](#)

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**CSS Calendar**

04/26/11: [FHWA Provides Free Webinar Series on Pedestrian Safety Action Plan](#)

04/28/11: [AASHTO to host a webinar on Constructicon Effluent Guidelines April 28](#)

05/03/11: [2011 High-Speed Rail Practicum](#)

**What is CSS?**

"Context sensitive solutions (CSS) is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting... [Read More](#) »

**Featured Video**

[DIY Streets in Clapton](#)



In the UK, the non-profit Sustrans is pioneering a community-based method to reclaim streets from high-speed traffic and make neighborhoods safer and more sociable places. - [Streetfilms.org](#)

**CSS Webinars**

**Benefits and Implementation of Urban Forestry in Transportation**

The aesthetic amenities of trees are widely appreciated - this webinar will cover the additional environmental, health, social, and safety benefits that urban forestry within the right-of-way can provide.

[Click here to view the webinar slides \(PDF\)](#)

**Featured CSS Project**

[2010 Urban Mobility Study](#)

05/18/11: [Women in Transportation 2011 Conference May 17-20](#)

[Full Calendar](#)  
»

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### New in "Research CSS"

4/25/11: [Tree Space Design](#)

4/21/11: [Benefits and Implementation of Urban Forestry in Transportation](#)

4/12/11: [AASHTO 2011 Call for Environmental Research Ideas](#)

3/28/11: [Automated Parking Information System Operational Test Evaluation](#)

3/28/11: [Center for Environmental Excellence by AASHTO AASHTO/FHWA "Every Day Counts" Programmatic Agreements Project](#)

3/21/11: [CSS Principles for Effective Corridor Planning](#)

3/2/11: [North Carolina Public Art on the Right of Way Policy](#)

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The 2010 Urban Mobility Report builds on previous Urban Mobility Reports with an improved methodology and expanded coverage of the nation's urban congestion problem and solutions. The links below provide information on long-term congestion trends, the most recent congestion comparisons and a description of many congestion improvement strategies.

### CSS Newsletter

The bi-monthly CSS newsletter keeps you up-to-date on the latest CSS-related news & information.

**Current Issue: [February 2011](#)**

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### Getting Started

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- [Site Map](#)
- [FHWA's CSS Toolbox](#)

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email [info@contextsensitivesolutions.org](mailto:info@contextsensitivesolutions.org)

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## Current Activities Report

**July 2007**
[PDF Version](#) (35 kb)

This report reflects the current and planned future activities of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) CSS program. This summary includes the CSS related activities being sponsored or championed by the FHWA Offices of Federal Lands Highway; Infrastructure; Planning, Environment and Realty; Resource Center; and Safety. For additional information about these or other activities, contact the points of contact identified for each activity. Additionally more information may be available on the FHWA CSS program web site at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd>.

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### More Information

- [FHWA Environment](#)
- [FHWA Planning](#)
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- [Office of Program Administration](#)

### Contacts

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**Rod Vaughn**  
[Resource Center,](#)  
[Lakewood](#)  
 720-963-3238  
[E-mail Rod](#)

- C. [CSS Webinars to Raise ITE Members Awareness](#)
- D. [Green Highways Initiative](#)

### ***I. Building CSS Capacity - Training & Education***

- A. **FHWA CSS Training Course (NHI Course # 142050)** - The purpose of this introductory course is to provide participants with a general appreciation and understanding of the CSS philosophy and principles. This course provides participants with a general overview of the opportunities to apply CSS in all phases of the planning, development, design, and implementation of transportation improvement projects. This three-day course is available for delivery. For information or to schedule this course, contact [nhitraining@dot.gov](mailto:nhitraining@dot.gov). FHWA is reviewing this course based on the experiences of agencies with applying CSS over the past couple of years, to determine what changes may be appropriate to this course. It is expected that any revisions to this course would be available in late 2008.
  
- B. **Integrating CSS into University Curricula** - The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE), based at North Carolina State University, is working in conjunction with FHWA to develop a graduate-level focused CSS course. This initiative will also: 1) create a template for integrating CSS philosophy and principles into transportation curricula, 2) develop an academic network to provide feedback into the development of this template and encourage the integration of CSS into undergraduate and graduate curricular, and 3) develop and offer an undergraduate-level CSS course for civil engineering and transportation planning students. Delivery is expected in 2008. FHWA contact: [keith.moore@dot.gov](mailto:keith.moore@dot.gov).
  
- C. **Integration of CSS into NHI and FHWA Training Courses** - The purpose of this project is to review NHI training courses currently being offered to ensure that CSS philosophy and principles are appropriately integrated into these courses. FHWA contact: [keith.moore@dot.gov](mailto:keith.moore@dot.gov)
  
- D. **CSS Training Assessment and Program Guide** - The purpose of this project is to develop a guide and tool to assist agencies in assessing their current and planned future CSS training activities. This guide will assist agencies in assessing and developing plans to enhance their CSS training courses, activities and multi-year capacity building programs. The draft of this guide is expected to be available in late 2007. FHWA Contact: [barbara.bauer@dot.gov](mailto:barbara.bauer@dot.gov).
  
- E. **FHWA CSS Training Action Plan** - The purpose of this project is to develop a multi-year strategy and plan to raise the awareness of the importance of CSS and to train staff within FHWA. The resulting plan will address the range of strategies and approaches that would be appropriate for a more comprehensive capacity building program to continue to raise the awareness and train staff on CSS within FHWA. The draft of this guide is expected to be available in the fall of 2007. FHWA Contact: [barbara.bauer@dot.gov](mailto:barbara.bauer@dot.gov).



## ***II. Toolbox to Apply CSS***

### **Planning:**

- A. **Integration of CSS in the Transportation Planning Process** - The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE) at the North Carolina State University conducted an FHWA-sponsored research project to determine best practices associated with integrating context sensitive solutions (CSS) into the transportation planning process. An annotated bibliography includes sections on current research initiatives, and applications and policies at national, state, and regional agencies. Deliverables also include an assessment of CSS as applied to planning, a tool-kit of fact sheets, Q&As, and case studies for both States and communities. A report summary includes findings and recommendations on ways to incorporate CSS into transportation planning based on research and case study evaluations. To view the final report go to <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/csstp/csstransplan.htm>. FHWA contact: [danyell.diggs@dot.gov](mailto:danyell.diggs@dot.gov).
- B. **Land Use and Transportation (NHI Course # 151043)** - This three day course assists practitioners in developing a multi-modal transportation system that supports desired land uses and helps shape land uses to support the transportation system. The course assists participants in understanding the relationships between transportation and land use; the processes through which transportation and land use issues can be jointly addressed, and; implementation steps to ensure that transportation and land use systems are designed in a compatible, mutually supportive manner. National Transit Institute has several offerings of the course in 2007 and National Highway Institute plans to start offering it in 2008. FHWA contact: [jodi.mccullough@dot.gov](mailto:jodi.mccullough@dot.gov).

### **Project Development & Design:**

- C. **CSS in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities** - The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) has developed this guide in cooperation with The Congress for New Urbanism, EPA and FHWA. ITE has published this guide as a recommended practice. A key feature of this guide is the use of context zones, thoroughfare types, and functional classification in the planning for and design of the traveled way, roadside and intersections. It also provides guidance on how CSS may be applied in the network or corridor planning that is conducted around which individual projects will result to improve specific sections of an urban thoroughfare. This guide and supporting outreach material are available electronically at: <http://www.ite.org/css>. FHWA contacts: [keith.harrison@dot.gov](mailto:keith.harrison@dot.gov) and [barbara.bauer@dot.gov](mailto:barbara.bauer@dot.gov).
- D. **The Ecological Guide** - The purpose of this guide is to raise the awareness of practitioners involved in developing transportation facilities to be more sensitive to wildlife and ecosystems issues and considerations. The guide will also provide examples and identify available resources to assist with integrating the stakeholders representing these issues and considerations into

processes involved with the planning for and development of these projects. FHWA contact: [shari.schaflein@dot.gov](mailto:shari.schaflein@dot.gov).

### **Construction:**

- E. **Integrating CSS in Construction - State-of-the-Practice Report** - The purpose of this project is to develop a State-of-the-practice report identifying how the CSS philosophy and principles are being applied in the construction of transportation facilities. The State-of-Practice Survey is available. Contact [keith.moore@dot.gov](mailto:keith.moore@dot.gov). The draft Report will be available in Fall 2007.

### **III. Raising Awareness and Advancing CSS Implementation**

- A. **CSS Clearinghouse Website - Context Sensitive Solutions.Org** - The purpose of the CSS Clearinghouse is to serve as THE source to nationally access CSS information and resources. It has been developed to provide a one-stop location to find information, find successful practices, locate technical resources, ask your peers a question, find training, and exchange information. The content posted and services supported by this clearinghouse is based on the information and examples practitioners submit for posting, in addition to the funding industry provides to support its operation and continued evolution. Availability is expected in 2008. FHWA contact: [keith.moore@dot.gov](mailto:keith.moore@dot.gov).
- B. **FHWA CSS Technical Assistance & Training** - Members of the Environmental and Safety/Design Technical Service Teams Team members are available to consult with and provide training tailored to the needs of individual agencies and/or projects to assist with the implementation of CSS principles. In addition to formal CSS training, team members are available to provide presentations at professional conferences along with briefings to executive leadership, MPOs, elected officials, other transportation officials. FHWA contacts: [klynn.berry@dot.gov](mailto:klynn.berry@dot.gov) and [keith.harrison@dot.gov](mailto:keith.harrison@dot.gov).
- C. **CSS Primer and Outreach Material** - The purpose of this project is to produce outreach material to assist with raising awareness of CSS philosophy and principles. This Primer is aimed at conveying the CSS philosophy and principles; benefits; challenges, importance and opportunities to integrate CSS within an organization; and apply CSS in the process of planning and developing transportation facility improvement projects. Other material to be produced will be a presentation, tri-fold brochure, questions and answers, and briefing paper. Draft products are expected to be available late 2007. FHWA contact: [jon.obenberger@dot.gov](mailto:jon.obenberger@dot.gov).
- D. **Guanella Pass CSS Lessons Learned Video** - This 30-minute DVD entitled "Thinking Beyond the Pavement" explains how CSS philosophy and principles were used to facilitate delivering one of the FHWA Federal Lands Highways most difficult and challenging projects. The video explains how the CSS principles were successfully applied on this Colorado Forest Highway

project. The video features diverse project stakeholders explaining, in their own words, the challenges that were faced and overcome, and provides valuable lessons learned to assist other agencies faced with similar challenges. The video will be distributed in the fall of 2006. The project website is <http://www.cflhd.gov/projects/co/guanella/index.cfm>. FHWA contacts: [mark.taylor@dot.gov](mailto:mark.taylor@dot.gov), [jennifer.corwin@dot.gov](mailto:jennifer.corwin@dot.gov) and [charles.luedders@dot.gov](mailto:charles.luedders@dot.gov).

- E. **CSS Self Assessment Guide & Workshops** - The purpose of this project is to develop a guide to assist agencies with identifying how, or to assess their progress, with advancing CSS implementation. This guide will assist agencies in assessing how the CSS philosophy and principles have been institutionally integrating within their agency, progress with advancing the application of these principles on all transportation improvement projects, or by a group of stakeholders involved in the development of a specific project. The draft guide, assessment tool and outreach material will be available in late 2007. FHWA Contact: [barbara.bauer@dot.gov](mailto:barbara.bauer@dot.gov).
- F. **CSS Pooled Fund Study (PFS)** - The purpose of this activity is to provide a mechanism for agencies to pool their resources to develop technical resources and services to assist practitioners with advancing the integration of CSS within their agency and on transportation improvement projects. The intent of the CSS PFS is for the funding that is provided by agencies is to go 100% into the development of the projects and activities the members collectively support. FHWA's expected contribution will include the staff to manage the CSS PFS along with the contract to provide the technical and administrative support to administer the PFS and managing the projects and activities that will be initiated. Availability expected in early 2008. FHWA contact: [jon.obenberger@dot.gov](mailto:jon.obenberger@dot.gov).
- G. **FHWA CSS Implementation Assessment** - This assessment tool is being developed to help FHWA gauge progress with achieving its Vital Few Goal (EN3 Objective) to improve the quality of transportation decision-making through implementation of CSS in all states and Federal Lands Highway Divisions. This project will review our current assessments and products being developed and tested during 2007 in response to an Agency decision to consider 2007 a transition year to work with and understand a new assessment approach. This new approach uses a metric that reflects progress made and a philosophy that improvements can always be made to processes and practices in implementing CSS in programs and projects. Availability is expected in early 2008. FHWA contact: [barbara.bauer@dot.gov](mailto:barbara.bauer@dot.gov)

#### ***IV. CSS National Dialog - Sharing Information***

- A. **CSS National Dialog** - The purpose of this activity is to facilitate a dialog to raise CSS awareness and provide a network to share information and experiences within industry. This activity is expected to build off of the success that has occurred with the coordination and dialog that initiated at conferences that has taken place in 2006 with AASHTO, ITE, and ASCE. This dialog is expected to involve outreach to the professional organizations representing the range of stakeholders and technical disciplines

that are involved in the planning and development of transportation improvement projects. Initial discussions are expected to occur in late 2007 to gauge the interest of key professional organizations to participate. FHWA contact: [jon.obenberger@dot.gov](mailto:jon.obenberger@dot.gov) and [shari.schaftlein@dot.gov](mailto:shari.schaftlein@dot.gov).

- B. **ASCE CSS Conference** "CSS In Practice: What You Need to Know" was held on November 16-17, 2006 in Atlanta, Georgia. This two-day hands-on conference was for professionals engaged in the planning and designing of roadways and other transportation facilities. The goal of the course was to advance the practice of CSS, provide tools for practitioners to use every day, and discuss promising ideas and future action. Conference information is available at: <http://content.asce.org/conferences/css06/welcome.html>.
- C. **CSS Webinars to Raise ITE Members Awareness** - This effort involves a series of webinars that highlight key opportunities for agencies to implement CSS within their agency and facilitate CSS focused sessions at ITE District Meetings. ITE will also develop a white paper identifying opportunities for ITE members to advance the implementation of CSS, what type of resources may be needed in a CSS toolbox, along with activities to advance CSS within ITE Technical Committees. The first webinar entitled "*CSS Design Phase of the Project Development Process*" was held on Nov. 30, 2006. The second webinar, "*Successful Application of CSS Principles in Transportation Planning*" was held on April 25, 2007 and the third webinar, "*CSS Implementation: Debunking the Myths*" is scheduled for August 1, 2007. FHWA contacts: [danyell.diggs@dot.gov](mailto:danyell.diggs@dot.gov) and [barbara.bauer@dot.gov](mailto:barbara.bauer@dot.gov).
- D. **Green Highways Initiative** - The purpose of this initiative is to promote streamlining and market-based approaches to meet transportation needs while promoting innovative environmental stewardship. This initiative supports the CSS philosophy and principles into stewardship focusing on watershed management, recycling, and ecosystem management. The EPA and FHWA has sponsored this initiative, in partnership with resource agencies in the Mid-Atlantic region, to strengthen stronger partnerships. Information on the Green Highways Initiative can be accessed at: <http://www.greenhighways.org/>. FHWA contact: [shari.schaftlein@dot.gov](mailto:shari.schaftlein@dot.gov).

PDF files can be viewed with the [Acrobat® Reader®](#)

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## Environment

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## FHWA's Vital Few Goal — Environmental Stewardship and Streamlining

### OVERVIEW OF VITAL FEW GOAL (VFG)

Environmental Stewardship and Streamlining are two different goals that are tightly interlinked. Environmental Streamlining drives us to improve project delivery without compromising environmental protection. Environmental Stewardship helps demonstrate that we are mindful of the natural and human environment while addressing mobility and safety needs of the public. FHWA promotes actions that show we are responsible stewards of the environment. We take advantage of opportunities to enhance environmental protection and encourage partnerships that promote eco-system conservation or encourage broader mitigation strategies that seek corridor or watershed based approaches. Environmental Streamlining is an outcome or result of a multidimensional complex process; therefore, there is no single self-contained measure that adequately reflects Streamlining progress. Environmental Streamlining solutions must go hand in hand with principles of stewardship.

The Vital Few Environmental Streamlining and Stewardship goal (Environment VFG) sets expectations, measures, and methods for advancing an improved and efficient environmental review process and for demonstrating environmental stewardship. The success of this goal is focused on improving processes that influence outcomes. FHWA oversees how the environmental processes are carried out; the project sponsors and other practitioners determine the final product, i.e., the project. Therefore the performance objectives for the Environment VFG measure process improvements and benchmark the results of significant stewardship activities.

### ENVIRONMENT VITAL FEW OBJECTIVES

#### Objective #1

*To improve the environmental quality of transportation decisionmaking, all 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Federal Lands Highway (FLH) Divisions will use, by September 30, 2007:*

- *Integrated approaches to multimodal planning, the environmental process and project development at a systems level; and/or*
- *Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) at a project level.*

#### Explanatory Information

The purpose of advancing integrated process approaches is to improve the environmental quality of transportation decisionmaking. At the systems level this is accomplished through earlier and better coordination of environmental concerns during the transportation planning process. At the project level, such integration can be enhanced through the application of context sensitive solutions. These strategies integrate environmental and community values into

transportation decisions at an early point in planning, and continue through project design. This objective also applies to FLH planning and projects.

The outcomes of meeting this objective will be reflected in higher quality decisions, better environmental documents, greater consensus, and timelier project delivery. To achieve this objective, FHWA is encouraging constructive partnerships with environmental agencies and communities. Each State transportation agency, as coached by FHWA in its role as lead Federal agency under NEPA, will determine the appropriate level of implementation. This objective challenges all State transportation agencies and FLH Divisions to reach beyond their normal processes at the systems planning or project level, and to search for solutions that demonstrate an improved compatibility between the natural and built environment. The results will demonstrate that a strong environmental ethic is compatible with good transportation solutions.

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## Objective #2

*To improve the timeliness of the both the Federal Aid and FLH environmental process:*

- Establish time frames for EAs and EISs and meet the schedules for 90% of those projects by September 30, 2007;
- Decrease the median time it takes to complete an EIS from 54 months to 36 months by September 30, 2007; and
- Decrease the median time to complete an EA from approximately 18 months to 12 months by September 30, 2007.

## Explanatory Information

Improved timeliness will demonstrate our ability to help reduce project delays. This objective fulfills the statutory direction of Section 1309 of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) to establish concurrent review timeframes as a cornerstone of Environmental Streamlining. In support of this statutory focus, FHWA felt it important to rigorously pursue the improvement of timeliness by establishing reasonable timeframes for all projects requiring an EIS or EA and by meeting those schedules 90% of the time. State transportation agencies will have to set project schedules with FHWA Divisions. In keeping with Section 1309, States should also negotiate timeframes in consultation with environmental review and permitting agencies. The timeframes set can be either project specific or for classes of projects. The timeframes should be established through agreement and consensus of the agencies. For project specific timeframes, the timeframe should be established, based on the complexity and characteristics of the project, as well as the State's own sense of priority for the project.

By tracking timeframes, we will develop a better understanding of the key impediments to the process, enabling us to address the concerns of Congress, the States, and others. This is a measure where shortcomings may yield useful information. We may find that States are unable to establish timeframes up front, or that tracking times does not improve delivery. Such data may give us more accurate representation of where the problems really do lie. FHWA acknowledges that while Federal review processes contribute to delays other State and local impediments such as funding, politics, and local controversy are also sources of delays.

Based on the historical baseline data, the EIS and EA processing time targets are very ambitious, but achievable if all parties work together. It is important to recognize that the target is a median time that represents a national aggregate of processing times. The median is more representative of typical project timeframes than the mean which can be disproportionately skewed by one or two projects

that may take exceedingly long or short time to process. While meeting the 36-month review time for EISs may not be realistic for certain projects or States, there are other projects around the nation that will be able to meet the 36-month target. The data to measure this objective will be collected primarily through the FHWA's new Environmental Document Tracking System (EDTS).

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### Objective #3

*To increase ecosystem and habitat conservation, implement by September 30, 2007, a minimum of 30 exemplary ecosystem initiatives in at least 20 States or Federal Lands Highway (FLH) Divisions.*

### Explanatory Information

FHWA has selected this objective to benchmark responsible environmental measures that can serve as a hallmark of stewardship. This measure focuses specifically on environmental stewardship of the natural environment through the conservation of habitat and ecosystems. It is important to quantitatively document transportation projects specific contributions to ecosystem protection. The environmental process requires multi-disciplinary involvement and input from review and permitting agencies that have jurisdiction over the environmental consequences that result from transportation decisions. These agencies need to be engaged early to define successes and solutions to environmental issues that arise during project planning and development. Many States and review and permitting agencies have increasingly recognized that watershed and ecosystem approaches to enhancement, restoration, and preservation of aquatic and upland ecosystems can expedite the environmental review process while maximizing benefit to the environment.

Ecosystem and habitat conservation was chosen as the preferable form of tangible environmental stewardship for the following reasons:

- It allows highway agencies to mitigate project impacts with flexible, regional approaches, rather than site-specific mitigation plans that are often more costly and less environmentally valuable.
- It is a particularly high and growing priority for environmental agencies, environmental interest groups, and the public.
- It will provide highly visible examples of proactive environmental stewardship by transportation agencies.
- There are opportunities for use of cutting edge science and technology in ecosystem/habitat conservation.

FHWA will identify exemplary ecosystem and habitat projects that are unique or highly unusual in their (a) geographic scope; (b) use of cutting edge science or technology; (c) high level of environmental standards; (d) high quality of results achieved; and/or (e) recognition by environmental interests as being particularly valuable or noteworthy. Exemplary ecosystem and habitat projects can come in many different forms such as development of conservation agreements, establishment or use of wetland banking, special mitigation based on research to assess wildlife movement corridors and habitat connectivity, partnering with local, State, and national conservation organizations to advance common goals, and development of ecological and environmental Geographic Information System baseline databases for use in project development and mitigation.

FHWA has identified [exemplary ecosystem initiatives](#) as a baseline for this objective.

For questions or feedback on this subject, please contact [Ruth Rentch](#) at 202-366-2034. For general questions or web problems, please send feedback to the [web administrator](#).

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United States Department of Transportation - **Federal Highway Administration**



In support of livable communities and sustainable transportation

# CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS

## FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

### Primer



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## WHAT IS CSS?

The CSS process is a collaborative, interdisciplinary, holistic approach to the development of transportation projects. It is both process and product, characterized by a number of attributes. It involves all stakeholders, including community members, elected officials, interest groups, and affected local, state, and federal agencies. It puts project needs and both agency and community values on a level playing field and considers all trade-offs in decision making.

The process differs from traditional processes in that it considers a range of goals that extends beyond the transportation problem. It includes goals related to community livability and sustainability, and seeks to identify and evaluate diverse objectives earlier in the process and with greater participation by those affected. The result is greater consensus and a streamlined project during later stages of project development and delivery.



While CSS processes are often associated with design, the approach is most effective when used during each step of planning and project development--from long-range transportation plans to individual corridor strategies.

## CSS and Consensus

While every project has unique circumstances, all CSS processes should build consensus around these issues before solutions are identified:

- Project context, including geography and community values
- Problem to be addressed
- Implementation plan and decision-making process and roles
- Vision, goals, and evaluation factors

Once stakeholders agree on these, the team can begin to identify and evaluate alternatives and make decisions. The steps for building agreement are flexible and can be adapted to suit individual projects. At the heart of the approach is the methodical integration of diverse values at each step of the process.

## Definitions

**The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines context sensitive solutions (CSS) as:** "a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders in providing a transportation facility that fits its setting. It is an approach that leads to preserving and enhancing scenic, aesthetic, historic, community, and environmental resources, while improving or maintaining safety, mobility, and infrastructure conditions."

**Context** is a broad description of a project's physical, economic, and social setting. The context may include the community, ecological, aesthetic, and transportation conditions as well as the political and policy environment.

**Interdisciplinary teams** are groups involving people with different backgrounds who work collaboratively to solve a common problem.

**Stakeholders** are affected people and organizations, including agency staff and elected officials, organized groups, area residents, and business owners.

*CSS is:*  
collaborative  
interdisciplinary  
a tailored approach  
about both *process* and *outcomes*

## Characteristics of the CSS

Communication with all stakeholders is open, respectful, honest, early, and continuous and is tailored to the context and phase

Establishes an interdisciplinary team early, including a full range of stakeholders, with skills based on the needs of the transportation activity

The landscape, community livability, valued resources and ecology, and construction issues are researched and understood before engineering design is started

There is a clearly defined decision-making process

Project teams track and honor commitments through lifecycle of the project

Full range of stakeholders and transportation officials are involved in identifying issues

Project purpose is clearly defined consensus is sought on the shared stakeholder vision and scope of projects and activities, while incorporating transportation, community, and environmental elements

There is commitment to the process from top agency officials and local leaders

Process involves multiple alternatives, resulting in a full examination of a range of possible solutions and agreement on the best path forward

Agency and stakeholder participants monitor how well the process is working and improve it as needed

Participants encourage mutually supportive transportation and land use decisions and consider the needs of a variety of transportation modes

Full range of communication and visualization tools are used to engage stakeholders

As shown by the graphs below, a CSS process becomes less contentious as the design becomes more complex. Public and stakeholder involvement might be a primary activity early in the project, but by the time engineers are producing detailed plans, stakeholders only wish to be kept informed about progress and involved when changes arise. This front-loaded community participation and decision-making process allows stakeholders to influence outcomes by raising issues early when they can still be addressed.



### Characteristics of the CSS Products or Design

The project is in harmony with the community, and it preserves environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, and natural resource values of the area

The project is a safe facility for all users and the community

The project solves problems and satisfies the purpose and needs identified by a full range of stakeholders

The project exceeds the expectations of both designers and stakeholders and is perceived as adding lasting value to the community as a whole

The project involves efficient and effective use of resources (time, budget) of all involved parties

*“The community’ is anyone who has an interest or stake in a particular place. It is made up of the people who live near a particular place (whether they use it or not), own businesses, or work in the area, or attend institutions such as schools and churches there. It also includes elected officials who represent an area and groups that organize activities there, such as a . . . merchants association.”*

— *Project for Public Spaces (PPS) from How to Turn a Place Around: A Handbook for Creating Successful Public Spaces — from Getting it Right in the Right of Way: Citizen Participation in Context-Sensitive Highway Design*



These before and after photos from the Aurora Avenue Project (Shoreline, Washington) illustrate how successful CSS projects improve safety and mobility for a variety of users. The photo illustrates a new grade-separated pedestrian crossing, improved sidewalks, managed access, enhanced greenscape.

### Sustainability and Livable Communities

CSS projects consider new and emerging technologies, funding sources, and public policy issues aimed at addressing major drivers such as energy supply, climate change, and sustainability initiatives.

CSS projects address livability issues such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit, and multimodal connections.



CSS projects embrace sustainability principles such as stormwater management, water quality, and the use of recycled materials throughout their lifecycles.

*"To be more responsive to the public, we need to move from expert-based design to community-based design."*

*— American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) — from Getting it Right in the Right of Way: Citizen Participation in the Context-Sensitive Highway Design*

### Let's Define Context

The first step of the CSS process is to define the context for a project. This is essentially the framework within which this approach will be applied, so it is important to understand what that includes. So what is "context?"

*"Context refers to the natural or built environment created by the land, topography, natural features, buildings and associated features, land use types, and activities on property adjacent to streets and on sidewalks, and a broader area created by the surrounding neighborhood, district, or community. Context also refers to the diversity of users of the environment."*

*— Federal Highway Administration*

While the context for every project will be different, every project has a context. An inventory of the context may include:

The area's natural environment. Does the project area include a major natural feature such as a river, open space, or view to a mountain?

The area's social environment. How do stakeholders perceive the community and its strengths and weaknesses? Are there major gathering places in the project area? What are the area's demographics? Are there elderly, low-income, or minority communities in the area?

The function and design of the transportation facility. What types of users and trips does the facility need to accommodate?

The transportation behavior in the area. Who is traveling in the area? What modes are they using?

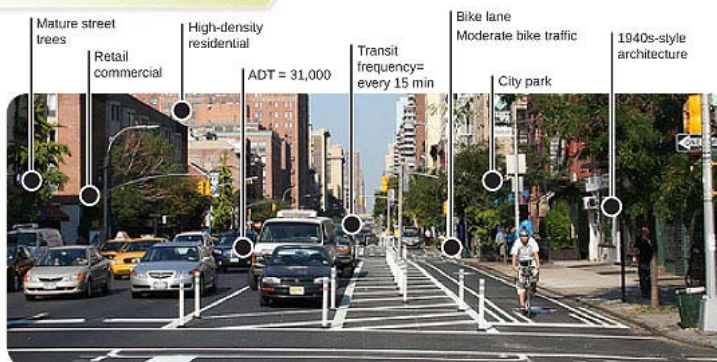
The area's economic environment. What are the land uses in the area? How does the transportation facility affect businesses and residents?

The area's cultural characteristics. What aspects of the community are important to stakeholders? What significant features define the community?

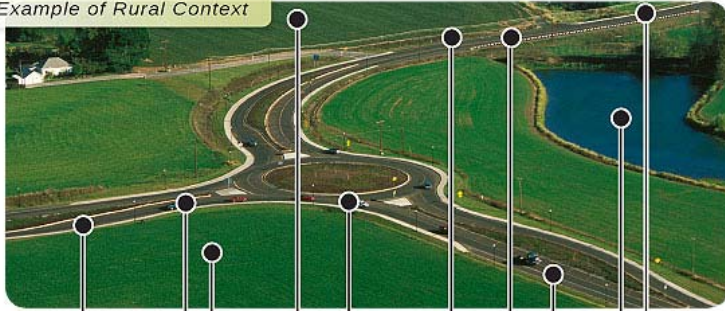
Some aspects of context might be viewed positively by one stakeholder group and negatively by another. For example, substantial regional traffic might be a positive for the owner of an auto-oriented business and a negative for the area's residents. Descriptions of the context should use objective, value-neutral language to reflect the perspectives of all stakeholders without judging which aspects are good or bad.

Creating an inventory or profile of community resources and attributes has long been a part of the "Community Impact Assessment (CIA) process. For more information on this methodology, see the [Community Impact Assessment \(CIA\) Web site](#).

#### Example of Urban Context



Example of Rural Context



Connects farmers to highway system

ADT = 7,796  
Farmland/rural agricultural land use

Rolling topography

Heavy agricultural truck volumes

Sidewalks are discontinuous

Shared lane with cyclists. Heavy cyclist use on weekends

2-lane arterial

One mile east to rural community  
Wetland and habitat

*Beyond function and design of a transportation facility, context includes built and natural environmental as well as social, cultural, and economic aspects*

Next



[FHWA](#) > [Design](#) > [CSS](#) > A Guide to Building CSS Knowledge and Skills for Successful Project Delivery

<p><b>What is CSS?</b></p> <p><b>Activities</b></p> <p><b>History</b></p> <p><b>Assistance</b></p>	<p><b>A Guide to Building CSS Knowledge and Skills for Successful Project Delivery</b></p> <p>The electronic version is currently not available. If you would like a copy of the Training Guide, please contact Keith Moore.</p> <p>Updated: 01/21/2011</p>	<p><b>Contact</b></p> <p><b>Keith Moore</b> <a href="#">Office of Planning, Environment, &amp; Realty (HEP)</a> 202-366-0524 <a href="#">E-mail Keith</a></p>
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Tuscany, Italy. [More on Scenic Context >](#)

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Evaluation: CSS Performance Measures

**Evaluation: CSS Performance Measures**

Both qualitative and quantitative performance measures are used to provide feedback and to improve other CSS projects. These measures range from award programs (NYSDOT) to traffic counts and other "hard" data.



Article /  
Paper /  
Report

**CSS Performance Measures - CSS Quick Facts**

Use of performance measures is becoming widespread among DOTs as a tool for improving management of important business priorities like pavement and bridge condition, project delivery and safety. Few agencies, however, have adopted CSS performance measures. DOTs would benefit from greater use of CSS performance measures in many important ways including:

- To help make CSS state-of-the-practice, not state-of-the-art,
- To strengthen support from agency leadership for CSS principles,

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Performance measures allow DOTs to judge how well they are accomplishing program missions through the delivery of products, services or processes. Measurement of CSS/D performance is new for most, if not all DOTs. Much of what [DOTs] are interested in measuring, such as changing mindsets, increasing skills, and better project results, suggests CSS/D measures may differ from other areas of performance measurement in DOTs.

-- Joe Crossett, Sally Oldham

"The adoption of transportation equity as a performance indicator institutionalized a more comprehensive technical approach and a more inclusive public involvement approach to decision making."

-- [U.S. Department of Transportation](#)

"Performance Measures are important because they enable a transportation agency to "consider how well alternate

- To maintain agency-wide focus on strategic CSS goals, and
- To strengthen trust with stakeholders and customers.

transportation plan investments met the target goals and objectives set out for [a particular region]."

-- Integrating Equity and Accessibility into Decision Making 



Article /  
Paper /  
Report

**NCHRP Document 69: Performance Measures for Context Sensitive Solutions - A Guidebook for State DOTs**

Around the country, groups of stakeholders ranging from local elected officials to citizen activists and interest groups are working hand-in-hand with transportation agencies to create projects that incorporate community values and are safe, efficient, effective mechanisms for the movement of people and goods. Vital to the success of these efforts is a movement among state Departments of Transportation (DOTs) to strengthen holistic, collaborative and interdisciplinary philosophies for governing the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of transportation infrastructure.

-- **Transportation Research Board (TRB)**

**More Related Content:**

- Publication: [Guidelines for Environmental Performance Measures](#)
- Publication: [Using Context Sensitive Solutions \(CSS\) Performance Measures to Assess the Effectiveness of a CSS Process During the Preliminary Design of a Major Highway Project: The Mon/Fayette Expressway](#)



Excerpt

### Question Three: What can we learn from the past?

"What has gone well between the partnering agencies, and what hasn't worked so well? What successes do you hope to replicate, and what failures do you want to avoid?" [more...](#)

from **Building Projects that Build Communities: Recommended Best Practices**



Article /  
Paper /  
Report

### Community Impact Assessment

The Florida DOT defines CIA as: "The process to evaluate the effects of a transportation action on communities and their quality of life - the human environment. It's focus is on the early and continuous gathering of information from the community and other sources. This information is used as input into transportation decisionmaking throughout the planning, project development, design, mitigation, and construction of a project."

-- **Federal Highway Administration**



### A Systematic but Not-Too-Complicated Approach to Cumulative Effects Assessment



The biggest obstacle facing the public and private sectors in conducting CEA is the lack of straightforward approach that can be applied inexpensively, quickly, and consistently in compliance with the CEQ handbook. In this paper, authors describe a five-part approach: scoping, organizing, screening, evaluating, mitigating, monitoring and adaptive management.

-- **Senner, Colonell, Isaacs, Davis, Ban, Boers, and Erikson**



Excerpt

### **Creating and Implementing a CSS Measurement Program**

A comprehensive CSS measurement program should be a program that draws on process and outcome measures, and includes both a project-level and an organization-level focus may include a considerable number of measures. [more...](#)

from **NCHRP Document 69: Performance Measures for Context Sensitive Solutions - A Guidebook for State DOTs**



Excerpt

### **CSS Measurement Program Framework**

A CSS performance measurement framework boils down to finding the right balance across two simple parameters, 1) measurement of project-level versus organization-

wide factors, and 2) measurement of processes versus outcomes. [more...](#)  
from **NCHRP Document 69: Performance Measures for Context Sensitive Solutions - A Guidebook for State DOTs**



Excerpt

### Project-Level Measures

The CSS principles mentioned earlier, after all, have their roots in the delivery of individual projects. Furthermore, measurement can initially be piloted on a small subset of projects. Project-level measures provide valuable feedback to stakeholders and project team members. [more...](#)

from **NCHRP Document 69: Performance Measures for Context Sensitive Solutions - A Guidebook for State DOTs**



Excerpt

### Organization-Wide Measures

For many DOTs, performance in program-wide areas of vital importance, such as system preservation or safety, is routinely measured using organization-wide performance measures based on data collected across the agency. [more...](#)

from **NCHRP Document 69: Performance Measures for Context Sensitive Solutions - A Guidebook for State DOTs**



Excerpt

### Tips for Getting Started

By now readers will understand that this guidebook advocates a rigorous CSS measurement framework that focuses on the processes and outcomes of CSS implementation, at both the project- and organizational-levels. Full realization of such a framework is likely to occur over time. At the outset of their efforts, transportation agencies just beginning to implement CSS may prefer to emphasize project-level measures that are directed to a handful of "pilot" projects. These measures can then be expanded to cover additional projects as implementation efforts grow. Likewise, measures that address processes may hold favor early on during implementation, before measurable outcomes are achieved. [more...](#)

from **NCHRP Document 69: Performance Measures for Context Sensitive Solutions - A Guidebook for State DOTs**

Feedback, questions, comments, or problems?

email [info@contextsensitivesolutions.org](mailto:info@contextsensitivesolutions.org)

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## What is CSS?

### Activities

### History

### Assistance

## Lead Organizations

### [American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials](#)

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials is composed of those Departments or Agencies of the United States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia in which official highway responsibility for that State or Territory is lodged, and the United States Department of Transportation, which is an ex-officio member.

[Federal Highway Administration](#) - The Federal Highway Administration is a part of the Department of Transportation and is headquartered in Washington, DC, with field offices across the United States. The vision of FHWA is to create the best transportation system in the world for the American people through proactive leadership, innovation, and excellence in service.

In working towards that vision, one of the key strategies of FHWA's National Strategic Plan is to work with our partners to ensure that highway facilities balance local, regional, and national concerns with the natural environment and add value to the community. To that end, FHWA provides technical assistance to state DOT's in applying context-sensitive design concepts within their agencies. FHWA also provides for, assists with, and supports outreach and training efforts to promote context-sensitive design. In addition, FHWA's Federal Lands Highway office is participating as a "pilot state" in sharing expertise it has in designing and building highways in some of the most environmentally, scenically and culturally sensitive areas of the country. For further information, see the latest [FHWA Report on their CSS Program Activities](#)

**Federal Highway Administrator Issues Memorandum on Context Sensitive Design:** The Federal Highway Administration has been involved in and supportive of many efforts promoting the Context Sensitive Design (CSD) philosophy - publishing the booklet Flexibility in Highway Design, a sponsor of the 1998 Maryland Conference, the 2000 ASCE Reston Conference, the 2000 International Scanning tour, and the 2001 Missoula Conference to name a few; until now there has been no official written statement formally endorsing CSD. [On January 24, 2002 Administrator Mary Peters signed a memorandum](#) to the FHWA field managers in which she affirms FHWA's support and commitment to the context-sensitive design philosophy and asks all of us to work together toward initiating CSD concepts where they do not exist, and toward sustaining them where they do.

[Transportation Research Board](#) - The Transportation Research Board (TRB) is a unit of the National Research Council, a private, nonprofit institution that is the principal operating agency of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering. The Board's mission is to promote innovation and progress in transportation by stimulating and conducting research,

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- [Office of Program Administration](#)

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facilitating the dissemination of information, and encouraging the implementation of research results.

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