

Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program

Name of Tool: Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program

Implementing Agency: The Capital District Transportation Committee

Scale of Application: State/regional planning, corridor/subarea planning, transportation project development, local comprehensive planning

Description: The Community and Transportation Linkage Program helps to integrate land use and transportation decisions by providing CDTC staff or private consultant support to local community planning initiatives. The funded planning studies are helping to implement key policies of the New Visions regional transportation plan through adoption by localities of land use plans, highway and transit designs, zoning ordinances, driveway, sidewalk, bicycle accommodation, and other standards.

Purpose and Need

In the mid-1990's the region first developed and adopted its long-range regional transportation plan. The public outreach process for this effort revealed a strong regional consensus that the region's quality of life, mobility, and economic vitality is dependent upon improved local land use planning and on better integration of land use development and the transportation system. Using a technique called "back-casting", CDTC determined that the region could meet its social, economic, and environmental goals in the future only if transportation service and facility actions were accompanied by a dampening of vehicular trip growth. The adopted regional plan, New Visions for Capital District Transportation, calls for a reduction in the growth in vehicular travel by one-third from trend forecasts – largely through altering the form and location of growth and its accompanying transportation systems.

Description

The core of the Capital District's regional transportation and land use policy is reflected in 11 adopted principles, a subset of CDTC's 25 adopted planning and investment principles. The policy thrust is that good site and community design *can* help realize the region's goals and that transportation actions *will* play a role. CDTC established its Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program to provide funding to convert the promise of sound land use planning into reality. The relevant policy principles behind the program are to link transportation and land use and to plan and build for all modes.

CDTC encourages potential program participants in their submissions to integrate sound planning principles that consider both land use and transportation issues. To assist potential sponsors, CDTC has developed seven broad strategies for the program that are consistent with the adopted New Visions principles, as well as with other initiatives such as the New York State Quality Communities initiative and the national Smart Growth movement. Submissions are screened as part of the evaluation process based on how well they incorporate the program strategies. The more program strategies incorporated, the higher the priority given to the submission. The seven strategies are to:

- Support urban revitalization and redevelopment of existing commercial/residential areas;
- Improve street connectivity and reduce driveway conflicts;
- Enhance and develop activity centers and town centers;
- Enhance and develop transit corridors and transit supportive built environments;
- Encourage a greater mix and intensity of land uses;
- Develop bicycle and pedestrian-friendly design standards; and
- Create an integrated multi-modal transportation network.

The Linkage Program is primarily financed through CDTC's FHWA metropolitan planning fund (PL) allocation as an MPO with additional funding from Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality and Surface Transportation Program funds. CDTC annually devotes approximately one-third of its planning program (over \$300,000 annually) to Linkage consultant activities, staff technical work, and study administration. Individual studies range from \$12,000 to over \$100,000 in size, with \$50,000 as the maximum federal fund request. A minimum 25 percent local cash match is required. Since 2000, 50 studies have been funded and the combined financial commitment from federal, state, regional, and local resources is over \$3 million.

All studies are managed by the CDTC staff, ensuring products that are both useful for the municipalities and consistent with regional policies. The program has proven very successful in raising the stature of the MPO and allowing it to effectively address regional planning issues at the local level. It has also generated viable project candidates for CDTC's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). A regional roundtable of municipal planners (with mandatory participation of Linkage Program study municipalities) meets quarterly to allow communities to build upon each others' experiences.

The number of studies, the number of municipalities engaged by CDTC in cooperative planning efforts, and the amount invested per capita by the MPO have few parallels in the nation. Critical and unique aspects of this region-wide planning effort are:

- Use of the MPO to hold the consultant contract for local planning;
- Influence of MPO staff on the local planning agenda and adherence of study scopes to adopted regional MPO policy;
- A high level of local funding commitment (the 2005-06 Linkage Program budget of over \$440,000 in studies reflects a local cash contribution averaging 42 percent);
- Regional planning engagement in the critical planning issues of nearly every city and nearly every growing suburb as well as those of a number of rural communities; and
- Development of a set of projects for TIP consideration that reflect reasonable, measured, and locally-supported plans.

Application Examples

Following are summaries of two of the 50 Linkage Program studies that CDTC has funded.

Hadley Pedestrian Linkage Study and Main Street Improvement Plan



[Figure 1] Sketch plan of the recommended Hadley Hamlet improvements in the Town of Hadley, New York.

This plan is intended to give Hadley a “road map” for developing a public pedestrian infrastructure and visual character that will compliment the community’s vision for the future. Hadley is hoping to regain some of its former vibrancy and some of the density it had at the turn of the 19th Century. The community strives to have a quaintness associated with small rural New England towns and to provide residents and visitors with a clear aesthetic identity as well as improved residential opportunities and commercial services. The primary study area is enclosed by the shores of the Hudson and Sacandaga Rivers (the eastern and southern boundaries), the Hadley Scenic Rail station (western boundary), and Sam Smead Town Park (northern boundary). Short and long term recommendations include the creation of Hamlet gateways, a redesigned Fowler Park and Circular Street, streetscape improvements to Rockwell Street, a re-aligned “four-corners” intersection and sidewalk, and trail improvements including the development of the Historic Rivers Trail.

Cohoes Route 470 Corridor Study



[Figure 2] Schematic plan for part of the downtown business district in the City of Cohoes, New York.

This study serves as one of the first steps towards long-term revitalization of the City of Cohoes. The study area encompasses Route 470 from the 112th Street Bridge to Columbia Avenue and adjacent neighborhoods including the downtown business district. A corridor development policy was outlined in the plan that advances economic development, reintegrates neighborhoods with the central business district, improves bicycle and pedestrian safety, and promotes traditional urban design. Along with an investigation of the transportation concerns along Route 470, three demonstration sites were investigated for their redevelopment potential. These areas include the Hudson River Waterfront, the Northern Gateway at NY 32 and NY 787, and the Historic Business District. Recommendations were made at each demonstration site regarding land use, development guidelines, and transportation improvements. Along with these recommendations, conceptual redevelopment plans were also created for each demonstration site.

Successes and Lessons Learned

A clear indication of success can be found in the broad regional consensus surrounding the approach of combining intelligent local planning with effective transportation operations and management. Recently adopted transportation policies are consistent with municipal plans.

In addition, the Linkage Program has jump-started many proactive planning activities in the region, particularly those in communities with limited local resources. Municipalities have adopted Linkage planning products as either amendments to their comprehensive plans or as a sub area or other master plan. In addition, many municipalities are working on updating or changing zoning codes, creating design guidelines, standards, and other regulatory tools to

help implement Linkage plans that affect the form of new development. The studies have articulated achievable local visions for the future that are compatible with regional policies and priorities. Linkage plans have also encouraged inter-municipal efforts to protect critical transportation corridors and to develop multi-modal transportation systems.

Much has been learned since the Linkage Program was initiated in 2000. In the early days, study sponsors were asking far too much of consultants leading to unrealistic scopes of work and significant cost overruns on the studies. CDTC has learned from these early experiences and now is realistic about what can be accomplished in these small scale efforts. In addition, CDTC staff has learned a great deal about the capacity of those at the local level to undertake proactive planning activities. In many cases, local governments lack the resources and expertise needed to manage a consultant, organize public meetings, and maintain a study advisory committee. To assist with these efforts, each Linkage study is assigned a CDTC staff person who actively engages in the process. This structure ensures that the regional principles are considered and the planning process is consistent in each study area.

The Linkage Program illustrates the value of involving the general public, local, regional, and state interests such as the regional planning commission, the state DOT, the regional transit authority, and the counties in local transportation and land use studies. Their involvement ensures that all issues of regional significance are on the table for each Linkage study and ensures a coordinated and collaborative local planning process.

For Further Information

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Web Sites and Publications:

<http://www.cdtcmpo.org/linkage.htm>

<http://www.cdtcmpo.org/interesting.htm>