

# Context Sensitive Strategy Report



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning  
August 2008

## Table of Contents

Context Sensitive Strategy Report.....	0
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.....	0
August 2008.....	0
Table of Contents.....	1
Introduction to Context Sensitivity.....	2
What is Context Sensitivity?.....	2
General Context Sensitive Planning.....	2
History of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS).....	6
Impacts of CSS.....	8
Project Benefits.....	8
Process Benefits.....	12
What about the cost of CSS?.....	13
Conclusions/Questions.....	14
Sources Cited.....	16

## Introduction to Context Sensitivity

### ***What is Context Sensitivity?***

Context sensitivity is a simple idea – taking the surroundings into consideration when making planning or infrastructure decisions. This represents a shift over traditional approaches, historically led by transportation engineers and planners and focused on safety and efficiency, to an approach that balances these project development priorities with community values and assets. Successful context sensitive processes both facilitate citizen participation throughout the process and allow greater design flexibility in the final product.

Our region’s surroundings, the “context,” are what define it and make it unique and distinctive. But in the rapidly growing and developing postwar America, this simple idea of taking the surroundings into consideration has not always been practiced. With the birth and expansion of the Federal Highway System, an increasing desire for lower-density development, and a national trend of sprawling growth, local “uniqueness” and character has often been sacrificed for efficiency and cost-effectiveness. In the last decade, however, this focus has been shifting, and municipalities and transportation agencies have recognized the need to balance these priorities with the existing aesthetics and values of local communities.

The context sensitivity concept is most actively utilized in the world of transportation planning and engineering, where it has evolved into a development approach termed “Context Sensitive Solutions,” or CSS. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) describes CSS as “an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist.” Most state DOTs have their own definitions as well, including Illinois:

“CSS is an interdisciplinary approach that seeks effective, multimodal transportation solutions by working with stakeholders to develop, build and maintain cost-effective transportation facilities which fit into and reflect the project’s surroundings – its ‘context.’”  
– Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)

CSS integrates community objectives and values relating to compatibility, livability and walkability, sense of place, environmental impacts and justice, and historic preservation, while respecting traditional objectives for street design of safety, efficiency, capacity, and maintenance. Greater consideration is given to the requirements of all travel modes (including walking, biking, and transit) on all street types; less focus is placed on expanding capacity. These objectives are met through early and continuous collaboration with stakeholders, with frequent working sessions and communication efforts throughout the design and construction processes.

### ***General Context Sensitive Planning***

Context sensitive solutions-type thinking is not limited solely to transportation planning and engineering. Other tools, usually implemented through zoning and development ordinances, attempt to deal with context sensitivity through components of urban design.

#### *Context Sensitive Signage*

One common application is context sensitive signage, which plans for and regulates signs, a prevalent and pervasive aspect of a community. Although the primary purpose of signage is to

act as an effective means of communication, its impact on the surroundings can range significantly. Context Sensitive regulations require signs to complement the existing built and natural environments, through height or illumination restrictions, or appearance standards.

### Examples of Context Sensitive Signage in the Region:



### *Neighborhood Conservation Districts*

Municipalities have also been adopting neighborhood conservation overlay districts, e.g. zoning districts which restore, preserve, and protect desired neighborhood character. Often utilized as an alternative to historic district designation, neighborhood conservation overlays are flexible and efficient, and promote infill and redevelopment that complies with modest development standards such as building height, setbacks, roof pitch, garage location, front porches, driveway access, street trees, and landscaping to maintain neighborhood character. These standards can also be set forth in more general design guidelines, which are frameworks adopted as a part of a municipality's zoning ordinance to ensure quality development. (For more information about this, please see CMAP's strategy report on [Teardowns](#).)

### ***Example Neighborhood Conservation District – Chapel Hill, NC***

A college town in central North Carolina, Chapel Hill has faced significant growth pressures in recent years. In order to protect unique and distinctive older in-town residential neighborhoods and commercial districts which contribute to the overall character and identity of the town, several neighborhood conservation districts have been established. The town currently has six neighborhood conservation district overlays, protecting a variety of neighborhoods. Some of these districts are designated as historic districts, others may lack sufficient historical, architectural or cultural significance to be designated as Historic Districts. As a matter of public policy, the Chapel Hill Town Council aims to preserve, protect, enhance, and perpetuate the value of these residential neighborhoods or commercial districts. Among other requirements, the district must be at least 75% improved, and platted or developed at least 40 years prior. (<http://www.townofchapelhill.org/index.asp?NID=144>)

### ***Contextual Standards***

Flexibility is key in ensuring context sensitivity. This flexibility can be built into zoning ordinances through contextual standards which are used in mature areas where the established development context differs from typical new development geared to meeting minimum development standards. These tailored standards reflect the area's current character, relying on cues from the surroundings rather than hard-and-fast rules. ]

### ***Example Contextual Standards – New York, NY***

New York City has established a number of residential districts termed “contextual” because they maintain the familiar built form of the existing community. These districts are similar to overlays in that they are subsets of the general residential districts (i.e., R2 zoning becomes R2-X if it is contextual). Therefore, the same zoning restrictions apply in regards to minimum lot size and width, but with some more flexibility to incorporate context. Floor-area-ratios, bulk, lot coverage, setbacks, scale, and other features can be adjusted to allow for flexibility and integration into the surroundings.

([http://www.tenant.net/Other\\_Laws/zoning/zonch09.html](http://www.tenant.net/Other_Laws/zoning/zonch09.html))



### ***Formula Business Ordinances***

Finally, some communities have adopted formula business ordinances. Formula businesses include retail stores, restaurants, hotels and other establishments that are required by contract to adopt standardized services, methods of operation, decor, uniforms, architecture or other features virtually identical to businesses located in other communities. Formula business ordinances do not prevent a chain store from coming in, but they do require that the incoming chain not look or operate like any other branch in the country. This has proved a significant deterrent to chains, which generally refuse to veer from their standardized approach. This helps communities retain their sense of place and uniqueness.

### ***Example Formula Business Ordinance – York, ME***

York, Maine is a small coastal community of about ten miles north of the New Hampshire border. At a town meeting in May 2004, residents of York voted to amend the town's

zoning ordinance to prohibit formula restaurants. The measure, which was endorsed by the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen, notes that York has retained a large concentration of historic buildings and locally owned businesses, and that the town's unique character is important to York's "collective identity as a community."

(<http://www.newrules.org/retail/york.html>)



A local example is the McDonald's fast-food restaurant on Waukegan Road (IL 43) in West Lake Forest, IL. The traditionally uniform chain restaurant was approved only after significant appearance, landscaping, and signage requirements, giving it a "barn-like" appearance that references Lake Forest's vernacular architecture.



Although these development tools are gaining support throughout the country and the region, the concept of context sensitivity has been most pervasive in the world of transportation. Thus, CSS is the focus of this analysis.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Do you know of examples of context sensitivity in development around your locale? "Do you like or dislike those projects? Why or why not?"
- Do you think context sensitivity is a worthwhile goal? Why or why not?

## History of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS)

### *Nationwide*

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which required transportation agencies to consider adverse impacts of road projects on the environment, might be considered as the beginning of CSS, at least at the national level. Another key moment in the evolution of CSS occurred in the late 1990s, when the Maryland Department of Transportation conducted the influential “Thinking Beyond the Pavement” conference, which yielded fourteen key principles of CSS, including seven “Qualities that Characterize Excellence in Transportation Design” and seven “Characteristics of the Process that will Yield Excellence in Transportation Design.”

In the current decade, CSS has been formalized into national transportation planning and project development processes. In 2003, the Federal Highway Administration identified “Environmental Stewardship & Streamlining” as one of its three “Vital Few Goals”. “Environmental Stewardship & Streamlining” includes the objective of incorporating CSS into the transportation planning processes of all 50 states. In 2004, the FHWA and partners launched its comprehensive ContextSensitiveSolutions.org website, and in the following year core principles of CSS were promoted in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

### *Illinois*

Although many of the strategies of Context Sensitive Solutions were implemented informally for years by the Illinois Department of Transportation, IDOT officially began researching and developing its approach to CSS in 2002. Throughout 2003, IDOT trained upper-level personnel, solicited feedback at meetings in five key municipalities and with regional transportation agencies/councils, and held interviews across the country with state transportation departments that had developed their own CSS policies.

This led to legislation passed by the State Legislature in 2003 (PA 093-0545), and departmental policies by 2005. Key features of IDOT’s formal CSS policy, which seeks to establish a process for providing cost-effective transportation facilities, include:

1. *A balance between mobility, community needs and the environment, while keeping safety paramount.*
2. *Involving stakeholders in the decision-making process early and continuously throughout the development of the project.*
3. *Addressing all modes of transportation in the planning and design of the project.*
4. *Using all appropriate disciplines to help plan for and design the project.*
5. *Applying the flexibility inherent in our design standards to fit a project into its surroundings and add lasting value to the communities it serves.*
6. *Incorporating aesthetics as part of basic design.*

IDOT has identified general specifications as to when the formal CSS process is required, and what sort of “stakeholder involvement process” is to be included. The CSS process is generally required in transportation projects that involve new construction and reconstruction or major expansion of existing transportation infrastructure, but it may not be required if an expedited schedule is necessary, or if consensus has already been established. In its Departmental Policy on CSS, IDOT states that its CSS process will include Stakeholder Involvement Processes that are “applicable to a wide range of projects,” “flexible and modular,” and “simple

enough to avoid adding another layer of process to an already lengthy planning and design schedule.” Last, IDOT’s Departmental Policy stipulates that “The Department is ultimately responsible for the safety and integrity of the state transportation system and therefore must make the final decisions regarding any and all aspects of the projects.”

For further information on the history of its development of a departmental CSS policy, along with current CSS policies and guidelines, resources, training, and current projects, IDOT has created its own [CSS website](#).

#### *CSS in the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan and the 2040 Framework Plan*

The guiding principles identified at the “Thinking Beyond the Pavement” conference coincide with several of the goals and implementation strategies of the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the NIPC 2040 Framework Plan. For example, the RTP calls for an approach that is interdisciplinary, transparent, and involves a wide range of stakeholders – the earlier, the better. Additionally, a key “quality of excellence” identified by the conference is that “The project is seen as having added lasting value to the community.” In line with this, the RTP states that “New investment should shape the transportation system in support of an evolving vision for the region’s future economic and social development,” and that transportation planners “should design local community transportation systems to enhance the quality of life of residents.”

#### *Local CSS Projects*

While many completed IDOT projects have embraced CSS principles, at time of this writing, IDOT has not completed a transportation project implementing a formal, comprehensive CSS process. Several projects with formal CSS processes, however, are in the works (i.e. the Elgin O’Hare – West Bypass, Illinois Rte. 47, and Illinois Rte. 31).

Even without the formal banner of CSS, in 2004 IDOT received the Award of Excellence in Urban Highways from the Federal Highway Administration for its reconstruction of South Lake Shore Drive, which used “a context-sensitive plan that not only improved the roadway but enhanced the neighborhood,” implementing a significant public involvement process that yielded a number of improvements, including new pedestrian underpasses and a new roadway drainage system that has improved water quality for Lake Michigan (see discussion of this project later in the paper).

Kane County’s [Stearns Road Bridge Corridor](#) project, targeted for completion in 2020, has implemented an informal CSS process that has helped tackle an assortment of unique challenges. The project will include a new multi-modal bridge (separately carrying both auto and bike traffic) across the Fox River, a 4.6-mile new road realignment that weaves its way around multiple environmentally-sensitive “fens,” and preserves approximately 2/3 of its right-of-way for open space.

Another relevant project is [Illinois Rte. 19](#), in Itasca. The initial IDOT proposal of a five-lane cross-section was modified following extensive public information meetings and alternatives analysis. This resulted in a new plan for a five-lane cross-section for the west end of the project in the commercial area, which narrows to a two-lane roadway, separated by a grassed barrier median, through the residential area.

CSS is also playing a role in the development of the study for the [Prairie Parkway](#), in Kendall, Kane, and Will Counties. Thus far, the study has included extensive public involvement, especially in the development of alternatives assessment. The study’s website is extremely user-friendly, and emphasizes the public involvement program.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are you familiar with any of these transportation projects that utilized context sensitive approaches in northeast Illinois?
- How far along is the project? What do you think of the results, so far?
- If you were involved – what did you think of the process?

## Impacts of CSS

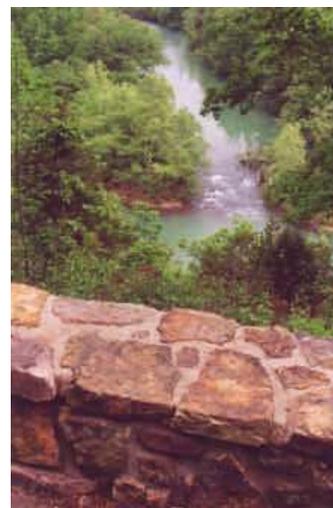
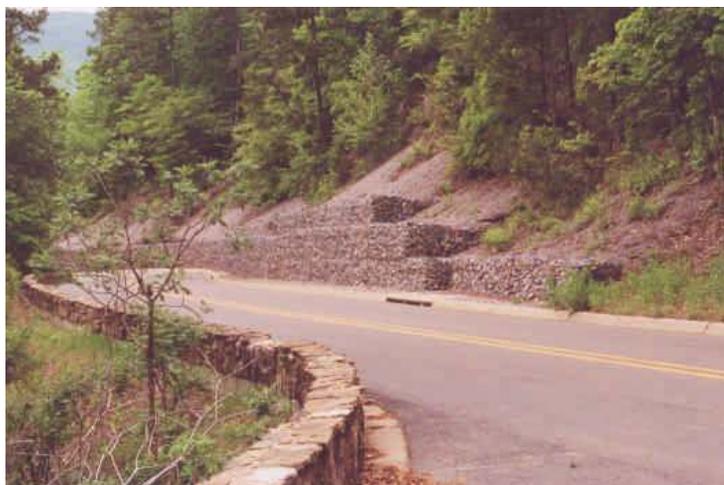
Utilizing a CSS approach has the potential to produce a variety of benefits, both to the community in which the project is being constructed, as well as the transportation agency responsible for construction. These benefits are mirrored in the principles of CSS: some derive from the finished project, and some derive from the CSS process.

### ***Project Benefits***

A transportation project that has been developed with a CSS approach is more likely to preserve community character, be less detrimental to the environment and natural resources, and add value to the community. Examples of this can be found in three projects: Arkansas Route 215 along Ozark National Forest, Cobblestone Park in Boonville, MO, and Paris Pike near Lexington, KY.

#### ***Arkansas Route 215 – Ozark National Forest***

Route 215 is an improved two-lane facility, approximately 15 miles long, that provides scenic views along the Mulberry River, and access to campgrounds within the White Rock Wildlife Management Area of the Ozark National Forest. The route needed to be widened without causing harm to the adjacent river or wildlife management area, and resurfaced in order to limit the amount of sediment and gravel runoff impacting the river. Special construction techniques were used to reduce erosion and siltation, native stone was used extensively for retaining walls and ditch lining, and scenic overlooks were enhanced. The completed project resulted in improved water quality along the river, better access to the campgrounds, and enhanced views. This project is a prime example of how a transportation improvement can also result in environmental enhancement and added community value.



### ***Cobblestone Street Interpretive Park – Boonville, MO***

During construction of a new bridge over the Missouri River, a cobblestone street was re-discovered. The street holds historic value; it was utilized by mule-carts and horse-drawn wagons throughout the 1800s to carry freight off the steamboats up the steep riverbank to the businesses at the top of the wharf. The MoDOT partnered with several community groups and worked to come up with a plan that incorporated the street into an interpretive park along the riverfront, and it was built during the bridge construction. The park is now a local landmark, part of Wharf Hill which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and a source of pride within Boonville and MoDOT.

### ***Paris Pike – Outside Lexington, KY***

Paris Pike is a scenic route between the northern limits of Lexington and the southern limits of Paris, serving commuters and through travelers. The project entailed reconstruction of an existing two-lane road into a four-lane over approximately 13 miles for safety and capacity reasons. During a lengthy stakeholder communication process, the project identified several natural features (critical topsoil, local vegetation including some endangered species and mature trees, and local streams and water channels) as well as several community features (historic properties, stone walls, horse farm viewsheds), in addition to the rural topography. The project's design and construction incorporated all of these natural and community features through a variety of techniques and measures – multiple realignments, minimized cut/fill, timber guardrails, stone facades, extensive erosion control techniques and tree protection zones, transplantations of vegetation, and others. The Paris Pike is oft-cited as a prime example of CSS, primarily for its efforts to accommodate environmental and community character value.



CSS can result in secondary benefits as well. Projects may be able to implement enhancements that promote increased transit use, biking, and walking. These improvements might translate in decreased automobile use, or a change in driving character (similar to traffic calming techniques). Furthermore, CSS projects do not sacrifice safety, and can often add safety for other travel modes. Examples of this can be found in two projects: transit program in Springdale, UT, and Asylum Avenue in West Hartford, CT.

### ***Springdale, UT – the Gateway to Zion National Park***

Zion National Park developed a shuttle program in 1993 in order to reduce traffic congestion and illegal parking throughout the park and its gateway town, Springdale. During a stakeholder process to implement the program, stakeholders expressed

interest in extending service throughout the town. The park worked with the town and UDOT to come up with a free shuttle-bus system that runs through town, picking up and dropping off passengers at parking facilities, hotels and major stops, and the Zion visitor center. The system's success allowed UDOT to narrow the main route through Springdale and the park, allowing for bus shelters and pedestrian crossings. Bike racks were placed on the propane-powered buses, and at stops. The roadbed, curbs, and sidewalks were colored red to minimize the visual impact on the natural landscape and "marry" the town and the park together. These efforts demonstrate the potential for a CSS project to reduce congestion as well as improve safety and community character by promoting transit, biking, and walking.

### ***Asylum Avenue – West Hartford, CT***

Asylum Avenue was once a four-lane arterial serving West Hartford, a prosperous, inner-ring suburban town which has had great success re-creating pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. With neighborhood input, the town decided to construct a median along Asylum Avenue, narrowing it to two separated lanes plus on-street parking on one side. Although ConnDOT characterized Asylum Avenue as a minor urban arterial, the context is residential, and supported it to be reclassified to a neighborhood avenue. The reconstruction of the road has transformed the character and appearance of the Avenue, and induced speed reductions, thereby improving safety, walkability, and pedestrian friendliness.



In addition, CSS projects can actually stimulate or bolster local economies. They serve as opportunities for improvements which can be incorporated into larger economic development efforts. Examples of this can be found in two projects: Rhode Island Avenue in Mount Rainer, MD, and Barracks Row in Washington, DC.

### ***Rhode Island Avenue – Mount Rainer, MD***

U.S. Route 1 (Rhode Island Avenue) split the commercial town center of Mount Rainer with a six-legged intersection and four lanes of busy traffic. Not only did this cause transportation issues, it hindered commercial revitalization in the heart of the community. Maryland DOT's Neighborhood Conservation Program, through close work with stakeholders, identified pedestrian safety and comfort as the key issue in this project. This was in addition to other goals of reducing stormwater runoff, creating a "sense of place" and pride in the town center, and increasing alternative modes of travel, especially transit. The project transformed the intersection into a roundabout, and incorporated landscaped plazas, pedestrian crossings and lighting, tree planting,

historically-referenced bus shelters, and public art. In turn, the neighborhood has seen significant reinvestment in the town center, and decreases in crime. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development has also been involved, granting loans through its Neighborhood Business Development Program. Some new businesses include a local food co-op, a bookstore, a café, a dance studio, and a Latino specialty market; the town has plans for a library expansion and specialty housing for artists.



### ***Barracks Row – Washington, DC***

Barracks Row is a six block stretch along 8<sup>th</sup> Street in one of DC's oldest commercial corridors. Despite its historic character, the strip had experienced economic decline with merchants complaining about deteriorating sidewalks and inadequate parking. A neighborhood group initiated revitalization of the street, first by winning designation as an official DC Main Street, then approaching the District DOT to find traffic, pedestrian, and parking solutions. With extensive public outreach and inter-agency coordination, Barracks Row was reconstructed to accommodate angled on-street parking, improve traffic flow patterns, replace streetlights, and pave sidewalks with brick. Additional improvements were able to leveraged, including a new public park, bike racks, historically-referenced street furniture and lighting, and extensive tree planting within new water-permeable planting strips. This combination of transportation and aesthetic improvements resulted in a safer, more welcoming environment which has stimulated economic reinvestment, with over 15 new businesses moving into the area.



## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Do you think that doing more transportation projects with context sensitivity would be good for the communities outside the immediate project limits? Why or why not?
- What do you think are those benefits of context sensitivity are?
- Do you think that incorporating context sensitive approaches into more transportation projects would significantly benefit the region as a whole? If so, how?

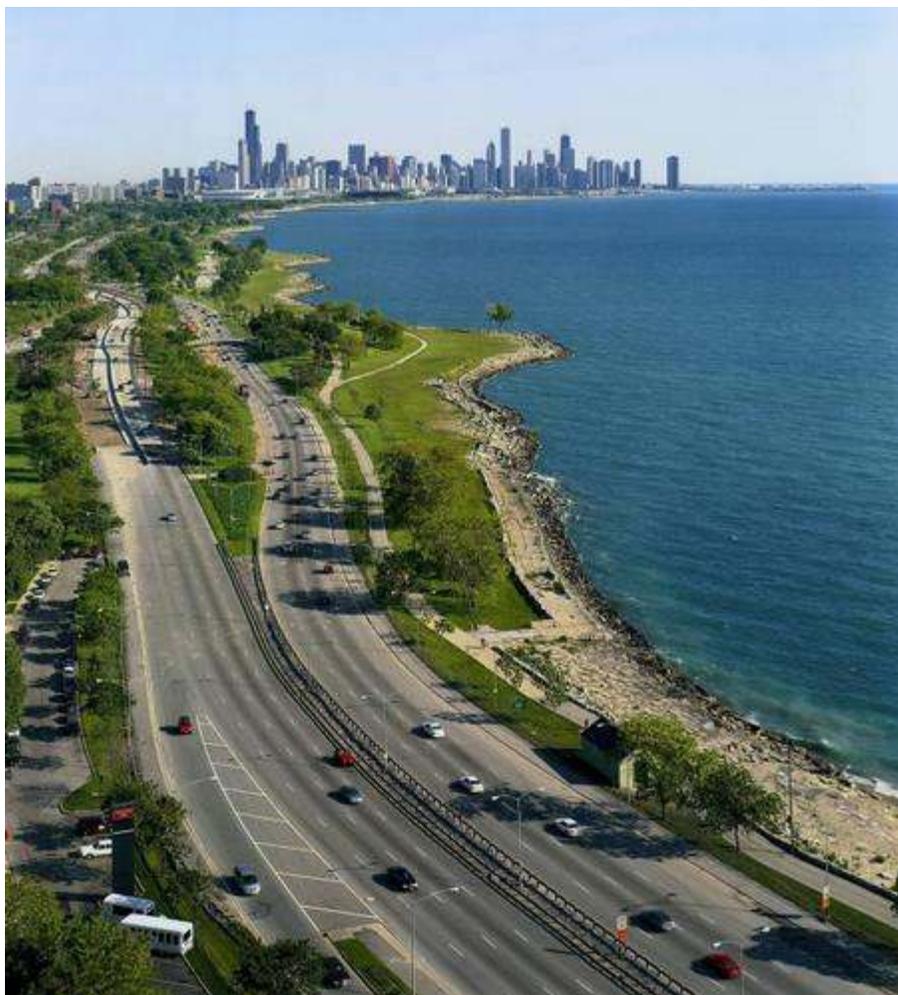
## ***Process Benefits***

Traditionally, project development has been the process to move a project from the planning stage through the construction phase. An evolution of practices with CSS has resulted in a process that includes an enhancement of public involvement throughout the stages, with emphasis on the NEPA process, beginning in the planning stages. The benefits of this proactive posture include timely decisions, partnerships rather than opponents, public trust, and improved project delivery schedules. (Pigman et al, 2005)

### ***South Lake Shore Drive – Chicago, IL***

The benefits of a well thought out CSS process were evident in the successful reconstruction of South Lake Shore Drive (SLSD). In the wake of strong community opposition to modernization in the 1970s, SLSD received only minor improvements over the following decades, but by the late 1990s community sentiment focused attention on the poor condition of the roadway.

Concerns about community opposition to planning efforts led IDOT, the consultant team, CDOT, and the Chicago Park District to develop a highly-transparent CSS process that enabled robust public involvement. An Advisory Group was established, intended to represent all portions of the community, involving over 30 organizations and government agencies, including neighborhood groups, advocacy groups, local establishments, educational and cultural institutions, elected officials, and police and fire departments. This Advocacy Group was actively consulted throughout all phases of planning, design, and construction, and feedback from the general public was solicited by SLSD team members at community and aldermanic ward meetings in the area. This highly-interdisciplinary CSS approach



resulted in a comprehensive, nuanced process that enjoyed considerable public support and yielded outstanding results, with the completed reconstruction effort winning number awards, including the Federal Highway Administration's Award of Excellence in Urban Highways.

<http://www.dot.state.il.us/css/d1/lakeshore/lakeshore.html>

<http://cms.transportation.org/sites/environment/docs/2005/South%20Lake%20Shore%20Drive%20Reconstruction%20-%20IL%20DOT.pdf>

### ***What about the cost of CSS?***

Despite these benefits, CSS typically includes a number of associated costs. It can be costly to facilitate robust involvement of the public and all stakeholders in a project development process from start to finish. Not only do all the meetings and extra layers of review have costly price tags themselves, the whole process is much more time-consuming than traditional project development. However, some advocates argue that in the long term, cost savings are often realized; by integrating more public involvement and environmental review into the process from the beginning, projects actually cost less and are built quicker. When public consensus is attained early on in a transportation project, litigation and redesign can be minimized, or avoided altogether, and permit approvals are expedited. Furthermore, CSS facilitates the often lengthy process of environmental compliance, and can stave off later environmental problems by addressing or avoiding them from the beginning. (ContextSensitiveSolutions.org)

Many of these benefits are difficult to quantify, and available research has yet to measure these aspects. However, in a survey which targeted state highway agencies for all 50 states and the District of Columbia, most of the responding agencies (23 of 26) stated that they had benefited from employing CSS. The benefits included early problem resolution; better relationships with stakeholders/public; reduced project development time; and increased ability to complete projects. Over half of the responding agencies (15 of 24) indicated that using CSS had not increased project costs. (KTC, 2006)

Although the academic research is minimal on the quantifiable benefits of CSS, its pervasiveness reflects the current climate in transportation planning and project development, as well as other areas of development and planning. Although CSS translates into several potential benefits, both from the actual project as well as from the process, these are difficult to measure and must be weighed against cost. Also, through their holistic approach, CSS and other context sensitive planning strategies open the door for several secondary and tertiary benefits oftentimes forfeited by traditional processes.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Do you feel that improving a project's sensitivity to its context is critical?
- Do you feel that context sensitivity should be an essential component of all future transportation projects in the region
- Do you feel that there are circumstances in which it should be only a minor concern, due to such realities as expedited timetables and limited funding? Please explain your perspective.

## Conclusions/Questions

In many ways, “Context Sensitive Solutions” is the natural evolution of transportation planning and project development from the established focus on efficiency and safety to a more thorough process, which balances these traditional transportation concerns with other priorities of stakeholders. While the investment of time and resources to this process can be considerable, it yields solutions that are more comprehensive, nuanced, and better-suited to the broad needs of communities involved. The CSS process also can offer appealing secondary benefits, such as improving opportunities for bicyclists or bolstering local economies. While broader in scope and containing additional layers of review, the comprehensive approach of CSS can have the effect of incorporating the unavoidable hurdles of transportation planning into a more streamlined process, helping identify problems sooner and garnering community trust and support earlier in the life of a project.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have you participated in a transportation improvement project in which context sensitivity was not a primary consideration?
- Do you think that the project outcome would have been significantly different if it had been? How so?

(2 side bars)

*“Through early, frequent, and meaningful communication with stakeholders, and a flexible and creative approach to design, the resulting projects should improve safety and mobility for the traveling public, while seeking to preserve and enhance the scenic, economic, historic, and natural qualities of the settings through which they pass.” – IDOT*

### **Principles of Context Sensitive Solutions**

#### **The CSS Product:**

- The project satisfies the purpose and needs as agreed to by a full range of stakeholders. This agreement is forged in the earliest phase of the project and amended as warranted as the project develops.
- The project is a safe facility for both the user and the community.
- The project is in harmony with the community, and it preserves environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, and natural resource values of the area, i.e., exhibits context sensitive design.
- The project exceeds the expectations of both designers and stakeholders and achieves a level of excellence in people's minds.
- The project involves efficient and effective use of the resources (time, budget, community) of all involved parties.
- The project is designed and built with minimal disruption to the community.
- The project is seen as having added lasting value to the community.

#### **The CSS Process:**

- Communication with all stakeholders is open, honest, early, and continuous.
- A multidisciplinary team is established early, with disciplines based on the needs of the specific project, and with the inclusion of the public.
- A full range of stakeholders is involved with transportation officials in the scoping phase. The purposes of the project are clearly defined, and consensus on the scope is forged before proceeding.
- The highway development process is tailored to meet the circumstances. This process should examine multiple alternatives that will result in a consensus of approach methods.
- A commitment to the process from top agency officials and local leaders is secured.
- The public involvement process, which includes informal meetings, is tailored to the project.
- The landscape, the community, and valued resources are understood before engineering design is started. A full range of tools for communication about project alternatives is used (e.g., visualization).

*From “Thinking Beyond the Pavement” Conference, Maryland  
[www.contextsensitivesolutions.org](http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org)*

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