

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY: BLUEGRASS CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLANNING HANDBOOK

Residents prize the rural atmosphere of the central Bluegrass Region of Kentucky. Development in this region historically has been contained within established urban centers and small towns, with each town separated from the other by greenbelts of farmland and connected by a network of scenic roads. Growth pressures, however, are causing a rapid increase in development in rural areas, and cities are expanding down the region's connecting roadway corridors toward each other. Residents fear that if this trend continues, the once distinct communities of the region will blur their identities with interlinking sprawl development.

In the Bluegrass region, as well as other parts of the Commonwealth, fear of development has grown so strong that it has stalled roadway projects meant to address pressing traffic congestion and safety concerns. The Cemetery Road corridor, a gateway to Bowling Green, illustrates the dilemmas faced in balancing transportation needs with community preservation. Plans developed by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) in the early 1980s to widen the road from two to four or five lanes and construct a freeway interchange were ultimately shelved as a result of opposition from residents, who feared the proliferation of strip commercial enterprises along this semi-rural roadway.

The passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, with its emphasis on public involvement, gradually inspired a new approach to corridor planning in Kentucky. In the mid-1990s, the KYTC returned to the Cemetery Road community to ask what it would take to "lay the road gently across the landscape" and obtain community support. A series of public meetings and workshops led to a set of transportation and land use recommendations, which are now being implemented.

The Cemetery Road project as well as the Paris Pike project – a high-visibility road reconstruction in the Lexington area – convinced the KYTC of the benefits of working with the community to create context-sensitive solutions to transportation problems. With the support of the TCSP program, the agency has codified its outreach-oriented planning approach in the Bluegrass Corridor Management Planning Handbook. The KYTC hopes that application of this approach statewide will lead to transportation projects that address mobility

and safety needs while preserving the communities through which they pass.



Courtesy Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

Bluegrass country near Lexington, Kentucky.

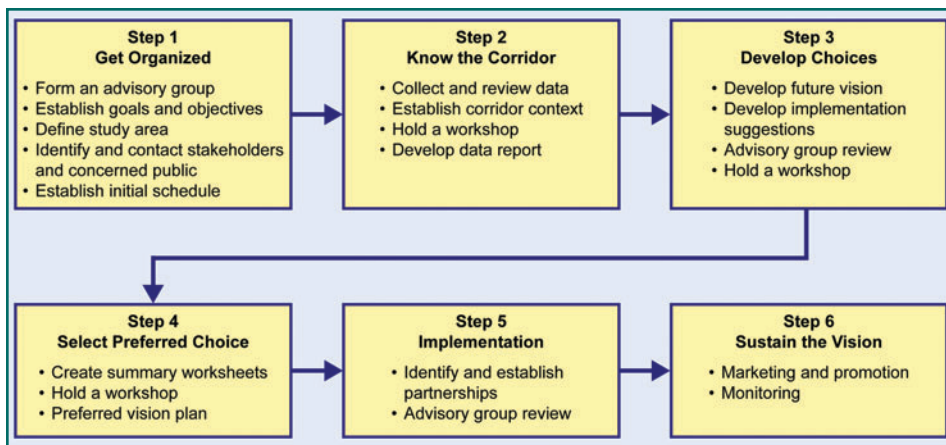
THE PROJECT

An FY 1999 TCSP grant of \$435,000 allowed the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, in partnership with the non-profit group Bluegrass Tomorrow, to develop the Bluegrass Corridor Management Planning Handbook. \$250,000 of this grant supported the handbook, supplemented by \$25,000 in funding from Bluegrass Tomorrow and \$5,000 from a National Park Service grant. The remainder of the TCSP grant funded the development and testing of visualization tools for transportation projects. In this part of the project (not discussed in this case study), the Kentucky Transportation Center tested the use of two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and virtual reality visualization techniques to solicit public involvement on roadway design features.

The KYTC is one of five State transportation agencies introducing context-sensitive principles into roadway planning and design on a pilot basis. While the corridor management handbook incorporates the context-sensitive design approach, it further expands upon this approach by introducing consideration of corridor land uses.

The Bluegrass Corridor Management Planning Handbook outlines a six-step process for conducting a corridor planning study. It discusses topics within the process such as:





Six-step corridor management process outlined in the Bluegrass Corridor Management Planning Handbook.

- Forming an advisory group;
- Identifying stakeholders and the concerned public;
- Finding data;
- Describing the corridor context;
- Holding a public workshop;
- Assessing and selecting alternatives; and
- Implementing the final master plan.

The handbook also provides resource materials including:

- A discussion of key aspects of transportation and land use such as access management, traffic calming, and mixed-use development;
- A sample newsletter and checklists; and
- Sample land use regulations.

The handbook is designed for a range of audiences involved in corridor studies, including engineers, planners, and landscape architects as well as the general public. While the handbook was initially developed for the central Kentucky region, it is being applied throughout the State. Furthermore, the principles contained in the handbook are broadly applicable to corridor planning anywhere in the United States.

“The purpose of the handbook is to provide people with a basic understanding of tools and practices to relate transportation and land use planning at a corridor level.”

– John Carr, Deputy State Highway Engineer, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPATION

The Bluegrass Corridor Management Planning Handbook was developed through a unique partnership between the KYTC and Bluegrass Tomorrow. Bluegrass

Tomorrow is a non-profit coalition of business, farming, development and preservation interests dedicated to promoting coordinated growth and preservation planning for the seven-county Bluegrass region surrounding Lexington, Kentucky. Supported primarily by private enterprise, the group’s members are convinced that a high quality of life is good for attracting business and maintaining a quality workforce.

The roots of the project can be traced back to the early 1990s, when Bluegrass Tomorrow led a visioning project for the Lexington

region. The project found strong community concern over a lack of connection between transportation planning, local and regional land use planning, and goals for community character. A follow-up study, marked by a high level of participation from elected officials and community leaders, recommended the development of management plans for key highway corridors. In 1995, Bluegrass Tomorrow gained support for a pilot study to develop a corridor management plan for U.S. 27, a road becoming more suburban spanning Fayette and Jessamine Counties. The governor of Kentucky at the time, Brereton C. Jones, requested Bluegrass Tomorrow and the KYTC – initially wary of each other – to work together and that the KYTC provide funding for the project.

Over the course of this study, the relationship between the KYTC and Bluegrass Tomorrow changed dramatically. By working together, the two groups realized they had mutual interests in improving traffic flow and safety while addressing community character, historic preservation, and other concerns.

“KYTC’s approach to planning has changed significantly over the 1990s. They are now taking the transportation-land use linkage to a whole new level.”

– Jean Scott, former Executive Director, Bluegrass Tomorrow

In 1997, the KYTC funded a regional conference on corridor access management planning which nearly 300 people attended. The conference was structured with presentations in the morning and afternoon break-out groups to discuss opportunities and obstacles relating to key access management issues. One clear finding was the need for a handbook on integrating transportation and land use. The KYTC and Bluegrass Tomorrow partnered to prepare a proposal for this



handbook, and were successful in receiving TCSP grant funds to support the project.

The principles in the handbook are being introduced into transportation corridor planning through a number of mechanisms:

- The KYTC has distributed nearly 500 copies of the handbook statewide and has made the handbook available to the public via the Internet.
- The KYTC and Bluegrass Tomorrow have conducted training workshops for local staff and consultants. A workshop in fall 2001 attracted over 100 engineers, landscape architects, and planners.
- Bluegrass Tomorrow is working with the 10 local governments in the Lexington metropolitan area to hold training workshops for planning commissioners and staff. Local governments are covering most of the cost of these workshops, which fulfill continuing education requirements for planners.

RESULTS

The KYTC reports that the concepts presented in the handbook are now being applied to projects in the planning and design stages. For a planning study of the Danville Connector (KY 2168), the KYTC and the Bluegrass Area Development District – a 15-county partnership of local governments – coordinated a public participation process with a special focus on community impact and environmental justice issues. Examples of activities include separate “initial contact” meetings with local officials, media, and community leaders; formation of an inclusive advisory committee; and open-house style public meetings from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

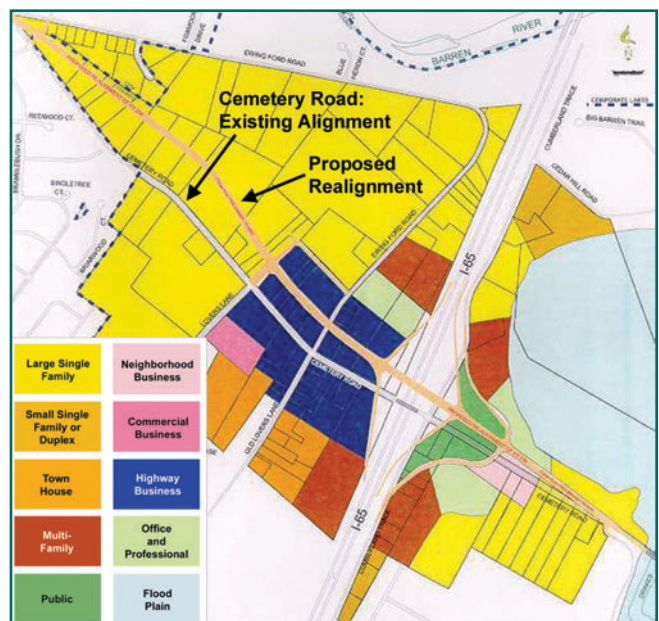
A corridor study of U.S. 27 between KY 34 and U.S. 150 is using many of the outreach strategies applied in the Danville project. A two-county advisory committee was established, including a freight company official and a commuter who uses the corridor to access work in Lexington – constituencies who previously had not been represented on advisory committees for this type of project. The guidance on corridor planning provided by the handbook also is helping KYTC staff address other goals such as environmental justice. For example, community outreach was also performed to locate and include the emerging Hispanic population in the U.S. 27 corridor.

The Cemetery Road project in Bowling Green, undertaken before the handbook was completed, illustrates how project outcomes can change as a result of the public process promoted by the handbook. Some of the final recommendations for the Cemetery Road project that made it acceptable to the community included:

- Creating a new section of the roadway off the existing alignment, to provide more freedom for access management;
- Creating the road as a landscaped boulevard, both for visual enhancement and to create a buffer between the highway and neighborhoods;
- Creating a bicycle/pedestrian path along the corridor, as one of the first links of a greenway plan developed by the city/county; and
- Developing an overlay district to specify allowable uses, building design and landscaping features, and connections to the roadway and the shared-use path.

The transportation recommendations were incorporated into the final design for the Cemetery Road project. The recommended land use overlay district also was implemented. The city and county planning and zoning commission wrote the ordinance for this district in partnership with the KYTC, local residents, and developers, and it has been adopted into law.

Following on the success of this project, the KYTC is discussing the application of a zoning overlay district as well as identifying appropriate pedestrian facilities for the proposed widening of U.S. 31 south of Bowling Green.



Land use designations recommended by the county planning commission for the Cemetery Road corridor in Bowling Green.

REACTIONS

The KYTC has become convinced of the benefits of an open and participatory process and has realized that such a process can actually help them achieve their transportation objectives. Furthermore, they have realized the importance of land use and community character issues to Kentucky residents and are



incorporating these considerations into corridor studies. According to Deputy State Highway Engineer John Carr, public feedback has been very positive, and people are enthusiastic about the application of the principles described in the handbook.

Committee members in the Danville Connector project had different opinions on the need for and location of a potentially controversial and divisive project. They ultimately came up with three alternatives by working together in groups. Bruce Duncan, a transportation planner with the Bluegrass Area Development District, noted that “each person became more receptive to compromise by listening to the opinions of others.”

Jeff Moore, an engineer with the KYTC District 3 in Bowling Green, cautioned that ongoing attention will be required to implement the process and design changes described in the handbook. For example, some context-sensitive design elements such as landscaping may cost more to maintain than conventional designs. The KYTC must be sure not only to fund the capital costs but also to support ongoing maintenance of the corridor.

“We are going to the community and asking what they want well before pen meets paper.”

– Jeff Moore, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, District 3

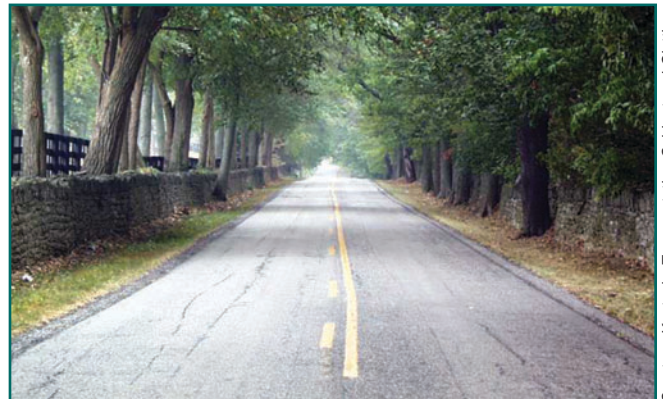
LESSONS LEARNED

The Kentucky Bluegrass Corridor Management Planning Handbook is proving to be of value for engineers, planners, and landscape architects involved in corridor studies, as well as for stakeholder groups and other citizens interested in the outcomes of transportation projects. The application of the processes described in the handbook represents a new way of doing business for the KYTC. This approach is demonstrating benefits both for the agency and for the communities that it serves. Some of the lessons learned from the KYTC’s experiences include:

- **An inclusive process can overcome opposition and allow transportation projects to move forward.** Citizen involvement in the Cemetery Road project led to changes that made the project acceptable to the public while still addressing congestion and safety concerns. As a result of this more open and flexible planning process, a project originally

proposed 20 years ago is now being built. An inclusive approach to public involvement also is helping the KYTC address related goals, including context-sensitive design, environmental justice, and historic preservation.

- **Economic development and mobility needs can be balanced with community character and historic preservation.** Experiences in Kentucky demonstrate that transportation facilities can be designed in such a way that they blend into the landscape, and transportation-related growth can be managed without being prohibited.
- **Transportation and land use must be addressed together in the planning process.** One of the greatest fears of some communities is that transportation improvements will induce development that is out of character with the surrounding community. The KYTC has taken the step of working with local governments to address zoning at the same time as corridor improvements are planned. The overlay district adopted in Bowling Green is an example of a tool for guiding the location and design of development.



Old Frankfort Pike, near Lexington.

Courtesy, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and Glaiting Jackson Kercher Anglin Lopez Rinehart, Inc.

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The handbook can be downloaded from:
www.kytc.state.ky.us/multimodal/index.htm

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