

What Sustainability Means To ODOT: Key Messages

SUSTAINABILITY IN GENERAL TERMS

An accepted general definition of sustainability is "*using, developing and protecting resources in a manner that enables people to meet current needs and provides that future generations can also meet future needs, from the joint perspective of environmental, economic and community objectives.*"

Sustainability is a uniquely broad and long-term concept that addresses quality of life and efficiency concerns. It takes into account both local and global views, applying a timeframe that considers costs and benefits over lifetimes rather than one- or two-year cycles.

Because of the broad nature of sustainability, it is often hard to articulate it in tangible ways that relate to a specific context. Having a mental framework can help provide specificity and clarity.

SUSTAINABILITY AND ODOT

At ODOT, we want employees to think about sustainability with regard to three key areas: **access**, **activities** and **assets**. These areas provide the mental framework for articulating how ODOT can incorporate sustainability.

Access includes a number of different elements relating to quality of life. ODOT must support, in an equitable manner for all Oregonians, access to: (1) essential goods and services; (2) economic opportunities; (3) transportation choices; (4) vibrant and livable communities; (5) healthy natural resources. There are challenges to meeting these needs, but they can be overcome by managing our **activities** and our **assets** carefully.

Activities are all the day-to-day tasks that ODOT employees carry out to provide a safe, efficient transportation system. These include everything from on-the-ground activities such as road construction and maintenance to office activities such as planning and design, as well as behind-the-scenes support functions. For each activity, we must consider the life cycle impacts on financial resources, local communities and the natural environment

Assets are all the different parts of the transportation system, such as roads, bridges, signs and guardrails. Assets also include the equipment, buildings, materials and data we use to manage the transportation system, as well as "soft" natural resource assets such as roadside areas, landscapes and water systems. We should manage assets with a view to the social, economic and environmental context while optimizing performance over the life cycle.

This mental framework reflects the cross-divisional nature of ODOT's Sustainability Program, because the terms **access**, **activities** and **assets** have meaning for each of ODOT's divisions. It also supports the existing CS³ (context sensitive and sustainable solutions) framework, which is ODOT's primary means of incorporating sustainability goals into the highway project delivery process.

We summarize what sustainability means to ODOT with the following phrase:

*Sustaining **access** for future generations through careful management of our **activities** and **assets**.*

"ACCESS, ACTIVITIES AND ASSETS" FURTHER DEFINED

Access

- Providing access **to a decent quality of life**, helping people reach desired goods, services, activities and destinations.
- Maintaining access **to markets** and supporting freight mobility to promote economic prosperity.
- Facilitating access **to multi-modal transportation choices**.
- Supporting access to **livable communities**.
- Ensuring access **to healthy places** by protecting Oregon's air, water, land, wildlife and botanical resources.
- Supporting access **for all people**, regardless of age, race, gender, income level, physical ability or mental ability.
- Sustaining access **for generations to come**.

Activities

Every activity that an ODOT employee undertakes contributes to sustainability goals. When contemplating activities, especially **recurring** or **system-wide activities**, we should be viewing them through the **life cycle lens**. That means considering all impacts – economic, environmental and social – **beyond the initial phase into the use and disposal/re-use phases**. This is true for all different kinds of activities. Office activities may include planning, design or administration, or even simple support functions such as printing. Field activities may include the maintenance and operation of the transportation system. Activities may also have an external focus, such as ODOT's interactions with the contracting community during construction or with citizens during the public involvement process.

Assets

- **Life cycle management** of all our assets – **linear** and **non-linear**, **hard** and **soft**.
- Developing our transportation system assets to continually improve **safety**.
- Designing, constructing and maintaining assets for **durability and low impact**.
- Building assets that are **sensitive to communities and ecosystems** now and in the future.
- Maintaining assets in a manner **compatible with native habitats and species**.
- Designing and constructing assets to **reduce demand for energy and raw materials**, and **reduce waste**.
- Developing assets that serve **multiple modes**.
- **Preserving and optimizing assets** over their lifetime through efficient operations and management.

SECONDARY MESSAGES

Articulating why sustainability is important:

- It's a better way of doing business – it provides the best value and least risk now and into the future.
- It's our duty to the public good – that's why it's in the ODOT mission and Oregon Transportation Plan policies.
- It's the law – it is required by executive order and statute.

Providing encouragement and momentum:

- It's in everybody's work, and everyone has a part to play
- Remember when? – Look how far we've come!