



Environmental Justice

New Orleans MPO Develops Effective Process

If you're looking for a better way to deal with Environmental Justice concerns, maybe New Orleans might be the place to go. Through a series of trial and error experiences they have learned a great deal about the process and ways to improve what we do.

It all started with decisions made by the State of Louisiana passing legislation to make major changes to the transportation system within the New Orleans area. When local low-income communities saw that they were going to be adversely impacted (or least they felt they were going to be) they marched on their community leaders and legislature to stop the construction.

The SRC's "Progress In Motion" newsletter is a time sensitive continuous resourceful way to share valuable technology and/or information that are taking shape that can help your programs/goals.

We encourage you to send in any information that you feel is important enough to be shared. We want to know about it.

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The Southern Resource Center provides technical services to transportation partners and customers throughout the Nation.

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In this particular case it was the Florida Bridge and Expressway project that was causing the stir. The New Orleans Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPO) decided that something needed to be done to change the mindset of both communities. Rather than bringing in plans on what needs to be done, they determined to come in explaining how the program works and asking questions on how it might be done better.

It was important to step back from the project, get everyone together on the same ideas and layout the scenarios to help everyone concerned. See how concessions can be made for the good of all. The process is simple - Come in with a short presentation on procedures, do a survey and then follow-up with a dialogue session. Be willing to listen to what their concerns are and then take the appropriate action.

Consideration must be taken into account regarding not only the local areas but also how it fits into the

regional needs. It boils down to finding out what the problems are. One problem may exist in several different communities and can best be addressed on a larger scale.

One project included rail movement and was subject to a lot of community outcry. The Carrolton Curve Project, which was intended to cost about \$57 million was only funded with \$6 million. By refocusing the effort on short-term solutions to problems common to all the stakeholders, the MPO was able to craft some win-win outcomes that avoided conflict over a project that was not achievable under current conditions.

An operational analysis of the situation allows each area to be a factor in resolving the overall concerns. Better planning and good community outreach usually helps Environmental Justice to take care of



itself. Look for common problems rather than using the us vs. them mentality.

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The most important part of the Environmental Justice and Title VI activities has to do with the community outreach program. In the planning process, particularly when we are beginning environmental work on a project or corridor, the MPO undertakes a proactive community outreach effort designed to allow the affected communities early input into the planning process. The goal is to open a dialogue with them on the issues the proposed transportation project raises for their community. The MPO staff then takes this input from the community and evaluates the likely impacts the transportation plan or project will have on neighborhood, parish and regional quality of life and how it will affect community goals. An effort is then made to continue the community dialogue to find mutual, context sensitive solutions to the issues raised. This process works best when the community dialogue is initiated in the early stages of the planning process before any specific project proposals have been put forth. In this way the MPO is beginning to plan with the community instead of for the community.

Although much work is yet to be done in maintaining and broadening this community dialogue, the current efforts are having significant impact on the content and character of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

Below are listed some project additions, modifications and deletions as a result of community outreach:

PROJECTS ADDED:

- **Inter-parish transit coordination study** - A local bus system stopping in both parishes instead of spending two hours going into New Orleans and back
- **Algiers Loop/Jefferson Transfer facility connector** - Created a one day all systems pass
- **Plaquemines/Jefferson connector service** - A service connecting the two streets
- **Peters Road bus line** - An additional bus line added
- **New Orleans jobs vans** - A van service providing transportation for workers
- **One day ride pass between Orleans and Jefferson buses** - Another inter-bus service
- **Support for ferry service**

PROJECTS MODIFIED:

- **Canal and Desire Streetcar line** - Added streetcar line
- **Earhart Expressway extension** - Change of extension to avoid difficulty with low-income area
- **Slidell Bike Path Plan** - Bike path adjustment

PROJECT OMITTED:

- **Causeway Bridge Third Span** - Project eliminated because of environmental impact

These and other ideas represent ways to improve the community outreach and better serve the transportation needs of all concerned.

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