

Capital District Transportation Committee Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program

Activity

Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program

Implementing Agency

The Capital District Transportation Committee (Albany, New York area Metropolitan Planning Organization)

Summary

The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program (the Linkage Program), started in 2000, provides consultant or CDTC staff technical assistance to carry out joint regional-local planning initiatives that link transportation and land use. The Linkage Program is a key implementation activity of *New Visions 2030*, the regional long range transportation plan, which seeks to reduce the growth of vehicular travel in the Capital Region. It presents an opportunity for CDTC staff to provide local planning assistance and outreach. Since 2000, 61 studies have been funded, with a combined financial commitment from Federal, state, regional, and local resources of over \$4 million.

Link to Livability

The Linkage Program helps local governments better support community transportation needs by providing assistance in developing and adopting local land use plans, highway and transit designs, zoning ordinances, and pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.

Context and Background

The region first developed and adopted its long-range regional transportation plan in the mid-1990's; the current long range plan is called *New Visions 2030*. The development of the long range plan 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.

New Visions 2030 principles follow four themes:

- To preserve and manage the existing investment in the region's transportation system,

- To develop the region's potential to grow into a uniquely attractive, vibrant and diverse metropolitan area,
- To link transportation and land use planning to meet the Plan's goals for urban reinvestment, concentrated development patterns and smart economic growth, and
- To plan and build for all modes of transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle, public transit, cars and trucks.

CDTC uses a technique called "backcasting" to help determine how the future regional transportation network can serve regional social, economic, and environmental goals, and the types of policies that would be necessary in order to reach that desired state. Different from forecasting, which predicts future needs based on current trends, backcasting starts with defining a desirable future and then working backwards to identify policies and programs that will connect the future to the present. Through this proactive approach, CDTC determined that the region could meet its future goals only by reducing the growth of vehicle trips.

The Linkage Program is designed to fulfill the adopted principles and strategies in New Visions 2030 by providing assistance to communities undertaking local planning initiatives that integrate land use and transportation. Since the program was initiated in 2000, CDTC has funded 61 planning studies in 37 Capital Region communities ranging from the largest city to some of the smallest towns and villages. Roughly \$4.0 million in Federal, state and local funds have been committed to the Linkage Program since its inception in 2000.

Detailed Description

The Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program provides funding to help realize local land use planning goals. The Linkage Program is primarily financed through CDTC's FHWA metropolitan planning fund with additional funding from Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, and Surface Transportation Program funds. For Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011, CDTC reserved \$200,000 of its federal planning funds for consultant activities and \$100,000 for staff technical assistance (capped at \$10,000 per study) for all study types. Planning studies range from \$30,000 to \$100,000 in cost; implementation activities (e.g. implementing Linkage studies, or other activities such as strategic zoning code changes, zoning code overlays, developing or revising design standards, or operational modeling,) are eligible up to \$50,000. The program requires a minimum 25 percent local cash match. Since 2000, 61 studies have been funded and the combined financial commitment from Federal, state, regional, and local resources is over \$4 million.

Eligible planning studies should relate to the following Linkage Program strategies, consistent with the adopted New Visions 2030 principles, as well as other initiatives such as sustainable development, Complete Streets and the national Smart Growth movement:

- 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.

CDTC provides assistance either through consultant work done under contract to CDTC, through consultant work done under contract to a municipality or other unit of government, or through CDTC staff technical assistance (limited to no more than \$10,000 of staff time). All studies are managed by the CDTC staff to help ensure that products are both useful to the municipalities and consistent with regional policies.

Application Examples

Following are summaries of two of the 61 studies conducted through the Linkage Program.

Schenectady Route 5 Transit Oriented, Mixed-Use Catalyst Project Study



Figure 1 State Street is the street shown at the top of this diagram. The design includes raised crosswalks at major intersections, street trees and pocket parks.

The purpose of this study was to create a concept plan for transit oriented development (TOD) in the Hamilton Hill and Vale neighborhoods in the City of Schenectady, to support the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system under development on State Street (Route 5) through the year 2020. Proposed BRT stations on State Street at Nott Terrace and Steuben Street (a \$600,000 investment) will help jump start the City's revitalization efforts in these neighborhoods that currently face social and economic challenges. Key study components included analysis of economic development opportunities around transit-oriented development, the location of the proposed BRT stations at the Nott Terrace and Steuben Street

intersections, and the pedestrian environment in the neighborhoods. Key concepts are shown in Figure 1.

The planning process, completed in May 2008, included formation of an Advisory Committee, three community workshops, a statement of vision and principles, review of existing studies, and the development of a community profile, action plan and implementation strategy. The total study cost was \$92,000.

Guilderland / Princetown Land Use and Transportation Study for Route 20

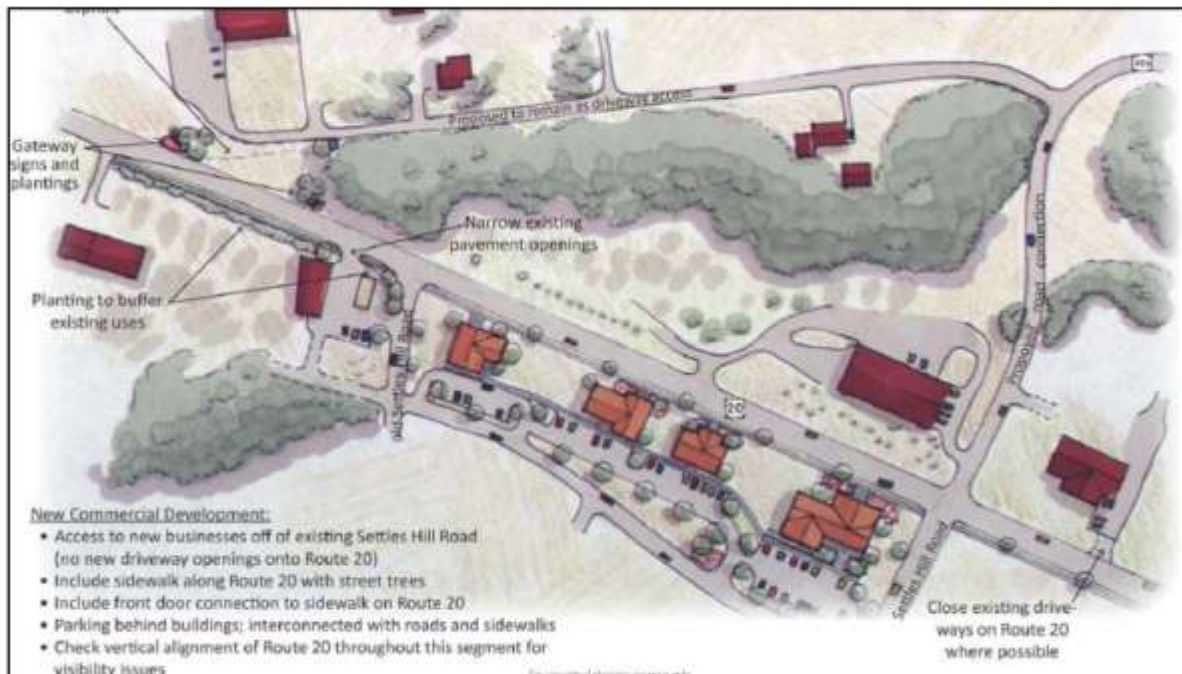


Figure 2: Conceptual realignment and access management alternative near Giffords Church intersection in Princetown, NY

CDTC assisted the towns of Guilderland and Princetown with a planning study to examine the land resources and current zoning in the Route 20 corridor from NY 158 to Duanesburg, focusing on the development of mixed use country hamlet and rural zones. The study also determined the feasibility of infrastructure modifications to enhance economic opportunities and aesthetics along the Route 20 corridor in the two municipalities.

The study developed action plans related to access management, pedestrian/bike facilities, streetscape improvements, natural/scenic topographic features, environmental features, architectural/site design, a hamlet concept, and mixed use development. It is expected to help the town of Guilderland implement recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan and the Rural Guilderland Study. Conceptual realignment of one of the intersections in Princetown is shown in Figure 2. The study also assisted the town of Princetown in addressing new challenges related to municipal water service in the Route 20 corridor. The recommendations of the Watervliet Reservoir Watershed Protection Study (CDRPC, 2003) were also considered. The study, which cost \$32,000, was completed in November 2008.

Lessons Learned

The Linkage Program has helped to develop regional consensus.

The program has facilitated discussion and broad regional consensus that combines intelligent local planning with effective transportation operations and management. Recently adopted transportation policies are consistent with municipal plans.

The Linkage Program has jump-started many proactive planning activities in the region, particularly in communities with limited local resources.

Municipalities have adopted the products of Linkage Program studies either as amendments to their comprehensive plans or as sub-area or other master plans. In addition, many municipalities have updated or changed zoning codes and developed new 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.

The Linkage Program has helped local and regional planners understand the abilities and limits of local planning capacity, and what can realistically be accomplished in small scale efforts.

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 a wide range of stakeholders.

A wide range of stakeholders, including the general public, the regional planning commission, the state DOT, the regional transit authority, and the counties have been involved with 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.

The Linkage Program has set a national example for excellence in regional planning innovations.

The Linkage Program has been recognized nationwide as an exemplary transportation planning initiative. In 2010, the Linkage Program was honored as an award winner in the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Transportation Planning Excellence Award (TPEA) program. The Linkage program is unique in the number of studies conducted, number of municipalities engaged in cooperative planning efforts, and the amount invested per capita by the MPO.

Unique aspects of the program include:

- 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;
- Opportunities to build upon experiences of other communities
- Priority given to projects that are supported locally through complementary activities and/or funding commitments beyond the minimum match requirements
- 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.

For Further Information

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Web Sites and Publications

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