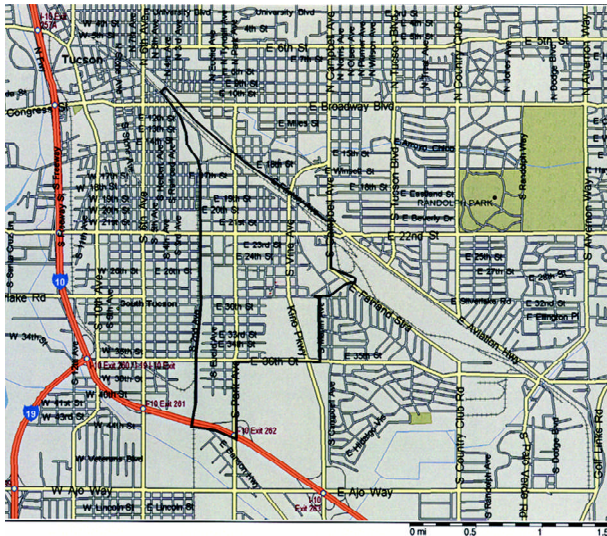




Partnerships, Enhancement Activities, and Public Involvement



South Park Avenue Improvement Project

TUCSON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

From an environmental justice standpoint, the South Park Avenue Improvement Project is noteworthy for three principal reasons:

Introduction

During 1995 and 1996, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), through its Livable Communities Initiative, awarded the City of Tucson, Arizona, \$1.5 million to carry out a series of transportation enhancements along a 1-mile stretch of South Park Avenue. The South Park area, located within Tucson's federally designated Enterprise Zone/Enterprise Community, is a low-income, minority community originally settled by African Americans during the 1940s. It is an area rich in cultural and historical significance because, during its early days, it was one of the few places in Tucson where African Americans could purchase land, build homes, start businesses, and create a community.

FTA's Livable Communities Initiative (LCI) was established, in part, to assist transit-dependent communities with economic recovery. From 1995 through 1999, the Tucson Department of Transportation (TDOT) worked with residents and businesses in the South Park neighborhood to plan and implement a series of improvements that increased transit, pedestrian, and bicycle safety and accessibility; enhanced commercial district aesthetics along South Park Avenue; and reinforced the community's sense of pride in its unique history and culture.

- *Partnerships* were developed to leverage financial and technical resources for planning and implementing transportation enhancements in a low-income, minority community. The project culminated a 10-year planning process whose major participants included the Tucson Urban League, the South Park Neighborhood Business Association, the University of Arizona, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), TDOT, and FTA.
- *Context-sensitive design* tools were used to reawaken a community's sense of identity and pride. Art components of the South Park Avenue Improvement Project — including mosaics, totems, and sculptures — were designed to draw attention to

The Participants

- Federal Transit Administration
- U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
- Tucson Department of Transportation
- Tucson Urban League
- South Park Neighborhood Business Association
- University of Arizona

The Livable Communities Initiative

The U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, developed the Livable Communities Initiative (LCI) to strengthen the linkage between transportation services and the communities served. The LCI is an experiment that uses sustainable design concepts such as transit-oriented development, community-sensitive transit services, mixed-use development near transit facilities, safe and secure pedestrian access, and transit-supportive parking management and traffic management techniques. The goal is to increase access to jobs, health care, education, and other social amenities and to stimulate community participation in the decision-making process that leads to these improvements.

Eligible Applicants

- Transit operators, metropolitan planning organizations, city and county government, planning agencies, and other public bodies with authority to plan or construct transit are eligible. Nonprofit, community, and civic organizations cannot apply directly, but they can participate as partners.

Eligible Types of Project Planning Activities

- Preparation of implementation plans and designs incorporating safe livable elements.
- Assessment of environmental, social, economic, land use, and design impacts of projects.
- Feasibility studies.
- Technical assistance.
- Participation by community organizations, businesses, and persons with disabilities.
- Evaluation of best practices.
- Development of innovative design, land use, and zoning practices.

Eligible Capital Activities or Capital Project Enhancements

- Property acquisition, restoration or demolition of existing structures, site preparation, utilities, restoration of historic buildings, building foundations, bikeways and trails, walkways, and open spaces physically or functionally related to the transportation project.

- Purchase of buses, enhancements to transportation intermodal centers, park-and-ride lots, and transfer facilities incorporating community services such as day care, health care, and public safety.
- Safety elements such as lighting and rail crossings.
- Intelligent Transportation Systems technology such as GPS vehicle location and dispatch systems and associated computer software.
- Traveler information for tourists and other rural travelers, improved access to transit services, and operational enhancements such as transit marketing and pass programs, especially for job access.

Available Funds

DOT provided about \$50 million for 21 capital projects and an additional \$2 million for local planning, technical assistance and best practices materials in FY 1999. Funding is available through the following programs:

Federal Transit Administration

- Transit Grants and Loans for Special Needs of Elderly Individuals and those with Disabilities
- Rural Transportation Accessibility Incentive Program
- Transit Capital Investment Grants and Loans Program (Bus and Bus Related)
- Transit Enhancements
- Urbanized Aid Formula Grants Program
- Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas

Federal Highway Administration

- The National Highway System (NHS)
- The Interstate Maintenance Program
- The Surface Transportation Program (STP)
- Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation
- Federal Lands Highway
- Transportation Enhancements
- National Scenic Byways Program

Project Chronology

1982-1989

Kino Boulevard constructed on the eastern boundary of the South Park community.

1989

Tucson Urban League receives CDBG funds to partner with University of Arizona to create the *South Park Area Community Development Plan*.

1991

South Park Area Community Development Plan published by the Tucson Urban League.

1995

TDOT receives \$1 million from FTA's Livable Communities Initiative for improvements to South Park neighborhood.

August-December 1996

Monthly town hall meetings held at Quincie Douglas Center to obtain public input on design and implementation of the project.

August 1996

TDOT receives additional \$500,000 from FTA's Livable Communities Initiative.

October 1997

South Park Community Art Center opens to provide community members with instruction in the creation of mosaic art pieces for the project.

July 1998

Construction begins on South Park Avenue.

September 1999

Project completed.

and celebrate the neighborhood's history and strong community spirit.

- Highly creative and effective *public involvement strategies* gave community residents a strong sense of project ownership. For example, community residents voted on project designs and created artwork integral to the project.

The Region and Community

Tucson is located in the southeast corner of the State of Arizona. It is the seat for Pima County and home to the University of Arizona and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, the area's two largest employers. Tourism is the region's third largest industry, followed by a growing high-tech industry.

Minority groups account for more than one-third of Tucson's population (405,000 in 1990). Hispanics are the largest minority, representing 29 percent of the population. Other minority groups include African Americans (4 percent), American Indians (4 percent), and Asian Americans (2 percent).

The South Park area of Tucson was first settled in the 1940s by African Americans who moved to the city primarily from other southwestern States. Although the majority of Tucson's African-American

Snapshot of the South Park Community

Location: Southeast of downtown Tucson

Population: 2,400

Racial and ethnic composition:

- African American - 43 percent
- Hispanic - 39 percent
- Native American - 3 percent
- Other - 15 percent

Median household income: \$7,922

Households below poverty line: 34.5%

Transportation concerns: Absence of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit amenities along South Park Avenue, the heart of the local retail business district

Source: 1990 U.S. Census.

residents at that time lived in substandard rental housing near the downtown area, many of these new arrivals had previously owned their own homes and were anxious to do the same in Tucson.

Because of segregation, however, African Americans had only limited opportunities to purchase land. The South Park area, at the time an unincorporated area southeast of Tucson, was one of only two locations where African Americans were permitted to buy lots. Families generally built their own homes. With little access to credit, they paid for materials and lived in tents while permanent dwellings were being constructed.

The struggles of these early residents helped foster a strong sense of community as residents pulled together to overcome adversity. By the 1960s, South Park was a well-knit, thriving community, anchored by a number of black-owned businesses along South Park Avenue. During the next several decades, however, South Park fell victim to problems of crime, gangs, and drugs shared by many inner-city communities across the Nation. The neighborhood declined, and by 1980, the incomes of almost 35 percent of South Park households were below the poverty level. The neighborhood's unemployment rate was more than 11 percent, nearly double that of the Tucson metropolitan area.

The racial and ethnic mix of the neighborhood also changed. By 1990, the area's African-American population had fallen from 90 percent during the 1940s to less than 50 percent. The Hispanic population, meanwhile, increased to nearly 40 percent.

What Happened

The South Park Avenue Improvement Project resulted from a decade-long planning process. In 1989, the Tucson Urban League received HUD Community Development Block Grant funds to help prepare a Community Development Plan for the South Park area of Tucson. Working in partnership with the University of Arizona College of Architecture, which donated its services, the Urban League conducted 9 months of

Context-Sensitive Design

Context-sensitive design is a way to integrate highways and communities. This concept encourages designers to balance the transportation goals of mobility and safety with community values by enhancing and preserving a community's cultural and natural resources, while not establishing any new geometric standards or criteria. Context-sensitive design is supported by provisions in the ISTEA, NHS Act, and TEA-21, which emphasize the importance of good transportation design that is sensitive to the human-made and natural settings.

Successful context-sensitive design requires involvement of an interdisciplinary team in which the community plays an active role throughout planning and implementation. With early and continuous collaboration, the team may identify valuable features for incorporation into plans and projects.

The U.S. DOT fully supports the concept of context-sensitive design as an important part of the effort to provide sustainable transportation service to the public. In recent years, U.S. DOT has actively promoted context-sensitive design in training materials, publications, conferences, and workshops.

intense public meetings to identify key issues and opportunities. The process culminated in January 1991 with the release of the *South Park Area Community Development Plan* [Plan].

One area of concern targeted by the Plan was the commercial district along South Park Avenue from 18th Street to 36th Street. Businesses along this corridor had been struggling recently, in part because of the

The town hall meetings were a success because community residents could see the evolution of their input on design mock-ups each month.

– Too-Ree-Nee Keiser
Lead Public Artist
South Park Avenue Improvement Center



Creating the art to complement the South Park development was a hands-on project.

construction of Kino Boulevard during the 1980s, a north-south arterial route for traffic between downtown Tucson and Tucson International Airport. This arterial diverted significant traffic volumes from South Park Avenue to Kino Boulevard, causing South Park Avenue commercial establishments to lose business.

In 1995, TDOT identified the FTA's Livable Communities Initiative as a potential funding source for improvements along South Park Avenue. TDOT ultimately submitted a proposal to FTA that incorporated concerns and recommendations recognized by the Community Development Plan and by the recently established South Park Neighborhood Business Association. The proposal included canopied bus stops, landscaping, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities. FTA awarded the City of Tucson a \$1 million grant for streetscape improvements to enhance pedestrian access to transit and local businesses along South Park Avenue. Project elements included:

- Sidewalk improvements.
- Construction of accessible bus shelters.
- Landscaping.
- Street lighting.
- Designated curb cuts and curb infill.

- Lane reductions on South Park Avenue.

During 1996 and 1997, TDOT held a series of town hall meetings to gain public input on the project's design. Although TDOT went to considerable lengths to publicize the first of these sessions, attendance was poor. Moreover, the few participants were skeptical about the city's plans and its commitment to meaningful public involvement on the project.

After this disappointing start, TDOT resolved to become more aggressive in its outreach efforts. Neighborhood "walkabouts" were held to show the community that "the project and people working on it were real and accessible," as one TDOT representative put it. Throughout the hot Tucson summer, project staff members walked through neighborhood streets and parks, introducing themselves to residents in a personal, informal context. In addition, TDOT also conducted in-home interviews with several respected elders in the South Park community.

Within months, participation at the town hall forums increased to more than 40 individuals. The increased turnout resulted, in part, from TDOT's increased solicitation efforts as well as the format of the meetings themselves. Residents were invited to "view and vote" on design mock-ups of bus shelter placements, crosswalks and other pedestrian facilities, and public art components of the project. Residents were provided five "ballots" each and given the opportunity to affix their votes next to their preferred designs. After each meeting the project team tallied the "votes" for each design. The effect was a continually evolving project design that reflected ongoing community input.

One of the most creative aspects of the South Park Avenue Improvement Project was to use public art to enhance the streetscape along South Park Avenue. TDOT hired a public artist to oversee this project task, which featured community participation to create mosaics and totems. In October 1997, classes began at a new community art center opened along South Park Avenue to instruct area residents in mosaic tile work.

Community members visited the art center during the day to decorate trash container shells and to work on the mosaic tiles and totems and other art components of the project.

Much of the project's artwork was intended to draw attention to the South Park area's history and identity as a community. For example, a number of new bus shelters featured colorful figures at each corner, their upraised arms "holding up" structure roofs. This design was intended to symbolize the South Park neighborhood's strong community spirit and legacy of helping others during difficult times.

In August 1997, citing the tremendous public involvement in town hall meetings and the community's design recommendations, the FTA granted an additional \$500,000 to the South Park Avenue Improvement Project. This grant was matched by \$100,000 from the City of Tucson. By the time the project was completed in September 1999, the improvements included:

- Constructing sidewalk and curb access ramps.
- Installing six artistic bus shelters and one standard shelter.
- Designing pedestrian-friendly walls that double as a public art canvas.
- Installing new traffic signals at three intersections.
- Landscaping.

Effective Environmental Justice Practices

The South Park Avenue Improvement Project enhanced the livability of a low-income, minority neighborhood and helped breathe new life into a distressed commercial district. The project illustrates several key practices useful for integrating environmental justice principles into transportation project planning, design, and construction.



Symbols of community spirit, colorful figures hold up the roofs of new bus shelters.

- **Creative Partnerships.** Clearly, no individual group or agency would have been capable of advancing this project. While TDOT played a central role, it relied upon others to supply crucial technical and financial resources integral to vision plans, design, finance, and other implementation activities. The origins of this project lie in the partnership established between the Tucson Urban League and the University of Arizona, which identified — in a comprehensive, grassroots manner — the needs and concerns of the South Park community. Local government agencies may not be in a position to conduct such thorough, exhaustive analysis for every neighborhood. In most cases, however, they are well suited to identify funding opportunities for specific transportation recommendations that come from the communities themselves. In this case, TDOT listened to the recommendations from South Park Area representatives and successfully used those recommendations to leverage significant city and Federal funding.
- **Enhancement Activities.** The South Park area of Tucson is a neighborhood rich in historical significance, especially for African Americans.



Totems designed and created by the South Park Community are an integral part of the new streetscape.

Project planners recognized this history as an asset capable of inspiring others. Design processes sought to draw attention to key historic themes and capitalize upon this historical context. Efforts of this nature can help reinforce a community's sense of pride and identity, serving as powerful elements of a rebuilding strategy.

- **Public Involvement Techniques.** Although citizens' preferences are increasingly taken into account in transportation projects, only rarely is public involvement elevated to the hands-on status it achieved during the design and construction of the South Park Avenue Improvement Project. By giving citizens a "vote" on the project's design and the opportunity to contribute their own artwork, TDOT actively engaged the public in a way that few transportation projects have.

Public Art Components of the South Park Avenue Improvement Project

- Bus shelters, totems and totem caps, benches, bicycle racks, and trash cylinder mosaic covers
- Bridge mosaic insets with mosaic paneling
- Sidewalk epoxy with random stenciled designs on both old and new sidewalks
- Historic plaques with site-specific or historic information and graphics

Challenges Ahead

The South Park Avenue Improvement Project represents a noteworthy example of incorporating the letter and spirit of Title VI and environmental justice into the transportation decision-making process. The improvements have given a significant boost to the South Park neighborhood, yet the area faces a number of key challenges. The community's long-term prospects depend on a sustainable program of investments and partnerships. Some of the challenges confronting the partners in this project include:

- Community members must continue to discuss, debate, and refine the vision for the neighborhood. Organizations such as the Tucson Urban League and the South Park Neighborhood Business Association will need to provide leadership in articulating both the vision and the plans and mobilizing the additional resources necessary for continued advancement.
- Local public officials will need to maintain a dialogue with the neighborhood so that they better understand the community's needs and preferences. Dialogue will need to be accompanied by resources in the form of staff support and funding, in particular. While such efforts may prove costly in the short term, the payoff will come in the form of sound projects embraced by the community.

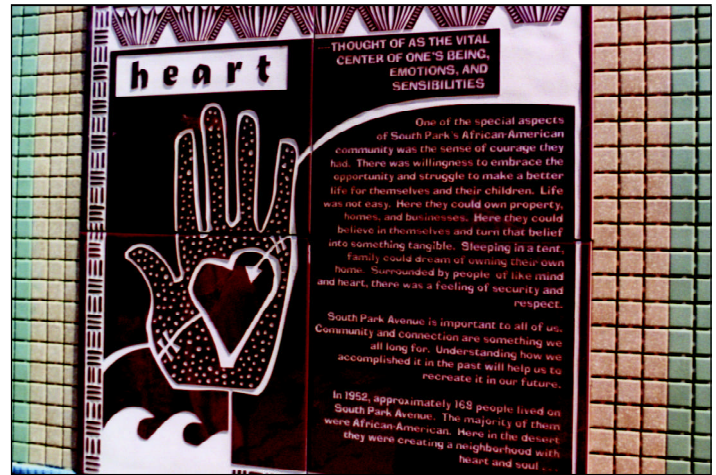
Benefits of Environmental Justice in Decision Making

For the Neighborhood:

- Neighborhood residents and businesses benefited from a series of pedestrian improvements that enhanced the commercial district along South Park Avenue.
- Community members gained experience working with government agencies and other institutions that can be used on future projects benefiting the neighborhood.
- Community members were provided with opportunities to celebrate and draw attention to the South Park area's history and culture.

For the Agencies:

- The South Park Avenue Improvement Project incorporated themes and recommendations identified in plans produced by community members, increasing the likelihood that the project would address issues and concerns important to the community.
 - By actively involving neighborhood residents and businesses in the project's design and construction, TDOT overcame initial public skepticism to win strong community support.
 - The City of Tucson gained important insights into community revitalization and the potential for transportation improvements to serve a broader purpose.
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- The City of Tucson and TDOT in particular learned key lessons about how to apply the principles of environmental justice to improve transportation planning. The project demonstrates several ways that these principles can be effectively incorporated into a specific project. The challenge now is to *institutionalize* these lessons so that future projects can benefit from the South Park Avenue experiences.



Public art elements included historic plaques intended to instill community pride.

Lessons Learned

Some of the most important lessons of the South Park Avenue Improvement Project include:

- Partnerships bring knowledge, expertise, financing, and other resources to the table. Low-income, minority communities in particular may need to draw on a variety of sources to assemble the resources necessary to advance costly transportation projects.
- Partnerships that bring together stakeholders from public agencies, community organizations, and the private sector have tremendous potential for discovering and implementing creative solutions to complex problems. They offer a workable

This project would not have been the success that it was without the public art component. The artist's daily interaction with the community was invaluable.

– Keith Walzak
Project Manager, Tucson DOT

foundation for targeting and addressing the more harmful factors leading to neighborhood decline and persistent poverty. Transportation officials should recognize the exceptional contribution of pedestrian-friendly streetscape design and enhancement-type investments in reversing perceptions, instilling community pride and volunteerism, as well as establishing the conditions for reinvestment. Properly targeted, these investments can create ripple effects such as safer neighborhoods, more cohesive communities, and more attractive environments.

- Transportation improvements can serve a broader purpose by playing a role in revitalizing distressed communities. Transportation officials who manage projects in such areas should be on the lookout for opportunities to integrate transportation enhancement investments into community redevelopment, economic development, and other local land-use initiatives.
- Integrating cultural symbols into transportation enhancement projects can be an effective way of engaging community members and reinforcing cultural awareness, pride, and identity.
- A well-planned and adequately funded public involvement process for the design and implementation phases of a project creates community buy-in. In the case of South Park Avenue, the feedback format for town hall meetings kept residents invested, while the opportunity to create highly visible mosaic art tiles delivered a true sense of community ownership.
- Residents of low-income and minority neighborhoods may justifiably feel that their issues and concerns have not been adequately addressed in the planning and implementation of public works projects. The accessibility and commitment of TDOT representatives to carry out neighborhood outreach efforts were essential to engaging an initially skeptical community.

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