



## Guiding Principles

At the 1998 workshop “Thinking Beyond the Pavement,” a set of context sensitive solutions (CSS) principles for project development was developed. These principles have shaped Federal transportation policy guidance, and a number of transportation industry groups have worked to widely publish the principles and provide guidance for mainstreaming them into the transportation decision-making process. State and regional agencies have adopted CSS and have launched programs to integrate CSS into the programming, design, construction, and maintenance of transportation projects. Truly, a national movement is underway that is shaping the way we think about and meet our transportation needs.

Yet, in order to more fully integrate CSS into the entire transportation decision-making process, CSS should begin well before the early stages of project development, during transportation planning. It is at this stage that basic transportation policy is developed, communities and regions articulate a vision for their future, and decisions are made as to how current problems will be addressed while also anticipating future needs and solutions. A CSS approach to transportation planning means a commitment to meaningful stakeholder participation, and keeping the human and natural context foremost in mind, which will produce a plan for a transportation system that will be an asset to the community and/or region.

To help planning agencies and the public accomplish this goal, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has provided a toolkit designed to help planners and the public integrate CSS into transportation planning. The materials include basic information, discussion, and examples of current practices to provide guidance and insight. We suggest that you begin with the [CSS Principles for Transportation Planning](#). These principles are applicable to all transportation planning efforts, from State long-range plans, to metropolitan planning organization (MPO) long-range transportation plans, to local corridor plans. They are not specific to any particular type of plan or planning agency. Those familiar with CSS will recognize many of these principles, as many of them parallel the CSS principles for project development. This is in recognition of the fact that there are strong linkages between planning and project development. Details and discussion of each principle are provided in [Question & Answer](#) format. The toolkit also includes a series of [Fact Sheets](#) and [Case Studies](#) from across the country, highlighting agencies already applying CSS principles in their planning process and documents. A [Glossary](#) of terms and abbreviations is also included.

FHWA is committed to the advancement of CSS nationwide and supports planning agencies and the public in their efforts to understand, adopt, and implement CSS in transportation planning. As part of that commitment, FHWA will continue to support research addressing transportation planning, including the enhancement of community and social benefits of highway transportation and improvements in the quality of the natural environment by reducing highway-related pollution, protecting and enhancing ecosystems, and strengthening linkages between NEPA and planning. Integrating CSS in transportation planning will help the transportation industry move closer to meeting FHWA’s highest priorities for the nation, the Vital Few Goals. Additionally, the application of CSS will help agencies meet the requirements for planning set forth in the current Federal transportation legislation SAFETEA-LU.

### For More Information on Integrating CSS in Transportation Planning

- [FHWA and Context Sensitive Solutions Web site](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/index.cfm): <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/index.cfm>
- [AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence Context Sensitive Solutions Web site](http://environment.transportation.org/environmental_issues/context_sens_sol/recent_dev.aspx): [http://environment.transportation.org/environmental\\_issues/context\\_sens\\_sol/recent\\_dev.aspx](http://environment.transportation.org/environmental_issues/context_sens_sol/recent_dev.aspx)
- [Context Sensitive Solutions.org](http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/): <http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/>
- FHWA Vital Few Goals: [Safety](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/): <http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/>
- [Congestion Management](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/congestion/index.htm): <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/congestion/index.htm>
- [Stewardship/Streamlining](http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/strmlng/index.asp): <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/strmlng/index.asp>
- [Information on SAFETEA-LU from FHWA](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/index.htm): <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/index.htm>





## The CSS Product

### Qualities of Excellence in a Transportation Plan

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1. Identification of the problem statement during transportation planning is derived from a collaborative process involving stakeholders, documents, and available data.
2. The problem statement takes into consideration safety for both the user and the community.
3. The transportation plan is in harmony with the regional and communities' visions and is sensitive to the human and natural environment.
4. The diversity of the various communities' visions is integrated into the transportation plan.
5. The transportation plan involves an efficient and effective use of resources, and is adopted according to any applicable planning update cycles.
6. The transportation plan gives consideration to avoiding and/or minimizing disruption to the community.
7. Transportation goals are consistent with the communities' visions and the adopted transportation plan meets or exceeds the transportation goals and objectives.
8. The transportation plan provides planning products that can feed directly into project planning to improve quality or reduce time to complete the project development process, including, but not limited to data, stakeholder contacts, hot issues, and agreements.

## The CSS Process

### Characteristics of the Planning Process Contributing to Excellence

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1. Communication with all stakeholders is open, honest, early, and continuous.
2. The multidisciplinary team(s) is (are) fully representative of the human and natural environment as well as the communities' perspectives of a good quality of life and important issues.
3. The transportation plan includes an upfront pre-planning process that allows all formal partners, including, but not limited to, environmental agencies and community representatives, to participate in the early identification of issues that should be considered during the transportation planning process.
4. The transportation plan evaluates multimodal, operational, and innovative strategies, and the recommended plan addresses all transportation needs, including, but not limited to, safety, access/mobility, and air quality issues.
5. The adopted transportation plan is based on adopted CSS policy and includes explicit support for CSS.
6. The transportation planning process is based on a comprehensive public involvement/participation plan based on meaningful opportunities for input.
7. The landscape, community, and valued resources are understood before analysis of the transportation system begins or potential transportation solutions are explored.
8. A full range of user-friendly tools for communicating transportation plan options are used to effectively present information.
9. Limitations to the quantity or quality of data and information are recognized, and strategies to manage any gaps are implemented. The final plan and the transportation planning process are thoroughly documented.
10. The transportation planning process includes identification/consideration of adopted municipal, state and federal agency plans relevant to the transportation planning process, including, but not limited to, those for land use, water/sewer, watershed management, economic development, and mitigation.

