

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY**

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### **MAKING THE CASE FOR USING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY**

Ohio has recognized since the passage of ISTEA in 1991, that a large increase of funding is needed just to preserve and maintain the existing transportation system. This preservation and maintenance include not only roadways, bridges, transit rail and airport runways but also capacity additions to the entire transportation system just to maintain the level of service that Ohioans now enjoy. Because of age and the much greater than forecast traffic volumes on the interstates, bridge and pavement renovations and replacements are urgently needed and must occur.

### **WHY OHIO DECIDED TO GREATLY EXPAND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAMMING AND DEVELOPMENT**

The need for rehabilitating and expanding the transportation infrastructure system is so great yet traditional transportation financing mechanisms are under siege. Motor vehicle fuel taxes are being tapped at all levels of government to cure many budgetary ills including deficit reduction. Increasingly, transportation infrastructure improvements need to compete for funding with education, health and welfare needs since user fees are being diverted in greater numbers to nonuser programs.

### **OHIO'S APPROACH TO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Because of the increasing need for funds coupled with an unprecedented competition from non-transportation uses, Ohio developed a two pronged approach to solving these issues. The first was to develop new and innovative ways to finance infrastructure improvements including defining all of the stakeholders of transportation and having them contribute to its financing. Secondly, we recognized that to survive and thrive economically, we had to get the message out to the public about transportation and the need to find new sources of funds to help preserve and maintain the system. One of the most successful ways to "get the message out" was to meet with the public and begin a dialogue. We wished to "tell our story." What we found early in the process

was that the public was even more eager to talk to us and "tell their story" with the hope that we would be good listeners.

### **ACCESS OHIO—The Genesis for Using Public Participation to Develop the Long Range Multimodal Transportation Plan**

Early in 1992, Ohio began the first phase of ACCESS OHIO known as the "Macro" Plan which was the vision for a future transportation system for the state. The cornerstone of the plan development was the use of public "listening" sessions to receive input that was crucial to identifying the key transportation issues, policies and strategic mechanisms to meet needs as identified by the public. A total of 99 public meetings and listening sessions were held across the state through three separate sets of outreach that involved more than 5,000 persons.

The first set of "listening" consisted of 50 meetings at various locations in Ohio to present the concept of ACCESS OHIO and the importance of developing a multimodal long range transportation plan. The second sets of meetings were termed "town meetings" and consisted of presenting, in draft form, a synopsis of the major issues that were "heard" at the first set of sessions as well as a number of other recommendations.

The major result of the ACCESS OHIO public listening sessions was to forge a new cooperative relationship between the public and ODOT with a reduction in the adversarial attitude that had prevailed prior to the outreach effort. The news media, skeptical in the beginning of ODOT's intentions, became important supporters during the second set of meetings. ODOT personnel in these meetings were open and truthful about the lack of public participation in the past and the problems that resulted from this lack of public input, including the "starting and stopping" of many projects. This openness coupled with the pre-meeting preparations including letters, news releases, invitations to leaders of organizations critical of ODOT in the past, were key elements to the success. For ODOT personnel themselves, there was a new respect for public opinion and a loss of the perception that the public "just does not understand."

### **FURTHERING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH "FOCUS GROUPS"**

After the successful conclusion of the "macro" phase of ACCESS OHIO's public participation sessions, ODOT began the "micro" phase. In addition to holding 28 public meetings across the state to review the micro phase and select priority projects within local areas, ODOT appointed "focus groups," one for each of ODOT's Districts that were not included in one of the 16 Metropolitan Planning Organizations boundaries. A total of 11 groups was formed to work directly with ODOT staff to review more detailed technical data including traffic counts, traffic forecasts, volume to capacity ratios and traffic accident information.

The result of the "micro" phase public participation process was a prioritized list of projects that were deemed necessary based upon capacity, pavement and bridge management systems information and forecasted traffic volumes. Included in this process was validation of about 85% of the existing projects that currently were in the ODOT "pipeline," that is, being developed through preliminary and final engineering, leading to eventual construction. The public input sessions further enabled an understanding of how ODOT is funded and the gap between funding resources and transportation system needs. One of the interesting observations was how the General Assembly members of Ohio became much more interested in transportation with each additional public meeting.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS AND IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SCORING SYSTEM WHICH DRIVES THE STIP**

Replete with successful completion of the ACCESS OHIO process, ODOT personnel became comfortable with public input. The decision was then made to develop a citizen involvement process to prioritize and select major new construction projects using a rating system adopted by the group. ODOT historically has selected about 85% of its projects using various management systems such as pavement ratings, bridge deficiency and high accident locations resulting in system preservation. There was, however, no process for ranking needs and selecting projects for major new construction. The selection was done informally based upon the level of local demands (measured politically) and upon the professional judgment of the department's director. This has led to animosity and mistrust and a general misunderstanding among project advocates of how the department makes decisions and how the departmental works within its financial limits.

In ODOT's strategic planning process, VISION 2000, a Goal #3 was adopted in early 1995, to create

"A project selection process based on open, objective criteria." The Project Selection Advisory Committee was formed in September 1995 by the Director of ODOT by the appointment of a broad-based group of elected officials, newspaper publishers, leaders of statewide professional groups, MPOs and ODOT officials. Their role was to help ODOT develop a project selection process that is fair, which meets the state's transportation goals and which can be adopted as the formal means by which ODOT makes major transportation investments. The definition of a major new construction project, originally proposed by ODOT to be capacity adding projects of over \$5 million in cost, was revised by the Project Selection Advisory Committee to be over \$2 million in cost.

The Committee held another 8 public "open hours" informational type meetings across the state and a formal public hearing in Columbus, the state capital. Based upon the input, 18 policies were adopted by the Committee and recommended to the ODOT Director for implementation. In addition to the definition of major new multimodal construction projects and a point ranking system which is attached to this paper, the Committee adopted several very significant policies including:

- Transportation efficiency factors shall have 70% of the weight in ODOT's selection process and economic development shall have 30% of the weight.

- The project selection criteria shall be derived from the goals of ACCESS OHIO.

- Bonus points shall be assigned to projects based upon the amount of local/public/or private funding contributed. This policy allows Ohioans to increase infrastructure investment to complete projects that would otherwise not be possible and to encourage new stakeholders to participate in construction financing for projects of benefit.

- ODOT shall build no new interchanges without at least a 50% contribution of the cost of the interchange from either private, local or other non-ODOT funds. ODOT may not require the interchange proponent to pay for the entire cost of improvements to the general purpose highway lanes affected by the project if the long range plan indicates that lanes will be needed within 5 years of the scheduled interchange construction.

Other policies include the ability to give bonus points for highway projects with intermodal or regional benefits; and, attraction of new jobs and investment for manufacturing, research facilities, distribution and tourism related facilities.

In VISION 2000, ODOT's strategic plan, Goal #2 was to provide a leadership structure that assures consistent long-term direction. To further assure long term consistency, a Citizen's Advisory Committee will become a permanent organization to review the rating

criteria on an annual basis and to score the projects for each year's adopted Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

#### **KEY RESULTS OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

In summary, ODOT has learned very much from the public participation process that has resulted in major changes both internally and externally for, what many believe to be, the better. Some of the notable examples are:

- New openness exists between ODOT personnel and the public, particularly local public officials, that has reduced the adversarial attitude that prevailed in the past between the two groups.
- There is a greater understanding in the public and the news media about the funding situation that confronts ODOT and the striving for solutions in an open forum manner. Because of this greater understanding, voters in Ohio on November 7, 1995 by 62% plurality, amended the constitution to allow

ODOT to increase its bonded indebtedness ceiling from \$500 million to \$1.2 billion. This complex of an issue, coming during the extensive media coverage of federal budget balancing, could not have been passed without ODOT involving the public in its decision-making process.

- Governor George V. Voinovich and the General Assembly of Ohio are very supportive of ODOT's initiatives including restructuring/re-engineering of the internal and external organizational elements that make up the Department of Transportation.

- ODOT's employees have a greater appreciation and focus on "customer service" because they are aware of the numerous opportunities for the customers to be involved.

In conclusion, I believe that long after our present ODOT executive staff moves onto other work, their legacy of an open inclusive process will continue and be a part of succeeding administrations. The public will be the guardians of that future and they will assure that the decision-making process for transportation in Ohio remains open and inclusive.