

# NCHRP PROJECT 20-65, TASK 67, BEST PRACTICES FOR COORDINATION TO PLAN & IMPLEMENT MULTIMODAL PROJECTS

## THE NEED FOR BETTER COORDINATION

As agencies, the public, and other stakeholders align on what constitutes the most effective transportation solutions for their region, these solutions are increasingly multimodal in nature. State departments of transportation (DOT) and their agency partners face many challenges to effective coordination as they plan, program, finance, and deliver multimodal projects. This problem is in part due to the historical siloed nature of multimodal planning, the number of partners involved, and the technical complexity of such projects. These factors raise the importance of coordination.

Other key challenges to coordination include insufficient funding; the need to compromise to stay on schedule and have a good project, if not 'perfect' in the mind of each stakeholder; managing relationships and establishing trust; addressing legalities of coordination; and complying with conflicting state, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements.



The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Standing Committees on Planning, Environment and Public Transportation identified the need for a synthesis on the practice of multimodal coordination across State DOT, metro-politan planning organizations (MPO), and regional transit agencies. This flyer presents highlights of the synthesis that includes examples of successful coordination between highway and transit improvements (such as in a major corridor) and in the role of state DOT's delivering or assisting in the delivery of multimodal transportation solutions. The objective of this research, informed largely by case study interviews, was to examine, document, and communicate successful coordination strategies and tools that can be duplicated in a variety of contexts and situations and that promote solutions that benefit the multiple stakeholders involved.

## CASE STUDIES – LESSONS LEARNED

### Meeting In-Person Still Matters in the Digital Age

*In-person meetings are critical, as the relationships that are developed are the backbone to successful project planning and delivery.*

All case study participants underscored the value of in-person meetings, as relationship development is key to trust, compromise, and proactive coordination to address challenges. The Maryland Department of Transportation – Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT-MTA) communicated that frequent in-person meetings and early coordination – at the staff and manager/executive level – were essential to success of the BaltimoreLink project. They found this face-to-face time invaluable and committed to biweekly meetings with The Secretary's Office (TSO) and MTA leadership throughout the duration of the project. This included the MDOT Secretary of Transportation, Office of Planning and Capital Programming, Office of Public Affairs, and Office of Real Estate and the MTA Administrator and Chief Operating Office. The MTA Director of Planning provided an update to this group, who in turn discussed key issues and concerns.

The MDOT-MTA practiced coordination approaches that went beyond traditional meetings. They conducted several large, day-long workshops for all agencies involved in the BaltimoreLink project. The workshops' purpose was to bring all working groups and organizations 'up to speed,' with each topical focus group presenting the progress of subprojects and plans. The workshops provided a chance to ensure that everyone had access to all planning and construction updates and that plans and project components aligned.

The MTA employed strategies to ensure the workshops were interactive and to guarantee that each group could gather ideas from all partners to align and improve the Plan. These workshops were modeled after a strategic planning concept, to break down silos and bring everyone up to the same level of knowledge across the project as a whole. Similarly the City of Eugene, Oregon, and Lane Transit District (LTD) staff that implementing the Moving Ahead Bus Rapid Transit project have found in-person and weekly meetings critical to developing relationships and discussing regional priorities and projects.

## Be Flexible and Ready to Adapt

*Flexibility, adaptability, and collaboration are critical to coordination for multimodal projects.*

Participating agencies for multimodal projects found flexibility and adaptability as vital to support project progress and evolution. This included adapting to changing roles – in some cases ceding a lead role (during a particular phase) to another agency in order to achieve broader, comprehensive results. For example, during the latter stages of the South Capitol Rail Runner Station project the Mid-Region Council of Government (MRCOG) took on a lead coordination role allowing it to operate with fewer restrictions than the project lead (New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT)). This streamlined and enhanced the completion of the public outreach process.

Collaboration is not simply information sharing but also wisely drawing upon the strengths of each individual agency and expertise from the ground up to navigate complex project issues and foster solutions together. Understanding past agency coordination history, including a review of project development and implementation, can help avoid previous pitfalls and generate new approaches. The collaboration could be formalized through memorandum of understanding for all project components or remain an informal commitment built on mutual trust to overcome communication



barriers, external pressures, and stick together through project completion. The Clifton Boulevard Transportation Enhancement Project brought together communities who at first had competing aspirations for the corridor. However, the process of working through a respected party (Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority) and openly discussing differences led to success and trust in partnering on shared responsibilities. Coordination and collaboration can be daunting, especially if parties must first work through past broken history, however these case studies prove the up front time/energy invested to determine how to work together translates into future project success and effective use of funds.

In Washington State, the Department of Transportation (WSDOT) undertook Practical Solutions, an approach that is best described as a collection of programs to advance performance-based (versus standards-based) transportation solutions. WSDOT's move to this approach is augmented by recent Washington State legislation and the Secretary's Executive Order (E1090.00) which enables and encourages a more holistic, cross modal, and cross disciplinary approach to strengthen community engagement and agency credibility. WSDOT's Secretary cites Practical Solutions as a key agency focus area – often referring to its early results as a way to promote and advocate change.

## Aligning Goals

*Align the multimodal project with the existing planning process whenever possible; define common goals for the project, and demonstrate how the project will support regional goals.*

When agencies are 'on the same page' project coordination is smoother. This is especially true for coordinating multimodal projects between state DOT and local agencies as the project should be developed to support mutual goals. Taking this action can help project staff see the value of the various aspects of the project and allow them to overcome challenges together. The linkage to regional goals is critical for building broader communication with



the executive level, external stakeholders, and public. While this theme of aligning goals was common across case studies, the MovingAhead BRT project in Eugene, Oregon provides a clear demonstration of this concept. The City of Eugene and Lane Transit District leveraged the lessons learned from the Emerald Express (EmX) implementation to develop the MovingAhead BRT project, a collaborative project working with the community and stakeholders to prioritize corridors for near-term transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure enhancements. In the past, these project types were implemented independently, rather than in a coordinated fashion. A key value of the MovingAhead BRT project is the coordination of transit and future land use assumptions. Another purpose of the project is to make clear how transit projects support regional economic, quality of life, and mobility goals, building from and implementing the local range plans, Envision Eugene, and LTD's Long Range Transit Plan.

To view a Quick Reference Guide, a presentation on project findings, and the Final Summary Report for NCHRP 20-65, Task 67, please visit: <http://apps.trb.org/cmsfeed/TRBNetProjectDisplay.asp?ProjectID=4156>