



Context Sensitive Solutions

What is the program?

Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) was originally a Federal Highway Administration initiative to “promote transportation solutions that enhance communities and protect the natural and built environment.” Its essence is that a proposed transportation project must be planned and designed not only for its physical aspects as a facility serving specific transportation objectives, but also for its effects on the aesthetic, social, economic and environmental values, needs, constraints and opportunities to fit into its setting.

How does the program help reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT)?

Transportation design is more of a process than a product. The CSS process produces a result that is visible on streets and roads. It is what people and communities see and experience, whether it is a Main Street or a scenic rural road. CSS is creating new approaches to the flexible application of design controls and standards and more attention to all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, bicyclists, freight mobility and transit. A transportation facility that provides for and promotes walking, biking, taking transit or improves freight mobility, will likely result in significant reductions in vehicle miles traveled.

What is happening now (current status/activities)?

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is guided by a statewide vision for transportation and livable communities, which is part of the Washington Transportation Plan, “Washington’s transportation system should serve our citizens’ safety and mobility, the state’s economic productivity, our communities’ livability and our ecosystem’s viability.” To support this vision, WSDOT is integrating a CSS approach to doing business agency-wide.

WSDOT encourages its employees to look beyond basic transportation issues and develop projects that are integrated with unique contexts within a project setting. WSDOT’s Executive Order on CSS drives this approach at all levels in the organization from Executive to technical staff in all aspects of work. The Executive Order provides the foundation and the case for change for the agency. It recognizes that the consensus or informed consent generated through development of CSS can benefit all parties and may help avoid delay and other costly obstacles to project implementation.

To support integration of CSS, WSDOT has developed guidance documents, outlining processes for working with stakeholder groups, providing an overview of what CSS is, and a resource for balancing flexibility in transportation design. WSDOT has also implemented training in CSS processes for transportation system designers.

The strength and viability of WSDOT’s award winning CSS approach is ensured through its numerous informal and formal partnerships. The agency commitment to CSS is further demonstrated by a strong support for staff development of CSS skills, internal and external

communication of the agency's CSS approach, and a rigorous, agency-wide performance measurement program.

What can we be doing with existing resources to enhance the program's ability to reduce VMT?

WSDOT has taken significant steps to integrate CSS into all facets of the agency's business from the executive level to technical staff, and from early planning through delivery and operation. WSDOT, guided by an Executive Order and a rigorous accountability process, is identifying new ways to move CSS forward each day. Some areas of current focus include:

- Continue efforts to implement CSS processes as WSDOT's only method for project delivery.
- Establishing processes to ensure consistency between WSDOT projects, local comprehensive plans and regional plans.
- Developing accountability and performance measurement tools that link CSS processes to project development and delivery.
- Continuing to take steps to foster an ecosystem approach to planning, developing and operating the transportation system.
- Continuing to conduct research to address some of the outstanding questions related to flexibility in design (e.g, state highways as main streets, urban street and rural road design, balancing safety and aesthetics).

What could we (or should we) be doing with additional resources? (i.e. where are the opportunities for growth/enhancement)?

Increased funding and integration with land use density practices can help create transportation designs that are sensitive to the environment and reduce VMT.

Contact:
Design Office
Washington State Department of Transportation
360-705-7230
www.wsdot.wa.gov/design/

or

Contact:
Highways and Local Programs Division
Washington State Department of Transportation
360-705-7370
www.wsdot.wa.gov/TA/HomePage/HLPHP.html