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Idaho Transportation Department’s Mission Statement, Vision and Board Policies

The mission of the Idaho Transportation Department is:

“To provide high quality, cost-effective transportation systems that are safe, reliable and responsive for the economical and efficient movement of people and products.”

The Idaho Transportation Board adopted the following vision for the Department in 2004 at the request of Idaho’s transportation partners:

“The citizens of Idaho aspire to have a transportation system that provides convenient access throughout the state and region. They want different means of transport to support the vitality of the state’s economy, an abundance of family-wage jobs, and ‘the Idaho way of life.’ They recognize the need for the efficient flow of freight and other ‘through traffic’ along highways and between airports. They appreciate the ability to slow down to enjoy recreational opportunities afforded by Idaho’s natural beauty. Across every region, they desire well-connected pedestrian and bicycle facilities so they do not always have to move in vehicles.”

The intent of the vision is to successfully guide future planning, funding and decision-making for the local and statewide transportation system.

Idaho’s transportation partners will explore new methods to coordinate transportation planning and multimodal corridor preservation activities. Idahoans will develop focus areas, strategies, and action plans to address economic, social, and environmental impacts; interact with the business community and each other; and jointly search for flexible funding alternatives.

The integrated approach to transportation of the future will need to address mobility for a diversity of users. Mobility would be increased by providing a broader variety of transportation modes. For example, while the highway system will remain a dominant component of the surface transportation system, the provision of other modes (rail, truck, air, information transmission or exchange, public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle) will play an increasing role.

Principles of Idaho’s Vision

The principles of Idaho’s vision parallel and support a Context Sensitive Solutions approach in the Idaho Transportation Department. The vision principles address the fundamental questions related to mobility, community benefit and stewardship of the system along with exploring new methods to coordinate transportation planning and multimodal corridor preservation activities in the corridor planning process. Idahoans can assist the Idaho Transportation Department in developing focus areas, strategies, and action plans to address economic, social, and environmental impacts; in interacting with the business community and each other; and jointly searching for flexible funding alternatives.

The vision principles for Idaho’s transportation system of the future are shown in the graphic below. Each of these principles reflects and emphasizes an aspect of the Context Sensitive Solutions approach.

• Mobility for all users

Mobility in an effective transportation system means the ability to move freely in order to be successful
in life, whether attending school, shopping, playing, moving goods and services, or sharing information. “Meet the mobility need” addresses the issue of effectiveness of the transportation system from financial and user perspectives. The financial perspective speaks to affordability and focus.

**Compatibility with the environment**
Idaho’s history is strongly associated with its natural resources. The theme of respect and value for our natural environment continues today and into the future. Using Context Sensitive Solutions provides a means to achieve mobility goals while serving as stewards of our natural and historically built treasures in Idaho. Balancing transportation needs and environmental goals is a fundamental tenet of this approach.

**Preservation of community assets**
Each community is responsible for defining itself and what constitutes success for its transportation system. Idaho’s existing transportation infrastructure is a unique asset that will require continued operation, maintenance, and modification to serve future system needs. Modification and/or expansion to address system needs must be done within the scale and context of the community to maintain the asset value. This vision principle and corridor planning practice directly reflect the Context Sensitive Solutions approach of utilizing a collaborative public involvement process. Collaborative public involvement is a process that involves citizens and affected agencies early and continuously in order to find the balance in safety, mobility, community and environmental goals.

**Flexibility and responsiveness**
With this principle comes the recognition that while addressing the future, time is passing. Many new needs, ideas, opportunities, and realities will arise in the next 30 years. Constant and committed efforts must be taken toward Idaho’s vision of a fully balanced transportation system. This means that the vision and the corridor plans must be open to options, opportunities, and community input as time passes.

Priorities of the Vision

Many of the following vision priorities have elements that reflect the principles of Context Sensitive Solutions.

**Integrate the transportation system**
A balanced transportation system where modal choices exist beyond private vehicles embodies the notion of meeting all the varied needs of a community. Although transportation plans are created with attention to existing local and regional plans and public needs, a Context Sensitive Solutions approach will affirm the community’s needs in both transportation and other civic ventures. Involvement by all interests in the community will better insure a robust transportation system.

**Support quality of life through endorsement and acceptance**
This priority recognizes the importance of transportation to the economic, social, and environmental health of the state. Context Sensitive Solutions recognizes the broad interpretation of “quality of life” in meeting the competing priorities of a diverse community by engaging all interests in the community and emphasizing the importance of finding solutions that preserve environmental values.

**Provide flexible funding**
The notion that communities need support for expanding available funding to address transportation solutions needed for economic vitality and livable communities underscores the importance of utilizing a Context Sensitive Solutions approach. Having flexibility in funding solutions outside traditional grant programs enhances a community’s ability to meet their diverse objectives.

**Integrate transportation and land use planning at state and local levels**
Under this priority, Idaho’s transportation partners see the interdependence of all the priorities—again reinforcing the need for a strong partnership approach among all the participants. Context Sensitive Solutions will assist in developing those partnerships.
• Support choices for all individuals

As noted above, Context Sensitive Solutions involvement by a broad cross-section of community interests better guarantees that the choices for all individuals will be met in the transportation planning and development process.

Idaho’s Vision at Work

The priorities are strongly related not only to each other, but also to the principles. When applied to the transportation system needs and attributes, they create a comprehensive framework for achieving the transportation system of the future. These operational principles and priorities remain fixed, while focus areas change over time. Focus areas, strategies, and action plans will be developed to accompany each priority and provide accountability and forethought. Context Sensitive Solutions will accommodate and promote continued citizen and stakeholder involvement and education for achieving this operational portion of the Vision.

An Environmental Ethic

Since the early 1970s, environmental factors have become an important consideration in the transportation planning, development, construction, operations and maintenance processes. New federal and state environmental laws, regulations, judicial decisions and administrative interpretations have added new requirements to these processes over the past three decades demanding greater accountability and compliance. State departments of transportation have adjusted to these new mandates and enhanced their environmental knowledge and capabilities to meet the challenge and to become better stewards of the environment. Central to this new approach has been the recognition and adoption of a publicly enunciated and acknowledged environmental ethic for the policy and decision-makers and the employees of these organizations.

The Idaho Transportation Department has adopted an environmental ethics statement to guide its work and accomplish its mission in a manner that employs a Context Sensitive Solutions approach. The Idaho Transportation Department environmental ethic is as follows:

“This Idaho Transportation Department respects and values the many facets of Idaho’s natural and human environment and will protect and enhance those assets while providing high quality, fiscally responsible transportation systems for the citizens of Idaho.”

This environmental ethics statement was developed from the mission and vision of the Idaho Transportation Department. It embodies concepts of respect and value for our natural and human environment and the responsibility of the Idaho Transportation Department to protect and enhance those assets whenever possible while providing high quality transportation systems and services to the citizens.
Environmental Responsibilities

There are more than 40 federal and state environmental laws that affect the Idaho Transportation Department transportation decisions. A unifying federal environmental law is the National Environmental Policy Act, which provides a framework for addressing the various environmental statutes, regulation and policies. The National Environmental Policy Act sets the tone for the federal government’s environmental ethic by recognizing the need for systematic, interdisciplinary planning and decision-making that considers environmental factors for major federal actions that could significantly affect the quality of the human environment. It set a new standard for federal decision-making based on thorough environmental analysis, consideration of alternatives to proposed federal actions and public disclosure and review before action is taken.

National Environmental Policy Act regulations mandate that transportation decisions involving federal funds and approvals consider environmental as well as technical and economic factors in the assessment and decision-making process. It also requires that the federal agency consider all reasonable alternatives to a proposed action and the social, economic and environmental impacts. The National Environmental Policy Act mandates that the public have an opportunity to participate in the process. The Federal Highway Administration regulations require the environmental process be coordinated into a single effort: compliance with all applicable requirements is to be indicated in the National Environmental Policy Act document.

Accordingly, the Idaho Transportation Department is committed to embracing the spirit of the National Environmental Policy Act for all transportation activities, regardless of whether or not they are federally funded. Although non-federal projects will not require federal agency approval, the National Environmental Policy Act process is an excellent framework for ensuring social, economic and environmental factors are considered consistent with the Idaho Transportation Department environmental ethic. The guiding principles of the National Environmental Policy Act have been incorporated into the Idaho Transportation Department transportation planning and project development process, as well as maintenance and operations of the state transportation system. It is the responsibility of all the Idaho Transportation Department employees to recognize and consider these essential principles and to appropriately include them in the transportation decision-making process to assure accountability across the department.

Purpose of the Context Sensitive Solutions Guide

The Idaho Transportation Department Context Sensitive Solutions Guide has been developed to introduce and explain the Idaho Transportation Department environmental ethic and an approach that embodies the principles of Context Sensitive Solutions. This Context Sensitive Solutions approach should permeate all aspects of transportation including policy development, systems planning and project development, and the design, construction, maintenance and operations of the transportation system. This Context Sensitive Solutions Guide is designed to educate and assist both internal and external users to better understand the considerations given to our environment and in the use of Context Sensitive Solutions approaches to implementing the Idaho Transportation Department environmental ethic.

The Context Sensitive Solutions approach is more than just processing environmental clearances and ensuring regulatory compliance for transportation projects. It embodies the notion of “going beyond” legal requirements and being responsive to community desires. A Context Sensitive Solutions approach means that the Idaho Transportation Department

1 CEQ Regulations, 40 CFR §§1500 et seq.
2 23 CFR §§771 et seq.
3 The term “environment” as used in this Context Sensitive Solutions Guide includes the natural environment, the built environment, the cultural and social fabric of our communities, and the quality of life of the people who live in Idaho.
employees are always environmentally conscientious and strive to ensure that the statewide transportation system is constructed, operated and maintained in an environmentally responsible, sustainable and compliant manner consistent with the desires of the community.

The Idaho Transportation Department considers environmental and community factors to be an important part of every plan and decision in the same way that engineering, economic, social and other factors are considered. The Idaho Transportation Department’s environmental ethic establishes a foundation for environmental responsibility that helps guide policy and systems planning decisions. As the planning and decision-making process becomes more project oriented, this environmental ethic is realized through environmentally responsible engineering, context-sensitive design and implementation, and through various best management practices.

**Board Adoption**

The Idaho Transportation Board adopted the Context Sensitive Solutions approach as a policy statement on December 17, 2005. Following the formal adoption of this new policy, the Director issued a memorandum instructing the Department to implement the Context Sensitive Solutions approach in all of its programs.
What is it?

Context Sensitive Solutions is a new approach to transportation planning and project development that recognizes the wide societal impacts of transportation. Context Sensitive Solutions has been pioneered by a number of state Departments of Transportation -- with the blessing and support of the Federal Highway Administration and transportation professional organizations. The emerging national-consensus definition of Context Sensitive Solutions is:

“... a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting, and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility.”

Transportation Influence on Society

Transportation is the most potent shaper of urban form, land use, environmental quality, community cohesion, and quality of life. The planning, construction and use of transportation facilities have shaped the human-built and natural environments more forcefully than any other human endeavor. Inevitably, then, transportation investment decisions are broad, not technical, decisions. They are value-laden. They pose issues of choice and public policy, particularly in the earliest stages when the most fundamental decisions are made -- where to put a road, or whether a highway or a transit line will be built.

Awareness of Community Needs

As citizens’ expectations for better, safer roads have increased, a growing awareness of communities’ needs has also emerged among designers. These factors contributed to bringing about this transformation in highway design and construction. Congress, the Federal Highway Administration, governors, state legislatures, and state transportation agencies have all played an integral part in this important evolution of highways. Meanwhile, public interest groups have worked to make developing better methods of highway design a major part of their agendas.

II. A Context Sensitive Solutions Approach

The sustaining qualities of a project produced through a Context Sensitive Solutions approach using a community-oriented process are gaining favor with state departments of transportation. The Context Sensitive Solutions approach questions some of the most fundamental assumptions of the culture of road building, and requires engineers and community leaders alike to reinvent how they think about transportation. It recognizes that transportation planners are community builders, and that the public has an important role to play.

Idaho Transportation Department’s Future

The transformation to Context Sensitive Solutions requires no less than the transformation of the highway development process--a new philosophy, culture and organizational structure. Responsive solutions must address both sides of the design process: what can be done technologically, and what may be done to improve the lives of the surrounding citizens and their environment. There is a need for more and better communication within the industry and with the public. Consensus-building techniques and process improvements must also be implemented so that standard design and planning procedures will produce exceptional transportation facilities with minimal negative impact on the environment and the community.

What are the Context Sensitive Solutions Principles?

The hallmark principles of the Context Sensitive Solutions approach can be summarized as follows:

- To address the purpose and need of the project by considering the safety and mobility needs for improvement, ensuring financial feasibility and sustainability, and addressing all modes of travel.

- To use collaborative public involvement processes involving citizens and affected agencies early and continuously throughout the process and finding the balance in safety, mobility, community and environmental goals.
To consider the total context and design with nature by using an interdisciplinary team tailored to project needs, applying the flexibility inherent in design standards and incorporating aesthetics as an integral part of good design.

How are they applied?

Through Vision, Purpose and Need Statements

A project vision, including purpose and need, must be developed and clearly documented with the involvement of project stakeholders early in the process. This vision should then guide the project development decisions. Project team members, from project planning, design, right-of-way, construction, maintenance, and operations must appreciate the importance of each function and buy in early to the project vision in order to successfully achieve that vision.

The purpose and need statement required by National Environmental Policy Act for new transportation projects addresses the fundamental reason or justification for proposing a transportation improvement. The project “need” is often documented by the safety and/or mobility deficiencies of an existing transportation system as identified in a corridor plan. These deficiencies should be described and quantified, to the extent possible, in the purpose and need statement. This statement becomes the cornerstone for project evaluations and decisions in the planning and development process.

However, the project “purpose” can also include other secondary but important factors to the community that may influence the design, choice or success of the solutions. For example, the aesthetic appearance of safety improvements in the transportation system can affect the use and hence the intended benefit of such features as cross walks or bridges.

The potential solutions must also consider alternative modes and approaches to meeting the transportation needs. For example, in some cases, non-structural solutions may be the most efficient and sustainable answer to capacity problems.

And finally, the solutions must be based upon sound financial and technical considerations. A transportation solution that lacks good engineering, design and financial feasibility cannot be sustainable or useful to the community.

Through Public Involvement

The cornerstone of successful Context Sensitive Solutions is public involvement. Effective public involvement encourages the exploration of issues from a variety of perspectives. Stakeholders need to be identified at the beginning and during the planning, programming and development processes. Stakeholders need to be involved throughout these processes. Open collaboration and exchange of information and concerns between the transportation planners and designers and stakeholders promotes buy-in to project outcomes and trust among stakeholders. All projects need some form of public outreach. On smaller projects, at the very least, the public should be notified of upcoming projects that will affect them.

This process includes talking and listening, teaching and learning. While projects are not expected to be unanimously endorsed by every citizen, the transportation department is committed to providing users with projects that meet their needs and fit into their communities. Good communication throughout the project, using appropriate tools, such as consensus-building techniques to develop consensus among project stakeholders helps achieve support.

A project schedule and budget should be determined only after the team has developed the project vision, completed conceptual design, and initially involved the stakeholders. For example, communities should be consulted when determining construction schedules where possible conflicts with other community affairs might occur.

Dialogue is a fundamental part of the decision-making process. From town hall to “store-front” meetings, to advisory groups and public hearings, the process encourages interaction. Decisions must balance the need for safe and efficient transportation with the need to preserve economic, social and environmental conditions. Effective public involvement creates a
legitimate basis for making those trade-off decisions in light of the community’s goals and objectives.

The transportation department strives to be a good provider, steward and caretaker and a good neighbor. Open lines of communication stimulate a sense of shared ownership and a common vision. The information collecting and sharing process begins at the grassroots level, is passed through the Idaho Transportation Department’s professional staff and is conveyed to the Transportation Board. Concerns are addressed. Decisions are made. Action is taken.

Through Designs Compatible with Environmental Context

Context Sensitive Solutions embraces the idea of designing transportation systems compatible with nature. Design with Nature, by Ian McHarg, is the forerunner to Context Sensitive Solutions. McHarg spelled out the need for urban planners to consider an environmentally-conscious approach to land use, and provided a new method for evaluating and implementing it.

“[The engineer’s] competence is not the design of highways,” McHarg explained, “merely of the structures that compose them -- but only after they have been designed by persons more knowing of man and the land.” He further noted “the task of the highway was to intervene with the least possible damage, to exploit and reveal the visual qualities of the landscape while meeting traffic requirements.”

Context Sensitive Solutions uses collaborative planning, stakeholder involvement, environmental consciousness and appreciation coupled with natural designs to find transportation solutions that become sustainable. Context Sensitive Solutions can affect all design elements; therefore project costs may increase, decrease or be unchanged as compared to the traditional design approach. Cost issues must still be addressed during project development, as is the case with all technical and environmental constraints. Context Sensitive Solutions adds value to the process by helping to identify and work with stakeholders to develop projects that are sensitive to their context. The Context Sensitive Solutions approach does not imply that there will always be unanimity among stakeholders, nor does it eliminate the Department’s responsibility to exercise sound engineering judgment in balancing trade-offs.

So what’s different at the Idaho Transportation Department?

Context Sensitive Solutions implementation now applies to all Idaho Transportation Department programs, and details of application vary depending on the community and the issues. However, a Context Sensitive Solutions approach generally follows these guidelines:

- Full commitment to the new Context Sensitive Solutions process by all of the Department’s employees.
- Early establishment of interdisciplinary teams, beginning at the corridor planning stage and continuing through construction, operation and maintenance.
- Development of responsive public involvement plans in consultation with the Department’s Public Involvement Coordinator that meets the communities’ needs.
- Identification of and agreement on project area problems before determining project objectives and solutions.
- Understanding of the landscape, the community and valued resources before closure on Scoping activities.
- Use of a full range of tools as appropriate to communicate project information (visualizations, internet, etc.).
- Consideration of multiple project alternatives, including fully considered community proposals.
- Maintenance of continuous and effective communication with stakeholders in the community.
Idaho Transportation Department Public Involvement

The Idaho Transportation Department aims for early, effective and continuous public involvement fostering meaningful participation and a sense of ownership in the process and the end product. This public involvement process explores the issues surrounding proposed transportation improvements, identifies potential solutions and limitations, asks questions of the community about their values and concerns, estimates the scope of the Department’s efforts and begins to understand the level of effort and time needed to design and implement effective solutions.

Public involvement is an important component of every transportation project. “The Guide to Public Involvement” and the Public Involvement Coordinator are resources for determining the appropriate level of stakeholder outreach.

The Public Involvement Coordinator is available to assist District Engineers, Program Managers, and Headquarters’ managers with their responsibilities for incorporating public involvement activities into their project development processes. District Environmental and Transportation Planners are also resources on Context Sensitive Solutions principles and public outreach. The Environmental Section is responsible for updating guidelines and the exchange of best practices information pertaining to Context Sensitive Solutions and public involvement approaches in consultation with the Public Involvement Coordinator and Public Affairs.

In the end, transforming the highway development process comes down to individuals cooperating with each other and making decisions about highway elements. Everyone has a role in this process, whether as an agency administrator setting policy; as a professional engineer, planner, or landscape architect making decisions on behalf of an agency or client; or as a regulatory reviewer, community activist, environmental advocate, or interested citizen. Transforming the highway development process will require new skills in understanding values, in communicating, in creating innovative solutions, and in funding and implementing context sensitive solutions. Design excellence is the result of an excellent design process. Through public outreach, better projects are constructed – projects that reflect the values of communities and engineering excellence.

Idaho Transportation Department Environmental Functions

The Idaho Transportation Department’s environmental functions at Headquarters are located within the Environmental Section. This section is responsible for assisting the Districts in identifying environmental issues and impacts associated with the location, design, construction, operation and maintenance of transportation projects within the state of Idaho. Further, it also:

◆ provides training, technical expertise and administrative support;
◆ provides environmental mitigation recommendations to the Districts and assists them with environmental clearance responsibilities;
◆ reviews and approves appropriately documented programmatic environmental evaluations submitted by Districts;
◆ reviews and transmits appropriately documented Environmental Impact Statements, Environmental Assessments, and Environmental Evaluations requiring the Federal Highway Administration approval;
◆ provides a liaison with federal agencies and others regarding environmental policy and procedure;
◆ assists the Idaho Transportation Department officials and Board Members in establishing environmental policy and procedures; and
◆ maintains a documented filing system on all project environmental submittals, clearances, and reevaluations involving the Idaho Transportation Department.

The Idaho Transportation Department District Offices have Environmental Planners who support the District staff on environmental matters and provide a communications link with the Headquarters’ Environmental Section. The environmental planners perform or oversee the National Environmental Policy Act process for project development and rely on the
Headquarters’ office for specialized social, economic and environmental expertise. They also work closely with the public, interest groups, partners, Federal Highway Administration and the federal and state resource agencies in coordinating review and consultation processes. They may be involved with Headquarters in developing working agreements with resource agencies. Environmental Planners also oversee and manage the environmental work performed by consultants on projects.

Communication between Headquarters and the Districts is critical to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to environmental work. Headquarters will provide the policy and procedural guidance to the Districts and monitor compliance on projects and on-going activities. Regular meetings of the environmental planners with Headquarters’ staff to discuss project issues are important to maintaining consistency and quality of environmental services. Periodic meetings provide a forum for discussing common environmental issues among the Districts and with Headquarters.

**Idaho Transportation Department Corridor Planning**

With Board Policy B-09-04 and Administrative Policy A-09-04, titled *Corridor Planning for Idaho Transportation Systems*, the Idaho Transportation Board adopted a Context Sensitive Solutions methodology for developing long-range plans for the state transportation system corridors. According to B-09-04,

Through the corridor planning process, the department shall:

- Develop collaborative partnerships;
- Involve local land use, highway jurisdictions, and other stakeholders in the identification of transportation issues and problems;
- Allow stakeholders to articulate specific corridor solutions and resolve major planning issues before project development begins;

The corresponding administrative policy calls for the department staff to seek close cooperation with all governmental agencies, to promote a community-based planning effort, to develop a public involvement program to ensure that all local government agencies, the private sector, and the general public are involved during the corridor planning process, and to provide a forum to resolve planning issues.

These principles are embodied in the “Corridor Planning Guidebook,” which serves as a practical reference for the District Transportation Planners who develop and manage corridor planning projects in the Districts. The corridor planning program and guidebook were produced and continue to be administered through a cooperative working relationship between the Division of Highways and Division of Transportation Planning at the Idaho Transportation Department. Corridor plans function as a bridge between the statewide Idaho Transportation Vision and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program – or –STIP, which consists of the five-year schedule of improvement projects.

In addition to an emphasis on collaboration with stakeholders, Context Sensitive Solutions principles are reflected in additional elements of the Department’s corridor planning methodology and practice. For example, the detailed research and analysis represented by the “Existing and Future Conditions” and “Environmental Scan” reports provide a basis for corridor-wide, as well as project purpose and need statements. Along with contributions from stakeholders, these reports also create a basis for determining feasible and recommended improvement options, identifying and developing improvement projects and obtaining environmental compliance. The land use and zoning element, demographic profile, and determination of corridor functions also make essential contributions to developing a comprehensive understanding of the present and future needs and desires of the varied corridor communities, and thus a firm foundation for future project identification and development.

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4 See the Idaho Transportation Department Environmental Process Manual for a detailed description.
Idaho Transportation Department
Construction and Maintenance Activities

In addition to project development activities, Context Sensitive Solutions principles are applicable to construction and maintenance operations. These operations are important because they employ the majority of the transportation workforce, are the focus of some of the most significant environmental impacts and opportunities, and are the most visible to the public. Moreover, many of the environmental commitments and mitigation measures identified and adopted in the planning and project development processes must be implemented and maintained by those responsible for construction and maintenance activities.

Many state departments of transportation have adopted “best management practices” or “environmental stewardship practices” to provide guidance to construction and maintenance personnel on practices and procedures designed to better care for the environment. Practitioners are often faced with specific problems that require them to take into account the settings in which the practices are applied, and usually tailor a more general practice to fit a specific context. Some of these stewardship practices are by necessity highly local, such as roadside vegetation management, while others, such as shop maintenance, have greater consistency and performance across an organization.

Communication and involvement among the various transportation functions and units are critical to insuring that good practices are understood and implemented. For example, inviting construction and maintenance representatives to attend critical project development meetings or final design reviews in order to provide early input into planning and project development decisions is helpful. Early notification to and consultation with maintenance of project mitigation commitments or design changes to a project that create long term maintenance obligations is necessary to insure those responsibilities are adequately funded and implemented as intended.

What are some Idaho Transportation Department examples of Context Sensitive Solutions?

The Idaho Transportation Department has several examples of projects that have incorporated Context Sensitive Solutions principles. Following are brief descriptions of some of these examples.

Urban Area Example: Communities in Motion

Communities in Motion is a six-county, 20 plus year plan that addresses issues on the regional transportation system, evaluates the needs for future corridors and addresses the effects of growth on transportation. The Ada County work was being coordinated with the “Blueprint for Good Growth,” a Boise City comprehensive land use planning project so that results could be shared between the two planning efforts. The Idaho Transportation Department is emphasizing the need to expand the planning area to better address issues on a regional basis. Reasons for expanding the area include:

1. Focus on regional/corridor level issues.
2. Use as a basis for seeking major federal assistance.
3. Integrate with Idaho Transportation Department plans.
4. Address “beyond the border” transportation issues.

Context Sensitive Solutions Principle: Public Involvement in Planning Phase

The early planning and involvement with the public, governments, and resource agencies to assess options and get community input in regards to the quality of life qualify this project as an example for a context sensitive solution to the growth problems. Residents of six counties were encouraged to become involved and offer opinions about land use and the future transportation system by attending one of four

workshops. The workshops featured an interactive game that allows participants to use regional maps to plot future residential development, industrial development and main streets using “chip” sets. The project team used completed maps to develop future options. Final workshops and public input developed a consensus for growth.

**Boise Community Team Workshop**

Involving the community in an interactive way to gather ideas on future land use and growth facilitated community support for the project. It served to educate the community about the challenges one is faced with when planning for growth. Even though the project had budgeted for public involvement work, this project required significantly more public involvement work as compared to other projects. This long range plan is now being used to develop priorities for project development.

**Large-scale Corridor Example:**

**Timmerman to Ketchum Environmental Impact Statement**

A National Environmental Policy Act process is underway for a 27-mile corridor on Idaho 75 in Blaine County from the Timmerman Junction to Ketchum through the Wood River Valley to a resort destination. It is very mountainous terrain with only one throughway (Idaho 75) which is experiencing severe congestion during peak-hour commute times. The National Environmental Policy Act process began in November, 2000 and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement is under review by the Federal Highway Administration. Because this project is highly contentious, it has required astute community “bridge building.”

**Context Sensitive Solutions Principle: Public Involvement**

The Idaho Transportation Department has tried to improve the highway in this valley for nearly 30 years. Because of recent expanded public involvement efforts, the Department’s relationship with the community is at an historic high and was well worth the time and cost. The project has made every effort to address and review community needs and desires. Community input has been thoroughly reviewed and considered including roundabouts, separated grades, high occupancy vehicle lanes, mass transit alternatives, traffic calming and demand management opportunities. The public outreach and involvement has been extensive including grocery stores, Hispanic media, preferred mode study, transit study, community-based work groups, local planning work groups, open houses, website access, neighborhood meetings, and council meetings. The Wood River Valley communities had a very important role to play in the development of purpose and need, particularly with respect to their adopted land use and transportation plans, goals, and objectives.

The resulting transportation improvements will better reflect this special part of Idaho while providing the needed improvements in transportation. The effort has also given rise to a number of local studies for various needs such as parking and circulation, safety improvements in downtowns and enhanced public transit system.
Environmentally Sensitive Area Example: Warm Springs to Montana State Line

The purpose of this project was to provide an overlay and seal coat to approximately 23 miles of U.S. 12. Within the project limits there were two culverts that were deemed complete and/or partial barriers to resident and migratory fish species listed under the Endangered Species Act as well as other aquatic organisms.

The purpose of the in-water work portion of this project was to replace existing highway culverts with large baffled counter-sunk culverts that would retain a natural stream bottom. The intent of this action was to facilitate movement and dispersal of fish and amphibians to upstream habitats blocked by the existing culverts.

Context Sensitive Solutions Principle: Design with Nature

This project occurred adjacent to the Lochsa River and within a Wild and Scenic River and Scenic Byway corridor. U.S. 12 is generally considered a challenging and difficult corridor to work within due to numerous environmental regulations and restrictions and high public visibility. The Clearwater National Forest approached the Idaho Transportation Department and asked that the department partner with them in a cooperative effort to replace the culverts. The Forest Service was responsible for culvert design, permitting and purchasing of the culverts. The Idaho Transportation Department was responsible for installation, inspection and some non-federal contribution of funds. Other entities involved with this project included the Nez Perce Tribe, Plum Creek Timber Company, Trout Unlimited and Bring Back the Natives. Since the completion of construction in the summer of 2000, migratory fish have passed through the culvert locations to upstream spawning areas for the first time in more than 40 years.

The project was an excellent example of a cooperative effort between agencies to enhance and restore existing facilities and the natural environment. The project was achieved with no delay to project timeframes at a cost of approximately $20,000 to the Idaho Transportation Department.

Multidimensional Example: Sand Creek Byway

The Sand Creek Byway concept was first conceived sometime during the late 1940’s. Since then it has always been a coffee shop discussion and viewed as a project that would never really happen. In the mid-1990s, the Idaho Transportation Department began an Environmental Impact Statement process to determine the best alignment for a through-traffic highway in or around Sandpoint. The Environmental Impact Statement process was very challenging as the community was well divided and it appeared that unless the community could come together behind a feasible alternative, the project would never happen. The City of Sandpoint, followed by a strong majority of the community, decided to come out in favor of the Sand Creek route paving the way for a Federal Highway Administration Record of Decision on the Environmental Impact Statement. Upon publication of the Record of Decision, design work began.
After selecting a consultant to assist in the design process, a public information office entirely dedicated to the Sand Creek Byway Project was opened. The office was a place where meetings took place and where the public interacted with a full-time staff person.

Context Sensitive Solutions Principle: Public Involvement in Design Phase

The design team created a public involvement plan for the project area to guide the design process and assist surrounding communities to obtain funding for satellite projects. The team developed the following mission statement for the project during the initial team chartering session:

“Our mission is to provide an aesthetically pleasing and functional Sand Creek Byway Project. We are committed to meaningful public involvement through understanding and responding to the community’s vision for the Sand Creek Corridor.”

The Sand Creek Conceptual Master Plan was created with input from hundreds of citizens around the community. The plan was a statement to land owners about what the community at-large wanted for the Sand Creek peninsula outside of the established proposed highway and existing railroad track. During the master planning process, citizen task forces on land use and circulation were formed to guide the process and prepare for larger community involvement. Upon completion of the master plan, the team had a community-driven design framework for context sensitive design.

Another off-shoot of the master planning process was the Citizens Design Advisory Committee. The committee was formed to provide oversight by community leaders to the more specific task force groups. Opponents and proponents of the project were willing to participate on the committee. This gave solidity to the decisions of the Citizens Design Advisory Committee and their recommendations to the design team. Over the course of the project, new committee members replaced old, providing fresh ideas and energy to the project. The design team used the Citizens Design Advisory Committee as a sounding board for ideas.

Members of the design team often made presentations at the Bonner County Area Transportation Team, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Kiwanis, and other community group meetings using artist and computer renditions to describe the vision the community had developed for the project. Public meetings were held to provide information and get input on the project.

Overall, the design process on the Sand Creek Byway was one of openness and community engagement. The team went beyond the standard “public meeting” form of involvement to create an atmosphere for honest, open interaction.
In implementing the Idaho Transportation Department environmental ethic and the Context Sensitive Solutions approach, it is important to understand that the Idaho Transportation Department has many partners in planning, developing and implementing the transportation system. These partners can assist in meeting the Department’s vision, mission and environmental ethic. The primary federal partner for the Department is the Federal Highway Administration. The federal government provides significant funding for transportation projects in Idaho.

These partners work with the Department implementing Context Sensitive Solutions at various stages in the transportation process from programming through construction and maintenance. They contribute to the environmental evaluations and community outreach efforts.

**Federal Highway Administration**
(U.S. Department of Transportation)

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is headquartered in Washington, DC, and maintains field offices in every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The Federal Highway Administration Division office in each state works closely with the state transportation agency in their respective states. The Federal Highway Administration is charged with the broad responsibility of ensuring that America’s roads and highways continue to be the safest and most technologically up-to-date. Although state, local and tribal governments own most of the nation’s highways, the Federal Highway Administration provides financial and technical support to them for constructing, improving and preserving America’s highway system. Federal-aid highway funds derive from the Highway Trust Fund, which is funded by federal fuel and motor vehicle excise taxes. The Federal Highway Administration has two major programs: federal-aid funding to state and local governments; and Federal Lands Highways funding for roadways in national parks, national forests, Indian lands, and other land under federal stewardship.

The Federal-aid Highway Program administered by the Federal Highway Administration provides federal financial and technical assistance to the states to plan, construct, and improve the federal-aid highway system, urban and rural roads, and bridges. The program also addresses economic and social assistance to communities and regions of each state through planning, development, safety and operational categories of funding. The program fosters the development of a safe, efficient, and effective highway and intermodal system nationwide. The Federal Highway Administration has primary responsibility for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other federal environmental requirements. The Federal Highway Administration is the lead federal agency for projects developed with federal-aid highway funds.

The Federal Highway Administration has identified three primary focus areas, referred to as the “Vital Few.” These are environment, safety, and congestion mitigation. More information is available at the Federal Highway Administration’s website, www.fhwa.dot.gov. This website also provides extensive information on project development, fulfillment of the National Environmental Policy Act requirements, and the Federal Highway Administration policies and guidance.

**Environmental Cooperation between Idaho Transportation Department and Federal Highway Administration**

The Federal Highway Administration and the Idaho Transportation Department have entered into an Oversight Agreement which identifies the duties and responsibilities of each entity for the Federal-aid Highway Program. The guiding principle of the Oversight Agreement is the partnership between the Federal Highway Administration and the Idaho Transportation Department for oversight of Federal-aid highway projects.

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6 The current version (11-17-03) of the Oversight Agreement is currently under revision.
Through the Oversight Agreement, the Federal Highway Administration and the Idaho Transportation Department management pursue - within state and federal laws, regulations and policies - alternative methods for providing quality services and transportation products and services. The partnership also ensures that federal funds will be expended cost-effectively and implementation provides justification for continued disbursement of federal funds.

The project and program-level responsibilities of each agency are presented in the Idaho Transportation Department-Federal Highway Administration Stewardship and Oversight Agreement. The Agreement, and attached matrix, outline which projects/project types will be administered by the Idaho Transportation Department, and which will remain under “full oversight” of the Federal Highway Administration. For state-administered projects, the Idaho Transportation Department agrees to fulfill all responsibilities for compliance with federal laws and regulations, and the Federal Highway Administration conducts periodic program reviews to verify this compliance.

Other Federal Transportation Agencies

The Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration are all subject to the National Environmental Policy Act. Although in many instances the implementing regulations adopted vary from those of the Federal Highway Administration. As a result, they have different internal requirements and review/approval processes. If an Idaho Transportation Department project involves federal funds or approvals from these other federal agencies, the Headquarters’ Environmental Section should be consulted to determine specific requirements.

Federal Resource Agencies

Many federal resource agencies must be consulted during the National Environmental Policy Act process. Early consultation with these agencies assists the planning process by identifying key concerns for assessment and helps develop a partnership approach for expediting their involvement. These agencies having jurisdiction for specific environmental resources can assist in advising the Department with regard to avoiding, minimizing or mitigating potential adverse impacts.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
(U.S. Department of the Interior)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works to protect endangered and threatened species, migratory birds, freshwater fish and wildlife habitats in Idaho. It also works with many other private and public partners to preserve and protect living resources of the Idaho ecosystems. They administer provisions of the Endangered Species Act and other wildlife laws.
**U.S. Forest Service**  
(U.S. Department of Agriculture)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service’s fundamental responsibility is focused on stewardship and sustainability of the land, water and communities. Much of the work today involves collaboration with other federal and state agencies, local communities, private and tribal landowners, university research centers, and international organizations.

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries/National Marine Fisheries Service**  
(U.S. Department of Commerce)

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries is charged with protecting and preserving marine resources, including anadromous fish species. These include ocean-going steelhead and salmon species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). These fish can be present in four of the six ITD Districts. NOAA Fisheries and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have issued joint regulations for administration of the ESA. Section 7 of the ESA requires consultation with NOAA Fisheries on all actions which could affect species of anadromous or marine fishes listed or proposed for listing under the ESA which have a federal nexus.

**Bureau of Land Management**  
(U.S. Department of Interior)

It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau of Land Management’s task is to recognize the demands of public land users while addressing the needs of traditional user groups.

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**  
(U.S. Department of Defense)

The United States Army Corps of Engineers becomes involved when an Idaho Transportation Department improvement incorporates the placement of fill material into a water of the U.S. In those instances, a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit from the Regulatory Branch of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must be obtained. For projects requiring individual 404 permits, Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (40 CFR Part 230), the Corps serves as a co-lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act documents. Projects or actions with minor effects to waters of the U.S. (including wetlands) can typically use one or more of the Nationwide Permits established by the Corps.

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

The mission of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is to protect human health and the environment. Since 1970, EPA has been responsible for administering many of the nation’s federal environmental laws and regulations. The Environmental Protection Agency provides oversight to the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality in administering the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act and provisions of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. The Environmental Protection Agency is often consulted in the National Environmental Policy Act process on possible environmental impacts and mitigation measures. The Environmental Protection Agency also reviews Environmental Impact Statements and rates the degree of impact and the adequacy of the document.
State Resource Agencies

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

The mission of Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is to protect human health and preserve the quality of Idaho’s air, land, and water for use and enjoyment today and in the future. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality is the state government agency responsible for ensuring clean air, water, and land in the state and for protecting Idaho citizens from the adverse health impacts of pollution. As a regulatory agency, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality is responsible for enforcing various state environmental regulations and administering a number of federal environmental protection laws, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality oversees Idaho Transportation Department projects to insure that they have the necessary environmental permits and clearances.

Idaho Department of Water Resources

The Planning and Technical Services Division of the Idaho Department of Water Resources deal with water resource issues. Their programs include groundwater protection, floodplain management, stream channel protection, water allocations and water planning.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game, as a state resource agency, has a role of advising and providing technical information regarding wildlife and fish. Unlike U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has direct involvement primarily with threatened and endangered species, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game is involved with all animal species in the state. This includes game and non-game species as well as those considered “sensitive” or at-risk. The Idaho Transportation Department has agreements in place with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to provide consultation services, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game is also a participant in interagency coordination for transportation projects under development.

State Historic Preservation Office

The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is a division of the Idaho State Historical Society. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office is the state clearinghouse for documentation from all recorded historic and archaeological sites in Idaho. The National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to consult with the State Historic Preservation Office during the planning of any federal action that may affect cultural resources. The role of the State Historic Preservation Office in federal project review is to reflect the interests of the State and its citizens in the preservation of Idaho’s rich cultural heritage. This process provides an important planning function by assisting federal agencies in the recognition and protection of sites, buildings, and structures that are important to Idaho’s past.

Local Agencies

The Local Highway Technical Assistance Council (LHTAC) was formed by the Legislature to assist local government in developing transportation projects. The Surface Transportation Programs-Local Rural, Local Urban and Local/Off-system Bridge programs are managed by the Local Highway Technical Assistance Council in Idaho. These programs are funded by the Federal Highway Administration through the Idaho Transportation Board. The Local Highway Technical Assistance Council assists the Local Highway Jurisdictions in preparing for future transportation needs through a systematic planning approach. They report directly to the Idaho Transportation Department headquarters.
Interagency Coordination

The transportation agencies, the Idaho Transportation Department and the Federal Highway Administration, have a history of working with the resource and regulatory agencies. In May 1995, an Accord for Integrating the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 404 Permit process on Federal-Aid Highway Projects in the State of Idaho (commonly referred to as the “merger accord” or “merger process”) was enacted to coordinate the processing of National Environmental Policy Act documents and Clean Water Act Section 404 permits. Nine federal and state agencies signed this agreement which outlined how agency participation in transportation projects would be conducted under the National Environmental Policy Act. In June 2003, a meeting of those agencies convened to review the 1995 merger accord and discuss whether that agreement should be extended, modified, or terminated. Subsequent to that meeting, an effort was commenced to develop a revised, improved process for interagency involvement and coordination on federal-aid transportation projects in Idaho. At the time of this writing, a draft of this revised process, referred to as the National Environmental Policy Act Coordination Process is under review by agency management.

Implementation of Context Sensitive Solutions

Implementation of the Context Sensitive Solutions approach in all areas of the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) will take time, education, experimentation, commitment, awareness of changing values and attitudes, and a constant reassessment of the best ways to provide for the public benefit through the development and implementation of transportation systems. A successful approach will pay dividends in terms of cost savings, greater public acceptance, and expedited programs.

The Context Sensitive Solutions Guide has been presented to the ITD Districts for explanation, discussion and feedback. Each District should consider developing an implementation plan to integrate the ideas and approaches outlined in this guide so that they become standard Department operating procedures.

Principal ITD manuals and guidance documents have been amended with the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) concepts and examples that can assist ITD staff. Although explanations and examples have been provided, the application of CSS principles can be a creative process and will depend greatly on the project and its context. Below are some key links to internet sites that can provide more information on the use of a CSS approach for different projects.

**References:** Context Sensitive Solutions Links

Both federal and state transportation agencies have developed Context Sensitive Solutions programs and illustrated examples of Context Sensitive Solutions. The following are some links to their web sites:

- Project for Public Spaces Context Sensitive Solutions: [http://www.pps.org/CSS/cssonline.htm](http://www.pps.org/CSS/cssonline.htm)
- Context Sensitive Solutions Network: [http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/network/?party_type=organization](http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/network/?party_type=organization)
- AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence CCS: [http://environment.transportation.org/environmental_issues/context_sensitive_solutions/overview.htm](http://environment.transportation.org/environmental_issues/context_sensitive_solutions/overview.htm)