Updating agency administration and culture

Why?

Successful DOTs will need to provide unwavering leadership and support in rolling out a practical solutions approach. Prioritizing the efficient use of limited funds, the safety of all users, and smaller impacts and footprints will take a significant amount of effort, dedication, and time. Implementing practical solutions includes providing direction to supervisory and management staff that all staff will be held accountable in annual reviews and supplying the training and mentoring necessary to apply this approach. New performance metrics for the outcomes of projects to the system will need to be defined, measured, and reported.

Most importantly, senior leadership should understand that real changes in rules, guidelines, standards, performance measures, training and job reviews will have to be instituted by them in order to change their agency's products.

Update organizational procedures to drive implementation

A practical solutions approach and policies will not be immediately integrated into day-to-day project level decisions. This challenge is not unique, though the size and dispersed structure of any agency is likely to obstruct the speed of culture change.

In addition, agencies should consider new performance measures for DOT programs to track implementation of practical design across divisions and evaluate the success of projects that take a practical design approach.

The following actions can support the transition from policy adoption to implementation.

Establish a set of principles and messages for leadership to deliver from the top down

Regardless of Headquarters' efforts, project teams will be unlikely to change how they currently do business unless they feel that their managers will support them. Likewise, managers will be unlikely to encourage their teams to change their approaches unless they feel confident that they have the support of their district leadership.

If leadership recognizes that simply adopting forward-thinking policies is not enough, District and Headquarters staff should conduct presentations for staff around the state to encourage the use of design flexibility and context-sensitive solutions and address perceived barriers to doing so, including concerns about liability.

Developing a clear set of principles for leadership to convey to their staff will help promote this shift in culture. These principles should be integrated into the onboarding procedures for new staff, the process for approving contractors, and staff performance reviews.

District leaders should recognize and praise staff who adhere to them. Job reviews should include these principles to ensure that those following them are promoted and rewarded and those who do not are redirected and retrained.

Some of these principles might include versions of the following:

- Staff are encouraged to work toward a clear understanding of the need for a project, even if this extends the scoping process. Doing so will save time and costs later.
- The role of each staff member goes beyond the facilities he or she builds or operates directly. He or she is contributing to a system that should work for all users, which in turn is contributing to the economic prosperity of the state and quality of life of its residents.
- Staff should think of themselves as facilitators and consensus-builders, bringing together the right stakeholders for collaborative problem solving.
- Staff are encouraged to utilize informed engineering judgment (rather than just "standard" design) and innovative multimodal roadway treatments tailored to the specific context and needs of the community.
- Every project delivered should play a role in advancing identified state goals and relevant plans. Project teams should always be able to articulate how their projects do so.

Update procedures and criteria for evaluating the performance of staff, leadership, and contractors

DOTs can consider establishing a performance review framework for staff that reflects practical solutions principles like those discussed in the section above. Broadening the criteria used to evaluate project teams will help remove pressures to move projects quickly through the scoping process at the expense of planning and community engagement. This will mean supplementing existing measures with criteria that assess and reward the use of innovation, collaboration, context-sensitivity, and attentiveness to the needs of all modes of travel.

- Consider evaluating staff according to how well they:
- Further the agency's vision, mission, and/or other identified goals through their work, and utilize the appropriate metrics to measure success of projects (rather than simply auto delay).
- Think about and tie their work to the larger systems, not just their own projects/facilities.
- Work collaboratively across teams and functional units.
- Articulate the true need(s) for projects and identify solutions tailored to that need.
- Consider and work to balance the needs of all users and modes.
- Meaningfully engage the communities they work with and other stakeholders.

These and other principles identified by each district should guide annual performance evaluations for staff at all levels, the criteria used in hiring new staff, and the criteria used in

hiring and evaluating contractors. Staff should be given access to the evaluation criteria so they can update their work approaches accordingly.

Utah DOT tracks successful implementation through the following performance metrics:

- Total cost savings for the overall program.
- Percent savings for the overall program.
- Percent savings per project.
- Percent of projects using Practical Design.
- Percent savings by project type (new construction, maintenance, etc.).
- Percent savings by project size.

Link updated organizational procedures with ongoing training

State DOTs will need to continue to provide ongoing training on how to implement elements of practical solutions—considering all users, design flexibility, performance-based project development, and more. The steps and strategies below may be helpful in supporting agency staff:

- Put training in the budget.
- Advocate for and defend funding for training to legislators and the general public.
- Make a basic level of training mandatory for all staff
- Make taking the training a mandatory part of the annual review process.
- Make advanced training mandatory for advancement

Incorporating a practical solutions approach into DOT practices will require a broad culture change within the agency. With updated documents and procedures, providing ongoing education and training for staff and consultants will help create an internal culture in which key elements of practical solutions are a core part of the agency's work.

Conducting ongoing training will also provide a variety of additional benefits, including:

- Ensuring that the changes to specific documents and procedures are interpreted correctly and used effectively throughout the agency;
- Helping to support broad adoption of a context-sensitive planning and design approach and preventing a "one-size-fits-all" interpretation; and
- Helping to improve coordination between DOT programs and external partners.

The Florida Department of Transportation details the implementation of their Complete Streets with a great deal of focus and planning around internal communication, collaboration, and training.[1] They developed five categories of training and versions for different audiences, purposes, and formats to best meet the needs of staff, partners, and stakeholders.

Provide tools

---

[1] Complete Streets Implementation Plan. The Florida Department of Transportation and Smart Growth America. December 2015. https://smartgrowthamerica.org/app/legacy/documents/fdot-cs-implementation-plan.pdf

Create a usable checklist for how elements of a project are considered—like context, purpose and need, impact on the surrounding area, and costs—to support DOT staff's implementation and provide guidance on how to meet the agency's goals. More information about tools used by other states can be found in the Practical Solutions Memos in this series titled *How to address land use and context* and *Getting project scopes right*.

Integrate field visits and walking audits into training as frequently as possible

Participants at GICD's workshops over the past two years consistently pointed to walking audit as one of the most valuable and eye-opening aspects of the training. Visiting a community in-person can drastically change the perspective of the engineers working on a project and can support a much clearer and more nuanced understanding of the needs of that community. DOTs may want to consider integrating field visits into training the department currently offers. Doing so could:

- Educate participants on how to conduct field visits/walking audits in their own work;
- Help participants connect the concepts covered during training to real-world examples and engage in creative problem-solving;
- Highlight the importance of meaningful community engagement; and
- Support bonding among training participants and a sense of team cohesion.

Encourage cross-disciplinary teams

As discussed in the memo on "Getting project scopes right," DOTs should prioritize empowered, multi-disciplinary team with a committed, strong leader and advocate for the goals of the project. It should be standard practice to establish a core project team with diverse multimodal expertise across disciplines working consistently on the project from start to finish, even if other members of the team evolve as it moves from one phase to another. Routinely including a planner who has worked on the area or corridor in question in each project development team can bring context to the scoping process and later phases of project delivery.

This continuity will help ensure that engineers involved in the later phases of project delivery have a clear and nuanced understanding of the goals of the project and prior conversations with community members and stakeholders do not get lost in translation. It will also help bring a wider range of perspectives and problem-solving expertise to each phase of project development. Planners often have established relationships with the community and other stakeholders that can help provide the continuity and consistency necessary for robust stakeholder engagement throughout project delivery and more successful project teams overall.

The Governors' Institute on Community Design worked throughout 2017-2018 helping a small group of state departments of transportation question and assess the underlying

assumptions that result in giant highway solutions for every transportation problem. This memo is part of a series about the states that are finding success through what's known as practical solutions, a way for transportation departments to meet changing demands and plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain context-sensitive transportation networks that work for all modes of travel.

The Governors' Institute on Community Design, a program of Smart Growth America, helps state leaders address economic development, housing, transportation, and other pressing issues that relate to how communities grow and develop.