

# In Context

In Context informs, educates, and creates new ideas on Context Sensitive Solutions

## DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

Caltrans recently won the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials' national award for Environmental Excellence Best Practices in Smart Growth and Transportation.



District Director  
R. Gregg Albright

Specifically, AASHTO recognized Caltrans for its department-wide efforts in implementing Context Sensitive Solutions and, thus, making permanent changes statewide in attitudes and organizational structure to help institutionalize Smart Growth practices in delivering transportation services.

Associate Transportation Planner Del Deletetsky of Headquarters Community Planning applied for the award. He said CSS is a "linchpin to several Smart Growth principles, and encouraging public participation in transportation decision-making is key."

I agree. We're honored by this recognition and will continue our progress in institutionalizing CSS by formal training, sharing information and establishing strong partnerships and good working relationships both inside and outside Caltrans.

*Editor's note: District 5 Director R. Gregg Albright will receive the award for Caltrans Sept. 21 at AASHTO's 90<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA.*

## Local Partner Discusses CSS

By Cindy Utter

*This is Part Two of SLOCOG's Executive Director Ronald DeCarli's discussion on CSS. Part One is in the Winter 2004 edition of In Context. In that article, DeCarli said balancing community interests and values with highway performance and safety is the most important element of CSS.*

CSS is important even during the State's difficult fiscal times, according to Ronald DeCarli, executive director of San Luis Obispo Council of Governments. He believes CSS will continue—regardless of budgetary concerns—to secure and maintain public support for sometimes "contentious" projects and move them toward delivery.

There should also be a "clear and unambiguous direction given to Caltrans staff to consider and implement CSS, he said. It doesn't always have to increase a budget for a project. CSS is more about participation, finding the best fit for all parties, and integrating options that meet the community's interests.

SLOCOG staff members working in planning, programming and project development are all responsible for implementing CSS, he said. Above all, his agency's job is to enhance and maintain local character; revitalize communities; and address multi-modal transportation for pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit users, while also addressing capacity concerns.

Transportation is progressive in San Luis Obispo County. "Every major highway project in our county—regardless of location—is progressing forward towards construction," he said. He noted that's impressive in an area with "very strong" concerns regarding quality of life, growth and the environment.



The recently completed Cuesta Grade Improvement Project along U.S. 101 is the county's greatest CSS project example, he said. It addressed both Caltrans' highway performance goals and the highly scenic environment.

The \$48 million project involved "maximum" environmental mitigation of massive "aesthetic" retaining walls, slope-contour grading and extensive re-vegetation, as well as constructing an undercrossing for bicycles and pedestrians. An aesthetic design committee, working with Caltrans, was instrumental in designing huge retaining walls that softened their visual impact with designs and rock patterns copied from the San Luis Obispo Mission.

Along with extensive public input, the planning process for the project included structured meetings with key stakeholders to facilitate collaboration and mutual decision-making. It also included an "innovative" transportation demand management program to encourage alternative transportation modes and reduce congestion during construction.

Overall, for successful CSS implementation, DeCarli reiterates, "Challenge, challenge, challenge, and never let up on the need to integrate CSS values in the planning, programming and project development process."

**D**ECARLI  
CREDITS HIS  
COUNTY'S  
SUCCESS WITH  
THE GREAT  
PARTNERSHIP  
BETWEEN  
CALTRANS,  
LOCAL  
GOVERNMENTS  
AND THE  
COMMUNITY IN  
GENERAL.

# CSS Gets Projects Built

By Bob Carr  
Caltrans, District 5  
Landscape Architect

*This is Part Two of Bob Carr's CSS definition. Part One is in the winter 2004 edition of In Context. In that article, Carr said CSS means providing good communication, and taking the time to understand the concerns of those impacted by our work.*

It's possible you're still wondering what CSS is and how we should implement it. Unfortunately, no specific CSS step-by-step manuals have yet been issued. Until that happens, we'll need to apply CSS according to our own district-inspired knowledge and experience.

Toward that aim, we should simply think of CSS as a mindful strategy to conduct our efforts based on an open dialogue with our customers. A strategy for doing CSS would include:

-  Develop an honest and thorough purpose and need statement for the project.
-  Define the project based on that specific purpose and need.
-  Provide a listening environment for communicating our responsibilities and hear-

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-  PROVIDE A LISTENING ENVIRONMENT FOR COMMUNICATING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AND HEARING STAKEHOLDERS' ISSUES. BY PROMOTING THIS DIALOGUE, WE INSPIRE A LEVEL OF TRUST THAT, IN TURN, INCREASES OUR ABILITIES TO GET OUR MESSAGE ACROSS.

ties and other stakeholders. Having confidence in our projects' true purpose enables honest communication, which fosters trust among stakeholders. And trust inspired from a public agency is invaluable.

ing stakeholders' issues. By promoting this dialogue, we inspire a level of trust that, in turn, increases our abilities to get our message across.

Make no mistake, putting CSS into practice does require effort. It may even mean asking ourselves the tough questions about our core mission and project purpose. But, by taking the time to develop well-grounded project definitions—backed up by defensible technical studies—we can openly discuss our needs and level of responsibilities with communi-

Overall, the application of CSS should be individually tailored to each project circumstance. It is also important to remember that CSS is not a finished project or merely the addition of an aesthetic nicety. It is a process and mind-set.

As we implement CSS, our design standards and projects' purpose and need justifications will gain much greater public acceptance. In addition, our department's mission is better understood and appreciated. We also earn greater community satisfaction and support for our projects, resulting in higher quality facilities getting built.

With a rate of return like that, it appears that CSS is definitely worth the investment of expanding our communication skills and taking the time to consider stakeholders' concerns. In fact, it appears we can't afford the price of not doing it.

## WORDS OF WISDOM

THERE ARE NO  
SPEED LIMITS  
ON THE ROAD TO  
EXCELLENCE.

— DAVID W. JOHNSON  
AUTHOR, INTERNET

To find out more about CSS, visit the Project for Public Spaces website at <http://www.pps.org/CSS/cssonline.htm>.



**In Context** is published periodically by Caltrans, District 5, Community Planning Branch. Layout by Janet Newland. Questions regarding content may be directed to Cindy Utter, Community Planning, (805) 549-3970.



## CSS IS PEOPLE, PROCESS, POLICIES AND PROJECT FEATURES

