Making the transportation process easier to understand for local partners is the main objective for a new Caltrans team.

“Our goal is trying to do business better,” said David Fapp, Office Chief for Design II, Project Development and leader of the Central Region Design Oversight Guidelines Team.

“We’re providing more technical assistance with the project development process,” he said. "We’ll help local agencies to better understand ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), Context Sensitive Solutions and the state’s approval process."

For starters, the eight-member oversight team is putting together a comprehensive information packet to give to partners at project kick-off meetings. It will include the following: an overview of the transportation process and funding; references to web sites, manuals and other information sources; terminology definitions; and guidelines for initiating a project as well as getting it approved, designed, constructed and maintained.

Eventually, each Caltrans function will contribute information to the packet titled Central Region Special Funded Projects Procedures Guidelines. This refers to any project using funding other than—or in combination with—the State Transportation Improvement Program. The information packet—designed also for the Department’s internal use—is tentatively scheduled for distribution in July 2006.

Currently, the team is reviewing all project development guidelines and requirements to ensure all pertinent information is included in the packet. New findings are being communicated internally. “We’re trying to create consistency in design oversight throughout the region,” Fapp said.

Toward that goal, the team recommends clarifying requirements on special funded projects for local partners. It also suggests that both the Department and local agencies work together to improve efforts on establishing roles and responsibilities, communication and conflict resolution.

“We want to establish early communication, so all sides understand each other better,” Fapp said, referring to local agencies, developers and consultants.

To do that, the team advises creating a project charter and a communication plan for obtaining and submitting information between all parties.

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The team also suggests creating a generic flow chart showing the various project development activities. The local agency would then use the chart as a template that can be applied to their own project, allowing for reasonable and acceptable review and response times for all involved.

Ideally, at the kick-off meeting, Caltrans and the local agency will both present their expectations. “We’ll lay everything out on the table—which creates Context Sensitive Solutions—and avoid eleventh hour issues,” he said. Another goal is to lock in the project’s budget early and prevent changes, Fapp said. “It probably won’t solve all the problems, but will help the process.”

He noted Senate Bill 45 changed the business climate for the Department. The legislation transferred authority for 75 percent of state highway funds to regional agencies, and 25 percent to Caltrans for interregional projects. Previously, Caltrans controlled most of the funds.

“Our partners now have a larger say,” he said. “We need to hear them and, at the same time, protect our state facility.”

Budgeting time and funds for CSS early in the project is also important, he said. Although most Caltrans staff generally acknowledges CSS must be considered, “it is not yet in everyone’s forethought when they approach a project — as it eventually will be.”

Among other things, the oversight team recommends the following steps:

- Establish a formal project development team with consistent participants.
- Select the most experienced staff to work on these projects and provide focused training for them.
- Clarify the role of the project manager to partners and internal staff.
- Inform partners on the state’s standard practices and policies.
- Improve the process of developing Purpose & Need statements for projects.
- Discuss the proposed funding and sponsor of the locally funded project. These decisions determine the reports necessary for initiating the project. Use the Project Development Procedures Manual to guide this discussion.
- Provide lists of documentation needed from all partners.
- Discuss consequences of delays or inactivity on a project such as changing policies or standards.
- Create a conflict-resolution matrix to help guide decision-making on the project development team.

The "locals" get consideration on Highway 1 near San Simeon.