

Historically, much of the attention in environmental impact assessment has been placed on the natural environment, rather than on how transportation projects affect the human environment. Yet transportation projects can have major social and economic effects—both positive and negative. Analysis of community impacts provides insight into ways projects can be improved or redefined to reduce adverse impacts and increase overall project benefits for a broad range of users. In addition, community impact assessment has long been required as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

To address the need for improved attention to community impacts in transportation plans and projects, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) contracted the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida to develop a handbook and training course on community impact assessment (**Contract #BB-296**). The handbook, entitled *Community Impact Assessment: A Handbook for Transportation Professionals*, provides methods that practitioners can use to identify and evaluate the community impacts of transportation projects, as well as strategies for reducing adverse impacts.

The handbook is intended to serve as a reference tool for FDOT in both planning and project development. It is a resource guide to supplement the *Project Development and Environment Manual* (PD&E Manual). The handbook is also intended as a resource guide for metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, and other agencies seeking more effective ways to address community impacts in the transportation planning process. The handbook expands upon *Community Impact Assessment: A Quick Reference for Transportation*, which was produced by the Federal Highway Administration in 1996, and draws upon the *Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment*, produced by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The handbook begins with an introduction to community impact assessment, how it relates to organizational objectives, and an overview of laws and requirements related to community impact assessment for transportation. It proceeds with a conceptual overview of the impact assessment process, and how that process relates to the various phases of transportation planning and project development. The handbook stresses that conducting a community impact assessment requires a thorough understanding of the affected community. Part Two, Baseline Conditions, provides guidance on how to develop a community profile. Part Three sets forth techniques for assessing social and economic impacts, including community cohesion, community facilities and services, safety, mobility, economic impacts, land use, aesthetics, relocation and civil rights or environmental justice. Part Four includes Appendices that provide tools and information for various assessment activities.

In addition to the handbook, a training course has been developed and will be available through TRESS for those interested in this program. The course will also be taught several times in 2001, beginning with planning and MPO staff.

“The research effort has been very successful,” said Buddy Cunill, Project Manager for FDOT. “CUTR has done a great job in putting the handbook and training course

together. The Department now has the tools available to educate practitioners, not only on how to assess impacts, but also putting into practice the principles of being more sensitive to communities; working more closely with communities to improve their quality of life; and helping solve community problems where we can.”

Every effort was made to make the handbook user friendly, including the development of assessment checklists and step-by-step instructions to guide the practitioner through the process. “The objective was to provide practical, community-based methods for identifying and addressing community impacts,” said CUTR Senior Research Associate, Kristine Williams, AICP, a Principal Investigator on the project. “It is a living document that will be updated as new methods are identified.”

The handbook and training were developed under the direction of Buddy Cunill, Project Manager, and Lee Ann Jacobs, Co-Project Manager, FDOT Environmental Management Office. The handbook is available at www.cutr.eng.usf.edu and through the FDOT website at www.dot.state.fl.us/emo under publications.

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