

Case Study

Florida DOT Gains Consensus on State Transportation Plan

The Problem

Florida is expecting to undergo changes that will have a dramatic impact on the statewide transportation system. Current trends indicate that by 2020, imports and exports will double, 5 million new residents will call Florida home, and up to 87 million tourists will visit the state each year—an increase of 15 million.

To prepare for such dynamic growth, in 1995 the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) adopted a comprehensive transportation plan called 2020 FTP. Under federal law, within five years the state was required to update the plan and submit it to the US Department of Transportation for approval.

The complex update procedure involved a number of issues, diverse interests, and multiple government agencies. To improve coordination among the various government agencies and to incorporate input from stakeholders, FDOT decided to use a facilitated consensus process.

The Policymakers

FDOT Secretary Tom Barry initiated the process. As primary convener, he chaired the 2020 FTP Update Steering Committee and appointed committee members.

The committees included a number of elected officials: two state senators, two representatives, the

mayors of Orlando and Gainesville, elected officials from the Municipal Planning Organization, three county commissioners, and representatives from the city and county.

Other Players

In all, there were 97 participants in the process, each carefully selected to assure a balance of perspectives and varying points of view. In addition to the policymakers mentioned above, the process included representatives from the governor's office, FDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, the chairman of the Transportation Commission, the Environmental Protection and Community Affairs departments, environmental representatives, and other citizen and non-governmental stakeholder groups.

The Process

In June 1999, FDOT enlisted the assistance of the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium (FCRC) to help develop and implement a process for revising the 2020 FTP. FCRC Director Robert Jones worked with FDOT staff and senior management to conduct a conflict assessment and design a participatory consensus process.

All committee meetings were facilitated, consensus based, and open to the public. The advisory committees held seven meetings to study and develop consensus recommendations on specific substantive issues. Following the meetings, public input was

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solicited through 12 workshops around the state. Using this input, the committees revised their reports and submitted them to the steering committee for review.

Over a three-month period, the steering committee met to discuss the advisory committees' recommendations and to draft a preliminary proposal. Although the consensus guidelines required that 80 percent of participants concur, the process helped to engender so much trust among the members that they unanimously agreed on a draft and on all major decisions throughout the process. Again, FDOT sponsored facilitated focus groups and workshops to encourage statewide public input on the decisions. The committee incorporated this feedback, revised the proposal, and reached another unanimous agreement on a final report.

The Product

In December 2000, Secretary Barry submitted the committee's final proposal to USDOT, which subsequently approved it. The update established four goals and associated long-range objectives. The goals were: 1) improving the safety of transportation; 2) preserving and managing existing transportation systems; 3) enhancing economic competitiveness; and 4) ensuring quality of life through livable communities, healthy ecosystems, and a sound economy. The plan also included implementation recommendations. Following USDOT's approval of the plan, the steering committee appointed three drafting groups to develop policy recommendations relating to three key issues: 1) economic competitiveness, 2) infrastructure and

operations, and 3) community and environment. The three groups continue to meet, solicit public input, and report to the steering committee.

FDOT's commitment to collaboration and consensus has enabled the agency to lay the substantive and procedural foundations necessary for reaching the statewide objectives by 2020.

According to Secretary Barry, over the past three years FDOT has been using consensus building to deal with a number of difficult issues. "We find that these processes provide better communication, save time and money, and strengthen important relationships," he said.

For more information about this case contact:
http://consensus.fsu.edu/transportation/FDOT_Report_A-8.html



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This case study is published jointly by the Policy Consensus Initiative (PCI) and its applied research and development arm, the National Policy Consensus Center (NPCC). PCI is a national non-profit organization that promotes consensus building and effective problem solving in states. NPCC is a center of expertise on consensus building for public leaders.

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