

On the Road Again....CREATIVE TRANSPORTATION DESIGN

Book with CD

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and state transportation departments began advancing the concept of “context sensitive highway design” a decade ago and today it is one of the top three agendas of the FHWA. Context-sensitive highway design considers the environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, community and preservation impacts of a road project, as well as bicycling and walking. Context-sensitive highway design also involves local communities in planning for area transportation projects. Since 1993, members of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) have been researching, writing and teaching about how to make streets and highways into civic spaces that benefit the surrounding community.

The design of the roadways entering a city or town offers the community an opportunity to create a gateway that introduces the passenger to the community. It is no surprise that state and local leaders in many areas of the country see how a very small investment in design, relative to the roadway construction cost, has the ability to dramatically impact the community and the visitor. The creation of design components often includes extensive community involvement in the design and artist/designer selection process to define and reflect a “sense of place.” Citizen participation is a critical component of context-sensitive design. Involving members of the neighborhood or community most impacted by the transportation project can produce support for the project in place of protest. In the process of communicating with community members, the artist/designer may bring a communication style that will complement the transportation engineer.

This book *On the Road Again...CREATIVE TRANSPORTATION DESIGN* was designed to counter some of the objections to including a creative and/or community based process to transportation projects. I'll call these *roadblocks*. The first section addresses the most frequent stated *roadblock*: funding. A quote from the book: “There isn't enough funding to expand or improve existing roads therefore adding a design component is too costly.” Essays in the first section on funding outline how other communities have addressed this *roadblock* and the many returns to an investment in a good design.

Section two outlines the benefit to the local or state Department of Transportation (DOT) when an artist is involved in a context sensitive design process. Most civil engineers do not have the inclination, or the training to be a community mediator. The civil engineer is trained in materials, mathematics, safety and maintenance with an emphasis on left brain activity. Essays in this section suggest that the artist/designer on a project can assist transportation engineers with the community process and involvement in context sensitive transportation design. The resulting collaboration can produce a stronger project with support from the community.

It is the community that benefits the most from these collaborations as outlined in Section Three. City economic development is often tied to the “livability” of the city. Transportation design features can also contribute to cultural tourism, another economic development factor for any size community. The New Mexico model of transportation entry design into a small town as a part of *Scenic Byways* and Chicago's pedestrian-overpass designed by Frank Gehry linking Millennium and Jackson Parks, are both about pedestrian friendly projects that become a destination for the visitor. For downtown retail businesses to succeed, a city must be pedestrian friendly.

The fourth section of this publication addresses how lack of understanding about the transportation process can be a *roadblock* for stakeholders. Any transportation project takes many years from initial planning to construction. Waiting until the bulldozer shows up is far too late to impact a project. The lack of understanding about when and how a community can best become involved in the design process is an educational *roadblock*. Advocacy can be very effective if it includes decision makers as well as stakeholders. This publication and CD can be a tool in the advocacy effort with or without the exhibit.

The last section outlines how to develop policies and processes that will assure the inclusion and success of quality design. If the process is sound, a project can be defended even if a debate surfaces based on personal taste of elected officials. The process should also enable the contracting agency to select the artist/designer who will best advance the project. Not every artist/designer has the disposition or background for the multi-year transportation design/construction project that is time-sensitive for deliverables and requires collaboration with engineers and many public meetings.

As an advocacy tool, the enclosed CD is very persuasive, with images of projects across the country in 25 categories of transportation design. As the images from the CD are projected, detailed project information can be accessed with a click of the mouse. Creating the CD was the most challenging part of this endeavor. Hundreds of hours were spent identifying ventures, obtaining high resolution images with rights of reproduction and acquiring complete information on each project. This can be a most powerful tool in the hands of decision makers determined to remove *roadblocks* to Creative Transportation Design in their community.

Dian Magie, editor and Executive Director, The Center for Craft, Creativity and Design

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