

Successes **in** Stewardship

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August 2010

FHWA's Livability Initiative Advances the Goals for Sustainable Communities

In June 2009, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) joined to form the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (the Partnership). Through the Partnership, the three Federal agencies are working closely together to help residents and workers in urban, suburban, and rural communities gain better access to affordable housing and more transportation options and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment. This issue of *Successes in Stewardship* provides an overview of the Partnership and highlights activities that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is undertaking to promote more sustainable communities, including their own Livability Initiative.



Overview of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

HUD, DOT, and EPA founded the Partnership to support the development of livable communities through the integration of housing, transportation, water infrastructure, and land-use planning and investment (for a definition of livability, see sidebox). To guide its activities and accomplish its purpose, the Partnership set the following goals:

- **Provide more transportation choices** to decrease household transportation costs, reduce U.S. dependence on oil, improve air quality, and promote public health.
- **Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices** for people of all ages, income levels, races, and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined costs of housing and transportation.
- **Improve economic competitiveness of neighborhoods** by providing reliable access to employment centers, educational opportunities, healthcare services, and resources addressing other basic needs.
- **Target Federal funding toward existing communities** through transit-oriented development and land recycling to revitalize communities, reduce public works costs, and safeguard rural landscapes.
- **Align Federal policies and funding** to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, and increase the effectiveness of programs aimed at planning for future growth.
- **Enhance communities' unique characteristics** by investing in healthy, safe, walkable neighborhoods, whether urban, suburban, or rural.

What Is Livability?

Livability ties the quality and location of transportation facilities to the broader opportunities of access to good jobs, affordable housing, quality schools, and safe streets.

"Livability means investing in a way that recognizes the unique character of each community. The era of *one-size-fits-all* transportation projects must give way to one where preserving and enhancing unique community characteristics, be they rural or urban, is a primary mission of our work rather than an afterthought."

– DOT Secretary Ray LaHood

By coordinating Federal housing, transportation, and environmental policies, programs, and financial resources, the Partnership seeks to maximize the efficient use of resources and to foster a system that supports the development of sustainable communities. In addition to working collaboratively, HUD, DOT, and EPA are pursuing individual programs and initiatives to further enhance the work of the Partnership. For information on recent agency activities that support the Partnership, see the "Partnership in Action" newsletter, available on EPA's [Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities website](#).

FHWA Livability Initiative

FHWA launched an internal Livability Initiative in the fall of 2009 to increase awareness of the importance of transportation in achieving livable communities and to build capacity in FHWA Division Offices, State DOTs, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in advancing the concept of livability. Recent and ongoing activities of the Livability Initiative are summarized below.

Livability in Transportation Best Practices Guidebook

FHWA is developing the *Livability in Transportation Guidebook: Planning Approaches That Promote Livability* to help practitioners at the Federal, State, and local levels understand how strategies can enhance the livability of communities. Through a series of case studies involving rural and urban areas, the guidebook demonstrates that a livable community is not a one-size-fits-all concept; rather, the unique characteristics of a given community define livability. The case studies show how to apply planning practices that are consistent with livability goals to a variety of transportation projects. They also address how to better connect neighborhoods and downtown areas through transportation systems, and how mixed-use developments can improve quality of life for residents. Additionally, the guidebook provides strategies to revitalize rural towns. The guidebook will be available on FHWA's [FHWA's Livability website](#) later this summer.

Livability Initiative Under Special Experimental Project No. 14

Special Experimental Project No. 14 (SEP14) is an FHWA initiative, designed to test and evaluate innovative contracting practices that have the potential to reduce the life-cycle costs of projects while maintaining product quality. As part of SEP14, certain contracting practices are implemented on an experimental basis by a select number of State DOTs. Practices that FHWA deems to be successful under this program may subsequently be made operational. FHWA seeks to use the SEP14 program to support the Partnership's efforts in order to align Federal policies with funding. This will be achieved by permitting State DOTs to request SEP14 approval for contracting practices as part of any project that is to be jointly funded with HUD. Currently, economic opportunity requirements associated with some HUD housing- and community-development-assistance funds are in conflict with the procurement requirements of Federal-aid highway projects, which prohibit funding recipients from using certain HUD funds as a local match for FHWA grants. To address this barrier, FHWA proposed that States be allowed to pilot combined FHWA and HUD funding sources for single, integrated projects. These projects will be procured and bid under a single contract while complying, to the extent feasible, with the training, employment, and contracting requirements of HUD's Section 3. In March 2010, FHWA's proposal was published in the *Federal Register*. As a result of the comments received, FHWA decided to permit States, on a case-by-case basis, to request SEP14 approval for contracting practices intended to enhance livability and sustainability as part of any project that is to be jointly funded with HUD. In June, FHWA issued the notice announcing the Livability Initiative under SEP14 in the [Federal Register](#).

Smart Growth Implementation Assistance

EPA's Smart Growth Implementation Assistance (SGIA) program provides technical assistance from a multidisciplinary team of national experts to help communities explore barriers to smart growth implementation and other related issues. Communities selected as part of the annual SGIA program receive assistance in one of two areas: policy analysis or public participatory processes. The expert panels develop detailed reports to help each community achieve its goal of incorporating smart growth techniques into future development. Beginning in 2009, EPA invited FHWA and HUD headquarters and regional staff to participate in the management and assistance provided to these communities. Including DOT and HUD staff on the expert teams strengthens the focus of developing comprehensive solutions to address the communities' development-related challenges.

Research Initiative: Strategies for Livable Communities

FHWA recently commenced a livability research project that will develop tools and strategies to incorporate the Partnership's goals of livability into transportation planning and project development. This multipronged research effort will result in a white paper describing livability, a toolbox of training materials on livability, livability workshops that will be presented throughout the country, and a communications plan that will help promote these research activities and products.

Workshops to Advance the Partnership at Regional and State Levels

FHWA Division Offices are partnering with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regions, HUD field offices and regions, and EPA regions to address the goals of the Partnership at the State and regional levels. Many regions have hosted workshops, webinars, and conference sessions to educate State and regional transportation agencies, planning organizations, redevelopment and housing authorities, and community-development groups on programs, policies, and funding opportunities related to sustainability and livability.

Looking Ahead

FHWA is committed to supporting urban, suburban, and rural communities in setting a vision for sustainable growth that celebrates the unique characteristics of their given areas. Over the coming months and years, FHWA, through the Livability Initiative, will continue to advance the goals of the Partnership by providing education and technical assistance to stakeholders and identifying opportunities within existing and new program areas to foster the development of livable communities. For more information, please visit [DOT's Livability](#) and [FHWA's Livability](#) websites.

Contact Information

Gabe Rousseau

FHWA Office of Human
Environment, Livability Team
Gabe.Rousseau@dot.gov
202-366-8044

Shana V. Baker

FHWA Office of Human
Environment, Livability Team
Shana.Baker@dot.gov
202-366-4649

Sharlene Reed

FHWA Office of Human
Environment, Livability Team
Sharlene.Reed@dot.gov
202-366-9629

Look What's New!

- FHWA has announced the availability of the proposed 2011 implementation strategy for the Surface Transportation Environment and Planning Cooperative Research Program (STEP). The draft FY 2011 implementation strategy is available on the [STEP website](#). The agency also requests [feedback](#) on the draft strategy and on suggested lines of research for FY 2011. The deadline for submitting feedback is September 30, 2010. For more information, link to the *Federal Register* [notice](#) and the [July 2010 STEP Bulletin](#).
- On Monday, August 23, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Eastern, the Interagency Working Group on Planning Regulations for Resource Agencies will host a training session for Federal, State, and local resource agencies to learn about the transportation planning process. The webinar will introduce the role of resource agencies in transportation planning, the benefits of early involvement, and useful tips and tools. [Registration](#) is limited so please sign up early. Once you register, you will receive an email with instructions on how to access the Webcast.
- The Fourth Northeastern Transportation and Wildlife Conference will be held at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst on September 12-15, 2010. The conference theme is "Sustainability in an Uncertain Landscape." Register before August 27 for the early registration rate. Student and one-day registrations are available. More details about the conference and conference agenda can be found at the [conference website](#).
- The Transportation Research Board (TRB) will conduct a webinar, "America's Energy Future: A Transportation Perspective," on August 12 at 2 p.m. Presenters will include Michael P. Ramage and John B. Heywood of the National Academy of Engineering. Space is limited, and participants must [register](#) at least 24 hours in advance.

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