State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) continuously strive to improve the quality of transportation decision-making. Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) is an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist. It encourages the involvement of all stakeholders and aims to achieve safety and mobility, together with preservation of community values and enhancement of the natural environment. In applying CSS principles, State Departments of Transportation (DOT) strive to provide for the needs of all highway users in balance with the needs of the local community and the context of the project.

Each State has unique needs and circumstances that guide its application of CSS principles to project delivery. AASHTO conducted a survey of its member states to gain a better understanding of CSS activities nationally, including the activities states are undertaking to apply CSS principles and what can be done to benefit such activities. Results from this survey have provided AASHTO with a snapshot of State DOT CSS implementation activities and identified CSS topics of interest to State DOTs. These topics will be explored at a national conference in Baltimore, Maryland in September 2006.

The survey was sent to members of the AASHTO Board of Directors, the Standing Committee on Highways (SCOH), the Standing Committee on the Environment (SCOE), the Standing Committee on Planning (SCOP), and the Subcommittee on Design (SCOD). Each state was asked to coordinate responses amongst its various disciplines and provide a single response for the state. All 50 States and the District of Columbia completed the survey. Survey responses indicate that CSS principles are being incorporated into State DOT missions and changing the way highway projects are developed and built.
Profile of National CSS Efforts

States were asked to provide information on their process of implementing CSS principles regarding CSS awareness, CSS policies, staff and/or consultant training, public involvement initiatives, internal cultural changes, performance measures, and incorporating CSS into their project development procedures. The survey results indicate that all states are aware of the CSS principles. Additionally, survey results indicate:

- 47 States have held seminars, workshops and/or provided CSS training to staff;
- 23 States offer CSS training to consultants;
- 14 States established CSS-related partnerships with university engineering departments for development and/or delivery of CSS training programs;
- 35 States issued formal policies related to CSS;
- 19 States developed CSS manuals or related website content;
- 37 States are undertaking steps to incorporate CSS into their project development process;
- 25 States developed or are developing public involvement plans or practice early stakeholder involvement;
- 25 States have taken specific steps to incorporate CSS into their agency culture;
- 8 States have formed CSS-dedicated internal committees or teams; and
- 6 States have included CSS in their agency strategic plans.

In addition, States were asked if they had any “best practices” or other resources they would like to share with other State DOTs. Thirty-eight States offered examples of best practices they would like to share including:

- Formal CSS policies;
- Case studies of successful CSS practices;
- Project development guidelines;
- Public involvement manuals;
- Performance measurement tools; and
- Successful CSS programs.
In addition, the AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence received 75 applications from 33 States for its 2005 “Best Practices in Context Sensitive Solutions” Competition. A brochure highlighting the entries is posted on the Center web site at http://environment.transportation.org.

When asked if States have encountered barriers to full implementation of CSS principles, 45 States indicated that they are facing challenges in this area. The following are the three most encountered barriers:

- 25 States encountered resistance to change;
- 19 States indicated that CSS is perceived to cost more in time and money; and
- 18 States indicated that DOT leadership, staff, and the public do not have a clear definition of what constitutes CSS.

Survey results indicate that a majority of States (34) would like to improve their CSS implementation processes. Learning from their peers through workshops, meetings, and training courses was judged the most effective way to gain information.

- 21 States indicated a preference to meet with DOTs that have similar concerns, and/or with DOTs successful in integrating CSS;
- 19 States indicated a preference for training opportunities through workshops, seminars, and national conferences; and
- 18 States indicated a preference for using website information and/or computer-based tools.

Topics of most interest were:

- Successful training tools/guidelines, including design flexibility and maintenance issues;
- Effective public involvement processes;
- Performance Measures – only 11 State have performance measurement tools, but most states consider this to be important;
- How to deal with the perception of higher costs; and
- How other states deal with the liability concerns.
AASHTO Conference on CSS

In June 2005, AASHTO formed a partnership with the FHWA to further the commitment to advancing CSS implementation in State DOTs. In coordination with this partnership, AASHTO is sponsoring a national conference on CSS on September 6-8, 2006, in Baltimore, Maryland. This conference is designed primarily for State DOT and FHWA representatives. Through personal and specific group discussions, the workshop will utilize real-life situations, projects, problems, and solutions to explore the successes, challenges, benefits, risks and lessons learned from CSS implementation across the country.

The AASHTO Task Force on CSS and the Center for Environmental Excellence would like to thank those who took part in this survey. For additional information on the upcoming conference, please contact Kate Kurgan at 444 N. Capitol St. N.W. Suite 249 Washington, D.C. 20001, (202) 624-3635, kkurgan@aashto.org, or look for information on the AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence website http://environment.transportation.org.