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Ferry Parking and Landside Access Study
Implementing Public Outreach and Impact Assessment

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Through federal regulations, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are mandated to perform public outreach and impact assessment. Although there are some established parameters, the quality and effectiveness of public outreach efforts vary widely, and in many instances information dissemination becomes the central focus of public outreach efforts. However, information dissemination, although essential, is not as effective as a two-way process of public involvement in which members of the public may provide feedback to shape agency initiatives. Research conducted for the Ferry Parking and Landside Access Study is used to describe best practices in public outreach, focusing on socio-economic and community impact assessment. The landside access study represents a dedicated effort by the New York MPO to approach planning for waterborne services by using a comprehensive approach based on land use. With emphasis on land-use criteria, the focus is on people and impact, unlike the traditional demand analysis seen in past ferry studies. By acknowledging regulatory shortcomings and outlining a plan for implementing public outreach and impact assessment, success for consensus building is likely. Practitioners are encouraged to examine the effectiveness of their own public outreach and impact assessment methods.

The goal for the Ferry Parking and Landside Access Study is to assist the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), the New York region’s metropolitan planning organization (MPO), in the assessment and evaluation of sites to determine whether they are suitable for the development of facilities to support waterborne transportation. (The Landside Access Study is primarily funded by the New York State Department of Transportation and NYMTC and is cosponsored by the University Transportation Research Center, Region II.) The landside access study began in December 2006 with an anticipated completion date of September 2008. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the landside access study is that it approaches planning for waterborne services by using a comprehensive approach based on land use. The study aims to optimize underutilized marine transportation resources and services through

- Review of previous research about waterborne transportation needs of the region.
- Development of criteria to assess viability of sites for development of facilities and infrastructure to support waterborne transportation, and
- Evaluation and prioritization of sites for development through public outreach and impact assessment.

The landside access study region (Figure 1) encompasses the 10 counties of the NYMTC region. This includes New York City, Long Island, and the lower Hudson Valley, an area of 2,440 mi² (6,320 km²) having a population of 11.3 million—approximately 65% of New York State’s population. The landside access study emphasizes public outreach and impact assessment, both essential to achieve project goals. Although public outreach and impact assessment are considered a routine part of transportation planning, these processes are not well documented (1) and often are criticized for lack of effectiveness. Attempts to provide project information can masquerade as public outreach efforts, and such attempts do not incorporate public opinion into impact-assessment decision making in a meaningful way. As such, MPOs face a variety of challenges in engaging public involvement (1). This paper describes the process of public outreach and impact assessment in the landside access study.

The first section of this paper is an overview of the waterborne transportation network in the New York metropolitan region. It is evident that as population and congestion grow and communities forecast their planning efforts, the transportation network will need to be expanded. Ferries are a feasible way to do this.

Next, impact assessment as a vehicle for public outreach is discussed. Federal regulations mandate public outreach and impact assessment. However, although the parameters are set, the effectiveness of public outreach is often marginal because of the complexity of the transportation network, as well as the extensive nature of associated impacts.

The next section discusses public involvement in transportation planning. Federal regulations mandate public outreach and impact assessment. However, although the parameters are set, the effectiveness of public outreach is often marginal because of the complexity of the transportation network, as well as the extensive nature of associated impacts.

Next, impact assessment as a vehicle for public outreach is discussed. This section includes an overview of impact assessment, including best practices. In the landside access study, criteria were extracted from an exhaustive literature review and series of expert interviews. This matrix of criteria provides the structure for a geographic information system (GIS) database and a point of departure for impact assessment.

Finally, the plan for implementing public outreach and impact assessment for the landside access study is outlined. Specifically, guidelines are established to increase effectiveness. Identifying the targeted extent for public outreach and impact assessment and the tools selected for these processes is influential in consensus building.

By using principals set forth through the example of the landside access study, practitioners can examine their own public outreach and impact assessment methods for effectiveness and adjust accordingly. Perhaps most significant is the need for adaptability in public
outreach and impact assessment methods. There is no one-size-fits-all methodology. However, understanding the premise behind the regulations, intent, and methodology allows sound practice and mutual partisan support.

**FERRY SERVICE IN NEW YORK METROPOLITAN REGION**

Transportation system alternatives are critical to the New York metropolitan region. New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg addressed transportation issues in the recently published *PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York* (2). Bloomberg states, "Transportation has always been the key to unlocking New York's potential. . . . New York's growth has always depended on the efficiency and scale of its transportation network. . . . For the last fifty years, New York has underinvested in its most critical transportation asset—transit" (2).

Although the New York metropolitan region is the most transit-intensive region in the United States, accounting for one-third of mass transit usage and two-thirds of commuter rail ridership in the United States (3), mass transit systems are aging and overcrowded. New York lags behind strong global competitors, such as London, Singapore, and Tokyo, which have recognized that providing more transit options creates a cleaner, healthier, more efficient urban environment. These areas have subsequently invested additional monies in improving transit (2). In contrast, New Yorkers experience some of the longest commutes in the nation. Of all large counties in the United States, 13 of the 25 having the longest commute times are in the New York area (2). New York must expand its transit network for these reasons, and waterborne transportation is a viable approach.

New York City has one of the world's premier waterfronts, with a total of 578 mi (930 km). Ferry service is a feasible solution to the serious transportation issues in the region, as ferries require little infrastructure, use existing space—the waterways (2)—and make use of Manhattan's best natural advantage—the business district's compactness and proximity to the water (4). More than 32 scheduled routes are being run by four private operators and the Staten Island Ferry Division of the New York City Department of Transportation (5). More than 5% of trans-Hudson commuters make their daily trip to work by boat, and this number is growing (5). Moreover, there is general consensus that expanded ferry service could help connect various points on the waterfront in a more direct way than the current network of bridges and tunnels (5).
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSPORTATION

Public involvement is the process of two-way communication between citizens and government by which transportation agencies and other officials give notice and information to the public and use public input as a factor in decision making (6). Public involvement often is implemented as a one-way process that informs citizens of transportation planning efforts but does not gather feedback, record public response, or allow for public influence in decision making. However, such feedback allows planners to accurately assess the public’s level of understanding about a particular project. The public begins to supply useful and insightful comments regarding a proposed activity (7).

As socioeconomic, environmental, and community impacts move to the forefront of the planning process, infrastructure planning efforts are shifting to an approach of effective public involvement. O’Connor et al. outlined objectives for public involvement, including consensus building, informing the public about transportation issues, and decision making that best reflects the interests of stakeholders (6).

Federal Regulations

Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) (8) joins the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) (9) and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (10). SAFETEA-LU provides $286.4 billion in guaranteed funding for federal surface transportation programs over 5 years, through Fiscal Year 2009, including $52.6 billion for federal transit programs—a 46% increase over transit funding guaranteed in TEA-21. Also significant in this new transportation law is the requirement for public involvement in transportation planning efforts. SAFETEA-LU expands the responsibilities of the regional and state transportation planning agencies by setting requirements and allocating monies for MPOs and states to consider fully a range of options to achieve the objectives of the planning process. Alternative transportation and development scenarios, created with public involvement, are tested to find the plan that best serves planning objectives (11).

SAFETEA-LU requires consideration of the aggregate impact of all projects in a regional plan. The analyses of cumulative impact are to be performed by the MPO as part of the development of the long-range plan (11). SAFETEA-LU required development of a formal public participation plan by July 1, 2007.

New York Metropolitan Transportation Council

In response to these federal regulations, NYMTC sought better ways to interact with residents of the NYMTC region. NYMTC works toward regional transportation priorities that focus on five key areas: increased mobility, reduced congestion, improved air quality, enhanced economic viability, and improved quality of life. In addition, NYMTC tries to ensure that future transportation investments reflect the interests and concerns of those who are most affected (12). NYMTC’s public involvement program has evolved significantly in the last decade and is integrated into all aspects of the planning process.

Early public participation procedures, adopted by NYMTC in September 1994, have evolved into a multifaceted course of action that involves as many people as possible in the regional transportation planning process. As described in NYMTC’s 2007 public involvement plan, public participation operates at three levels—regional, subregional, and local (12)—and includes many avenues for involvement.

Landside Access Study

The landside access study is indicative of NYMTC’s commitment to public outreach with multiple publics and stakeholders. The study approaches planning through a comprehensive regional lens. The multifaceted approach analyzes ferry sites through several layers.

The first step of the planning process was a review of the literature to understand the criteria used to inform siting decisions. This review was followed by a series of interviews with experts in the NYMTC region to gather additional information on ferry sites and services to develop a set of screening criteria for ferry parking and landside access.

The interviews began in February 2007. Although the focus of the interviews was on the issue of landside access, questions were asked regarding each interviewee’s role and connection to waterborne transportation and each interviewee’s opinion on the place of waterborne transportation in the regional transportation system. In addition, interviewees were asked for assistance in providing or locating data to be used in a GIS data repository for subsequent task work.

Eleven interviews were conducted. However, in some cases, more than one individual was present at a session, and thus a total of 19 people were interviewed. Among those interviewed were a private operator of a ferry service, the executive director of a publicly operated water transit system, the executive director of a nonprofit organization concerned with waterborne transportation, and several planners, policy analysts, and decision makers at the local, county, regional, and state levels. These interviewees were chosen because of experience in waterborne transportation. In most cases, one interviewee would suggest another interviewee.

Interviewees agreed that increasing the availability of waterborne transportation would provide benefits to the region. Continued growth in population and employment is projected in the New York metropolitan area (2). Most roads are severely congested, even outside peak hours. Likewise, many mass transit systems are at capacity during peak hours. Thus, developing new and extending existing waterborne transportation systems was seen by the respondents as necessary if the region is to remain economically competitive.

Interviewees saw reduction in traffic congestion and concomitant environmental improvements as the primary benefits of increased use of ferries. Other benefits were mentioned by more than one of the respondents. For example, ferries could be useful for evacuation in the event of disaster, human or naturally caused. This was clearly demonstrated after the events of September 11, 2001, and during the 2003 blackout.

Moreover, as the population grows and available land becomes increasingly scarce, the need to transform New York’s waterfront is evident. All along the New York waterfront, apartment buildings are rising and land is being rezoned to accommodate new housing. Much of this new development is planned to be affordable to middle-income families (2). Waterfront land also is being converted into esplanades and parks. More than 60 mi (96.6 km) of largely abandoned waterfront land is being reclaimed for recreation and new residential, mixed-use communities. However, some of these neighborhoods lack the basic transportation infrastructure required for sustainable growth. In some residential areas, the nearest subway stop is more than 0.75 mi (1.2 km) away, and where there is service the trains and buses are becoming overcrowded with commuters (2).
Interviewees identified new residential and mixed-use development adjacent to or near waterfronts in many parts of the region. Provision of ferry service could help promote these developments and could reduce the need for other types of transportation infrastructure. As such, ferry service is a marketing tool for residential development because prospective residents can walk to the ferry for travel to work and other destinations.

Ferry service, when coordinated with land use planning, can provide an opportunity to create transit-oriented development. This is evident in New Jersey communities such as Jersey City, Weehawken, and Hoboken, as well as neighborhoods in Brooklyn, New York. In addition, the village of Haverstraw, in Rockland County, New York, is experiencing a revitalization of its downtown and adjacent waterfront and has responded by implementing improved ferry service to further attract residential and retail activity. The city of Newburgh, in Orange County, New York, has followed suit by developing its waterfront and providing a transit link across the Hudson River.

Finally, ferry service was seen by several respondents as important to the revitalization of Lower Manhattan, New York. The new service between Yonkers in Westchester County, New York, and Lower Manhattan was instituted primarily for this reason.

Note that this paper is a report of work in progress. As the work proceeds, the landside access study team will generate a list of potential ferry sites. When a list of potential sites has been compiled, public outreach will assess community impact and work toward consensus building. Conversations with the public will help confirm that the site meets community needs, affirm community acceptance for the development of a particular site, and ensure that the viability of a particular site or location has not been overlooked.

Public outreach on several layers provides both structure and flexibility. Structure is important, as outlined by the Structured Public Involvement process of determining goals and decision-making criteria through public participatory consultation and iteratively using obtained feedback to influence planning or design decisions (7). Unstructured public involvement, which is essentially more meetings with the same people and using the same methods (13), often generates undesirable results. How can the public be engaged to provide input in a haphazard outreach program? Nevertheless, the word structured should not be taken to represent inflexibility or strategic control of the goals of public involvement; rather, structure provides the framework for the planners’ role in the process (13). To be effective, public outreach must also be flexible. The public is a dynamic entity, and to reach various constituents planners must be prepared to admit a certain level of adaptation.

**IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN TRANSPORTATION**

Impact assessment in transportation projects began with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). However, the process continues to develop through various laws, publications, and events. In particular, community impact assessment (CIA) of transportation projects considers items of importance to people, such as mobility, safety, employment, relocation, and isolation, throughout the decision-making process. It evaluates the effects of a transportation action on a community and its quality of life.

Through NEPA, major federal actions must be evaluated in an interdisciplinary manner. However, an important element of NEPA often is lost amidst the scientific analyses of an environmental impact statement. The government must listen to the public and build two-way communication. Although the decision ultimately is that of government officials, agencies must make an effort to inform and gather comments from stakeholders (14). As the Supreme Court found in Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council, “NEPA does not mandate particular results, but merely prescribes the necessary process. Other statutes may impose substantive environmental obligations on Federal agencies, but NEPA merely prohibits uninformed—rather than unwise—agency action” (14).

Decades later, however, studies have shown that many citizens believe agencies have adopted a policy of one-way communication, ignoring what the public has to say (15).

The consequences for communities of transportation investments often have been disregarded or introduced near the end of a planning process, reducing them to reactive considerations at best. Avoiding this scenario is inherently the premise of the landside access study. With emphasis on criteria based on land use, the focus is on people and impacts rather than a traditional demand analysis. Without community support and subsequent consumer demand, a ferry landing site and service likely would fail.

Transportation investments have a major influence on society through significant economic and social consequences. Impact analysis informs affected communities and residents, as well as transportation decision makers, about the likely consequences of a project and ensures that human values and concerns receive proper attention during the planning process. Community impacts include quality of life, responsive decision making, coordination, and nondiscrimination (16).

**Best Practices**

According to best practices set forth in the CIA handbook (16), one of the first steps in incorporating CIA into a project is project identification. Community impact analysts should take a strong role in defining the project in the early phases of development. On the basis of their understanding of community values and issues, analysts should take an active role in providing input into a project’s purpose and need in developing project alternatives (16). The landside access study reviewed previous studies, including public opinion, and discussed public opinion with expert interviewees. Consultation with a steering committee convened by NYMTC member agencies focused on the perception of potentially affected areas.

In accordance with CIA best practices, a carefully selected study area is critical, as each technical analysis (i.e., air quality, traffic, noise, and wetlands) may have its own study area. Community impact analysts should identify a geographic region, which incorporates the communities directly affected by the project based on scoping, public involvement, and interagency coordination (16). The community impact study area typically includes communities within and immediately surrounding the project study area.

Moreover, a study performed as an exploratory analysis of 15 public involvement experts’ experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about this critical process concluded in four generalizations (17):

- Experts attempt to be as inclusive as possible when choosing publics based on a public’s perceived salience and interest in an issue and group composition.
- Issue development directly affects how experts choose publics for public involvement processes.
- Issue development occurs through various methods of communication driven by affected values and beliefs.
- Improper choices of publics for public involvement processes can lead to failure.
The expansiveness of a study area is particularly evident in transportation projects, especially waterborne transportation. The catchments for ferry service are both small and large, depending on the transportation mode of arrival. Ferry origins and destinations can be serviced by pedestrian, vehicular, and public transit traffic. This adds to the complexity and potential impact of instituting ferry service. Although roadway projects often serve a broad population, many of which can readily accommodate changes in travel routes, ferry projects with smaller catchments, providing service to pedestrians, frequently have a direct impact on a specific population that is highly sensitive to changes in the transportation network and level of service.

To effectively consider impact—social, economic, environmental, and community—the landside access study is geographically comprehensive. Similar to Rhode Island’s waterborne transportation plan (19), the landside access study planning efforts are within the larger regional transportation network. The Rhode Island plan emphasized the intermodal aspects of the region’s transportation system, focused on the efficient use of resources, and related the development of waterborne transportation to other regional goals (19). Although previous ferry studies in the New York region have focused on specific sites on the basis of anticipated demand, the landside access study is all-inclusive. From its commencement, all sites were considered equally as they relate to waterborne transportation criteria. Thus, the landside access study has a regional perspective in planning for waterborne transportation.

Landside Access Study Preliminary List of Criteria

Several of the respondents from the expert interviews distinguished between two types of site—origin and destination. Origin sites are where passengers board a ferry (typically the home-based end of a trip), and destination sites are where passengers disembark (typically the work-based end). In some cases, the criteria are different for each type of site.

At the origin end, the main criterion mentioned was accessibility: “How can ferry passengers get to the point of departure?” For most of the currently operating systems, a large percentage of passengers arrive by automobile. Use of automobile is likely for many of the prospective sites. Some interviewees referred to this mode of access as park-and-sail. Road access and the availability of parking are essential. It is critical to have sufficient area to build surface parking, or a parking structure large enough to meet the projected demand for the service. This would be a prerequisite for instituting service from many areas.

There are other ways to get to an origin site. Respondents frequently mentioned mass transit, particularly bus. However, very small numbers on the current systems use this mass transit option. For a mass transit system to attract ridership, there must be sufficient population density at the origin. If the catchment area of a proposed site does not have this density, public transportation will not work, and vehicle parking spaces are necessary. There are a couple of exceptions. Many people boarding the ferry in Staten Island, New York, arrive by bus, and the New York Waterway service from Hoboken Terminal (New Jersey) serves many passengers arriving by New Jersey Transit trains. However, many of the respondents thought that future services would not have many users arriving by bus. For most proposed origin sites, the catchment areas are large and the population densities are low.

Last, walking and biking were mentioned as ways that passengers could get to an origin site. Conventional wisdom in transportation planning says that people will walk or bike no more than 15 min to get to a transit stop. This suggests a maximum distance of approximately 0.25 mi (0.40 km) for pedestrians and approximately 3 mi (4.8 km) for cyclists.

Residential density at the origin end thus becomes an important criterion for landside access; the more people who live within the walking or cycling distances of a ferry landing, the more who might walk or cycle to the landing. This also demonstrates why potential sites for ferry service are also sites where new residential or mixed-use development could take place. The waterfront areas of Williamsburg, Yonkers, and Haverstraw, New York, and Weehawken, New Jersey, are examples. As such, ferry service is a marketing tool for residential development because prospective residents can walk to the ferry.

For the great majority of ferry passengers in the New York metropolitan area, the workplace is their destination. Most of these passengers commute to Midtown or Lower Manhattan. Therefore, ferry landings at the destination end must meet one of two important criteria. The first is that the site be within walking distance of a passenger’s workplace. The maximum walking distance, as mentioned, is approximately 15 min. Because of its geography, almost any site in Lower Manhattan meets this criterion.

For passengers heading to Midtown, walking may not be feasible. Therefore, ferry sites for passengers going to Midtown Manhattan must have frequent and convenient intermodal connections, including buses and subways. Thus, ferry sites should be developed at locations where bus and subway routes already exist or where bus service could be instituted. Careful planning is necessary to coordinate the development of a ferry site with the institution of new bus service. Some interviewees felt strongly that no sites should be developed at the destination end without interagency planning and coordination to have mass transit connections in place before the ferry site and service opens.

In the real world, where decision making takes place, most planners, policy makers, and even community residents want to examine interaction effects between different sets of criteria. For example, a site may be accessible to neighborhood residents arriving on foot, but the same site may be less accessible to those who drive from afar and need parking spots for their cars. To identify a list of potentially viable sites and allow for active engagement about the benefits and limits associated with any single site, the landside access study team is building an interactive GIS-based tool that will allow end users (decision makers) to examine how different sites will behave when different criteria or combinations and weights of criteria are applied. The GIS-based interactive tool seeks to use a range of data, including demographic information, parcel-level land use and zoning information, environmental constraints, community acceptability, and modal split data, to examine individual sites.

IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC OUTREACH AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Targeted Public

For public involvement processes to be effective, planning practitioners use broad-based formal groups. The NYMTC steering committee for the landside access study is an example of such a group. This approach brings balance, promoting acceptance and credibility between group members and the outside community. Theorists argue that publics should not select themselves. Instead, practitioners should control the selection process to make sure all groups are represented and that the constituents of a community are reflected within the group (17). The steering committee members for the
lanside access study were selected in this manner on the basis of their representation of the NYMTC region.

The challenge, however, will be selecting the target area for extensive public outreach in areas included on the list of potential ferry sites to be further analyzed. In this case, experts are inclusive rather than exclusive when choosing publics and creating a pool of interested publics. Casting as wide a net as possible is important. If a wide-enough stakeholder impact zone is not chosen, a gatekeeper could appear once the planning process has been initiated. If the gatekeeper, or someone who has authority, is not included at early planning stages, problems could arise (17).

Once the public outreach population is identified, an important objective of a good public involvement process is the extent to which the process builds consensus. In exchange for participation in a fair and open process, citizens often are willing to support the outcome of the process even if their preferred alternative is not selected. This result, sometimes known as informed consent, is the desired outcome on highly controversial projects. It allows projects to move forward although all stakeholder desires are not accommodated (6).

Clearly, there is a need to understand how the issue is developing, what underlying affected values and beliefs are driving current communication activities, and the various publics' perspectives regarding their level of involvement and preferred participation level (17). However, lack of attendance at public meetings, difficulty engaging people in long-range planning, lack of adequate resources, complexity of the issues, and the ever-present NIMBYism ("Not in my backyard") can threaten to undo even the most well-conceived transportation plans and projects (1). This again emphasizes the necessity to be adaptive throughout the public outreach process.

Tools

Presentations

The landside access study will involve the public extensively and provide opportunities for participation by residents in affected communities and by citizen groups. Extensive efforts to disseminate information about planning development and to communicate the concepts of the plan will involve slide presentations. Successful presentations are adaptable to specific audiences (19), and these presentations will be revised to address the appropriate public group.

To further increase effectiveness, the presentations will include elements of public information, public relations, and active public involvement through the use of keypad polling. Public information will be one-way communication to inform public constituents about the project, its goals, methodology, need, benefits, and impacts. Public relations will involve the dissemination of information with emphasis on the solutions, and public involvement will include both public information and public relations, but with the addition of two-way communication to promote feedback used for decision making. As such, a public outreach program ideally acts as an honest broker—informing, providing opportunities for feedback, and mediating differences of opinion (6).

Keypad polling, an engaging wireless voting technology, will be used to enable participation during these presentations and bring a focus to discussion and decision making. Keypads make two-way communication possible. Participants communicate anonymously by entering their preferences on a keypad. Selections are transmitted to a base station, a laptop computer, and, finally, a projector, which displays the group’s results.

Visualization

Multimedia communications technology applications play an increasingly important role in public involvement programs and can include anything from a website and availability of e-mail addresses to highly realistic three-dimensional animation, multimedia CDs, and interactive kiosks that can be placed throughout communities. These technological tools leverage the ability to reach critical audiences and communicate information in creative and accessible formats (20). Visualization tools increasingly provide a common ground on which consensus and mutual agreement are built (21).

When administered correctly, visualization tools have many benefits. It is imperative that tools present actual information that supports an informed decision-making process. By presenting the full picture, including both positive and negative aspects, a valuable service is provided and credibility is enhanced (20). In addition, the content of any tool or publication must be organized so that it is accessible and makes sense to public entities. This is especially important for website information, as the average visit to a website lasts less than 3 min (20).

The landside access study has a web page link through NYMTC’s official website that provides basic information about the study’s goals, methodology, tasks, and contacts. E-mail addresses are provided for those involved in the project so that the public can request more information or provide feedback. In addition, task deliverables are available on this web page. As the landside access study continues, additional information will be incorporated on the study web page when it becomes available.

EVALUATING PUBLIC OUTREACH AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The previous sections outlined the importance of public involvement in transportation planning and its role in the landside access study. It is clear that to ignore the issues and concerns of citizens is to dismiss the public’s history and experience with transportation (22). However, the success of a public involvement campaign often is difficult to measure (18). Successful public involvement cannot depend entirely on the direct response to the problem; it must involve a substantial element of trust and respect between the stakeholders and the transportation agency (23). Public involvement practitioners assert that public outreach must be applied early and often.

The landside access study is an example of such methodology. Through an extensive literature review, the landside access study team engaged in broad research of waterborne transportation within the study area as well as in other geographic areas. This comprehensive analysis resulted in an understanding of the planning and implementation of ferry services, as well as public perception of the planning process. Next, the landside access study facilitated expert interviews, which further probed the planning issues of waterborne transportation. Interviewees were questioned about the most important criteria for siting waterborne transportation facilities. Two criteria frequently mentioned were public acceptance and impact assessment.

Building the right kind of atmosphere for successful public involvement appears to be possible by observing a short list of guidelines. These are inclusion, support from trusted locals, acknowledging impacts, clarity, flexibility, and personal interaction (23). Failure to provide for real public involvement could mean loss of public support (22). A major component of the landside access study is an interactive GIS-based tool, which addresses all the guidelines for public involvement.
The GIS-based tool requires data from all involved constituents. This facilitates a buy-in from the NYMTC counties. Essentially a customized query interface to run within ESRI's ArcGIS, the GIS-based tool provides clarity, flexibility, and interaction. As a critical element of the landside access study, this tool will allow NYMTC to analyze potential ferry sites and vary criteria parameters for further analysis. Moreover, this tool will help decision makers understand the influence of criteria, including community acceptability.

Visualization can complement the GIS-based tool by creating maps and graphics. Through the use of software such as Community VIZ, the exhaustive GIS data repository can be visualized, analyzed, and communicated. As the premise of the landside access study is a land-use-based approach, Community VIZ is a resource that facilitates land use decision making. Land use planning scenarios can be visualized in three-dimensional imaging; environmental, economic, and social impacts can be analyzed; and ideas can be communicated clearly.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the examination of public outreach best practices that include socioeconomic and community impacts, several conclusions can be drawn. Public outreach, although mandated through several federal regulations, is a reoccurring challenge for planning practitioners. The process set forth in these transportation mandates can provide structure to a public outreach and impact assessment program. However, the nature of the project and communities involved can heavily influence the success of these programs. As such, adaptability is increasingly important when implementing public outreach and impact assessment in transportation projects.

Furthermore, by acknowledging regulatory shortcomings and outlining a plan for implementing public outreach and impact assessment, the success of consensus building is likely to increase. This paper is intended to push practitioners to examine their public outreach and impact assessment methods for effectiveness and to adjust accordingly. There is no one-size-fits-all methodology. However, understanding the premise behind the regulations, intent, and methodology allows sound practice and mutual partisan support.

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