Community Awareness Plans

Public participation is an important element of all FDOT projects, from planning and PD&E through design and construction. During planning and PD&E, the emphasis is on participation in the decision-making process concerning the need for a project and its basic concepts. In the design phase, the emphasis changes to one of informing the public of the project. People are much more likely to tolerate the inconvenience of a construction project if they understand the need for the work and have good information about the project. Therefore, emphasis during the design and construction phases is on communicating with the community. During design there are also opportunities to work out details of the project to minimize negative impacts.

Each design project should have a Community Awareness Plan (CAP) which will carry forward into the construction phase. The CAP can be developed by the PM, or it can be made part of the consultant scope of services. The CAP should explain the activities which will take place to keep the community informed of the project and to minimize negative impacts. The scope and complexity of a CAP will vary according to the expected community concern about a project. Projects can be categorized into one of four levels of public concern they are likely to generate, as illustrated by **Figure 1**. Phase I of plan development is the most important for CAP activities. Decisions affecting access management, temporary traffic control (TTC), possible interruptions of utility service, and drainage, are almost always of concern to the public. The PM must have a good understanding of the impacts on the community and the concerns and needs of the public. Changes in vertical alignment are likely to create access problems during construction. Drainage during construction can also be affected.

335.199 F.S., requires a public meeting for any project on the State Highway System which will divide a state highway, erect median barriers modifying currently available vehicle turning movements, or have the effect of closing or modifying an existing access to an abutting property owner. Property owners, municipalities and counties must be notified at least 180 days before the design of the project is finalized, providing a written explanation of need to modify access and informed they will be given an opportunity to provide comments to the FDOT regarding potential impacts. At least one public meeting in the jurisdiction where the project is located shall be held to receive public input on how the project will affect access to businesses and the potential economic impact of the project on the local business community.

A CAP should, as a minimum, include the following:

- Date of the plan and each revision.
- Name of person initiating the plan.
- A description of the project and anticipated level of public concern.
- Identification of city, county, and other local officials that may be involved in the project and how they will be kept informed of project activities.
- A summary of expected traffic impacts during construction.
- A description of the community and properties affected by the project.
- A description of any access changes including median construction or revisions and any driveway drive closures or modifications affecting property access.
- A discussion of removal of street parking (if any) and how it will affect adjacent properties and businesses.
- Special features and amenities that will be part of the project, including landscaping and esthetic treatments.
- Construction schedule, contract time and consideration for alternative contracting methods.

- A list of known community concerns and a strategy for addressing each of them. The PD&E Report will be a good place to begin this list.
- A list of all PD&E and right of way commitments made to the public and how they are to be addressed.
- A plan for news media relations (for Level 4 and possibly Level 3 projects), developed in cooperation with the District Public Information Office. A public information campaign may be appropriate for very large projects.
- A summary of planned public information meetings and/or required public hearings.

The media can be of great assistance to FDOT in encouraging citizen input and keeping the public informed about a project. The PM should work with their District Public Information Office (PIO) to develop and implement the CAP.

The PM should be aware of any unique CAP requirements of the District. The ***Public Involvement Handbook*** and ***FDM 104.3*** is an excellent resource to use in developing a CAP. The CAP should be updated throughout the design process and then passed to the construction PM for use during the construction phase.
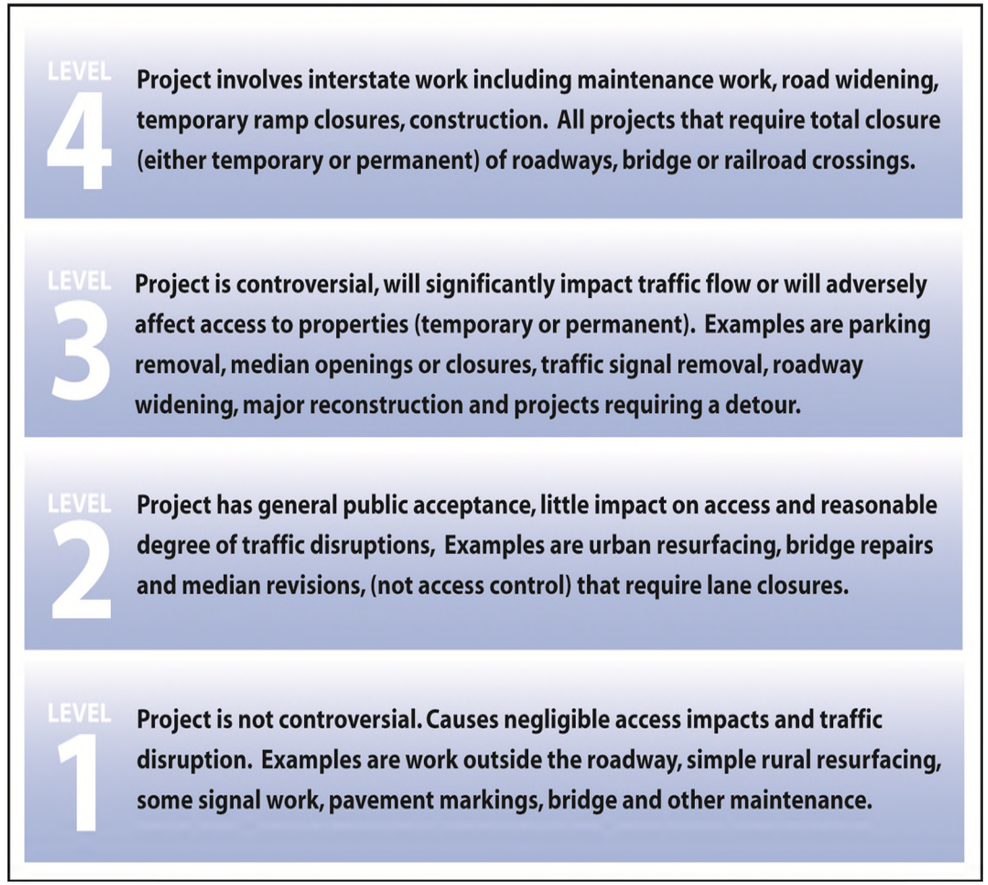
Figure 1
Community Awareness Plan