

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR TRANSIT AGENCIES**

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Since the issuance of Executive Order 12898 and the USDOT Order on Environmental Justice, transportation agencies have been asked to give more consideration to social equity issues in planning, in project development, and throughout the delivery services. While the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has not issued an order, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other USDOT administrations have done so. This project provides guidance similar to that of the FHWA *Community Impact Assessment: A Quick Reference for Transportation* for transit agencies.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this project is to provide information and materials on issues and resources related to environmental justice, Title VI, and social equity using community impact assessment techniques. The goal is to make available to transit providers tools to assess the impact of transportation actions, to work with communities to avoid, mitigate, or minimize these impacts, and to develop transportation strategies that enhance communities.

To that end, the researchers reviewed current literature on community impact assessment, environmental justice, public involvement, and related topics. A short survey was faxed to all Florida transit agencies to gauge their knowledge of Title VI, environmental justice, and related legislation and policies. Agencies also were asked to indicate various community impact assessment and public involvement techniques used in decision-making. Eight telephone and face-to-face interviews were held with representatives of Florida transit agencies. These activities were coordinated with other community impact assessment research and related projects. These findings were synthesized to compile a booklet, *Environmental Justice and Community Impact Assessment for Transit Agencies*.

### **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Although the bulk of the literature and practice continue to focus on roadway projects, greater emphasis on moving community impact assessment into planning and increasing public involvement in all transportation actions occurred during the course of the project. The FTA Office of Planning has established a website on the environmental process, and FTA and FHWA established and continue to maintain a joint website on environmental justice. Various TRB subcommittees addressed community impact assessment during their mid-year meetings held in the summer of 2001.

A TRB Joint Subcommittee on Community Impact Assessment, which has a representative from FTA, was established at the 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. In addition, TRB, two FHWA Resource Centers, and other agencies planned regional meetings. The TRB Northeastern CIA workshop was held in New Jersey in October 2001. The TRB Southern CIA workshop was held in December 2001. The principal investigator worked with these agencies and committees to gather information and other resources for the project. These materials were combined with the findings from the survey and interviews.

Overall, the survey respondents had some knowledge of community impact assessment techniques and were most familiar with public involvement techniques. Many, however, were not familiar with a number of resources that have become available recently, which suggested that a bibliography, complete with Internet address, would be appropriate for the booklet. Two Florida transit agency representatives participated in the 2001 Florida Public Transit Association annual meeting, in addition to the principal investigator and Hal Beardall from the Florida Conflict Resolution Center.

During the course of the project, several efforts at the state and national levels have been underway to increase the use of community impact assessment techniques to improve decision-making. This project has and the booklet should continue to contribute to those efforts. The FTA Office of Planning has requested copies and has appointed a person to focus on this area. Other resources, such as the TRB Joint Subcommittee, also have expressed interest in the project. The booklet will be linked to the community impact assessment website, which is sponsored by FHWA and FDOT Environmental Management Office (EMO). The booklet also will be added to the NCTR and CUTR websites.

## **BENEFITS**

This research provides transit agencies with guidance for incorporating assessment techniques into planning and service delivery. The anticipated benefits of community impact assessment include better service to users and more tools to address environmental justice issues. Hard copies of the booklet will be distributed to transit agencies. Furthermore, an electronic version will be available through the FDOT Transit Office and CUTR web sites. This research, therefore, shall also be an available tool for MPOs, District Public Transportation Offices, and District Environmental Management Offices (for use in their public involvement process).

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