

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

PROBLEM STATEMENT

For more than a decade, federal, state, and local transportation agencies have refocused efforts to involve communities when considering transportation actions in order to assess the social impacts of the proposed actions. These efforts have included greater public involvement; training, regulations, handbooks, and other guidance for transportation professionals; and the compilations of a number of techniques and tools commonly identified as the community impact assessment (CIA) process. Considerable resources have been directed toward these efforts. The enactment of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) mandated a more streamlined process for consideration of environmental impacts while assuring inclusion of the public, particularly traditionally underserved subgroups of the population, in the decision-making process. The need exists to examine from multiple perspectives whether community impact assessment is an effective process and how the process can be improved to meet regulatory requirements and improve the quality of life.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project include the following:

- identifying effective performance measures or measures of effectiveness (MOEs) for community impact assessment
- assessing actual impacts after a transportation action
- identifying methods for meaningful feedback to inform future actions.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The researchers reviewed transportation actions in varying stages (e.g., planning, design, construction) to determine how potential impacts were identified, how alternatives to these impacts were identified, and whether the actions addressed the needs of a broad range of users. Researchers surveyed state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and transit agencies, and they reviewed the Florida MPOs' long-range transportation plans (LRTPs).

The review suggests that these agencies have become more attentive to the impacts of their actions on local communities. Community impact assessment was discussed, in one form or another, in all but one of the LRTPs. The most common areas where impact assessment was mentioned were in sections on goals and objectives, project evaluation, and public involvement.

This research identifies eight basic qualities of effectiveness:

1. Safety of facility, i.e., service for the user and the community.
2. Satisfaction of purpose and need established by all involved parties.
3. Action is in harmony with the community.

4. Action makes efficient and effective use of resource.
5. Action sustains and preserves resources.
6. Action exceeds expectations of designers and other stakeholders.
7. Action is designed, built, or otherwise implemented with minimal disruption to the community.
8. Action is perceived by all parties as having added lasting value to the community.

The final report provides an overview of each of these measures as well as data sources for evaluation and application.

In many instances, a suggested process is an update of baseline data, analyses of findings, and/or an exploration of strategies to address adverse impacts. Both qualitative and quantitative analytical methods are recommended. Many of the public involvement strategies recommended rely heavily on qualitative methods.

BENEFITS

The findings of this research may be used by public transportation planning and implementation agencies to evaluate and refine their assessments of social impacts. Improved analysis of these impacts may contribute to better project development and service delivery for the Florida Department of Transportation. The suggested measures include consideration of safety, economic impacts, efficiency, and the preservation of resources. The performance measures also suggest methods for including the public in the evaluation process, to ensure that solutions are appropriate for the affected communities. This concept is important to the development of transportation resources that are sensitive to Florida's environment and quality of life.

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