



## Florida Department of Transportation Research

### The Relationship of Title VI Requirements to Florida's Transportation Planning Process BDK84 977-12

Beginning in the 1960s, awareness of the disproportionate exposure of poor, migrant, and minority communities to environmental hazards led to the concept of environmental justice. With Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act as its basis, this concept has led to policies and regulations in many areas, not least transportation, with its power to transform entire communities.

The U.S. Department of Transportation laid out three principles of environmental justice requiring transportation planners to minimize adverse effects on minorities and low-income populations, to ensure full participation of all communities affected by transportation plans, and to ensure equitable and timely delivery of benefits of transportation infrastructure. In this project, researchers from the University of South Florida documented the current state of practice regarding incorporation of environmental justice into transportation planning processes.

The researchers first reviewed the laws, executive orders, and regulations that frame the response to environmental justice requirements, often conditions for receiving federal transportation funds. Requirements are fulfilled through two processes: a long-range transportation plan, which examines needs at least 20 years into the future, and a State Transportation Improvement Program, projects that will be built within four years. Florida documents relating to civil rights in planning were selectively reviewed, including MPO joint certification reviews, MPO quadrennial federal certification reviews, FDOT handbooks, and a sampling of monitoring documents from the Title VI office, such as Quality Assurance Reports.

In the second phase, researchers interviewed transportation planning officials within FDOT and in Florida's metropolitan planning organizations (MPO). MPOs are policy boards composed largely of local government elected officials, required by federal law for urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people. MPOs are intended to ensure a planning



*Using building blocks and maps of Miami-Dade county, residents get a hands-on understanding of the area's future growth patterns and its transportation needs.*

process that allocates federal funds appropriately within a shared vision of the region's future.

Interviews were conducted with six of FDOT's seven districts. District staff were asked 26 questions in five subject areas: personnel, planning activities, data, public involvement, and EDTM (Efficient Transportation Decision Making, a state of Florida effort to balance efficiency and quality in transportation planning processes). Seven of Florida's 26 MPOs were also interviewed, based on: 1) one MPO from each geographic FDOT District, and 2) varying population sizes and different organizational structures.

The study clearly showed that the process for ensuring compliance with Title VI in Florida is extensive and fully integrated in FDOT and MPO planning processes, as evidenced by staffing, outreach activities, and reporting requirements. More can be always done in this dynamic area, and several MPOs expressed a desire to improve their programs. Researchers proposed several enhancements, and continued efforts promise to advance transportation options and equity for all Floridians.