CHAPTER 4

Education/Technical Assistance

Regardless of the role that a state takes in land use control and regulation, and regardless of its technical capabilities, there are different approaches to the level of assistance it provides to local government. Since different states approach the coordination of transportation, land use and economic development planning in different ways, styles of technical assistance and training will also differ. Some of the more important ways in which states perform local technical assistance are discussed in this chapter.

React to Local Requests

Reacting to local requests is a strategy that involves the state in only a reactive, passive, role. When a local government comes to the state with a request for assistance, most states will respond by providing that assistance. If that is all the state does, it is providing limited help to local governments on land use and economic development issues. Some states adopt a more proactive strategy aimed at getting up-to-date information into the hands of local agencies to improve their decision-making capabilities.
Often it takes the effort of only a small number of individuals at a state agency to begin the coordination of state and local level planning. Even in the cases of states where local comprehensive planning is not required, the state DOT or other agencies may still choose to make an effort to provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions.

Planning at the state level can have local ramifications. Therefore, state transportation planners may want to consider reaching out to local governments to make them aware of actions the DOT may take that influence individual communities. This is especially true of transportation decisions. Other state agencies may want to consider the same approach with regard to their own plans, research and policy implementation. Agencies that take the leading role are often those which make the most effort to involve local government officials in the decision making process.

State Oversight Committees

A number of states have established joint committees and councils as a means of coordinating land use programs. These committees can be made up of only state agencies, or they could be broadened to include representatives of local government and individuals. The scope of such committees can vary from a means to communicate new information to a specific task force charged to create new legislation.

Wisconsin Land Council

In 1995, WisDOT joined with the Wisconsin Department of Administration, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Development, Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations and Department of Revenue to create the Interagency Land Use Council (ILUC). This council developed recommendations and a set of actions for a statewide land use vision and specific land use reforms in a report that was presented to the governor. Later, a ten-member permanent Land Use Council was appointed, which included state
agency secretaries, county and municipal representatives and public members at large.

In conjunction with the ILUC, the Strategic Growth Task Force – a group representing state and local agencies, municipal associations, private and public associations and citizens appointed by the ILUC – participated in several focus group discussions in communities statewide. The overall theme emanating from these focus groups indicated strong support for local land use decision making. However, it was recognized that the state must play an important role in encouraging local governments to make land use decisions that are consistent with statewide goals and plans. This encouragement would principally come in the form of technical assistance from state agencies.

Guidebooks

A number of states have issued guidebooks and technical assistance materials that are specifically directed to local agencies. These materials are used to help local government better understand good land use planning practices and the interaction between transportation and land use. The materials can help create consistency in planning practice between different locales and to transfer information on emerging practices and techniques. Some examples are given below.

**Managing Transportation Handbook**

A municipal handbook was developed by the New Jersey Department of Transportation to provide guidance for developing and implementing successful transportation master plans. The guidebook contains elements on how to define study areas and goals, as well as steps to implement the plan, including zoning updates, access control on roadways, parking management, and advice on how to review traffic impact studies and transportation demand management principles. By providing this information, the state DOT is able to assist communities make informed transportation decisions that are consistent with the goals of the state transportation plan, in New Jersey – Transportation Choices 2020.
Planning Transit-Friendly Land Use Handbook

New Jersey Transit developed a handbook for New Jersey communities to assist elected and appointed planning officials and citizens in improving the relationship between land use planning and transit. The book presents techniques to reinforce basic strategies that organize land uses to support transit, emphasize pedestrian and other non-motorized modes of access and implement traffic calming techniques that interface automobiles with transit facilities while protecting pedestrian movement. The handbook supports the policies outlined in the State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

Traffic Impact Analysis Handbook

In order to ensure that traffic impact analyses provide sufficient information to make informed infrastructure additions, WisDOT District 2 in the Milwaukee metropolitan area developed guidelines for impact studies. The guidelines specify information requirements and a presentation format to be included in all projects submitted. This standard format decreases the processing time through the department and ensures that appropriate access decisions are made for new or improved development along state highways.

Conferences, Training Sessions

States have also had involvement in land use issues through the sponsorship of conferences and training sessions. These programs are designed to make local government personnel more aware of good land use and transportation practices. For example, a state could sponsor local training sessions on access management for local government in order to convince local agencies of the need for better control of driveway entrances onto state highways. Typically, these training programs are run for one day and are held regionally to allow for attendance with a minimum of travel. Such programs may be offered by the state directly or offered by others such as universities or professional organizations. States can be very effective as catalysts for such programs if they adopt an active role in their development and promotion. Even if a state feels that land use is entirely a local issue, training and conference programs can help local governments perform their jobs more effectively.

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1 Traffic Impact Analysis Guidelines, District 2, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, January 1998.
Newsletters, Hotline, Web Sites etc.

Active states provide information to MPOs and municipalities so that they are aware of alternative transportation choices by organizing planning conferences and training sessions, releasing newsletters, distributing educational videos and releasing planning guides. Another strategy adopted by several states is to maintain a hotline or an up-to-date web site. The hotline has become somewhat outdated, and the web site has replaced it as a means to quickly reach out to the local agencies. Care must be taken by states to ensure that its web site is updated frequently with all the latest issues pertinent to transportation and land use planning within the state.

One-to-One Assistance/Circuit Riders

Research conducted at technical organizations is often documented in language far too technical and detailed for rapid understanding by potential local users of research. Sophisticated research is useless if it is not relayed effectively to a wide range of users in a language they can understand. A circuit rider can provide a link for the flow of information from the source to the user. The circuit rider is able to address the varying needs of the users and translate the required technical knowledge to them in a manner that is easy for the user to understand and apply.

This method of technical assistance is patterned after the agricultural extension model for information transfer. A circuit rider has periodic meetings with local governmental agencies at their offices where they discuss local problems and exchange information on new methods for dealing with them. The circuit rider can also initiate the exchange of information between users. Moreover, the circuit rider is in a position to guide researchers according to the needs of users. Circuit riders must create relationships based on trust and credibility with both the researchers and the users to ensure that vital new technologies do not go to waste.
Nearly all state DOTs participate in the LTAP (Local Technical Assistance Program) program of the Federal Highway Administration. This program was originally set up to provide local governments with better information to administer and maintain their local roads. Many states use circuit riders in conjunction with training programs and newsletters to assist in local road programs. Some states have expanded the role of the circuit rider to deal with land use/transportation issues as well.²