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**To:** [CSS\\_Forum@yahoo.com](mailto:CSS_Forum@yahoo.com)  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 20, 2003 8:08 AM  
**Subject:** CSS: It's solving problems cost appropriately---It's not design.

Hi,

I want to thank all the people who are on the list and share their wisdom and research. For without you this list would not be possible. As promised, I have sat down and tried to put together the sum total of conversations I've had with people in the last several weeks from many DOTS concerning state budgets and CSS

A lot of yucky things are happening in many states because of budget cuts. And while we may not be able to do much about the budget cuts, the one thing we can do is to make sure that we "cut" as much of the quality INTO the process as possible. In other words, think twice, cut once.

Throwing out CSS is pitching the very thing that in times of financial dieting can help states stick to a leaner budget with quality and an eye toward solving problems in the future. It seems counter intuitive doesn't it?

The way CSS is practiced in many states now, it's considered gravy. According to some of the people I've spoken to in DOTS that are CSS, it's used as a way to wade through a contested project or as extra bells and whistles on some project that people care enough about to dress it up.

CSS is a process not an end design. In fact CSS is more than a process. It's a mission statement. CSS should be used when a DOT first scopes out a project. I'm not talking about just bringing in the public. But how the engineers look at projects in the first place. When defining the purpose and needs as the DOT sees it THATS when CSS philosophy is most critical.

## **CSS can do the following:**

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- 1. By taking into account the context through which the roads run, you take into account the public from the first. This makes it more likely that the public can get on board with the project.***

It's kind of like good social skills. When starting a conversation, most of us hopefully don't start saying immediately what is on our minds. We evaluate the "context" in which the conversation is going to take place. For example, most men do not compliment a woman co-worker on some aspect of her physical appearance in the presence of his wife. Is it because what the man has to say is inappropriate? Well hopefully not. It's just prudent to take in the context of which the conversation is occurring. (Self preservation)

*Moral: Sometimes..just because you can doesn't mean you should.*

- 2. CSS allows for more input when looking at purpose and need which allows for better problem resolution by correctly identifying the problem. This saves time and money by directly spending money on the root of the problem.***

This is important. Often, transportation systems are not looked at enough. Road projects are treated as if they are in isolation. Now that's ridiculous. What's happening in other areas of the system does impact every road in the system. What happens when there is an accident on a major thoroughfare? Traffic reroutes. What happens if signalized intersections aren't timed properly? Does some traffic avoid that road? You bet. What happens if there is good, reliable, low cost mass transit? Some of the load on the roads is reduced. Sometimes it's not about widening a road. It might be to \*fix\* what's fundamentally wrong with the road or the system as a whole. Is it bad land use? Is it bad access practices? ITS? What and where is the problem really?

Once the problem is truly fixed, \*traffic\* flows better. And you're not constantly throwing money into a bad system. This saves tax dollars in the long run.

It's kind of like medicine. If you have diabetes for example, you can treat the acute symptoms all you want. But if you don't deal with the disease, you will never keep ahead of the acute failures. In fact it will eventually kill you no matter how much money you throw at it.

Or Manufacturing for example. Are you going to be satisfied with a piece of software that constantly has to be debugged or redesigned or upgraded every month because the software programmers are trying to program around crappy hardware? OR do you prefer systems that work as they are suppose to and are generally reliable because the hardware was looked at as well as the software.

NOTE: There are more than 40,000 fatalities a year on U.S. highways. With rail, the death rate is almost zero a year. Busing has a better safety record than cars as well. So what's the answer as far as moving people safely? If you're the type of person that rattles off "safety" as the need to widen a road, you're not being honest with yourself or anyone else either. Widening a road is about capacity issues. Capacity that could be better upgraded in the form of mass transit at least for awhile until there is a balance. Mass transit is ultimately cheaper, safer and has less environmental impacts.

The most recent discussion on this list talked about Benzene levels. In major metropolitan areas like Chicago, doctors are seeing the effects of that benzene on people directly. Here is an example of billions of dollars that are being sucked up in medical bills, medical debt, and lost wages and productivity. This is a cost of more lane miles that few figure in. Most of the benzene in the air is a direct result of auto emissions. Rail, per passenger has emissions so low that a cow is more toxic to the environment. Walking and bicycling of course is absolutely \*clean\* and very healthy for everyone...assuming we don't get hit by a car. Multi-modality is vitally important. It's not bells and whistles.

*Moral: Identify and treat the "disease" not the symptoms in transportation. It's more cost efficient to use dollars to get at the root of the problem. Better longevity for money and time spent. It's smarter.*

**3. CSS allows for more players in a project, which will allow for completion of balanced projects thus saving money with better NEPA compliance.**

This is counter-intuitive. How can getting more people involved possibly save money? It takes more meetings! It takes more man-hours! Well, the answer is...it also gets projects completed with a good degree of public approval and predictability of schedule. You're less likely to get off track. You're not wasting time. You're not wasting dollars in lengthy delay, lawsuits and/or dropped projects.

Further, those players can help double check that a project has the proper balance and problem definition. No single agency can "see " it all. For balance it takes at least two perspectives. The teeter-totter, it takes two to rock.

*Moral: Short cuts are really long cuts in the end resulting in higher costs.*

**4. CSS allows for more players thus more resources, which cuts costs.**

For those money crunched states bringing stakeholders in as part of the project team avails you to manpower that is volunteer hours. Citizen's groups can do amazing things. They can put together a tight coalition. Take NIFTI for example. They have an email group comprising of 1000's and growing. They represent and can communicate with 11,000 voters! in a matter of a week. You want to work with the public...a citizen's group like that one can sure help. They can form focus groups to help with the legwork, the research, the public polling. True input means that you listen to their findings and you treat their perspective and concerns as seriously as your own if you are DOT. Trust and partnership is essential. But in the end you get a better design for much less the cost considering the actual man-hours spent.

It's kind of like the story of "Stone Soup". A village was divided, paranoid, barely making it. Three hungry soldiers came and were begging. The soldiers had to find a way to break down the barriers between themselves and the villagers. In the end, when everyone finally got together and contributed:

- The soldiers with the idea of a meal, collaboration and graciousness.
- The villagers with ingredients, side dishes, beverages, and eventually even tables, chairs, musicians etc.

They didn't just have a meal, they had a feast and an experience of community. All commented it was the best soup they had ever had

*Moral: Working together allows you to do more with what you have.*

**5. Always stay in touch with the public through every part of the process to ensure public approval.**

Sometimes a DOT, who is doing good public involvement, gets caught up in the problem solving and fails to maintain contact with the public. Oh BROTHER!

You have to keep in mind there are two time scales, DOT time and public time. Your six months is like six years to us. What happens is while you're gone, we become anxious. We're wondering,

*"What are they doing over there? My goodness they have been gone for a long time and they must be redesigning every road in sight! Holy cow! How much time does it take to put in a few turn lanes anyway!!! They MUST be doing a lot more."*

Rumors start arising. Paranoia! Soon the public feels betrayed and they're off screaming for their lawyers in fear. I understand the attraction of getting lost in a design. I really do. It's how I feel about a good math proof. Or piece of artwork that's going well. But don't do that. Because what it means is that you then must start all over again with the public. This can lengthen a project significantly and worse still, for no good reason.

Instead, make sure you keep touch with your residential representatives even if nothing is going on. If you're waiting on something, tell them that and what it is, a consultant firm or a simulation etc. Let them know the reason why the project is still being worked on internally. Allow them in if they want to see what you've got so far. Every three weeks to one month would do it.

***Don't cut CSS as you look at state budgets. In the end it will serve you better because it's the right way to do business.***