Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Peer Program

Community Connections for I-10

A TPCB Peer Exchange Event

Location: Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Date: March 13-14, 2018

Host Agency: Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

National Peers: Tim Hill, Ohio Department of Transportation
Michael Trepanier, Massachusetts Department of Transportation

Federal Agencies: Federal Highway Administration
Volpe National Transportation Systems Center

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

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This report highlights key recommendations and noteworthy practices identified at "Community Connections for I-10" held on March 13-14, 2018 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This event was sponsored by the Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Peer Program, which is jointly funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

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Introduction

This report highlights key recommendations and noteworthy practices identified at "Community Connections for I-10" held on March 13-14, 2018 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This event was sponsored by the Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Peer Program, which is jointly funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The goal of the peer exchange program is to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building by connecting peers from different states and/or agencies to exchange best practices and innovative solutions to transportation planning challenges.

Event Overview

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD), with support from the FHWA Louisiana Division, requested a peer exchange from the FHWA/FTA TPCB Program to assist Louisiana DOTD staff with the development of a framework for stakeholder and public engagement. The Louisiana DOTD is in the early project development stage of a project to reconstruct and add capacity to I-10 in Baton Rouge. The Louisiana DOTD is seeking to incorporate Community Connections elements into the project, and is using this project as a pilot for implementing Community Connections, a FHWA Every Day Counts 4 innovation. The Louisiana DOTD is interested in learning from peers with experience in:

- Incorporating Community Connections into Interstate reconstruction projects;
- Working closely with stakeholders to implement Community Connections elements that meet the needs of the community; and
- Overcoming challenges that arise in complex projects that incorporate Community Connections.

Background

Reconstruction of I-10 in Baton Rouge

I-10 opened to traffic in Baton Rouge in 1963. The highway was designed to carry 80,000 vehicles per day, but in 2011, it was carrying 155,000 vehicles per day with essentially no capacity improvements made since the opening. Today, I-10 experiences stop-and-go traffic congestion in Baton Rouge throughout much of the day, particularly between Louisiana Highway 415 and the I-10/I-12 interchange.

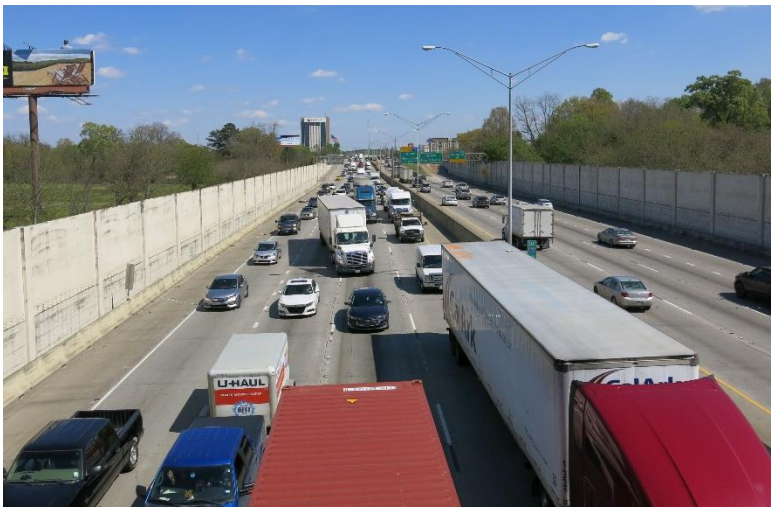
The Louisiana DOTD is moving forward with a project to add capacity to I-10 to alleviate the congestion. The I-10 project is a pilot project for the State's implementation of Community Connections.

The Louisiana DOTD has completed a "Stage 0" feasibility study for the project. The preliminary purpose and need of the project is to "reduce congestion and improve traffic flow throughout the I-10 corridor, to improve safety throughout the I-10 corridor, and to accommodate the continuing economic and

population growth of metropolitan Baton Rouge."[1] During the Stage 0 process, the Louisiana DOTD conducted public involvement to solicit the public's ideas and desires for the project.

The project will extend from Louisiana Highway 415 (west of the Mississippi River) to Essen Lane, just east of the I-10/I-12 interchange. It will involve expanding the number of travel lanes in each direction from three to four. As planned at the time of the peer exchange, the project is proposed to make a number of significant changes to the interchanges in the project area:

- The Louisiana Highway 415 interchange will receive access improvements;
- The Washington Street and Dalrymple Drive interchanges will be combined into one, with a parallel road providing access to Dalrymple Drive;
- The Perkins Road interchange will be removed; and
- There will be a flyover ramp from I-10 westbound to the College Drive interchange (to eliminate three lanes of weaving).



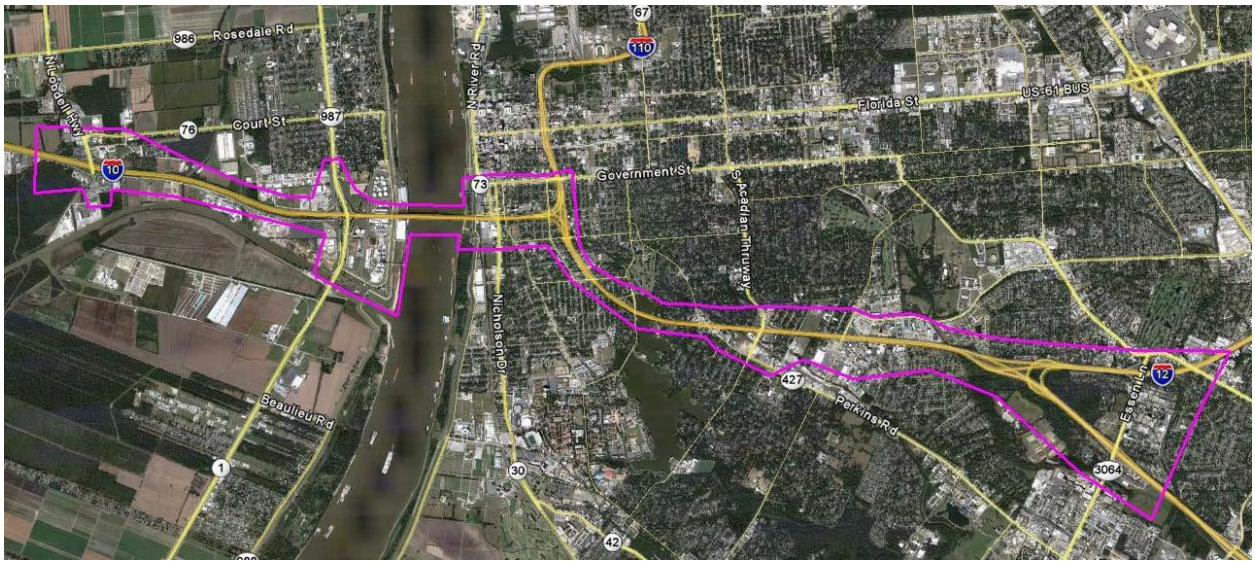
Traffic on I-10 at Nairn Drive, looking East (Courtesy of Louisiana DOTD)

In addition to the elements of the project that will increase capacity on I-10, the Louisiana DOTD is exploring opportunities to include Community Connections elements into the project. There are five locations that the Louisiana DOTD believes would benefit from Community Connections investments:

- Expressway Park
- Area under I-10 and On/Off Ramps near E. Washington Street
- I-10 On/Off Ramps at Perkins Road
- Nairn Bridge over I-10

[1] I-10 Corridor Improvements Stage 0 Feasibility Study. http://i10br.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Feasibility-Study_I-10-Corridor-Report-Only_July-2016.pdf

- Ward Creek under I-10



Map of the I-10 Project Study Area (Courtesy of Louisiana DOTD)

The peer exchange attendees explored these locations during the tour and later discussed opportunities for Community Connections investments at these locations. These are described later in this document. Even though the peer exchange attendees did not look in-depth at potential Community Connections opportunities in West Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana DOTD and West Baton Rouge Parish officials are reviewing and discussing potential options for Community Connections on the west side of the Mississippi River.

Peer Exchange Overview

Event Goals and Peer Selections

The Community Connections for I-10 Peer Exchange was a 1.5-day event focused on exploring opportunities to integrate Community Connections principles and strategies into the I-10 project. By sharing the experiences of peers in other jurisdictions and discussing their applicability in Baton Rouge, the event provided an opportunity for Louisiana DOTD staff and their partners to consider their approach to public engagement, stakeholder outreach and involvement, and project elements that reconnect communities. The event was hosted by Louisiana DOTD and sponsored by the FHWA/FTA's TPCB program, which assisted with planning and documentation of the event and funded the participation of the following peer presenters:

Timothy Hill, Administrator of the Ohio DOT Office of Environmental Services

> Mr. Hill has over 25 years of experience in project management and development, environmental document preparation review, and oversight. He has 20 years of experience with the Ohio DOT (ODOT), where he is the Administrator of the Office of Environmental Services (OES). Mr. Hill's office takes an interdisciplinary, scientific approach to providing education, training, technical expertise, and policy development to Federal, State, and local governments in Ohio.

As the Administrator for OES, Mr. Hill seeks to ensure a safe, efficient, and environmentally compliant intermodal transportation system, while encouraging best practices and proactively working toward consensus among transportation and community interests. Mr. Hill is responsible for leading teams to develop policy and direction for integrating environmental decisions into all operations within ODOT.

Mr. Hill was the lead manager of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) approval for the I-70/71 Columbus Crossing project. He is also responsible for ODOT's Project Development Process and can provide detail regarding the processes for the management and integration of project design and NEPA review and approvals in Ohio.

Mr. Hill has been an active member of the American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials (AASHTO), and currently serves as the Vice Chair of the Standing Committee on the Environment (SCOE). Mr. Hill has a B.A. in Design Technology with a focus on Architectural and Environmental Design from Bowling Green State University.

Michael Trepanier, Senior Project Manager for the Massachusetts DOT Highway Division's Environmental Services Section

Mr. Trepanier has more than a decade of transportation and environmental project planning experience. In his current position with the Massachusetts DOT (MassDOT), Mr. Trepanier manages major, complex projects in urban contexts. These projects, including the McGrath Boulevard Project in Somerville, MA and the Ink Underground project in Boston, MA, involve extensive public involvement, technical analysis, and wide political interest. In this role, he oversees the management of multidisciplinary teams and leads community involvement activities, including the creation of working groups and the management of their activities, to engage the general public and key stakeholders in project development.

In addition to his work with MassDOT, Mr. Trepanier is actively involved with AASHTO, serving on SCOE and the Environmental Process & Analysis Subcommittee.

Mr. Trepanier started his career as a natural resources scientist and previously served as a Senior Environmental Planner/Supervisor, conducting environmental planning for MassDOT, and as a Natural Resources Scientist with a private consulting firm. He holds a B.S. in Earth Science and Hydrogeology from the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

A list of key peer exchange contacts is included in Appendix A: Key Contacts.

Peer Exchange Sessions

The Peer Exchange took place over 1.5 days, March 13-14, 2018 in Baton Rouge, LA. The following is an overview of the presentations, activities, and discussions held during the peer exchange:

- **I-10 Project Overview:** Representatives from the Louisiana DOTD gave a presentation about the I-10 corridor.
- **Baton Rouge's Expressway Park Overview:** Reed Richard from BREC, the recreation and park commission for East Baton Rouge Parish, gave a presentation about the past, present, and future of Expressway Park.

- **Community Connections Overview:** Corbin Davis from FHWA gave a presentation on FHWA's Community Connections initiative.
- **Ohio DOT Project Overview:** Tim Hill from the Ohio DOT gave a presentation on the I-70/I-71 Columbus Crossroads project.
- **Massachusetts DOT Project Overview:** Michael Trepanier from the Massachusetts DOT gave two presentations, one on the interim improvements for McGrath Highway and another on the Ink Underground project.
- **Tour of I-10 Corridor:** Representatives from the Louisiana DOTD led participants on a tour of five sites in the I-10 project area.
- **Brainstorming Community Connections Solutions for I-10 Discussion:** Brandon Buckner from FHWA led a group discussion to brainstorm Community Connections solutions for the I-10 project.
- **Best Practices for Partnering for Success Discussion:** Corbin Davis from FHWA led a group discussion on best practices for partnering for success.
- **Best Practices for Overcoming Challenges Discussion:** Jared Fijalkowski from the Volpe Center led a group discussion on best practices for overcoming challenges.

The peer exchange agenda is included in

Appendix B: Peer Exchange Agenda.

Peer Project Presentations

ODOT's I-70/I-71 Columbus Crossroads Project

The I-70/I-71 Project was designed to address the large-scale safety hazards, access barriers, and traffic delays caused by the design of the I-70/I-71 interchange in Columbus, OH. Constructed in the 1960s and designed to carry 125,000 vehicles per day, today the corridor carries almost 200,000 vehicles daily and experiences 3.3 crashes per day in a 1.5-mile segment. Potential solutions to these problems were very complex, and required a large-scale investment and long timeframe for implementation, as well as community buy-in.

ODOT conducted public engagement regarding the project and the phased construction schedule, as well as the overall project design. Public comments focused on the preservation of access in the redesign process, which would necessitate a lengthy consideration of designs. ODOT also presented a wide variety of design features for the projects, and asked for input. This exchange led to the selection of widened bridges designed to reconnect communities, which included green spaces, bicycle and pedestrian paths, along with the creation of the Long Street Bridge Cultural Wall with artwork displaying community history.

Cultural Wall on Long Street Bridge in Columbus, OH (Courtesy of ODOT)

In order to move the project forward, ODOT implemented a schedule of phased construction, stretching over a decade. Each phase would address another aspect of the interchange or stretch of highway. ODOT's constant communication with the affected communities helped to explain this long process and secure continued community support. The final project will include significant redesign of the bridges connecting main arterial streets on either side of the sunken highways. The borders of the highway will also be reimagined to minimize visibility and impacts of the highway, using some environmental

mitigation funds for the installation of buffers, noise walls, and trees. Phases are being built as funds become available, with each segment capable of standing alone to minimize risk of funding uncertainty.

One of the signature elements of the Columbus Crossroads project is the Long Street Bridge. Residents and leaders in the King-Lincoln Bronzeville neighborhood, a historically African American community, informed ODOT through its public outreach efforts that the Long Street Bridge was an important transportation connection for the community, as it provides access to the Discovery District and downtown Columbus. Through extensive collaboration, ODOT worked with the community to build a bridge that not only served the community's transportation needs, but also tells the story of the community, including its leaders and cultural amenities. The Cultural Wall, which runs the length of the bridge, features photos of past and present community leaders. The Long Street Bridge represents the successful partnership between ODOT and the community.

First Things First: Implementing Interim Improvements during Design for MassDOT's Grounding McGrath Highway Project

The McGrath Highway (Route 28) in Somerville, MA runs between Mystic Avenue/I-93 to the north and the Monsignor O'Brien Highway at the Cambridge line to the south. The McCarthy Overpass is the elevated section, or "viaduct" which provides a significant link on the McGrath corridor. The Grounding McGrath Highway project seeks to reconnect Somerville by converting the elevated portion of the highway into a six-lane, at-grade boulevard. The project will also incorporate a separated bicycle path along the length of the corridor, as well as two new pedestrian crossings.

Improvements at the McCarthy Overpass and the intersection of Somerville Avenue and Medford Street (Courtesy of MassDOT).

As project development for the boulevard continues, MassDOT addressed immediate needs in the project area to make it safer for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists to travel along and through the corridor. As part of this effort, MassDOT made the following improvements:

- Improved lighting beneath the viaduct;
- Coordinated traffic signals at the intersections near the viaduct;
- Accessibility improvements to make it easier for pedestrians with physical impairments to travel safely;
- Expanded pedestrian islands to shorten crossing distances;

- New bicycle markings, including painted bike lanes through intersections and priority shared lane markings;
- Closed an onramp to the viaduct and an underpass beneath the viaduct to improve traffic flow; and
- Provided direct access to the viaduct to reduce traffic at the Washington Street intersection.

This effort highlights the benefits of making relatively small and inexpensive investments that can positively impact an area, particularly for those who walk or bike. While these improvements may be changed with the eventual construction of the boulevard, MassDOT has reinforced its commitment to improving safety and access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists in Somerville.

Transforming MassDOT Infra-Space 1: Ink Underground

Two neighborhoods south of downtown Boston – the South End and South Boston – have long been separated by the Fort Point Channel and the Interstate 93 viaduct. The elevated highway, reconstructed as part of the Central Artery/Tunnel project decades ago, provided an unpleasant, if not hostile, environment for pedestrians. The lighting was dim, there was a perception of the presence of illegal activity, and it was a generally uncomfortable space. MassDOT previously used the space under the highway for construction staging and storage. MassDOT partnered with the developer of an adjacent set of parcels to reimagine the space under the highway as a safe, bright space for pedestrians, cyclists, and those seeking open space in a congested city.

Underground at Ink Block (Courtesy of MassDOT)

Underground at Ink Block (named to coincide with the development partner, Ink Block) is part of MassDOT's Infra-Space Program, which provides innovative redevelopment opportunities and multi-modal solutions for areas under elevated roads, bridges, and/or viaducts. The goals for the project were to:

- Build safer community connections;

- Repurpose underutilized real estate for community betterment; and
- Maintain access to the existing parking, highway use, and bridge structure.

MassDOT and the Ink Block developers worked together to design the new park under the highway to meet these goals. The open space created beneath the highway includes:

- A pedestrian connection between the South End and South Boston, including new and improved crossings on Albany Street (between Ink Block and Ink Underground) and wayfinding signage;
- A landscaped addition to the Boston Harborwalk along the Fort Point Channel;
- Three new community-amenity zones for dog owners, sports, and a waterfront event venue;
- Architectural lighting fixtures that illuminate the underside of the highway structure;
- A stormwater management landscape to improve the water quality of the Fort Point Channel; and
- A pedestrian-focused plaza with innovative lighting structures wired to support art and events.

Underground at Ink Block was a transformational project for MassDOT because it was the first project in its Infra-Space program. In addition, MassDOT's partnership with the Ink Block developers is helping to ensure the project's success. MassDOT owns the land that the park sits on (as well as the highway it sits underneath) but the Ink Block developers are responsible for park maintenance. This partnership has yielded a new, transformational public gathering space in the core of Boston that includes bicycle and pedestrian connections between two neighborhoods.

Tour of I-10 Project Locations

On the afternoon of the first day of the peer exchange, Louisiana DOTD staff led participants on a driving and walking tour of five locations in the I-10 project area. Those sites included:

- Expressway Park
- Area under I-10 near E. Washington Street
- I-10 On/Off Ramps at Perkins Road
- Nairn Bridge over I-10

- Ward Creek under I-10

Map of I-10 Corridor and Locations Visited during the Tour

The following sections include brief descriptions of the locations and photos from the tour.

Expressway Park

The group visited Expressway Park because it could serve as inspiration for future Community Connections elements and partnerships throughout the I-10 project corridor. Expressway Park was established shortly after I-10 was originally constructed. It is located immediately beneath the elevated highway ramps that connect I-10 to I-110 just south of downtown Baton Rouge. In 1970, Louisiana DOTD and BREC entered into a joint use agreement – Louisiana DOTD owns the park while BREC operates and maintains it.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Pathway in Expressway Park (Photo courtesy of Louisiana DOTD)

In 2014, BREC made several improvements to the park. The park currently contains basketball courts, a football field, a playground, exercise equipment, and picnic areas. In addition, a bicycle and pedestrian pathway that runs through the park is part of a planned Downtown Greenway to connect downtown Baton Rouge, Expressway Park, and City-Brooks Park.

Recently, BREC and Louisiana DOTD entered into another joint use agreement to light the football field. The lighting fixtures were clamped to the sides of the elevated highway ramps that flank the football field, which light the field without having to install poles into the ground. In addition to demonstrating a successful partnership between Louisiana DOTD and BREC, the group was open to incorporating improvements to Expressway Park as part of the I-10 project.

Area under I-10 near E. Washington Street

Next, the group visited space beneath I-10 between the East Washington Street ramps. The space beneath the highway is currently used for parking, particularly on Sundays due to the proximity of the location to a nearby church. This location is also adjacent to the McKinley Middle Magnet School.

I-10 On/Off Ramps at Perkins Road

The peer exchange participants continued east to visit the I-10 on and off ramps at Perkins Road. The ramps provide vehicular access to Perkins Road, which has many popular restaurants and shopping areas. There are a few unpaved parking areas behind the restaurants near the elevated portions of the ramps.

Parking adjacent to Perkins Road Ramps (Photo Courtesy of Louisiana DOTD)

As currently planned, the I-10 project involves removing the Perkins Road ramps, which would require vehicles to access the area via the nearby Acadian Thruway exit. There is some concern among the businesses in this area that removing the ramps will reduce access and hurt business. However, the removal of the ramps presents an opportunity to incorporate Community Connections elements at this location.

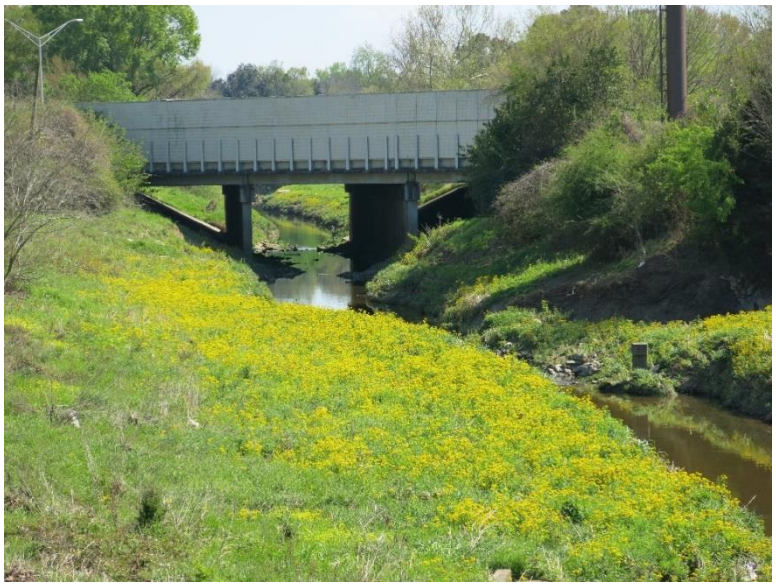
Nairn Bridge over I-10

The Nairn Bridge (located on Nairn Drive) is the only bridge over I-10 in the project area. It connects the Westdale and Valley Park neighborhoods over I-10 to Perkins Road and points south. The bridge does not provide a direct connection to I-10. It has one travel lane in each direction and sidewalks on both sides of the road, separated from traffic by a concrete barrier with a handrail.

The old Valley Park School is located just north of the bridge, and Nairn Park and the Nairn Recreation Center are located just south of the bridge. Nairn Park has a bicycle and pedestrian path that connects to Ferrett Street, which provides access to shopping destinations along busy College Drive. The bridge, which is likely to be replaced as part of the I-10 project, could serve dual purposes as an important transportation connection for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians, as well as a visual gateway for drivers on I-10 entering Baton Rouge from the east.

Sidewalk along East Side of Nairn Bridge (Photo Courtesy of Louisiana DOTD)

Ward Creek under I-10



Ward Creek under I-10 (Photo Courtesy of Louisiana DOTD)

Finally, the peer exchange participants visited Ward Creek as it passes under a bridge portion of I-10. The creek is located 0.9 miles east of the I-10 interchange at College Drive. It presents an opportunity for a possible bicycle and pedestrian path along the creek, passing under I-10. Currently, the distance between interchanges in this area (College Drive and Essen Lane) is 2.6 miles. Over this distance, I-10 serves as a barrier from traveling north-south. A possible path along Ward Creek would provide an important north-south connection. However, due to the low clearance below the bridge and a narrow right-of-way, it may be difficult to design and construct a path that provides ample space for pedestrians and bicyclists while minimizing impacts to the creek.

Discussion Topics

Brainstorming Community Connections Solutions for I-10

Following the tour of five locations along the I-10 corridor in Baton Rouge, Brandon Buckner facilitated a discussion among the attendees about opportunities for implementing project elements that improve Community Connections in those locations.

Expressway Park

- Observations
  - The park should feel more cohesive.
  - If the porpoise fountain were to be remade into a splash park, restrooms would need to be installed.
  - The spaces immediately beneath the elevated ramps are underutilized.
- Programming
  - Organize farmers' markets in the park (taking advantage of a nearby community garden).
  - Organize a food truck round-up.
  - Make use of the stormwater management area when the area is not flooded.
- Infrastructure
  - Relocate the porpoise fountain so that it is on the same side of South Boulevard as the playground.
  - Make the porpoise fountain into a social gathering space.
  - Install a skate park.
  - Install rain gardens directly beneath the elevated ramps.
  - Install additional parking.
  - Improve the sidewalks along Myrtle Avenue.
  - Install an architectural or design element that serves as a gateway for the area.
  - Improve wayfinding and place-making signage.
  - Pair creative lighting with the landscaping, including pedestrian-level lighting along the path and colored uplighting on the underside of the elevated ramps.
- Partnerships
  - Partner with the nearby Odell S. Williams African-American Museum to incorporate historical elements into the park.

Area under I-10 near E. Washington Street

- Observations
  - The parking under I-10 is used by church-goers.
  - Take advantage of the shade provided by the elevated highway during the summer.
- Programming
  - There could be educational opportunities for students at the adjacent school in the space under the highway, including stormwater ecology.
- Infrastructure
  - Improve the lighting for the parking areas.
  - Implement dedicated bicycle and pedestrian crossings within the parking area.

    - Make Louise Street a complete street.
    - Install a recreational climbing wall.
- Partnerships
    - There is an opportunity to work with the churches as partners.
    - Engage the school as a partner. There could be educational opportunities in the space under the highway, including stormwater ecology.

Perkins Road Ramps

- Observations
    - Selling the land for development may be an option, but disposing of the property eliminates the option to rebuild the ramps in the future.
- Programming
    - None.
- Infrastructure
    - Construct shared-use paths in the area of the removed ramps to provide bicycle and pedestrian connections between the businesses.
    - Replace the ramps with an at-grade road that begins where the ramps meet Perkins Road and that connects to Greenwood Street. This provides an opportunity to add another entrance/exit for the Acadian Village Shopping Center, located at the intersection of Perkins Road and Acadian Thruway.
    - Provide additional parking for the businesses in the immediate area. This parking could include electric car charging stations.
- Partnerships
    - There may be opportunities to enter into an agreement with the municipality for developing or programming the space.
    - If any businesses are displaced by the proposed widening of highway, consider relocating them to the Perkins Road area.

Nairn Drive Bridge

- Observations
    - The landfill on the north and south side of I-10 by Nairn Drive may be a challenge or an opportunity in terms of development.
    - The bridge should be a signature structure both for the bridge users and those driving beneath it on I-10.
    - There is currently no sidewalk along Nairn Drive/Valley Street between South Eugene Street and Perkins Road.
- Programming
    - None.
- Infrastructure
    - Provide a shared-use path on one side and a sidewalk on the other. The shared-use path could connect to paths along Bawell Street.
    - Ensure that, if the bridge has enhanced bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, that those are continued south to Perkins Road.
    - Improve the pedestrian crossings across Nairn Drive to the old Valley Park School and Nairn Park.

    - The aesthetics of the security fence should be enhanced to create a more welcoming environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Partnerships
    - There are opportunities to partner with the occupants of the old Valley Park School and BREC (for Nairn Park).

Ward Creek

- Observations
    - The BREC Master Plan includes a multiuse path along Ward Creek.
    - The I-10 bridge over Ward Creek is not currently planned to be replaced as part of the project.
    - A multiuse path along Ward Creek would link Concord Estates and other areas south of I-10 to the retail and commercial areas along Corporate Boulevard, and serve as a safer alternative to walking and bicycling along College Drive.
    - There is limited vertical and horizontal space under the I-10 bridge for a multiuse path. If necessary, the path could be designed with the anticipation of periodic flooding.
    - Baton Rouge Bikes has advocated for a multiuse path along Ward Creek.
- Programming
    - None.
- Infrastructure
    - Install a multiuse path along Ward Creek, including under the I-10 bridge.
- Partnerships
    - Partner with the adjacent businesses, which would benefit from the presence of a multiuse path.

General Observations

- It may be useful to review old images of Old South Baton Rouge to see what the area used to look like.
- Revisit the Center for Planning Excellence's cultural study.
- The Louisiana DOTD and BREC are preparing the East Baton Rouge Parish Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. That may be an opportunity to collaborate on pedestrian and bicycle improvements in the project area.
- The Capital Region Planning Commission (metropolitan planning organization for Baton Rouge) has GIS data on transit routes and ridership.
- Efforts should be made to avoid doing anything that might impede opportunities for future Community Connections projects.

Best Practices for Partnering for Success

On the morning of the second day, Corbin Davis facilitated a discussion among the attendees about best practices for partnerships that ensure the success of Community Connections projects. Prior to the discussion, Tim Hill and Michael Trepanier spoke about their experiences in partnering for success.

Ohio DOT Experiences in Partnering for Success

Tim Hill recommended that the project have a distinct brand (beyond the name of the highway being reconstructed), a logo, and an identity. Naming the I-70/I-71 project "Columbus Crossroads" helped people to connect with the goals of the project.

He noted that the tendency is to focus on the impacts to the communities within the footprint of the transportation project. However, through the Columbus Crossroads project, Tim learned that transportation projects directly and indirectly impact a broad range of people and communities, not just those in the project corridor. He recommends giving a broad range of people, those who are directly and indirectly impacted by the project, an opportunity to talk. The more people you talk with, the more solutions you'll find. For example, find out how kids access the schools in the corridor, and what kind of events take place there after hours. Have conversations to learn more about the community.

Tim said that when you open up the conversations with those directly and indirectly impacted by the project, people will often ask for a lot, assuming that the DOT has more funding for the project than it does. You need to be clear and up front about what you can and can't do as part of the project. For example, Tim worked with the pastor of a church near the project that had serious concerns about the project at first. The project required the removal of street parking, which the church needed for parishioners to park. Tim worked with the pastor to identify a solution that met the needs of the church and the project.

In order to strengthen the outreach to the communities impacted by the project, ODOT invited all of the stakeholder groups to join an Advisory Board. The Advisory Board met every few months to identify the issues and set expectations. ODOT provided the members with details about the project so that they were well informed and could help build support for the project.

Finally, Tim mentioned that the increased awareness about the project among community leaders opened up opportunities for private involvement and investment. In several cases, community entities, such as the churches, were able to secure non-government funding by leveraging support from other interested parties.

Massachusetts DOT Experiences in Partnering for Success

Michael Trepanier stressed the importance of building champions for the project outside of the DOT. Often, community members or leaders who may be adversarial can become your biggest champions. Bring them in, talk with them, listen to their concerns, and explain how the project will address them. Be honest and up front about how your project can't solve everyone's problems, but that the DOT is willing to work with the community to address as many concerns as possible. Work to build relationships with champions that will last. Once a community member or leader has become a champion for your project, they will spread their support of the project to others.

I-10 Project Stakeholders

During the first part of the group discussion, the participants identified stakeholder groups for the I-10 project. These included:

- Associations
    - Trucking Associations
    - Historic Associations

    - Neighborhood organizations/associations
    - Chambers of Commerce
    - Merchant associations
- Businesses/Employers
    - Major companies in the area (Turner, Community Coffee, Exxon, Dow, etc.)
    - Raising Cane's Civic Center
    - Perkins Road merchants
    - State and Federal agencies in the project area
    - Downtown businesses
- Government/Public Entities
    - Emergency medical services/Incident Management/First responders
    - City/Town/Parish governments
    - Port Authorities
    - Mayor's office neighborhood coordinator
    - Capital Area Transit System (CATS)
    - BREC
    - Elected officials
    - Capital Regional Planning Commission (metropolitan planning organization for Baton Rouge)
    - Levee District
- Other
    - Cultural districts
    - Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX)
    - Museums
    - Churches
    - Louisiana State University (LSU)
    - Schools and School Board
    - Baton Rouge Foundation (BRAF)
    - Downtown Development District (DDD)
    - Baton Rouge Green
    - The media
    - Commuter Krewe (ridesharing and transportation demand management organization)
    - Baton Rouge Bikes
    - Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center

Opportunities for Engagement

After identifying the stakeholders for the I-10 project, the participants identified opportunities for engaging the stakeholders in discussions about the project as a whole and specifically the Community Connections elements of the project. These included:

- Branding
    - Come up with a new name for the project to brand it, similar to how the Ohio DOT branded its I-70/71 project "Columbus Crossroads." Some noted that it may be important to retain "I-10" in the project name so that it is clear that the primary focus of the project is the highway.

    - Once a brand is in place, develop a single, clear message and make sure everyone involved is spreading that message.
- Website and Social Media
    - The website is currently being redeveloped and will help convey the single, clear message mentioned above. It will also include an interactive project timeline and map.
    - Use social media to convey the brand and message, providing links to website updates, YouTube videos, and other project information.
- Targeted Outreach
    - Identify stakeholders who may have strong opinions about the project and work with them early and often to understand and address their concerns.
    - Due to the unique concerns and needs in the Perkins Road area, hold a focused meeting with stakeholders in the area.
    - Engage with the Capital Region Planning Commission Policy Board to keep them up to date on the project. The members would appreciate having detailed project information so that, when asked questions, they can provide answers.
    - Meet with the Metropolitan Council members whose districts are in the project area.
- Working with the Media
    - Prepare a media packet that provides accurate information for the media to disseminate about the project.
    - Meet with traffic reporters to provide them with information about construction activities that may impact traffic to inform drivers in advance.

Best Practices for Overcoming Challenges

Later in the morning of the second day, Jared Fijalkowski facilitated a discussion among the attendees about best practices for partnerships that ensure the success of Community Connections projects. Prior to the discussion, Tim Hill and Michael Trepanier spoke about their experiences in partnering for success.

Ohio DOT Experiences in Overcoming Challenges

Tim Hill suggested that the Louisiana DOTD clearly communicate the project's funding constraints to the public and how the project is set to be phased and completed over time. Louisiana DOTD should also provide clarity to the public on when they should be involved throughout the process. Phasing the project allows you to focus the communities' attention on small portions of the project. As they see one phase implemented successfully, they will be more trusting of the DOTD and the process.

Massachusetts DOT Experiences in Overcoming Challenges

Michael Trepanier noted that it is important to balance the various and often competing needs along the project corridor. He suggested that the Louisiana DOTD be flexible in how it determines design criteria for the project, especially for the Community Connections elements. Using a Context Sensitive Solutions approach will help to incorporate the community's desires into the project.

Challenges for the I-10 Project

Next, the participants identified a list of challenges that they anticipated for integrating Community Connections elements into the I-10 project. The full list of challenges includes:

- **Communication vs. misinformation**

- Competing priorities between local and State politics
- Competition for space
- **Funding**
- Identifying champions
- **Managing expectations and commitments**

Due to the limited timeframe, the group focused on discussing the challenges that are bolded above.

Communication vs. Misinformation

The participants noted that misinformation about projects travels faster and further than accurate information. They noted that it can be difficult to manage the conversations about such a large project. The participants identified the following strategies to employ to ensure that accurate information is being shared and that the conversations about the project are managed appropriately:

- Provide timely information via the project website and social media.
- In particular, develop consistent project information and messaging on project and funding constraints, showing what a certain amount of funding can do.
- Develop information packages and facts sheets and distribute them to local media outlets to provide information and control messaging.
- Conduct early and continuous public involvement to the general public and targeted outreach to the stakeholders.
- Consider new branding for the project that both highlights the improvements to both I-10 travelers and the communities through which it passes.
- Clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of different organizations and groups, including the Louisiana DOTD, the Capital Region Planning Commission, members of the public, and others.

Funding

The participants discussed the limited funding that is available for the project, specifically for the Community Connections elements of the project. It is unlikely that enough funding will be secured to address all of the stakeholders' concerns while meeting the project objectives. The participants offered the following next steps to address the funding challenge:

- Identify additional funding and/or financing sources (e.g., Federal, State and Local) to supplement allocated/anticipated funding.
- Provide clarity to the public and stakeholders on the amount of allocated/anticipated project funding and what it can be used for. Explain, if needed, that the current funding allocated for the project will not complete everything.
- Communicate how funding can be used (e.g., $X for Community Connections, $X for interstate improvements).

Managing Expectations and Commitments

The participants are aware that there are numerous conflicting needs, desires, and expectations among all of the stakeholders for the I-10 project, and that it would be impossible to address them all. The question was raised: how do we manage the expectations of stakeholders given conflicting desires and limited funding? The group came up with the following ideas to address this challenge:

- Define the base build – at a minimum, what must be built?
- Work to balance stakeholder group interests. At the very least, make sure everyone is feeling heard.

- Accommodate Baton Rouge's bicycle and pedestrian plan into the Community Connections elements of the project. That may reflect the needs and desires of the communities.
- Educate stakeholders about the noise policy.
- Identify any enhancements and mitigations that will be incorporated into the project and link them to the needs and desires of the communities.
- Communicate to stakeholders and the public that the project is moving forward under regulatory and political time constraints.

Conclusion

The Community Connections for I-10 Peer Exchange featured two State DOTs with ample experience in the planning, design, and implementation of complex, multimodal highway projects. Communication and engagement were central to the success of these projects. Through this TPCB Peer Exchange, the Louisiana DOTD learned from Ohio DOT and Massachusetts DOT useful perspectives and strategies to:

- Have a **distinct brand and a clear message** that conveys critical project information to the stakeholders, the media, and the public.
- Engage with a **broad list of stakeholders** (those that are either directly or indirectly impacted by the project) through a formal Advisory Board and constant communication of project updates.
- **Understand stakeholders' needs and desires**, both transportation-related and not, and determine how Louisiana DOTD can help address those needs and desires within the limits of the project.
- **Manage expectations** by being clear and up front about what the DOTD can and can't do as part of the project.
- Build up **stakeholders as champions** for the project.
- **Identify and foster potential partnerships**, including with the business community, particularly those businesses directly impacted by the project.
- Implement a **phased approach to construction** to keep the stakeholders' focus on the elements being planned or constructed at the time.
- Use a Community Connections approach to the neighborhoods that are directly impacted by the project to **create unique spaces** that draw the community together.
- Make **interim or small-scale improvements** as part of the project, or before the project is constructed, to have a positive impact on a community and stakeholders' views of the project.

Appendices

Appendix A: Key Contacts

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Appendix B: Peer Exchange Agenda

Day 1: Tuesday, March 13, 2018

Time	Topic
8:30 – 8:45 a.m.	**Welcome and Introductions** FHWA welcomes attendees, reviews the agenda, describes documentation/follow-up, establishes ground rules for discussions, and introduces TPCB and the Peer Program.
8:45 – 9:00 a.m.	**Introductory Remarks from LDOTD** LDOTD provides welcome remarks.
9:00 – 9:30 a.m.	**I-10 Project Overview** LDOTD and its consultant team present an overview of the I-10 project.
9:30 – 9:45 a.m.	**Baton Rouge's Expressway Park Overview** BREC team presents an overview of the current status of Expressway Park.
9:45 – 10:00 a.m.	***Break***
10:00 – 10:30 a.m.	**Community Connections Overview** FHWA provides an overview of the Community Connections initiative.
10:30 – 11:15 a.m.	**Ohio DOT Project Overview** Tim Hill from Ohio DOT provides an overview of sample projects in Ohio.
11:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	**Massachusetts DOT Project Overview** Michael Trepanier from MassDOT provides an overview sample projects in Massachusetts.
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.	***Lunch***
1:00 – 1:15 p.m.	***Load Vehicles for Tour***
1:15 – 3:15 p.m.	**Tour of I-10 Corridor** Participants load into Louisiana Division vehicles and visit three sites along the I-10 corridor: • Expressway Park • Perkins Road ramps • Nairn Drive Bridge
3:15 – 3:30 p.m.	***Break/Return to TTEC***
3:30 – 4:45 p.m.	**Discussion: Brainstorming Community Connections Solutions for I-10** FHWA facilitates a discussion among attendees to identify potential Community Connections solutions for the three sites visited during the tour (15 minutes of discussion for each), and for the corridor as a whole (30 minutes).
4:45 – 5:00 p.m.	**Day 1 Takeaways and Introduction to Day 2** FHWA recaps the day's discussions and previews the agenda for Day 2.

Day 2: Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Time	Topic
8:30 – 8:45 a.m.	**Introduction to Day 2** FHWA provides an overview of the Day 2 discussion.
8:45 – 10:00 a.m.	**Discussion: Best Practices for Partnering for Success** FHWA facilitates a discussion among attendees on best practices for engaging key stakeholders in Community Connections projects, including partner agencies and the public.
10:00 – 10:15 a.m.	***Break***
10:15 – 11:30 a.m.	**Discussion: Best Practices for Overcoming Challenges** FHWA facilitates a discussion among attendees on best practices for identifying, addressing, and overcoming challenges for Community Connections projects.
11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	**Discussion of Key Takeaways and Next Steps** FHWA facilitates a discussion of the key takeaways and next steps for LDOTD to move forward on the I-10 project.
12:00 p.m.	**Adjourn**

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