

State DOTs, Smart Growth Group Highlight How to Stretch Transportation Funds

BY: [Ryan Holeywell](#) | September 10, 2012

A group of state Department of Transportation directors has teamed up with the smart growth movement to release a new best-practices report that offers recommendations and case studies on how to stretch limited transportation dollars.

The partnership might seem to be something of an unusual relationship. Historically, the smart growth movement has made close inroads with city transportation planners and the transit community, who line up closely with the movement's goals of encouraging transit-oriented development, finding alternatives to driving and designing walkable communities while combating sprawl.

State departments of transportation, meanwhile, spend the bulk of their time on highways.

But Smart Growth America CEO Geoff Anderson says his organization's mission is broader than just encouraging transit and is more about moving people most efficiently. At a time when state transportation departments are strapped for cash, that's a message that could resonate. The report's goal is to highlight ways that transportation departments can get the most bang for their buck, and it highlights innovative techniques across the country.

"If you start to put them all together, it's a pretty interesting package of stuff that includes smarter, cheaper ways to get at the same, better outcomes," says Anderson.

The study, "The Innovative DOT," was produced along with the State Smart Transportation Initiative. That organization's membership includes 19 state departments of transportation. It gets funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Rockefeller Foundation. The report (available [here](#) on Tuesday morning) will be formally released this week at an SSTI meeting of state DOT executives in Detroit.

SSTI managing director Eric Sundquist explains that the transportation field lacks "a thorough, systematic account of innovative policy and practice" that the report could help fill.

The report still emphasizes the smart growth movement's traditional goals. But it also touches on the value of collaboration between state agencies and local partners; "right-sizing" transportation projects; and finding innovative ways of securing funds for transportation projects.

"DOTs must change their strategic approaches to make smarter investments, to wring more and better performance out of our existing system, and to critically evaluate the full range of possible future investments. We must focus on those that do the most good for the least money," former Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary Al Biehler said in a statement.

On the revenue side, the study highlights innovative funding mechanisms, like special taxing districts used to pay for the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco and a special levy on property owners to pay for a transit stop in Washington, D.C.'s up-and-coming NoMa neighborhood.

It also gets into the specifics of transportation policy, showcasing, for example, a computer-based pavement management system used in the San Francisco area to help to more efficiently target maintenance funds.

The report also pushes new ways for DOTs to prioritize projects and highlights the role local jurisdictions should play in the process, giving high marks to the state of Maryland for allowing municipalities to submit proposed project lists. It also touts competitive transportation grants, like those in Washington state, as a way to spark innovation.

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