

AASHTO-ARTBA-AGC Joint Committee
Joint Position Statement JPS-2-15
Title: Conveying a Clearer Understanding of the Project Selection Process

In the current era of constrained and uncertain funding at all levels of government, the ability to successfully demonstrate the value of transportation investment to taxpayers hinges on the collective credibility of the state departments of transportation (state DOTs) and their contractor and construction industry partners. Credible organizations are understood to be responsive, to be trustworthy, to have strong relationships with key decision-makers, and to have demonstrated accountability. In the transportation investment context, there is no more crucial barometer of accountability than effective use of allocated funds using a transparent project prioritization process and efficient project delivery.

Reflecting the federally-assisted, state-administered philosophy behind the federal transportation program, the planning and programming process throughout the country is underpinned by the long-range plans at the statewide, metropolitan, and rural level, which provide the holistic vision and policy platform. These blueprints then seed the statewide and metropolitan Transportation Improvement Programs that identify and fund specific projects for the upcoming four years.

Selection of transportation projects that deliver maximum safety, economic, mobility, and social value, requires frequent and extensive public involvement and consultations with stakeholder groups. These opportunities for input represent a foundational element of the transportation planning process.

State-specific mandates and considerations, which may include mode-specific plans and legislative directives, are also addressed through this planning process. As to be expected, there is great diversity in the extent of legislative involvement and authority in the process of selecting and approving projects across states. In some states, the legislature actively reviews or approves state DOT plans or programs, often as part of the budget and appropriations process.

MAP-21's initiation of a performance-based federal transportation program will enhance decision-making on projects through a consistent business practice that better links organizational goals and objectives to resources and results.

The AASHTO-ARTBA-AGC Joint Committee believes the progress made under MAP-21 in the project selection process must be maintained. As such, the Joint Committee recommends the three organizations to continue improving the project selection process by:

- Clearly articulating assumptions used behind both subjective and technical elements of projects, and better linking them to overarching transportation policy goals;
- Clearly illustrating not only the job creation benefits of investment in transportation projects in the shorter term, but also the broader and enduring economic benefits of investment gained at the regional, statewide, and national level;
- Clearly defining, making available, and publicizing the state department of transportation's goals and the plans and programs developed to meet those goals;
- Supporting development and adoption of innovative technology in data collection and processing, coupled with consideration of analytical tools that better illustrate project benefits and costs, especially in the context of safety and the state and regional economy;
- Strengthening each state's transportation asset management plan, which is based on a strategic and systematic process of operating, maintaining, and improving physical assets to identify a structured sequence of maintenance, preservation, repair, rehabilitation, and replacement actions to achieve and sustain a desired state of good repair over the lifecycle of the assets at minimum practicable cost; and,
- Enhancing the credibility and value proposition behind each and every transportation project by engaging the public and decision-makers with easy-to-understand messages and accessible, state-of-the-art communication platforms.