

CNU REPORTS

TRANSPORTATION SUMMIT - 2005

SUMMIT LOCATION: COUNTRY CLUB PLAZA, KANSAS CITY, KAN.

Built in 1922 by J.C. Nichols on the outskirts of Kansas City, Mo., Country Club Plaza was the nation's first "shopping center," an area planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

Country Club Plaza is not your typical suburban shopping center. It displays many characteristics of traditional urbanism that maintain the pedestrian scale. Parking lots are accessible but hidden behind first-floor retail. Pedestrians, cars and bicycles mingle within the street grid. Visitors enjoy an abundance of public art. The plaza is designed in Romantic Spanish architecture and displays murals, sculptures and fountains made by local artisans and imported from Europe and Asia.

Recognizing the shopping center's place in transportation history, the transportation summit was held at conference facilities within the Plaza. On the second day of the summit, participants had an opportunity to tour the plaza with local design experts from the Historic Kansas City Foundation.



AT COUNTRY CLUB PLAZA, J.C. NICHOLS PLACED PARKING BEHIND STOREFRONTS TO MAINTAIN A STRONG STREET FRONTAGE.

PHOTO COURTESY KEVIN KLINKENBERG, 180 DEGREES DESIGN STUDIO.

Toward a New Urbanist Transportation Agenda

BY ELLEN GREENBERG

Streets, or more properly, thoroughfares, have been central to new urbanism from its beginnings. New urbanists understand streets as public spaces, multi-modal movement corridors, gathering places, pattern-makers and permeable boundaries between the private and public realms. The engineering establishment's view of streets is desperately impoverished in comparison, referencing only two dominant functions: providing mobility and access to land.

NEED FOR CHANGE

Streets have been both a passion and aggravation for new urbanists as we seek the full realization both of our own ideas and the aspirations of the communities in which we work. Whether the task at hand is the creation of streets, lanes and alleys within a single neighborhood or the removal of a freeway blighting portions of a city, the focus on walkability, place-making and the overall character of the street is paramount.

CNU has tapped into a tremendous need by posing an alternative to the vehicle-capacity-driven practice of engineering streets. Our message about the importance of walkability and the role of transit in mobility and place-making has permeated transportation research and practice. The widespread interest in our partnership with the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) and the demand for its results has been a tremendous testament to the relevance of new urbanism.

In 2000, CNU's Transportation Task Force set out a plan for transportation reform: Change the built environment by first changing industry standards, then professional practice. The group's strategy involved partnering with organizations that have standing within the industry to advance new design guidelines.

CNU established the partnership with ITE with relative ease, due to the interest of ITE leadership and active backing by the EPA's Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation. Support from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was harder to win.

THOROUGHFARES ■ PAGE 5

Roadblocks to Walkable Thoroughfares

Controversy and Compromise in the Development of the CNU/ITE Design Manual

BY RICHARD A. HALL AND BILLY HATTAWAY

CNU's joint initiative with the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) is a complex partnership with diverse expectations for how the resulting design manual will shape the built environment. This ambitious partnership aims to create a guide for thoroughfare design in walkable communities. CNU members have an enormous stake in this initiative because virtually all of their projects run up against transportation design standards meant for rural and suburban applications. The hope is that the document will be approved by ITE as a recommended practice, which would eventually be adopted by states and municipalities nationwide, making it easier to build new urbanist projects.

There have been numerous meetings, reviews and discussions over many years leading to this proposed recommended practice. Dedicated professionals representing the sponsor organizations have expressed their interests and concerns during that process. Those who have participated in this initiative should be congratulated for their progress. However, there is still significant disagreement over the goals, content and criteria contained in the manual.

Portions of the draft manual will assist those designing walkable, mixed-use communities. For example, the report's excellent con-

text zones — a translation of transect zones — will help designers, developers and regulators understand the urban context surrounding the thoroughfares. The context zones guide the function and design of the street. However, new urbanists should be concerned about areas of the report. The main point of contention is the degree to which current thoroughfare planning and design will change to accommodate pedestrians. The current arterial, collector and local classifications consider pedestrians as an afterthought, rather than an integral function of the thoroughfare.

SPECIFIC AREAS OF CONCERN IN THE MANUAL ARE NOTED BELOW:

1. Despite the manual's focus on urban thoroughfares for walkable communities, it contains an entire section on single-use, auto-oriented areas. The manual repeatedly references these auto-truck-only facilities. As a new recommended practice, this document should not focus on the existing paradigm, but should highlight emerging facility types. Current practice is thoroughly discussed elsewhere. Any discussion of "vehicle mobility priority areas" and their associated thoroughfares should be limited to a definition section where they could stand in stark contrast to well documented walkable thoroughfares in traditional, pedestrian-oriented urban areas.

ROADBLOCKS ■ PAGE 7

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Dear Reader,

Thanks to the hard work of our panelists and other participants, the transportation summit in Kansas City was a great success. If you missed the delights of Kansas City's barbecue and bustling Country Club Plaza streets, read the following articles to catch up and **Save the Date** for the next Transportation Summit on November 17 – 18, 2006, hosted by Jim Charlier of Charlier Associates in Boulder, Colo.

2006 will be a busy year for the Transportation Task Force. This spring, the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) will release a proposed recommended practice called *Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities*. This joint effort of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) and the ITE is a major step in transportation reform, bringing urban street design principles to a huge audience of mainstream transportation engineers and officials.

CNU and ITE worked together, under contract to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and with support from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to create a context-sensitive design guide dedicated exclusively to major thoroughfares in cities and towns. As we move forward, we will announce opportunities for our members to comment on the manual.

In order to increase understanding of the manual among planners, elected officials and other decision-makers, CNU is also developing workshops, a downloadable presentation and a more concise publication funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Members of the project team will promote the manual at several upcoming events. ITE will highlight the project at its 2006 Technical Conference and Exhibit, "Transportation Solutions for the Real World," in San Antonio, March 19 - 22. The discussion will continue in San Antonio at the APA National Conference, April 22 - 26, and will climax at CNU XIV in Providence, R.I., June 1-4.

CNU is also working on a real estate and transportation study with the Center for Neighborhood Technology. This project, entitled *Highways to Boulevards: Reclaiming Urbanism & Revitalizing Cities*, makes a case for replacing super-highways and high-speed arterials with at-grade streets. It will combine research and analysis of property, health and traffic-performance data with on-the-ground constituency building to promote change in urban infrastructure investments.

We look forward to your ongoing participation in CNU transportation activities. See you in Providence and Boulder!

John Norquist

Heather Smith

Congress for the New Urbanism

A Note from Transportation Task Force Chairs

2005 was a strong year for the CNU Transportation Task Force. We continued to build our relationship with the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), and we made great progress in our joint effort to produce a context sensitive design manual. ITE is an important partner, and we will continue to work with them toward our goal of systemic transportation reform in the United States.

CNU's third transportation summit was a highlight of 2005. It was very well attended and served to energize old-time members as well as new members.

CNU also tested a new, interactive session format at the summit that allowed attendees to bring forward new ideas and initiatives. This format was such a success that CNU will be using it at the upcoming congress in Providence. On June 1, the entire membership of CNU will have an opportunity to use the technique for generating ideas and initiatives. This event will represent a reaffirmation by the CNU board of directors of the importance of task forces and the initiatives they undertake.

CNU's board reaffirmed that we are primarily a membership and advocacy organization, made up of people who practice in a range of professional disciplines who share the values represented in the Charter. The members serve as the core vision and strength of CNU. Because they are on the leading edge in their professions and they are motivated to overcome the barriers to new urbanist development in their everyday practice, they are often the ones to initiate reform in the form of committees, task forces and initiatives. The board reaffirmed that these efforts deserve support and cultivation by the CNU.

It is a very exciting time for the organization. We are looking forward to seeing many of you at the Congress in June and at the fourth CNU transportation summit in November.

Thank you for all your hard work.

Marcy McInelly and Norman Garrick

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A MULTI-WAY BOULEVARD WAS CENTRAL TO THE DESIGN OF NEW LONGVIEW, BUT THE ORIGINAL CONCEPTION FACED RESISTANCE FROM A NEIGHBORING COLLEGE AND THE CITY.

IMAGE COURTESY
180 DEGREES DESIGN STUDIO.

Changing Street Standards in Kansas City

BY KEVIN KLINKENBERG

Changes in transportation standards at the national level are being reflected in local communities across America. As the CNU/ITE project moves forward, two examples from the Kansas City metropolitan area highlight important progress on the ground: the New Longview multi-way boulevard in Lee's Summit, Mo., and a new street ordinance adopted by the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kan.

NEW LONGVIEW MULTI-WAY BOULEVARD

The multi-way boulevard is an integral design element of the 260-acre New Longview traditional neighborhood development, master planned by 180 Degrees Design Studio. Straddling important topography and bisecting the center of the site, the boulevard has the potential to link the entire project together rather than divide it, as the previously proposed arterial design would have done. The design team's original conception for the boulevard was a key factor in achieving neighborhood and city approval for the project.

Unfortunately, the design faced several challenges that have resulted in a not quite genuine multi-way boulevard. In the face of resistance from the nearby community college, the alignment was shifted at the 11th hour, causing a replanning of the town center. In addition, several large roundabouts were placed at key intersections to alleviate concerns about traffic flow at peak periods. The roundabouts are a fine solution but present challenges in how they dovetail with a design as complex as a multi-way boulevard.

Finally, city engineers had difficulty accepting the proposed number of intersections, both across the boulevard

and along its frontage roads. Specifically, they wanted to add diverters at the frontage lane intersections, forcing right turns at all intersections. This outcome was later foregone with the elimination of most cross-streets, which were replaced with pedestrian connections. The result is certainly not a pure multi-way boulevard, but given the current approval environment and lack of sufficient published data on their operation, it is still an important step towards acceptance of this valuable urban road type.

A NEW STREET DESIGN ORDINANCE FOR KANSAS CITY

While the new street design ordinance in Kansas City, Kan., is filled with design ideas familiar to many new urbanists, it represents an important leap forward for this region. When it became clear that the proposed 170-acre NewMarket TND would lose many of its design characteristics if it had to conform with existing street ordinances, 180 Degree Design Studio was called in to develop a new ordinance that integrates land use, transportation and environmental standards. The ordinance, which is based on the SmartCode, was adopted by the Unified Government and will eventually be used throughout its jurisdiction.

The new street ordinance is aimed at integrating street design with community design. It is difficult to achieve a walkable community design if all of the standards do not work together.

In this example, it was crucial that the developer not waste time negotiating variances for every street. If the proper street variances were not pursued, the resulting community would have streets that were too wide or geared for fast traffic. The street standards alone would kill the livability of the place.

During the process of creating an integrated ordinance for the region, 180 Degrees staff sat down with the Unified Government's public works and planning staff to generate a set of street standards. As the discussions progressed, the Transect model was generally accepted as a good framework for the standards. The Transect's intensity levels and character of places provided a way to rationalize why one street would be used in one application and a different

street in another.

The resulting standards covered the entire gamut of engineering standards, from number of lanes, parking conditions, pedestrian and bike facilities to lane widths and curb radii — all carefully crafted so that each street would be calibrated to its corresponding Transect zone.

The next step was more of a challenge. Following the sessions with the public works and planning staff, 180 Degrees staff met with the fire department, which resisted the new street standards. The fire department's concerns regarding road widths were fairly typical. Where the proposed standard called for a minimum of 10 feet clear width on every road, the fire department wanted to fall back on the conventional standard of 17 – 20 feet clear width.

Again, the Transect demonstrated the rationale behind the new street standards. When shown street types in relation to the character of the neighborhoods and districts, fire department officials understood the benefit of shorter blocks, the interconnected street network and the inclusion of alleys. They could clearly see that their trucks would have more access points in a traditional neighborhood than in a conventional suburban development.

After further negotiations with the fire department, 180 Degrees was able to come up with a standard that would ensure 12-foot clear widths. It should be said, however, that there still remains a measure of skepticism. While their real-world application is yet to be seen, the standards should work well for public works officials and allow for successful design and execution of walkable communities.

The Unified Government has adopted a very progressive set of street standards — the first comprehensive set of standards in the Kansas City metro area. In time, these standards will be applied in other Kansas City urban areas and other metro areas nationally as a means to facilitate the creation of more walkable places.

Kevin Klinkenberg is a principal at 180 Degrees Design Studio.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CNU/ITE PARTNERSHIP

BY BRIAN BOCHNER

This spring, the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) will publish a proposed recommended practice for designing urban thoroughfares. If adopted after a period of public review, this CNU/ITE manual will help streamline the design and implementation of new urbanist transportation projects.

The manual was developed with a diverse team of engineering and planning professionals in order to address the range of issues in transportation planning, but reaching consensus on new concepts and procedures was and continues to be a challenge. Despite the fact that the manual is nearing publication, key elements of a complete set of context sensitive guidelines have yet to be fully conceived and tested in the field. A strong review and refinement process is essential to producing a quality product.

As we approach the milestone of publication, we can reflect on several important lessons from this project that have been and will continue to be critical to getting our principles put into practice:

NEW DESIGN CONCEPTS NEED FURTHER REFINEMENT

Though we've made significant progress, we haven't found all of the answers yet. Specific CSS components need further study and clarification, specifically context zones, thoroughfare types and network design. The iterative process needs to continue as we work to answer the following questions: Do the context zones offer sufficient definition? Have all of the different development scenarios been identified? Should thoroughfare types be more specific with respect to design features?

AN ACTIVE AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH IS PARAMOUNT

More important than critiquing convention, we need to offer viable thoroughfare design alternatives for all kinds



PARTICIPANTS FORMED SMALL WORKING GROUPS AT THE SUMMIT TO DISCUSS PERTINENT TOPICS AND DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR FOLLOW-UP WORK.

Day Two at the Summit: CNU Members Take Control

BY LEE CRANDELL

One of the goals of the transportation summit was not only to offer participants a wealth of information on advances in new urban transportation, but to provide a place for members to interact and offer ideas for new CNU initiatives. The entire second day of the summit was dedicated to a new format of interactive, on-the-fly sessions to achieve that goal. Jennifer Hurley, co-chair of the CNU Planners Task Force, spearheaded the second day using "Open Space Technology," which allows participants to manage their own sessions and report their findings back to the rest of the group.

The day started with participants posting discussion topics on a schedule board. They then worked together to combine sessions and create a schedule for the day, including a variety of small group discussions such as "Light, Light Rail," "If This Is a TOD, Why Is There So Little Transit?" and "Taming the Modeling Beast." Participants were free to rearrange their schedule as the day progressed and as new topics of interest arose.

PEDESTRIAN SCIENCE

One of the workgroups, led by Jim Charlier, president of Charlier Associates, focused on "Pedestrian Science." The participants discussed the need for better resources for pedestrian design and a more descriptive design vocabulary to address pedestrians and walkability. "Pedestrian Science" explores the various types of walkers, from rambling to utilitarian, and addresses their unique needs in a variety of contexts.

For follow-up, the group plans to assess and compile existing pedestrian design resources and review the ITE/CNU context-sensitive design manual from a pedestrian perspective to see what's missing or what needs to be flushed out in greater detail. They plan to use their findings as a framework for a pedestrian design toolkit. The next CNU Transportation Summit, hosted by Charlier Associates in Boulder, Colo., on November 17 - 18, will offer a venue to explore pedestrian standards more in-depth.

COMMON GROUND WITH EMERGENCY RESPONDERS

Another group led by Dan Burden, senior urban designer at Glatting Jackson and director of Walkable Communities, Inc., sought common ground between emergency responders and new urbanists. Many new urbanists wanting to create safe, pleasant and fun places to live find that good design is sacrificed to the needs of police, medical technicians and fire fighters. While new urbanism promotes narrow streets to calm traffic and minimize accidents, fire fighters want wider streets to respond to emergencies. New urbanists want tight turning radii to calm speedy drivers who threaten pedestrians crossing at intersections, but emergency vehicles want wide turning radii for easier navigation.

While the two camps may disagree on some of these points, the group did identify plenty of common ground. Emergency responders and residents both want easy access to internal streets. Multiple points of access to neighborhoods that distribute traffic evenly also serve both groups. Short block lengths, which keep traffic speeds low and make walking easy, are a favorable solution for emergency responders too. Alleys also offer both community design and emergency response benefits. Not only do they add two more points of access per property, but by keeping an abundance of utilities and driveways off of narrow streets, they minimize obstacles for emergency responders and make way for attractive trees and landscaping.

"So why are there so many disagreements on street designs and street-making details?" asks Burden. "Often it is because we are focusing on a foot or two of roadway width and not looking at the bigger picture." New urbanists could focus more energy on promoting those details and features that bring both improved or acceptable response time and are elements of healthier communities.

CNU members will have a chance see the interactive Open Space Technology format in action and generate their own ideas for CNU initiatives at CNU XIV in Providence, R.I., June 1 - 4. Watch for details at cnuxiv.org.

THOROUGHFARES ■ FROM PAGE 1

Linking our effort to the FHWA's growing Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) program (also known as "Thinking Beyond the Pavement") enabled us to secure funding and recognition from the federal government. Unfortunately, our sense of mission has not been fully matched by our partners in this endeavor.

CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS AND NEW URBANISM: MUTUAL ATTRACTION OR BAD CHEMISTRY?

The somewhat forced linking of CNU's objectives to the imperfect and still-evolving CSS program has undoubtedly influenced the project in unpredictable ways. Some view CSS as primarily focused on process rather than outcome. They believe that any transportation project can be context-sensitive as long as the community is involved, regardless of the project design. Our efforts to work within the CSS framework have been burdened by the need to reconcile these and similar views with new urbanist practice, which engages the community while anchoring itself in a specific set of principles about the built environment.

Whether this burden will ultimately be viewed as worthwhile remains to be seen. Agencies that have meaningful CSS programs will welcome our work. Others will use CSS to make ill-advised and or even disastrous projects palatable to local residents by dressing them up with landscaping, public art and isolated "preservation" of protected resources. Even in the best scenario, it will be obvious that CSS and new urbanism are not the same thing, and that the practitioners of the two do not have perfectly overlapping objectives.

What is less obvious is that CNU — despite our commitment to the principles of the Charter of the New Urbanism and our practical experience — does not have a fully-developed agenda for major streets. Our message about the role of walkable streets in urban life is powerful, as is the depth of our collective expertise in the design of streets across the Transect. However, we have failed to address the role of major urban thoroughfares in the regional movement of people and freight. Because our focus has largely excluded this issue, the new urbanist's emphasis on character, place and walkability has been falsely pitted against conventional concerns about capacity, safety, movement of goods and traffic mitigation. Our failure to reach internal consensus and formulate positions on fundamental transportation issues has hampered our ability to inject urbanism into the engineering establishment.

WHERE WE STAND AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

At this writing, ITE is completing the finishing touches on the proposed recommended practice for the design of major urban thoroughfares in walkable communities. This document is the result of CNU's partnership with ITE and FHWA. ITE worked actively to protect the integrity of the product as it was reviewed by FHWA, advocating publication as early as possible to facilitate widespread peer review and comment.

Publication of the proposed recommended practice will be a major milestone. However, the success of the initiative hinges on two critical next steps. First, we will marshal our members and colleagues to carefully review and comment on the draft. The input of experienced practitioners will be essential to improving the document. Second, given the compromises that emerged from our engagement with our partners and the world of CSS, CNU will produce a companion resource that illustrates and highlights the ways in which the newly-published material can be applied in new urbanist designs.*

We are also faced with the task of defining next steps to further our transportation goals. In advance of the Kansas City meeting, I organized my thinking into a very preliminary agenda for transportation advocacy and research activities. These are shown in

the accompanying table. I categorized each of the items as either already firmly on the urbanist agenda, or not yet on the agenda, and perhaps unlikely to capture our collective attention. However, the diversity of transportation professionals who participated in the Kansas City meeting and other events suggests a possible opportunity to expand the scope of our collaborative activities into items on the second list.

TOWARDS AN URBANIST TRANSPORTATION AGENDA

CURRENT AND NEAR-TERM PROJECTS

- CNU / ITE Partnership: major thoroughfare design
- CNU Companion Document: major thoroughfare design
- Street design for LEED-ND

POSSIBLE LONGER-TERM PROJECT FOCUSES

Firmly on the Urbanist Agenda

- Integrating place-making and mobility
- Neighborhood and regional structure
- Parking: amount, location, price, design

Not yet firmly on the Urbanist Agenda

- Regional mobility for people and freight
- Traffic operations
- Speed and safety research
- Forecasting methods + response
- Design Exception Process

Many new urbanist practitioners are working on projects or research addressing this broader set of issues. We may in fact be better equipped than anyone to address them since we have a firm grasp on the types of places that the circulation systems need to support and we've had unparalleled success in changing both paradigm and practice. As we consider how and whether to expand the scope of our transportation activities, it will be helpful to reflect on what I consider the greatest weakness of our effort.

Our effort has failed to capitalize fully on the talents and experiences of our own practitioners. The project as a whole has been too-firmly planted in a conventional model of interaction between clients, consultants and advisors. This model has not been fruitful for the cultivation of our own ideas. Our three transportation summits sought to inject doses of collaboration and creativity into the process, but with only limited success.

CNU's ongoing transportation reform efforts must involve a collaborative process that will make the best possible use of our collective abilities. Otherwise, our best hopes will lie with the continued independent, sometimes divergent efforts of our members and partners. If we can capitalize on our collective knowledge, the results will be extraordinary.

* CNU recently secured a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to explain the manual to planners and elected officials through workshops, a downloadable presentation and a summary of the publication.

Ellen Greenberg is a principal at Freedman Tung & Bottomley. She has represented CNU as a member of the project management team.

LESSONS LEARNED ■ FROM PAGE 4

of community configurations. Well-designed thoroughfares can create a more walkable and sustainable environment in both mixed-use communities and conventional suburban environments. This inclusive outlook will help CSS and new urbanism gain traction in the long run.

WE NEED TO SPEAK IN THE SAME LANGUAGE AS OUR AUDIENCE

If new urbanists want to win over the decision-makers and standard-setters, we need to communicate our principles in their terminology. We must explain new urbanism in simple, straight-forward language, without jargon — or we should learn their jargon.

CHANGE IS A SLOW, STRATEGIC PROCESS

Even though the need for change is widely accepted, our culture has a well-established bureaucratic system that responds slowly to innovation. In order to accomplish our goals, we need a strong understanding of how design policies, standards and practices are created and changed. The key to getting our ideas implemented is working with the leaders of the current system.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS NEEDS TO REMAIN FLEXIBLE

While there is an increasing understanding that the current standards do provide a degree of flexibility, state and local agencies often interpret these standards in a more restrictive manner. We need to encourage agencies to take full advantage of the flexibility offered by the current standards in order to implement CSS.

CONCLUSIONS

As design professionals, we have the opportunity to test the new manual and suggest improvements for the final version. As we continue our push to build walkable, sustainable, mixed-use neighborhoods, we would be wise to learn from our past experiences and keep the above lessons in mind.

Brian Bochner is a senior research engineer at Texas Transportation Institute. Norman Garrick and Ellen Greenberg also worked to identify the lessons learned from the ITE project.



THE BILOXI-OCEAN SPRINGS BRIDGE HAS BECOME A CENTER OF CONTROVERSY IN THE EFFORT TO REBUILD THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST.

PHOTO COURTESY SANDY SORLIEN.

Fighting Bridgezilla

A Skirmish in the National Battle for Transportation Reform

BY NORMAN GARRICK

Images of the toppled Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge endure for me as a symbol of the power and destructive force of nature. Five months after Katrina, this bridge serves as a rallying point for Mississippi residents who would like to see an alternative to the business-as-usual approach to transportation planning. Newly energized activists (like those at bridgenow.org) argue that the Mississippi Department of Transportation's (MDOT) bridge plans will eat away at urbanism on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and stunt community desires to rebuild their cities as walkable, mixed-use places.

In October, the Mississippi Renewal Forum brought together local leaders and residents with over 120 new urbanist planners, architects and a handful of transportation engineers to develop plans for rebuilding 11 of the hardest hit Gulf Coast cities. During this week-long charrette, participants articulated a vision for the rebuilding that combines the communities' desires with urban design principles.

Plans emerged to rebuild the cities as walkable centers linked by transit and to replace transportation features that work against this urbanism. Various plans include the elimination of a Biloxi freeway and the relocation of the CSX freight line to make way for a new east-west transit boulevard. Perhaps most important to locals, the plans call for the restoration of a beach highway to its former glory as a slow and graceful boulevard that celebrates the tranquil beauty of the gulf and the elegant live oaks that line its shores.

With the final charrette presentations barely completed, MDOT made it clear that they were not interested in the plans and that

they would proceed with their own plans. MDOT proposed using federal funds to rebuild the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge (Route 90) with six lanes rather than the four lanes that existed before Katrina. This announcement drew the ire of local charrette-goers who saw the widening of the bridge as a direct assault on plans to convert Route 90 into a boulevard.

In November, the Governor's commission on rebuilding called a meeting together between leaders from Ocean Springs and Biloxi, MDOT officials and new urbanist transportation planners in order to resolve their differences over the bridge. MDOT presented its plan as a done deal and intimidated the city of Ocean Springs into supporting the larger bridge. Agency representatives did agree to add pedestrian and bicycle "amenities" as a concession to Ocean Springs.

After this meeting, local opponents of the bridge nicknamed it "Bridgezilla," and the story started to take on elements of a bad B movie. The most bizarre plot twist came with the publication in a local newspaper of a poem by an MDOT leader in praise of the bridge and the agency's adroit work in bringing it to fruition. This led to a flurry of poems by new urbanists and others heaping scorn on Bridgezilla.

New urbanists won handily* in the poetry slam, but the struggles over the bridge prompt a reassessment. Overall, the charrette was remarkably successfully at generating a vision for rebuilding that local residents and officials were excited about. Many communities have gone on to host local charrettes and develop more detailed plans with buy-in from large segments of the local populations, and some communities have even begun to adopt the SmartCode.

BRIDGEZILLA ■ FROM PAGE 6

We have been less successful in those areas where new urbanists have not yet developed strong alternatives to conventional planning. Regional transportation issues have been a major obstacle for many of the communities, since they have little authority over the region. For example, Ocean Springs Mayor Connie Moran and Alderperson Julia Weaver have been vocal opponents of the bridge due to concerns about traffic impacts and how the bridge and connecting highways will overshadow one of the most beautiful and intact downtowns on the Mississippi coast. But their urbanist vision is contingent on coordination with the state and with Biloxi, whose leadership is focused on building a bridge as quickly as possible to satisfy the needs of the casinos.

Local urbanist visions, like that in Ocean Springs, will always be weighed down, if not crushed, by DOTs and the “predict and provide” approach to transportation planning. This approach can no longer be ignored or accommodated if we are going to have communities with real neighborhoods and diverse districts designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car.

MDOT’s approach to predicting traffic growth is particularly backward and egregious, but it is essentially the approach that is accepted and used all over the country. What is most telling is the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) willingness to back the MDOT even after the revelation of serious flaws in the bridge analysis. It was disheartening to see that even in this unique situation where historical traffic data is obviously no longer valid, FHWA is still willing to stick to a procedure that defies common sense even under normal circumstances.

More than 30 years ago, British transportation planner Stephen Plowden wrote:

“We have seen that traffic engineers have traditionally thought it their duty to provide in a positive way for all demands that might be made on the roads for which they are responsible. Understandably and creditably, they dislike any suggestion that that they cannot and should not attempt to do so — it sounds like falling down on the job. But in fact there is no other sector of the economy in which it would be thought right to supply all demands in a limitless and indiscriminate way, nor would the recipients wish them

to be supplied if it involved the destruction of other things which they value or the commitment of large resources for which there are better uses.”

Plowden’s 1972 Book “Towns Against Traffic” should be required reading for all who are interested in understanding the flawed logic that is the foundation of conventional transportation planning. The Mississippi experience not only shows the extent to which “predict and provide” planning is embedded into the system, but it also fully demonstrates the pernicious effect of this approach to planning on any attempt to advance urbanism on a regional basis.

The lesson for me is that the CNU needs to make a concerted and full-scale effort to challenge the “predict and provide” approach to transportation planning. Trying to accommodate or to work around this fundamental flaw in the system will not get us to our goal. And it is not just the transportation establishment that needs to be challenged.

Recently, the mayor of Biloxi observed that we need the big bridge because of the “tremendous growth we’ll see in the next three to five years.” In other words, even though the DOT’s numbers shows no increase in traffic volume on the bridge over the last 10 years during a period of rapid growth, the mayor and many of his constituents still hold to the belief that vehicle traffic and economic growth are linked in some inextricable and immutable manner. This leads me to conclude that we also need to focus on developing methodology and language that will serve to engage and educate the general public on the true nature of urban and transportation planning.

At the Kansas City summit we made a good start at addressing some of these transportation planning issues. My experience in Mississippi suggests that we need to make transportation planning reform the number one issue on our agenda.

** Judge for yourself who won the poetry slam at www.cnu.org/bridgezilla.*

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ROADBLOCKS ■ FROM PAGE 1

2. The current functional classification system is entrenched in government codes and manuals, but lacks an adequate palette of street types to assist designers of walkable TND thoroughfares.

Current classifications support the motor vehicle function as primary and cannot address walking, biking or transit as a primary mobility function on a given street, regardless of the context envisioned for the neighborhood.

Early in the manual’s development, a decision was made to use existing functional classification definitions of arterial, collector and local streets as a framework for defining new walkable thoroughfare functions. This strategy was meant to minimize opposition. Other classifications including boulevards, avenues and lanes that allow other modes to serve the primary mobility function should augment the existing definitions. By adding new functional thoroughfare types, a more diverse and meaningful system of classifications would have been available to designers.

3. Attempts were made to include pedestrian functions within the existing classification system. A layered set of definitions emerged, blending arterial labels and primary pedestrian functions. However, this hybrid system would only confuse designers regarding the basic function being served by each thoroughfare. This mixing of thoroughfare functions within facilities of the same

name has already led to considerable confusion in working committees. This will also create confusion for the average designer and/or government regulator. Clearly the cost of this technical confusion far outweighs the difficulty of introducing new walkable thoroughfare concepts.

4. As an example of the resulting confusion generated by the layered definitions above, the manual’s design speed recommendations are incorrect and have very negative implications for agencies and developers operating within a walkable community design context. Text and table recommendations call for design speeds set 5 miles per hour over the target speed. This practice is correct in high-speed, rural context areas. It is not appropriate for the lower speed environments so vital to greater pedestrian and bicycle safety. Higher design speeds simply create higher operating speeds, not a “higher factor of safety” for the vehicles. The recommendation’s true cost is reduced safety for pedestrians.

While this document represents progress in achieving some goals of CNU, there are significant outstanding issues with design definitions and criteria that require resolution before the document can help create more livable, pedestrian-oriented communities.

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