

Integrating Sustainability with Transport Asset Management Processes: Governance of Intergovernmental Decision Making on Prioritizing Transport Projects

ABSTRACT

For enabling the integration of sustainability considerations in transport asset management processes, this study assesses the critical role of governance of intergovernmental decision making, which is undertaken by state and regional agencies to prioritize transportation projects for STIPs (State Transportation Implementation Plans) required by federal legislation. We hypothesize that the criterion of “system preservation” dominates the selection and implementation of transportation projects in the current governance network. In contrast, environmental sustainability related criteria are under-emphasized in project prioritization processes. We test this hypothesis by statistically modeling the STIP project prioritization processes between Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) and Vermont’s Agency of Transportation (V-Trans) for two project classes between 2006 and 2010: roadways and traffic operations. Focus groups, interviews, and analysis of CCMPO and V-Trans project prioritization data informed the statistical modeling of complex inter-governmental and technical decision making processes undertaken by this intergovernmental governance network. We find a statistically significant effect of “system preservation” criterion on project prioritization scores, while the projects that score better on environmental sustainability criteria in CCMPO’s assessment are under-prioritized by V-Trans. We discuss the implications of these findings on the need to modify the governance of intergovernmental decision making processes for prioritizing transport projects if sustainability considerations are to be seriously integrated with transport asset management and investment decision making processes.

