

**Public Decision Making for Transport Projects:
The Case of the CALTRAIN Downtown San Francisco Extension Project**

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a case study of the public input process used to refine alternatives for extending commuter rail service to a new station in downtown San Francisco and describes its applicability to other large-scale transportation improvement projects such as new transportation projects in the Alpine region. The paper also outlines problems associated with the public involvement approach and suggests various improvements.

At the case study's outset there were two major build alternatives with numerous design options. Through the "design options screening" process, the number of build alternatives was reduced to one and the number of design options was reduced significantly. Reducing the scope of the study enabled resources to be focused on addressing the remaining critical questions in development of the draft environmental impact statement. The design options screening process also helped focus public discussion and the ability of decision-makers to concentrate on the issues critical to their constituents. The design options screening process consists of breaking the design options into a series of questions, providing detailed information about each of the questions, and encouraging the public to weigh in on the questions. The process was very successful at focusing public involvement and in allowing the policy board to make decisions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today, public input is a key component of the transportation planning process, but it was not always this way. Not many years ago transportation planning was dominated by the ‘Great Man’ theory where one person (or agency) could pretty much decide what infrastructure would be built, how it would be built and where it would be built. A good example of this style is Robert Moses in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s. However, in most countries those days are gone forever.

The Great Man style of planning was not abandoned because it did not work – one of its best qualities in fact was that it worked – but rather because the public became concerned with the impacts these projects had on the environment and on their quality of life. San Francisco’s freeway revolt in the late 1950s was caused by the environmental, social and economic impacts that such single-minded projects have on a city. That the impacts of freeways was recognized first in a city like San Francisco is not surprising – building a freeway that blocks that city from its waterfront was an affront to almost everyone. The impacts of many other projects were not so clear and therefore not recognized immediately.

In San Francisco the city government stopped the state’s freeway building program, because freeway planners had ignored project impacts. Similar actions were taking place throughout the developed world in all different types of infrastructure planning and planners realized that they needed to start working with the public to get their projects completed. In simple terms public involvement became incorporated into the planning process to gain the public support needed to facilitate project implementation. Public support was obtained by evaluating and addressing project impacts – in a process that focused on public involvement – before infrastructure decisions were made. In essence, the public had gained the ability to stop projects, so to be successful projects needed public support.

Part of the public’s control over infrastructure projects was that the public generally controls the project funding process. This might be directly through voter referendums on specific projects (for example in Switzerland), or indirectly through election of public officials with similar spending priorities.

Some consider this public power problematic. How often do you hear something like, “What we really need today is someone like Robert Moses. He could get things done.” In fact, while much of the infrastructure built by great planners was well done, when one looks closely at many of these projects – especially those built more recently – one realizes that they are relicts of a past age. They generally focus on one thing (e.g. moving traffic) at the expense of all other things (e.g. neighborhood cohesion) and so you find freeways cutting through cities creating a wasteland all around them. (Caro, Robert; *The Power Broker*; 1960*) Thus a third reason for public input is to improve the project by reducing impacts and sometimes re-thinking the whole project.

The public input process was designed to provide people with early access to the decision-making process for major infrastructure projects. It enables them to identify impacts that project proponents may forget or consider unimportant, and to ask the sponsoring agency to change or reject the project. Providing early access to the process is important because, since the public has the ability to stop projects, a significant amount of money and time can be saved by involving the public early, as opposed to the case where the public just says no at the end of a purely technical analysis.

Most government agencies have developed regulations requiring public involvement and defining how and when it should take place in the planning process. In most cases these regulations should be considered minimum standards for public involvement. This may strike planners as problematic, some feel that the regulations already provide too much involvement, but as outlined above there are three important reasons for adopting a strong public involvement process. In summary these reasons are:

- Better Project – Involving the public can create a better project since the public will approach the problem from a different (non-technical) perspective; projects can be improved by listening to the public.
- Feasible Project – The public has many ways of stopping a project. Working with the public provides information for designers need to make the project acceptable to the public and therefore feasible.
- Project Funding – In many cases the public will be asked to pay for the improvement in some way. Working with the public on the project's design will increase the likelihood that the public will agree to pay for the project.

This paper describes a case study of public involvement in a transportation planning process carried out in San Francisco between 1995 and 1997. A decision was made early in that study to focus on public involvement in order to obtain the necessary public support for the project – extending a commuter rail line to a new downtown terminal. This decision was made because the project had been studied many times, but never built.

The paper is organized into four chapters, this introduction, presentation of the case study, an analysis of case study conclusions regarding public involvement, and finally a chapter that outlines findings from the case study that would be applicable to the Alpine Transportation Planning process.

2. CASE STUDY: CALTRAIN DOWNTOWN EXTENSION STUDY

This chapter presents a case study of the public input process for the Caltrain Downtown San Francisco Extension Study. In order to provide a background for the case study the chapter begins with a description of the Caltrain commuter rail system, an outline of the environmental impact statement planning process in the United States, and a summary of the project's previous planning studies. The detailed case study follows.

2.1 Caltrain Commuter Rail System

The Caltrain commuter rail system provides rail service along a 77-mile corridor from Santa Clara County to San Francisco. The corridor contains one of the Bay Area's densest concentrations of jobs and population including the city of San Jose, Silicon Valley, Palo Alto (home of Stanford University), the rapidly developing area of San Mateo county along the San Francisco Bay, San Francisco International Airport, and the south east portion of San Francisco.

Caltrain currently operates 80 trains each weekday, most service is provided during the peak periods and in the peak direction (towards San Francisco in the morning) although Caltrain operates service every half-hour service in the non-peak periods and carries heavy loads all along the route. The Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB) operates Caltrain. The JPB is made up of representatives of the three counties served by the commuter trains: San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara. JPB members are elected officials who are appointed to serve on Caltrain's governing board.

Passenger service has operated on this corridor since the late 1860's. One major problem with the service is that its terminal station is located approximately 1.25 miles from San Francisco's downtown core – the region's major destination and the Bay Area's transportation hub. Consequently, it has been a long-standing objective to extend the commuter rail service to downtown San Francisco. Over the years many

different plans for building a new downtown station have been considered, but for one reason or another all failed.

This case study describes the planning process for the latest attempt to build a new downtown San Francisco commuter rail terminal. This process began in 1995 and is just being completed in mid-2002. The case study focuses on the public involvement process used in the first stage of planning between 1995 and 1997.

2.2 Environmental Impact Statement Process

There are many different planning processes used in the United States for different types of projects and at different stages of project analysis. Almost all types of planning include public involvement and many require specific public involvement processes set forth in laws and regulations. This section presents a very simplified explanation of the planning process used in the Caltrain Downtown Extension study, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

An EIS is required for all major infrastructure projects that need funding from the United States government, therefore it is one of the most important planning documents. The EIS is normally the last in a series of planning studies designed to move from conceptual planning to approval of a specific project. The term 'project' is used in an EIS to mean anything from an infrastructure improvement to a new government policy.

An EIS is prepared by a sponsoring federal agency. Sometimes the federal agency prepares the EIS itself, but normally, especially in the case of transportation projects, a local agency manages the study for the federal agency. In order to begin an EIS, regional, state, and federal officials must approve of the study. The federal government has many different regulations governing how an EIS must be prepared including technical analysis techniques and the public involvement process.

In its simplest terms, an EIS describes the environmental and social impacts of a proposed project. The EIS contains a description of the problem to be solved, describes various alternatives for solving the problem, and then presents the impacts of these alternatives. The EIS usually starts with what is termed a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) that has surfaced through previous planning processes.

The first step in the EIS study process is a public meeting that describes the problem, alternatives to be studied, potential impacts and the process that will be followed in the study. Following the public meeting the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is prepared based on a series of technical studies that focus on each main impact area (e.g. transportation impacts). The DEIS outlines the problem, the alternatives and then evaluates the impacts of alternatives. The DEIS is reviewed by the public and other interested parties (government agencies, businesses etc.).

Following public review of the DEIS, the sponsoring agency uses the analysis results and public input to refine the locally preferred alternative and to identify the need for any additional impact analysis. The refined LPA is then evaluated and additional impact analyses are prepared. This information is presented in the project's Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). A public hearing is held on the FEIS and then the project can be approved by the sponsoring agency. Once the federal government agrees that the FEIS adequately describes the project's impacts it can approve the FEIS. At this point the project is eligible for federal funds.

The EIS process is time consuming and involved. The U.S. government and courts have developed many different legal and technical regulations governing the process. Public involvement is a key part of the

process and there are many specific requirements that have been developed to ensure that all members of the public and impacted parties have the opportunity to participate in the project decision-making process.

The many regulations regarding public involvement in the planning process serve to provide a kind of floor for the minimum required public involvement, but allow flexibility and innovation in the process used for a given study. This paper describes some lessons learned in the Caltrain San Francisco Downtown Extension EIS that should be considered for other controversial and complicated transportation studies.

2.3 Previous Caltrain Downtown Extension Studies

San Francisco has a very concentrated downtown business and shopping district; unfortunately the Caltrain terminal is approximately 1.25 miles away. This means that Caltrain customers must walk or transfer to other public transit to complete their journey downtown. The buses and trams customers use are often caught in traffic congestion and provide unreliable connections, particularly during the evening peak, when customers are rushing to catch specific express trains.

Since 1962 the Caltrain corridor has been the subject of more than 20 major transportation analyzes many of which focused on extending the train to downtown San Francisco. In 1975, the Peninsula Transit Alternatives Project (PENTAP) studied various methods for improving mass transit on the San Francisco peninsula and recommended that commuter rail be extended to downtown San Francisco.

In the early 1980s, the state transportation department (Caltrans) took over operating the commuter rail service from the private sector (Southern Pacific Railway) and changed its name to Caltrain. In 1984, Caltrans completed a terminal relocation study that recommended building a new underground terminal in downtown San Francisco adjacent to the Transbay Bus Terminal. The proposed terminal was almost built, but the economy changed and plans were shelved.

In the meantime transportation problems in Caltrain's market area worsened. Therefore, in 1985, the California State Legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 74 (SCR 74), which mandated completion of a Peninsula Mass Transit Study. This study evaluated nine systems-level solutions to peninsula transportation problems. It recommended both extending Caltrain to downtown San Francisco and extending Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) service to San Francisco Airport. Importantly, the study also identified the most significant problems in implementing these major projects: financial and institutional responsibilities.

Following completion of the SCR 74 study, interest groups favoring the Caltrain extension argued with others favoring the BART extension over the effectiveness and financing of the two projects. There was significant controversy because many thought that there would not be enough funding for both these major projects. However, in 1987, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the Bay Area's regional transportation planning agency, passed Resolution 1876, which set forth a plan to fund both projects.

After passage of MTC Resolution 1876, more detailed evaluation of the Caltrain extension alternatives began. In 1987 the newly formed Peninsula Corridor Joint Study Board (the JPB's predecessor agency) completed the Caltrain Interim Upgrade Study. This study recommended extending Caltrain downtown and evaluated a number of terminal locations.

In 1988, building on results of the Interim Upgrade Study, the JPB received authorization to complete an environmental impact statement (EIS) on the downtown extension project. Work began in 1989 and included an evaluation of at least six downtown terminal sites. The study was completed in 1993; it

recommended the Second and Market streets and Transbay Terminal sites as most feasible. Unfortunately the project cost was too high to be funded under the MTC Resolution 1876's financial plan so a new study was undertaken to find a lower-cost project.

In 1993-94, the JPB and MTC took a fresh look at many of the previous alternative terminal locations and considered new ideas such as replacing Caltrain's heavy rail service with light rail vehicles that could operate in San Francisco's Market Street subway. In all nine alternatives and numerous design options for each alternative were considered. Upon study completion the JPB, MTC, and the city of San Francisco agreed on two alternatives for evaluation in a new EIS: a locally preferred alternative (underground terminal at Market and Beale streets) and a fallback alternative (above ground terminal at a remodeled Transbay Terminal). (Figure 1) Preparation of this EIS is the subject of this case study.

2.4 Caltrain Downtown Extension EIS: Public Information Process

The Caltrain Downtown Extension Environmental Impact Statement planning process began in the spring of 1995. Preparation of the study provided the JPB with an opportunity to evaluate the previous planning efforts and to consider what had gone wrong. Why was so logical a project – extending a commuter rail system into the heart of one of the most transit dependent city in the world – being stymied? The JPB decided that there were three main problems

1. **Technical Analysis** – Previous studies had not paid enough attention to technical and construction methods aimed at reducing project impacts on neighborhoods;
2. **Public Understanding** – There was not enough public understanding of the project and its importance; and
3. **Funding** – There had not been enough support to secure funding for previous projects.

The JPB decided that the new EIS would address these problems directly by using the public information process to obtain valuable ideas from constituents, to communicate information to them, and to use this process to help define the alternatives and options – thus generating the public support necessary to support and obtain funding for the project.

The public involvement process was designed to take ideas from the public, elected officials, key decision-makers, and public agency staff members and to use these ideas to help determine the scope of the technical analyses and to assist in developing the project's financial plan. Technical information developed by the project engineering and planning consultants was translated into language that could be understood by the general public and was presented in a manner that made it easy for the public to participate. Finally, the visibility of a public process that was truly two-way gave the project itself greater credibility and importance in the community.

The following sections outline the use of public involvement in each phase of the Caltrain Downtown Extension study.

2.5 Initial Public Input

This section outlines the initial public input on the Caltrain study and how results of this input were integrated into the overall study. The important point is that the JPB decided to use results of the public input process to help detail the study's technical analysis as well as to refine the alternatives under

consideration. The JPB's main objective was to develop a project that would have sufficient popular support to be implemented.

Project Initiation

The first step in any public involvement effort is to announce that the study is beginning and to make certain that those affected know about it. For the Caltrain downtown extension study, an extensive public information effort was made. A study newsletter was mailed to more than 2,500 people and distributed door-to-door to another 5,000. Canvassers distributed the newsletter and met with interested residents and business owners along the proposed route to talk with them about the project and invite them to a public meeting.

Three public meetings were held during June 1995 to discuss the study. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the alternatives being studied in detail and to hear comments and ideas from the public. The meetings were held in different locations and at different times of day to maximize the number of people who could attend. The newsletter also encouraged people to write or telephone a toll free number to comment on the project. Information was developed in several different languages and provisions were made for providing information to disabled people (e.g. for the deaf or blind).

On a parallel track, the JPB's Project Manager and the study's public input consultants completed approximately 40 one-on-one stakeholder interviews with key decision makers. The purpose of these meetings was to describe the project alternatives, discuss the study scope of work and to solicit advice and opinions from people interested in the project. As a result of these interviews, an atmosphere of trust developed between the project manager and stakeholders. This atmosphere of trust was extremely helpful in keeping the project moving through the planning process, a non-trivial accomplishment in such a highly bureaucratic field.

Results of Initial Public Input

The initial public involvement process generated many comments and suggestions for the study. Since the JPB had decided to use the public involvement process to help generate support for the project, they were willing to consider refining the study scope to make use of these public comments. There were three major areas where the public recommended changes to the study, they were:

1. Drop Alternatives – Several alternatives were completely unacceptable to the public;
2. Add Alternatives – The public suggested several alternatives that appeared to have merit;
3. Increase Study Scope-Improve Coordination – The public involvement indicated that the Caltrain study needed to be closely coordinated with a concurrent study for replacing the Transbay Bus Terminal.

Following completion of the initial public involvement effort, staff developed a revised study plan that addressed these issues. The revised plan evaluated a new set of alternatives and increased the scope of the impact evaluation. The JPB approved the revised plan and directed staff to move forward with preparation of the DEIS technical studies. The following sections outline how the issues raised by the public were addressed in the technical studies.

Public Recommendations on Alternatives

The public involvement process had the most obvious impact on the selection of alternatives for evaluation in the study. As outlined above two alternatives had been approved for evaluation in the

DEIS; both alternatives had numerous design options associated with them. For example, the Main/Beale terminal alternative had three options for routes to the site.

Following the initial public involvement, JPB staff and consultants evaluated the public's alternative recommendations in light of the initial technical analyses and public opinion. In some cases the public was totally opposed to an alternative while in others they suggested some good new ideas. As a direct result of this public input, the JPB voted to modify the alternatives being evaluated in the study. They eliminated the Brannan Street alignment options, agreed to study a portal at Seventh Street (longer subway), agreed to evaluate constructing a new Transbay Terminal (rather than remodeling the existing building), and agreed to study a more direct tunnel alignment to the Transbay Terminal.

Refining the study alternatives was a big step for the JPB since some of the changes were major and especially because the alternatives had been agreed-to by the entire region's transportation planning hierarchy before the study was allowed to begin. Changing the alternatives could have meant that the JPB would need to start over and go to the end of the line of EIS studies being carried out in the region. However, the JPB agreed to drop some options and add others because they believed that this would both improve the project and help increase project momentum by showing that they were listening to the public.

The lead story in the project's second newsletter, entitled "The Community Has Spoken," described the changes that had been made in response to public input and included seven maps illustrating the alternatives and design options that would be evaluated in the DEIS.

Study Coordination and Complexity

At the same time that the JPB was preparing the Caltrain study, Caltrans and the city of San Francisco were studying replacement options for the Transbay Terminal. The terminal had been constructed in the late 1930s as part of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, and needed significant seismic and building code upgrades. The terminal had originally been built for the electric trains that used the lower deck of the Bay Bridge but was converted for bus use when the trains were replaced.

The purpose of the bus terminal study was to evaluate alternatives to simply upgrading the building; instead it was a conceptual study focused on ways to both significantly improve the bus terminal and increase the area's development potential. The existing terminal and aerial access ramps were considered a strong barrier to development; in fact, the terminal's access loop was referred to as the "ring of death" by property developers.

Coordinating the two studies was difficult for many reasons including study focus, stage in the planning process, and most importantly, lead agency. The Caltrain study was a detailed evaluation of a major transportation improvement being carried out by a regional public transit agency while the bus terminal study was a conceptual land-use and transportation planning study being carried out jointly by the city and state department of Transportation.

While there were good reasons for keeping the studies separate, it was clear from the initial public input that having two studies in the same general area on the same general topic (transportation) led to confusion. Furthermore, the public argued, there were many opportunities for synergy in the two projects. These arguments made sense to the JPB who directed staff to work in close coordination with the Transbay study.

The first step in coordinating the studies was to help the public understand the relationship between the studies. The key intersection between the studies was the Transbay Terminal site. Both studies had two alternative sites for their respective transportation facility one of which was at the Transbay site. There were multiple combinations of different Caltrain – bus terminal alternatives. The most logical way of looking at the projects together was to develop an illustrated summary of the combination alternatives and how they might change the area. Therefore, the JPB and the city developed a brochure designed to provide a vision for the new train/bus terminal and surrounding area.

The “City at the Crossroads” brochure described the need for new train and bus terminals as well as summarizing and illustrating six different train/bus combinations. Each train/bus combination had a three dimensional architectural illustration (from the same vantage point) and four plans/sections of the train and bus facility. This brochure was used by the public and policy boards to understand the different train/bus terminal locations and their relationship.

2.6 Refining the Alternatives: The Design Options Screening Process

Once the JPB had approved the refined study plan (early summer 1995) the consultants began preparation of the DEIS technical studies. These studies analyzed the alternatives and design options in detail. They evaluated ground conditions, construction techniques, terminal designs, track alignments, as well as operating and capital costs. Given the need for close cooperation with the city’s Transbay Terminal study, the JPB also completed a detailed technical analysis of design options associated with each of the combination Caltrain/bus terminal alternatives.

As the technical studies were being completed it became clear that the number and complexity of the different alternatives and design options would make it very difficult for the public and decision-makers to understand the alternatives. This was viewed as a major problem since success of the project depended on having strong public support. Therefore, project staff had to develop a good way to present the alternatives and to guide the public into helping identify the best alternatives for more detailed analysis in the DEIS document.

The essential problem being confronted was how to involve the public in the decision making process when there were many different combinations of options under consideration and relevant information about those options was presented in highly technical studies. Specifically, the Caltrain project included the following options:

1. Two east-west alignment options;
2. Two portal locations;
3. Two construction techniques;
4. Two north/south alignment options;
5. Three terminal configurations at the Market/Beale terminal site;
6. Two terminal configurations at the Transbay Terminal site;
7. Two storage yard sites, and
8. Four propulsion options.

The JPB solved this problem by developing a public input process that they called the “Design Options Screening Process.” The process is outlined below.

Design Options Screening Process

The Design Options Screening Process essentially broke the Caltrain project design options into eight separate questions and presented technical information on each one in an easy to understand format. The goal of this process was to provide information to the public and decision-makers that would enable them to identify which design options they thought should be carried further in the study.

As an example of the DOS process, Question 1 was, “Which east west alignment and portal location should be selected? ... Townsend Street (Portal at Fourth Street); Townsend Street (Portal at Seventh Street); and King Street (Portal at Sixth Street)?” For each question the background information was provided (e.g. a definition of the word portal) and information was provided about each design option (e.g. a portal at Sixth Street would cost \$5 million more than a portal at Seventh Street).

Three levels of information were prepared in the DOS process. The simplest level was presented in the study’s Newsletter 3, which summarized the questions and answers. Next, the Design Options Screening Report (DOS Report) was a 70-page report that presented each of the questions and answers in more detail. Finally, the technical studies that presented detailed results of engineering and planning analyses.

Newsletter 3 was sent to the project mailing list and distributed at many public meetings, San Francisco commissions and regional policy board meetings. The DOS Report was mailed to approximately 500 people and copies were made available at all meetings. The technical reports were made available by request, although the DOS Report provided sufficient technical information so there were relatively few requests for the technical reports.

Newsletter 3 and the DOS Report were issued to the public in September 1995. In October and November several public meetings were held to discuss the DOS questions, the JPB held three public workshops to answer questions about the DOS report, and many presentations were made to various San Francisco city commissions, regional transit groups and advisory committees. The objective was to encourage groups to understand the questions and make recommendations to the JPB on how to proceed with the study. It was especially important to strongly link the Caltrain and Transbay Bus Terminal study at this point in both studies.

Caltrain used the DOS process format to structure all of its community outreach in this stage of the study. Using a consistent format was important because of the number and complexity of alternatives and design options. One measure of success was that the comment letters and testimony form the public also followed the question format. The public simply discussed issues associated with the questions and recommended an answer. Some answered all the questions, others focused only on the questions important to them.

Furthermore, the DOS process format also improved the quality of oral presentations to the various governmental policy boards whose members were unfamiliar with the Caltrain project. One could provide the big picture and then focus on questions that were important to the group being addressed. For example, most of the San Francisco commissions were very concerned about the train terminal location so discussions with them focused on that question.

Design Options Screening Process Results

In January 1996, the JPB acted on the eight decisions. There had been significant public comment on the design options including comments from three San Francisco commissions, several citizens advisory committees, and many individuals at the December JPB meeting. An interesting aspect of the public comment, due in part to the structure provided by the DOS process, was that it was well organized and generally positive rather than the unfocused and negative comments that often were made at the JPB meetings.

The JPB's ability to act on the eight design option questions is a testament to the success of the DOS process. In fact there was a near consensus on all of the decisions, even a very significant decision to eliminate the Market/Beale site alternative from further analysis. The Market/Beale site had been San Francisco's and the JPB's locally preferred alternative at the start of the study, but the preponderance of public sentiment and technical analyses argued against it. The design options screening process allowed the JPB to eliminate this site relatively easily; other processes such as ones that tied options into several compete alternatives might not have led to such an outcome because of the project's complexity.

Newsletter 4 outlined the JPB's decisions and reasoning on the design options decisions. While significant progress had been made in terms of eliminating infeasible options, several alternative options were still under consideration. These alternative options were fully evaluated in the DEIS.

2.7 Preparation of the DEIS

The JPB used results of the public input process to further refine the alternatives under consideration and to increase the scope of impact analysis in the DEIS. Following their decisions, the JPB directed staff to resume the technical analysis on the new set of alternatives and to prepare additional impact analysis on Transbay Terminal replacement and tunneling routes that would avoid the South Beach Neighborhood of San Francisco. The analysis of refined alternatives was similar to that completed in the previous step and so is not described in this section. Instead, this section focuses on the additional technical analysis requested in the public involvement process that was prepared for the DEIS.

The JPB's decision to focus on an underground train station at the Transbay Terminal narrowed the number of possible train/bus terminal location combinations. More importantly, it meant that building the Caltrain extension definitely required tearing down the existing Transbay Bus Terminal. Since that would be a major impact of the Caltrain extension, construction of a new bus terminal was evaluated as a project mitigation measure in the DEIS.

The DEIS presented an evaluation of four bus terminal mitigation options: a new bus terminal building at the Transbay Terminal site or the Main/Howard site or a surface bus terminal at the two sites. Adding the bus terminal mitigation option to the Caltrain study added to the complexity of the study – ironically, just as the number of Caltrain design options had been reduced through the DOS process.

The JPB explained the bus terminal mitigation options to the public in Newsletter 5 and at two public meetings. The first meeting described bus terminal operations, and the second described joint development opportunities. Both meetings were held as panel discussions with experts presenting information on the alternatives and then the public asking questions and making comments.

While there were many logical reasons for including the bus terminal mitigation measure in the Caltrain DEIS, one of the most important was that the public wanted it included. The Caltrain DEIS was moving forward more quickly than the bus terminal study and Caltrain had more technical resources available. At this point, the city of San Francisco and many citizens groups wanted the JPB to include the bus terminal in the Caltrain study, in contrast to several years earlier when they were opposed to linking the projects too closely. The JPB was able to show that it was listening and was sensitive to public input by including replacement of the Transbay Terminal in the Caltrain study. A full description of the bus terminal issues was included in the DEIS.

The second area where the JPB directed consultants to prepare an expanded analysis was in the South Beach neighborhood. The Caltrain extension would travel underground on the western border of San

Francisco's South Beach neighborhood. Residents and businesses in the South Beach area were very concerned about the construction impacts, especially because they had lived with the impact of some three years of reconstruction of the Embarcadero Roadway.

The neighborhood used the DOS process to constructively influence the process in two ways: first, they led the opposition to the Market/Beale alternative, which would have required cut and cover construction through their neighborhood; and second, they asked the JPB to evaluate mined tunnel construction techniques that could be used to minimize impact on their neighborhood. Based on input from this neighborhood, the JPB agreed to complete a comprehensive geotechnical analysis on ways to reduce the construction impacts to the neighborhood while utilizing safe and efficient mined-tunneling techniques. Results of the geotechnical study were included in the DEIS and summarized in the Newsletter 6.

Following completion of the more detailed technical studies the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was prepared. The DEIS summarized the project's purpose, the refined group of alternatives, the impacts of the alternatives, and mitigation measures for impacts.

2.8 DEIS Publication and Public Involvement

The sponsoring agency has two main objectives for the DEIS; first, to ensure that all the relevant environmental impacts have been identified and accurately described; and, second, to assist it in selecting the Locally Preferred Alternative. The Final Environmental Impact Statement makes needed revisions to the impact analyses and evaluates the LPA in more detail. The sponsoring agency uses public comments to assist in both respects.

While the design options screening process had narrowed the options that were analyzed in the DEIS there were still a number of alternatives and design options under consideration. Because of the success of the DOS process, Caltrain decided to use a similar process to help it select a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the FEIS. A series of five questions were developed in the DEIS for selection of the LPA:

1. East-west alignment options along Townsend Street,
2. Tunnel alignments through the South Beach Neighborhood,
3. Alternative bus terminal options,
4. Storage yard sites, and
5. Three propulsion options.

These five questions were described in Newsletter 6 and in the DEIS released in March 1997. As in the DOS process presentations were made to many different groups and commissions, many of whom weighed in with their recommendations on each question. Caltrain also held three public workshops to present information, answer questions on alternatives, and to obtain public input on the questions.

In general there was consensus that the technical analysis of impacts was adequate, although there were still concerns from the Transbay bus terminal's main tenant and the South Beach neighborhood. These concerns could be characterized as of a political nature – generally having to do with a different issue (i.e. the bus terminal tenant was concerned with operating subsidy rather than the Caltrain project per se).

In June and July 1997 the recently elected Mayor of San Francisco decided that he did not want to continue with the Caltrain extension project since he felt that it might compete for funding with other transit projects and could negatively impact land development in the Transbay Terminal area. Consequently he ordered the project stopped. The city's supervisors were unable to overcome the

mayor's veto. One and one half years later, following passage of a citizen's initiative supporting the Caltrain project, the mayor reconsidered his decision and decided to restart the environmental process.

The revised DEIS addressed the two main political issues identified by the public in the study's earlier phase: a much improved bus/train station building (a "Grand Central Terminal") as well as new tunneling routes designed to reduce impacts. The revised DEIS was issued in early 2002 and a decision on an LPA is expected in the summer 2002.

Web site references for Newsletter 6:

www.transitinfo.org/Caltrain/ANNC/otrt-3-97
www.transitinfo.org/Caltrain/ANNC/otrt-3-97/poster.html

3. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE CALTRAIN EXTENSION STUDY

This chapter describes some of the general lessons about public involvement in the transportation planning process from the Caltrain Downtown Extension Project case study. It includes a short analysis of what can be learned from the public involvement process, a description of various techniques used in Caltrain's public involvement process, seven specific recommendations for public involvement learned from the case study experience, and a short description of problems encountered in the case study.

3.1 Learning from Public Involvement

Public involvement should be considered as an integral input to the study process, as important to the study's success as more technical inputs such as engineering or market demand. The study process, in its most general sense, can be considered a learning process where learning takes place in different 'input areas.' Learned results from the public involvement process should be treated in exactly the same way as learned results from these other areas. For example, if an engineering analysis indicates that a given alternative is infeasible then that alternative is dropped; similarly if a public involvement process indicates that a given alternative should be dropped, it too should be dropped.

The exact type of learning that can take place in a good public involvement process depends upon the process and on what type of study is being prepared. It is especially important to understand what stage in the planning process the project is in to understand what type of learning can take place. Table 3-1 lists types of learning and when they can take place.

In summary, much can be learned from public involvement, although to be effective it is critical that the public involvement process be well planned, integrated into the study, and well carried out. The following sections outline some recommendations from the case study for successfully completing public involvement processes.

Table 3-1 Learning From Public Involvement			
What can be learned?	Why Important	Planning Stage	Techniques
Define Problem	Public often has different ideas about what the problem is and how to define it exactly. Rethinking problem definition often leads to new and innovative solutions.	Conceptual Studies, early in other studies	Brainstorming, Meetings, Stakeholder Interviews
Identify Alternatives	Public often can think of innovative solutions. Including solutions developed by the public can show that planners listened.	Early in study	Brainstorming, Meetings, Stakeholder Interviews, other techniques
Eliminate/ Refine Alternatives	Public input can be used to help refine alternatives and indicate when a solution is not politically feasible.	Throughout study	Meetings, Stakeholder Interviews, other techniques
Analysis Scope	Study needs to provide information that the public can use to evaluate study results. Public input can help define the extent and type of technical analysis of alternatives.	Early in study (best)	Brainstorming, Meetings, Stakeholder Interviews, other techniques
Improve Alternatives & Mitigation Measures	Public can provide information on what is needed to make a project acceptable (i.e. mitigation measures)	Throughout study	Techniques vary in different stages of study. Early techniques include those above, later techniques include more formal comment procedures such as writing, public testimony.
Project Support	Public support often determines whether a project is implemented or not. Public support can be used as a tool to help guide study to solutions that are acceptable and therefore have a good chance of	Throughout study	Techniques vary in different stages of study.

	being implemented.		
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3.2 Public Involvement Lessons from Caltrain Case Study

From the start, public involvement was recognized as critical to the Caltrain study's success because there was not a strong general level of institutional and public support for the project and furthermore, the project had the potential for creating significant impacts on some individuals. The public participation process was designed to address these concerns by informing the public about the project, listening to their concerns on impacts, providing them with information specifically related to their concerns, and building public support for the project. The public involvement process also enabled the study sponsor to refine the study scope, reducing the number of alternatives in the study, which reduced the time and budget needed to complete the study.

This section describes public involvement lessons that can be drawn from the Caltrain case study.

1. Commit to a strong public involvement process.

In order for a public involvement program to be successful the sponsoring agency must make a commitment to using results of the public process to help guide the study. This means that public input should be considered in all phases of the study including:

- Problem Definition
- Alternative Identification
- Evaluation Scope
- Decision-Making

In return for making this commitment the sponsoring agency can benefit from better planning solutions and increased support for the ultimate project (or reduced opposition). Commitment means that the study sponsors and managers need to be committed to the importance of the public process (as expressed in terms of funding and time).

Today, public involvement is a commonly accepted part of the planning process, but too often it is perfunctory or done simply to meet government regulations. People can usually tell the difference between a serious and perfunctory process, and are much more likely to participate in a serious process. By keeping the public engaged in the process the project is less likely to be delayed at the end by lawsuits or regulatory processes from members of the public who claim their issues were not considered in the study.

Making a commitment to public involvement can be difficult, often the people providing input are directly impacted by the project and therefore they can become emotional and even irrational. The challenge is to develop public involvement techniques that help channel public input in constructive directions such as reducing impacts of alternatives or developing appropriate project mitigation measures. While a public involvement process may not change everyone's mind, it can help increase public understanding of the project and reduce project opposition.

In summary it is important to understand the two sides of public participation, that it can help improve the study and second, that ignoring the public can have severe consequences on study completion (in other

words delayed or rejected). It is for these reasons that study sponsors should commit themselves to a strong public process.

2. Structure the study to encourage public involvement.

The sponsoring agency must think creatively when developing the study workplan to ensure that meaningful public input is systematically built into all study phases. A good approach is to use public input to help make study decisions. This provides the sponsoring agency with good information about project acceptability and an opportunity to let the public assist it in the decision-making process. Caltrain's use of the Design Options Screening process was a good example of encouraging the public to participate in the decision-making process.

Caltrain adopted a study workplan designed to increase the amount and effectiveness of public involvement. This was done by thinking clearly about how and when the public information could help provide guidance to the study, thinking about how best to provide information necessary to help the public provide that guidance, thinking about when the public information could be most helpful, and then structuring the work tasks around these questions. Critically, Caltrain provided the time and study funding necessary to accomplish this public involvement program.

In summary, a study workplan should be developed that includes:

- A time schedule that allows the public to participate effectively;
- Tasks that the public can influence;
- Funding to communicate effectively with the public; and
- Many different types of feedback opportunities.

This workplan will probably change during the course of the study, but whenever it changes it is important to explicitly consider how to effectively involve the public.

3. Use advisory groups to guide study.

Organizing advisory groups is a good technique for public involvement. A good facilitator can work with diverse groups of people to develop ideas for the study. These groups can also be excellent sources of feedback on draft work products. There are many different types of advisory committees including citizens, technical staff members from affected organizations, policy board members, to name just three.

The Caltrain case study had a technical advisory committee but no citizens advisory committee. Instead existing citizens advisory committees for the public agencies involved in the study were used to facilitate public involvement. A conscious decision was made not to have a specific citizens advisory committee for the study due to the large number of existing citizens advisory committees in existence.

4. Develop a relationship with key project stakeholders.

Key stakeholders can be defined as people (or organizations) who can make a project happen or stop it. It is important to meet with stakeholders to understand their positions, solicit ideas and seek advice on study process. Individual meetings are important because stakeholders must often represent specific views in public, individual meetings make it easier for them to express thoughts directly in a non-confrontational environment. Furthermore, these meetings give them an opportunity to ask questions without the

potential for sounding dumb as they might if asking the same questions in a public meeting. Finally, these meetings involve the stakeholders more directly in the study – encouraging them to have some personal stake in the study’s outcome.

An additional reason for holding one-on-one interviews was that it helps build a personal relationship between study staff and stakeholders. This relationship proved to be very useful in the Caltrain study. Stakeholders felt that they had better access to the project manager, the project manager had a better understanding about particular stakeholder concerns, and an environment of trust that built up between stakeholders and the study.

5. Hold relevant and interesting public meetings.

Public meetings should be well organized, interesting, and provocative. Furthermore, people must believe that they are important in order to attend and participate. There are many types of public meetings from formal large group hearings to informal workshops with breakout groups. These different meeting formats can be combined into endless variations. The important thing is to choose a format that best achieves the meeting purpose.

Meeting management is critical to holding a successful meeting; it’s not simply announcing a meeting and finding a room. As with other highly specialized professions, there are many consultants who provide meeting management services to help plan, arrange and facilitate meetings. It is important that the meetings be closely coordinated with the study’s communications effort (see below).

In the Caltrain case study, workshops were held that combined public meetings (presentations to and comments from the entire group) as well as small group discussions and information exhibits on different aspects of the project. A significant amount of time was spent working closely with the public involvement consultant planning the meetings to make them successful.

6. Break down complicated issues into smaller ones.

This lesson is true of many endeavors in life, but is especially important for improving public involvement in transportation planning (and other technical processes). Many transportation projects are very complicated and difficult for laymen to comprehend. Often a good strategy is to break these projects into smaller pieces that are easier to understand.

In the Caltrain study a process called Design Options Screening (DOS) was used to help the public understand the different alternatives and design options. The basic technique was to break the alternatives into logical components, to provide the public with detailed information on the components, and to encourage the public to provide input on all components of the alternatives. Caltrain’s governing board then used this public input to help it make decisions regarding study alternatives and analysis scope.

The DOS process accomplished three objectives; first, it enabled the public to effectively influence the study alternatives and analysis scope; second, it enabled Caltrain’s governing board to reduce study cost and duration by providing support for eliminating alternatives; and, finally, it showed the public that Caltrain was serious about public involvement by using public input to eliminate alternatives.

The key aspect of the DOS process that helped it achieve these objectives is that it encouraged the public to structure their comments in a manner useful to the Caltrain’s governing board. Furthermore, it enabled the public to focus on the important decisions, to make these decisions and then to proceed. There is

nothing so frustrating as processes that drag on because the decisions needed are not clearly articulated. It is especially important in a public process because the public has little patience for disorganized processes and will tune out of them – only to resurface at the end of the process and demand to know why they were not consulted.

In summary, the design options screening process proved to be a good technique for breaking the Caltrain project into smaller pieces so that the public could effectively influence the study. It did this using a structure that laid out specific questions about project alternatives and provided information designed to help the public answer the questions. The public could then use the same structure to communicate its input to the governing board.

An important part of the Caltrain DOS process success was the fact that the information was communicated in a very logical and clear manner (see below).

7. Prepare logical and clear study information.

A strong communications program is necessary for a good public involvement process. The particular communications products (i.e. newsletters, webpages, advertisements, media spots, etc.) should be carefully considered to be those most appropriate for the particular need. For example, a newspaper advertisement might be the best way to get many people to attend a study kick-off meeting, while e-mail might be the best way to keep interested members of the public regularly informed about study progress. The study workplan should pay particular attention to the communications needed in each phase of the study. These communications should be designed in conjunction with the particular task at hand.

Public communications is very important to study success and therefore it is recommended that professional communications experts help develop the communications plan as well as produce the actual communications products. Many communications consultants specialize in particular types of planning studies, their experience can be very helpful to the study. Since meeting management is part of the study communications package, meetings should be very closely coordinated with the other communications products. Often the same consultants can provide both types of services.

All communications products must present the necessary information clearly and logically. This is a very difficult job especially for the study's technical staff members since they are often highly specialized and use technical terms (another reason for using professional communications experts). The first step is deciding what information to present. A technical editor is good for working with study staff to separate important from unimportant information to communicate with the public. A side benefit is that study staff can profit from working with editors because it helps crystallize for them the important points thereby improving their ability to explain the study.

Once you know what you want to communicate it needs to be communicated logically and clearly. Communicating logically means structuring information in a way that helps make sense of the whole. A simple example would be when describing a process start with the first step. Presenting issues in a logical format is especially important when large issues are broken-down into smaller pieces, it must be clear how the pieces fit together. Caltrain's design options screening process is an example of structuring components in a logical manner that helped the public understand study alternatives.

Communicating clearly means well edited text presented in a clean and easy-to-read layout. Good editing is especially important when presenting technical information. In addition to being well edited, documents must be attractive and interesting to view. This calls for good graphics, illustrations and a

well-designed page layout. It is good to develop a consistent theme for publications to help the public develop a coherent image of the study.

There are two important pieces of information that should be part of every communications product: study status (process) and contact information. Study status means what stage the study is in, what comes next, and when the next opportunity for formal public input will take place. Providing the public with this type of information on study process helps keep them involved in the study, since to be involved they need to know how and when they can participate. Contact information consists of ways for the public to provide the study with feedback or ways to get more information on the study.

In the Caltrain study a detailed communications plan was part of the study workplan. This plan was updated regularly as new study issues arose and the study's scope changed. The Caltrain study used printed newsletters and intermediate reports to keep the public informed about study results and process. Caltrain spent significant time and money to prepare very clear and attractive public information. The study team was constantly praised for the high quality of newsletters, technical documentation and presentations. The high quality of these materials helped provide support for the project and encouraged the public to participate since it was easy to understand the issues and how to be part of the process. This quality was especially important for communicating the DOS process and information to the public.

In summary, all good public involvement programs require good communications. The best programs are well integrated into the overall study and are developed with strong professional assistance. Communications is extremely important and must be a high priority for the project manager.

3.3 Problems Encountered in Caltrain Case Study

When considering problems encountered in the Caltrain study one can start with the ultimate results; to paraphrase the old medical joke, the Caltrain Study Public Involvement Process went extremely well, but the project died. It would be more true to say that the patient was on life support for several years until public support built up to the degree that San Francisco's Mayor could no longer stop the project and now it is going forward again.

The first problem encountered by the Caltrain study then was that even with the excellent public involvement program the project was significantly delayed. The particular problem in the Caltrain case study was that a very powerful mayor took office in San Francisco in the middle of the Caltrain Downtown Extension Study. The mayor was influenced by a small group of property developers interested in developing their property quickly and were thus concerned only with short term impacts. The mayor vetoed the project and his political strength prevented the city legislature from overturning the veto. This problem came about for two reasons.

First, Caltrain's public involvement process was not able to 'crack' into the property owner group. The group had its own policy/technical consultant who controlled access to the group and filtered all the information to the group. In these particular circumstances it is hard to believe that this group could have been convinced to support the project, but their opposition could have been more effectively countered by strong political support for the project. This leads directly to the second reason; Caltrain's advocates (members of the public) were unable to transform their general support to political support when the mayor vetoed the project. In the next year and a half they developed a ballot initiative that was approved by over 70% of San Francisco voters, but that was too late for the original study. If the project supporters had had more political muscle in 1997 the project would not have been vetoed. This illustrates a classic planning problem, namely how far should planning studies go in the political realm. While taking an active political role in moving the project forward would be inappropriate, the Caltrain process could have

better communicated the changing political situation to the public. Interested members of the public then could take action in the political arena.

A second closely related problem with the Caltrain study, and one similar to many projects, is that it proved impossible to get a large cross section of the public interested in the project. The sector of the public that was interested enough in participating in the process were either directly impacted or members of advocacy groups that generally supported such projects. The former included those who opposed or supported the project because of impacts that would directly affect them and the latter included environmental and good planning groups. It was not until the issue had been put on the ballot that the general public weighed in on the project and enabled the study to continue.

Caltrain implemented a very significant public involvement program and still was not able to attract the general public to the study. Consequently the only remaining study approach was to work with those who impacted to refine the project and make it less objectionable by refining alternatives and developing mitigation measures. As outlined above this approach proved not enough to overcome the property owner opposition and new mayor's political strength.

4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ALPINE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

This chapter presents recommendations for public involvement in the case of the Alpine Transportation Planning process. The first section outlines key differences between the Alpine case and the Caltrain case study, the second presents some particular recommendations for applying the case study recommendations developed in Chapter 3 to the Alpine case, and the final section outlines some conclusions.

4.1 Alpine Transportation Planning – Case Study Differences

There are three major differences between the Caltrain Downtown San Francisco Extension study and the Alpine Transportation Planning process. These are the study scope, study complexity and geographic area. These differences and their implications on case study recommendations are outlined below.

Study Scope

The Caltrain study was in the last stages of the planning process while the Alpine transportation planning problem is in the conceptual planning stage. This means that there should be a much wider discussion of issues such as problem definition, study scope, and potential solutions (alternatives) than was necessary in the Caltrain study (which focused on refining and analyzing alternatives for a particular infrastructure project).

The first step in a planning study is defining the problem to be solved. In the case of the Alpine Transportation Planning problem this has not yet taken place. While defining the problem sounds simple, it can prove difficult because the more one learns about a problem the more linkages one sees with other problems, thus the problem becomes more complicated. This means that there are many different potential solutions to Alpine transportation problems ranging from regulatory to capital projects, all of which need to be considered in the study.

Initial ideas for problem definition can be obtained using brainstorming with stakeholders, advisory groups and the public. By listening closely to these brainstorming sessions study staff can get a good idea what the public sees as the major problems. Next a process similar to Caltrain's design options screening process could be used with the public to help refine the problem definition and study evaluation scope. Involving the public in defining the problem could be very helpful because of their tendency to think outside the box and because it will help identify publicly unacceptable ideas early in the study process.

A similar process could be used to identify alternatives for the study and the scope of the technical analysis. It is good to remember that the public often has the ability to suggest good alternatives since they are generally not starting from a technical viewpoint. Consequently this is one of the most useful portions of the public involvement process. In terms of study scope, consulting the public early makes sense because they know what information they will want in order to evaluate the study later in the process.

Once more detailed alternatives have been identified the Caltrain design options screening process could be followed more directly.

Study Complexity

Closely related to study scope is study complexity. The goal of the Caltrain study was to evaluate alternatives for a relatively well-defined project while the Alpine Transportation Planning problem is far more complex and will have a wide range of different alternative solutions from policy changes to infrastructure projects. Given this complexity public involvement is extremely important since early decisions (such as problem definition) can lead a study in certain directions that need significant effort to revise. In other words if a study begins with a certain problem definition and bases its analysis on that definition, then everything needs to be revised if the public questions the study definition at the end of the process.

A second aspect of complexity has to do with the number of different stakeholders and organizations involved in the Alpine Transportation Planning effort ranging from impacted individuals to huge goods distribution companies to national governments. Again, all the recommended processes in the Caltrain case study must be increased and broadened to bring all the necessary players to the table. This will require excellent facilitation and communications processes.

As with study stage, most of the recommendations from the case study are directly relevant to addressing the problem of study complexity, although again they need to be increased in scope and effort.

Geographic Area

The Caltrain study took place in a very limited geographic area – perhaps one square mile in area, in contrast, the Alpine transportation planning problem covers a huge area with many different languages, countries and traditions. Even if the Alpine problem can be defined as regional – it's still a huge region and if it's defined as European, then it's even more enormous; in any case much larger than the Caltrain case study. This means that the public involvement techniques used in all stages of the project must be scaled-up from those used in the Caltrain study. In other words the Alpine process would require more meetings, more publications to be mailed, and much more coordination among advisory groups, stakeholders, the public and study sponsors.

While the larger geographic area causes major scale differences between the Caltrain case study and Alpine Transportation Planning, some of the main concepts found in the Caltrain case study simply become more important in larger regions. Probably the most important of these is the need for clear and

logical communications. This is especially true since the Alpine region straddles several different languages.

4.2 Additional Recommendations

This section provides comments on how recommendations for the Alpine Transportation Planning process might differ from those learned from the Caltrain case study presented in Chapter 3. In general all the case study recommendations are relevant, but in the Alpine Transportation Planning process they become more important and will require much more effort than in the Caltrain case study.

1. Commit to a strong public involvement process.

This is critical for Alpine Transportation Planning process given the need for national governments to agree on recommended policies and infrastructure projects.

2. Structure the study to encourage public involvement.

The Alpine Transportation Planning process will be much more complex than the Caltrain case study so a very strong effort must be made to develop a study workplan that encourages good public involvement. Developing this public involvement plan will be a challenging task in and of itself.

3. Use advisory groups to guide study.

Advisory groups will likely be the only way to efficiently obtain direct feedback on the Alpine Transportation Planning process given the large geographic area and numerous consistencies involved. Several advisory groups focusing on different issues could be formed and brought together later in the study to develop comprehensive solutions.

4. Develop a relationship with key project stakeholders.

Again, given the huge study scope and area, developing relationships with key project stakeholders will likely be even more necessary for the Alpine Transportation Planning process than for the Caltrain case study.

5. Hold relevant and interesting public meetings.

Innovative techniques should be used to encourage public participation such as televising meetings on the Internet or web-based meetings that enable people to participate over a several day period. Language will be a critical issue that needs to be addressed in all communication products and meetings.

6. Break down complicated issues into smaller ones.

This will be critical given the likelihood that potential solutions to Alpine transportation problems will be complex and inter-related.

7. Prepare logical and clear study information.

The Alpine Transportation Planning process will need extremely good communications given the complexity of the project and different nationalities, languages and traditions that define the public for this study. The communications program must be well integrated into the overall study and should be developed with strong professional assistance.

4.3 Conclusions

In summary, when planning and completing a study it is important to understand the two sides of public participation, that it can help improve the study and second, that ignoring the public can have severe consequences on study completion (in other words delayed or rejected).

It is clear that effective public input is an important aspect of any major planning project. By listening to the public, professionals can learn to design projects that minimize impacts to communities and engender support from the public – both critical elements in a successful effort to build major infrastructure projects or implement new transportation policies. Furthermore, the public often has good ideas for solving problems because they do not come to the table with a well-defined set of solutions. The public is often good at thinking beyond the box.

The best outcome of a study is when there is a consensus on how to move forward with implementing the new policy or implementing the project. In today's political environment there must be a significant public support for projects in order for them to be implemented. The most important lesson from the Caltrain case study is the process used in the study to help the public make key study decisions. The design options screening process was very successful at communicating alternatives to the public, describing their impacts, and providing them with a structure which allowed constructive assistance to the decision-making process.

There are two main lessons from the case study that can be applied to the Alpine Transportation Planning case, commitment and creativity. Commitment simply means that the study sponsors and managers need to be committed to the importance of the public process (as expressed in terms of funding and time). Creativity means that the project managers must think creatively about how to structure the particular planning process to maximize the extent and effectiveness of public involvement.