THE FLORIDA STRATEGIC INTERMODAL SYSTEM COMMITTEE
MANAGING CONFLICT THROUGH DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

The Florida Long Range Transportation Plan for 2020 places emphasis on viewing the State’s Transportation system with a holistic point of view. This entails planning and funding for different modes of transportation rather than focusing on just highways. By incorporating the modes that are responsible for goods and people movement into the Transportation Improvement Program, greater efficiency of the intermodal system will result and the State’s ability to compete in the national and global economic market is enhanced.

The Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) project is a collaborative effort between the Florida Department of Transportation and various stakeholders in the State, to identify and develop crucial facilities that are vital to the success of the transportation system. The facilities include 1) airport and seaport hubs, 2) connectors such as Interstates and Expressways, and 3) Specific rail modes of transportation.

The benefits of having a facility that is selected as an existing or emerging project for the SIS in your community includes 1) augmented funding which translates into improved development, operation and maintenance of the facility, 2) a larger amount of jobs related to the construction and operation of the facilities, and 3) increased capacity and access to residential and commercial districts that may be greater than accounted for in the land use plan.
A steering committee consisting of 41 stakeholders representing 31 partners of transportation was created (http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/sis/steering/members.htm). Their objective was to develop criteria for designating existing and emerging projects, the criteria would then be recommended to the Secretary of the Department of Transportation for approval.

CONFLICT

Gaining consensus between the members in a short period of time on the criteria would require a strategic conflict management program designed to incorporate the interests of the arenas represented by the members. This case study analyzes a conflict management program designed by staff members of the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium and the Florida Department of Transportation. Terry Kraft, project manager for FDOT prefers the title of the Florida Consensus Building Consortium due to the staff members’ ability to apply dispute management tactics to broad situations with the objective of gaining consensus. In particular, it will examine how well the design integrates principles described in ‘Managing Public Disputes’ (Susan Carpenter and W. J. D. Kennedy), and the ability of the design to foster balanced input from and build consensus of all parties involved.

METHODOLOGY

The primary resources for the case study were obtained from personal interviews with Terry Kraft, project manager for the Florida Department of Transportation and Hal Beardall, Project Associate (FCRC). Secondary resources include reviews of minutes from meetings of the steering committee, available online at (http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/sis/steering/meetings.htm) and references from ‘Managing Public Disputes’ by Susan L. Carpenter & W.J.D. Kennedy. Attempts were made to collect data
from staff members of Cambridge Systematics, the technical consultants for FDOT, with no success.

The framework used to analyze the design and whether it was successful consisted of the degree of implementation of the following strategies.

1. Defining the problem
2. Identifying external constraints
3. Establishing a conflict management goal
4. Selecting a meeting structure
5. Identifying process steps
6. Determining who should participate
7. Defining other roles
8. Considering other process issues

(Carpenter & Kennedy, Managing Public Disputes 2001, pg.93)

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

In this case defining the problem was simple, the FDOT, FCRC and Cambridge Systematics needed to develop a strategic intermodal plan. The consensus design would allow for maximum participation by representatives and would ensure that all members were equally informed with knowledge required to provide valuable input during the criteria designation process. The latter task was crucial to the success of the management program. The FCRC was hired by the FDOT as consultants, not just designers of a consensus-building program (Kraft).

As consultants, the FCRC were responsible for digesting and interpreting technical information from Cambridge and other firms providing support and explaining the information to members of the steering committee in a way they would understand. The same was done for
Cambridge; the FCRC would explain what the members of the committee wanted from the technical firms in terms of studies, data analysis and so forth. This neutral role played by the FCRC facilitated stakeholder and expert input to assure an adequate and comprehensive understanding of all the issues that were at the table (Beardall).

IDENTIFYING EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

External constraints on a process must be considered in outlining a process, (Carpenter & Kennedy). During the interview with Hal Beardal, he mentioned some variables that were facing the steering committee. One of the most significant restraints to developing a criteria package was the time available before the recommendations had to be turned in. The first meeting took place in February 2002, while the final meeting to come to consensus on a recommendation report would take place in December 2002, 10 months later. Other variables included time restraints imposed by the occupation of each member. The representatives are from all parts of Florida and each have responsibilities that decrease the amount of time available for meetings.

ESTABLISHING A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT GOAL

A goal of the conflict management design team (FDOT, FCRC, and Cambridge) was to create a consensus-building process that would build support among stakeholders and the public for recommendations to the Secretary of the Florida Department of Transportation on: Strategic Intermodal System designation policies and criteria; and What facilities and services should be considered for the Strategic Intermodal System in both urban and rural areas (http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/sis/steering/default.htm#goal).
In order for the consensus-building process to be successful, the design would have to provide channels for: Cambridge representatives to brief steering committee members with technical information; members of the committee to voice early on their respective issues and interests; creating an environment that is conducive for developing recommendations (brainstorming); and members to reach agreement (Carpenter & Kennedy, pg95).

SELECTING A MEETING STRUCTURE

The FCRC applied a meeting structure that would address the above mentioned principles for successful consensus-building. The 41 member steering committee would meet 10 times to vote. The recommendations however, would be conceived by drafting groups or subcomponents of the steering committee. Key issues affecting the intermodal system and the impacts it would have were identified and drafting groups were created to concentrate on the issues.

This format allowed for Cambridge and members of the committee to interact one on one and it also allowed for members of the drafting groups to have numerous meetings in a short period of time. Cambridge was able to bring every individual assigned to a specific group up to speed on that area of transportation, a lot of the members had transportation expertise but it may not have been in a particular area of transportation (Kraft). Once the members were at a common level, they were then able to focus on recommendations for that addressed their specific area.
IDENTIFYING PROCESS STEPS

The four general steps to a conflict management process are: 1) Adopting procedures, 2) Educating the parties, 3) Generating options, and 4) Reaching agreements. The key is deciding how many of the processes are required for the facilitator to successfully implement the conflict management program (Carpenter & Kennedy, pg100). In this situation, all four steps were required.

Adopting Procedures

During the first meeting of the steering committee (Feb 25th, 2002), members were presented with a draft consensus-building guideline worksheet. Members were instructed by the facilitation staff to make comments and recommend changes if any. The revised worksheet would then be revised and prepared for the second meeting. The consensus guidelines were adopted without rejection at the 3rd meeting in Tampa. ([http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/sis/steering/feb252002/summary.pdf](http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/sis/steering/feb252002/summary.pdf))

Educating Parties

This process was implemented to allow the committee members to come to speed on key interests of the SIS project as identified in the first meeting. As mentioned earlier, the design of the program allowed for members to interact one on one with technical consultants and other parties continuously.

Generating Options

Once committee members had enough material to focus on their area of concern in the development process, they could generate criteria for that specific area. For example, the drafting group focused on infrastructure and operations could draft recommendations for
infrastructure standards, maintenance schedules and so forth. The recommendations from each drafting group would then be presented at one of the meetings in which the entire committee was present.

**Reaching Agreement**

This is a final step that should be easier to obtain if the three previous steps were implemented correctly (Carpenter & Kennedy pg102). In this case, criteria for accepting recommendations such as 80% consensus were laid and served as a guide for the committee’s effort to reach consensus.

**DETERMINING WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE**

The SIS project affects all residents, tourists, and commuters that enter the State of Florida. Since it was impossible to gather opinions from a sample size required to reduce error, the members of the steering committee were chosen to represent 33 different partners of transportation in the state including members of the Senate and House.

**DEFINING OTHER ROLES**

The FCRC conflict management program features the FCRC as the neutral facilitator with no interests in the outcome. There was some concern with the role of the Florida Transportation Commission being allowed to review the final document before it was recommended to the secretary. It was explained that the FTC could review but only recommend changes to the final product ([http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/sis/steering/feb252002/summary.pdf](http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/sis/steering/feb252002/summary.pdf)).

**CONSIDERING OTHER PROCESS ISSUES**
Other issues considered by the design and implementation team included the inability for all members of the steering committee to attend all 10 meetings physically. For this purpose technology such as e-connects (Net meeting) were used to provide visual and audio for members who could not attend (Terry Kraft).

OUTCOME

As a result of careful preparation and design, the steering committee was able to come to consensus on a recommendation package for the Secretary which was submitted on January 17\textsuperscript{th} 2003.

CONCLUSION

The conflict management design helped to mitigate possible situations of disagreement that may have developed if representatives were not able to voice their interest from the beginning. One on one interaction between the technical staff and steering committee facilitated creation of a balanced participation environment. In addition, it helped to increase the flexibility of meeting schedules and expedite the process of bringing members up to speed.

The design integrated the 8 components described by Carpenter & Kennedy. The drafting group aspect allowed for all members of the steering committee to become educated on their area of transportation impact in a short time period. This allowed the members to focus more on contributing to recommendations based on acquired knowledge rather than feel information that was being paid for by FDOT was being stuffed down their throat.