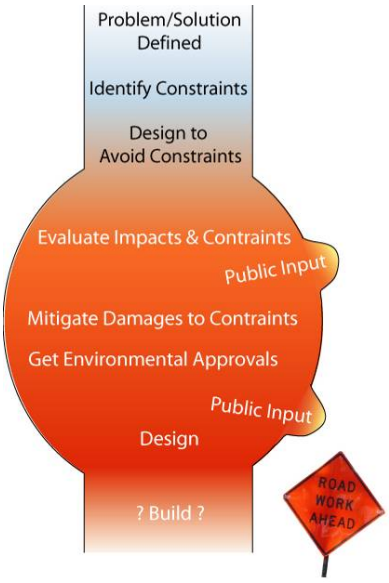
Environment is a CSS Context

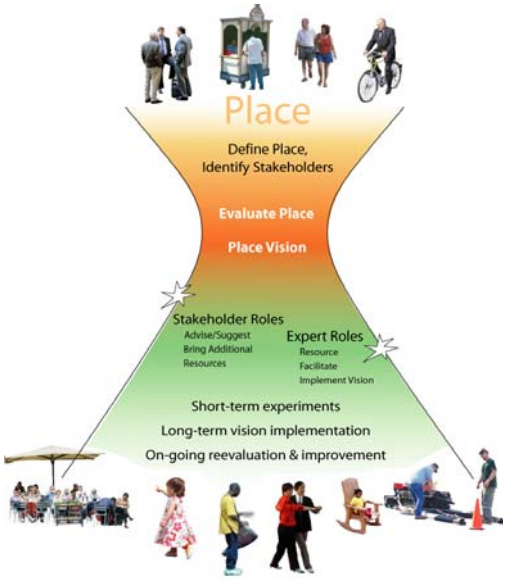
Practitioners and advocates alike often mistake CSS as “Community” Sensitive Solutions. This misconception probably arose because the roots of CSS are found in community resistance to DOT projects. By the mid-1990s, environmental agencies and advocates had learned how to take advantage of the plethora of federal and state environmental regulations, which usually mandate legal compliance and permits; no such legal authority was given to communities. Therefore, it is probably true that the early push for CSS was based on community concerns.

However, it is a mistake to view CSS only as a way to accommodate community concerns, and developing transportation solutions that are sensitive to a project’s environmental context should not be left solely to permitting and NEPA processes. This approach will create extra planning steps and project delays. More importantly, it misses the opportunity to use CSS to streamline critical transportation projects.



The conventional DOT approach to dealing with environmental issues was linear. As depicted in the graphic to the left, the highly formal NEPA process was often compared to the “D.A.D.” approach: Decide, Announce and Defend. It was crisis-driven, politically initiated and expensive. It often involved static designs that evolved in an iterative and lengthy process. It usually treated community engagement as an obstacle and professionals as experts, making community resistance practically inevitable.

CSS creates the opportunity to develop projects through an inclusive process like that to the right, which empowers communities and environmental resource agencies to actively participate in the entire process. This approach starts with consensual definition of the project’s context and place and proceeds with stakeholder participation in alternative development and selection, design, and construction. DOT professionals become resources and facilitators, rather than experts with all the answers. More flexible solutions emerge that balance and respect environmental, community and



transportation contexts at the same time, instead of iteratively. This participatory process prevents the endless start-stop-restart-stop again cycle that has plagued the transportation industry since the passage of NEPA in 1969.

In summary, instead of viewing CSS as a solely community-oriented approach, proper application of it to address environmental issues can both enhance a project's environmental outcomes and deliver much needed project streamlining.