MassDOT’s Lessons Learned - Institutionalizing Public Health

Clinton Bench, Deputy Executive Director
Office of Transportation Planning
Why does a Massachusetts Transportation agency care about health?
Contributing Factors

- Shifting Demographics
- Healthy Transportation Compact
- Transportation Reform: One MassDOT
Shifting Demographics

- 59.3% of Mass adults are overweight, and 23% are obese.
- The Massachusetts population aged 65 and over will increase by over half a million (548,699), growing from 14% of the state’s total population in 2010 to 21% by 2030.
Legislative Requirements

As part of the creation of MassDOT in 2009, the Legislature created the Healthy Transportation Compact, which requires a comprehensive focus on the intersection of health and transportation.

The Healthy Transportation Compact is a formal partnership between:

- MassDOT (Planning, Highway, and MBTA) *
- Executive Office of Environmental Affairs
- Executive Office of Health and Human Services *
- Department of Public Health
- Housing and Economic Development (recently added)

* Co-Chairs
Healthy Transportation Compact

Mission
Facilitate transportation decisions that balance the needs of all transportation users, expand mobility, improve public health, support a cleaner environment and create stronger communities.

Goals
• Promote inter-agency cooperation
• Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
• Improve access to services for persons with disabilities
• Increasing bicycle and pedestrian travel
• Expand impact of Complete Streets Policy
• Implement health impact assessments
• Expanding service offerings for Safe Routes to Schools
• Initiate public-private partnerships
• Measure progress
MassDOT Reorganization

In November 2009, a single, streamlined Massachusetts Department of Transportation was formed through the integration of various transportation agencies and authorities.
MassDOT’s Focus on Health

Transportation Reform:
One MassDOT

Healthy Transportation Compact

Shifting Demographics

MassDOT Mission & Goals w/ focus on Health
MassDOT Goals

1. Safety: Actively manage the nation’s safest transportation system to minimize injuries whenever, wherever, and to whomever possible.

2. Build and Preserve: Build a quality transportation system and maintain it in a state of good repair.

3. Stewardship: Operate the transportation system in a manner that embraces our stewardship of the Commonwealth’s natural, cultural, and historic resources.

4. Customer Service: Deliver superb service that both anticipates and responds to customer needs.

5. Efficiency: Invest public funds and other resources wisely while fostering economic development.
How is MassDOT Incorporating Health into its practices?
At every step:

- Asset Level Planning
- Project Level Planning
- Project Design
- Project Selection
- Municipal Planning
Asset Level Scenario Planning

- Through our *weMove Massachusetts: Planning for Performance* tool, we have been changing the way we look at our distribution of funding.

- By incorporating health metrics in scenario planning, health considerations can get decision makers to have a better appreciation of the health impacts of our program.
Project Level Planning

• We are also incorporating health assessments into our planning studies:

• First, we conducted a pilot Health Impact Assessment with the Department of Public Health

• Now, we are taking steps to institutionalize this practice by:
  • Adding a requirement for health analysis in all planning scopes
  • Working to provide guidance to consultants who may not be familiar with appropriate methods.
Project Design

• The Healthy Transportation Directive was issued to require walking, biking, and transit access be considered at the beginning of all projects.

• Sidewalks are now required in most cases and exceptions require sign-off from the Secretary.

• Despite initial resistance, the directive was a major step in changing the culture of MassDOT.
Project Selection

- We have been changing the way we look at how we select individual projects through the Project Selection Advisory Council.

- By incorporating health metrics in project selection, potential health impacts, beyond minimum requirements, must be considered at the start of a project.
Municipal Projects

- MassDOT efforts go beyond state projects:
  - Evaluation Criteria: MassDOT criteria will impact MPO projects and may shape the MPOs own criteria
  - Incentive Program: A Complete Streets Certification Program is being developed to provide monetary support to municipalities to implement complete streets projects.
Conclusions & Lessons Learned

- MassDOT is working to address the issue from a variety of angles.

- Embedding health considerations throughout a DOT is a time-consuming process, but the work has resulted in a notable culture shift.

- One benefit for the DOT thus far has been how communicating health benefits has seemed effective at garnering support for projects.

- There has been pushback from rural areas particularly about promoting active transportation; health issues must be considered in context – there is not one best solution in all areas.