



AIA Proposed Amendments to Sec. 1203 of the Surface Transportation Authorization Act

The American Institute of Architects strongly supports the creation of an Office of Livability in the U.S. Department of Transportation, as proposed in Sec. 1203 of the Surface Transportation Authorization Act of 2009. In particular, provisions that require the Office to develop and disseminate information and best practices and provide technical assistance and training in issues related to livability (Sec. 1203(g)) will provide a vital and unique resource to communities.

The AIA/University of Minnesota study *Moving Communities Forward*, authorized in Sec. 1925 of SAFETEA-LU, found that transportation projects that are well designed – both in terms of the physical design *and* the design process – have the greatest chance of providing multiple benefits to their communities, including economic development, sustainability, the creation of great places and improvement in public safety.

In order to fully achieve the goals of the STAA, and reflecting the findings of *Moving Communities Forward*, the AIA recommends that the following two topics be added to the list of those outlined in Sec. 1203(g) for which the Office of Livability is required to provide best practices and technical assistance:

“Use of public participation processes, including interactive workshops led by planning and design professionals, to expand the ability of citizens to participate in the early stages of the planning of livable communities;”

As the AIA and the University of Minnesota found in *Moving Communities Forward*, public participation processes help citizens “gain knowledge about planning and design processes and expertise on community issues that they take away from the participation process. Benefits are also gained by the broader community as it gains credibility and pride in its accomplishments... in each case [analyzed in the study] the process of engaging around the design and planning of a transportation project brought the community together.”

In addition, the study found that “design experts play indispensable roles in engaging the public in planning and design processes and communicating alternative design outcomes.” The study further noted, however, that the application and impact of public participation processes is often inconsistent. Therefore, the Office of Livability can play a vital role on disseminating best practices and providing technical assistance about public participation processes.

“The development and dissemination of practical design standards (as defined in Sec. 331) for transportation facilities that provide and offer access to a diverse range of community amenities and that revitalize older central business districts and main streets;”

Moving Communities Forward found that those transportation projects that help create vibrant, attractive and active communities not only improve livability but also promote economic development. This is an especially critical issue for older and historic downtown central business districts and main streets, which in many cases have been long neglected or even devastated by poorly planned transportation projects.

Although each community is different, the promotion of design that uses an interdisciplinary team to design a facility that “fits its physical setting, balances costs with the necessary scope of the project, and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility” (as described in the Sec. 331 definition of “practical design standards”) and connects users to a range of amenities can foster livable and economically vibrant communities anywhere. This is regardless of the kind of transportation mode or facility. In addition, transportation facilities that allow for a range of uses at all times of the day promote public safety by reducing opportunities for crime.

STAA rightly endorses the use of “practical design standards” as a part of comprehensive streets policies. These standards, however, have a much broader application across a wide range of transportation facilities. This addition will ensure that the design of all transportation facilities, regardless of mode or location, achieves the goals set forth in the underlying legislation – to promote mobility, access, connectivity, livability, safety and sustainability in the nation’s transportation system.