



# MEMO

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**Date:** October 15, 2009  
**To:** Interested Parties and Stakeholders  
**From:** Controller's Office City Services Auditor Division  
**Re:** Better Streets Institutional Analysis

## Summary

The Better Streets and Complete Streets Policies, passed in 2005 and 2006, call for City departments to work together to improve the functioning and aesthetic of our City's streets to meet social, recreational, transportation, and ecological goals. The Better Streets Plan (BSP), currently in Draft form, provides a comprehensive set of street design guidelines to meet these goals. To implement the guidelines in a consistent and coordinated manner the City is also taking steps to improve its street delivery process, beginning with the conceptual project planning, through detailed technical design and review to construction. This memo summarizes background, work to date, and next steps of this study.

## Project Initiation

The Director's Working Group (composed of the City Administrator (CA), Department of Public Works (DPW), the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA), Planning Department (PLN), County Transportation Authority (SFCTA), and the Mayor's Office on Disability (MOD)) requested from the CSA an analysis of the City's existing process for planning, funding, constructing and maintaining streetscape improvement projects and develop recommendations to streamline the process.

## Outcomes

This project will recommend process improvements for the City to

- 1) Streamline the streetscape<sup>1</sup> improvement design and approval process;
- 2) Better leverage and track funding for streetscape improvement projects;
- 3) Increase our understanding and planning for the maintenance costs of existing streetscape features and those associated with "better" streets. Provide recommendations regarding funding options for maintenance activities; and
- 4) Support community and private streetscape projects and partnerships through permitting.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "streetscape" refers public spaces such as roadways and sidewalks and enhancements to both for example, street trees, street furniture, and pedestrian or cycling facilities.



## **Approach and Methodology**

In collaboration with the Better Streets Coordination Team, composed of project level staff representing DPW, PLN, MOD, SFPUC, SFMTA, SFCTA, CSA staff selected six recent street improvement projects to examine as examples of existing planning, design and review processes, challenges and opportunities. Of the six selected projects four were led by City departments, one was led by a private developer and one was led by a private citizen. As a follow-up to reviewing the six street improvement projects, CSA interviewed project managers and City staff in the San Francisco Planning Department, Department of Public Works, Municipal Transportation Agency, and the Public Utilities Commission. CSA also reviewed the business practices to increase multi-departmental collaboration instituted by the cities of Charlotte, Portland, Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Sacramento. Finally, CSA has hired a private firm to develop a model for the City to better understand the life-cycle costs of existing street maintenance activities, develop a model for future costs, and provide recommendations regarding funding options for San Francisco's streetscape maintenance activities.

## **Existing Conditions and Challenges**

- 1) *The responsibility for project planning, design, delivery and maintenance is shared by many City departments and agencies.* The overall design and project coordination is not one department's focus. Departments have capital plans and project management systems which track paving, transit route updates and area plans individually rather than geographically, and are updated at different intervals. As individual departments' projects evolve, funding or design opportunities may change and require regular and on-going coordinating by departments to avoid missed opportunities to combine or co-locate projects to maximize funding or impact. This is one reason why the City continues to replace streets "as is" after repaving, sewer replacement or Muni rail replacement.
- 2) *Although departments do coordinate, no formal framework exists to allow and encourage City departments to negotiate project prioritization and project designs and make necessary compromises (at the department level) to support citywide goals.* The Transit First Policy, Better Streets Policy and the Complete Streets Policy provide direction on the balance of transportation modes in the public right of way however



guidance regarding the implementation of these policies is absent. Without a formal policy implementation framework, City departments move forward on projects differently, which has been a reported source of tension and frustration among departments and between the public and “the City.”

- 3) *Existing purchasing and contracting systems reinforce traditional design and materials motivated by risk and maintenance cost reduction.* Department purchasing practices and procedures discourage the expansion of inventories and the stocking of unique parts and prefer the use of existing suppliers and materials, despite designer preference for other materials. The true life-cycle cost of existing and alternative materials is also a subject of debate. The City has a limited capacity for weighing the costs and benefits of a specific design, particularly novel designs.
- 4) *The street delivery process is highly technical and complex. It is confusing to the general public, which views the City as a monolithic entity, rather than as individual departments.* Currently no single “City” point of contact exists for the public, which may result in conflicting communications received from City departments. Misunderstandings result regarding project design requirements and responsibility for on-going maintenance or liability. Members of the public and private developers in particular, place a premium on receiving clear guidance and timely information in order to maximize returns and minimize delay and exposure to risk. The City’s lack of coordinated direction to the public may reduce the number of possible public-private partnerships. Additionally, the general public has little knowledge about the most appropriate forum to share project ideas or their concerns.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations from this study will be process-focused and intend to bring increased clarity regarding department roles and responsibilities, formality to existing inter-departmental collaboration, and public transparency to City decision making regarding street improvement projects. Recommendations will suggest practical, incremental and financially feasible steps to fully implement the intent of the Better and Complete Streets policies and BSP.



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## **Next Steps**

CSA will summarize findings and recommendations for improving San Francisco's interdepartmental coordination in streetscape improvement project design, development and implementation, expected in December 2009. The streetscape life-cycle maintenance cost model and final report is expected to be completed in February 2010.

## **Contacts**

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