

Tonight we're going to hear a lot about 'Level of Service (LOS)', a sacred cow of traffic engineering.

LOS is simply a letter grade, A thru F, for the amount of time cars have to wait at an intersection and it has traditionally led to widening roadways to improve the flow of automobile traffic at the expense of other modes.

Recently, many communities have begun to recognize that LOS analysis is outdated and a new way to measure the performance of our streets is needed, one that considers all users.

City Of Portland Request for Proposals for Updated Transportation Performance Standards (August 17, 2012)

The existing Level of Service (LOS) standards and measures, which focus only on motor vehicle levels of service, do not reflect the City of Portland's current practice which emphasizes and promotes a multimodal approach to transportation planning and providing transportation services. The performance standards only measure vehicle performance and there is a concern that they do not give credit to the benefits of facilities and land use patterns that encourage the use of other modes.

San Francisco Board of Supervisors Resolution (April 2006)

Sample of 'Whereas' statements...

- Whereas Level of Service (LOS) analysis does not account for modal shift, where reduced motor vehicle capacity encourages auto trips to shift to other travel times, routes or travel modes; and,
- Whereas Auto LOS as a metric does not recognize that projects such as transit lanes, bicycle lanes, traffic calming, and sidewalk widening may reduce auto LOS but increase capacity for not-automobile modes, which can increase the total number of persons moving through a given corridor
- Now therefore be it resolved that the San Francisco Board of Supervisors finds that automobile LOS analysis alone is not an appropriate metric for assessing environmental impacts...
- And be it further resolved that this Board urges the Planning Commission to consider significance criteria other than the measurement of LOS, particularly where creation of, or improvement to, pedestrian, bicycle and transit facilities....may improve overall transportation network operations.

Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) 2012 Transportation Summit (Sept 2012) (Broadway Design Team member Phil Erickson will be a facilitator there and new TDOT Director Daryl Cole is an accredited member of CNU)

A sample of Working Groups and descriptions:

Transportation Reform Modeling

More complete transportation modeling that properly accounts for multi-modal travel patterns in walkable mixed-use areas can switch transportation modeling from being an obstacle to being a tool for advancing New Urbanism.

Functional Classification Reform

This Working Group will discuss history of functional classification in planning, its detrimental impacts to urbanism, and explore alternative classification and planning ideas that can promote more livable, walkable streets and sustainable cities.

Despite all the talk about this project being multi-modal, and even showing only a bus and bicyclist on the project logo, we see the devotion to LOS in the project charter - the very first Project Assumption on page 13 specifies a minimum LOS and states that regardless of the general corridor development scheme, the arterial traffic function will be addressed. This basically says that cars win and pedestrians, cyclist, transit users, and historic neighborhoods get to fight among themselves for the scraps.

If Broadway Blvd is truly to become a multi-modal corridor that serves as both the anchor for vibrant walkable neighborhoods and as a thriving business destination, the project team will need the freedom to think creatively beyond the artificial limitation of LOS. There should be a level playing field among all those who use and are affected by this project – there should be no pre-determined LOS.