

Developing Practical Land Revitalization Tools for Communities

BEST PRACTICES IN INFRASTRUCTURE COORDINATION

EPA REGION 5



Cities throughout the Midwest continue to experience economic and demographic shifts that result in an imbalance between the infrastructure that exists and the infrastructure that is needed. In many cities, past development patterns have resulted in more infrastructure than is currently needed, given depopulation and an emphasis on more compact development patterns. These cities are also facing the economic constraints of a shrinking revenue base, while at the same time facing decreases in funding from state and federal revenue sources. Creative approaches in infrastructure management is more important than ever in these and other cities that are seeking to provide more resilient and efficient results.

EPA's Land Revitalization Team is developing a tool that will help cities identify best practices to more effectively coordinate public infrastructure maintenance, repair and development. The tool also will assist cities in estimating the cost savings that they can realize by implementing more efficient infrastructure planning practices.

The project team met with public officials in the cities of Saginaw and Detroit, Michigan, and Vaparaiso, Indiana, to learn how city officials approach infrastructure maintenance, repair and development. The meetings provided information about existing organizational arrangements that facilitate progress or create barriers to more effective coordination; factors that drive infrastructure priorities (e.g., economic development, availability of grant funds) and their implications for coordination; and potential benefits of improved coordination, including cost savings and improvements in quality and continuity of public services.

Information from these meetings and additional research will be the basis for developing a Community Public Infrastructure Asset Management Tool. The tool will help local infrastructure managers, city planners and other local officials assess their current state of coordination, identify practical ideas for change and estimate the cost savings and other benefits that could be realized through enhanced coordination.

The tool will have two parts. The Checklist and Action Plan will be a question-based checklist to help communities assess their status with regard to completing an asset inventory, organizational practices that encourage coordination, community collaboration and financial collaboration. It will summarize local priorities and areas for improvement in an action plan. The second part of the tool will allow municipalities to complete an Invest-to-Save analysis. This will:

- Help municipalities organize information about public infrastructure to support a high-level strategic invest-to-save analysis.
- Serve as an analytical tool to assess long-term savings from near-term public infrastructure investments and the incremental benefits of coordinated planning and investments.
- Provide high-level cost-benefit information to help managers and public officials explain sensible, cost-effective infrastructure investments.

We expect the tool to make clear that better coordination could not only help cities stretch their dollars further and improve service reliability, but could also attract investment to help communities achieve revitalization objectives. Coordination can help ensure that projects have broad local support, demonstrate a comprehensive planning approach and articulate multiple benefits that could be leveraged through public funding. A history and reputation for cooperation and coordination also communicates to potential investors that the city is committed to timely and predictable review processes in support of investments in community revitalization.

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Figure 9: Infrastructure repair in Detroit, Michigan.

NEXT STEPS

- Develop draft Community Public Infrastructure Asset Management Tool, to include a Checklist and Action Plan, and Invest-to-Save Analysis Tool.
- Conduct webinar with participating cities and request feedback on draft tool.
- Refine and finalize the tool and develop user guide.