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Making the Journey a Destination

by Tracy Hadden Loh and Andréa Livi Smith

Infusions of art into transportation infrastructure can help generate a sense of place, engage communities, and support economic development. Here's how you can make it happen.



Photo: Lee Staatsworth

This sculpture by French-born artist Niki de Saint Phalle, -The Three Graces, enlivened New York Avenue in Washington, DC, from March through October 2011. The installation was one of many efforts across the country to incorporate public art into transportation infrastructure.

You don't have to be standing in a museum to appreciate artwork. In many places across the United States, you can see art while out jogging, shopping, or, in the case of Washington, DC, while traveling to a museum. In a broad median along New York Avenue in front of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, bold and colorful dancing female sculptures by an internationally renowned artist greeted commuters and visitors entering the downtown area between March and October 2011.

This public art exhibition helped "transform a dull and barren commuter corridor into a cultural and colorful gateway into the District of Columbia's business district," says Colleen Hawkinson, a senior transportation planner at the District Department of Transportation (DDOT).

Hawkinson is pointing out one of several transportation and community issues that art enhancements can help address: boring concrete surfaces, unwelcoming public spaces, and disruption of existing neighborhoods when new roads and noise walls are put in. Art can enliven those paved surfaces and noise walls, while creating public spaces that attract residents and visitors alike.

Across the spectrum of surface transportation -- from transit-oriented development and multimodal nodes to highways, interchanges, streets, sidewalks, and trails -- infrastructure design needs to balance myriad secondary objectives with the primary goal of getting people where they need to go safely and efficiently. These other objectives include pleasing the community and stakeholders, plus maximizing the value of adjacent properties.

Today, in communities across the country, no matter the speed or mode of transport, travelers increasingly have the opportunity to experience artwork while on the go. Walk along a city sidewalk, park your bicycle by a country trail, or drive on a highway, and you might glimpse artwork that reflects the local culture and brings a bit of whimsy and creativity into the public realm. The process of creating public art can be challenging, but transportation agencies and arts organizations are partnering to make works of art a reality.

Art Creates a Sense of Place

Transportation agencies traditionally are focused on delivering service: moving traffic, goods, and people through different modes. As Wendy Feuer, assistant commissioner for urban design and art at the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) puts it, "There are a lot of bigger issues that result from transportation infrastructure that are hard to fix," such as traffic noise, crossing challenges or barriers, and visual impacts. However, she adds, opening up the design process to include artists "brings new ideas to the table...they see people where others see pavement. Art is a way of humanizing infrastructure, a way to communicate and personalize identity and location."

Liesel Fenner, the public art program manager at Americans for the Arts, adds that art creates an awareness of one's surroundings that "causes people to reconsider familiar spaces and look more carefully at what is around them." In other words, incorporating art can help infrastructure create a sense of place. And to be a "place" is to have a unique "personality."

Despite iconic historical examples of beautifying public infrastructure, such as the Brooklyn Bridge (completed in 1883) and the streetlights of San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter, conventional thinking has not looked at surface transportation infrastructure as critical to creating a sense of place. That began to change after enactment of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). The act created Transportation Enhancement activities, which, since 1992, have played a major role in improving the quality of U.S. transportation infrastructure, in part through the inclusion of public art. Within ISTEA's Surface Transportation Program funding category, the act called for a 10 percent set-aside for transportation enhancement activities, one of which is "landscaping and other scenic beautification." The stated purposes of these activities include enhancing the built and natural environment and providing a sense of place. The Surface Transportation Program and Transportation Enhancement activities are among the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) programs administered through State departments of transportation (DOTs).

In addition to qualitatively improving the travel experience, the potent combination of place, transportation, and art can lead to numerous benefits, as demonstrated by successful installations across the country. Specifically, communities are finding that art in transportation serves as a way of incorporating local culture into projects, a tool for encouraging public participation, and an economic development strategy.

Transportation Enhancement Activities

The phrase "transportation enhancement activity," with respect to any project or the area to be served by the project, refers to any of the following activities as they relate to surface transportation.

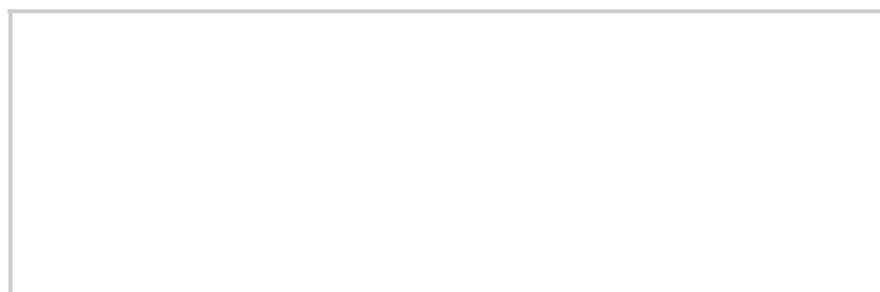
1. Provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles.
2. Provision of safety and educational activities for pedestrians and bicyclists.
3. Acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites (including historic battlefields).
4. Scenic or historic highway programs (including the provision of tourist and welcome center facilities).
5. Landscaping and other scenic beautification.
6. Historic preservation.
7. Rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures, or facilities (including historic railroad facilities and canals).
8. Preservation of abandoned railway corridors (including the conversion and use of the corridors for pedestrian or bicycle trails).
9. Inventory, control, and removal of outdoor advertising.
10. Archaeological planning and research.
11. Environmental mitigation to address water pollution due to highway runoff or reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality while maintaining habitat connectivity.
12. Establishment of transportation museums.

Source: FHWA.

Public Participation

Many aspects of transportation planning and capital construction are best left to professionals with technical expertise. Public participation, however, is a critical component of any successful transportation project. Public participation has been mandatory for Federal-aid highway projects whenever Federal funds are involved at least since 1958, and the role for public participation in the planning process was expanded in ISTEA in 1991.

Major infrastructure projects can be derailed when public participation goes wrong, stalling progress when cases wind up in court rather than in agreement. In the case of the recently completed Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project in Detroit, for example, the largest single construction contract in the history of the Michigan Department of Transportation was on the line. The environmental assessment for the project identified a need for the department to address the socioeconomic impact of the I-75 bridge approach, which would split the Mexicantown neighborhood into east and west sides. The department addressed this need by constructing a pedestrian bridge connecting the neighborhood, including art installations in the plazas at each end of the bridge. Incorporating public art into the project enabled neighbors to participate through community-based forums with the artist.





Jay Wasson, Indiana DOT

Creative landscaping at interchanges like this one along I-70 is the focus of A Greener Welcome, a project to improve the aesthetics of the highway approach to downtown Indianapolis.

Art has proven to be a highly effective medium for encouraging public participation in transportation projects. When projects incorporate art, hostility can be transformed into local pride and ownership of transportation infrastructure. For example, when the Slavic Village Development Corporation first began work to convert an abandoned railroad corridor into a trail in Cleveland's Slavic Village, "there were naysayers," says Eric Oberg, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's manager of trail development in the organization's Midwest Regional Office. And it didn't help that "there was a lot of illegal graffiti along the corridor."

Incorporating art became a key part of the success behind Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Urban Pathways Initiative, which works to encourage active transportation (such as walking and bicycling), healthy recreation, and community engagement around trails in urban areas. In its work on the Morgana Run Trail in Cleveland and the Metropolitan Branch Trail in Washington, DC, conservancy staff found art to be a powerful tool for engaging trail neighbors, giving them a way to discover, claim, and use the trail. On the Morgana Run Trail, a "committed effort by the neighborhood to have artwork, including large murals," has led to an "almost complete lack of graffiti" along the trail, Oberg says.

The bottom line is that local communities want far more from their transportation infrastructure than just compliance with standards and mobility goals. "Communities nationwide are seeking a higher quality of development that includes attention to aesthetics, and they are willing to put money on the line to get it," says Kyle Lukacs, program coordinator of the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse.

In Indianapolis, IN, a coalition of groups banded together to breathe new life into the bland, generic, and lifeless facade greeting travelers arriving in Indianapolis via I-70. The stakeholders dubbed the project A Greener Welcome, which entailed creating an attractive new look for I-70 between the airport and downtown that included landscaping and major public art installations at five highway interchanges.

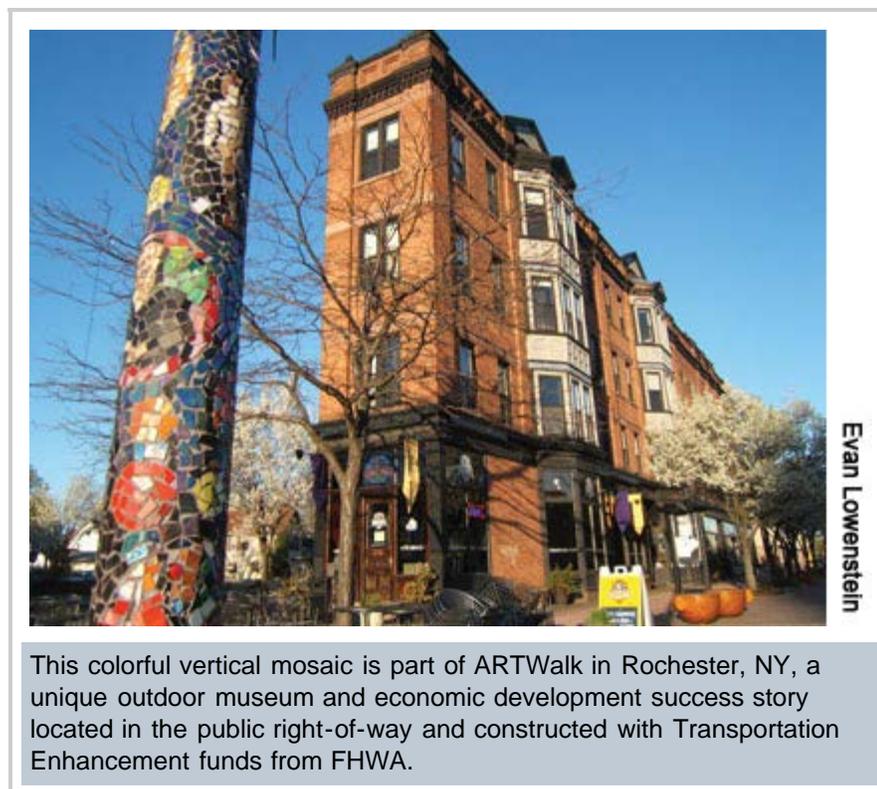
Demonstrating the commitment of the local community with regard to the project, pharmaceutical giant and major local employer Eli Lilly contributed both a \$1 million local match and volunteer labor from more than 8,000 employees through the company's Global Day of Service. The city of Indianapolis and Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, Inc., worked together to secure Federal funding through the Indiana DOT by way of the Transportation Enhancement program. Other partners included the West Indianapolis Development Corporation and the Concord Community Development Corporation.

According to the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse, State DOTs have directed 19 percent of all Transportation Enhancement funds programmed since 1992 to

projects like Indianapolis' A Greener Welcome. This percentage is due in part to the fact that the program is administered as a form of local aid in most States, and the project ideas and priorities are driven by local participation. "For many communities, given the opportunity to request funding for locally driven projects, art is a priority, not an optional addendum," adds Lukacs.

Economic Development

One major reason for integrating art into transportation infrastructure is its impact as an economic development strategy. When the city of Rochester, NY, prepared to widen and resurface University Avenue, planners were caught by surprise when neighbors instead asked for the opposite -- a narrower road. This conversation was made possible because of an innovative program called Neighbors Building Neighborhoods that was created in the early 1990s by then Mayor William Johnson in response to the urban decline that Rochester and many other U.S. cities had suffered after the 1960s. With the city losing jobs and the tax base shrinking, as part of his campaign platform, *Living Within Our Means: A Blueprint for Change*, Mayor Johnson looked for creative but feasible ways to promote Rochester's economic development. The Neighbors Building Neighborhoods program empowered citizens to address the issues confronting them in partnership with government.



The input of the neighbors transformed the widening of University Avenue into an economic development initiative. The community realized that, while the purpose of the avenue was to connect people and places, goods and markets, and workers and jobs, the street did more than just connect -- it also took up space in a central area of the town, and that right-of-way was valuable real estate. With an extra boost from a \$232,800 Transportation Enhancement award for sidewalks, benches, and other pedestrian facilities, the city implemented a new design featuring fewer driving lanes and increased parking. The design also incorporated art installations along the sidewalk, as well as artistic elements, such as imprints and coloring in the sidewalk material, and in the design of functional street elements like bus shelters and benches.

Today, University Avenue is home to ARTWalk, an urban art trail connecting museums, galleries, shops, and public spaces. A 2007 study by Americans for the Arts found that the arts have a nearly \$200 million annual direct impact in Monroe County, where Rochester is

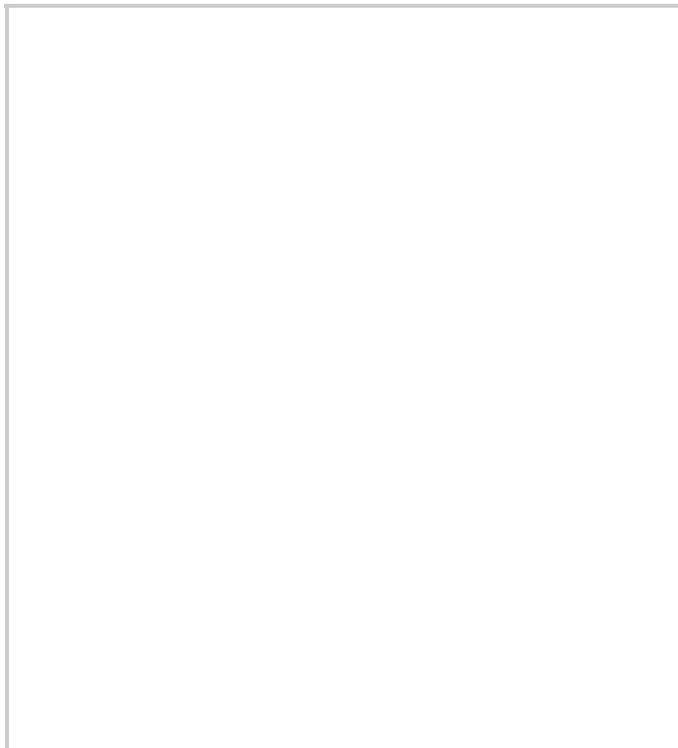
located. Indeed, ARTWalk has been so successful at revitalizing the economy of the surrounding neighborhood that the city is currently constructing a second phase, scheduled to be completed in fall 2012, featuring engraved sidewalks, performance spaces, light sculptures, and an interactive science-themed installation near the Rochester Museum & Science Center.

Economic development was also the impetus for the city of Edmonds in Washington State when it commissioned a market analysis of the State Route 99 corridor in 2004. The report identified a plaza with a cluster of local businesses including international markets and products as an opportunity for growth as an international district. Once again, local dollars are being combined with Federal funding from the Transportation Enhancement program to complete a neighborhood branding project through improvements in transportation infrastructure. The project, "Eight Luminaries" by artist Pam Beyette, will consist of eight lanterns, seven lining the sidewalk and integrated into the new streetscape light standards, while the eighth will be a 14-foot (4.3-meter)-tall painted steel sculpture. The artwork will help articulate the Edmonds International District's identity through a functioning streetscape, including pedestrian lights, new signs, and a signature sculpture. Thanks to these improvements, the businesses of the international district anticipate increased foot traffic and revenues after the project is completed in summer 2012, which also will benefit the State and local tax bases.

Placemaking Through Design

Projects like "Eight Luminaries" represent more than just a way to stimulate the economy, however. Incorporating the local culture into transportation infrastructure through art is also a placemaking and wayfinding tactic. For example, once generic and thoroughly utilitarian, bicycle racks with artful designs are today a hot trend in many U.S. cities, attracting media attention from major outlets, including *USA Today* and *The New York Times*. Small, inexpensive (custom racks can range from \$500 to \$5,000 each), and easy to install, these racks can be a surprisingly easy way to reflect local culture or identify the neighborhood or city through incorporated design elements such as color and shape.

For an installation on New York City's Wall Street, David Byrne, perhaps best known as a member of the rock band Talking Heads, designed a bicycle rack in the shape of a dollar sign. He also created a number of other designs keyed to specific locales, and NYCDOT has installed them throughout the city. Further north, in Buffalo, bicycle racks bear the logo of Green Options Buffalo, a local nonprofit that funds the racks.

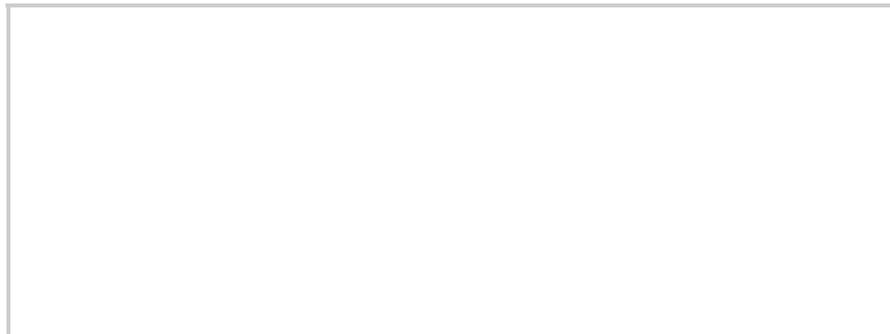




Pam Beyette

After a marketing study identified the international district in Edmonds, WA, as an opportunity for economic growth, the city commissioned an artist to reenvision the streetscape to articulate a visual identity for the area. The first step was this artist's rendering of new lamps and signage superimposed on a photograph of an existing street and sidewalk.

In both cases, the bicycle rack is a useful piece of street furniture that also indicates where you are. The identity of the place is clear, yet presented more elegantly than on a traditional street sign. According to Justin Booth, executive director of Green Options Buffalo, "the demand for the racks continually outstrips our capacity to fill requests. We set it up so that businesses can request a rack within the public right-of-way...The city invested resources for 25 racks, and we had more than 400 individual requests with a minimum of 2 racks per location. This has encouraged continuous investment and promotion of the program by the city."





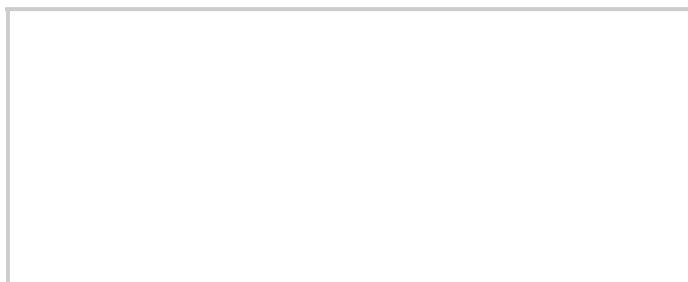
Customization can instill local flavor into a functional piece of street infrastructure such as bicycle racks. This bright blue bicycle rack in Buffalo, NY, bears the logo of Green Options Buffalo, the nonprofit organization that funds the installation of the racks.

Ameliorating Transportation Impacts

Engaging the public, supporting economic development, and localizing design are all positive aspects of incorporating art into transportation and creating a sense of place. Art is "not a Band-Aid[®]," Feuer says, but it can help to mitigate some negative impacts of transportation infrastructure that impede placemaking, such as blank walls, neighborhood separations, anonymous and repetitive design, and machine-scale structures created as a result of some transportation projects.

Beautification efforts matter. Research into psychology and the built environment has shown again and again that aesthetics count: people want to frequent places that are beautiful and avoid those that are ugly. For example, a 2004 study, "Changes in Neighborhood Walking Are Related to Changes in Perceptions of Environmental Attributes," published in the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* revealed that men who reported positive changes in aesthetics and convenience were twice as likely to increase their walking. Similarly, women who reported positive changes in convenience were more than twice as likely to increase their walking.

The history of modern surface transportation in the United States is one of tremendous accomplishment but also harm (displacing neighborhoods, traffic noise, and air emissions, for example). The enormous body of administrative law and court cases that have grown up along with the interstate highway system provide ample evidence of this, as noted in the article "Surface Transportation and Administrative Law: Growing Up Together in the 20th Century," published in the Transportation Research Board's *Transportation Research Record* 1527. Incorporating art and transportation not only delivers benefits, but can help mitigate some of this harm. This was the case in Indianapolis, where the bland, uniform appearance of I-70 created an objectionable aesthetic for the community around it, ultimately leading the community to pursue A Greener Welcome.





Unique bicycle racks, such as this one shaped like a dollar sign and installed on Wall Street in New York City, are not only functional pieces of street infrastructure but also provide wayfinding clues to pedestrians.

For the Barrio Anita neighborhood in Tucson, AZ, the widening of I-10 and the addition of noise walls addressed a transportation need and mitigated one negative impact (noise), but it also created a substantial barrier that literally walled off Barrio Anita from neighbors and resources west of the roadway. A 1999 Transportation Enhancement award enabled the neighborhood to reclaim the noise wall through a participatory public art process that transformed an ugly barrier into a neighborhood gathering place. The Barrio Anita Neighborhood Association led the application process and worked with the city of Tucson's transportation department and the Tucson Pima Arts Council to select an artist. Ultimately, artist Joshua Sarantitis and photographer William Wilson engaged community members to help identify a central symbol for the piece, local tortilla maker and centenarian Josefa Carrillo. A small park adjacent to the north mural wall includes seating, tables, and a trellis where the public can gather to appreciate the art.

Public art shows that a place is cared for, owned, and attractive. According to NYCDOT's Feuer, in New York City subway stations, art not only helps to distinguish one station from another, providing visual cues to let riders know they have reached their destinations, but also helps riders feel safer knowing they are not in a forgotten or neglected space.

Oberg at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy reports a similar effect on the Morgana Run Trail in Cleveland's Slavic Village. Where a rail line once reinforced a hard boundary, a trail has opened up new opportunities for recreation and active transportation. Art has played a key role in facilitating this transition. On windowless walls that otherwise might attract graffiti and vandalism, colorful murals instead welcome trail users and create destinations along the route, which "gives people another reason to get out and be active," Oberg says.

Finding Funding

How would a transportation agency go about incorporating art into a transportation project? In a time of tight Federal, State, and local budgets, identifying funding to cover the cost of

public art can be challenging. FHWA's Transportation Enhancement activities help fill that need, expanding travel choice, strengthening local economies, improving local quality of life, and protecting the environment, all through innovative projects related to surface transportation.

Devoting a fraction of the overall cost of constructing federally funded transportation infrastructure to quality improvements enables smaller communities to commission major artwork. Federal funding also makes possible large-scale projects that cross many jurisdictions, such as New Mexico's Cultural Corridors program, which placed art alongside two of the State's national scenic byways: the historic El Camino Real and Route 66. Many communities have adopted a similar strategy by setting aside a percentage of the budget on local capital construction projects for art, typically 1 percent. In fact, more than 60 communities in the United States have "percent for art" ordinances.



When noise walls were required to mitigate traffic sounds associated with widening I-10 in Tucson, AZ, murals painted on the walls transformed them into a colorful expression of community pride.

Partnerships with the private sector, such as the one created by Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, Inc., also can be effective for generating both dollars and manpower. In addition, place-based art can be a powerful catalyst for organizing revenue-generating street festivals and events, such as Rochester's ARTWalk Alive! and Cleveland's Morgana Run 5K, which also offer sponsorship opportunities to involve the private sector. In Buffalo, a local brewery created a bicycle-themed beer and dedicated a percentage of its sales to the cost of installing bicycle racks. This community-minded gesture yielded not only hundreds of bicycle racks for the city but also one of the brewery's top-selling products.

Upfront costs, however, are only the first piece of the puzzle. Permanent art requires maintenance. "You can't just put it in and walk away," Feuer says, unless the art is a temporary piece, such as the sculptures on Washington, DC's New York Avenue. In fact, the city's DDOT has developed an effective approach that could set the stage for a national model. Washington often partners with local business improvement districts to install and manage innovative transportation projects ranging from streetscapes and alternative lighting to stand-alone monumental art pieces like the sculptures on New York Avenue. With dedicated revenue streams for maintenance efforts, business improvement districts are ideal partners for public art projects.

What Is a Business Improvement District?

Business improvement districts serve as innovative economic development and revitalization tools for urban areas across the country. Though these districts range in size, function, and structure, they typically have a common interest in improving the quality and types of services available in their areas, promoting economic development, providing a collective voice for a given area, and working with public agencies to obtain funding for projects. Typical activities include street cleanup and trash collection, security patrols, capital improvements, marketing, and event staging.

The districts operate on an additional tax imposed on properties, businesses, or consumers in the defined area. A district typically requires an act of the local legislature to define the boundaries and establish the revenue stream, and participation is mandatory for the businesses within the district. A business improvement district is usually governed by either a quasi-governmental agency or a nonprofit organization with 501(c)(6) tax status.

Garnering Political Will

Another major challenge in integrating art and transportation is establishing political support. NYCDOT has decades of experience with this process. Feuer says public art boosters need to obtain buy-in from both external and internal constituencies, and "each is equally important." Internal constituencies consist of stakeholders within DOTs, while external constituencies include members of the public, arts organizations, community groups, elected officials, and, of course, artists.

With artists, Feuer has seen significant progress over the course of her career. In the past, major artists and galleries showed little interest in working in transportation, in part because of the bureaucracy and committee review required. More recently, though, the arts world "has learned the value of the [transportation] venue," Feuer says. Even internationally renowned artists now collaborate with transportation agencies to create signature pieces. One example is Roy Lichtenstein's (1923-1997) *Times Square Mural* installed in a subway station at 42nd and Broadway in New York City.



Trailside murals turned blank industrial walls into a welcoming reason to get outdoors on the Morgana Run Trail in Cleveland, OH.

Appreciation of public art among travelers and the community also has grown and

diversified as more people realize its benefits. Today, public art can be original and cutting edge, as exemplified by the 35-foot (10.7-meter)-tall Cleveland Public Art sculpture "Rotoflora": a giant allium flower made from recycled bicycle rims that serves as a marker for the Morgana Run Trail's East 49th Street trailhead. However, originality needs to be weighed against local support. Transportation projects involve changing the environment, which can sometimes engender political and popular controversy; in addition, they usually mean increased public expenditures -- also a fraught venture. As a result, public art has a special need to garner goodwill.

The key to building political support is to emphasize that art in transportation is not frivolous. Instead, beautiful street furniture, trails, and highways provide more benefits than do ugly ones.

In terms of internal constituencies, Wendy Feuer emphasizes the importance of establishing champions within State and local DOTs who can get the ball rolling, and the word-of-mouth that then exponentially gets others onboard. One change that has taken place in recent years is that the mindset in many DOTs has largely shifted from "Why?" to "Why not?" Art advocates at nonprofits and within DOTs report that garnering political support has become easier in the past few years.

"Art has moved from decoration to something more wholly integrated into transportation," says Greg Peckham, executive director of Cleveland Public Art. "The challenge is changing people's point of view that art is what you do after everything else is taken care of. We have turned a corner. Artists are given a place at the table."

That said, NYCDOT's Feuer underscores that it is important to remember that "art is not the mission. You also need to be sympathetic and care about the mission of the agency. There are so many talented, smart, and dedicated people who work in these agencies, and they are your partners."

Art in transportation is not just beautiful; it is functional and serves the needs and goals of projects.

Defining the Scope of Work

Using Federal funds for art carries challenges. Defining a scope of work and structuring a public art procurement process that complies with Federal competition requirements and State DOT procedures is not something the average transportation project manager has a lot of experience doing. In fact, the Michigan DOT had never procured a public art project when the Ambassador Bridge project came along. Agency officials had to outline the process from scratch. Developing a scope for an art project requires a specific skill set, so the department engaged a consulting firm to develop and administer the process, including assembling a selection committee, issuing a request for qualifications, conducting the competition, and facilitating community forums.

Other States, such as Arizona and Washington, have partnered with local arts commissions to administer public art projects. However, attempts at collaboration are often a challenge when the engineering-based world of transportation meets the subjective, aesthetics-based world of art. When artist Pam Beyette responded to the call for proposals for the Edmonds, WA, project that ultimately would become "Eight Luminaries," little did she know that the greatest obstacle would simply be the persistence required. Begun in 2006, the project faced a number of bureaucratic hurdles involving several agencies and required the artist's ongoing engagement to keep the concept fresh and alive through its estimated completion in 2012.

Challenges like the ones faced by Beyette are not unusual in art-transportation projects. However, in exchange for her patience, Beyette had the opportunity to change the face of a community in a way that is both meaningful and highly visible.

Making It Stick

Infrastructure provides a unique canvas for art: together, they create "postcard moments"

that people remember. The cross-pollination of art and transportation delivers significant benefits to projects and communities, including real and valuable public participation, economic development, and improved wayfinding and local branding.

Although art in transportation has come a long way, with many success stories stemming from installations along trails and at major airports and rail stations, the highway environment remains a fertile frontier for growth. Although some communities seem convinced of its value, in others, artistic interests still need to elbow their way into the discussion. In those cities and towns, convincing engineers, politicians, and other stakeholders of the value of art is an ongoing endeavor. Nonetheless, each new success story makes it clearer that art in transportation increases public involvement and sense of community, stimulates local economies, and ultimately makes places stronger.



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