U.S. Department of Transportation
BEAUTIFYING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE COUNCIL

Council Notes for Task 26-03: Implementing the Principles of Beautiful Design
The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT or Department) asks the Beautifying Transportation Infrastructure Council (BTIC or Council) to provide feedback to DOT on the mechanisms through which principles that guide and direct the development of more aesthetically pleasing transportation projects can be substantively implemented by DOT, its partners, and stakeholders.

Discussion: Beautiful Design Principles Implementation
The Council structured the discussion around the following themes:

Potential Mechanisms

- Educational tools: website, guidebook, videos
    - Constraints, tradeoffs, and opportunities impacting general principles of aesthetics and the design and construction process.
    - The benefits of following design principles.
    - Examples and outcomes such as revenues, demographic changes, and land value.
    - Public service and social media videos that concisely explain infrastructure design aesthetics, provide examples of good design and landscaping, and highlight their importance and cultural/historical value.
- State-level champions to elevate the narrative and help develop buy-in and interest.
- Subject matter expertise: A rotating board of urban design review experts, including business experts, covering different aspects of infrastructure design and development. Such a panel could bring in local experts that understand local communities and history.
- Aesthetic master plans that highlight examples to follow, establish base level standards for corridors, and show how costs can be met at scale while including the details and standards expected for the aesthetics.
- Budgetary requirements could be set for landscaping, aesthetic designs, etc. For example, Florida requires some projects to set aside 1.5 % of budget for aesthetics and greenery but context should be considered when determining these percentages.
- Relevant state scoping and procurement processes that incorporate aesthetic considerations could inform the development of a concise primer to help other state agencies structure and refine their own processes.

Barriers to Incorporation of Aesthetic Design

- Funding and time constraints.
- The tendency to use design aesthetics funding as discretionary.

Timeliness of Design Input

- Input may change over the project lifecycle.
- Important to uphold design principles across project stages.

Regulatory and Other Impacts

- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) already considers infrastructure

aesthetics; some entities may not be aware.
- New standards and mechanisms may take more effort to implement so adding to existing mechanisms may facilitate their adoption.

Examples and Noteworthy Practices Identified by the Council
- Klyde Warren Park as a highway cap in Dallas, TX.
- The General Service Administration (GSA) Design Award is a premier biennial program recognizing visionary architecture, engineering, and landscape design within the Federal government's real estate portfolio.
- Section 106 requires a community process for projects funded by Federal government and requires Federal agencies to consider how projects impact historic properties and give communities a direct voice in project planning.
- The National Academies' Transportation Review Board provides a forum that could explore the nexus of safety and design aesthetics. This forum could offer opportunities to share BTIC findings and recommendations, while also identifying avenues for collaboration with relevant research efforts.

Council Recommendations

Enhance Available Resources
- Revise core Federal guidance documents like the Federal Highway Administration's aesthetic design guidelines.
- Publish ready-made, legally vetted procurement language that state and local agencies can insert into solicitations and requests for proposals.
- The Federal Highway Administration should revise the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) to include reduction of road signage clutter.
- Encourage the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials to include context-sensitive design chapters in their Green Book and streamline design exceptions to minimize rigid geometric standards in historic or unique areas.

Establish Aesthetic Design Process/Requirements
- Require independent review panels for projects that meet important thresholds
- Require public input and engagement opportunities for projects that meet important thresholds.
- Utilize existing state scoping and procurement processes that incorporate aesthetic considerations to develop a primer to help structure and refine planning processes for state agencies.
- Require agencies on major projects to articulate written aesthetic goals during early planning and establish non-binding, independent peer review panels (modeled after the GSA Design Excellence Program).
- Explore other Federal regulation frameworks, like NEPA, and how they impact potential design aesthetics or could be integrated.

Create Best Practices

- Determine clear design definitions and how they relate to different roles throughout project development stages.
- Treat aesthetic commitments on major projects as formal requirements so they cannot be easily eliminated during budget adjustments.
- Make design a visible budget line in DOT grants and require its long-term maintenance as a funding condition.
- Establish new awards for recognizing aesthetic value of transportation facilities.
- Include design quality as an explicit scoring criterion in federal Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs).