

If Things Were Perfect...

Dr. Ruth Middleton House • President, Middleton-House & Company

Just ask the presenters at the 2006 Georgia Transportation Summit how hard it is to get anything done about transportation problems:

What we lack is the political will to solve the problem.

“There is too much turf guarding.”

“We have problems because of bad blood. We’ve got to work together.”

These comments highlight the difficult problem of coordinating efforts across transportation organizations. Of course, a complete assessment paints a picture of solutions, too. But we’ve been stuck for a long time and the odds don’t seem good. What are we missing?

Sports psychologists have long been teaching athletes to picture success—even against all odds. And managers have used an approach called “Visionary Analysis” to picture business success. The approach has worked for individuals, for projects, and for whole organizations. Can it work across organizations? It seems worth a try to take these steps (House, Ruth. *It’s Time to Change the Way You Change*. Kennesaw, Georgia: Middleton-House & Company, 2005, pp. 103-106.)

1. Develop a moving picture in your head of the perfect outcome. How would the many organizations involved in transportation planning, funding, and execution work together if the world were perfect? Reality will come into play later, but not now. We are not talking about “OK” or “acceptable” or “meets specs.” We are talking about perfect.
2. Write down a detailed description of that moving picture. Get all of your senses in on the act. What do you see, hear, touch, smell, taste?
3. Play that moving picture of success over and over again in your head—even before you tell anyone about it. Have confidence that you could play out your part

in real life without even thinking about it.

4. Deal with obstacles from the right side of your brain. When someone says “That will never work,” you will likely reply from the left (logical) side of your brain “Why not?” Then you get an earful! There are many logical reasons not to try. You are stuck.

Next time, respond from the right (creative) side of your brain instead. When someone says “That will never work,” answer “What if it did work? What would it look like?” You already have the answer to that question—in your picture of success. Now you are un-stuck and moving toward a solution.

5. Enlist the support of other people. Finally, let reality back into the picture. Whose support would you need in order to make your moving picture a reality? What, specifically, would they need to do and when? Now you are ready to share your moving picture with others.

Can this approach work across organizations? It’s worth a try. To get started, let’s ask some of the people who can attest that the problem is stubborn. How would they apply Step One of our process? What would be in their moving picture of perfect?

First, let’s hear from Dan Bollinger, Executive Director of the Southwest Georgia RDC and President of the National Association of Development Organizations “What an eye-opener!” That’s what my Missouri counterpart said about getting early input from his local government and his local business community. He passed their recommendations and concerns on to the state before priorities were set, before plans were underway.

If things were perfect, we’d have that kind of timely involvement here. Now I know we can’t just copy another state’s approach as is—there are just too many variables; but surely we can learn from what has worked in other states. Kentucky and Missouri are two that deserve our attention.

In both these states, the local planning organization consults early on with local governments and businesses. They compile local business input about growth and barriers to growth along with local government input about safety and planned development. The input they give the state already has these local concerns and issues taken into account.



Advanced
Underground Mapping
using
Ground Penetrating Radar
(GPR)

Find Utilities
Map Infrastructure
Facility Mapping
Environmental Assessment
Archeological
Geological
Cemetery

Virtual Underground, Inc.
www.virtualug.com
(404) 315-4828



- » Project scheduling
- » Project risk management
- » Constructability review
- » Design analysis
- » Claims analysis
- » Dispute resolution

Robert W. Davenport, AIA » 404.524.7707
bdavenport@navigantconsulting.com
Offices in Atlanta & 23 strategic locations worldwide

It makes sense to leave control of funding with the State. But if things were perfect, projects selected for funding would match the priorities of the local community as well as the priorities of the state. As a result there would be a lot less push back after a project is actually underway. And, it would be easier to pass a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), too.

The perfect process to deliver this perfect outcome would look something like this.

1. Local development organizations consult with governments and businesses in the area.
2. Local advisory groups get together and compare needs and concerns across intrastate regions. They look at the collective local concerns and issues and identify the regional priorities.
3. Working with local governments, these local groups build an ideal plan for their region within the state.
4. The State reviews the plans then comes back to the local groups with issues and problems.
5. The RDC (Regional Development Center) would provide help in problem-solving and consensus-building.
6. The State proceeds.

Now it's true that conversations with local governments and businesses are time consuming. And it's true that they don't have the visibility or the glamour of conversations with those large companies that may relocate to the area. But existing local organizations actually have

the greater impact on the local economy. They do more than sustain the existing job market—they provide the bulk of the area's new jobs as well. It's time for us to start paying more attention to them.

And here's how David Doss, Board Member of the Georgia Department of Transportation, described perfect.

In my perfect world: Organizations focus together on The Big Picture. Policy makers realize that transportation decisions can help narrow the gulf between "the haves" and "the have-nots"—or help widen it. The contribution of some donor regions (those that send in more dollars than they get back) is necessary to ensure that all areas of the state have what they need to flourish.

When people or groups disagree, Common Sense guides the solution. We don't rely on statistics and studies

alone—we talk to local people about what they know and what they think. And we reward the behavior we want—we give tax breaks to people who use energy-efficient cars, for example.

Together, these two principles impact funding, environmental regulation, Federal governance and local cooperation. Funding is no longer a constraint that produces stress and conflict between groups. We have the financial resources to do the job right. And the source of funding is varied so transportation projects aren't threatened by a downturn in the economy. We tax out of state users of Georgia roads based on the mileage of the user.

Environmental regulation is less complex and more consistent. We can quickly and easily assess the environmental consequences of a project or course of action. To begin with, there are fewer Federal Environmental



Infrastructure, planning and engineering expertise



**JORDAN
JONES &
GOULDING** 770.455.8555 | www.jjg.com

Water & Wastewater | Land Development
Transportation & Transportation Planning
Management & Operations | Tunnels & Geotechnics
Environment & Water Resources

Standards. And when there are disagreements, Common Sense plays a major role in resolving them. We don't rely on "Studies" alone. We ask the local people about impact. No need to delay a project to avoid disturbing a Skullcap plant (the herb) when it is so plentiful that farmers consider it a weed and are spraying to kill it off

The Federal Government is easy to navigate, in general. We get things done on time because there are fewer organizations and less red tape within each one. Performance standards enforced within and across Federal agencies ensure two things. First, they ensure timeliness. Environmental documents are actually completed within the 18-month limit. Second, they ensure consistency. Once we have a commitment, we move

ahead with confidence. No one comes back later and says, "Who told you that?"

Even locally, there are fewer organizations to deal with and fewer levels within each. Metropolitan Planning Organizations pull GDOT into the loop before decisions are made or plans are formulated. We are open to their input and they are open to our consultation. We develop real solutions to problems, not just workarounds. In consultation with each other, we focus on the things that will get the most bang for the buck and serve the most people.

We still have different organizations representing different points of view—important checks and balances come into play. But inefficiency and ambiguity are a thing of the past. Across the board, the ground rules are clear. A

person making a decision, planning a project, or executing a project knows who to go to and why.

In my perfect world, across agencies and issues we:

- Focus on the big picture: the best transportation for the most people.
- Let common sense govern our thinking and our relationships with others.

Dan Bollinger and David Doss have given us a good start. A complete assessment both identifies problems and envisions solutions. Sometimes—especially when you are *stuck*—the creative side of your brain can paint a clear picture of success that the logical side hasn't brought into focus. ❖

Contact: Joe D'Alessandro, PE

Power Generation
T-Lines & Substations
Communications
Automation & Controls
Facilities
Project & Const. Mgmt.

5325 Oakbrook Parkway
Norcross, GA 30093
Tel. 770-279-3200
Fax 770-921-9862

www.powereng.com



SOUTHERN RESEARCH

Historic Preservation Consultants

Archaeology • History • Architectural History

www.southres.com • 706/582-2440

Associate member ACEC/G

HEERY

Engineering • Architecture
Program Management
Construction Management • Interior Design

HEERY INTERNATIONAL
www.heery.com

999 Peachtree Street, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30367-5401
Tel: 404/881-9880 FAX: 404/875-1283

ESTES • SHIELDS

ESE

ENGINEERING • INC

CIVIL | STRUCTURAL | GEOTECHNICAL | ENVIRONMENTAL

6 EXECUTIVE PARK DRIVE • SUITE 300
ATLANTA • GEORGIA • 30329
P 404 | 248 | 1960 • F 404 | 417 | 0664
www.eseinc.com

ROSSER **ROSSER INTERNATIONAL, INC.**

404.876.3800 www.rosser.com

Mechanical
Electrical
Structural
Plumbing/Life Safety
Civil
Transportation
Environmental
Architecture



Water • Wastewater • Environmental
GIS • Transportation

 **Gannett Fleming**

A Tradition of Excellence

www.gannettfleming.com

Augusta, GA (706) 855-1085

Be a part of some of the most challenging and exciting transportation projects and programs underway in the Southeast.





Whether you're an experienced engineer, architect or planner, a junior professional or a recent college graduate, we encourage you to learn more about the opportunities and rewards that HNTB offers.

Contact: Jeremy MacDonald jmacdonald@hntb.com Travis Black jblack@hntb.com

HNTB Corporation
The HNTB Companies
Engineers
Architects
Planners

3715 Northside Parkway, NW
400 Northcreek, Suite 600
Atlanta, Georgia 30327
(404) 946-5700
www.hntb.com

