Hello, and welcome to Community Context Tools for Transportation Decisions. On this website we’re collecting tools and methods that can help transportation professionals in their work of integrating transportation into community context.

OK, you may be wondering, just what is community context?

Simply stated, it’s the ‘look and feel’ of a community.

It’s the physical features like buildings, parks, landmarks, and streets; it’s the community members and their values, perceptions, interactions, and activity levels; and it’s the natural environment, including air and water quality, forests, plants, and wildlife. Community context is about all aspects of quality of life.

Understanding community context means understanding how these elements interact and work together.

So, what does this have to do with transportation? Well, quite a lot.

We all rely on transportation every day to support and improve our quality of life. Transportation facilities—including streets, highways, sidewalks, and greenways—provide the physical connections we need to access places and activities. Transportation facilities can also affect natural habitats, views, neighborhoods, and historic or cultural sites.

This means that when transportation planners and engineers make decisions about building transportation facilities, community context must be carefully considered.

Understanding context helps transportation planners support a community’s long-term development and land use goals, and it helps avoid negative impacts to the places and activities that are important to the community.

Understanding context also helps transportation engineers. The design of a roadway affects the amount and speed of traffic, stormwater runoff, walkability and bikability, access to businesses, and how freight and transit vehicles will operate with other traffic.

The tools to understand context come in many forms. Some tools use quantitative data such as population, income, traffic counts, or miles of sidewalks. Others use qualitative data such how lively and attractive a city street is or the importance of natural areas to the community. Context tools often use existing data from sources like the US Census, local governments, or GIS collections. New data can also be collected directly from the community using methods such as focus group interviews, web surveys, and electronic meetings. Context tools collect and organize community data so that community context can be understood and become an integral part of how transportation decisions are made.
As I mentioned earlier, we’re collecting context tools and methods, and we need your input. Because community context reflects the full range of community characteristics, we want to hear not only from transportation planners and engineers, but from many other disciplines, as well as community members and neighborhood organizations. Our goal is to provide a rich and varied collection of tools that help inform transportation decisions.

So, to submit your Context Tool, simply go to the ‘Tool Submission’ page of this website. There you’ll find an electronic submission form. We’ll use the information you provide to help improve this online resource for practitioners.

Thank you in advance for your submission, and thanks for exploring the website. Your contribution will help build better transportation projects that support and enhance community quality of life.