

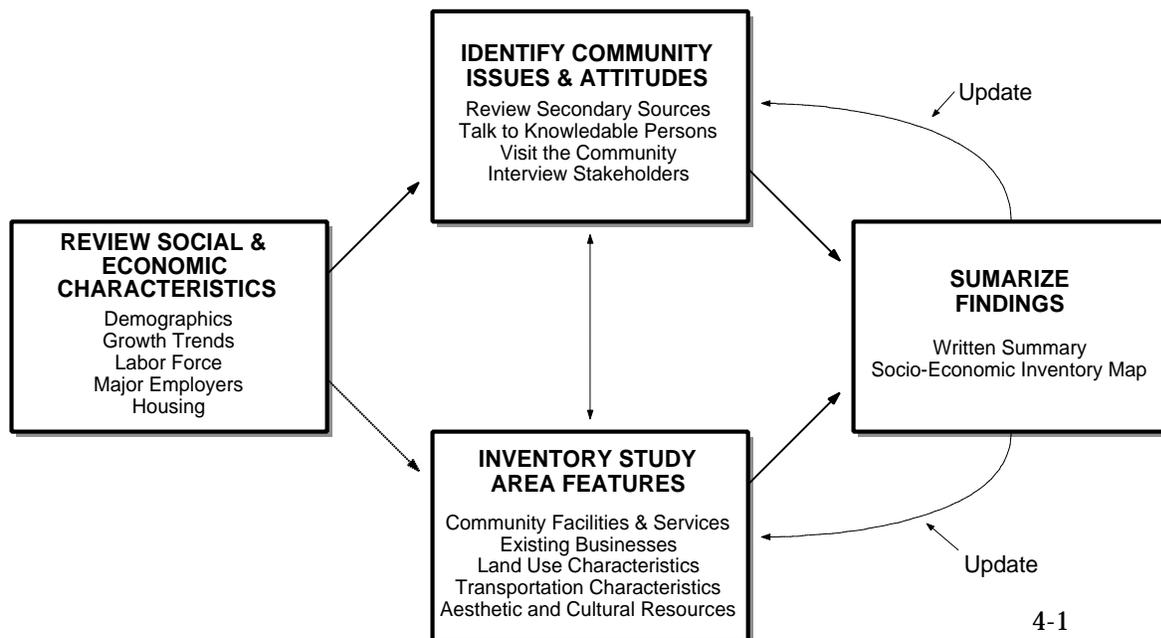
CHAPTER 4 : DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY PROFILE

The community profile is a summary of baseline conditions and trends in a community and study area. It establishes the context for assessing potential impacts and for project decision-making. Developing a community profile involves identifying community issues and attitudes, locating notable features in the study area, and assessing social and economic conditions and trends in the community and region that have a bearing on the project. Preparing a community profile is often an iterative process. Although some information can be collected early project development, other important information about the community may not be uncovered until later in project development or production.

Information can be collected both from primary sources, such as interviews or field surveys, and secondary sources, such as comprehensive plans or newspaper articles. The nature of the data collection effort and the level of documentation required will vary according to the project. For major or controversial projects, information on the community might feed into the Baseline Conditions section of the CIA technical report. For other less extensive projects, a brief summary of key issues and baseline data could be included in the project files.

This chapter provides a general process for developing a community profile (see Figure 4-1). It addresses major elements for consideration, where and how to get the information, and suggestions on documenting the information. A checklist, summarizing the various elements of a community profile, appears at the end of this chapter. It is intended as a guide for collecting relevant data, recognizing that not all of this information will be relevant for every project.

Figure 4-1: Process for Developing a Community Profile



REVIEW SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Begin with a review of population, housing, and economic characteristics and trends of the broader community and the study area. Such data are useful for understanding growth trends, ethnicity, income, and mobility needs of a population. Economic data also provide insight into how the local or regional economy may be affected by a transportation project. Housing data are useful for gaining insight into economic and relocation impacts, as well as changes in housing composition that could affect the character, social organization, and the level of cohesion in a particular neighborhood.

Data Sources

Population, housing, and economic data are often readily available from other government agencies or previous planning studies. County planning departments, city planning departments and metropolitan planning organizations can provide demographic and economic information for the county and subgroups of the county. This information may already be summarized in local comprehensive plans and MPO long range plans. The U.S. Census also provides much of this information, although depending on the census year it may be somewhat out of date. Local governments or metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) may have more current county-level census tract or block group data. Demographic information is also regularly compiled and maintained by other agencies such as School Boards, social service agencies, water management districts, and health departments. Also, a variety of locations on the Internet (including the U.S. Census Bureau website) provide demographic and other useful information at no charge.

Economic information, such as labor force characteristics and major employers and industries, may be obtained from the Census, local plans and planning studies and area economic development organizations. In addition, the Florida Department of Labor compiles a quarterly record of labor data on Florida businesses in the ES202 Database. This information is not available publicly in disaggregated format. However, the Florida Department of Transportation receives information extracted from that file and compiles data on the Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) level. Contained in this file is the number of employees by commercial, industrial, and service for each TAZ. This database can be obtained from the FDOT Planning Office.

Housing data are available through the FDOT Right-of-Way office, local and state planning agencies, the local property appraisers office, local real estate agencies, social service agencies, and non-profit organizations or neighborhood groups. More specific data can be obtained through field observation of housing condition and interviews with knowledgeable persons.

Types of data to look for:

- a. Relevant demographic characteristics of the community include:
 - Population and growth trends;
 - Age distribution;

- Average household size;
 - Ethnic composition;
 - Average household income (compared to surrounding area); and
 - Concentrations of special groups, such as minority or low-income populations, elderly persons, religious or ethnic groups, and persons with disabilities.
- b. Relevant economic characteristics, include:
- Unemployment rates and trends;
 - Work force characterization (by SIC code);
 - Dominant business sector type; and
 - Major employers and industries.
- c. Relevant housing characteristics, include:
- The age, type, and condition of structures;
 - Vacancy rates and trends in the community and length of residency (percentage of residents five years in home).
 - The extent and availability of low-income housing in the affected community;
 - The type of occupancy in the study area (renters versus owners).

Summarizing the Data

Summarize the highlights of your findings. Compare local data with similar county and state data for further insight into the magnitude of identified social and economic trends in relation to the broader region or state. The summary should address the following:

- Major population changes that have or are occurring in the community, such as major changes in population size, density, composition and/or homogeneity.
- Location and path of high growth areas in the region.
- Housing characteristics in the study area (number of units affected, types of units, soundness of units); length of residency or vacancy rates compared to the larger community, and the type of occupancy (owner vs. renter, average household size). Length of residency or vacancy rates provides some indication of the degree of stability of an area, whether it is characterized by long term residents or highly mobile individuals, and can sometimes provide clues of the degree of resident satisfaction with an area.
- Characteristics of the populations affected by the proposed transportation project in terms of age, racial and ethnic composition, employment, and relative income distribution.

- Location of special populations, such as concentrations of low-income elderly, persons with disabilities, low-income or minority neighborhoods, or ethnic communities.
- Labor force characteristics and trends, major employers in the area, dominant business sector, and employment trends that may be relevant to the project.

A Caution on Census Data

The U.S. Census provides data on racial and income characteristics at the census tract level. However, in some cases census data have been shown to be unreliable for identifying low-income or ethnic communities. The level of aggregation may not be fine enough or data may be outdated, depending upon the timing of the analysis. Also, the census is based on self-reported data, making it prone to undercounting certain populations due to their reluctance to divulge information. Aside from census data, minority and low-income populations may be identified through field observation or through nonprofit community organizations that work with specific groups or low-income populations. In some cases, surveys may be the most effective tool to determine the race/ethnicity, number of persons per household, and income level of residents near a transportation project.

IDENTIFY COMMUNITY ISSUES AND ATTITUDES

Community impact assessment requires a thorough understanding of the potentially affected community, including community values, issues or attitudes relevant to the project. Comparison with other similar projects, discussions with knowledgeable persons, and a review of community plans, media reports, and other secondary sources are all helpful in uncovering relevant issues (see Table 4-1). The following approach will provide a solid understanding of community issues and attitudes. These activities may be more or less extensive depending upon the nature of the community and the project.

“Community values can be defined as a set of ideals, which are openly practiced or hidden, that are shared among individuals that identify themselves as a group. Community values are often expressed in written, oral, ritual, or symbolic forms to communicate these ideals to the group or others. These values, which may evolve over time, may relate to family, education, government, economy, natural resources, religion, recreation, social class, communication network, health and general welfare.”

— FDOT CIA Steering Committee

Review Secondary Sources of Information

Secondary source materials can provide a wealth of helpful information. They may reveal community issues of relevance to a transportation project, provide information about community leaders or stakeholders to be interviewed, and can

be helpful in developing relevant interview questions. Good secondary sources include local government comprehensive plans and amendments, evaluation and appraisal reports, local policy studies, media reports, editorials, minutes of public hearings, published local histories, government reports, early versus current photographs of the area, or other relevant local sources.

Public comment delivered at public hearings and news clippings related to similar projects or are about your agency can provide insight into the social characteristics and values of an area, as well as public attitudes. For example, is there a history of opposition to similar projects in the affected area? If so, who

Table 4-1: Methods for Identifying Community Issues	
Method	Sources of Information
Telephone hot-line	Members of the community
Mail-out questionnaires	Members of the community
Published and unpublished historical materials (i.e., oral history)	Community archives Community historians
Community workshops, forums, meetings	Members of the community
Interviews with stakeholders	Environmental organizations Business and trade organizations Civic/public interest groups Grassroots/community-base organizations Elected officials and agency representatives Homeowners and resident organizations Labor unions State and local elected officials and agencies Religious groups and leaders Schools, colleges, and universities Medical community Legal aid providers Rural cooperatives Civil rights organizations Senior citizens groups Transit users MPO Citizen Advisory Committee members
Newspaper articles, media reports	Local news media
Official transcripts of public hearings	County and local records

was involved and what were their reactions? How do the comments characterize your agency? If the potential project has already been made public, how did elected officials and community leaders feel about it—who supported it, who did not, and why?

Talk to Knowledgeable Persons

Before initiating stakeholder interviews and field visits, identify and speak with a few people that are knowledgeable about the community. The local planning director, county administrator, or executive director of the metropolitan planning organization is a good place to start. Talk to these people over the phone or in person to get a perspective on active organizations in the area, issues of local or regional importance, and other people to interview. A scoping process, similar to that for projects requiring an environmental impact statement, is another method of gaining background on key issues or interest groups (see FDOT PD&E Manual, Chapter 8, Section 2-5). Scoping is a process for narrowing down the key issues to be addressed when assessing social, economic and environmental impacts — in other words a process for establishing the *scope* of the study. Stakeholder interviews can be conducted later to collect more specific information about the ideas and concerns of various groups, including individuals that may not be represented in the scoping process.



Visit the Community

All evaluations of community impacts should be based to some degree on direct observation of community life. Visit the community and observe the affected area as a neutral observer. How do people meet their daily needs? Where are the pedestrians and where are they crossing? Where do people congregate?

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Two basic methods for gaining first hand knowledge of the area are described below.

- *Participant observation* is a method for obtaining first-hand knowledge of community life. Participant observation involves spending some time in the affected area, establishing rapport with community members and participating in community life so that people continue to conduct “business as usual” when you are around.



- *Field surveys* involve visiting the affected community(s) and observing existing patterns of activity and interaction. Field surveys include visual study of the community, along with written descriptions and notations regarding activity, services available, community infrastructure, community layout, residential and commercial development, and so on. The information gathered through field surveys will be an important supplement to all of your assessment activities.

Interview Stakeholders

This stage involves visiting and speaking with area stakeholders. A stakeholder, as the name suggests, is anyone with a “stake” in the project. This will include two general groups: those directly affected by the project, such as adjacent property owners or representatives of affected neighborhoods, and those indirectly affected or that have an interest in the project, such as local officials, other community leaders, or interest groups. Personal interviews with stakeholders can provide a wealth of information related to community issues, attitudes, and potential impacts of a project. They can also pass important project information on to others with similar interests. Encourage them to convey the project information in the next group meeting or by word of mouth.

Who should be interviewed?

Stakeholder interviews should be as inclusive as possible to gain a solid understanding of potential community issues and perceived impacts. In selecting the appropriate people to interview, begin with identified community leaders. A “community leader” is anyone who is knowledgeable about the community and local issues or objectives. Subjects may include Chamber of Commerce representatives, religious leaders, local elected officials, local planning directors, leaders of social service agencies or non-profit organizations, leaders of area interest groups, school principals, school board members, community or neighborhood association representatives, or others identified as holding special knowledge or interest in the community. Preferably, the “community leader” should be an individual that has lived in the area for several years. If the study area includes low-income and minority groups, make a special effort to involve representatives from these groups in the interview process (see Chapter 10).

Interview local elected officials early in the process. Use the interview as an opportunity to brief them on the project and the process underway to address potential impacts. This is important for several reasons. First, these individuals can assist in identifying interview subjects and may be helpful in making contacts or obtaining the necessary data. Second, these officials will be called on to make difficult project decisions on behalf of the community, and should be made aware of the efforts underway to minimize adverse community impacts.

How to identify interview subjects

Community leaders and affected groups may be identified through field visits to the community, informal conversations with knowledgeable persons such as

agency representatives, and minutes from community meetings. Some of the community leaders and affected groups will have already surfaced in the previous steps of this process. To broaden the pool of interviewees, try using a “snowball sampling” method. In snowball sampling, the initial set of respondents is asked to name others who should be interviewed. If the list of potential subjects is too long, narrow it down to subjects that are named by more than one other person or that represent an interest group that has not previously been interviewed.

Low-income and minority group representatives may be identified through discussions with other involved persons as well as through local churches, social welfare organizations, and neighborhood organizations. Inadequate programs for informing and involving low income and minority neighborhoods in transportation decisions are the primary cause of environmental justice concerns in transportation.

How to conduct the interview.

Prior to scheduling interviews, it is helpful to develop an interview guide containing the general topics and questions that will be addressed in each interview. Sample questions are provided below. During the interview, remember that the role of the interviewer is to listen more than to speak.



Be mindful that the purpose of the interview is to learn about the respondent’s point of view, regardless of whether you agree with their perspective. Avoid agreeing or disagreeing with statements that are made.

How to Conduct Stakeholder Interviews

Introduce the project and describe purpose and need. Explain that the interview is to inform them about the project and to identify potential impacts, concerns, or objectives related to the project.

Sample questions might include:

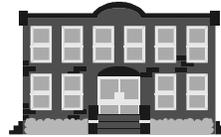
1. Do you have any questions or concerns related to this project?
2. Are you familiar with the concerns or expectations of other groups in the community regarding the project? How would you characterize those issues?
3. What (if any) has been your experience with (our agency)? What (if any) has been your experience with public involvement activities on our past projects?
4. What are the best ways to communicate with you and involve you or your organization in project decisions?
5. Who else do you think we should talk to about this project?

INVENTORY FEATURES OF THE STUDY AREA

Inventories of notable features and resources in the study area provide a basis for understanding and assessing potential project impacts. Consider identifying the location and major characteristics of the following features: affected businesses, activity centers, community facilities and services, and cultural and aesthetic resources. This information, and the identification of community issues and characteristics, provides the basis for understanding and evaluating potential community impacts.

Inventory Community Facilities and Services

Compile an inventory of community facilities and services in the study area. Include information related to the number, location, service area, eligibility, membership, funding, and access of each service and facility. This information will be used to determine whether the proposed project will affect access to needed services in the study area. Chapter 5 discusses how to evaluate the impacts of a project on community facilities and services. This inventory is the first critical step. Although the inventory of community facilities and services begins during the development of the community profile, it may need to be updated and expanded as the analysis proceeds and new information is uncovered through fieldwork. The inventory of community facilities and services should identify any of the following:



1. **Medical and Health Care Facilities:** type of facility or service (e.g., hospital, clinic, doctor's office, public health department, dental facility, specialty service facility, etc.), public or private designation, location, clientele, services offered.
2. **Educational Facilities:** type of facility (e.g., elementary, middle, or high school, community college, university, technical college, vocational school, preschool, etc.), public or private designation, location, school district boundaries, size, student enrollment, age, condition of structures.
3. **Religious Facilities:** type of institution (e.g., church, synagogue, temple, mosque, etc.), location, size of building, membership description (areas from which members are drawn, demographic characteristics or membership, etc.), services offered to members and/or general public, community activities.
4. **Public Works and Services:** description of services available to residents, including law enforcement, emergency services (such as fire protection and ambulance service), postal services, libraries, and public assistance services; location of facility; jurisdiction of services; location of emergency routes.
5. **Civic Centers:** location, services provided.
6. **Recreational Facilities:** location and description of facilities (indoor vs. outdoor, public park, community center, private facility, amenities available, etc.), availability (time of year, hours of operation, membership eligibility, etc.), programs offered, condition of structures/facilities, if applicable.
7. **Historical and Cultural Facilities:** location and description, assigned significance, role in community, services provided, if applicable.
8. **Commercial Facilities:** Location and type of facility (e.g., grocery stores, restaurants, shopping areas, businesses, etc.), services provided.

Inventory Existing Businesses

Some projects require a thorough inventory of the type of businesses in the vicinity of the transportation improvement. This is useful for analysis of potential economic impacts, as well as right-of-way, alignment, and relocation needs.



It is important to obtain information about each individual property, as different types of businesses are affected differently by transportation projects. Inspection of current land use maps, aerial photographs, and on-site inspection will help identify businesses that could be impacted. Below are other sources that can be used to gain information specific to each property within the study area:

1. Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development Council: Basic information about business properties contained in the study area can also be obtained from the local chamber of commerce or economic development council. These organizations often have information on businesses, such as number of employees and specific business activities that would not be contained in tax collector files.
2. County Tax Collector Files: County tax collector files contain basic information for each property within a county. This information can be used to develop a matrix of the type of properties that will be directly or indirectly affected by a transportation project. Each property in the tax collector file is categorized by type according to the Standard Industrial Classification or SIC code (residential, office, retail, industrial, government, community, etc.). The SIC system will convert over time to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) with a full turn-over in most government publications by the year 2003.
3. Field Surveys: Information such as business value and employment are not contained in tax collector files, but can sometimes be obtained through direct observation and visits to area businesses.

Benefits of Field Surveys

FDOT conducted a field survey in northeast Florida to supplement tax records for a project area to better evaluate properties that might have to be demolished or relocated for a roadway improvement project. A warehouse that appeared rundown and having little value, was discovered to house sophisticated electronics and telecommunications equipment and connections that would have cost several million dollars to relocate.

Once this information is gathered it should be put into a table containing information about properties being relocated, properties abutting the transportation improvement, and properties in the area of the improvement. The table should contain information for each property on type of business, property value, and number of employees, and note whether the business is a major employer in the community. This information will be helpful in understanding potential impacts of a project on the local economy and business activity on the corridor. Specific methods for assessing economic impacts of transportation projects are addressed in Chapter 6.

Inventory Land Use and Transportation Characteristics

Obtain comprehensive plans, land development codes, and special planning studies from the affected communities. Review this information to identify any special land use or development issues that need to be considered in relation to the project. Much of this information is readily available from the local planning or public works department, Metropolitan Planning Organization, tax assessors office, and area utility companies.



Specific data sources for the land use assessment include:

- Local Comprehensive Plans, plan amendments and Evaluation and Appraisal Report;
- Local Land Development Codes and Zoning Maps;
- Tax Assessor Maps/Local Plat Maps;
- Geographic Information System (GIS) Land Use/Land Cover Maps;
- Concurrency Management Program data;
- Neighborhood or Subarea Plans;
- Community Redevelopment Plans;
- Special Land Use Studies;
- Aerial Photographs;
- School District Property Plans;
- Development of Regional Impact (DRI) Studies;
- Sewer and Utility Service Area Plans;
- Economic Development Plans
- Military or Federal Facility Plans;
- Transportation Corridor Studies;
- Transit Development Plans;
- Long Range Transportation Plans;
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Plans;
- Congestion Management System Plans;
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plans;
- Transportation Demand Management Plans;
- Access Management Plans;
- Florida Intrastate Highway System Plan;
- Emergency Management and Hurricane Evacuation Plans;
- Historic Preservation Plans;
- Architectural/Design Guidelines/Standards

Existing land use and property ownership data are available from existing land use maps in local comprehensive plans, GIS land use/land cover maps, and tax assessors maps, as well as aerial photographs. Land use information can be acquired from Regional planning councils, local planning departments, and water management districts. Regional planning councils typically maintain a collection of all area plans, programs and studies, but these are not always up to date. County planning departments and public libraries may also maintain a similar collection. Plans for utilities, state parks, school districts, federal facilities, water management, and other relevant issues can be obtained directly

from the respective agency or organization. Large landholders (malls, theme parks, office parks, etc.) may also have useful planning documents available for review.

Some things to look for in the land use and transportation inventory are described below.

1. Obtain aerial photos of the corridor and identify existing land use characteristics. If available, compare this to aerials that were taken in past years.
2. Briefly summarize existing land use and zoning on the corridor, using a combination of land use plan maps, land cover maps, aerial photos and field surveys. Identify the type of uses abutting the corridor and what proportion of total acreage on the corridor is currently industrial, commercial, residential, agricultural, or open space/conservation. Also determine the amount of vacant land along the general corridor that is zoned for commercial, industrial or residential development. The land use and zoning designations and level of detail will vary according to the length of the corridor and whether the area is urban, suburban, or rural.
3. In suburban or rural areas, consider obtaining plat maps indicating property ownership and land division patterns abutting the facility. This information is often available for use on geographic information systems (GIS), from the local planning department or tax assessor's office. Property ownership information is helpful for minimizing property impacts as the roadway alignment is further defined. Land division activity is an excellent indicator of the conversion of rural land for development and if time series data are available, it can dramatically illustrate losses in productive farmland and development trends along the corridor. For example, over time large agricultural land holdings are often sold off and split into smaller and smaller parcels. Lot split activity on roadway frontage leads to commercial strips and increases demand for direct roadway access, creating long-term transportation and growth management impacts for the affected community. In addition, conversion of agricultural land for residential estates is the leading cause of the disappearance of productive farmland. Such information can be useful both in raising community awareness of the problems, the relative significance of the transportation improvement in relation to other public policies that affect development outcomes, and the need for local government action in addressing adverse land use impacts.
4. Talk to the local planning or public works department to determine if there are special zoning districts or overlay regulations that apply to the study area, such as local access management plans, historic district overlay zoning, or canopy road ordinances.
5. Determine whether there are any neighborhood or subarea plans, community redevelopment areas, Main Street program areas, or other special planning designations within the study area. Identify their boundaries and any goals, objectives or policies that have a bearing on the project.
6. Identify whether transportation right of way may have been dedicated or reserved for the project.

7. Identify which utility companies will be affected and where the utilities are located.
8. Identify whether development is constrained in the study area due to lack of adequate transportation capacity to meet concurrency requirements.
9. Determine whether the community has a bicycle and pedestrian plan for the affected area and identify if any planned bicycle or pedestrian facilities lie within the study area. Locate pedestrian and school crossings and major pedestrian travel routes.
10. Locate the transit station areas and facilities in the study area and determine whether any additional facilities are planned in the area.

Inventory Aesthetic and Cultural Resources

The FDOT Project Development & Environment Manual addresses the aesthetics of highways and bridges and their impacts on the surrounding environment. However, several other aspects of aesthetics and visual quality impacts should be addressed in the community impact assessment, including:



- Trees,
- Historic districts and structures,
- Neighborhoods with adopted architectural or design guidelines,
- Local landmarks and cultural resources,
- Local measures of community character,
- Historic/scenic landscapes,
- Impacts to or of transit facilities (the aesthetics of bus and rail facilities can directly impact their patronage),
- Impacts to or of traffic control devices (ie, mast arms), and
- Impacts to or of parking facilities.

Identifying cultural and aesthetic resources is a major step toward assessing aesthetic impacts of a transportation project. The inventory of aesthetic and cultural resources along a corridor may be more or less extensive, depending upon the nature of the study area. In most cases, aesthetic or cultural resources can be identified through public involvement and field observations. If the study area includes a locally or nationally important scenic landscape, the inventory may require the assistance of a trained landscape architect. Chapter 8 provides a method for assessing the aesthetic impacts of transportation projects. A few sample options that may be used for identifying aesthetic features on a corridor include:

- Conduct a workshop in the study area. Using an aerial photograph of the corridor, ask participants to identify locally important landmarks or aesthetic features.
- Provide residents in an area with disposable cameras and ask them to take pictures of features that they prefer or would like to preserve. Ask them to provide the pictures with some indication of its location, a brief description, and any local issues.

- Review the local comprehensive plan to identify policies, programs, or land use plans related to community character and aesthetics.
- Identify someone with local knowledge of cultural resources, such as a local historian or architect, and invite them on a walking or driving tour of the corridor to identify notable cultural and aesthetic features. Indicate the specific location of the feature, a brief description, and any local issues that surround it.
- Conduct a visual preference survey with residents in the study area. Show slides of various typical project designs or streetscapes and ask them to rate their reactions.

SUMMARIZE AND MAP KEY FINDINGS

Summarize the highlights of your inventory in the report of baseline conditions or in a written briefing of major findings. In summarizing the information, focus on issues of relevance to the project. As described in Chapter 2, the Baseline Conditions Assessment would include the following information:

II. Baseline Conditions

A. Social Characteristics

- Demographic Profile & Special Populations
- Community Issues and Attitudes (relevant to project)
- Community Facilities and Services (in study area)
- Community Cohesion
- Mobility
- Safety

B. Economic Characteristics

- Labor Force Characteristics
- Major Employers and Industries

C. Land Use and Growth Trends

- Existing and Planned Land Use
- Existing Zoning
- Growth Trends and Issues (past and present)

D. Notable Features in Study Area

- Aesthetic Character
- Historic Resources

Prepare Socio-Economic Inventory Map

Also prepare a base map of key geographic information. This map may be simple and conceptual or more detailed, depending upon the nature of the project. Begin with a base map of the community or study area. Either on this map or through overlays, map the location of defined neighborhoods, special populations, major pedestrian crossings, community facilities, and any other notable features in the study area that you have identified through the profile. This is most easily completed through the use of GIS technology.

The socio-economic inventory map is an invaluable tool for developing and evaluating project alternatives. Alternatives can be overlaid on the socio-economic inventory map to uncover potential community impacts in a graphical way that is easy to understand. The best way to accomplish this task is through the use of geographic information systems. These maps can be used to compare

alternatives for potential impacts and to inform the community and project staff of the trade-offs among alternatives. If this is not an option, a simple conceptual graphic can also be effective in communicating the location of various features in relation to the proposed project.

UPDATE THE PROFILE

Profiling a community is an iterative process. The description of baseline conditions should be updated as new information is obtained throughout the community impact assessment process. The geographic information systems are ideal for this process as inventory maps and data may be easily added or updated.