The challenge to designers has grown over the past decade. Congestion brings angry complaints and demands from motorists who want safe, fast, well-maintained highways. Also there are growing demands from neighborhood groups, environmental activists, other interest groups and ordinary citizens for involvement in the decision making process. They do not want "business as usual." We can ignore all that. But we don't get a project built then. We don't solve a problem.

These interest groups and communities want priority given to protection of natural and historic resources. They want commercial areas and residential neighborhoods over high capacity design. However, designers have a tendency to pull out the Green Book.

But what is Context Sensitive Design and what is it not? CSD isn't dressing up the project with a few amenities. It isn't asking for public input and then filing away the comments just to meet the requirement. It is not a roundabout or a speed hump. It could be but it's just not that. CSD is a proactive process in which the public is part of the decision making team. Since CSD is really evolving presently, it is a living discussion.

In 1997, we issued a book called Flexibility in Highway Design as a companion guide to the updated Green Book. The Green Book was perceived as the absolute non-negotiable standards that we use. Flexibility in Design encouraged us to look at other solutions. Interestingly, we did not walk into this on our own volition. When Congress passed ISTEA, it asked us to the same thing - to look at projects designed for preservation of scenic or historic value and those projects that have mitigation measures. But, in truth and in all fairness to the design community, we have been practicing this flexibility in design for some time. In case-specific examples, we have done a good job of applying particular standards to that solution.

In 1998, AASHTO and FHWA joined with Maryland DOT to host a national workshop on "thinking beyond the pavement" and integrating the highway development process with the environmental process while maintaining the safety and performance of the highways. In 1999, the concept of CSD evolved further and five states agreed to become pilot states teaching the rest of us what they learned. And interestingly, three of those states are with us here today - Kentucky, Connecticut and Maryland.

So, what is CSD? To me, it is an attitude; it is an ethic, if you will. I have sat in some discussions about CSD and we say, let's look at our standards. I feel that that's not the place to start, it's more than that. In my mind, its how you go into the project, not how you come out of it. It's more than flexibility in design which only focuses on geometric standards. "Thinking beyond the pavement?" If we just take that concept, it forces us to think about what the surrounding environment is like. It's about consensus and collaboration, not compromise. To get there, we need to start with the problem. Does the public understand what the problem is? Do they agree that that's the problem we are trying to solve? It is essential to get ownership upfront and develop an agreement on what the problem is.

Firstly, what is it that we are trying to solve? We do not have the end in mind. We begin by listening, by understanding the context. Secondly, what is it that the communities and the surroundings are telling us? What
are the other complementary and competing goals of the community? It is essential to listen and understand and make sure that each party's views are clearly stated. Thirdly, it is necessary to balance competing issues, functions and other needs, in an open and flexible manner. Lastly, test the solution on the community. Question in a honest and critical manner whether the proposed solution has solved the problem.

I would like to leave you with a challenge. To the speakers, to challenge the thinking of the audience. To the listeners, to take this knowledge back to their organizations, to exchange cards and exchange information with the contacts you made here.