A Better Tomorrow
an America 2050 project
Overview

America 2050 and Spencer Trask Collaborative Innovations are launching a web-based, collaborative innovation competition to engage the public in visualizing the future of America’s transportation systems and urbanization.

The 90-day competition aims to build broad support for a positive vision of America’s future transportation systems and communities by eliciting thousands of shareable web-based video clips that envision “A Better Tomorrow.” The competition will aim to achieve several outcomes:

• Create buzz, excitement and media attention about the role of transportation in our nation’s future.

• Reignite momentum to reauthorize the nation’s 5-year surface transportation bill.

• Cultivate, engage, and educate a new group of stakeholders about transportation and urbanization’s role in meeting our country’s economic and environmental challenges and connect them to ongoing advocacy efforts.

• Pioneer a new online tool for collaborative innovation to address societal challenges.

• Generate hundreds of shareable YouTube and YouTube-like videos that promote a positive vision for future transportation systems and communities in America.

The competition will launch on April 16, 2010 at Regional Plan Association’s annual Regional Assembly, “Innovation and the American Metropolis”, which brings together over 600 of the New York region’s leading civic, business and government leaders at the Waldorf-Astoria and taps into New York City’s robust media market. Through partnerships with media, industry groups, and advocacy organizations, the effort will target specific communities and attempt to reach tens of thousands of participants across America.

Collaborative Innovation Platform and Competition

The platform for the competition is Spencer Trask’s collaborative innovation tool, VenCorps. The platform is a transparent marketplace for social innovation. Through a web-based portal, teams post their ideas for review by the community. The community provides feedback and resources to the innovators. The community then votes to select a winner, who receives a prize from the sponsor. The structured collaboration creates high levels of engagement, speed of decision-making, and quality of outcome.

The most recent competition run on this platform was the “ITS Congestion Challenge,” which sought solutions to relieving auto congestion in America. The Challenge resulted in the submission of over 120 innovative solutions which were proactively and constructively engaged by over 5,000 participants in a 90-day competition. The online collaboration culminated in the selection of iCarpool.com at the 16th World Congress on ITS in Stockholm.
Engaging the Public in a Positive Vision for the Future

Seventy years ago on the heels of the Great Depression, Americans were inspired by transportation’s role in a positive vision for the future of America. At the 1939 World’s Fair, visitors saw the future of America at the General Motors Pavilion in Flushing Meadows, New York. GM’s vision of 1960 (“The Futurama”) was one in which all Americans had access to the benefits of a modern society via rapid automobile travel on modern highways and a reorganized, suburban American landscape. No doubt, GM’s vision helped build support among the 44 million people who attended the World’s Fair from 1939-1940 for federal policies such as the National Defense Interstate Highway Act of 1956, which helped make “Futurama” a reality.

Fast forward to 2010. The nation’s surface transportation bill is stalled indefinitely in Congress. The federal motor fuel tax no longer covers the cost of our national highway and transit programs. We experience about 40,000 annual deaths on the nation’s highways and spend billions to import motor fuels from politically unstable countries. In addition, the transportation sector contributes 30 percent of the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions. And yet, transportation hardly registers among voters and politicians focused on other pressing issues like health care, the economy, and the war in Afghanistan.

In this context, A Better Tomorrow aims to elevate transportation in the public discourse by engaging tens of thousands of people in the challenge of visualizing the role of transportation in our daily lives and the types of transportation and land use investments, strategies, and technologies that are needed to build a prosperous and sustainable future. Our objective is to create a broadly shared, positive vision for the future of America that inspires and galvanizes action for the transportation policy reforms and investments that are needed.
How the Competition Works

The competition begins with a challenge, such as the following.

*Over the next forty years, the nation will face increasing mobility needs due to a growing population, economy, and changing demographics. We will also need to address our dependence on imported fossil fuels and the emission of pollution and greenhouse gases.*

- **What is your vision of transportation in the year 2050 and the communities of the future?**
- **What solutions do you envision to address these challenges?**

Participants are invited to create an online profile and submit their solutions on the VenCorps platform using a narrative description, images, PowerPoint presentations, and videos. Once they create a profile, they become a member of the community with the ability to read, comment, offer suggestions, and rate the other posted solutions on the site during the “open period” that lasts the first 60 days of the competition.
To encourage the type of solutions that America 2050 wishes to promote, community members will be asked to rate each solution on the basis of five criteria that promote values of economic productivity, safety, sustainability, equity and access, and innovation/technology:

• How well does the vision respond to anticipated population and economic growth?

• Will the vision help reduce our nation’s dependence on foreign oil and cut greenhouse gas emissions?

• Does it improve the overall safety of our transportation system?

• How well does the vision improve access to jobs, education, healthcare, and other activities for people underserved by our current transportation system, such as the elderly, the young, the disabled, and the disadvantaged?

• How well does the vision utilize information technology and other innovations to improve the efficiency, reliability, and safety of our transportation system?

During the open period, community members have the opportunity to refine their proposals, collaborate with other participants, and place classified ads in the “marketplace” for collaborators with specific skills that would improve their proposal. As they participate in various aspects of the competition, whether by creating a profile, proposing a solution, and rating other solutions, they earn points that elevate their status in the community. The more active a member becomes, the more points they earn, and the great their votes counts when judging others’ work.

The open period concludes with nine finalists who then enter the “showdown.” During the 30-day showdown, finalists will be asked to provide more detail to their solutions, including creating a short video that brings their solution to life. The community members then vote on the nine finalists’ solutions using the points they have accumulated during the competition. The winning finalist is selected through the voting process by the members of the community at the end of the 90-day competition and wins a cash prize, publicity, and opportunities to promote the solution with A Better Tomorrow partners.

Partnerships and Promotion

The success of this competition will depend in large part on our ability to promote it to a wide audience through a variety of partnerships with media outlets, advocacy organizations and industry groups. We will target three categories of potential partners to reach the widest possibly audience and specific stakeholders.

Media: We will seek media partnerships and coverage of the competition working with a public relations firm to place stories and generate interest among reporters and bloggers. Before
the competition begins, we will seek partnerships with print and web-based media outlets to feature the competition and the competition’s winner. For example, one of the prizes of the competition could be a spread in Good magazine or a feature on the Infrastructurist blog.

**Advocacy Groups:** Advocacy organizations already engaged in shaping transportation, climate, and energy legislation are natural partners in this effort. We will work with groups like Transportation for America, AARP, ITSA America (sponsor of the recent Congestion Challenge using the VenCorps platform) to feature the competition and invite their members and networks to participate. We will also provide the opportunity for community members to link up with partnering advocacy organizations as a way to channel the enthusiasm and excitement generated during the competition into action.

**Industry/ Affinity Groups:** We will also reach out to various consumer organizations, educational institutions, and professional/industry associations to reach specific stakeholders and demographics. For example, since this concerns the nation’s future, we want to engage young people, specifically high school and college students, in the competition. We will also tap into networks like the two million experts in Scholar Universe. To reach those capable of producing high-quality videos, we will target graduate schools of architecture, graphic design, and animation, as well as design industry associations like the American Institute of Graphic Designers.

**Budget**

Regional Plan Association, the sponsor of America 2050 and A Better Tomorrow, is seeking $300,000 to support this initiative. Approximately $125,000 is budgeted for RPA staff time for project management, outreach and partnerships, graphic and website design, and content development. About $130,000 is budgeted for Spencer Trask Collaborative Innovations for program design, community development, user interface, content customization, and community facilitation and support.

An additional $30,000 is budgeted for a public relations firm to promote the competition to the media. RPA has worked with Group SJR previously on America 2050 and plans to hire them for this purpose. $15,000 is budgeted for prizes – including the grand cash prize of $10,000 and $5,000 for “awards” that can be purchased by the community members as an incentive to participate.
Timeline

A Better Tomorrow is currently under development by RPA and Spencer Trask Collaborative Innovations, drawing on resources and in-kind support from Rockefeller Foundation and IBM. RPA is seeking donations between now and the end of February to line up the resources needed to launch the competition on April 16, 2010 at the Regional Assembly. Donations are fully tax deductible and donors will be acknowledged as financial supporters of A Better Tomorrow.

Project Leadership and Partners

The project is being managed by Regional Plan Association’s America 2050 Initiative in partnership with Spencer Trask Collaborative Innovations. Program support to RPA for developing this proposal was provided by the Rockefeller Foundation. In-kind support for marketing and concept development has been donated by IBM. Software license fees for the VenCorps platform are being donated through the STCI Foundation. ITS America, the sponsor of the recent Congestion Challenge, is providing advice gained from its role sponsoring the previous VenCorp challenge and connections to the community built around the Congestion Challenge. More information about America 2050 and Spencer Trask Collaborative Innovations is below.

America 2050

America 2050 is a national urban planning initiative to meet the infrastructure, economic development and environmental challenges of the nation as we prepare to add about 130 million additional Americans by the year 2050. For the last year, America 2050 has been working to shape a national infrastructure plan of high-speed/passenger rail, goods movement, and metropolitan transportation systems to support sustainable and equitable growth in the 21st century. America 2050 is guided by a National Committee of business, civic and academic leaders from across the country and staffed by Regional Plan Association, the oldest independent metropolitan planning organization in the United States. For more information visit: www.america2050.org.

Spencer Trask Collaborative Innovations

STCI creates innovation ecosystems that bring new futures into being. We believe that mass collaboration is creating an Innovation Revolution in the same way that mass production unleashed the Industrial Revolution a hundred years ago. Our mission is to enable organizations to harness the power of collaborative innovation with advanced technologies, proven methods, and creative communities.

The STCI Foundation brings the power of collaborative innovation to the public sector. The Foundation makes the VenCorps platform available at no charge to governments and nonprofits. Public institutions are able to create innovation ecosystems that engage citizens’ collective imagination and tap a global network of expertise to improve the quality of life and sustainability of our environment. For more information visit: http://www.stcinnovations.com.