

OFFICE OF PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty

<https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/>

FHWA's Office of Project Development and Environmental Review develops and implements programs and activities that accelerate project delivery and improve the environmental review process for FHWA funded projects.

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty offers research opportunities to improve transportation decision-making and promote efficiency while protecting communities and the environment. The Office supports and conducts research that:

- ◆ Informs Decisions
- ◆ Reduces Environmental Impacts
- ◆ Enhances Quality of Life
- ◆ Accelerates Project Delivery
- ◆ Advances Transportation Planning

Research Focus

The Office of Project Development and Environmental Review research efforts focus on improving the NEPA process to accelerate transportation decision-making and improve environmental outcomes. Research projects study how to protect the human and natural environment while meeting the public's need for safe, efficient transportation improvements. Research topics include:

- Accelerating project delivery
- Programmatic approaches
- Improving the quality of environmental documents
- Threatened and endangered species
- Water quality
- Historic preservation

The Office's research seeks to identify methods to help FHWA stakeholders effectively evaluate project and program impacts and identify, improve, and implement sound mitigation options.

The Office aims to improve coordination and communication between State departments of transportation (DOTs), partner agencies, and the public to ensure project understanding and create new efficiencies.

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FEATURED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Project and Program Action Information System (PAPAI)

FHWA's Project and Program Action Information System (PAPAI) is an internal monitoring system that tracks progress on NEPA and related authorization actions between major milestones and helps accurately determine the total processing time from initiation of an EIS or EA to the approval of the final ROD or FONSI. This information is used to update the [Federal Permitting Dashboard](#), for regular reports to agency leadership, and Reports to Congress. The Federal Permitting Dashboard is the government-wide system for publicly tracking the environmental review and permitting process for infrastructure projects. The Dashboard increases transparency and accountability for meeting permitting timelines for reviewing agencies, project sponsors, stakeholders, and the public.

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Virtual Public Involvement (VPI)

Virtual public involvement enhances and broadens the reach of public engagement efforts including considerations and strategies for engaging traditionally underserved communities. It makes participation more convenient, affordable, and enjoyable. When used in combination with traditional public involvement strategies, virtual tools provide increased transparency and access to transportation planning activities as well as project development and decision-making processes. FHWA is developing case studies and fact sheets and facilitating peer exchanges to help transportation agencies implement VPI. For more information, visit [FHWA's Virtual Public Involvement website](#).

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Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL)

PEL represents a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that 1) considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and 2) uses the information, analysis, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process. FHWA has generated fact sheets, trainings, case studies and state-of-the-practice studies to further advance the application of PEL. For more information, visit the [PEL website](#).

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Transportation Liaison Program

HEPE funds several national transportation liaison positions through interagency agreements with Federal resource and regulatory agencies, such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard, National Marine Fisheries Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The national liaisons assist HEPE in resolving emerging, precedent-setting program and project development issues, and strengthening interagency relationships. The Transportation Liaison Guidebook

(September 2021) provides information on how to establish transportation liaison positions (dedicated staff) in Federal and state resource and regulatory agencies and Indian Tribes to improve the environmental review process. This guidebook explains to state DOTs and other public entities what to consider when establishing such a program. For more information, visit the [Transportation Liaison Community of Practice website](#).

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Environmental Excellence Awards

Since the program started in 1995, the Environmental Excellence Awards recognize outstanding transportation projects, processes, and organizations that incorporate environmental stewardship into the planning and project development processes using FHWA funding sources. This biennial program was developed by FHWA to honor those partners, projects, and processes that excel in meeting growing transportation needs while protecting and enhancing the environment. The Environmental Excellence Awards are coordinated with FHWA's Offices of Human Environment, Natural Environment, and Project Development and Environmental Review to reflect the notion that "environment" means a connection to both human and natural environmental systems.

For these awards, FHWA accepts nominations for any project, process, group, or individuals involved in a project or process that has used FHWA funding sources to make an outstanding contribution to transportation and the environment. The next award cycle will be for 2026 with the nomination period opening late summer/early fall 2025. For more information, visit the [Environmental Excellence Awards website](#).

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Stormwater Quality Coordination and Research

Federal highway and state departments of transportation need to assess the potential for adverse effects of highway runoff on receiving-water quality and ecology and the potential effectiveness of mitigation measures to minimize such effects. This information is needed as part of the NEPA process and in the post-construction phase to address highway-runoff discharge permits needed for the municipal separate storm sewer system and, for impaired waterways, the total maximum daily loads analyses required by the Clean Water Act. FHWA has supported a long-term stormwater research program in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), to develop the tools (including the Stochastic Empirical Loading and Dilution Model and the Highway Runoff Database) and information needed to address water-quality issues. FHWA also works with the USGS to provide training, information, and analyses that State DOTs and regulatory agencies need to address highway-related water-quality issues.

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