



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

Interagency NEPA & Permitting Collaboration Tool (INPCT)

INPCT is a new web-based collaboration tool designed to aid NEPA practitioners to efficiently manage the environmental review and permitting processes for all types of transportation projects. The tool can help strengthen interagency collaboration during the NEPA process by making it easier for project managers, environmental planners, and resource and regulatory agency staff to exchange documents and collect and share comments in real time. INPCT centralizes the many elements of a NEPA review to help manage the decision-making process. For more information, visit the [INPCT website](#).

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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. For more information, visit the [Environmental Excellence Awards website](#).

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