

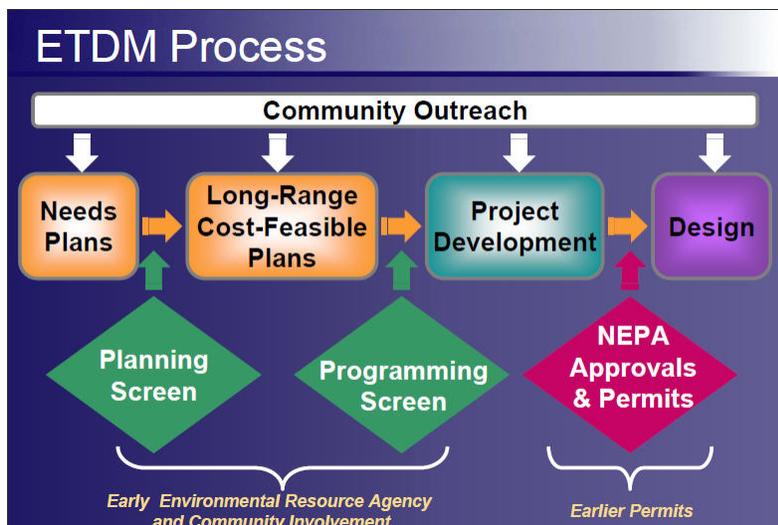
EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION DECISION-MAKING PROGRAM, FLORIDA

From: NCHRP Synthesis 373: Multi-Disciplinary Teams in Context-Sensitive Solutions

As with many places, in Florida the transportation planning process begins when MPOs and FDOT identify mobility needs. At the metropolitan level, project needs are matched to available funding for projects in the MPO Long-Range Transportation Planning process. Similarly, at the state level, FDOT develops cost-feasible plans for the highway system and the state's bridges. Priority projects are selected annually from these cost-feasible plans and are presented to the Florida legislature as the tentative, five-year Work Program. Once the legislature approves the Work Program, included projects may wait for funding for up to five years before significant work proceeds. At that point, the Project Development and Engineering (PD&E) process begins, design survey work is carried out, and interaction between permitting agencies is initiated. The PD&E process is followed by the project design phase. In the past, many of Florida's permitting agencies would wait for the submittal of a permit application before expending significant effort in project review. This would typically occur at about the 60% level of detail in the design phase.

A number of problems developed in connection with this long and complex process:

- Long-time gaps occurred between some steps.
- Planning information was often obsolete before PD&E began.
- Community concerns elicited during planning were not effectively communicated to designers.
- Agency involvement occurred late in the process, after substantial work was performed.
- Momentum for delivery of the project discouraged significant design changes, especially late in the process



Recognizing that the entire process needed to be revised, the Central Environmental Management Office of FDOT took the initiative to reexamine FDOT's entire process from the very early stages of planning through project development and permitting. The revamped process is known as Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM). The ETDM process seeks to give equal emphasis to the human environment and the natural environment. Meeting this goal requires interaction among

agencies and the public. In turn, these interactions require substantial coordination of data, which needs to be available to all stakeholders. Therefore, along with policies requiring interagency cooperation, one of the major components of ETDM is an Internet-accessible, interactive database called the Environmental Screening Tool (EST). EST delivers the data needed for making balanced decisions.

FDOT has a decentralized organizational structure, with the state divided into seven geographic districts. Each district has an Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT) consisting of representatives from agencies that have statutory responsibility for issuing permits or conducting consultation under NEPA.

- FHWA
- FTA
- U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
- U.S. Coast Guard
- EPA
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- National Park Service
- Seminole Tribe
- Miccosukee Tribe
- Florida county governments
- MPOs
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Florida Department of Community Affairs
- FDOT
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- South Florida Water Management District

The district's ETAT is responsible for interacting with FDOT and with MPOs throughout the ETDM process. Each district and MPO has designated an ETDM coordinator, who has the responsibility for interacting with agency ETAT representatives and also for coordinating activities within the district. Districts and MPOs also have Community Liaison Coordinators (CLCs), who are assigned the responsibility for interaction with affected communities and for establishing a two-way conduit of communication about project plans. The ETAT identifies avoidance and minimization issues, and the CLC works with communities to address issues and requests regarding CSD. The intent is that there are no "surprises" late in the process (e.g., requests for another scope of work, changes in permit conditions, permit denials, community concerns, or disapproval).

FDOT has developed detailed guidelines for the composition, function, and responsibilities of ETATs. The team ultimately assists with the determination of whether a project is viable and should move forward. If a project moves forward the team's input determines the scope and level of NEPA documentation, as well as which alternative becomes the preferred alternative. Most ETATs have 20 members. However, team size may increase as more agencies sign agreements and become a part of the process; for instance, when work affects a Florida military installation, a military representative is added to the ETAT. The following is a list of disciplines and stakeholder interests represented on ETATs.

- Wildlife and habitat specialists
- Water quality
- Aquaculture
- Environmental contamination
- Soils
- Horticultural
- Transportation planners
- Urban and regional planners
- Permit coordinators
- Community planners
- Archaeologists
- Engineers
 - Structural
 - Environmental
 - Transportation
 - Geotechnical
 - Bridge
 - Civil

In the ETDM process, project development is a collaborative effort from beginning to end. In addition, the ETDM process itself is open to adjustment. FDOT includes numerous feedback loops in the process through ETAT meetings to identify and address areas where improvement to the process may be needed.

Team Performance

FDOT is pleased with the positive performance of the ETATs. FDOT now has access to valuable information on which to base decisions about project funding priorities and the levels of project documentation needed. FDOT is already realizing benefits from shortened time frames. For example, after Hurricane Ivan in 2004, a series of bridges on I-10 needed replacement (23). The EST provided a framework for quickly distributing project information and collecting agency responses. Having an established team in place allowed meetings to be coordinated on shorter notice. The PD&E process for the bridges was complete in 15 weeks, compared with the typical 18 to 24 months for similar projects. Other realized benefits have included verification of available GIS data by agencies and making more high-quality data available to FDOT and MPOs.

ETATs and the entire ETDM program are also bringing greater efficiency because of overall time savings and better allocation of human and financial resources. Reviews are being conducted in much less time and, in many cases, concurrence is discussed or even decided in advance of when it is needed. The early involvement of all parties removes uncertainty about what will be required during the later phases of NEPA work, which helps FDOT more efficiently allocate resources. The ETDM program also helps ensure less waste in the work produced by staff.

Additional information can be found at the Florida Department of Transportation Efficient Transportation Decision Making: <https://etdmpub.flas-etat.org/est/> and NCHRP Synthesis 373 *Multi-Disciplinary Teams in Context-Sensitive Solutions* http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_syn_373.pdf.