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Federal-aid Program Overview

Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL)

www.fhwa.dot.gov/federal-aidessentials

Efficient practices enhance project delivery.



The life cycle of a transportation project begins with the transportation planning process and is followed by environment, design, right-of-way, construction, ending with maintenance and operations. The traveling public and taxpayers are challenging agencies to accelerate the project delivery process and improve efficiency without compromising public input, safety, and environmental laws.



Planning and Environment Linkages, known as PEL, promote the use of the information, analyses, and products developed during the transportation planning process to inform the environmental review process, including the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA. This collaborative and integrated approach leads to better environmental results, considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in transportation decision-making and helps decrease project cost, schedule times, and redundant efforts.

Let's explore two examples.

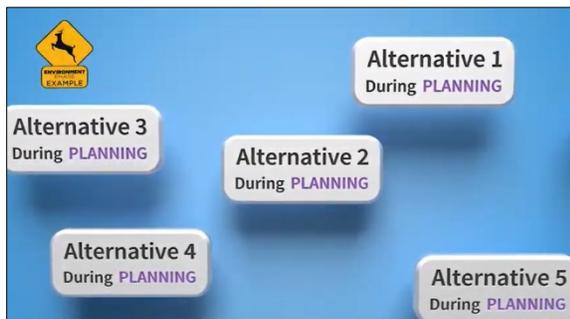
During the transportation planning process, how does your agency coordinate with external stakeholders such as State, local, Tribal, and Federal agencies?



To explore the potential environmental impacts of future projects, some agencies start engaging external stakeholders during the transportation planning process. They might ask, can we avoid disrupting a wetland or minimize impacts? If avoidance or minimization of impacts is not possible, how we can mitigate any potential damage? By discussing environmental topics with external stakeholders during the transportation planning process and then documenting key decisions, the agency may accelerate the subsequent environmental review and permitting processes. Also, early robust public involvement may even reduce the

occurrence of eleventh hour surprises and their potential for controversy.

During the environmental process, does your agency use the analyses conducted during planning to eliminate unreasonable alternatives?



Typically, during the environmental process, transportation and resource agencies review all the alternatives developed during the planning process, including the ones determined to be unreasonable. The level of resource agency and public involvement, the conditions that have been met for documentation and detail, methodology, quality and timeliness of the analysis will determine how the elimination of alternatives can be used in the NEPA process. PEL offers the flexibility for agencies to select an approach for using planning phase activities to identify reasonable alternatives and reduce the range of alternatives to be evaluated during NEPA. This may save significant time during the environmental review process.



Accelerated project delivery is important to all stakeholders of our transportation system. Our examples show that PEL approaches assists the environmental review process because it:

- Reduces duplicative efforts
- Contributes to cost and time savings;
- Improves documentation of processes and decisions;
- Improves interagency relationships and coordination; and
- Enhances community involvement.

Your agency may already be using PEL on a regular basis, but is it doing enough to meet the challenge of improved efficiency and accelerated project delivery?

Here are a few questions to assess whether or not you are optimizing your PEL opportunities:

- Have your agency's planning and environmental teams met recently to discuss opportunities for process improvement?
- How can your agency make planning studies more useful?
- How can outdated institutional barriers that prevent or limit the use of planning studies during the environmental process be overcome?

The Congress has amended legislation to improve the integration of transportation planning and environmental review.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) actively promotes PEL. Every State Department of Transportation, metropolitan planning organization, and local public agency can utilize PEL approaches to provide more efficient and effective decisions. To explore opportunities for enhanced linkages, please coordinate with the appropriate FHWA Division Office.

Additional Resources

FHWA page providing background and guidance for implementation of PEL.

https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_initiatives/PEL.aspx

View this page for some of the most often asked questions about PEL.

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/guidance/pel/pelfaq16nov.cfm>

The Federal Register notice dated May 2016 that addresses use of planning products in project development.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/05/27/2016-11964/statewide-and-nonmetropolitan-transportation-planning-metropolitan-transportation-planning>

FHWA report dated October 2015 on the benefits of PEL.

https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_initiatives/pel/pel_benefits_report.aspx

The content of this document is not a substitute for information obtained from State departments of transportation, appropriate FHWA Division Offices, and applicable laws. Scenarios have been simplified for emphasis and do not necessarily reflect the actual range of requirements applicable to the scenario or this topic. This document was created under contract number DTFH61-13-A-00001 by the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, and is offered to the public to heighten and focus awareness of Federal-aid requirements within the local public agencies community and reinforces the importance of these necessary policies, procedures, and practices.

This Companion Resource is the script content for the video production of the same name.