

A Guide to Measuring Progress in Linking Transportation Planning and Environmental Analysis



Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) is a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) initiative that represents an approach to transportation decision-making that considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the planning stage and carries them through project development, design, and construction.

The goal of PEL is to create a seamless decision-making process that minimizes duplication of effort, promotes environmental stewardship, and reduces delays from planning to project implementation. PEL lays the foundation for a broad consensus on goals and priorities for transportation related processes.

While planning and the environment can be linked at almost any stage of the decision-making process, the most effective way for linkages to work is to coordinate as early as possible and ensure consistency with initial transportation plans as project planning moves forward.

FHWA has developed a guide to assist State DOTs and MPOs in developing programs to measure progress toward linking transportation planning and environmental analysis. The guide provides an overall goal, four sample objectives, tips for developing strategies and setting targets, and example output and outcome measures to track progress.

Example Overall Goal: Create a seamless transportation decisionmaking process that minimizes duplication of effort, promotes environmental stewardship, and reduces delay from planning through project implementation

Sample Objective 1: Foster the early and ongoing involvement of regulatory and resource agencies in the planning process.

Involving resource agencies early and continually during transportation planning can enhance the protection of natural and cultural resources and streamline the project development process.



Tips include:

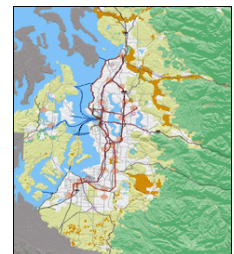
- Identify appropriate stakeholders
- Determine and communicate desired level of involvement from stakeholders in the transportation planning process

Example measures:

- Output: Participation rate of members in interagency meetings that focus on input to transportation plans
- Outcome: Satisfaction of resource and regulatory agencies with the transportation planning process

Sample Objective 2: Consider natural and cultural issues in planning and TIP development to achieve community goals and avoid adverse impacts to priority resources.

When transportation plans (long-range, corridor) or programs are developed with input from land use, natural, and cultural planning agencies, the resulting programs and projects can better meet broad regional and statewide goals and objectives.



Tips include:

- Identify key land use, natural, and cultural resource issues
- Identify essential data sets, and those that are available

Example measures:

- Output: Relevant data layers are identified, obtained, and used in analysis (and reliability/accuracy is known and documented)
- Outcome: High priority environmental habitats and connections between them are protected

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Sample Objective 3: Identify preliminary regional environmental mitigation needs as part of the planning process, thereby providing opportunities to develop more effective environmental mitigation measures.

By considering the cumulative impacts of the proposed transportation system during the planning process, agencies can consider mitigation activities on a broader scale than individual projects may allow. Coordination between planning agencies and those in charge of executing projects is critical to ensure that agencies understand their roles in defining and implementing effective mitigation.



Tips include:

- Seek resource agency participation in identifying potential environmental impacts and mitigation options
- Consider opportunities for multi-project mitigation

Example measures:

- Output: Consistent definitions/understanding of mitigation among transportation and resource agencies
- Outcome: High priority environmental habitats and connections between them are protected

Sample Objective 4: Utilize planning level information and products in NEPA analysis and documentation to improve decision-making and streamline project delivery.

By linking planning and NEPA, transportation agencies can create one cohesive flow of information, resulting in greater predictability and tighter timeframes in project delivery. Planning decisions must be documented in a format that can easily be appended to the NEPA document or incorporated by reference. The information should be thorough and include the reasons behind decisions, so that it can be understood by NEPA practitioners who were not involved in planning.



Tips include:

- Identify the appropriate stakeholders to engage during planning
- Develop standard documentation criteria

Example measures:

- Output: Presence of clearly defined criteria to document planning decisions for use in NEPA
- Outcome: Decreased time spent revisiting planning decisions in NEPA (for projects with a relevant planning study)



Visit the Planning & Environment Linkages Website

Visit the PEL website to learn about:

- Benefits of Planning and Environment Linkages
- Steps to get started
- Tools for successful implementation
- Effective practices and case studies
- Training and workshops
- Data and Analysis Tools
- Relevant legislation and guidance

<http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/index.asp>

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