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Research Results Digest 300

OUTCOMES OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STREAMLINING PILOT PROJECTS

This digest presents the results of NCHRP Project 25-24, "Monitoring, Analyzing, and Reporting on the Environmental Streamlining Pilot Projects." The study was conducted by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.; the Principal Investigator was Frank Bracaglia.

SUMMARY

This digest describes the analysis of 10 environmental streamlining projects and suggests a "toolbox" of best practices for reducing the time associated with highway-project environmental reviews and approvals. The digest discusses the main points presented in the final report for NCHRP Project 25-24, "Monitoring, Analyzing, and Reporting on the Environmental Streamlining Pilot Projects" (published as *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79* and available by clicking on "NCHRP Web Documents" at www4.trb.org/trb/onlinepubs.nsf). NCHRP Project 25-24 looked at 10 projects in seven states in which a variety of streamlining approaches were taken. These approaches included promoting early consultation among federal, state, and local government entities; advancing concurrent rather than sequential review of plans and projects; fostering stakeholder participation; and shortening various steps in the environmental review process. The diversity and some delays in execution of projects made it difficult to draw general conclusions about the effectiveness of the various approaches to streamlining, but the assessments of individual projects will be useful to those concerned with maintaining timely project delivery schedules while ensuring that environmental concerns are addressed in the process.

This digest is organized into four sections: Introduction, Key Conclusions, Pilot Project Outcomes, and Environmental Streamlining Best Practices. The Introduction section describes the scope and limitations of the research and the various pilot projects. The Key Conclusions section presents the conclusions drawn from the pilot projects as a set. The Pilot Project Outcomes section summarizes the outcomes of each of the pilot projects investigated. Finally, the Environmental Streamlining Best Practices section summarizes what the research suggests would be best practices in environmental streamlining and provides an environmental streamlining "toolbox."

INTRODUCTION

This introduction discusses the scope and limitations of the research.

Scope of the Research

In April 1999, the AASHTO Board of Directors approved establishment of a joint AASHTO, FHWA, and U.S. EPA pilot program for environmental stream-

lining. Ten projects in seven states (California, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin) were selected to be included in the pilot program. Research began in 2001. A variety of approaches that stakeholders viewed as being essential to a successful streamlining effort were used in the pilot projects. These approaches included promoting early consultation among federal, state, and local government entities; using concurrent rather than sequential review of plans and projects; fostering stakeholder participation; and shortening various aspects of the environmental review process. Before the study was completed, the two pilot projects in New Jersey were withdrawn; the study continued with the eight remaining projects. The original 10 pilot projects are briefly described in Exhibit 1.

The objective of NCHRP Project 25-24 was to use the experiences of the pilot projects to identify ways to improve the efficiency and reduce the time frame of the project development process. This digest summarizes the assessments of the eight completed pilot projects. In this digest, the terms "participant" and "stakeholder" are used interchangeably. Participants in NCHRP Project 25-24 included the lead AASHTO member department, other pilot project sponsors, various resource and regulatory agencies, and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs).

Limitations of the Research

As seen from the descriptions in Exhibit 1, the projects in this study were very different. The dissimilarity of the projects made developing general conclusions about environmental streamlining from the projects very challenging.

Several of the pilot projects, such as "Integrating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Statewide Planning Pilot Project in Oregon" and "The Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Process in Florida," involved significant reengineering of the transportation planning and project development process. Measuring the results of this type of change typically requires tracking a transportation project's performance over a longer period of time than the time frame of this study. Results from several of the pilot projects are limited at this time because of the projects' evolving nature and short life to date. In these cases, assessment of performance and results produced for this study should be considered intermediate rather than final.

In addition, the measurement of actual time savings was limited and difficult because of the discomfort of the states with comparing their pilot projects with other projects (there were substantial differences in structure and subject) and because of the absence of effective mechanisms for capturing reliable data about project development (explicit monitoring to capture such data would place a significant burden on the state departments of transportation [DOTs]). As a result, most of the performance measures for the research are qualitative and involve the perceptions of the pilot project participants about past and present performance.

Finally, there have been numerous national, regional, and state environmental streamlining activities that have occurred since the beginning of the research period. This study does not evaluate the effectiveness of these numerous other activities.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

A review of the eight pilot projects revealed the following:

- Adequate levels of information, funding, and staff for environmental review are important for streamlining the transportation planning and project development process. Streamlining does not necessarily result in reduced costs or staff time expenditures.
- Streamlining does not sacrifice the quality of transportation decision making or environmental protection.
- The benefits of environmental streamlining extend beyond time savings in total project delivery time and improved environmental protection. Other benefits are improved relationships among federal and state transportation and environmental agencies and between the agencies and the public.
- Moving environmental considerations into the transportation planning process contributes to better transportation decisions, but requires intensive time commitments for all stakeholders. These costs are particularly high at the outset of the process when the learning curve is the steepest.
- The use of tiered environmental impact statements (EISs) to streamline the project develop-

EXHIBIT 1 Pilot Projects Monitored in the Research

The Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP) in California	The RCIP integrates four major planning efforts in Riverside County with the goal of providing more efficient processes and better environmental and transportation results.
The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)/Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)/Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Partnership Effort	The Caltrans/FHWA/EPA Partnership Effort is aimed at improving interagency understanding and communication through the establishment of three partnership working groups: the Partnership Steering Committee, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/404 Integration Workgroup, and the Partnership for Integrated Planning (PIP) Pilot Project in Merced County.
The Caltrans/State and Federal Agency Position Funding Effort	The Caltrans/State and Federal Agency Position Funding Effort provides additional staff resources to selected resource agencies.
The Efficient Transportation Decision-Making (ETDM) Process in Florida	The ETDM process brings agency interaction forward into the early stages of transportation planning. This leads to adjustments in project design concepts to satisfy permitting requirements. Permits are to be issued concurrently with the NEPA final environmental document at completion of the project development phase.
Environmental Streamlining for the Georgia Rail Passenger Program (GRPP)	The GRPP involves multiagency coordination, concurrent document reviews, public involvement, and early agency involvement to expeditiously prepare and review required NEPA documents.
The Portway Program in New Jersey	Initially, the Portway program was envisioned as a single project with multiple segments that would have been processed with one major environmental impact statement (EIS) addressing the overall corridor. The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) withdrew the Portway program from the study after the Portway program evolved into a number of smaller, individual, less noteworthy projects.
Parallel Processing of Section 106 and Section 4(f) Requirements in New Jersey	The pilot project involved merging the Section 106 process with the Section 4(f) process for projects that had adverse effects on historic districts and historic sites (except bridges) and that were classified as categorical exclusions. NJDOT did not continue with this pilot project after 2002, and it became inactive.
Integrating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Statewide Planning in Oregon	This pilot project involves two new approaches to integrate the NEPA and statewide planning processes: an early coordination process, dubbed the Collaborative Environmental and Transportation Agreement on Streamlining (CETAS), and a tiered NEPA decision-making approach.
The Loop 12/IH 35E Corridor Major Investment Study and Environmental Assessment Project in Texas	Streamlining aspects of this pilot project focus on early coordination with involved agencies and the use of a broad stakeholder process.
Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Screening Worksheets in Wisconsin	The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) has used Screening Worksheets (SWs) for Environmental Assessments (EAs) for more than 20 years. This pilot project takes these worksheets to the next level and uses them to create an EIS.

ment process requires substantial coordination and clear communication between project proponents and reviewing agencies. Project proponents and reviewing agencies must agree on which decisions will be made in a Tier 1 versus a Tier 2 document and agree on the level of detail necessary in each document.

PILOT PROJECT OUTCOMES

This section describes the eight pilot projects evaluated in the study and discusses successful and unsuccessful aspects of each pilot project. For several pilot projects, it is too early to tell whether certain expectations will be met. This status is indicated in the discussion of the project.

The Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP) in California

The RCIP in California began in May 1999 to address transportation congestion, habitat conservation, open space, land use, and watershed issues in the large, rapidly growing Riverside County region. The RCIP integrated the preparation of a new Riverside County General Plan, the development of a Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), the identification of four new transportation corridors through the Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP), and the development of a watershed plan for the San Jacinto and Santa Margarita watersheds (referred to as the Special Area Management Plan [SAMP]). Integration of these components was designed to balance competing transportation, conservation, and development interests; avoid fragmented and adversarial planning efforts; and preserve transportation corridors for future development. The integrated approach to planning for local community development, transportation, and habitats is intended to provide more efficient processes and better environmental and transportation results. For more detailed information on the RCIP, refer to Appendix B of *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79.*

What Was Successful?

- Key parts of the RCIP project, such as the General Plan, MSHCP, and the NEPA process for one of the CETAP corridors have been completed.
- The CETAP effort to identify and preserve rights-of-way for transportation corridors while minimizing environmental impacts is shaping the growth patterns for Riverside County.
- The MSHCP preserved 150,000 acres of land for conservation purposes, resulting in over 40 percent of the land in Riverside County being set aside for conservation purposes.
- The MSHCP allowed for issuance of one federal and state Endangered Species Umbrella Permit that is valid for 75 years. There is no longer a need for full Section 7 (Section 7 of the federal Endangered Species Act) coordination or individual permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game. This could reduce review and consultation time by up to 3 years. It is also anticipated that the consultation time frame under Section 7 of the federal Endangered Species Act, currently 6 to 18 months, will be reduced.

What Was Not Successful?

- Disagreement among transportation and environmental agencies over the amount and detail of environmental analysis required for decision making was a problem, and the RCIP had to substantially lengthen its original schedule.
- The initial stages of the RCIP process were not successful in quickly identifying and resolving key environmental issues affecting Riverside County transportation corridor development because there was insufficient participation from appropriate agency staff, an overly ambitious schedule that affected decision making, and a lack of coordination and collaboration among stakeholders. Key to resolving these issues was the active intervention by a U.S. DOT "champion" appointed to the CETAP by the Interagency Transportation Infrastructure Streamlining Task Force, created by Executive Order 13274.

For What Is Success Indeterminate?

- When completed in 2005, the SAMP will develop a map of preservation areas, restoration areas, and areas for mitigation. The SAMP will allow issuance of regional general Section 404 permits for projects that meet specific

criteria within the three SAMP watersheds. The regional general Section 404 permit is expected to streamline regional Section 404 compliance by using a programmatic approach to permitting.
- More substantive information regarding environmental review processing time will not be available until after the completion of a major part of the CETAP process in 2007.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)/FHWA/ EPA Partnership Effort

In 1999, Caltrans, EPA, and FHWA held a facilitated workshop to explore each agency's legal mandates and to determine the issues and factors that led to problems in normal business interactions. The results of the workshop were a set of recommendations on communication, policy, and knowledge and information issues and the adoption of an implementation plan called the Mare Island Accord. To accomplish the initiatives envisioned in the Mare Island Accord, the agencies established three partnership working groups: the Partnership Steering Committee, the NEPA/404 Integration Workgroup, and the Partnership for Integrated Planning (PIP) Pilot Project in Merced County. The Partnership Steering Committee, composed of senior management and staff from each agency, (a) discusses emerging problems, issues, opportunities, and agency priorities and (b) reports on and tracks the status of the Caltrans/FHWA/ EPA Partnership Effort initiatives. These initiatives are training and outreach coordination, interagency rotational assignments, funding coordination, and joint guidance development.

The NEPA/404 Integration Workgroup was charged with evaluating the existing NEPA/404 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process and revising the MOU to improve implementation. The intent of the Merced County PIP is to improve the delivery of transportation projects through early state and federal agency participation in the planning process. For more detailed information on the Caltrans/FHWA/EPA Partnership Effort, refer to the project narrative in Appendix B of *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79.*

What Was Successful?

- The Partnership Effort improved communication, coordination, and understanding among the participating agencies and increased their involvement in transportation planning processes before the initiation of the NEPA process.
- The Merced PIP developed methods for conducting effective multiparty land use, transportation, and ecosystem preservation planning processes on a broad scale. As a result, stakeholders believed that the Merced PIP improved protection of the human and natural environments and that its results justified the necessary expenditures of staff and processing time.
- The Merced PIP demonstrated the benefits of high-level geographic information system (GIS) capabilities. The UPLAN GIS software application facilitated analysis of impacts on endangered species and their habitats, wetlands, and important farmlands and helped develop recommendations on optimum locations for development and placement of transportation infrastructure.
- Use of the Merced PIP approach to performing cumulative impacts analyses for groups of projects may lead to the development of a standardized method for such analyses that can be implemented across California and in other states.

What Was Not Successful?

- The Partnership Steering Committee did not initially meet regularly because of personnel changes and because no single agency had been designated to lead the effort. The process has since been rejuvenated, and the group is meeting regularly.
- Training and outreach efforts initially moved forward, but were not as extensive as initially planned because of budget constraints within the agencies.
- Interagency rotational job assignments designed to increase understanding and levels of knowledge among staff members at three agencies were limited by staffing shortfalls, budget constraints, and location issues.
- The revised NEPA/404 MOU negotiation process was delayed, and, ultimately, the revised MOU was not implemented as a result of Council on Environmental Quality guidance on Purpose and Need Statements issued in 2004.

For What Is Success Indeterminate?

The Merced PIP could not be evaluated in terms of environmental streamlining as major projects from the Merced County 2030 Regional Transportation Plan have not yet completed the NEPA review process.

The Caltrans/State and Federal Agency Position Funding Effort

The Caltrans/State and Federal Agency Position Funding Effort provides additional staff resources to selected resource agencies to allow early and constructive participation in project planning and design decisions, timely field reviews and negotiations, and expeditious processing of project and emergency permits. The additional staff resources help the resource agencies provide premium service levels, thereby shortening project time frames. For more detailed information on the Caltrans/State and Federal Agency Position Funding Effort, refer to the project narrative in Appendix B of *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79.*

What Was Successful?

- The Position Funding Effort has fostered a more collaborative and responsive relationship with Caltrans, and the number of project-related conflicts between EPA and Caltrans has been reduced because of early federal involvement in projects.
- Most participants report that the Position Funding Effort has resulted in more timely reviews and faster permit processing.
- Stakeholders in the Position Funding Effort felt that having sufficient staffing to review projects and foster early agency involvement would result in better transportation decisions in the future.

What Was Not Successful?

The federal full-time-equivalent allocation, a state hiring freeze set to expire in June 2005, and state layoffs are creating difficulties with filling vacancies at certain agencies. Although Caltrans is authorized to fund 21 positions in 7 agencies, because of high turnover and the difficulties of filling vacant positions, there are only 13 positions (12 agency positions and 1 Caltrans position) in 5 agencies that were occupied as of August 2004.

The Efficient Transportation Decision-Making (ETDM) Process in Florida

The Florida DOT (FDOT) developed the ETDM process to address problematic characteristics with the department's previous transportation planning and project development process. The ETDM process was designed to bring review agencies into the early stages of transportation planning, make adjustments in project design concepts to satisfy permitting requirements before the NEPA process, and identify avoidance and minimization strategies earlier. The ETDM process uses agency agreements, environmental technical advisory teams (ETATs), an interactive database system called the Environmental Screening Tool, and public involvement with local transportation and planning entities to meet process objectives. FDOT began the implementation of the ETDM process in the seven FDOT districts on July 1, 2003. Between July 1, 2003, and February 1, 2004, the MPOs (in the MPO areas) and the FDOT districts (in the counties) uploaded information on more than 150 projects into the initial planning screen. Major projects in the "pipeline" (i.e., those with EAs or EISs) were not included. For more detailed information on the ETDM process, refer to the project narrative in Appendix B of *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79.*

What Was Successful?

- FDOT created the Environmental Screening Tool, a database for each project, to which the whole team contributes via a Web-based user interface. The database becomes the project history, the agency review mechanism, and the documentation trail. All reviewers can view the same project data; the agencies can view each other's comments; the project comments are kept in one location for the duration of the project; and the single repository for project information helps ensure that issues are not overlooked.
- The Environmental Screening Tool has also been used for more functions than originally anticipated. Agencies have been using the application to review projects not involved in the ETDM process, and the program to develop this process has been a catalyst for updating GIS layers.
- ETDM process participants regularly cited increased collaboration and education as among the most successful aspects of the pilot project.

What Was Not Successful?

- Some agency staff reported that the ETDM process required the same or increased levels of staffing resources. Greater agency involvement in the planning stages of proposed projects has also increased staff workload before the permitting phase begins.
- Inadequate project descriptions in the Environmental Screening Tool presented problems for some users because the lack of information resulted in unnecessary reviews for projects that had no potential to affect certain resource types.

For What Is Success Indeterminate?

- The success of the ETDM process in reducing the time frame for planning and project development has not yet been quantified. A task team of representatives from the State Historic Preservation Office, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, FDOT, the MPO, and FHWA are in the process of developing performance measures. FDOT believes that within the next 1 to 5 years it will experience time and cost savings on the typical 10- to 15-year planning period for transportation projects.
- The effectiveness of the ETDM process on larger, more complex projects with more substantial impacts has yet to be determined.

Environmental Streamlining for the Georgia Rail Passenger Program (GRPP)

The GRPP involves implementing seven commuter rail services, six intercity rail services, and a multimodal passenger terminal in the Atlanta area to help cope with growing peak-hour traffic and to provide a multimodal alternative in the state's largest travel markets. The GRPP pilot project uses a system of multiagency coordination among the state transportation agencies, concurrent document reviews for rail corridor EAs among all agencies, public involvement, and position funding at the Georgia Historic Preservation Division (GHPD) to quickly reach program decisions, foster a unified front when dealing with third parties, and avoid the time-consuming traditional joint decision-making processes.

What Was Successful?

- The Georgia DOT (GDOT), the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority, the Federal Transit Administration, the FHWA, and the Federal Railroad Administration used a concurrent review process for environmental documents. Review time was cut substantially through this method.
- GDOT provided funds for positions in the GHPD to allow the GHPD to commit the resources required for the GRPP. According to the GHPD, early coordination in the planning and project development phases helped to resolve issues expeditiously and streamlined the review of the Section 106 documentation.
- The GRPP public involvement process was comprehensive, identified issues early, and contributed to solutions.
- The EAs included the same level of environmental analysis as for an EIS. This higher level of environmental data brought into the process was another key factor in the program's success.

What Was Not Successful?

- Criticisms of the GRPP included a lack of flexibility on station locations because of funding for acquisition of right-of-way, a lack of feedback on agency comments on the reviewed documents, and lack of input among the environmental agencies on the corridor design.
- State environmental agency participants reported higher-than-average staff time spent on GRPP because of additional meetings and increased technical assistance.

Integrating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Statewide Planning in Oregon

The Oregon DOT (ODOT) developed two new approaches to integrate the NEPA process with the statewide planning process (referred to in this summary as the "Integrated Process"). The Collaborative Environmental and Transportation Agreement on Streamlining (CETAS) process engages resource agencies early and merges the reviews needed for compliance with NEPA and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The tiered NEPA decision-making process uses a location EIS at the planning stage to support decision making on purpose and need, type of facility, corridor location, and transportation modal choice. Oregon's Transportation System Plan (TSP)

guidelines require amendments to the local comprehensive plan and exceptions to statewide planning goals to be passed in the period between the completion of the location draft EIS and the publication of the location final EIS.

Presently, only one project has progressed far enough through the Integrated Process to be evaluated. This project is the Newberg-Dundee Transportation Improvement Project, which is a large bypass project involving eight corridors. A project oversight steering team (POST), composed of 11 local, state, and federal officials, made key decisions on this project. Resource agencies were not included on the POST. For more detailed information on this pilot project, refer to the project narrative in Appendix B of *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79*.

What Was Successful?

Positive outcomes identified by participants include greater consideration of environmental quality on the part of ODOT, a focus on environmental issues early in the review process, and more opportunity to identify mitigation opportunities.

What Was Not Successful?

- The largest obstacle to the success of the tiered NEPA process was the disagreement among transportation and environmental agencies over the level of environmental data required for decision making during the location phase.
- ODOT received nonconcurrence letters on the recommended alternative for the Newberg-Dundee Transportation Improvement Project from six of the CETAS agencies. The solution was to draft a Record of Agreement/Consensus document, signed by all CETAS participants, in which ODOT committed to avoidance and mitigation measures during the design phase of the project. As a result, the location final EIS for the Newberg-Dundee Transportation Improvement Project was scheduled for early 2005, 1 year after it was initially projected to be completed.
- There was no interaction between the POST and the CETAS group regarding the analysis prepared during the draft EIS phase until receipt of the document. State and federal regulatory and resource agencies believed that having more involvement in the decision making and integrated planning for complex transportation projects through the POST could have resolved many of the nonconcurrence issues.
- Some participants identified the need for a clear understanding among agencies as to their roles and responsibilities in the CETAS process, a commitment not to overstep those bounds, and an agreement not to revisit previous discussions and decisions.

For What Is Success Indeterminate?

- Because ODOT has not had any projects completed through the Integrated Process, the success or failure of the Integrated Process cannot be determined. The perception among many state and federal agency participants is that the Integrated Process has the potential to streamline the environmental process and improve environmental protection but that these goals have not yet been achieved.
- The timing of passage of statewide planning goal exceptions and amendments of local comprehensive plans in conjunction with the tiered NEPA decision-making process continues to be a challenge. It is difficult to address the goal exception standards with the level of information generated for a Location EIS; however, TSP guidelines require passage of the exceptions and local comprehensive plan amendments at this stage of the process. Oregon is considering shifting the responsibility of preparing goal exception findings to towns and counties, allowing local entities to complete the process before ODOT becomes involved in the transportation planning process.

The Loop 12/IH 35E Corridor Major Investment Study and Environmental Assessment Project in Texas

The Loop 12/IH 35E Project was a concurrent major investment study (MIS) and EA of a 13.5-mile (21.7-kilometer) corridor. This pilot project used early coordination with involved agencies, a broad stakeholder process, on-call contracts for consultants, a combined MIS-NEPA process and contracts, and reviews of NEPA documents concurrently at interim stages of project development. The FHWA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Loop 12/IH 35E Project on December 11, 2002, concluding the pilot project.

For more detailed information on the project, refer to the project narrative in Appendix B of *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79.*

What Was Successful?

- The use of MIS/EA Option 2 (i.e., combining the MIS and NEPA processes) allowed seamless integration of the planning and environmental impact review processes. This option also provided streamlining benefits, saving 6 months to 1 year by avoiding the need to hire another transportation/environmental consultant between the completion of the MIS and the start date for the EA.
- The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) established a Loop 12/IH 35E project coordination work group (PCWG), which included federal and state transportation and resource agencies, city officials, the county, and the public and involved these entities in the project development process. This approach gave TxDOT and the PCWG the ability to respond to concerns because the project's design was still in its early stages.
- TxDOT held early quarterly public meetings to identify potential stumbling blocks. TxDOT also tried more flexible methods: meeting with stakeholders at locations, times, and dates of the stakeholders' choosing; holding open houses; providing a telephone hot line; making on-call presentations; publishing press releases; briefing elected officials; and placing newspaper ads and legal notices. Early inclusion of stakeholders also helped to avoid the problem of unexpected issues being raised in the later phases of project development.
- FHWA and the TxDOT Environmental Affairs Division performed concurrent rather than sequential EA reviews, and they performed these reviews at the both the 60-percent stage and the 90-percent stage of the design schematic. (A design schematic is a preliminary engineering plan that shows the project "footprint.") The 60-percent design schematic also was sent to resource agencies for review. This resulted in reduced overall project review times.
- The process proved especially successful in building better, ongoing coordination with the local MPO (the North Central Texas Council of Governments).
- Originally scheduled for advertising in Fiscal Year 2009, the Loop 12/IH 35E Project should now move up to letting in Fiscal Year 2005 or 2006.

What Was Not Successful?

The pilot project overall was a success.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Screening Worksheets in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin DOT (WisDOT) uses screening worksheets (SWs) for EAs. The SWs describe the proposed action and its direct, indirect, and cumulative effect evaluations and mitigation measures in an easy-to-complete, question-and-answer format. The purpose of this pilot project is to use these worksheets to create an EIS.

WisDOT developed three types of worksheets for the EIS: Basic, Factor, and EIS. The Basic worksheets are completed for all projects and include sections such as Executive Summary, Purpose and Need, and Alternatives. The Factor worksheets are project-specific worksheets that focus on a specific resource and are completed only for those resources that would be affected. Impacts and mitigation are described on these worksheets. EIS worksheets are required for the information that is specific to the EIS, such as the list of agencies and organizations to whom the document was sent.

WisDOT is preparing EISs using SWs for two highway projects as part of the pilot project. The first project is State Route 23, a 21-mile (34-kilometer), mostly rural corridor between Fond du Lac and Sheboygan. The second project is the Verona Road (Route 151)/West Beltline (U.S. 12/14) project in Madison, a much more urban corridor with heavier traffic. For more detailed information on the EIS SWs in the Wisconsin pilot project, refer to the project narrative in Appendix B of *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79.*

What Was Successful?

WisDOT revised the Verona Road Draft EIS to better accommodate review of the document and to improve its clarity (e.g., presenting information on multiple alternatives in a clear manner on the SW forms). In response to its experience on the Verona Road project, WisDOT made changes to the State Route 23 SWs' matrices to better illustrate the differences and similarities between alternatives.

What Was Not Successful?

WisDOT hoped to reduce the EIS length to approximately 150 to 300 pages (not including technical appendixes or comment letters) and to increase the uniformity of the documents. The Verona Road (Route 151)/West Beltline (U.S. 12/14) Draft EIS was actually 438 pages.

ENVIRONMENTAL STREAMLINING BEST PRACTICES

The findings of the study showed that the most effective streamlining approaches stressed early consultation among federal, state, and local government entities; used concurrent rather than sequential review of plans and projects; fostered stakeholder participation; and worked to provide adequate levels of information, funding, and staff for environmental review.

Several of the streamlining measures employed by the pilot projects could be successfully applied to other locales. These include partnership agreements among state DOTs, FHWA, and U.S. EPA; position funding agreements between state DOTs and federal and state transportation and environmental review agencies; integration of regional transportation and environmental planning processes; and centralized, concurrent review practices.

Exhibit 2 presents a "toolbox" of streamlining approaches and techniques used in the pilot projects and the procedures necessary for optimal streamlining benefits.

EXHIBIT 2 Environmental Streamlining Toolbox

Management Considerations	Best Practices
Partnerships and Collaboration	• Implement early in the project or planning timeline • Involve high-level staff • Cast a wide net for stakeholders • Establish guidelines for roles and responsibilities • Involve all decision makers in all steps
Communication	• Employ facilitators and mediators • Develop a conflict resolution plan and procedures • Develop educational process • Consider use of electronic communications
Leadership and Staffing	• Engage elected officials and key agency leaders • Engage experienced and creative environmental professionals
Logistics	• Be realistic about scheduling • Factor issues such as travel into project and process budgets
Technical Approaches	**Requirements**
Integrating Planning and Environmental Review	• Clear communication and collaboration • Realistic schedule • Clear expectations on level of data needed • Education on the process • Clear understanding of agency roles and responsibilities • Dispute-resolution process
Corridor Preservation	• Sufficient funding • Realistic schedule • Public involvement
Tiered NEPA Process	• Clarify decisions to be made at each tier • Clarify level of data needed at each tier
Agency Position Funding	• Master agreement • Position- or agency-specific multiyear contracts • Clear minimum professional requirements • Performance measures • Progress tracking system and procedures • Flexible funding

REPORT AVAILABILITY

The complete report for NCHRP Project 25-24 is available on TRB's website as *NCHRP Web-Only Document 79* (available by clicking on "NCHRP Web Documents" at www4.trb.org/trb/onlinepubs.nsf).

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These digests are issued in order to increase awareness of research results emanating from projects in the Cooperative Research Programs (CRP). Persons wanting to pursue the project subject matter in greater depth should contact the CRP Staff, Transportation Research Board of the National Academies, 500 Fifth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

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