

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Interim Planning and Environmental Linkages Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to act as a summary of the early planning processes and ease the transition from planning to a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. It is consistent with the 23 CFR 450 (Planning regulations) and other FHWA policy on the Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) process. Often there is no overlap in personnel between the early planning and NEPA phases of a project, so information and justifications for decisions made in the corridor or subarea planning may be lost. Different planning processes take projects through analysis at different levels of detail. NEPA project teams may not be aware of relevant planning information and may re-do work that has already been done. Proper use of this questionnaire can help fill these gaps and ensure that planning information can be useful in the NEPA analysis.

The term Planning and Environmental Linkages study (PEL study) is used in this questionnaire as a generic term to mean any type of planning study conducted at the corridor or subarea level which is more focused than studies at the regional or system planning levels. A PEL study is similar in many respects to a Reconnaissance Engineering Study (Preconstruction Manual Section 430.4). The main difference being that a Reconnaissance Engineering Study focuses on developing technically feasible alternative solutions to a problem or deficiency in order to compare the engineering alternatives, but with limited public engagement. Whereas, public and agency involvement is central to the NEPA process. A PEL study should have a detailed plan for documenting public and agency involvement so that outputs from the reconnaissance stage are useful to the NEPA analysis. At the inception of the PEL study, the study team should decide how the work may later be incorporated into subsequent NEPA efforts. A key consideration is whether the PEL study will meet standards established by NEPA regulations and guidance. One example is the use of terminology consistent with NEPA vocabulary (e.g. purpose and need, alternatives, affected environment, environmental consequences).

Instructions: These questions should be used as a guide throughout the planning process, not just answered near completion of the process. When a PEL study is started, this questionnaire will be distributed to the project team. Some of the basic questions to consider are: "What did you do?," "What didn't you do?," and "Why?". When the team submits a PEL study to Statewide Environmental Office (SEO), the completed questionnaire will be included with the submittal. SEO will use this questionnaire to assist it in determining if the study meets the requirements of 23 CFR § 450.212. The questionnaire should be included in the planning document as an executive summary, chapter, or appendix.

1. Background:

- a. Who is the sponsor of the PEL study? (DOT&PF, Municipality, Local Agency, Other)
- b. What is the name of the PEL study document and other identifying project information (e.g. corridor studied, STIP numbers, sub-account, or sub-area of transportation plan)?
- c. Who was included on the study team (Name and position of DOT&PF representatives, consultants, etc.)?
- d. Provide a description of the existing transportation facility within the corridor (if any), including project limits, modes, functional classification, number of lanes, shoulder width,

access control and type of surrounding environment (urban vs. rural, residential vs. commercial, etc.)

- e. Provide a brief chronology of the planning activities (PEL study) including the year(s) the studies were completed.
- f. Are there recent, current, or near future planning studies or projects in the vicinity? What is the relationship of this project to those studies/projects?

2. Methodology used:

- a. What was the scope of the PEL study and the reason for completing it?
- b. Did you use NEPA-like language? Why or why not?
- c. What were the actual terms used and how did you define them? (Provide examples or list)
- d. How do you see these terms being used in NEPA documents?
- e. What were the key steps and coordination points in the PEL decision-making process? Who were the decision-makers and who else participated in those key steps? For example, for the corridor vision, the decision was made by DOT&PF, a municipality or other local agency, with buy-in from FHWA, the USACE, and USFWS and other resource/regulatory agencies.
- f. How should the PEL information be presented in NEPA?

3. Agency coordination:

- a. Provide a synopsis of coordination with federal, tribal, state and local environmental, regulatory and resource agencies. Describe their level of participation and how you coordinated with them.
- b. What transportation agencies (e.g. municipal agencies or ARRC) did you coordinate with or were involved during the PEL study?
- c. What steps will need to be taken with each agency during NEPA scoping?

4. Public coordination:

- a. Provide a synopsis of your coordination efforts with the public and stakeholders.

5. Purpose and Need for the PEL study:

- a. What was the scope of the PEL study and the reason for completing it?
- b. Provide the purpose and need statement, or the corridor vision and transportation goals and objectives to realize that vision.
- c. What steps will need to be taken during the NEPA process to make this a project-level purpose and need statement?

6. Range of alternatives: Planning teams need to be cautious during the alternative screen process; alternative screening should focus on purpose and need/corridor vision, fatal flaw analysis, and possibly mode selection. This may help minimize problems during discussions with resource agencies. Alternatives that have fatal flaws or do not meet the purpose and need/corridor vision will not be considered reasonable alternatives, even if they reduce impacts to a particular resource. Detail the range of alternatives considered, screening criteria, and screening process, including:

- a. What types of alternatives were looked at? (Provide a one or two sentence summary and reference document.)
- b. How did you select the screening criteria and screening process?

- c. For alternative(s) that were screened out, briefly summarize the reasons for eliminating the alternative(s). (During the initial screenings, this generally will focus on fatal flaws.)
- d. Which alternatives should be brought forward into NEPA and why?
- e. Did the public, stakeholders, and agencies have an opportunity to comment during this process?
- f. Were there unresolved issues with the public, stakeholders, and/or agencies?

7. Planning assumptions and analytical methods:

- a. What is the forecast year used in the PEL study?
- b. What method was used for forecasting traffic volumes?
- c. Are the planning assumptions and the corridor vision/purpose and need statement consistent with each other and with the long-range transportation plan? Are the assumptions still valid?
- d. What were the future year policy and/or data assumptions used in the transportation planning process related to land use, economic development, transportation costs, and network expansion?

8. Environmental resources (wetlands, cultural, etc.) reviewed. For each resource or group of resources reviewed, provide the following:

- a. In the PEL study, at what level of detail was the resource reviewed and what was the method of review?
- b. Is this resource present in the area and what is the existing environmental condition for this resource?
- c. What are the issues that need to be considered during NEPA, including potential resource impacts and potential mitigation requirements (if known)?
- d. How will the planning data provided need to be supplemented during NEPA?

9. List environmental resources you are aware of that were not reviewed in the PEL study and why. Indicate whether or not they will need to be reviewed in NEPA and explain why.

10. Were cumulative impacts considered in the PEL study? If yes, provide the information or reference where the analysis can be found.

11. Describe any mitigation strategies discussed at the planning level that should be analyzed during NEPA.

12. What needs to be done during NEPA to make information from the PEL study available to the agencies and the public? Are there PEL study products which can be used or provided to agencies or the public during the NEPA scoping process?

13. Are there any other issues a future project team should be aware of?

- a. Examples: Controversy, utility problems, access or ROW issues, encroachments into ROW, problematic land owners and/or groups, contact information for stakeholders, special or unique resources in the area, etc.