PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT LINKAGES (PEL)
Workshop Goals

• Inform participants of the basics of Planning & Environment Linkage (PEL) practices.
Planning & Environment Linkages (PEL)

Overview
An approach to transportation decision-making that helps State DOTs, MPOs, and local agencies consider environmental issues early in the transportation planning process and use information and analysis conducted in planning in the NEPA process.
Elements of PEL

Weaving Together Integrated Planning and NEPA
Benefits of the PEL Approach

- Address complex environmental challenges early and avoid environmentally sensitive natural resources.
- Design projects that meet mobility, environmental, and community needs.
- Minimize duplication of efforts and data.

Improves project delivery times
Current State of the Practice

Transportation planning often does not incorporate environmental factors

Environmental agencies have little understanding of or influence on transportation plans and programs

Planning decisions are often revisited under NEPA

Environmental reviews often are conducted without knowledge of prior planning studies and activities

Public and elected officials become impatient, confused, frustrated over apparent revisiting of previous decisions
Challenges

- Underutilization of planning documents.
  - Example: Strategic Highway Safety Plan and Congestion Management Process

- Lack of proper documentation.
Ideal Future State of the Practice

Ideal Future State
Environmental Analysis in the Project Planning/Project Development Stage

- Environmental issues are considered early in the transportation planning process
- Environmental, regulatory, and resource agencies are involved early and continuously in the planning process
- Planning decisions are documented in a format that can be appended to the NEPA document or incorporated by reference
- Planning information that will be used in NEPA will be identified and communicated to agencies and the public
PEL Study

• Generic term meaning a planning study at corridor or subarea level

• More focused than regional or system level planning studies
When is a PEL Study Done?

• Transportation project or need identified in long-range plan
  – To perform preliminary analysis
  – To make decisions at finer detail than regional/system level

• Transportation project or need not identified in long-range plan
  – To clearly identify problem
  – To identify potential solutions for inclusion in future long-range plan
When a PEL Study is NOT Needed

- Project started NEPA-level analysis
- Other planning study(s) already done to assist in NEPA
Ideal State of the Practice

Notice of Intent

Relevant planning information to be utilized in NEPA:

• Preliminary purpose and need.
• Range of alternatives for study.
Example: Intercounty Connector (ICC) Project

“Project studies pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) concerning the ICC project were most recently conducted in the early to late-1990s resulting in the completion of a Draft EIS/Draft Section 4(f) Evaluation in 1997. Study alternatives were presented at four Location/Design Public Hearings in May and June 1997. The State of Maryland put the ICC project on hold shortly after the hearings.

The ICC project will involve the consideration of a reasonable range of alternatives that address the project goals. Consistent with NEPA, a full range of multi-modal highway alternatives will be considered, ranging from a No-Action Alternative to a limited access roadway on new location.”
Example: I-95 Improvement Project

“Improvements to the I-95 corridor are considered necessary to improve safety and to provide for increases in projected traffic volumes. **Alternatives under consideration include, but are not limited to:** (1) taking no action and (2) addition of a third travel lane in each direction. The EIS will use data and findings from two major deficiency and needs studies entitled “Southeastern Connecticut Corridor Study” dated January 1999 and “I-95 Corridor Feasibility Study, Branford to Rhode Island” dated December 2004. Copies of these studies are available from ConnDOT’s Office of Environmental Planning.”
Ideal State of the Practice

Transportation Planning
- Public Involvement
- Transportation Deficiencies & Needs
- Goals and Vision
- Solutions Evaluation and Screening
- Preferred Solutions
- Documentation

NEPA Decision-Making
- Project Scoping
- Public Involvement
- Purpose and Need
- Alternatives
- Preferred Alternative
- Documentation
Regulatory Authority

- 23 CFR 450.212 and 450.318 - Transportation planning studies and project development
- 23 CFR 450 Appendix A
- 23 CFR 771.111 (a)(2) - Early coordination, public involvement, and project development
- 40 CFR 1501.2 - Apply NEPA early in the process
- Environment and Planning Linkage Processes Legal Guidance
Every Day Count’s PEL Initiative

PEL Questionnaire
PEL Questionnaire Sections

- Background
- Methodology used
- Agency coordination
- Public coordination
- Purpose and need
- Range of alternatives
- Planning assumptions and analytical methods
- Environmental resources
- Cumulative impacts
- Potential strategies for mitigation
Lessons Learned

• PEL studies can be conducted for different reasons
  – Limit range of alternatives
  – Develop corridor vision
  – Continue study of corridors beyond scope of NEPA

• Questionnaire questions ask project team to think about how the study will be used in NEPA
Lessons Learned Continued...

- NEPA studies naturally build off PEL studies
- Creates efficiencies with respect to time and cost (NEPA)
- Adjacent NEPA studies incorporate changes from PEL study analysis
Support for PEL

“PEL can result in a more efficient and streamlined NEPA process, and allow better decision-making with respect to alternatives analysis and project prioritization”

*Colorado DOT*
Technical Guidance

Purpose
Guidance document on the use of transportation planning information and decisions in the NEPA process.
Activities to Support PEL Initiative

1. Ask the question: What planning information can I bring forward on this project?

2. Share your success: Send information on equivalent approaches or that you’ve started implementing the PEL questionnaire.

3. Start the conversation: Talk with state and local partners about using the PEL questionnaire.
QUESTIONS?
Contacts & Information

Every Day Counts Website:
http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/everydaycounts/projects/toolkit/planning.cfm

PEL Website:

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