Environmental Streamlining
STEP UP

Linking Conservation & Transportation Planning
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What is STEP UP?

Strategic Transportation, Environmental and Planning Process for Urbanizing Places (STEP UP)

- Environmental Streamlining Pilot Project in Colorado in response to Section 1309 of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).
- A partnership between FHWA, FTA, CDOT, EPA, and the NFR MPO
- Funded by FHWA Colorado Division
STEP UP Objectives

- Improve evaluation on environmental issues in the Regional Planning Process
- Full and early participation of all relevant agencies in the planning process.
- Improved NEPA decision-making
- Early identification and consideration of environmental impacts and issues
- Meet Federal planning requirements – including SAFETEA-LU
Phases of STEP UP

Ø Phase I
• Establish procedure
• Develop relationships with Resource Agencies

Ø Phase II
• Implementation
• Pilot test for just NFR
Phase I Objectives

1. Modified RTP Process – Quantitatively address environmental impacts related to transportation at the earliest possible stage.

2. Regional Cumulative Effects Assessment Process - to help understand the effects of transportation development and land use on the environment.

3. GIS Tool – Communication tool for planners and Resource Agencies to review information and submit comments
Model Planning Process

Objective 1

- Early and continuous Resource Agency involvement
- Guidelines for environmental review in the RTP process
- Development of GIS-web based tool for identifying the potential environmental impacts of transportation projects and communicating with Resource Agencies.
- Environmental analysis of corridors and potential projects prior to the NEPA process
- Incorporation of a cumulative effects assessment process for NFRMPO’s Regional Transportation Plan
Regional Transportation Plan

Objective 1

Previous RTPs (2020 & 2025) attempted to include environmental assessment criteria in the Project Prioritization Process (PPP)

- Lack of data for analysis
- The 2030 RTP does not include environmental assessment criteria due to a lack of information

Environmental review of a project doesn’t start until after project moves into the TIP
Issues with the Current RTP Process

Objective 1

- Does not effectively address environmental considerations
- Lack of Resource Agency involvement during the planning stage
- Time and cost impacts to project due to unknown environmental issues
- NEPA review struggles with accommodating projects rather than a best fit
Phase I Modified RTP Process

Objective 1

Environmental Database (all) – includes the natural, built and social environment

Corridor Assessment & Visions Review (MPO)

RTP Project Submittal (MPO members)

Project Prioritization and Screening Process (MPO)

RTP Document
- Vision Plan
- Fiscally Constrained Plan (MPO)

Pre-TIP Environmental Review & Scoping (RA/FHWA/CDOT/Project Sponsor)

TIP/STIP Document (MPO/CDOT)

Project Development
- NEPA Documentation Process
- Permitting
- Preliminary Design
- ROW Acquisition
- Final Design
- Construction (CDOT/Project Sponsor)

Regional CEA Report (CDOT)

Regional CEA of Fiscally Constrained Plan (CDOT)

Comprehensive Local Planning (Local jurisdictions)

Note: Some of the actions in the process may occur concurrently.
Steps indicate a logical flow, but not chronological.
RCEA Process
Objective 2

- Identify regional resources of concern for cumulative effects
- Identify data needs
- Establish thresholds for resources
- Identify impacts of RTP on identified resources
- Identify impacts of land use changes on identified resources
GIS Tool
Objective 3

- Web based communication tool
- Template created for Statewide use
- Dependent on data repository, which needs full participation of Resource Agencies to develop the relevant data
- Requires staffing and equipment (server, software, etc) with ongoing funding
Benefits to Stakeholders

- Promotes environmental stewardship by taking environmental issues into account up front
- Predictable and timely approval process
- More comprehensive regional planning
- Improved project selection
- Improved project cost and time line
Current Status of STEP UP

- Final Phase I Report is complete
- Phase II consists of conducting a pilot project using the methodologies and tools developed in Phase I
- Live Demonstration
STEP UP Phase I Report is available at:
http://www.nfrmpo.org/pdfs/PhaseIReport_v4.pdf

Suzette Thieman, NFRMPO
sthieaman@nfrmpo.org
970-416-2257