

NEPA - National Environment Policy Act of 1969

On January 1, 1970 the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) was signed into Law. NEPA requires the examination and avoidance of potential impacts to the natural and human environment when considering approval of proposed transportation projects. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) NEPA project development process is an approach to balanced transportation decision making that takes into account the potential impacts on the human and natural environment and the public's need for safe and efficient transportation. Accordingly, it is FHWA policy that:

- *To the fullest extent possible, all environmental investigations, reviews, and consultations be coordinated as a single process, and compliance with all applicable environmental requirements be reflected in the environmental document required by this regulation.*
- *Alternative courses of action be evaluated and decisions be made in the best overall public interest based upon a balanced consideration of the need for safe and efficient transportation; of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed transportation improvement; and of national, state, and local environmental protection goals.*
- *Public involvement and a systematic interdisciplinary approach be essential parts of the development process for proposed actions.*
- *Measures necessary to mitigate adverse impacts be incorporated into the action.*

NEPA and Transportation Decision Making

The principles or essential elements of NEPA decision making include:

- *Assessment of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of a proposed action or project*
- *Analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, based on the applicants defined purpose and need for the project*
- *Consideration of appropriate impact mitigation: avoidance, minimization and compensation*
- *Interagency participation: coordination and consultation*
- *Public involvement including opportunities to participate and comment*
- *Documentation and disclosure.*

FHWA adopted the policy of managing the NEPA project development and decision making process as an "umbrella" under which all applicable environmental laws, executive orders, and regulations are considered and addressed prior to the final project decision and approval. The FHWA NEPA process allows transportation officials to make project decisions that balance engineering and transportation needs with social, economic, and natural environmental factors. During the process, a wide range of partners including the public, businesses, interest groups, and agencies at all levels of government, provide input into project and environmental decisions. The following sequential project development components comprise the FHWA NEPA process:

1. *Purpose and Need Development*
2. *Alternatives Development and Evaluation*
3. *Determine Environmental Impacts*
4. *Mitigate Environmental Impacts*
5. *Agency Coordination and Public Involvement*
6. *Documentation*

