

CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN PROJECT PHASES

Community impact assessment (CIA) serves an invaluable role in planning, project development, and project decision-making. Not only does CIA fulfill NEPA requirements, it also provides a basis for more integrated problem solving by identifying the role of other jurisdictions and agencies in addressing project impacts. Ultimately, CIA helps assure that important community issues are identified and assessed before a project reaches later phases of production. Early identification of community issues greatly increases the ability of an agency to effectively address those issues. CIA also facilitates commitment compliance, by assuring that any commitments made in previous phases related to the project are passed to the next phase.

The process and methods described in this Handbook have utility in each phase of a transportation project. Useful methods for planning include, but are not limited to, the community profile and overlay techniques. The purpose of CIA at the planning stage is early identification of major project issues having NEPA implications or other potentially significant adverse impacts that would eliminate the project from further consideration. Such information will provide a helpful starting point for the project development and environment (PD&E) phase.

During PD&E, the project is well enough defined for a detailed assessment of community impacts. The level of effort necessary to accomplish the various steps of the process will depend upon the nature of the project and whether or not community impact assessment was initiated in the planning phase. Each of the techniques provided in the handbook could be applied during the PD&E phase.

When the project enters the design phase, CIA becomes even more focused. Many of the controversial issues would have been addressed in previous phases, thereby reducing the potential for production delays. Design alternatives still need to be reevaluated to determine their implications in relation to community impacts. Nonetheless, designers would be informed up front as to special community needs or issues of relevance to project design, such as areas of high pedestrian activity or locally important aesthetic features. Any commitments made in previous phases would be communicated to designers, who will be responsible for carrying them out. If constraints arise that require changes in design, then the process would require follow-up with the affected community prior to proceeding.

For right-of-way staff, the information from previous phases will prove useful in preparing conceptual stage and final relocation plans. The partnering strategies also help to expand the range of potential solutions to adverse relocation impacts. When the project reaches the construction phase, many issues related to maintenance of traffic during construction will likely have already surfaced, thereby aiding in the development of maintenance of traffic plans. The community profile and related inventories will prove invaluable, as will the strategies set forth in the handbook for minimizing adverse economic impacts of

construction on area businesses. Below are specific suggestions of community impact assessment activities in the various phases of a transportation project.

PLANNING

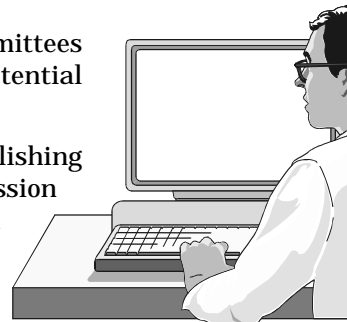
The time to begin addressing community or resource agency issues and concerns is in the planning process, rather than after extensive time and resources have been spent on developing and designing the project. Early assessment of potential social, environmental, and economic impacts in the planning process increases the likelihood that these issues can be addressed and helps screen out projects that might be problematic.

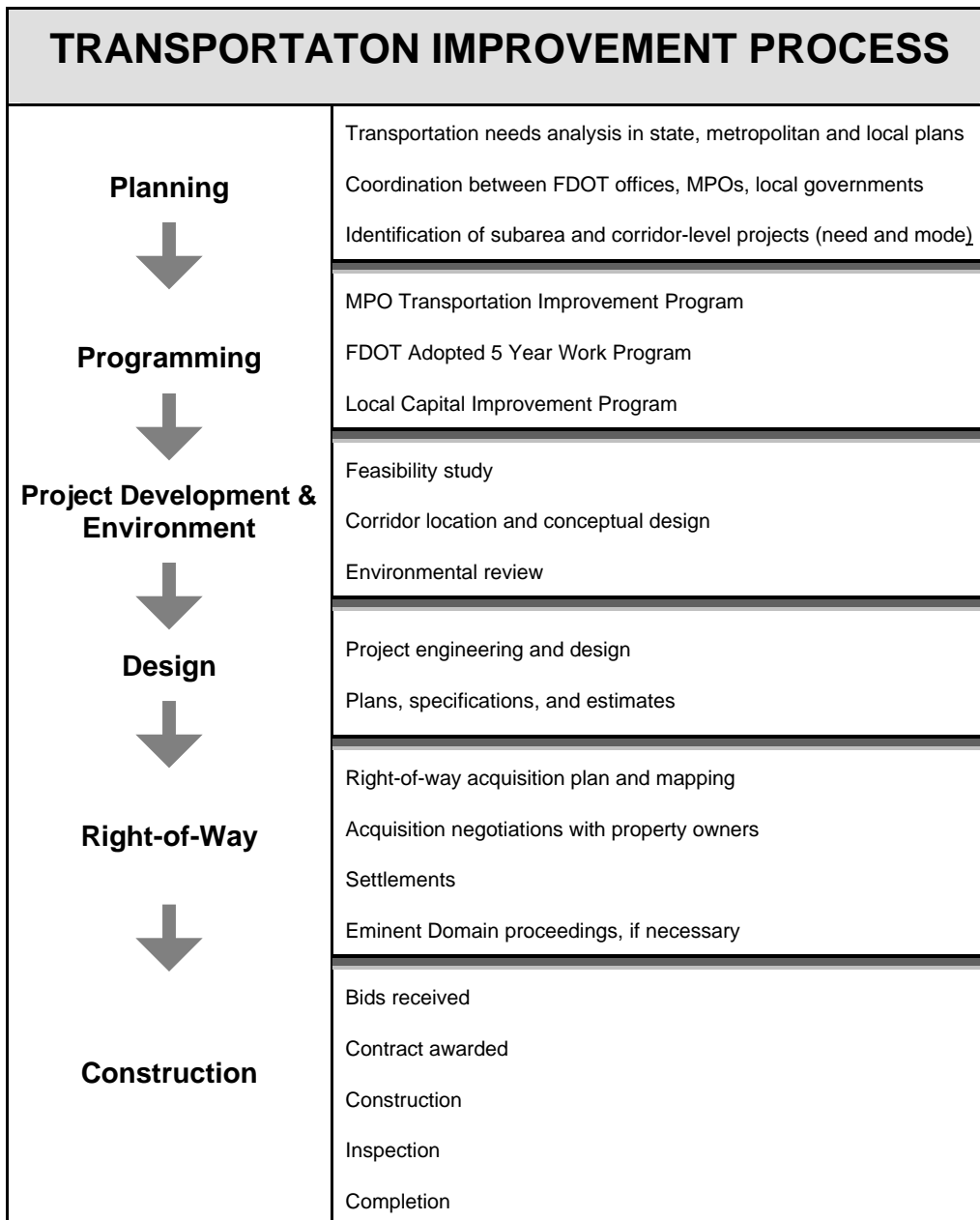
Primary responsibility for community impact assessment in the planning phase:

- In urban areas, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (with FDOT assistance and local government involvement);
- In rural areas, the FDOT with local government involvement.

During the development of planning studies, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, in cooperation with the FDOT, should engage in the following community impact assessment activities (See Appendix C-1):

- Broaden the scope of the Citizen Advisory Committees to enlist their assistance in identifying potential community issues and impacts.
- Conduct visioning workshops aimed at establishing long-range community objectives and mission statements in relation to the transportation plan and long-term development of the region.
- Evaluate the relationship of the long-range transportation plan to the local government comprehensive plan in cooperation with the affected local governments. Indicate any inconsistencies or potential conflicts, as well as compatibility with plan objectives. Define the need for proposed transportation improvements in relation to community goals, objectives, policies and transportation systems development.
- Conduct a screening analysis of projects to identify any with potentially significant adverse impacts on communities, protected populations, the environment, or major inconsistencies with local comprehensive plans (PLEMO exercise). Engage resource management agencies and local governments in this effort. Evaluate the secondary land use impacts of major new transportation projects or major new expansions flagged as problematic.
- Initiate a process to address conflicts or inconsistencies between the long range plan, local government comprehensive plans, and plans and programs of natural resource management agencies. Engage affected agencies and





jurisdictions in identifying an acceptable compromise and determining whether the project should be retained, modified, or eliminated.

- Document any community issues that arise during this phase having NEPA implications that will need to be addressed in later phases and any project related commitments.
- Transmit these documented findings to the Project Development Team.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENT (PD&E)

Community impact assessment and public involvement activities are most extensive during the project development and environmental phase. The primary objective is to gain a thorough understanding of the affected community and to use this knowledge in evaluating and assessing project alternatives. Another important objective is to involve other agencies that can play a cooperative role in identifying, evaluating, and addressing community impacts.

Primary responsibility for community impact assessment in the PD&E phase:

- FDOT Environmental Management Office, in cooperation with Metropolitan Planning Organization and local governments.

Community impact assessment responsibilities in the project development and environmental phase are discussed in the FDOT Project Development and Environmental Manual. Key activities involve the following:

- Identify community issues and objectives that relate to the project. Speak with community stakeholders and potentially affected parties to obtain a thorough understanding of these issues. Speak with stakeholders and affected parties individually or at public workshops, public hearings, small group meetings, focus group meetings and regular meetings of local organizations.
- Establish a comprehensive purpose and need statement for the project in coordination with the affected community, stakeholders, and Metropolitan Planning Organization.
- Visit the potentially affected community and observe it first hand.
- Identify the potential social and economic impacts of project alternatives, including new impacts that may arise due to changes in the community during project development.
- Establish the significance of potential impacts to assist in determining what level of impact assessment and documentation is appropriate for the project.
- Provide social and economic criteria for evaluating and selecting a preferred alternative.
- Identify techniques for addressing potential adverse impacts, as well as potential roles for other agencies that could assist with the mitigation effort. Activities include the following:
 - Consider adverse relocation impacts. Document any special needs or considerations for inclusion in the conceptual stage relocation plan.

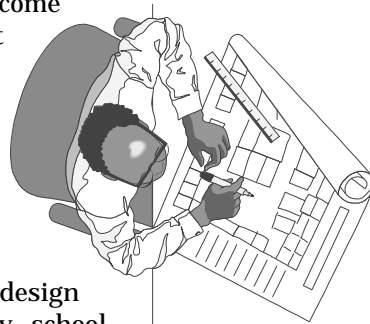
- Identify issues related to maintenance of access during construction and coordinate with potentially affected parties on specific mitigation strategies.
- Provide information for project documents, such as the Categorical Exclusion (CE), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS), Environmental Assessment (EA), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), Record of Decision (ROD), Section 4F reports, and project reevaluation reports. See Chapter 3 of the FDOT Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Manual for additional guidance on documentation required for various project categories.

DESIGN & RIGHT OF WAY

Typically, when a project reaches the design and right-of-way phases, many of the project commitments and community issues have already been identified. However, this is not always true. Projects classified as programmatic categorical exclusions, for example, may have potential community impacts that are not identified until the design phase. An example could be a median reconstruction project. In such cases, additional public involvement and community impact assessment may be necessary to address public concerns.

Primary responsibility for community impact assessment in Design phase:

- FDOT Design and Right of Way Office, in cooperation with Environmental Management Office.
- Review environmental documents to become familiar with issues surrounding the project and commitments made to date.
 - Carry out previous commitments. Any revisions that depart from past commitments or clearly pose social and economic impacts will require additional assessment and coordination with affected parties.
 - Reevaluate social and economic impacts of design alternatives, including impacts on public safety, school crossings or other high pedestrian locations, and accessibility of corridor businesses and neighborhoods. Projects involving medians or access changes must be carried out in accordance with *Median Opening Decision Process* (625-010-020), and *Working With the Public on Accessibility Concerns* (625-010-021). These procedures can be obtained from the FDOT Systems Planning Office.
 - Provide additional public involvement opportunities for changes that arise in design to inform affected parties and identify opportunities to avoid unnecessary adverse impacts on specific businesses, neighborhoods, or property owners.
 - Incorporate information from the other phases of the community impact assessment into the conceptual stage relocation plan and develop



strategies in coordination with affected parties and other agencies for addressing adverse relocation impacts.

CONSTRUCTION

The primary consideration during construction is to manage traffic effectively in areas under construction and minimize adverse economic impacts on businesses that could result from temporary loss of access during construction.

Primary responsibility for community impact assessment in Construction phase:

- FDOT Construction Office, in cooperation with Environmental Management Office.

- Review environmental documents to become familiar with issues surrounding the project and commitments made to date. Carry out specific recommendations related to maintenance of traffic and multi-modal access during construction.
- Provide outreach to affected parties for the purpose of explaining the construction schedule and notify them of the agency contact person that will assist in addressing construction impacts and problems.
- Develop maintenance of traffic plans and mitigation strategies in coordination with affected parties that minimize economic hardship on affected businesses or congestion around major employment and activity centers.
- Carry out previous commitments. Any revisions that depart from past commitments, agency standards, or that pose social or economic impacts will require additional assessment and coordination with affected parties.

