

# Successes **in** Stewardship

<http://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/strmlng/es4newsltrs.asp>

April 2007

## Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL): Streamlining Transportation Decisionmaking

Since the enactment of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has continued its initiatives to promote a more integrated approach to the transportation planning and project development processes. Although this focus on integrated processes, especially for planning and the environment, is not new, it continues to evolve, incorporating new activities to better link planning and environmental review processes and related efforts.

FHWA has developed a number of programs to enhance both the planning and environmental review processes. The umbrella approach of Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) incorporates these two processes. PEL is an integrated approach to transportation decisionmaking that takes into account environmental, community, and economic goals throughout the project life cycle, from the planning stage through development, design, construction, and maintenance. PEL promotes greater communication within and among transportation and resource agencies, leading to improved decisionmaking and project development.

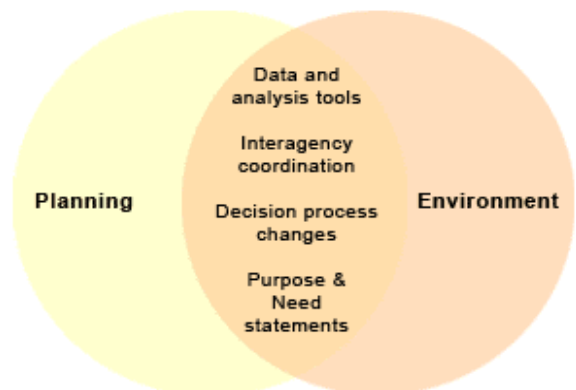
Using PEL, transportation and resource agencies can:

- Enrich the transportation planning process
- Develop more environmentally sensitive transportation projects
- Enhance resource agency conservation efforts
- Develop relationships within and among agencies
- Minimize duplication of effort and reduce delays in project implementation

PEL is supported by Federal transportation regulations and FHWA programs and guidance that focus on improvements to planning and on environmental review processes.

### The PEL Approach to Decisionmaking

Along with related planning and environmental review regulations and guidance, PEL creates a foundation for transportation staff and for transportation and resource agencies to build relationships and enhance decisionmaking processes. The diagram below depicts this foundation and the role of PEL.



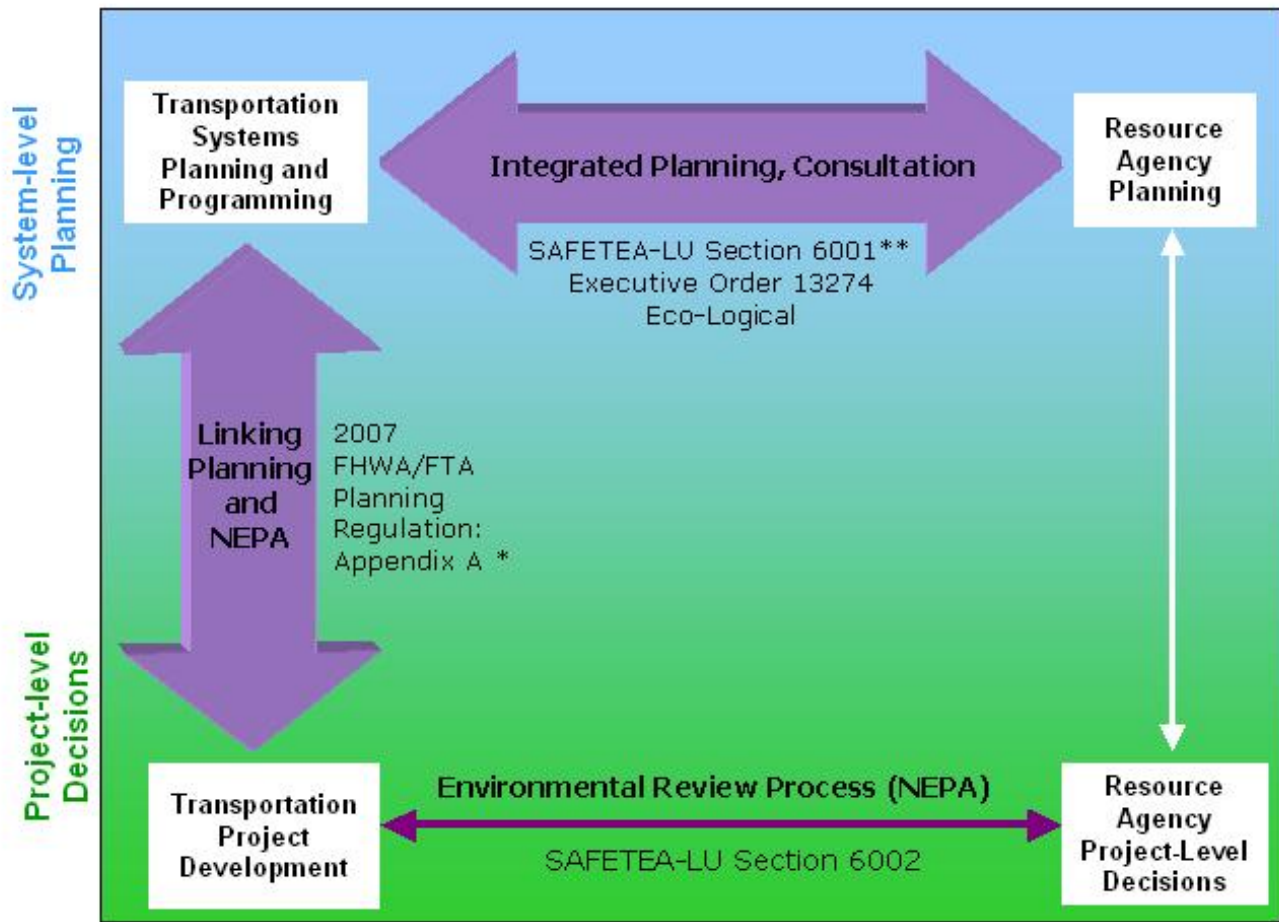
### The Benefits of Linkages

PEL streamlines decisionmaking processes by encouraging planning and environment staff at transportation and resource agencies to share tools and improve coordination.

### The Relationship between Linking Planning and NEPA and PEL

- *Linking Planning and NEPA* covers a specific part of the transportation decisionmaking process. It links statewide and metropolitan transportation planning with the NEPA process.
- *PEL* encompasses Linking Planning and NEPA but takes a broader view of planning and environmental practices, including interactions with resource agencies. (PEL also includes SAFETEA-LU Section 6001 consultations, Ecological, Integrated Planning, Linking Conservation, and Transportation Planning.)

## Planning and Environment Linkages in Decisionmaking Processes



\*23 CFR 450.212, 318, Appendix A

\*\*23 CFR 450.214, 322

The diagram integrates decisions, activities, and related regulations that influence every transportation project. Some of these project components are discussed below.

### System-Level Planning

PEL means completing certain activities in the planning process that can be helpful in project development. It can also help to link transportation and conservation planning. Examples of these linkages are environmental mapping and overlaying natural and historical resources with proposed transportation facilities. Related system-level planning activities include:

- *Transportation systems planning and programming:* The planning and analysis of transportation strategies, project locations, and conceptual design that generate such outputs as long-range, statewide, and metropolitan plans.
- *Resource agency planning:* A source of information for transportation projects, including plans for land use, watersheds, habitats, and cultural resources.

Transportation and resource agency activities are connected during system-level planning in the following ways:

- *Consultation* with resource agencies during transportation planning is required by the [Statewide Transportation Planning, Metropolitan Transportation Planning, Final Rule](#). This allows agencies to compare transportation plans with state conservation plans and inventories of natural or historical resources.
- *Integrated planning* helps agencies to identify opportunities that address environmental impacts early during project development and to develop mitigation options in response to the highest-priority needs in an ecosystem.
- *Eco-Logical* describes how to make infrastructure projects more sensitive to wildlife and ecosystems through integrated planning, partnerships, and cooperative conservation.
- *Linking Conservation and Transportation Planning Workshops* emphasize the sharing of information, tools, and methods among transportation and resource agencies to incorporate conservation strategies earlier in the transportation planning process. For more information, refer to the [January 2007](#) issue of the *Successes in Stewardship* newsletter.

## Linking Planning and NEPA

[Linking Planning and NEPA](#) is the connection between system-level planning and project-level decisions. It integrates statewide and metropolitan transportation planning with the NEPA process to streamline project delivery. It also allows agencies to lay the foundation for purpose and need, define the range of alternatives and eliminate some of them, and begin the public involvement and documentation needed in the NEPA process during the planning stage. For more information, see [Appendix A](#) of the Statewide Transportation Planning, Metropolitan Transportation Planning, Final Rule (23 CFR 450.212, 318, and App. A), as well as the [NCHRP 8-36 \(48\)](#) report “Improved Linkage Between Transportation Systems Planning and the NEPA,” which explains the benefits of Linking Planning and NEPA and how to implement the concepts.

## Project-Level Decisions

Activities in project-level decisionmaking include:

- *Transportation project development:* The transportation delivery process for each conceived project, consisting of environmental analysis and permitting, engineering design, right-of-way acquisition, construction, and maintenance.
- *Resource agency project-level decisions:* A process based on NEPA, environmental and land development permitting, and other analyses.

Transportation and resource agency project-level decisions are connected when agencies work together to complete the NEPA / environmental review process, discussed below.

## Relation of PEL to Regulations and Guidance

PEL implementation coordinates seamlessly with recent regulatory guidance on transportation planning and environmental review processes, including:

- [Statewide Transportation Planning, Metropolitan Transportation Planning, Final Rule \(23 CFR 450\)](#)  
The planning rule revised regulations governing the development of state and metropolitan transportation plans and programs as well as regulations for Congestion Management Systems. Revisions include the consultation and mitigation requirements under SAFETEA-LU Section 6001 (23 USC 134). The planning rule (23 CFR 450.212 and 450.318) explains how results or decisions of transportation planning studies may be used as part of the overall project development process consistent with NEPA.
- [Appendix A of the Statewide Transportation Planning, Metropolitan Transportation Planning, Final Rule \(23 CFR 450.212 and 318\)](#)  
Appendix A explains linkages between planning and NEPA. It also provides voluntary guidance on how to improve decisionmaking and incorporate products from transportation planning into the NEPA process. When the NEPA and transportation planning processes are not well coordinated, the result is duplication of effort and delays in transportation improvements.
- [SAFETEA-LU Environmental Review Process, Final Guidance \(23 CFR 139\)](#)  
The final guidance stems from the passage of SAFETEA-LU Section 6002 (23USC 139) and establishes a new environmental review process for transportation projects developed as environmental impact statements (EIS). The final guidance describes the roles of the project sponsor and the lead, participating, and cooperating agencies; sets new requirements for coordinating and scheduling agency reviews; broadens the authority for states to use Federal funds to ensure timely environmental reviews; and specifies a process for resolving interagency disagreements. Through these requirements and PEL, the environmental review process will be more efficient while protecting the environment and community resources.

## Useful Online PEL Resources

The [PEL website](#) contains resources and tools for implementing PEL. It includes benefits of PEL, getting started, effective practices, relevant legislation, regulations, guidance, and FHWA contacts.

The [Re:NEPA topic area](#) on Linking Transportation Planning and NEPA is an open, online exchange of information about NEPA, PEL, and transportation decisionmaking.

## Contact Information

FHWA Office of Project Development  
and Environmental Review:

### Michael Culp

FHWA Headquarters  
Project Development Specialist  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590  
202-366-9229  
[Michael.Culp@dot.gov](mailto:Michael.Culp@dot.gov)

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FHWA Office of Planning:

### Danyell Diggs

FHWA Headquarters  
Community Planner  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington DC, 20590  
202-366-9629  
[Danyell.Diggs@dot.gov](mailto:Danyell.Diggs@dot.gov)

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## Look What's New!

View the [SAFETEA-LU Environmental Provisions](#) page, which now includes [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on the Environmental Review Process.

FHWA is seeking grant applicants for projects that support the [Eco-Logical](#) framework and the ecosystem approach to mitigation of transportation infrastructure projects. Complete information can be found at on [grants.gov](#) or by contacting Bethaney Bacher-Gresock at [bethaney.bacher-gresock@dot.gov](mailto:bethaney.bacher-gresock@dot.gov)

Have suggestions or comments about the *Successes in Stewardship* newsletter or any other section of the FHWA Environmental Review Toolkit? Visit our [feedback webpage](#) and let us know what you think.