

Transportation Planning Requirements and Their Relationship to NEPA Process Completion (1/28/2008)

Background

This summary is intended to clarify the statutory and regulatory planning and conformity requirements that must be met with regard to the STIP/TIP, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), and the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan (SLRTP) prior to FHWA signing a Record of Decision (ROD) or Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), or approving a Categorical Exclusion (CE) for a project. Project sponsors may undertake the NEPA process with federal funds for a project or corridor that is included in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan as a project, corridor study, or NEPA study, if appropriate (some non-regionally significant projects may not need to be in the MTP) (23 CFR 450.324(g)). In the case of the SLRTP, the project, corridor, or NEPA study should be consistent with the SLRTP before proceeding with the NEPA process (23 CFR 450.216(k)). For federally funded NEPA studies, the STIP/TIP shall contain an item for NEPA and/or PE activity costs for the project prior to the authorization/obligation of federal funds to start the NEPA process. If a proposed NEPA study is not in the MTP (in metropolitan planning areas), consistent with the SLRTP (in non metropolitan planning areas), and contained in the STIP/TIP, only funds from non-federal sources can be used to conduct the NEPA process. Regardless of funding sources, the ROD, FONSI, or CE for a project can not be signed or approved by FHWA until the planning requirements described in the Q and A's listed below are met.

Questions and Answers

1. What statutory and regulatory planning requirements and conformity requirements must be completed regarding a proposed project before a ROD or FONSI can be signed, or a CE approved, *for a project in a Metropolitan area?*

Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Requirements: Regulations require that the entire project described in the ROD, FONSI, or CE shall be consistent with the MTP. If phases (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) of the project fall beyond the life of the MTP, they do not have to be included, however it is recommended that those phases (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) beyond the life of the plan and the costs associated with those phases be referenced in the plan for informational purposes. All project phases (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) planned within the life of the transportation plan have to be included in the fiscally constrained MTP in order for FHWA to sign the ROD, FONSI or approve the CE. In the event that there is construction phasing and

“multiple or revised RODs” (for independent segments) of a larger project, FHWA can only sign the ROD, FONSI, or approve the CE for those segments of the project that have independent utility and logical termini, while contributing to the function of the overall project, and are included in the MPO’s fiscally constrained MTP. The timing of this phasing (construction phases for independent segments) in the MTP should be consistent with the timing of the phasing (construction phases for independent segments) of the future project implementation as described in the environmental document. Examples are given in the attachment to this document. The MTP must be approved by the MPO policy board, found to conform for air quality purposes (if applicable), and fiscally constrained. The MTP must demonstrate that revenues are reasonably expected to be available and sufficient to cover the costs of the entire project (all phases) (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) that are included in the plan.

STIP/TIP Requirements: The planning regulations require that before FHWA can sign a ROD or FONSI, or approve a CE for a regionally significant project, the proposed project or a phase(s) (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, or construction, and/or construction phase(s)) of the project must come from an approved, financially constrained STIP/TIP. This is required because the final Planning Rule requires that both the STIP and TIP shall contain all regionally significant projects requiring an action by FHWA or FTA irrespective of the project’s funding source (23 CFR 450.324(d); 23 CFR 450.216(h)). In order for FHWA to sign a ROD or FONSI, or approve a CE for a project or phase (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) of a project with logical termini and independent utility (see CFR 771.111(f)), the STIP/TIP is required to show all phases (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) of the project that are planned within the time frame of the STIP/TIP. This can include or be limited to non-construction funding (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utilities relocation) and/or construction or construction phases if there are phases (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) of the project that are planned beyond the horizon of the STIP/TIP. Those phases (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, and/or construction phases) of the project beyond the horizon of the STIP/TIP do not have to be shown in the STIP/TIP. At least one subsequent phase (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, or construction) of the project has to be included in the approved STIP/TIP before FHWA can sign the ROD or FONSI or approve a CE. For example, the STIP/TIP might include final design, but not construction, if the construction phase is not planned within the horizon of the STIP/TIP. The timing of these subsequent phase(s) (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, or construction phases) should be consistent with the MTP and the environmental document. In those unusual instances where no subsequent (subsequent to NEPA approval) phases (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, construction, or construction phases) of the project fall within the

timeframe of the STIP/TIP, then a description of the project should be included in the STIP/TIP for informational purposes and identified as being beyond the horizon of the STIP/TIP. An example of including subsequent phases of a project in a STIP/TIP is included in the attachment to this document.

Conformity Requirements: Before a ROD or FONSI can be signed, or a CE approved, regulations require that a project level conformity determination shall be made for all projects that are subject to transportation conformity. Project level conformity can be demonstrated if the project is part of a conforming metropolitan transportation plan and TIP and meets all project level conformity requirements (see 40 CFR 93.104(d); 40 CFR 93.109). See also, http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/conformity/feis_rod.htm.

In the event that a “multiple ROD” approach is used, a project-level conformity determination must be completed prior to the signing of each ROD. The portion of the “overall project” being addressed by each ROD must be consistent with what was included in the regional emissions analysis for the MPO MTP and TIP (i.e., the design concept and scope of the project included in the conforming transportation plan cannot be significantly different from what was included in the environmental document). Project level conformity can be demonstrated if the project is part of a conforming metropolitan transportation plan and TIP and meets all project level conformity requirements (see 40 CFR 93.104(d); 40 CFR 93.109). Additionally, the financial plan supporting the MPO MTP and TIP must reflect the portions(s) of the “overall project” prior to the approval of each ROD.

2. What planning and conformity requirements must be completed regarding a proposed project before a ROD or FONSI can be signed, or a CE approved *for a project that is in a rural area?*

Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Requirements: Before FHWA can sign a ROD/FONSI, or approve a CE, a project in a rural area must be found to be consistent with the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan. The Planning Regulations allow Statewide Transportation plans to be policy plans and not project specific. In such cases, the project does not have to be specifically listed in the plan but should be consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the Statewide Plan. The Statewide Transportation Plan, by regulation, does not have to be fiscally constrained.

STIP Requirements: Before FHWA can sign a ROD or FONSI, or approve a CE for a regionally significant project, the proposed project or a phase (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utility relocation, or construction) of the project must come from an approved, financially constrained STIP. The planning regulation requires

that the STIP shall contain all regionally significant projects requiring an action by FHWA or FTA irrespective of the project's funding source (23 CFR 450.324(d); 23 CFR 450.216(h)). In order for FHWA to sign a ROD or FONSI, or approve a CE for a project or phase of a project with logical termini and independent utility (see CFR 771.111(f)), the STIP is required to show all phases (e.g. PE, final design, ROW, utilities relocation, or construction) of the project that are planned within the 4 year time frame of the STIP. This can include or be limited to non-construction funding (e.g., PE, final design, ROW, utilities relocation) if there are phases of the project that are planned beyond the 4 year horizon of the STIP. Those phases of the project beyond the 4-year horizon of the STIP do not have to be shown in the STIP. At least one subsequent phase of the project does have to be included in the approved STIP before FHWA can sign the ROD or FONSI or approve a CE. For example, the STIP might include final design, but not construction. The timing of these subsequent phases should be consistent with the SLRTP and the environmental document (if it is a regionally significant project). In those unusual instances where no subsequent (subsequent to NEPA approval) phases of the project fall within the timeframe of the STIP, then a description of the project should be included in the STIP for informational purposes and identified as being beyond the horizon of the STIP/TIP.

Conformity Requirements: The conformity regulations require that before FHWA signs a ROD/FONSI or approves a CE for a project that is in a nonattainment or maintenance area, the project must be found to be in conformity (see 40 CFR 93.104(d); 40 CFR 93.109). In nonattainment and maintenance areas, for a project in a “donut¹” area, the project must be included in a regional emissions analysis that supported the conformity determination of the associated metropolitan transportation plan and TIP and meet all applicable project level conformity requirements before a project level conformity determination can be made. See 40 CFR 93.104(d); 40 CFR 93.109.

In isolated rural nonattainment and maintenance areas² a project level conformity determination must meet all the requirements in 40 CFR 109(l) prior to FHWA signing a ROD or FONSI or FHWA approval of a CE.

¹ A “donut” area is a geographic area outside a metropolitan planning area boundary, but inside the boundary of a nonattainment or maintenance area that contains any part of a metropolitan area(s). These areas are not isolated rural nonattainment and maintenance areas.

² Isolated rural nonattainment and maintenance areas are areas that do not contain or are not part of any metropolitan planning area as designated under the transportation planning regulations. Isolated rural areas do not have federally required metropolitan transportation plans or TIPs and do not have projects that are part of the emissions analysis of any MPO's metropolitan transportation plan or TIP. Projects in such areas are instead included in a statewide transportation improvement program. These areas are not donut areas. (40 CFR 93.101).