

**NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
INTEGRATION OF PLANNING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT DESCRIPTION
(January 6, 2006)**

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is currently conducting a major environmental stewardship and streamlining project with a goal of integrating the long range planning and project development processes within the state. This project is being co-sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration.

Background

By federal law, large urban areas (MPOs) must adopt long-range (25- to 30-year) transportation plans. Under state law, MPOs, small urban areas and counties are encouraged to adopt comprehensive transportation plans. One of the purposes of these plans is to identify specific projects that can help the local governments meet their community and transportation goals.

Also by federal and state law, funded projects are subject to a rigorous environmental review and environmental permitting processes. Ideally the information collected and decisions made during the long-range planning process would be used as the starting point inputs for the environmental review process. This is not the case. In fact, there are legal, process and organization cultural barriers that have created two almost totally disconnected processes.

Integration Project

The overall purpose of this project is to develop an integrated planning process that provides a seamless connection between long-range planning and project development. Both of these processes are complex multi-agency processes. Long-range planning is conducted by local and regional planning agencies in partnership with NCDOT's Transportation Planning Branch. Internal to NCDOT, the project development process is primarily a partnership of two NCDOT branches, Project Development and Environmental Analysis (PD&EA) and Highway Design. There are other NCDOT organizational units who are responsible for individual sub-processes (for example, the Right-of-Way Branch). In addition to this internal partnership, the project development process has formally established external partnerships with the environmental review and permitting agencies and local planning organizations. This complex internal and external partnership establishes a shared decision-making process for project development.

The sheer complexity of the project development process has driven NCDOT to look for ways to streamline the process and strengthen partnerships both internally and externally. In the last five years, NCDOT has spent a considerable amount of time and effort in formal process improvement initiatives. As a result, the four major project development sub-processes have been fully integrated into a new process commonly called Merger 01. These four sub-processes are: 1) environmental review (NEPA), 2) design, 3) mitigation, and 4) permitting. To support this integration, the department is in the process of implementing a new project management information system (PMii) based on the Merger 01 process.

The multiple process improvement initiatives for Merger 01 have created considerable documentation of the project development process. NCDOT has detailed process maps, defined roles and responsibilities, individual step and overall process time frames, inputs and outputs, and data flows for road projects (new location and widening) and bridge replacement projects.

While incremental improvements have been made to the long range planning process over the last several years, few of these "new" processes have been fully documented or formally adopted as a standard process for the branch and local agencies to consistently follow.

The project plan for integrating long range planning and project development has five project phases:

Phase 1: Scope Project and Secure Commitment

The first phase was detailed scoping to establish sponsor expectations, clearly defined deliverables and the final project approach. During the scoping phase over 30 interviews were conducted. Those interviewed included representatives from NCDOT leadership and staff, FHWA leadership and staff, resource agency mid-management and staff, metropolitan and rural planning organization staff, and consultants engaged in supporting long range and project development processes for NCDOT. At the end of this phase a project scope and team charter were approved by the project sponsors (NCDOT and FHWA senior and mid-managers).

Phase 2: Map Existing Processes

A new integrated comprehensive transportation planning (CTP) mainline process has been designed by a team with representation from NCDOT, FHWA, MPOs and RPOs. This team also identified several supporting sub-processes that are needed to complete the process redesign. These nine are:

Land Use	Environmental Considerations
Fiscal Constraint	Air Quality Conformity
Modeling	MPO/RPO/NCDOT Coordination
Multi-modal	Documentation
Stakeholder Involvement	

All of the sub-processes have been designed with the exception of the multi-modal process, stakeholder involvement and documentation. Preliminary research has been completed to identify multi-modal processes from areas outside North Carolina that might be adaptable to the concepts outlined by the CTP process redesign team; however, there were no multi-modal processes or analysis tools that are compatible with what the team has envisioned. The team will need to revisit this issue to determine how they will handle the multi-modal process. The framework for the stakeholder involvement sub-process has been developed, and more detail will be added by the end of the year. All of the sub-processes include identification of documentation needs and requirements, which will be inputs into the documentation sub-process design.

Phase 3: Perform Analysis and Develop Recommendations

Eight linkages between long-range planning and project development have been identified:

- Problem Statement to Purpose and Need
- Community Impact Assessment
- Land Use to Indirect and Cumulative Impact Analysis
- Mitigation Needs and Opportunities
- Alternatives Analysis
- Fatally Flawed Alternatives
- Stakeholder Involvement
- Multi-Modal Alternatives

These linkages represent issues that are discussed in both long-range planning and project development. A multi-disciplinary team, consisting of staff from NCDOT, FHWA, MPOs, RPOs, and state and federal resource agencies, has detailed out the data, decisions, stakeholder involvement and documentation required to transfer the information generated during planning to the NEPA/SEPA phase of project development. To accomplish this, a producer (the “long-range planners”) – customer (“project planning engineers and resource agencies”) relationship was used to ensure that the expectations about the products being produced in long-range planning will be acceptable as the starting point for the project development process. As of January 1, 2006 integration workshops have been conducted for all linkages except Multi-

Modal Alternatives. This linkage cannot be completed until the design of the long range planning multi-modal sub-process is complete (see Phase 3).

Phase 4: Document Integrated Process

During this phase, the integrated process will be documented based on all of the previous information that has been generated from the Integration Team. Outputs from this work will include overall process maps, roles and responsibilities, inputs and outputs, and data flows for a single seamless transportation planning/project development process.

Phase 5: Develop Procedures Manual

The last phase will be development of the detailed documentation needed to support implementation of the integrated process. NCDOT has hired a consultant to assist in the preparation of procedures manual level documentation. The procedures manual development is underway with an initial focus on the processes which will not be impacted by overall integration.