



National Consortium for Remote Sensing in Transportation

Streamlining Environmental and Planning Processes

Background, Purpose and Needs - Synthesis Report

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Task Introduction

One of the responsibilities of government at all levels is to plan for orderly development and to establish rules and regulations governing development based upon those plans. These plans should inform the nature of development that is to take place within the jurisdiction over which the government has planning authority. The purpose of this project is to review existing local, state and federal land use and transportation plans of the political subdivisions with planning authority within the project area to determine the extent to which they comport with one another, and whether or not these plans can inform the purpose and need, the alternatives considered, and the preferred alternative that is the focus of an Environmental Impact Statement. These plans should also be foundational to the public participation process.

Traditional Approaches

Transportation plans and land use plans are frequently not developed in concert with one another. Land use planning has typically focused on the compatibility of uses. Transportation planning has traditionally focused on the functional class of roads and modes of transportation and the capacity and functionality of the means of conveyance. While transportation and land use are inherently related, the transportation and land use planning processes tend to be decoupled from one another. While these plans should guide the development of land and transportation within a project area, they are not often incorporated into the Environmental Impact Statement preparation process under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Streamlining Approaches

Land use plans (comprehensive plans) and transportation plans should identify the land use and transportation development priorities of the governmental authorities that promulgate them. Comprehensive plans provide the basis for local land use regulations. Transportation plans establish transportation project hierarchies. Both should facilitate the predictability of development decisions. The planning process, and the ultimate approval of the plans, is a function of local legislative authorities with the consent of higher authorities such as state, and sometimes federal, regulatory agencies. Assuming these plans were properly developed and approved with public involvement and regulatory oversight, they should establish goals, objectives, and priorities associated with the development of land and transportation projects. As such, these plans have the potential to streamline the establishment of the purpose and need, alternatives considered, and the preferred alternative that is the focus of an Environmental Impact Statement.

Expected Deliverables

- A report comparing the goals and objectives of all adopted land use plans and transportation plans within the project area and the extent to which they are consistent with one another. This report will provide the basis for a graphic representation of the goals and objectives identified by these plans using GIS tools.
- Recommendations as to how these plans can be used to inform project purpose and need, alternatives considered, the preferred alternative, and the public participation process.