

**NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
INTEGRATION OF PLANNING AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT DESCRIPTION
(July 9, 2004)**

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, urban areas must adopt long range (25- to 30-year) transportation plans. Under state law, smaller cities and counties are encouraged to have similar plans in place. 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.

Phase 2: Map Existing Processes

The integration project is currently in this phase. Under the original project plan it was anticipated that the existing long range planning process would be documented to provide a consistent level and type of information to that which is available for project development. However, during initial meetings it became clear that the process was undergoing significant changes in response to amendments to the state transportation planning law. As a result, the initial step in this phase has been to redesign and document a new comprehensive transportation planning process which reflects the department's environmental stewardship ethic and commitment to context sensitive solutions.

As of July 2004 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 eight supporting sub-processes that are needed to complete the process redesign. These eight are:

Land Use	Environmental Considerations
Multi-Modal	Fiscal Constraint
Modeling	Air Quality Conformity
Stakeholder Involvement	Documentation

As of July 2004 fiscal constraint, air quality conformity, and modeling have been completed. The land use, stakeholder involvement and environmental considerations sub-processes are in the process design phase. Research is underway to find multi-modal processes from areas outside North Carolina that might be adaptable to the concepts outlined by the CTP process redesign team. The sub-process analysis includes identification of documentation needs and requirements. These will be inputs into the documentation sub-process design.

Component 3: Perform Analysis and Develop Recommendations

During this phase integration opportunities and barriers will be identified. The Executive Sponsors for the integration project have identified two products from long range planning that should be developed and documented sufficiently to serve as the starting point for project development. These two are a systems level purpose and need statement and documented fatally flawed alternatives. Other potential products are being identified and will be included in the integration analysis and recommendations. During this phase coordination with project development process "owners" and "doers" (within NCDOT and at resource agencies) will be critical to identify what level of analysis and documentation is required for these products to be useful during project development.

Component 4: Design Integrated Process

During this phase the integrated process will be designed and documented. 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.

Component 5: Develop Procedures Manual

The last phase will be developing the detailed documentation needed to support implementation of the integrated process. NCDOT has hired a consultant to prepare 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.