

9 Environmental Screening

In an effort to streamline the project development process, the SCDOT, in partnership with the COG's statewide, are doing early environmental screening by clearly defining the project, purpose and need, design expectations, public concerns, and potential environmental, cultural, and social impacts. The SCDOT process now requires that all new projects in the STIP, as well as high priority long-range plan projects have Advance Planning Project Reports (APPR). The contents of the APPR will include several elements. An introduction will define the purpose of the document and the project sponsor (SCDOT, COG, Other). A description of the existing facility will illustrate the roadway characteristics and existing features such as utilities, railroad crossings, mass transit, bridges, etc. The purpose and need section will give background information with project goals, current roadway deficiencies, traffic data, socioeconomic projections, level of service, accident data, and funding priority. The proposed facility element defines what the requirements are to meet the need of the project, such as design criteria, potential cross sections, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, mass transit accommodations, design techniques, and projected project cost.

A summary of public involvement is included in the APPR, highlighting public meetings, comments, and public involvement activities. Also in the report is a corridor assessment of social, economic, and environmental concerns. This section discusses the environmental screenings and site information, potential cultural resources, public parks and recreational areas, wetlands and water bodies, endangered species, potential displacements, hazardous materials, and community impacts of the project. The final section of the APPR contains recommendations and preliminary plans for the project.

Elements of an Advanced Project Planning Report can include existing and proposed typical cross section information that can be represented using "before" and "after" computer-generated visualizations for select locations throughout the length of the project. Projected traffic volumes are generated using the travel demand model and provide projected average daily traffic volumes for the proposed facility and the no-build scenario. Social, cultural, natural resources, and environmental concerns are identified using GIS database information for the environmental screening process. The total number of crashes at particular locations is summarized by providing statistics on accidents involving fatalities, injuries, and property damage. Cost estimates are also provided for one or more typical cross sections and may prove to be a key variable in the decision making process.

Advanced Project Planning Reports are conducted in close coordination between SCDOT, MPO's, and COG's for projects identified in the STIP and constrained projects included in long range plans. Planning reports typically involve transportation improvement projects, such as a widening and new location alignment(s).