

CHAPTER 6 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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6. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

6-1 OVERVIEW

The preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) by the District begins after the completion of the Programming Summary Report in the ETDM Process. This includes an approved Environmental Class of Action Determination from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or other Lead Federal Agency, which indicates that an EA is to be prepared. Whenever FHWA is referenced hereinafter it may be exchanged with the Lead Federal Agency. Concurrent with the preparation of the EA, a public involvement program is developed and administered by the District according to procedures in Part 1, Chapter 11. The environmental assessment process is shown in Figure 6.1.

Following the procedures herein, an EA is prepared. The EA is submitted only after the District has completed a quality control review and has determined that the document is complete and ready for approval by FHWA. The EA is then forwarded to FHWA for approval along with supporting technical reports (i.e., **Noise Report, Air Quality Report, Conceptual Stage Relocation Plan, Contamination Screening Evaluation Report, Project Development Summary Report, Wetland Evaluation Report, Endangered Species Biological Assessment**). At the District's discretion, the Central Environmental Management Office (CEMO) may be requested to comment on the EA. If the project involves a cooperating agency, a copy of the EA is forwarded to that agency by the District for their review and comment.

FHWA will conduct a document review for compliance with its various rules and regulations. If the EA is not approved by FHWA and comments are returned to the District from FHWA Division Office and any cooperating agency, the District will evaluate the comments and revise the EA accordingly and resubmit it to FHWA for approval. This will result in either additional comments or approval for public availability of the document by FHWA. FHWA will return one copy of the approved EA to the District for availability notification and public hearing purposes.

Upon approval, the District prepares a **Notice of Availability** which is published in a local newspaper. When a public hearing is held, the notice may be incorporated in the same advertisement for the public hearing. The document must be available for public review at least twenty-one (21) days prior to the public hearing (Part 1, Chapter 11). Copies of the approved EA are also made available for public inspection at locations listed in the notice. Comments may be received on the EA for a period of 30 days from the publication of notice of availability.

The EA will be sent by the District to the Florida State Clearinghouse and all interested State and Federal agencies utilizing the Environmental Screening Tool (EST).

After the public hearing, the Finding of No Significant Impact (if appropriate) is prepared according to procedures in Part 1, Chapter 7. If significant impacts are anticipated as a result of the public hearing process, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement may be prepared in accordance with Part 1, Chapter 8.

6-2 PROCEDURE

6-2.1 Format and Sequence of Topics

Table 6.1 lists those topics which are relevant content for the EA. The items in all capital letters are mandatory and need to be included in all EAs. The topics are divided into two (2) categories; Standard and Optional. Standard categories are those topics that must be discussed in the assessment regardless of degree of impact. Optional categories are those that may be presented and discussed in the EA if applicable.

Reference chapters in Part 2 of the PD&E Manual are identified in Table 6.1. Preparation of the document entails following the procedures in each of the referenced chapters for all standard topics and those optional topics deemed relevant to the project.

6-2.2 Intradepartmental and FHWA Review Process

After preparation of the EA and District quality control review, copies (the number requested by FHWA) are submitted by the District to the FHWA Division Office for their review and approval. In addition, FHWA is sent one (1) copy each of all supporting technical reports including the ***Project Development Summary Report***. A sample transmittal letter from the District to FHWA Division Office that accompanies the EA and supporting reports is shown in Figure 6.2. At the District's discretion, they may send CEMO a copy of the EA with a request for formal comments. If so requested, comments will be forwarded to the District within 30 days of receipt of the EA.

If there are cooperating Federal agencies, the District submits two (2) copies to each agency for their review and comment.

Within a thirty (30) day time frame, FHWA Division Office will issue one of the following three comments:

1. Review with comments.
2. A statement that the document is not ready for review.
3. Approval of the document by FHWA.

After making revisions to incorporate the comments received from the cooperating agency, CEMO, if applicable, and FHWA, the District forwards two (2) copies of the revised EA to FHWA for their approval for public availability.

6-2.3 Actions Taken After Approval of the Environmental Assessment

One (1) copy of the approved EA and a transmittal letter are forwarded by FHWA to the District (Figure 6.3) for availability notification and public hearing purposes. The District publishes a notice (***Notice of Public Availability***) in a local newspaper(s). This is usually a part of the advertisement for a public hearing and includes a list of places that the document can be inspected by the public in accordance with Part 1, Chapter 11. The EA must be available for public review at least 21 days prior to the public hearing. A public hearing is held by the District after a minimum of twenty-one (21) days after publication of the notice of availability. Comments may be received on the EA for a period of 30 days, dating from the notice of availability publication.

At the same time that the Notice of Availability is published, the EA is uploaded to the Environmental Screening Tool (EST) by the ETDM Coordinator or Project Manager. When the document is uploaded the tool automatically sends an electronic copy of the EA to the Florida State Clearinghouse and other contacts to which the Advance Notification was originally sent. The ETDM Coordinator or Project Manager may also send copies to other interested State and Federal agencies. Email and physical addresses can be stored and organized in the EST. This feature will allow documents to be sent electronically, or they may be printed out and mailed to other State and Federal agencies upon request. The ETDM Coordinator or Project Manager may also burn a copy of the EA onto a CD for distribution. Copies must be sent to the cooperating agencies (i.e., U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). All organizations and agencies have a comment period of 30 days.

After the public hearing has been held and all issues have been resolved, the District prepares a Finding of No Significant Impact according to procedures in Part 1, Chapter 7. If significant impacts are identified as a result of the public hearing, a DEIS may be prepared in accordance with Part 1, Chapter 8.

6-3 REFERENCES

1. Federal Highway Administration, Technical Advisory T6640.8A, "Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents". October 30, 1987.
2. Council of Environmental Quality, 1978. Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 43 FR 55978-56007 and 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508.
3. Federal Register, Vol 52, No. 167, "Environmental Impact and Related Procedures". August 28, 1987.

4. Memorandum, titled, "Florida-Meeting with U.S. Coast Guard", from FHWA Highway Safety and Environmental Coordinator to FHWA Assistant Division Administrator (Copy to C. L. Irwin), September 2, 1988.
5. Memorandum of Agreement Between the Department of Transportation and the Department of the Army, U.S. Corps of Engineers. 1983.
6. Federal-Aid Policy Guide, 23 CFR 771, Sub chapter H - Right-of-Way and Environment, Part 771-Environmental Impact and Related Procedures, December 9, 1991, Transmittal 1.

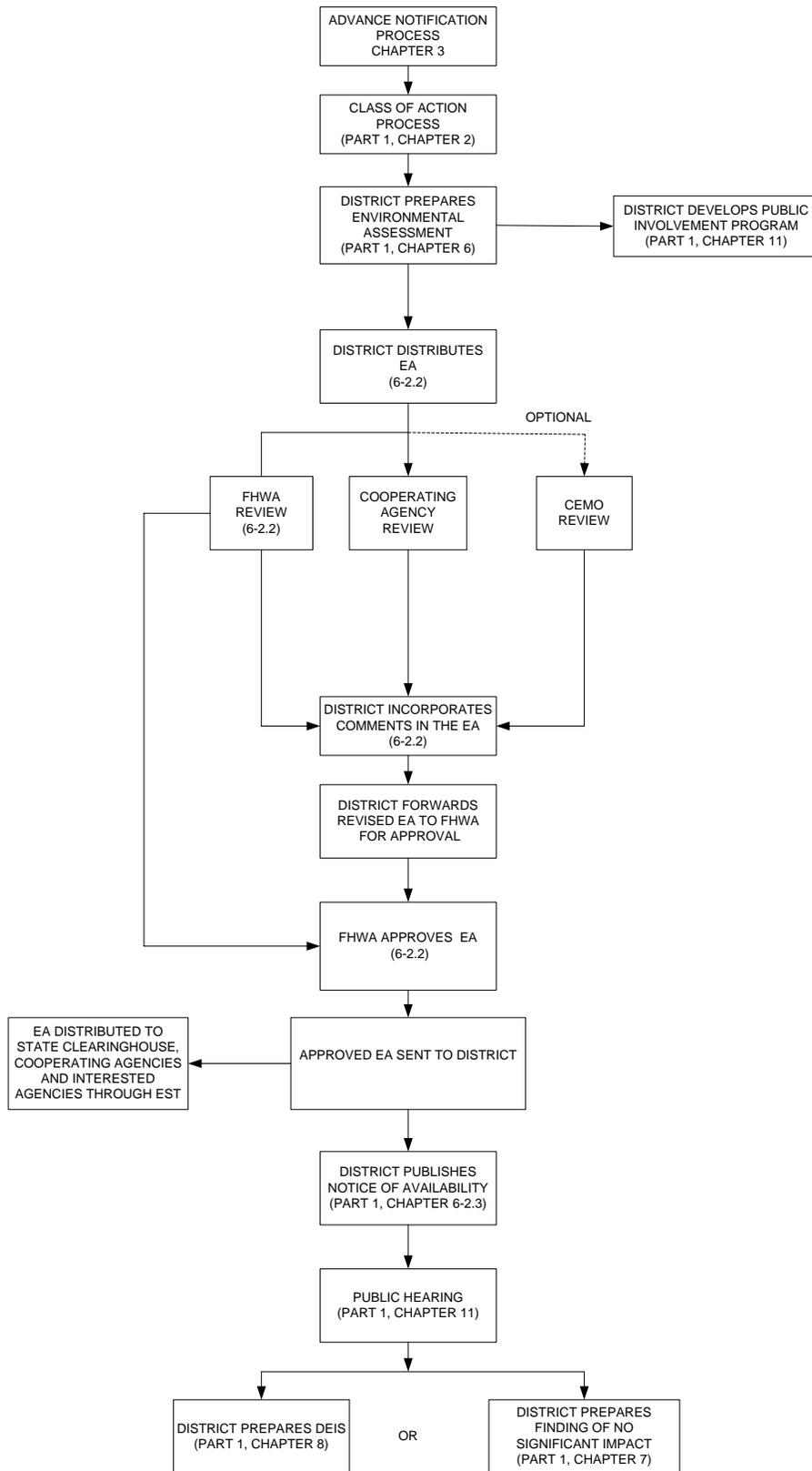


FIGURE 6.1 Environmental Assessment Process

(DATE)

Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
545 John Knox Road, Suite 200
Tallahassee, Florida 32303

Attention: (FHWA Transportation Supervisor)

Dear Mr./Ms.

Subject : Environmental Assessment
Financial Project Number XXXXX-XXXXXX
Federal-Aid Project No. X-XXX(X)-X
Any County, Florida

Enclosed are two (2) copies of an Environmental Assessment for the subject project as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and submitted in compliance with 23 CFR Part 771.

In addition, copies of the (e.g., Project Development Summary Report, Conceptual Stage Relocation Plan, Contamination Screening Evaluation Report, Wetland Evaluation Report, Endangered Species Biological Assessment, Noise and Air Quality Reports) are enclosed as reference material.

Please advise us of your actions so that we may proceed with the project.

Sincerely,

District Environmental Management Office

Enclosures

cc: Federal-Aid Programs Coordinator

FIGURE 6.2 Example Transmittal Letter to FHWA for EA and Associated Reports

(DATE)
HC-FL

District Secretary
Florida Department of Transportation
Any City, Florida

Dear Mr./Ms.

Subject: Florida - Federal-Aid Project Number X-XXXX(X)
Financial Project Number XXXXX-XXXXXX
Environmental Assessment
Any County

As requested by _____'s (date of letter) letter, we have reviewed the subject document and are returning a signed copy approved for public availability.

Sincerely,

Division Administrator

Enclosure

FIGURE 6.3 Example Transmittal Letter of Approval of EA from FHWA

CONTENT ITEMS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

TOPIC	STANDARD	OPTIONAL	CHAPTER (Part 2 of PD&E Manual)
COVER PAGE	X		2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	X		2
DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION	X		4
NEED	X		5
ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED	X		6
IMPACTS	X		8
Social and Economic Impacts	X		9
Community Impact Assessment	X		9
Utilities and Railroads		X	10
 Cultural and Historical Resources			
Archaeological and Historical	X		12
Recreational / Parkland	X		13
 Natural and Physical Impacts			
Pedestrian / Bicycle Facilities	X		14
Visual / Aesthetic	X		15
Air	X		16
Noise	X		17
Wetlands	X		18
Aquatic Preserves		X	19
Water Quality	X		20
Outstanding Florida Waters		X	21
Contamination	X		22
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X		23
Floodplains	X		24
Coastal Zone Consistency	X		25
Coastal Barrier Island Resources		X	26
Wildlife and Habitat	X		27
Essential Fish Habitat	X		11
Farmlands	X		28
Scenic Highways		X	29
Construction	X		30
COMMENTS AND COORDINATION	X		31
APPENDICES	X		36

TABLE 6.1 Content Items in Environmental Assessments