



Appendix B. FHWA Colorado Division Planning/ Environmental Linkages Questionnaire





US 85 Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) Study Federal Highway Administration

Planning/Environmental Linkages Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to act as a summary of the Planning process and ease the transition from planning to a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. Often, there is no overlap in personnel between the planning and NEPA phases of a project, so consequently much (or all) of the history of decisions made in the planning phase is lost. Different planning processes take projects through analysis at different levels of detail. Without knowing how far, or in how much detail a planning study provided, NEPA project teams are not aware of and may often re-do work that has already been done. This questionnaire is consistent with the 23 CFR 450 (Planning regulations) and other FHWA policy on Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) process.

The Planning and Environmental Linkages study (PEL Study) is used in this questionnaire as a generic term to mean any type of planning study conducted at the corridor or subarea level which is more focused than studies at the regional or system planning levels. Many states may use other terminology to define studies of this type and are considered to have the same meaning as a PEL study.

At the inception of the PEL study, the study team must decide how the work will later be incorporated into subsequent NEPA efforts. A key consideration is whether the PEL study will meet standards established by NEPA regulations and guidance. One example is the use of terminology consistent with NEPA vocabulary (e.g. purpose and need, alternatives, affected environment, environmental consequences).

Instructions: These questions should be used as a guide throughout the planning process, not just answered near completion of the process. When a PEL study is started, this questionnaire will be given to the project team. Some of the basic questions to consider are: "What did you do?", "What didn't you do?" and "Why?". When the team submits a PEL study to FHWA for review, the completed questionnaire will be included with the submittal. FHWA will use this questionnaire to assist in determining if an effective PEL process has been applied before NEPA processes are authorized to begin. The questionnaire should be included in the planning document as an executive summary, chapter, or appendix.

1. Background:

- a. Who is the sponsor of the PEL study? (state DOT, Local Agency, Other)
The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- b. What is the name of the PEL study document and other identifying project information (e.g. sub-account or STIP numbers, long-range plan or transportation improvement program years)?
*US 85 Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study
CDOT Project Number: NH 0853-088 (18997)*



- c. Who was included on the study team (Name and title of agency representatives, consultants, etc.)?

Gloria Hice-Idler—CDOT Project Manager

Johnny Olson—CDOT Regional Transportation Director

Myron Hora—CDOT Regional Planning and Environmental Manager—Former

Karen Schneiders—CDOT Local Agency Planning & Environmental Manager

Troy Haulsaka—CDOT Region 1 NEPA Program Manager

Lindsay Edgar—Planning and Environmental Linkages Manager

Chris Fasching—Felsburg Holt & Ullevig (FHU)—Consultant Project Manager

Alex Pulley—FHU—Deputy Project Manager

Jenny Young—FHU—Public/Agency Involvement

Kelly Leadbetter—FHU—Public Involvement

Dave Hattan—FHU—Traffic/Safety

Jeanne Sharps—FHU—Design

Kevin Hock—FHU—Design

Megan Ornelas—FHU—GIS

Jim Hanson—Atkins—Traffic

Jamie Archambeau—Atkins—Traffic

Oliva Brey—Atkins—Traffic

Andrew Holton—Atkins—Design

Amy Kennedy—Pinyon—Environmental

Robyn Kullas—Pinyon—Environmental

- d. Provide a description of the existing transportation facility within the corridor, including project limits, modes, functional classification, number of lanes, shoulder width, access control and type of surrounding environment (urban vs. rural, residential vs. commercial, etc.)

The US 85 corridor is a 62-mile stretch from Interstate 76 (I-76) to Weld County Road (WCR) 100. The corridor is primarily an Expressway, Major Bypass (E-X) but has sections of Regional Highway (NR-A) and Arterial (NR-B). The southern portion is a 4-lane facility, and the middle and northern portions are 2-lane facilities. The intersections are primarily signalized or stop-controlled intersections with two interchanges. The surrounding areas are primarily rural but have some areas of urban.

- e. Provide a brief chronology of the planning activities (PEL study) including the year(s) the studies were completed.

The project was initiated January 2014 and completed April 2017.

- f. Are there recent, current or near future planning studies or projects in the vicinity? What is the relationship of this project to those studies/projects?

The most recent planning study for this corridor was conducted in 1999 and resulted in an Access Control Plan. The North I-25 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) 2011 addressed Commuter Bus Service and Stations along US 85.



2. Methodology used:

- a. What was the scope of the PEL study and the reason for completing it?
The objective of the US 85 PEL study is to develop a strategic vision for US 85 that addresses safety, mobility, and access concerns.
- b. Did you use NEPA-like language? Why or why not?
Yes, NEPA-like language was used to streamline the environmental process for transportation projects along the corridor.
- c. What were the actual terms used and how did you define them? (Provide examples or list)
 1. *A Purpose and Need Statement was prepared for the study [refer to Section 1.0 of the US 85 PEL Study]*
 2. *Alternatives Development & Evaluation—Designed to allow for use in subsequent NEPA documentation.*
 3. *Recommended Alternative – Used for the alternative selected for analysis and to move forward into NEPA.*
 4. *No Action Alternative – Would leave US 85 as it currently is and would not provide any major infrastructure improvements; however, the No Action Alternative would include safety and maintenance activities that would be required to sustain an operational transportation system.*
 5. *Environmental Consequences – Discusses the impacts on the environmental and cultural resources that would be expected under the Recommended Alternative.*
 6. *Next Steps/Mitigation Strategies – Describes the next steps necessary for the environmental and cultural resources analyzed and mitigation measures that have been identified to address adverse impacts that would be expected with the Recommended Alternative.*
- d. How do you see these terms being used in NEPA documents?
These terms will be used in NEPA documents in a similar fashion as they have been used in the PEL study.
- e. What were the key steps and coordination points in the PEL decision-making process? Who were the decision-makers and who else participated in those key steps? For example, for the corridor vision, the decision was made by state DOT and the local agency, with buy-in from FHWA, the USACE, and USFWS and other resource/regulatory agencies.
A Project Management Team (PMT) with CDOT and the consultant team was formed and met monthly over the course of the project.
A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was formed and met monthly to bi-monthly. The TAC consisted of staff members from Adams County, Weld County, City of Commerce City, City of Brighton, Town of Fort Lupton, Town of Platteville, Town of Gilcrest, Town of LaSalle, City of Evans, City of Greeley,



Town of Eaton, Town of Ault, Town of Pierce, Town of Nunn, North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization, Denver Regional Council of Governments, FHWA, CDOT Environmental Programs Branch, CDOT Region 4, and CDOT Region 1.

An Executive Committee (EC) was also formed consisting of elected officials from the local jurisdictions stated above. This group provided oversight and assisted in direction setting.

FHWA was coordinated to determine the reason for PEL Study and desired outcome, provided comments and feedback on the Purpose and Need, Alternative Evaluation, and Finalization of PEL Document.

US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), US Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Colorado Department of Natural Resources Parks and Wildlife (CPW), and State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) were invited to provide input and feedback on the project.

- f. How should the PEL information be presented in NEPA?
The PEL information presented below should be presented in NEPA in a similar fashion as it was used in the PEL study.
3. Agency coordination:
 - a. Provide a synopsis of coordination with federal, tribal, state and local environmental, regulatory and resource agencies. Describe their level of participation and how you coordinated with them.
Refer to Section 5.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - b. What transportation agencies (e.g. for adjacent jurisdictions) did you coordinate with or were involved during the PEL study?
Refer to Section 5.1 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - c. What steps will need to be taken with each agency during NEPA scoping?
The steps to be taken will depend on the type of future NEPA documentation prepared for the construction projects that will be developed for the corridor. These steps are outlined in Section 6.1 of the US 85 PEL Study.
4. Public coordination:
 - a. Provide a synopsis of your coordination efforts with the public and stakeholders.
Refer to Section 5.1 and Section 5.2 of the US 85 PEL Study.



5. Purpose and Need for the PEL study:
 - a. What was the scope of the PEL study and the reason for completing it?
Refer to Section 1.3 and Section 1.4 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - b. Provide the purpose and need statement, or the corridor vision and transportation goals and objectives to realize that vision.
Refer to Section 1.3 and Section 1.4 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - c. What steps will need to be taken during the NEPA process to make this a project-level purpose and need statement?
This Purpose and Need statement addresses the US 85 corridor from I-76 to WCR 100. Depending on the specific project, the Purpose and Need statement may need to be revised to address the specific needs at that location. The individual project elements of the Recommended Alternative should address at least one need identified in Section 1.4 of the US 85 PEL Study.
6. Range of alternatives: Planning teams need to be cautious during the alternative screen process; alternative screening should focus on purpose and need/corridor vision, fatal flaw analysis and possibly mode selection. This may help minimize problems during discussions with resource agencies. Alternatives that have fatal flaws or do not meet the purpose and need/corridor vision cannot be considered viable alternatives, even if they reduce impacts to a particular resource. Detail the range of alternatives considered, screening criteria and screening process, including:
 - a. What types of alternatives were looked at? (Provide a one or two sentence summary and reference document.)
Refer to Section 2.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - b. How did you select the screening criteria and screening process?
The screening process was applicable to the corridor wide alternatives and is still applicable to the individual project locations. Refer to Section 2.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - c. For alternative(s) that were screened out, briefly summarize the reasons for eliminating the alternative(s). (During the initial screenings, this generally will focus on fatal flaws)
Refer to Section 2.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - d. Which alternatives should be brought forward into NEPA and why?
The Recommended Alternative should be brought forward into NEPA. Please refer to Section 3.0 of the US 85 PEL Study. In some cases, more than one recommended element should be carried forward into NEPA.
 - e. Did the public, stakeholders, and agencies have an opportunity to comment during this process?
Yes. Please refer to Section 5.2 of the US 85 PEL Study.



- f. Were there unresolved issues with the public, stakeholders and/or agencies?
Overall consensus among the public, stakeholders, and agencies was gained on overall long-term solutions.
7. Planning assumptions and analytical methods:
- What is the forecast year used in the PEL study?
2035
 - What method was used for forecasting traffic volumes?
Please refer to Section 2.0 of the US 85 PEL Study and the US 85 Corridor Conditions Report.
 - Are the planning assumptions and the corridor vision/purpose and need statement consistent with the long-range transportation plan?
Please refer to Section 2.0 of the US 85 PEL Study and the US 85 Corridor Conditions Report.
 - What were the future year policy and/or data assumptions used in the transportation planning process related to land use, economic development, transportation costs and network expansion?
Please refer to Section 2.0 of the US 85 PEL Study and the US 85 Corridor Conditions Report.
8. Environmental resources (wetlands, cultural, etc.) reviewed. For each resource or group of resources reviewed, provide the following:
- In the PEL study, at what level of detail was the resource reviewed and what was the method of review?
A detailed description of the environmental resources analyzed is included in Section 5.0 of the SH 85 PEL Corridor Conditions Report, which is included in Appendix A of the US 85 PEL Study, and in Section 4.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - Is this resource present in the area and what is the existing environmental condition for this resource?
A detailed description of the existing environmental resources analyzed is included in Section 5.0 of the SH 85 PEL Corridor Conditions Report, which is included in Appendix A of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - What are the issues that need to be considered during NEPA, including potential resource impacts and potential mitigation requirements (if known)?
Please refer to Section 6.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.
 - How will the data provided need to be supplemented during NEPA?
Please refer to Section 4.0 and Section 6.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.



9. List environmental resources you are aware of that were not reviewed in the PEL study and why? Indicate whether or not they will need to be reviewed in NEPA and explain why.

Please refer to Section 5.0 of the US 85 Corridor Conditions Report and Section 4.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.

10. Were cumulative impacts considered in the PEL study? If yes, provide the information or reference where it can be found.

The PEL Study includes an analysis of potential cumulative impacts. Please refer to Section 4.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.

11. Describe any mitigation strategies discussed at the planning level that should be analyzed during NEPA.

Please refer to Section 4.0 of the US 85 PEL Study.

12. What needs to be done during NEPA to make information from the PEL study available to the agencies and the public? Are there PEL study products which can be used or provided to agencies or the public during the NEPA scoping process?

This PEL study was intended to provide the framework for the long-term implementation of the Recommended Alternative as funding becomes available and to be used as a resource for future NEPA documentation.

13. Are there any other issues a future project team should be aware of?

- a. Examples: Controversy, utility problems, access or ROW issues, encroachments into ROW, problematic land owners and/or groups, contact information for stakeholders, special or unique resources in the area, etc.

Section 6.0 of the US 85 PEL Study included information regarding the next steps. Specific consideration to the location of the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way should be considered in portions of the corridor.