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APPLICATION OF ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS TO REGIONAL AND STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

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Abstract

The application of ecological assessments can facilitate transportation project planning and delivery that can avoid or minimize impacts to the environment and minimize disruptions of critical ecological processes.

This presentation considers the value of ecological assessments designed to integrate regional conservation planning with environmental regulatory compliance that support ecologically appropriate transportation planning and project delivery. Recent transportation legislation (SAFETEA-LU) requires transportation agencies to consider environmental considerations in their regional and state-wide transportation plans. Earlier transportation required Federal agencies to coordinate environmental reviews to address multiple regulatory compliance simultaneously rather sequentially whenever possible. This requirement has been retained in the in SAFETEA-LU.

Ecological assessments have been developed to address a variety of objectives. This presentation will review a subset of assessments and discuss components of those assessments which may offer the greatest value to transportation planners. The presentation will offer a template for developing a rapid assessment that offer a menu of assessment components that state and local transportation planners may consider to facilitate compliance with the new planning regulations that result in streamlined planning and project delivery.

After the passage of SAFETEA-LU, the National Academy of Sciences hosted a workshop to discuss the information needs necessary to support the new provisions such as these new environmental within the recent legislation. The presentation will offer a list of data needs that facilitate the coordination and integration of multiple agency considerations and regulatory requirements.

Follow-up work could include an analysis of the rapid assessment process and how it can be continually improved.