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**Abstract**

Project Overview: Recent federal legislation and accompanying rules (SAFETEA-LU) require state Departments of Transportation to increase their levels of collaboration with local jurisdictions and with other state and federal environmental and resource agencies related to the environmental impact of transportation projects. At the same time, they face increased demands for reducing the time and cost associated with project environmental reviews and permitting. Some barriers to achieving these desired results, experienced by DOTs, are:

- Misunderstanding of goals, priorities and expectations among the DOT, local jurisdictions, and resource/regulatory agencies during project development.
- Items and requests passed from one agency to another getting “lost in the shuffle.”
- Duplication of effort to gather and assess environmental data by the DOT, local planning agencies (MPOs), community organizations, and resource agencies.
- Important environmental or community impact considerations arising late in project development/delivery process, creating unexpected costs and schedule delays.
- Choice of a project alternative by the MPO that requires very costly and time consuming environmental studies and mitigation efforts.
- Frequent rework of environmental documents and delays in study and permit approvals.

The Language-Action Framework focuses on building commitments and coordination between customers (for example, a DOT that needs a water resource study) and performers (for example, a consultant who completes the water resource study). This approach provides a structure for improving coordination using the following key communication points:

a. Clear and specific statements of customer needs, including the motivation for the proposed effort  
b. Agreement between customer and provider on cycle time, cost and quality expectations for the work, so that there is a shared understanding of and commitment to meeting these expectations.  
c. Progress tracking and reporting, so that needed mid-course adjustments can be made in schedule, budget or other areas of the project  
d. Interim customer feedback on project deliverables  
e. Report of completed work to the customer  
f. Customer review, assessment and feedback on work delivered, and recommendations for continuous quality improvement which are developed collaboratively by customer and performer.

Sample process designs have been developed, using the Language Action Framework, for three key process areas: integrating long range planning with the NEPA process, coordinating resource and regulatory agency review of environmental decisions and documents (EIS or EA), and ensuring the fulfillment of environmental commitments (including mitigation or other measures). These process designs, when adapted to the unique situation and needs of a particular agency, show potential for a wide range of tangible benefits, including:

- Reduced time and effort to produce environmental documents (EAs and EISs).  
- Improved relationships between DOTs and the various resource, regulatory, and local jurisdiction agencies they collaborate with to produce and obtain approval for environmental documents.  
- Increased clarity about roles and accountabilities for completing environmental studies among DOT staff, the DOT’s partner agencies, and consultants/contractors.  
- Improved reliability of the DOT’s project schedules.  
- Improved environmental outcomes, achieved through greater clarity and broad interagency commitment regarding those outcomes.

List of current/anticipated results: The Language-Action Framework has been used to design a set of sample diagrams and descriptions for typical DOT environmental streamlining processes. These process designs reflect the experience of TDOT, as well as recent AASHTO and FHWA studies of environmental streamlining and environmental management system processes within DOTs.
Recommendations for future research:

- This approach should be further tested by DOTs of various sizes and in various parts of the country, for its viability and application to meet their environmental streamlining and stewardship needs.
- The approach may also improve collaboration and coordination for specific environmental mitigations or other actions—for example, multi-agency coordination to improve aquatic resources or wildlife habitat. Additional research in this area may be useful.

**Biographical Sketch:** Tom Crawford is president and founder of Praxis Northwest, LLC, a firm which specializes in helping client organizations demonstrate outstanding results by connecting strategy with operations. Tom's work has included organizational development, process analysis and redesign, IT project planning and management, systems analysis and design and feasibility study development. Environmental agencies and processes have been a vertical market focus over the last ten years. Tom's recent work has included projects with several state Departments of Transportation and a national survey of environmental management best practices among DOTs.