

NEPA EIS Process Steps with SAFETEA-LU 6002 Key Steps

The environmental review process defined in Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU provides a framework for carrying out existing requirements under NEPA and other laws; it does not supersede those existing procedures. In other words, this process is best understood as an “overlay” on existing environmental review procedures, which continue to apply to highway and transit projects. The following steps are provided to help project teams meet the newly established SAFETEA-LU 6002 required steps (highlighted in gray). We also include two new steps to help both internal and external coordination of an efficient environmental review.

Table 1.0

Step	Who	Timing of Step	How	Notes
Early Coordination Pre-NOI				
1. EIS Notification Director of ESO	Regional Environmental Office/Project Team in consultation with FHWA	When an EIS has been programmed and prior to the Project Initiation letter to FHWA Division Office	Memo or Meeting	<i>New!</i> This first step in the environmental review process is to inform the Environmental Services Office (ESO) that an EIS is being developed. It will also help ensure broad agreement on the NEPA compliance strategy. We recommend a meeting with ESO and the FHWA Environmental Manager where discussion of the overall compliance strategy can be done collaboratively.
2. Project Initiation Letter to FHWA	Drafted by Region/Mode – signed and submitted to FHWA by Director of ESO	Must happen prior to or at the same time of the Notice of Intent (NOI) Project team should	Template Letter (ESO website)	The project sponsor must submit notice to the FHWA Division Office requesting that the environmental review process be initiated. This letter should include the type of work, termini, length, and general location of the project, together with a statement of any anticipated Federal approvals/permits.
3. Develop Environmental Pre-Scoping Package	Project Team in consultation with ESO NEPA point of Contact	This package is developed prior to the Early Coordination meeting. Elements of the Package will be		The Environmental Pre-Scoping Package consists of the Project Data Sheet ¹ , the SAGES Advisory Comment Form, and the draft Coordination Plan(s). This package will be used to present the project at the SAGES meeting.

¹ The Project Data Sheet is prepared to provide the Statewide Advisory Group for Environmental Stewardship (SAGES) with information on the proposed project. At this stage of development, detailed information on project impacts is most likely not known; thus the Project Data Sheet should only state what types of impacts might be anticipated.

		supplied to the SAGES 14-days prior to the meeting.		
3a. Draft Coordination Plan(s) and Public Involvement Plan	Project Team in consultation with ESO NEPA point of Contact and Tribal Liaison	As per SAFETEA-LU: Should be developed early in the process and although does not require review and comment must be shared with the public. Follow WSDOT guidance for developing the Public Involvement Plan.	Coordination Plan Template (ESO website)	<p>The coordination plans* are documents prepared by the project team that define the processes for meeting the agency coordination and public involvement requirements established under SAFETEA-LU 6002.</p> <p>(The Public Involvement Plan is not a new procedure, however it should be drafted in conjunction with the SAFETEA-LU required Coordination Plan).</p> <p>*The tribal Coordination Plan should be drafted in consultation with HQ Tribal Liaison.</p>
Agency Coordination				
4. Early Coordination meeting with the SAGES	Project Team, ESO NEPA Point of Contact, other Lead Agency(s)	Occurs prior to Notice of Intent (NOI)	Contact ESO (NEPA point of contact) to schedule meeting	<p>New! This is an early coordination/information sharing meeting with the newly formed Statewide Advisory Group for Environmental Stewardship (SAGES) standing committee². The project team will present the project for discussion of potential issues, concerns, and anticipated impacts. The project team will also discuss the coordination plan. The SAGES to provide informal comment on the draft Purpose and Need; identify known red-flag issues; comment on the coordination plan and reflect on schedule issues and staffing/resource concerns. This meeting can also help determine appropriate Participating & Cooperating Agencies.</p>
5. Invite Cooperating and Participating Agencies	Project Team	Invitations can be sent before or after the SAGES meeting but will be sent prior to the NOI	Template letter for inviting agencies (ESO website)	The invitation letters will state and request to accept or decline within a 30-day period.

² This new advisory group will act as a standing committee to assist WSDOT and other lead agencies in making efficient environmental decisions at the NEPA/SEPA EIS level of environmental classification. WSDOT and FHWA will hold periodic forums with the Group to discuss recurring problems, concerns, and potential process improvements. The SAGES will also be used as a project kickoff forum to ensure the new EIS process is clear to all parties.

EIS Scoping				
6. Issue Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register.	Lead Agencies and Project Team with help from the ESO NEPA Point of Contact	Must not happen prior to sending project initiation letter to FHWA	Federal Lead sends NOI to EPA.	The NOI will include the Scoping Info. Packet. If during the scoping process the project teams elect to hold public and agency open houses, the NOI should discuss the dates of the meetings.
7. Provide opportunity for involvement to participating agencies and the public in defining/refining the project Purpose and Need	Lead Agencies and Project Team with help from the ESO NEPA Point of Contact	Should happen as early as practicable during the EIS scoping period. Can happen concurrently or sequentially with developing the Range of Alternatives	Recommend a meeting	The opportunity for involvement of the participating agencies and the public must be provided prior to the lead agencies' decision regarding the purpose and need statement to be included in the NEPA document. SAFETEA-LU requires a 30-day review & comment period for public and agency involvement. The comment period will be documented in the project Coordination Plan
8. Provide opportunity for involvement to the participating agencies and the public in the identification of the Range of Alternatives	Lead Agencies and Project Team with help from the ESO NEPA Point of Contact	Should happen as early as practicable during the EIS scoping period. Can happen concurrently or sequentially with defining the Purpose and Need	Recommend a meeting	The opportunity for involvement of the participating agencies and the public must be provided prior to the lead agencies' decision regarding the range of alternatives to be evaluated in the NEPA document. SAFETEA-LU requires a 30-day review & comment period for public and agency involvement. The comment period will be documented in the project Coordination Plan
9. Collaboration on Methodologies to be used to assess impacts and level of detail required in the analysis of each alternative	Lead Agencies and Project Team in collaboration with participating agencies	Collaboration on Methodologies for studying Alternatives can occur at various points during the environmental review process. <i>(Optional)</i> 30-day review & comment period.	Utilize already established practices within the Environmental Procedures Manual (EPM)	SAFETEA-LU requires collaboration with participating agencies regarding the methodologies to be used to assess impacts and the level of detail in the analysis of each alternative. This collaboration need not occur at a single point, and need not involve written reports or comment periods. It is recommended to use the scoping process to solicit agency input on impact assessment methodologies and to reach closure prior to drafting the DEIS on what methodologies will be used to evaluate impacts. It is also recommended to work with WSDOT Subject Matter Experts (SME) (Subject Matter Experts are those folks defined as your Discipline Report Reviewers).
Post EIS Scoping				
Conduct Studies and write Preliminary DEIS				