

Part 3

Project Scoping and Programming

Chapter 300 Project Scoping and Programming

Chapter 310 Project Scoping

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300.01 Introduction

Part 3 covers the evolution of transportation projects from their conceptual stage after Transportation Planning, through Project Scoping and Programming, when they become better defined and are prioritized for funding.

300.02 Process Overview

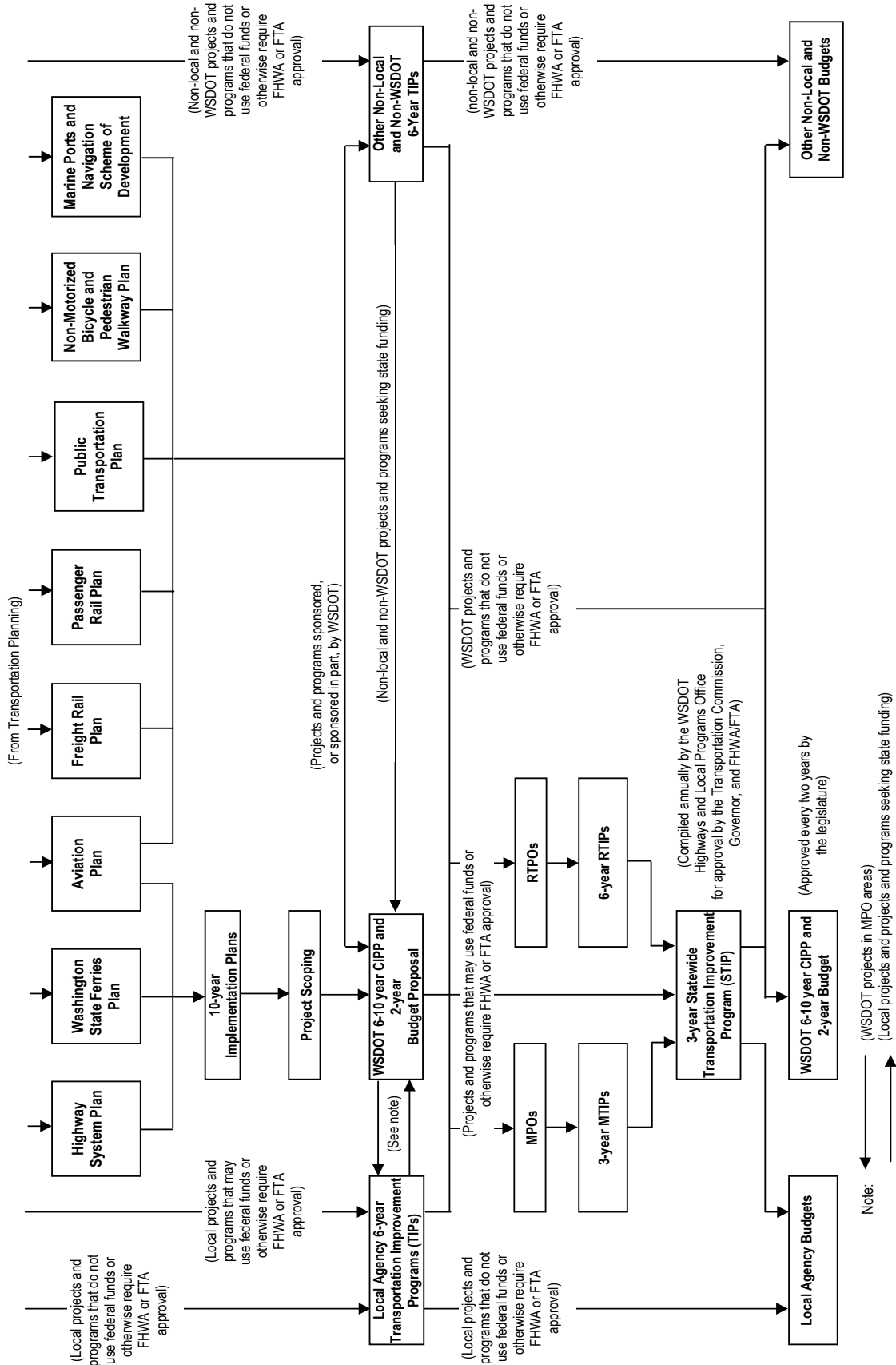
Figure 300-1 shows how Project Scoping and Programming relates to preceding and succeeding phases in the WSDOT Transportation Decision-Making Process, and **Figure 300-2** shows the Project Scoping and Programming process itself. During this phase, WSDOT develops a medium-range implementation plan for each of the primary transportation system components, highways, ferries, and the statewide airport system. It engages in Project Scoping and some additional programming to develop a six to ten year Capital Improvements and Preservation Program (CIPP) and a two-year budget proposal for each state-owned component (and some state-interest components as well) for consideration by the Legislature.

Figure 300-1: Project Scoping and Programming Phase

EPM Part 2	EPM Part 3				EPM Part 4
Transportation Planning Phase	Project Scoping and Programming Phase				Design and Environmental Review Phase
	Medium Range Implementation Plans	Project Scoping	MPO / RTPO and WSDOT Transportation Improvement Programming	WSDOT 6-10 Year CIPP and 2-Year Budget	

*Web sites and navigation referenced in this chapter are subject to change. For the most current links, please refer to the online version of the EPM, available through the WSDOT Environmental Services Office (ESO) home page: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/environment/>

Figure 300-2: Project Scoping and Programming



An overview of the process is described here in more detail for highways.

To begin the process, the Headquarters Systems Analysis and Program Development Office develops a Ten-Year Implementation Plan for highway preservation and improvement program projects listed in the Highway Systems Plan.

For all projects in the Ten-Year Implementation Plan that are expected to begin design or construction in the next six years, Headquarters Program Development, an office within the Systems Analysis and Program Development Office, directs WSDOT divisions and regional offices to prepare a scope, schedule, projected performance outcome, and budget. Project scoping involves:

- Identifying the highway problem or need.
- Defining a project purpose.
- Identifying and evaluating alternative solutions to find the most cost-effective and environmentally acceptable solution.
- Defining the scope of the proposed solution, with a cost estimate and benefit/cost analysis.
- Preparing a draft Project Summary to document the results of the process. A Project Summary includes three documents: Project Definition, Design Decisions Summary, and Environmental Review Summary.

Upon completion of the project scoping process, Headquarters Program Development creates lists of prioritized projects for each objective (project type) in the Highway System Plan based on each project's benefit/cost, constructability issues, and performance change. Program Development uses the constructability analysis to combine high priority projects into a single contract during the development of budget scenarios for department executives and the Governor.

The Governor submits the proposed budget, including a list of proposed projects in the Highway Construction Program, to the Legislature for consideration of funding authorization. Because the Highway Construction Program includes state and federal dollars, many projects are funded with federal aid, and they must be dealt with in accordance with the Federal-Aid Highway Program Stewardship and Oversight Agreement between WSDOT and FHWA, which is available at:

 <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/Compliance/agreements.htm>

During recent years, available state funding has decreased for several reasons, and high priority state-funded projects were converted to federal aid in order to be built.

Projects that are designated for federal funding and high priority state funded projects that are eligible for federal funds, or will otherwise require FHWA or FTA approval, are included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for approval by the FHWA and FTA.

300.03 Organization of Part 3


Chapter 310 describes the Project Scoping process, during which the need and purpose for a project is defined, alternatives are evaluated, and a Project Summary is prepared for consideration in biennial budget meetings. The environmental analysis conducted during this process includes classifying the project to determine what documentation will be needed for NEPA/SEPA compliance. The chapter includes detailed instructions for determining this classification, and references data resources and other tools available to help with the analysis. **Chapter 320** describes how WSDOT projects are programmed or prioritized for funding, which involves developing a ten-year Implementation Plan, a biennial budget proposal, and a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for federally funded projects of various types, including highways, ferries, and airports.

300.04 Environmental Issues in Project Scoping and Programming

Decision makers have the option to place a higher priority on certain types of investments with less environmental impact when they identify the kinds of projects that should be included in the ten-year Implementation Plan and the smaller list of projects selected for scoping. Project Managers also have this option during project scoping, when they identify alternative solutions for addressing a project purpose and need and identify a proposed solution after evaluating the alternatives to find the most cost-effective and environmentally acceptable solution.

Once a proposed solution is selected, the Environmental Review Summary is prepared, identifying potential environmental impacts, any proposed mitigation, environmental documentation requirements, and any environmental permits. This helps ensure that the full scope, schedule, and budget for any environmental work, including mitigation, is determined and included in the project duration, estimated project cost, and benefit/cost ratio recorded in the Project Definition. Also, if a Cost Risk Assessment is conducted for the project, the full range of costs or cost savings associated with any environmental risks or opportunities can be identified.

These procedures are described in **Chapter 310** and **Chapter 320**, and a link to copies of the Project Definition, Design Decision Summary, and Environmental Review Summary forms is available online at:

 <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/Compliance/ComplianceGuidance.htm#scoping>

300.05 Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviations and acronyms used in **Part 3** are listed below. Others are found in the general list in **Appendix A**.

CE	Categorical Exclusion (NEPA) or Categorical Exemption (SEPA)
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CIPP	Capital Improvement and Preservation Program
CRA	Cost Risk Assessment
DCE	Documented Categorical Exclusion (NEPA)
EA	Environmental Assessment
EBASE	Estimate and Bid Analysis System
ECS	Environmental Classification Summary
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ERS	Environmental Review Summary
ESO	Environmental Services Office
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GIS	Geographic Information System
HOV	High Occupancy Vehicles
LAG	Local Agency Guidelines
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PATS	Priority Array Tracking System
PS&E	Plans, Specifications, and Estimates
RTPO	Regional Transportation Planning Organization
SEPA	State Environmental Policy Act
SIP	State Implementation Plan
STIP	Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
TDM	Transportation Demand Management
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
TMA	Transportation Management Agency

300.06 Glossary

A glossary of terms used in **Part 3** are listed below. See **Appendix B** for a general glossary of terms used in the EPM.

Federal Nexus – A determination that at least one federal agency is involved as a proponent of a specified proposal and/or as an agency that needs to act on a federal permit, license, or other entitlement (such as a request to use federal funds or federal land) needed to implement the proposal. A federal nexus (even on an otherwise non-federal proposal) typically triggers the need for the federal agency or agencies to comply with various federal statutes including but not limited to NEPA, Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act, Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. A project has a federal nexus when there is a connection with the federal government; i.e., when any of the following occur: federal land is within the project area, federal money is used in the project, or federal permits or approvals are required as part of the undertaking.

Project Scoping – A phase of the WSDOT Transportation Decision-Making Process when a Project Summary (consisting of a Project Definition, Design Decisions Summary, and Environmental Review Summary) is prepared for a project.

300.07 Exhibits

None.

- 310.01 Introduction
- 310.02 Defining the Need and Purpose for a Project
- 310.03 Identifying and Evaluating Alternative Solutions
- 310.04 Preparing a Project Summary
- 310.05 Preparing the Environmental Review Summary
- 310.06 Environmental Database Resources
- 310.07 Project Classification
- 310.08 Project Scoping Meetings
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310.01 Introduction

Project scoping is done on an ongoing basis for all projects in the Ten-Year Implementation Plan that may be scheduled to begin design or construction in the next six years. Keeping project scoping current allows WSDOT to produce a six-year Capital Improvement and Preservation Program at any time to satisfy the requirements of Chapter 47.05 RCW. The results of the project scoping process are used in Project Programming to prioritize projects for funding in the next budget request to the legislature (see **Chapter 320**).

Project Scoping is not to be confused with EIS or EA Scoping, which is addressed in **Chapter 411**. It involves:

- Defining the need and purpose for a project.
- Identifying and evaluating alternative solutions to find the most cost-effective and environmentally acceptable proposed solution.
- Preparing a Project Summary to document the results of the process and define the overall “scope” of the proposed solution.

Each Project Summary includes three documents:

- **Project Definition** – Identifies the project purpose and need, proposed solution, estimated cost (including the cost of design and construction as well as environmental review, permitting, and mitigation), and a benefit/cost ratio for the project, which includes the projected change in system performance.

*Web sites and navigation referenced in this chapter are subject to change. For the most current links, please refer to the online version of the EPM, available through the WSDOT Environmental Services Office (ESO) home page: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/environment/>

- **Design Decisions Summary** – Identifies the current conditions and general design parameters for a proposed solution (e.g., route, length of road segment, lane width, paving depth). It also lists any deviations from design standards for the type of project. Projects must meet design standards with approved deviations in order to be eligible for federal funding.
- **Environmental Review Summary** – Identifies potential environmental issues and impacts, any proposed mitigation, and any NEPA/SEPA documents and permits that are likely to be required. A preliminary project delivery schedule is also developed at this time in order to determine the duration of the pre-construction and construction phases for the project. A Cost Risk Assessment may be conducted (primarily on major projects) to determine the full range of potential costs.

Under NEPA and SEPA, projects are classified as either Class I (Environmental Impact Statement required), Class II (Categorically Excluded or Exempt), or Class III (Environmental Assessment or SEPA Checklist required) to determine whether environmental impacts will be significant. Under SEPA, the Class III action is roughly equivalent to making a threshold determination of nonsignificance. WSDOT has developed an extensive online GIS database that is useful for preliminary environmental analysis and project classification during Project Scoping (see **Section 310.06**).

When appropriate for budget development, each Region may also hold a project scoping meeting where draft project summaries are discussed with federal and state resource agencies, Tribes, and local municipalities. Based on their feedback, a final Project Summary is prepared so the Governor and Legislature will understand the level of analysis and development required for each project, including the recommended level of environmental analysis (i.e., categorical exemption/exclusion, environmental assessment, or environmental impact statement).

310.02 Defining the Need and Purpose for a Project

The first step in Project Scoping is to define the need and purpose for a project. Since project funding is limited to solving deficiencies identified in the Highway Systems Plan, projects that solve major deficiencies or multiple deficiencies are likely to receive a higher priority for funding in Project Programming. Therefore, it is important to identify all the deficiencies, including any environmental deficiencies, or problems, that a project might solve. Examples of environmental deficiencies include a lack of adequate existing stormwater control, habitat connectivity problems like a fish passage barrier, existing noise problems caused by the highway, and chronic environmental deficiencies like bridge scour and road washouts caused by river bank erosion. After these are identified, the overall purpose of the project, which may be to solve multiple problems, can be defined.

310.03 Identifying and Evaluating Alternative Solutions

The second step in Project Scoping is to identify and evaluate alternative ways to solve the deficiencies identified in the first step. There are multiple ways to solve highway deficiencies, some of which do not even involve changes to the highway itself, and some may be more cost-effective and environmentally acceptable than others. In addition, there are often multiple ways to address each aspect of a particular deficiency, and each alternative needs to be evaluated in order to identify the best solution.

Several tools are available to assist in evaluating alternative solutions:

- **Cost and Feasibility Analysis** – Studies may be needed during project scoping to compare alternatives in terms of their cost-effectiveness, level of benefit, and acceptance. Cost estimates for alternative solutions may be created using WSDOT's Estimate and Bid Analysis System, EBASE, and Headquarters Systems Analysis and Program Development Office has developed a list of analyses that may be appropriate for determining the feasibility and level of benefit for various types of highway projects. Information about EBASE is available online at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Design/ProjectDev/EngineeringApplications/>

- **GIS Workbench** – Tool for identifying and evaluating the environmental effects of alternative solutions. See **Section 310.06** for details.
- **Analysis of Project Duration** – WSDOT's Project Delivery Information System (PDIS) or Project Management and Reporting System (PMRS) project scheduling software can be used to prepare a project schedule for each alternative. The schedule should include time required for pre-construction and construction, with particular attention to the time needed for environmental review and permitting. The PDIS and PMRS are discussed online at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/ProjectMgmt/>

In addition, some example critical path timelines for environmental work on hypothetical projects requiring different levels of environmental review are available at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/Compliance/ComplianceGuidance.htm>

- **Cost Risk Assessment (CRA)** – For major projects, the CRA may be needed to determine the full range of potential costs, or cost savings, including those associated with environmental risks and opportunities. The range of costs submitted for consideration by decision-makers should reflect any uncertainty as to whether any environmental problems will be encountered during environmental review or permitting. Examples include whether the need for an unanticipated EIS or permit may be identified during environmental review; whether an unknown hazardous

material or cultural resources may be discovered during construction; or whether some cost savings might be realized, such as through partnering on mitigation. More information on CRA and WSDOT's Cost Estimating Validation Process is online at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/ProjectMgmt/>

- **Watershed Characterization** – For major projects, a watershed characterization may help you to identify the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial mitigation for stormwater, wetlands, or floodplains. Consultation with WSDOT's Watershed Program is the best route to take if you think this may be a valuable tool for your project. It is very important that this consultation occur very early in the planning process. Watershed Program staff can evaluate your situation and also use their screening tool to identify whether your project is one that would benefit from watershed characterization. Information on WSDOT's watershed characterization process is provided in **Chapter 413** and online at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/Watershed/characterization.htm>

310.04 Preparing a Project Summary

Once a proposed solution for achieving the project purpose has been identified, a Project Summary is prepared to document the results of the project scoping process and define the overall scope of the proposed solution in terms of the work and material involved, including any environmental review and permitting work and mitigation, plus a cost estimate and performance outcome, and/or benefit/cost ratio, for the project. The Project Summary has three components:

- Project Definition
- Design Decisions Summary
- Environmental Review Summary

Preparation of the Project Summary ensures that regional staff have considered all major costs of the project, including both engineering and environmental factors, so a realistic budget can be prepared.

A link to the Project Definition, Design Decision Summary, and Environmental Review Summary forms is available online at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/Compliance/ComplianceGuidance.htm#scoping>

For details on this process, see the WSDOT *Design Manual* available at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Publications/Manuals/M22-01.htm>

For details on the *Local Agency Guidelines* (LAG) Project Summary process and forms, see the WSDOT Web site at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/localprograms/LAG/>

(1) **Project Definition**

The Project Definition form includes:

- Deficiencies or needs addressed by the project and whether the deficiencies are included in the 20 year Highway System Plan (or equivalent for other modes) or 10 Year Implementation Plan.
- Statement of purpose.
- Proposed strategy (description of work by road segment).
- Right-of-way or relocation requirements.
- Duration of pre-construction and construction phases.
- Estimated project costs. As stated in **Section 310.03**, these can be derived from historical data in EBASE. However, on large, unique, or high risk projects, or projects with a lot of public attention, it may also be appropriate to conduct a Cost Risk Assessment (CRA) to determine the full range of potential costs or cost savings (including any that might be associated with environmental risks or opportunities). For instance, if there is any uncertainty as to whether any environmental problems will be encountered in environmental review or permitting (such as an EIS or unanticipated permit being required) or in construction (such as some unknown hazardous materials or cultural resources being discovered), or if some cost savings might be realized (such as through partnering on mitigation), these should be conveyed as a range of costs for consideration by decision-makers. For more information on Cost Risk Assessment and WSDOT's Cost Estimating Validation Process, see:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/ProjectMgmt>

- Benefit/cost ratio. Benefit/cost and performance analyses are prepared for all highway projects so they can be compared and prioritized in Project Programming, and environmental considerations are a factor in the benefit/cost analyses for certain types of projects (e.g., projects that retrofit fish passage barrier culverts). For more information, see the *WSDOT Programming and Operations Manual* at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Publications/Manuals/M12-51.htm>

- A summary of the Environmental Review Summary, Design Decisions Summary, public input, project commitments, potential utility impacts, work zone traffic control strategy, potential railroad impacts, specialized workforce expertise required, and other issues (emergency services, school transit, etc.).

(2) **Design Decisions Summary**

The Design Decisions Summary is prepared with the guidance of the Design Matrix (see WSDOT's *Design Manual* (M 22-01)). Design matrices are used to identify the design level(s) for a project and the associated processes and approval authority for allowing design variances. The matrices address the majority of preservation and improvement project types and focus on those design elements that are of greatest concern for project development.

The Design Decisions Summary includes:

- Geometrics and traffic
- Access control designation
- Roadway geometric data (existing and proposed) compared to standard
- Pavement requirements
- Roadway preservation
- Roadside restoration
- Improvements (safety and hydraulics)
- Deviations from the design matrix
- Design variance inventory

(3) **Environmental Review Summary**

The Environmental Review Summary allows the regional environmental staff to consider, at this early stage, any potential impacts and mitigation, required permits and approvals, and what form the environmental review documentation for the project will take. If the project scope is revised before the project is included in a biennial budget request, the design office consults with the regional environmental staff to verify that the environmental classification and other information is still correct.

310.05 Preparing the Environmental Review Summary

The Environmental Review Summary (ERS) form is found in the Project Summary database. It is generally completed by the region environmental staff at the request of region design staff during project scoping to identify any environmental requirements that apply to the project. In addition to identifying any necessary environmental permits and approvals, it also identifies the type of environmental document that will be required for the project to comply with NEPA and/or SEPA (as explained in **Section 310.07**), and it identifies any other studies that will be required to comply with the ESA, Section 106, Section 4(f), Section 6(f), and any other applicable environmental laws.

If the ERS indicates that the project will require a NEPA EIS or EA, then the ERS is converted to an Environmental Classification Summary (ECS), which gets signed and retained by the region, and the EIS or EA process begins.

If the ERS indicates that the project qualifies for a NEPA Categorical Exclusion (CE) in either of the following cases, then the ERS is converted to an ECS, which gets signed and retained by the region:

- The project qualifies for a NEPA CE under 23 CFR 771.117(c); or
- The project qualifies for a NEPA CE per the Categorical Exclusion Memorandum of Understanding between FHWA and WSDOT (May 25, 1999).

If the ERS indicates that the project requires a NEPA Documented CE under 23 CFR 771.117(d), then (after all of the necessary environmental studies are completed) the ERS is converted to an ECS, which gets signed by FHWA, and the signed ECS is retained by FHWA and the region to document compliance with NEPA.

In completing Part 4 of the ERS, Environmental Considerations, it is advisable to attach a memo to explain any determination that the project should be classified as a Categorical Exclusion or Documented Categorical Exclusion. For guidance on the level of environmental documentation needed for a particular element of the environment, see **Chapter 420** through **Chapter 470**, in the Technical Guidance section under Discipline Reports.

The WSDOT GIS Workbench, which provides data needed for the “Environmental Considerations” section of the form, is described below in **Section 310.06**. Guidance on project classification for NEPA/ SEPA purposes is found in **Section 310.07**.

For details on required environmental review procedures, see **Chapter 410** through **Chapter 490**. For details on permits and approvals, see **Chapter 510** through **Chapter 550**.

310.06 Environmental Database Resources

(1) WSDOT’s GIS Workbench

WSDOT’s GIS Workbench is an internal data system developed for use by WSDOT staff in preparing the Project Summary, particularly the “Environmental Considerations” portion of the ERS. The workbench is a user-friendly interface covering a wide range of environmental resources gathered from a variety of public agency and WSDOT sources.

The database has over 500 layers of environmental and natural resource management data, in the following major data categories:

- **General Reference** – Transportation routes, political and administrative boundaries, major public lands, geographic reference.
- **Environmental Data** – Air quality, fish and wildlife, priority species and habitats, geology and soils, groundwater and wells, hazardous materials, hydrography, plants, and water quality.

WSDOT users can access these data sets through the GIS Workbench. For information on how to access the Workbench, see:

☞ <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Environment/GIS/workbench.htm>

For a list of current data sets, see the WSDOT Web site at:

☞ <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/mapsdata/geodatacatalog/default.htm>

A six-hour training session has been developed to provide WSDOT staff with starter knowledge of ArcView, the GIS Workbench tool and the environmental data available through the tool.

The data provided to WSDOT staff through the GIS Workbench is sufficient for Project Summary purposes.

(a) **Accessing the GIS Workbench**

WSDOT staff wishing to access this GIS application should contact their Information Technology Manager (or equivalent), and ask for ArcView and the GIS Workbench Extension. Geographic Services provides WSDOT employees with basic training on ArcView, and the ESO provides technical support and information regarding the data available through this interface.

At this time, there are no plans to provide this interface to the general public or to WSDOT consultants.

(b) **Expansion of GIS Workbench**

GIS resources for environmental data are expanding rapidly. WSDOT staff works with federal, state, and local agencies to maintain a collection of the best available data for statewide environmental analysis. New data resources are being incorporated into the WSDOT GIS Workbench. To facilitate getting the best data into the system, please contact the ESO's Environmental Information Program with information about newly identified data resources.

(2) **What is a GIS Data Set?**

A Geographic Information System (GIS) data set is data that describes and locates geographic features and stores an Earth-based delineation of those features. GIS data sets are used to track information about things on the ground, typically organized by geographic features (e.g., stream, watershed, city, county). Using common tabular database technology, GIS links data tables and records with graphical representations (maps) of real-world features. These features are stored using coordinate values correlated with the Earth's surface. This allows tabular information to be stored as a characteristic of a place or geographic feature and then be cross-referenced to other information based on common geographic location.

(3) *Using Online GIS Databases*

The data needed for transportation project environmental impact analysis often can be retrieved from a GIS database. Many public agencies and non-governmental organizations now focus their mapping functions on building GIS databases rather than physically publishing maps or reports. For example, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetlands Inventory data are available through several Web sites and via the WSDOT GIS Workbench.

Generally, if the online data is sufficient for the purpose, there is no need to acquire paper versions from the same agency. However, agencies often still produce and distribute standardized paper maps and reports produced using their GIS systems. They also often provide copies of the GIS data as a product.

When required data is available through a GIS, it may be reviewed either online or on paper printouts. Direct use of the GIS database enables ad hoc inquiries that generate information not found in pre-designed, standard products.

The GIS may or may not be the best available source for some environmental data. Whether the environmental data is obtained from paper products or digital ones, the information has the same value and is equally appropriate for use in reviewing projects.

(4) *Citing a GIS Database*

The GIS data system itself should be cited as a reference whether the data is provided on paper or digitally. Proper form for citations referring to digital database is evolving, but typically includes the name of the data system, the name of the agency that maintains/updates the database, and date of the data retrieval. If the data comes from an Internet Web site, the title of the site should be included with the full Uniform Resource Locator (URL).

310.07 Project Classification

Based on the environmental considerations identified during preparation of the Environmental Review Summary, WSDOT projects are classified for NEPA/SEPA purposes to determine the type of environmental documentation that will be required. Projects with a federal nexus (see definition in **Section 300.06**) are subject to NEPA and SEPA. Projects that are state funded only, with no federal nexus, can just follow SEPA guidelines. Since many WSDOT projects are prepared with intent to obtain federal funding, NEPA guidelines are usually followed. The sections below define the three classes of projects and list types of work typically found in each class, FHWA/federal agency concurrence required, and procedures for classifying and, if necessary, reclassifying projects.

(1) Classification System

(a) NEPA Classifications

All projects subject to NEPA are classified as either Class I, II, or III. Class I projects require preparation of an EIS because the action is likely to have significant adverse environmental impacts. Class II projects are categorical exclusions (CE) or Documented Categorical Exclusions (DCE) that meet the definitions contained in 40 CFR 1508.4. These are actions that are not likely to cause significant adverse environmental impacts. FHWA and WSDOT have agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding to a programmatic approach, classify as categorical exclusions any actions identified in 23 CFR 771.117, as long as criteria in the regulations and conditions listed in the MOU are met. Determinations made by WSDOT under this blanket classification do not require further approvals by FHWA, and will be documented in the Project Summary. Environmental classification of all projects will be identified on project authorization submitted to FHWA but documentation for projects identified as CEs under this MOU does not need to be submitted. On DCE projects where the use of federal funds is proposed or other federal nexus is present, FHWA must review and concur with the NEPA classification as part of design approval. For guidance on these procedures see the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between WSDOT and FHWA on Programmatic Categorical Exclusion Approvals ([August 2009](#)).

The MOU is online via the Environmental Services Office Web site:

 <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/environment/compliance/agreements.htm>

Class III projects require an Environmental Assessment (EA) because the significance of the impact on the environment is not clearly established.

(b) SEPA Classifications

Under SEPA, Class I projects require an EIS; Class II projects are Categorically Exempt or require a SEPA Checklist and Threshold Determination leading to Determination of Nonsignificance; and Class III projects require a SEPA checklist and Threshold Determination. The Threshold Determination will be one of the following: a Determination of Significance (DS), a Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS), or a Mitigated DNS. If the Threshold Determination declares a DS, then an EIS is required. See WAC 197-11 Part 3 for SEPA threshold determination criteria.

Projects classified as NEPA Categorical Exclusions (Class II) are not always categorically exempt under SEPA (WAC 197-11-305). If the project is not exempt under SEPA, WSDOT must prepare a SEPA checklist and make a threshold determination (DS, DNS, or mitigated DNS).

For NEPA Class III projects, when a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) is issued by FHWA, WSDOT may adopt the NEPA EA (WAC 197-11-610) to satisfy the SEPA requirement for a SEPA checklist. However, WSDOT is still required to issue the DNS. For a state-funded project, if a SEPA checklist supports a DNS, no EIS is required.

(2) Class I Projects (EIS)

Class I projects are actions that are likely to have significant impact on the environment because of their effects on land use, planned growth, development patterns, traffic volumes, travel patterns, transportation services, natural resources, or because they are apt to create substantial public controversy. An EIS may follow an EA if significant impacts are discovered during preparation of an EA, or may be prepared without an EA if it is evident that the project will have significant impacts. See **Section 411.08** for details on EIS documents and procedures and general guidance on preparing an EIS.

Examples of projects that usually require an EIS, as defined in 23 CFR 771.115, are:

- New controlled-access freeway.
- Highway project of four or more lanes in a new location.
- New construction or extension of fixed rail transit facilities (e.g., rapid rail, light rail, commuter rail, automated guideway transit).
- New construction or extension of a separate roadway for buses or high-occupancy vehicles not located within an existing highway facility.
- Although examples are given, it is important to remember that the size and significance of the potential impacts determine the need for an EIS, not the size of the project.

(3) Class II Projects – Categorical Exclusions (CE and DCE)

Categorical Exclusions are actions that meet the definition contained in NEPA rules (40 CFR 1508.4) and, based on past experience with similar actions, do not involve significant environmental impacts. Unless specifically requested by other agencies or the public, these actions do not require an EIS or an EA.

Categorical Exclusions are actions which do not induce significant impacts to planned growth or land use for the area; do not require the relocation of significant numbers of people; do not have a significant impact on any natural, cultural, recreational, historic, or other resource; do not involve significant air, noise, or water quality impacts; do not have significant impacts on travel patterns; or do not otherwise, either individually or cumulatively, have any significant environmental impacts.

Class II projects are defined further by two fixed subcategories as described below. The subcategory determines the documentation and approval required.

(a) **Class II Projects Not Requiring Documentation for FHWA Concurrence (CE)**

Projects in this subcategory, Categorical Exclusions (CE), meet the requirements of the MOU between WSDOT and FHWA on Programmatic Categorical Exclusion Approvals. A copy of this MOU is available online at:

☞ <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/environment/compliance/agreements.htm>

The only NEPA documentation required is a signed Environmental Review Summary that is included in the Project Summary package sent to Headquarters. No other NEPA documentation or approval by FHWA is required. However, some CE projects may require a Biological Assessment (BA), which may result in a “Letter of No Effect” on endangered species or habitat (see **Section 436.05**). If “No effect” is documented, the projects may qualify for inclusion under the MOU on Programmatic Categorical Exclusion Approvals.

Examples of CE projects are found in 23 CFR 771.117(c) available on the FHWA Web site at:

☞ <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/docuce.asp>

(b) **Class II Projects Requiring Documentation and FHWA Concurrence (DCE)**

For projects in this subcategory, Documented Categorical Exclusions (DCE), additional environmental documentation is required and FHWA approval must be obtained before the design file can be approved. All environmental documentation must be completed before finalizing the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) package and going to ad. If indicated by the Environmental Review Summary (ERS), preliminary environmental studies are completed. The ERS is then renamed the Environmental Classification Summary (ECS), signed by the WSDOT Regional Environmental Manager, and sent with federal permits and/or documentation to FHWA for approval.

After obligation of project design (PE) funds, detailed environmental studies for CE documentation may be required for DCE projects to determine the environmental, economic, and social impacts. WSDOT then finalizes the ECS and submits it to FHWA for final approval. Examples of DCE projects are found in 23 CFR 771.117(d) available on the FHWA Web site at:

☞ <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/docuce.asp>

Any action that would normally be classified as a CE but could involve unusual circumstances will require the applicant, in cooperation with the FHWA, to conduct appropriate environmental studies to determine if the CE classification is proper. Such unusual circumstances include:

- Significant environmental impacts;
- Substantial controversy on environmental grounds;
- Significant impact on properties protected by Section 4(f) of the DOT Act or Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (see **Chapter 456** and **Chapter 457**); or
- Inconsistencies with any federal, state, or local law or administrative determination relating to the environmental aspects of the action.

(4) Class III Projects – Environmental Assessment (EA)

When the significance of the impact of a proposed project on the environment is not clearly established, an EA is prepared to determine the extent of environmental impact and to determine whether an EIS is needed. WSDOT may adopt the EA to satisfy requirements for a SEPA DNS, but the EA will not satisfy the SEPA EIS requirement. Under RCW 43.21C.150, compliance with SEPA is not required where there has been a “detailed statement” prepared under NEPA, but an EA is generally not a detailed document. Refer to the definitions of each 40 CFR 1508.9 and 40 CFR 1508.11. No EIS is required when the EA supports a NEPA Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). See **Section 411.07** for details on EA documentation and procedure.

(5) Classification Procedure

(a) NEPA Classification Procedure

The NEPA documentation procedure occurs in several stages during project development. Generally, the path is as follows: Scoping/ERS documents, evolving to Design/ECS documents, evolving to PS&E/Permit documents, evolving to Construction.

The procedure for NEPA classification is as follows:

- Once the project has been sufficiently developed to assess any environmental impacts, the Region completes the ERS based on the best information available at the project scoping stage.
- The Regional Environmental Manager then concurs with the classification by signing the ERS and the completed form is returned to the design office for inclusion in the Project Summary package.
- If a project is determined to be a Categorical Exclusion (NEPA-CE), the NEPA environmental review process is considered complete. If it is determined that a Documented CE, EA, or EIS is required, the Region evaluates the project schedule and arranges for preparation of the appropriate document.

(b) SEPA Classification Procedure

SEPA requires no documentation with regard to categorical exemptions; therefore, the region is responsible for verifying and monitoring these projects to assure that all necessary environmental documentation is completed. The procedure for SEPA projects is as follows:

- Once the project has been sufficiently developed to assess any environmental impacts, the region completes the ERS based on the best information available.
- The Regional Environmental Manager then concurs with the classification by signing the ERS and the completed form is returned to the design office for inclusion in the Project Summary package.
- On projects funded entirely with state funds, this ends the environmental classification process. On projects that are categorized as exempt from SEPA, the environmental process is complete, unless the project requires biological evaluation to comply with the Endangered Species Act (see **Section 436.05**). On projects categorized as needing a SEPA checklist or EIS, those documents are prepared prior to design approval.

(6) Revision of Project Scope and Classification

See **Section 411.12** for details on project re-evaluation and preparation of supplementary environmental documentation if warranted by the re-evaluation.

(a) NEPA Reclassification

Since FHWA must concur with the NEPA classification, any major change in a project classification for a project involving federal funds requires the processing of a revised ECS form. Minor changes may be handled informally, if FHWA concurs.

(b) SEPA Reclassification

When the scope of a project changes, a revised ERS is usually required. As part of that revision, the environmental classification needs to be reassessed. The decision on whether or not to revise the ERS is made by the regional environmental office in coordination with the region program management office. For many minor scope changes, a new ERS is not required. However, note to the file or a follow-up memo should then be prepared to document the revision.

In some cases, new circumstances may cause a change in the environmental classification but not a change in scope. Any changes in classification are documented by a note to the file or a follow-up memo.

310.08 Project Scoping Meetings

When appropriate for budget development, each region may hold a project scoping meeting where draft project summaries are discussed with federal and state resource agencies, tribes, and local municipalities. Based on their feedback, a final Project Summary is prepared so the Commission and Legislature will understand the level of analysis and development required for each project, including the recommended level of environmental analysis (i.e., categorical exemption/exclusion, environmental assessment, or environmental impact statement).

310.09 Exhibits

None.

- 320.01 Introduction
- 320.02 Ten-Year Implementation Plan
- 320.03 Biennial Budget
- 320.04 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
- 320.05 Exhibits

Key to Icon

 Web site.*

320.01 Introduction

Programming of WSDOT projects is required by law, and it is limited to solving state highway deficiencies (RCW 47.05.010).

As described in **Section 300.02**, the outcomes of the WSDOT project programming process are:

- Approval of a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), by the FHWA and FTA. As required by federal law, the STIP includes any project that is eligible for federal funds or may need federal approval.
- Approval by the Legislature of WSDOT six- to ten-year Capital Improvement and Preservation Program (CIPP) and two-year budget, including legislative modifications.

RCW 47.05 requires that WSDOT's priority programming system for evaluating multi-modal solutions to state highway system deficiencies include a needs analysis to identify preservation and improvement problems and deficiencies; and an evaluation of alternative solutions and project tradeoffs or comparisons. The alternatives analysis must include an estimate of the costs and benefits of proposed projects and services. Evaluating the impacts of each project on the program objectives and performance measures is an essential part of the investment comparison. Each project in the investment comparison must satisfy needs identified in the Highway System Plan.

RCW 47.05 requires that WSDOT consider a broad range of multimodal solutions as appropriate to address identified state highway deficiencies, including but not limited to:

- Highway expansion projects
- Measures to improve highway efficiency

*Web sites and navigation referenced in this chapter are subject to change. For the most current links, please refer to the online version of the EPM, available through the WSDOT Environmental Services Office (ESO) home page: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/environment/>

- Transportation facilities serving non-motorized modes
- High occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities
- Transit facilities and services
- Rail facilities
- Transportation demand management (TDM) programs

320.02 Ten-Year Implementation Plan

Ten-Year Implementation Plan projects are identified through a funding and fiscal analysis that updates revenue projections for the 20 year system plan and develops a preliminary allocation of anticipated resources (see **Section 300.02**).

RCW 47.05 requires that investments to implement the Highway System Plan include the kinds of improvements listed in the following two WSDOT Programs: Preservation and Improvement.

The Preservation Program includes:

- P1 Roadway** – Embodies preservation work on roadway surfaces and shoulder and restoration of existing safety features.
- P2 Structures** – Comprises preservation and prevention of catastrophic failure of bridges.
- P3 Other Facilities** – Includes preservation of rest areas, weigh stations, unstable slopes, and major drainage and electrical rehabilitation.

The Improvement Program includes:

- I-1 Mobility** – Includes projects to relieve congestion in rural and urban areas. Examples include additional general purpose lanes, truck climbing lanes, intersection improvements, route realignments, and surveillance control and driver information. Other objectives address bicycle connectivity, and the Puget Sound core HOV network.
- I-2 Safety** – Includes strategies to make highways safer by reducing collisions in accident corridors, and preventing collisions before they occur by bringing highways up to standards in selected high risk locations.
- I-3 Economic Initiatives** – Includes projects to upgrade roadway surfaces to withstand freeze-thaw effects; provide four lane limited access highways for all roads carrying 10 million tons or more of freight per year; provide new rest areas; replace or upgrade bridges that cannot currently carry legal overloads or have vertical clearance of 15 feet six inches or less; provide interpretive sites on scenic and recreational highways; and provide for rural bicycle touring loops.

I-4 Environmental Retrofit – Provides for stormwater runoff improvements; fish passage barrier removal; rehabilitation of WSDOT assets to correct chronic environmental deficiencies; noise abatement projects; and air quality improvement.

In addition to these ongoing WSDOT programs, there are two subprograms, which are funded for specific purposes:

I-6 Sound Transit – Sound Transit provides funding to improve transit access to state highways in the Puget Sound area.

I-7 Tacoma Narrows – The objective of this subprogram, added in the 1999-2001 biennium, is to improve mobility along the SR-16 Tacoma Narrows Bridge corridor by partnering with private firms to design and build improvements.

Two other WSDOT programs have their own project scoping and programming processes for capital improvements:

W – Washington State Ferries Construction

F – Aviation

Others are typically funded as a program, instead of project-by-project, although they do engage in on-the-ground project-type work. These programs are:

D – Highway Management and Facilities

K – Economic Partnerships

M – Highway Maintenance and Operations

Q – Traffic Operations

R – Sales and Services to Others

X – Washington State Ferries Operations and Maintenance

Y – Rail Programs

Z – Highways and Local Programs

320.03 Biennial Budget

All projects, including road and ferry projects in WSDOT's biennial budget, must be tied to the Washington Transportation Plan. They are also tied to medium range implementation plans like the 10-Year Implementation Plan for highway projects. Every two years, the budget and system plan are reviewed to consider the addition of new service objectives, action strategies, and programs to address highway deficiencies. Conversely, as service objectives are met or further refined, existing programs may be modified or eliminated in future Highway System Plan documents and biennial budgets.

320.04 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA LU) requires Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) to be prepared by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Transportation Management Agencies (TMAs), such as the Puget Sound Regional Council, and approved by the FHWA and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). (See **Chapter 230**.)

The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) includes:

- All TMA TIPs
- All MPO TIPs
- A TIP for the remainder of the state

Agencies involved in preparing the STIP include local governments, RTPOs, TMAs, MPOs, WSDOT, transit agencies, and the Governor's Office.

WSDOT's Highways and Local Programs Office has lead responsibility in developing guidelines and procedures for preparing the STIP and manages STIP amendments and financial feasibility throughout the year.

For details, see WSDOT's Web site at:

 <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/localprograms/ProgramMgmt/STIP.htm>

(1) **STIP Requirements**

TIPs prepared by transportation management agencies or MPOs include all federally funded projects in the region (including projects on native lands). Projects for TIPs are selected based on each agency's long-range plan, need, priority rating defined by a clear set of criteria, and the availability of funds. TIPs usually are prepared annually and provide a three year "window" for projects at both the regional and statewide levels. They must be prepared at least every two years.

In air quality nonattainment areas, projects funded with state or local funds must be included in the TIP as well. This is to ensure that Washington's TIPs reflect important changes to the transportation system with potential air quality impacts. (See **Chapter 425** for details.)

The current STIP contains federally funded projects plus state and local regionally significant projects programmed for calendar year 2005 through 2007. These projects have been identified through the planning process as the highest priority for the funding available to the state's transportation program.

The STIP also includes state and local roadway, bridge, bicycle, pedestrian, safety and public transportation (transit) projects. Eligible activities include project-related activities, such as preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition, and construction for roadways, and capital and operating expenses

for public transit. Projects are organized in alphabetical order by MPO, county and lead agency, and are shown in a standardized format, which includes similar information for each project.

In Washington, most of the TIPs and the STIP have been developed on a yearly basis. A two-year budget is developed in even years and approved in approximately May of odd years. A supplemental budget is developed on the off-year. Puget Sound Regional Council, the largest MPO in the state, develops its TIP on even years, and a major amendment on odd years. The timing of the STIP process results in its approval in advance of the two-year budget. Most projects in the two-year budget are also in the approved STIP, although some must be added by amendment. The development of the TIPs includes an extensive public involvement process.

(2) **STIP Contents**

Following are the basic required elements of the STIP:

- Identifies all proposed highway and transit projects in the state funded under title 23 USC and the Federal Transit Act, including Federal Lands projects.
- Incorporates the metropolitan transportation improvement programs approved by the TMAs and MPOs.
- In carbon monoxide, ozone, or PM10 nonattainment areas, includes projects that conform with the State Implementation Plan (SIP).
- Maintains consistency with expected available funding.
- Identifies selection priorities developed with appropriate consultation and/or coordination with local jurisdictions, metropolitan planning organizations, and Federal Lands agencies.
- Contains all regionally significant transportation projects requiring FHWA or FTA approval, regardless of funding.
- Meets the requirements of 23 USC 135(f), Statewide Planning, coordination with local jurisdictions, and review by FHWA.

320.05 Exhibits

None.

