

Considerations When Using NCHRP Report 456

Guidebook for Assessing the Social and Economic Effect of Transportation Projects

Consult with affected populations. In every case the distribution of benefits and costs among population groups should be assessed for disproportionately high and adverse effect to minority and low-income populations. Use your Public Involvement Plan to:

- Determine which effects are the most important to the affected communities.
- Give the highest priority (time and money) to analysis of effects that are of greatest local interest.
- Inform the public and decision-makers of results in a way that:
 - Allows them to understand the effects and their magnitude.
 - Enables them to participate in choosing among alternatives and mitigation approaches.
 - Helps them balance tradeoffs between benefits and costs for all population groups.
- Explain carefully and deliberately how the conclusions were reached
 - Document assumptions.
 - Document how public input affected decisions.

Methodology: Depending on the context, some effects will warrant more extensive examination than others. Focus your efforts on the issues of greatest local interest based on the public scoping meetings, feed-back from Public Involvement and interviews with local officials. Effects that are consequential, but not paramount can be examined with more basic methods. Some elements may not require analysis at all.

- Use the simplest method available to adequately describe the problem based on its complexity.
- Be consistent across all alternatives to provide fair comparison of alternatives.
- Chose a methodology consistent with the available data or easily collectable data to control project costs.
- Document the reason you chose the analysis tool.

The analysis for each element must be conducted separately and results combined to provide a qualitative measure. Individual items may be expressed in quantitative measures, but they cannot be added together because it is not possible to express them in the same units. The NCHRP guidebook suggests methods for communicating results. FHWA prefers graphic or tabular displays that allow easy comparison between the alternatives.

Avoid: excessive counting and double counting effects. One effect may have several consequences with overlapping impacts. Adding them together may overstate the cumulative effect. Example: a travel time saving may contribute to business growth, allowing the business to reduce prices. It would be a mistake to count both the original travel cost savings and the income gain by customers when assessing the effect of the travel time savings.