

NEPA Introductory Course – Aesthetic Effects

Welcome to the National Environmental Policy Act also known as NEPA introduction course on Aesthetic Effects provided by the Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT's) Office of Environmental Management.

The purpose of this course is to provide instruction on the Aesthetic Effects evaluation as described in Part 2, Chapter 5 of the PD&E Manual. The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws described in this training are carried out by FDOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. §327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated December 14, 2016, executed by FHWA and FDOT.

This course is broken into three lessons including a discussion on Background Information, Assessment Procedures and Special Aesthetic Effects Considerations.

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Lesson one covers the background of aesthetics, what are aesthetic effects and FDOT's aesthetic effects focus.

Aesthetic qualities of a community can include a number of resources including scenic vistas, landscape, architecture, structures, scenic roadways, sights and sounds. When present, these resources help define the character of a community.

While Aesthetics can be defined many ways, Aesthetic Effects are based on the context of the project area and can be positive or negative. Either way they can influence community cohesion and community values and can alter the travel experience.

Transportation actions can affect communities and influence aesthetic qualities. As a result, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) will consider aesthetic effects while producing affordable, constructible and maintainable transportation projects.

As a result, FDOT will seek to balance transportation needs with community values by selecting appropriate design approaches that balance engineering with community vision.

Next we will discuss FDOT's Aesthetic Effects evaluation procedures including coordination, analysis & documentation efforts to be used during each phase of project delivery.

A complete assessment of aesthetic effects will typically take into account the following considerations, Character, Compatibility, Community Values, Sensitive Areas, and Visual Features. The analysis of each will help the project manager better understand the resources unique to a community and its environment. All of these considerations are defined in greater detail in Part 2, Chapter 5, of the PD&E Manual.

Each aesthetic effects evaluation will include several steps: from first identifying the aesthetic resources in the study area, to assessing the value of each resource and ultimately considering potential solutions to address identified project impacts to these resources. While analyzing potential solutions the project manager should consider, in the following order; avoidance, minimization, mitigation and enhancement options that may be available.

Based on the project type and scope, the aesthetic effects evaluation process may begin during the Efficient Transportation Decision Making or ETDM phase. Although preliminary in its analysis, the project manager should begin to identify possible aesthetic issues along with possible controversies and impacts that could result from a planned project. Issues identified during the planning screen and the programming screen should be documented and carried forward into the next project phase.

The aesthetic effects evaluation process used during the PD&E phase builds upon previously identified analysis and findings. The evaluation used during this phase is a multi-step process that documents, evaluates and resolves project related aesthetic effects issues. It is important to note that less detailed evaluations may be considered for projects that do not qualify for ETDM screening.

This evaluation process first requires the establishment of a project study area. Once established, data collection using existing information and available databases followed by field review and confirmation can begin. Available resource databases may include Environmental Screening Tool, FDOT *Highway System Videolog*, FDOT *Roadway Characteristics Inventory* and others.

As a general rule of thumb, a more detailed aesthetic effects evaluation may be needed for projects that include acquiring large amounts of Right-of-Way, conflict with local government planning policy, impact community aesthetic qualities or disruption to established communities or neighborhoods. Special note should be taken of any potential outdoor advertising issues or specially designated highways, including Florida Scenic Highways located within the study area.

Once project conditions have been identified, the project manager will need to assess their significance to the community and begin to identify project related effects to these resources. Keep in mind that effects can be direct or indirect. Discussions with the community may help the project manager establish the significance of the resources identified. All findings are to be documented in the project's environmental document.

Based on analysis and identification, the project manager will need to address project related aesthetic effects. The project manager's aesthetic effects focus should be to make the project fit the community. This may be done by identifying solutions that address adverse effects. The project manager should always consider avoidance of impacts first.

Minimization, mitigation and enhancement may be alternatives requiring consideration. The FDOT offers several guidance tools including Context Sensitive Solutions and Complete Streets Policies to assist the project manager in developing aesthetic effects solutions. These policies can be found on the reference page of this training.

The project manager should always coordinate all project related aesthetic effects commitments with the pertinent FDOT *support* offices before finalization. Key partner offices commonly include Design, Landscape Design, Construction, Maintenance, Outdoor Advertising and Scenic Highways.

Community interaction is a key component of the aesthetics effects evaluation process. The project manager will typically work jointly with the community to identify and resolve aesthetic effects issues.

Community involvement does not end with completion of the PD&E phase. It carries forward into the design phase and in many cases into construction. More information can be found in Part 1, Chapter 11 of the *PD&E Manual*.

The aesthetics effects evaluation and findings will need to be documented in the project's environmental document. Commitments made will be recorded according the procedure in Part 2, Chapter 22 of the *PD&E Manual*, and transmitted to design. The link to this form can be found under the Resources Tab for this course.

Project reevaluations performed during the subsequent phases provide an opportunity for the project manager to reassess project design and its impact on study area aesthetics.

During design, the project manager is responsible for ensuring that all project commitments are addressed. To accomplish this it is first important to clearly understand commitments made during PD&E. Then as design proceeds it is the project manager's responsibility to monitor plans development for commitment compliance.

In many cases it is important to confirm compliance during plans development through field reviews and other coordination efforts. The project manager should track the resolution of each commitment and document any project changes that could have an impact on commitments made. Any changes should be documented in a reevaluation.

During the construction phase the project manager is responsible for ensuring commitments identified in the construction plans are incorporated into construction activities performed. Final confirmation on the completion of all commitments should be addressed as part of final acceptance during project closeout.

Lastly, in Lesson 3 we will discuss two programs requiring special consideration as a project proceeds through project delivery.

The first of these special considerations is Outdoor Advertising. The presence of outdoor advertising signs within the project study area should be noted and closely coordinated with the FDOT Outdoor Advertising Office or OAO.

During the ETDM phase the project manager will begin to identify current permitted signs and consider project related impacts. Remember to consider both direct and indirect impacts.

It will be important for the project manager to also begin the investigation on local community preferences for billboards including local codes, ordinances and existing policy.

Investigation and documentation started during the ETDM phase will carry forward into the PD&E phase. The project manager will need to coordinate closely with the OAO to confirm sign location and project related effects. Possible

mitigation measures and commitments should be coordinated closely with the OAO with final commitments transmitted to design.

During the Design and Construction phases the project manager will continue to monitor project commitments and closely coordinate design changes that impact approved commitments with OAO and the PD&E office. Final acceptance at the completion of the construction phase should confirm the status of all commitments made.

The Project Manager should also pay close attention to the presence of designated scenic highways within a project corridor. There are several types of specially designated highways that might be encountered during project delivery.

The focus of this presentation is highways designated as a Florida Scenic Highway. Questions associated with this program should be coordinated with the District Scenic Highways Coordinator. Questions associated with the other scenic highways programs should be coordinated with the District Environmental Administrator.

There are a number of tools available to the project manager to assist in locating designated Florida Scenic Highways including highway signage, websites and FDOT databases like the Roadway Characteristics Inventory.

The most valuable of these tools though is the District Scenic Highways Coordinator who should be able to identify designated byway limits, specific historical documentation and points of contact with a particular byway organization. More information can be found in Part 2, Chapter 5 of the PD&E Manual.

During ETDM screening the project manager will identify designated scenic highways and begin to consider project related impacts. It will be important for the project manager to initiate coordination with the District Scenic Highways Coordinator at this time if the presence of a designated scenic highway has been identified.

Investigation and documentation started during the ETDM phase will carry forward into the PD&E phase. The project manager will need to coordinate closely with the District Scenic Highways Coordinator to confirm the presence of designated scenic highways in the study area and assess project related effects. The District Scenic Highways Coordinator can facilitate discussions with the affected byway organization and assist with the development of scenic highway related project commitments as needed.

During the Design and Construction phases the project manager continues to monitor previous commitments and closely coordinate any changes that impact approved scenic highway commitments with the District Scenic Highways Coordinator and the Environmental Office. The District Scenic Highways Coordinator can facilitate discussions with the byway organization as needed.

This concludes the National Environmental Policy Act also known as NEPA Introduction Course on Aesthetic Effects. Please Select the Exam link to continue with the Exam.