

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

AESTHETIC EFFECTS

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PART 2, CHAPTER 5

AESTHETIC EFFECTS

5.1 OVERVIEW

5.1.1 Purpose

Pursuant to **23 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 327** and the implementing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) executed on December 14, 2016, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has assumed Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA's) responsibilities under the **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** for highway projects on the State Highway System (SHS) and Local Agency Program (LAP) projects off the SHS. In general, FDOT's assumption includes all highway projects in Florida whose source of federal funding comes from FHWA or which constitute a federal action through FHWA. This includes responsibilities for environmental review, interagency consultation and other activities pertaining to the review or approval of **NEPA** actions. Consistent with law and the MOU, FDOT will be the Lead Federal Agency for highway projects with approval authority resting in the Office of Environmental Management (OEM).

Transportation actions can affect communities and influence aesthetic qualities. FDOT considers of Aesthetic Effects (AE) in project development because it influences community cohesion, community values, and can affect the travel experience. As such, FDOT identifies practical and feasible opportunities to improve project aesthetics on each project proposed. Often these improvements can be included at minimal or no cost, and add little or no time to the project schedule.

This chapter contains FDOT's procedures for evaluating AE during project delivery include special considerations for scenic highways and outdoor advertising. AE can be either positive or negative and should be evaluated based on the existing and proposed context of the project area. The aesthetic qualities of a community or area are defined by a combination of visual resources and other qualities that define the character of that community. The evaluation of AE should address the community's aesthetic ideals while producing an affordable, biddable, constructible, and maintainable design.

The AE process assesses the existing aesthetic context of the project area, evaluates a proposed project's aesthetic effects, and determines the most appropriate opportunities for enhancement within the project area while remaining consistent with federal and state aesthetic requirements by:

1. Developing transportation facilities that are compatible with the surrounding natural and/or man-made environment;
2. Balancing transportation design concepts with community vision;

3. Selecting appropriate design approaches and materials, forms, styles, scale, color, pattern and texture; and
4. Preserving existing plants or landscape, when feasible, and considering opportunities for new landscaping.

5.2 PROCEDURE

The evaluation of AE begins in the Planning phase with necessary data collected as part of the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process. The evaluation continues through the Project Development & Environment (PD&E) process and into the Design and Construction phases ([Figure 5-1](#)). The completed AE evaluation delineates the magnitude of project related aesthetic effects.

An AE evaluation for a proposed transportation project should meet the following objectives:

1. Identify current aesthetic resources (e.g., Florida Scenic Highways, other special roadway designations, existing forested areas, wildflower areas, trees, landscape, community features, ponds and drainage features, bridge structures and other architectural features);
2. Analyze/categorize the aesthetic resources that could be affected;
3. Assess the value of each of these aesthetic resources to the community or study area;
4. Assess potential impacts; and
5. Identify potential avoidance, minimization, mitigation and/or enhancement measures.

The typical considerations that should be weighed as part of an AE evaluation are summarized in [Table 5-1](#).

TABLE 5-1 Typical Aesthetic Effects Considerations

CHARACTER	Used to understand the aesthetic resources unique to the studied community and its environment(s). Each of the following may be identified and described before any value and/or impact assessments begin: adjoining architectural styles; adjoining land uses; available transportation modes; corridor width and alignment; density (urban, rural); level of (historical) maintenance; lighting; common materials; visual rhythms, patterns, forms, lines, colors and textures; vegetation; and vehicle speed; sounds; odors; and vibrations.
COMPATIBILITY	These base considerations may be evaluated in the context of 'fit for the transportation component' proposed: access; community cohesiveness; existing design characteristics; planned growth and land use patterns; sense of ownership /public boundaries; traffic patterns/congestion; design compatibility with community setting; and color and materials coordination (with evident patterns).

COMMUNITY VALUES	To utilize in understanding how the transportation project can contribute to public perceptions, and will inform the 'measurement' of the intensity of potential AE. May include the following: community goals; cultural significance; gateways and focal points; local plan consistency; open space; quality of life; safety; and special community designations.
SENSITIVE AREAS	Many of these contribute subtly to a community's identity and may need to be considered in the broader Community Values context (level of sensitivity to each): areas of recognized beauty; bicycle routes; commercial centers; historic or other culturally-important resources; parks and recreation areas; pedestrian facilities; public facilities (hospitals, colleges, universities); public parking areas (and access to them); residential areas; specific historic or cultural features; transit facilities; and 'name-sake' water bodies.
VISUAL FEATURES	These are usually rated as very important and highly valuable by communities. They should be considered in the context of potential for both short- and long-term impacts of the project. They may include: scenic spaces (views and vistas); tree cover; natural shade/shadow patterns; vegetation and screening; water bodies; light features and evident lighting levels; other natural green spaces; recognized safety features; visual clutter (if present); and, simplicity and attractiveness of signage.

5.2.1 Efficient Transportation Decision Making Screening Evaluations

Projects qualifying for screening through the ETDM process receive early consideration of AE during the evaluation of sociocultural effects (SCE) ([Part 2, Chapter 4, Sociocultural Effects Evaluation](#)).

Generally, evaluating AE during ETDM includes the following:

1. Planning Screen Evaluation – Identification of existing visual resources and features that could be affected or improved by the proposed transportation project, including forested area, wildflower areas, trees, landscaping and other aesthetic features and the identification of issues related to aesthetics that could prevent the project from moving forward or require significant adjustments to the project concept.
2. Programming Screen Evaluation - provide commentary about effects, summarize scoping recommendations, and identify public concerns to further understand the magnitude of potential aesthetic impacts and to determine methods for resolving each.

5.2.2 Project Development & Environment

The AE evaluation during the PD&E phase builds upon previous planning and ETDM evaluations by filling information gaps, analyzing issues of concern identified in ETDM and completing the appropriate level of analysis.

5.2.2.1 Aesthetics Effects Evaluation

The AE evaluation should be tailored to the context and scope of the project. The typical AE considerations presented in [Table 5-1](#) should be considered during each step of the AE evaluation. If the Project Manager determines the evaluation completed during ETDM

screening efforts is sufficient to address aesthetic issues, then findings should be summarized in the Environmental Document.

PD&E projects that require AE evaluation should follow the steps below.

Step 1: Describe Existing Conditions - The study area is determined by the Project Manager and will vary depending on the project context, resources involved and project impacts. Once the study area has been defined, the Project Manager will describe the existing aesthetic characteristics, such as existing forested areas, wildflower areas, trees, special highway designations and landscape.

This step may include using AE information available on the Environmental Screening Tool (EST) Area of Interest (AOI) tool, the SHS Videolog, aerial photography, Roadway Characteristics Inventory (RCI), and other online tools. The analysis should include field reviews to verify data collected during the desktop review.

Step 2: Evaluate Effects - This evaluation should identify the effects a project may have on the visual resources & qualitative physical characteristics of a study area. Using the Typical Aesthetic Effects Considerations in [Table 5-1](#), assess the positive and negative effects of the project on the study area's aesthetic resources. The interrelationship of effects varies with the type of transportation action and the affected community. The analyst should coordinate with appropriate program specialists (e.g., cultural resources, landscape architecture, scenic highways, water quality, noise, air quality) to determine how the project affects these areas from an aesthetic perspective. The Project Manager should describe the intensity of the effects providing sufficient information to determine their magnitude. If there are multiple alternatives, provide sufficient information to differentiate between them (including the no-build alternative).

Based on knowledge of the affected area and the impact analysis, the Project Manager must determine if the perceived AE is significant. Significance is a function of both context and intensity. Significance of the impact will vary with the setting of the proposed action and the surrounding area. To determine significance, the severity of the aesthetic impact must be examined in terms of the type, quality and sensitivity of the aesthetic resource involved; the location of the proposed project; the duration of the impact (short or long term); and the community's value of the aesthetic resource. The determination of each impact must be documented in the Environmental Document.

Step 3: Recommend Ways to Resolve Issues - As a project moves through the PD&E process and AE are identified, the Project Manager considers potential solutions to address adverse effects or enhance the aesthetic experience. In keeping with FDOT's [Context Sensitive Solutions, Policy No. 000-650-002](#) and [Complete Streets, Policy No. 000-625-017](#); consideration of solutions that would make the project "fit" the needs of the community may be warranted. The Project Manager should consider both standard and unique aesthetic enhancements for a specific project where deviations are possible in response to the community's input. The public can provide input as to identify ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse AE or identify aesthetic enhancements through the public involvement process ([Part 1, Chapter 11, Public Involvement](#)).

Methods for resolving adverse AE associated with a transportation project can include: **avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement**, for example, the preservation of existing forested areas, wildflower areas, or relocation or preservation of trees, landscape and other aesthetic features. Solutions should consider short-term effects (during construction), and long-term effects as appropriate. The Project Manager considers the effects of these measures on the affected community and confirms that the approach supports the project's purpose and need.

5.2.2.2 Commitments

Prior to finalizing any aesthetic commitments, the Project Manager must coordinate with the District Design Office, and other FDOT offices as appropriate, to ensure that FDOT standards are considered and that proposed commitments are feasible. Some aesthetic enhancements may require a local agreement before such commitments can be made. AE commitments are documented on the **Project Commitment Record (PCR), Form No. 700-011-035** according to [Part 2, Chapter 22, Commitments](#).

5.2.2.3 Re-evaluation

For projects developed through a PD&E Study the Project Manager must, as part of the Design phase, ensure commitment compliance, identify any changes that have occurred since the approval of the Environmental Document, and document findings in the reevaluation per [Part 1, Chapter 13, Re-evaluations](#). If significant design changes have taken place since approval of the Environmental Document, the Project Manager will need to assess whether AE will change. Changed impacts to AE will need to be documented and may need to be coordinated with other internal offices and the community.

5.2.2.4 Documentation

The AE evaluation findings are documented in the appropriate Environmental Document as described below:

1. **Categorical Exclusions (CE)** - Documentation of the AE evaluation must demonstrate the proposed project has no significant AE. For Type 2 CEs, AE evaluation material should be briefly summarized and included in the Type 2 CE documentation. This documentation should include a summary of pertinent AE information on the selected alternative.
2. **Environmental Assessments (EA) and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)** - The findings of the AE evaluation are summarized for direct inclusion in the Environmental Document. AE information and documentation is provided in the AE section of the EIS or EA, as well as the Comments and Coordination, and Commitments sections of the EA, EA with Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), and Final Environmental Impact Statement /Record of Decision (FEIS/ROD) document. In the AE section

the AE summary should present the impact analysis findings and recommend avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement measures.

3. **State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR)** - The results of the AE evaluation are included in the Environmental Analysis section of the SEIR.

5.2.3 Design

Aesthetic commitments established as a result of the a PD&E Study must be transmitted to the Design Office. Transfer commitments to Design using the **Project Commitment Record (PCR), Form No. 700-011-035** according to [Part 2, Chapter 22, Commitments](#). The Project Manager will monitor plans development and document the final disposition of each commitment made. Changed impacts to project aesthetics and commitments made will need to be documented in a re-evaluation.

5.3 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

When assessing AE there are several unique programs that require special attention from the Project Manager. Supplemental guidance to the AE procedures discussed above, is provided in [Section 5.3.1](#) and [Section 5.3.2](#).

5.3.1 Outdoor Advertising

When there are existing permitted outdoor advertising signs, on the project the PM must review their permit status, and their view zones, as early as possible during project delivery. Outdoor advertising regulations are found in **Chapter 479, Florida Statutes (F.S.)**, and in **Rule Chapter 14-10, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.)**. Coordinate with FDOT's Outdoor Advertising Office (OAO), as appropriate, as issues with the anticipated blocking of the view of or impacts to outdoor advertising signs are identified. Consideration of the view of or impacts to outdoor advertising signs being affected by the proposed project should be carried throughout project delivery as summarized below:

1. **ETDM Screenings** – During the screening process, current permitted sign locations can be identified utilizing the EST or the OAO website and confirmed by contacting the OAO as needed. The Project Manager should begin to consider how the view or disposition of the permitted sign could be affected by the proposed project. Consider for example, whether a sign is conforming or non-conforming (coordinate with OAO). Also note if any community preferences have been identified regarding the role of outdoor advertising in the proposed project.
2. **PD&E** – Identify or confirm the presence of existing signs and their permit status. Determine how each sign and/or its view zone is affected by the proposed project. Guidance on outdoor advertising sign impacts based on view zone is provided in [Part 2, Chapter 18, Highway Traffic Noise](#). Continue coordination with OAO, and the District Right of Way (ROW) Office as appropriate.

3. **Design** – The Project Manager should initiate or continue coordination with OAO to identify or confirm existing signs and their permit status along with the status of any plans for proposed signs. The Project Manager should also update any pertinent signage related commitments as appropriate and advise the PD&E staff of any changes. Review design plans and consider view zones (see [Volume 1, Chapter 9 of the Plans Preparation Manual \(PPM\), Topic No. 625-000-005](#)).
4. **Construction** – Ensure commitment compliance as appropriate, see [Section 5.2.3](#) of this chapter.

5.3.2 Florida Scenic Highways and Other Specially Designated Highways

There are four types of specially designated highways: local, state, national and legislative. Each designation may have different levels of protection, preservation, and public involvement.

The intent of the Florida Scenic Highways Program (FSHP), as administered by FDOT is to protect and to promote awareness of community resources that are valued by Florida's residents and tourists. These can include scenic, natural, historic, cultural, recreational and archaeological (*Florida Scenic Highways Program Manual; July 2016*).

The AE evaluation of potential project impacts to Florida Scenic Highways includes identification of intrinsic qualities or resources that are present on the project corridor and a determination of how a proposed project will potentially affect these resources. This evaluation also considers community preferred opportunities to conserve or enhance scenic highway qualities.

The Project Manager should, when practical and feasible, identify opportunities to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to the documented resources on scenic highways. Accommodation of scenic resources on a designated highway within the limits of a project may require the application of flexibility in highway design through use of appropriate Design Exceptions and Design Variations. Each Florida Scenic Highway is associated with a Byway Organization and a Byway Management Plan (BMP). The concept of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) allows for collaboration with the Byway Organization and other corridor stakeholders to consider competing project goals.

Consideration of designated scenic highways affected by the proposed project should be carried throughout project delivery as summarized below:

1. **ETDM Screenings** – Contact the District Scenic Highways Coordinator (DSHC) for identification of designated Florida Scenic Highways. The Project Manager should also review the [FDOT Legislatively Designated Scenic & Historic Highways Report](#) (available from the District Environmental Manager) which identifies scenic and historic corridors designated in the State of Florida by special legislation. Use guidance in [Part 2, Chapter 8, Archaeological and Historical Resources](#) to evaluate historic corridors designated by special legislation. The

presence of locally designated scenic highways should be coordinated with the local authorities.

2. **PD&E Evaluation** – The Project Manager should confirm findings from the ETDM screenings to ensure no changes have taken place. Additionally, the Project Manager, in coordination with the DSHC should become familiar with the priorities and plans for a designated scenic highway. Based on a review of scenic highway documentation, the Project Manager will be able to coordinate with the District Environmental Manager to evaluate the impact of the project on the designated corridor.

Review the project setting to determine which scenic highway intrinsic qualities exist and analyze field data to determine potential impacts. The scenic highway evaluation should include an assessment of potential opportunities for FDOT to help fulfill goals identified in the BMP or partner on resource related issues. The evaluation should also recognize the relationship between existing intrinsic qualities on the scenic highway and community goals and objectives for the corridor as expressed in the BMP. The AE section of the Environmental Document should discuss whether the project has the potential to affect the scenic highway.

If the project impacts the resources of a scenic highway, the public can provide additional input to identify ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse impacts or identify aesthetic enhancements through the public involvement process ([Part 1, Chapter 11, Public Involvement](#)). If impact(s) to a scenic highway is unavoidable, the Project Manager will identify mitigation strategies consistent with FDOT's [Policy No. 000-650-002, Context Sensitive Solutions](#). The Byway Organization's vision, goals and objectives as outlined in the BMP may be considered to collaboratively identify, preserve, maintain, or enhance the intrinsic qualities or resources while maintaining safety and mobility. Transfer commitments to Design using the **Project Commitment Record (PCR), Form No. 700-011-035** according to [Part 2, Chapter 22, Commitments](#).

3. **Design** – The Project Manager should work with the DSHC or District Environmental Manager to reconfirm/identify the presence of designated Florida Scenic Highways or other specially designated highways within the project boundaries. For Florida Scenic Highways, continue coordination with the Byway Organization through the DSHC providing updates on project status and AE commitments.
4. **Construction** – Ensure commitment compliance as appropriate, see [Section 5.2.3](#).

5.4 REFERENCES

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Highway Subcommittee on Design Task Force for Environmental Design. June 1991. A Guide for Transportation Landscape and Environmental Design

FDOT. April 1995. Florida Highway Landscape Guide

FDOT. Plans Preparation Manual, Volume 1, Topic No. 625-000-005

FDOT. Construction Project Administration Manual, Topic No. 700-000-000

FDOT. Project Commitment Tracking, Topic No. 700-011-035

FDOT. Complete Streets, Topic No. 000-625-017

Memorandum of Agreement Between FHWA and FDOT Concerning the State of Florida's Participation in the Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327, December 14, 2016.

<http://www.fdot.gov/environment/pubs/Executed-FDOT-NEPA-Assignment-MOU-2016-1214.pdf>

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FHWA. October 30, 1987. Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents, FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A

FHWA. 1988. Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects, Washington D.C., Publication No. FHWA-HI-88-054

FHWA. June 1997. Flexibility in Highway Design, Publication No. FHWA-PD-97-062; HEP-30/7-97(10M)E

FHWA. May, 1999. Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts, Order 5610.4, Docket No. EP-1, Notice 5

USDOT. November 1980. Aesthetics in Transportation, Contract No. DOT-OS-90040; Report No. DOT.OST.P-20.30, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C.

5.5 FORMS

[Project Commitment Record \(PCR\), Form No. 700-011-035](#)

Note: Hyperlinks are only for those with FDOT Intranet access only. Those without Intranet access may view or download forms at: <http://www.fdot.gov/procedures/>. Sign in is required.

5.6 HISTORY

2/15/1999, 11/14/2012, 9/30/2014, 8/7/2015

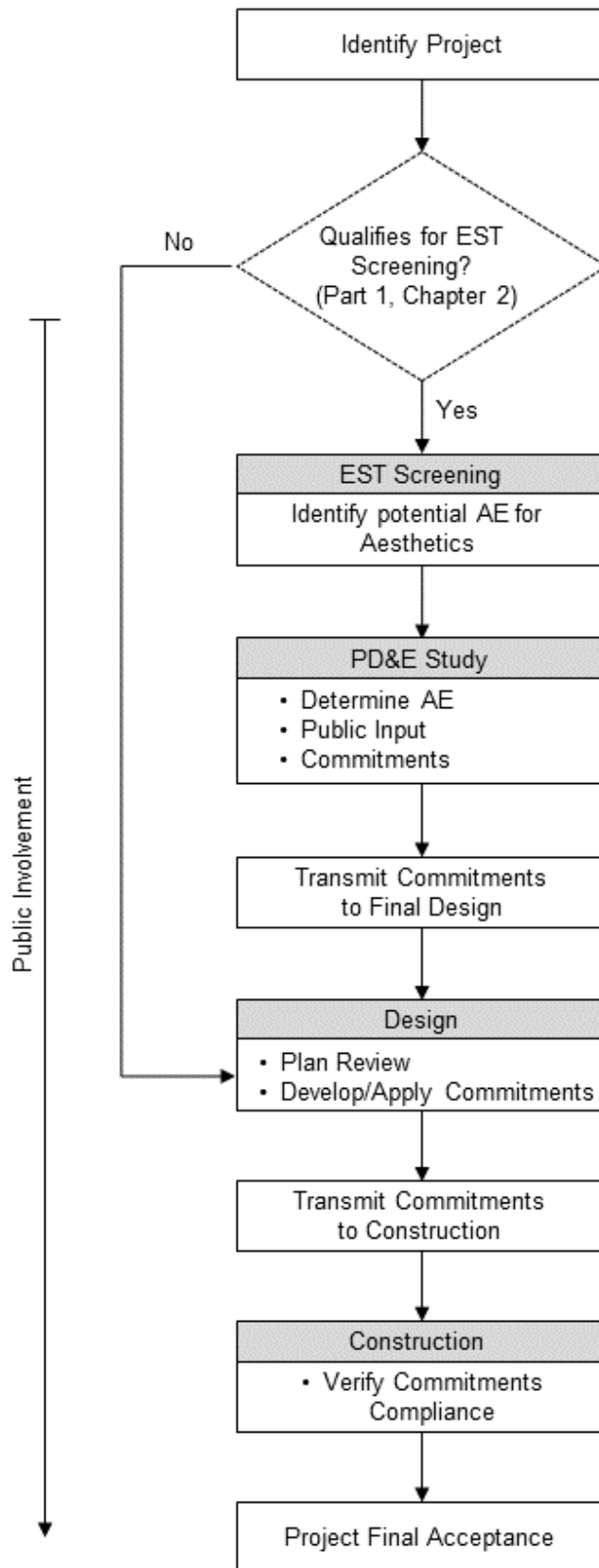


Figure 5-1 Aesthetic Effects Process Flow Chart