

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PLANNING SCREEN**

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## CHAPTER 3

# PLANNING SCREEN

### 3.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter details the process for completing the Planning Screen of the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process and provides instructions for conducting the Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) process during the Planning Screen, when applicable. The chapter also describes the process for identifying environmental considerations to assist in the development of transportation plans such as the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Cost Feasible Plan, the Metropolitan Planning Organization/Transportation Planning Organization (MPO/TPO) Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs), and further into the MPO/TPO LRTP Cost Feasible Plans. It also describes tools and techniques for interacting with the Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT) and members of the public during the Planning Screen review. The ETAT is comprised of representatives from MPOs/TPOs, federal and state agencies, and participating Native American Tribes (Tribes).

The Planning Screen incorporates federal guidance on environmental streamlining and links the transportation Planning phase to the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) phase by giving early consideration to natural, physical, social, and cultural resources. Accomplishing this involves frequent communication and coordination among ETAT members. The Planning Screen reviews help to:

- Consider the feasibility of proposed projects.
- Focus topics to be addressed during the Programming Screen.
- Allow for early identification of potential avoidance, minimization, and mitigation opportunities.
- Identify potential direct and indirect effects on communities through information gathering, analysis, and consideration of sociocultural effects.
- Generate documentation and support information which may be carried forward into subsequent project phases.

For federal projects, the Planning Screen provides the project sponsor [i.e., FDOT District, Florida's Turnpike Enterprise (Turnpike), or MPO/TPO] with the opportunity to begin addressing consistency with local plans pursuant to **23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450**. FDOT and the MPOs/TPOs can begin identifying modifications to the project concept or amendments to the plans that may be needed in future phases to ensure

consistency. For more information about consistency requirements, refer to FDOT's [MPO Planning Support Website](#).

The Planning Screening applies only to qualifying projects (refer to **Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1** and **Table 2.2** of this *Manual* for a complete list of qualifying project types). Projects selected for the Planning Screen originate from FDOT, MPOs/TPOs, or local government planning efforts intended to guide future transportation improvements. These efforts reflect community goals and visions, addressing subjects like transportation, conservation, and development. Transportation plans are prepared based on these goals and objectives and supported by detailed transportation analyses, public outreach, and other planning considerations, and then carried out by FDOT, MPOs/TPOs, and local governments. Planning Screen projects may also originate from transit project applications.

The FDOT Districts, Turnpike, and MPO/TPOs each have an ETDM Coordinator who sponsors Planning Screens for their projects. Usually, the sponsoring ETDM Coordinator leads the Planning Screen tasks for their organization's projects. However, based on coordination between FDOT and the MPO/TPO, the Planning Screen tasks for MPO/TPO projects may also be led or supported by the FDOT District ETDM Coordinator. This *Manual* allows for this flexibility by simply referring to the "ETDM Coordinator," meaning the applicable ETDM Coordinator. At the end of the Planning Screen, the FDOT ETDM Coordinator leads the transition to the Programming Screen.

ETAT members use the Environmental Screening Tool (EST) to review project information, identify potential project effects, provide recommended avoidance and minimization measures, and submit comments to the project sponsor during the transportation planning process. This web-based Geographic Information System (GIS) database and mapping tool provides access to project information and data about natural, physical, social, and cultural resources in the project area. The ETAT members provide input about potential project effects on the natural, physical, social, and cultural resources specific to their area of expertise. They may also provide cumulative effect considerations during the screening. Early identification of potential issues may influence project priority and the feasibility of an alternative alignment and design. Input received during the Planning Screen helps transportation planners prioritize transportation investment strategies and improve project cost estimates, in support of the development of a Cost Feasible Plan. Planning Screen information may also be used to inform subsequent steps in consideration and analysis of the proposed transportation project. The results of the Planning Screen are documented in a **Planning Screen Summary Report**, which is accessible to ETAT members through the EST (<https://www.fl-etat.org/est/secure/>) and the public through the ETDM Public Access Site (<https://etdmpub.fl-etat.org>).

## 3.2 PLANNING SCREEN PROCESS

The Planning Screen occurs when an MPO/TPO or FDOT considers projects for inclusion or prioritization within Cost Feasible Plans, regardless of whether they are within a MPO/TPO area. **Figure 3-1** illustrates how the Planning Screen fits within the context of the transportation planning process.

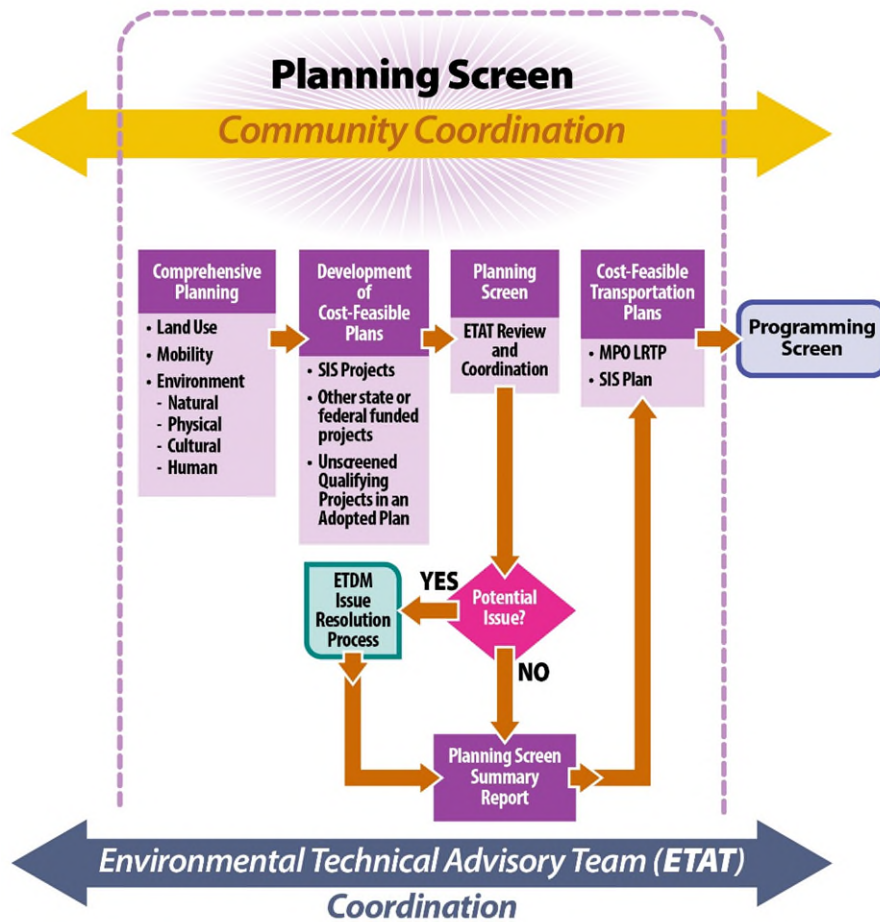


Figure 3-1: Planning Screen

The Planning Screen includes steps for preparing a project for review, conducting the review, responding to comments, and preparing a **Planning Screen Summary Report**. These steps are shown in **Figure 3-2** and further described in **Sections 3.3** through **3.5**.

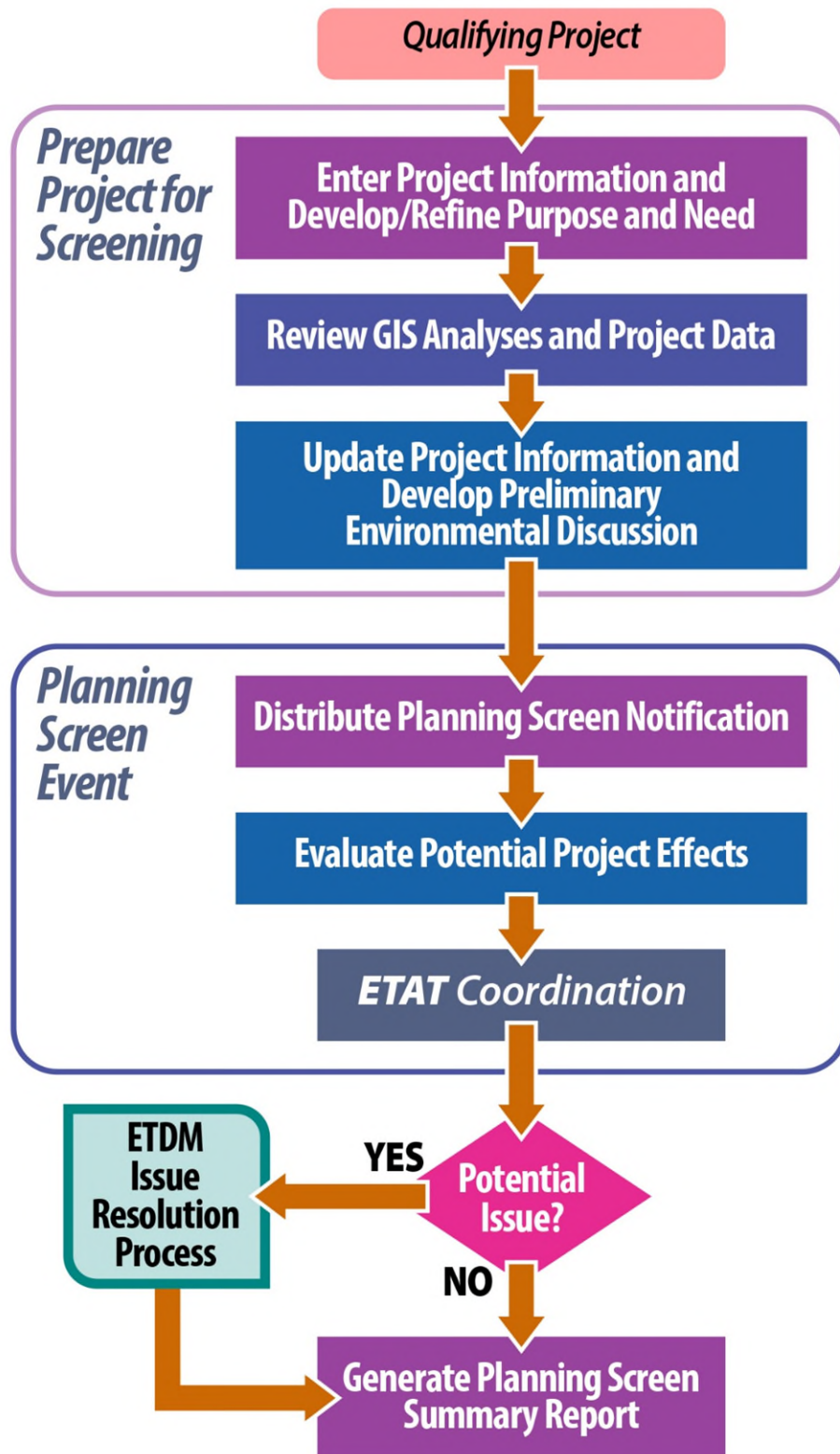


Figure 3-2: Planning Screen Process Flow

### 3.3 PLANNING SCREEN PROJECTS

In preparation of adopting Cost Feasible Plans, MPOs and FDOT personnel identify qualifying projects and schedule the Planning Screen reviews. They may also use the EST to support planning activities related to non-qualifying projects.

#### 3.3.1 Identify Qualifying Projects

District MPO Liaisons, FDOT Planning Managers, and ETDM Coordinators work with other MPOs/TPOs, FDOT, and local government staff to identify qualifying projects to screen. Projects may originate from a variety of FDOT, MPO/TPO, or local government programs and plans, such as:

- [SIS Plan](#)
- MPO/TPO LRTPs
- Transportation Needs Plans
- Master Plans
- Action Plans
- Corridor Plans
- Local Government Comprehensive Plans

These personnel select transportation projects based on criteria including:

- Project type
- Transportation system designation
- Potential funding source (federal, state, or local)
- Responsible agency

In this context, “transportation system designations” refers to whether a proposed project is part of the SIS or State Highway System (SHS), also called on-system. “Responsible agency” refers to the agency required to meet federal, state, and other applicable requirements. See **Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1**, and **Table 2-2** of this **Manual** for specific examples of qualifying projects and guidance on how to apply the selection criteria.

Not all qualifying projects require a Planning Screen. Only unscreened qualifying projects in or expected to be included in a Cost Feasible Plan undergo a Planning Screen. Ideally, all Planning Screens should follow the formation of a Needs Plan and be completed before final approval of a Cost Feasible Plan, with highest priority projects being screened first.



The standardized EST GIS analyses can be performed on batch uploads of imported Needs Plan projects. This can assist MPOs/TPOs (and, as appropriate, local governments) to understand the relative potential project effects to environmental resources when prioritizing projects for Planning Screens or for inclusion in the cost feasible LRTP.

After selecting a project for review, the ETDM Coordinator begins the Planning Screen by updating the project record in the EST. Refer to FDOT's [ETDM Training Website](#) for instructions on preparing projects for review in the EST.

### 3.3.2 Project Screening Release Schedule

Based on the list of qualifying projects, FDOT ETDM Coordinators and Project Managers (if assigned) work with appropriate staff to develop or update a 12-month project release schedule as described in **Chapter 2, Section 2.3.6**, of this *Manual*.

When releasing projects for review, ETDM Coordinators should provide the ETAT members with enough time to review and provide comments. Therefore, when scheduling a Planning Screen review, it is recommended that no more than two projects be released at a time, and that project releases be scheduled at least two weeks apart. In addition, four- five months should be allowed per project to provide time for reviews, public involvement activities, possible review extensions, and preparation of the **Planning Screen Summary Report**.

OEM and FDOT ETDM Coordinators collaborate about the anticipated release schedule to consider Districts' needs, plan adoption dates, work program deadlines, and the workload of ETAT members who may be assigned to multiple FDOT Districts. OEM subsequently receives schedule updates from the ETDM Coordinators and provides a statewide update to the ETAT on a quarterly basis.

### 3.3.3 Non-Qualifying Projects

FDOT and MPOs/TPOs (and local governments as needed) may also use the EST to support issue identification of non-qualifying projects (such as Type 1 CEs or FTA projects) and/or an entire plan. These projects are not intended to be released to the ETAT for formal review. Instead, they are entered into the EST using the Area of Interest (AOI) Tool with basic information needed to generate the standardized EST GIS analyses (refer to FDOT's [ETDM Training Website](#) for details).

## 3.4 PREPARE PROJECT FOR SCREENING

The transportation, environmental, and community data presented in the EST provide a foundation for project reviews. **Chapter 6** of this *Manual* describes data collection, preparation, and maintenance of these datasets. In preparation for a Planning Screen review, FDOT and the MPOs/TPOs enter information about the project into the EST, while the Community Liaison Coordinators (CLCs) gather and enter community data. In addition, the ETAT representatives provide new and updated GIS data to the Florida Geographic Data Library (FGDL) for use within the EST, as available.

### 3.4.1 Enter or Update Project Information

In MPO areas, the MPO ETDM Coordinator enters or works with the FDOT ETDM Coordinator to enter project data in the EST, unless the project is on the SIS/SHS. If the project is on the SIS/SHS or not in a MPO/TPO area, the FDOT ETDM Coordinator enters the project data. Whenever possible, ETDM Coordinators should work with FDOT and MPO/TPO planners to obtain information from previous planning and community involvement activities in order to maintain a comprehensive project record and better link the Planning and PD&E phases.

To prepare a project for a Planning Screen review:

- Develop or refine the purpose and need for each qualifying project to be screened in accordance with the [\*PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description and Purpose and Need\*](#). Transportation planning data developed for long-range plans are the primary source of information used to assist in establishing the purpose and need. These data are drawn from corridor plans, subarea plans, regional models, and other sources that help identify corridors and facilities where transportation improvements are needed. This information is summarized in MPO/TPO LRTPs, the FDOT SIS Plan, MPO/TPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Staff preparing the purpose and need for projects undergoing a Planning Screen should coordinate with the MPO/TPO liaison or other appropriate planning staff to develop the initial purpose and need, if it does not already appear in the transportation plan. The initial purpose and need developed during the Planning phase may change as the project advances since new information or public input may be identified. Only describe the appropriate purpose and need categories that are applicable to the project.
- Enter the “Goal of the Screening Event”. This is a statement that communicates the goal or intent of the specific screening event (i.e. feasibility, study area vs. corridors, etc.). This not a goal of the project.
- Develop a project description, which includes:
  - Project name.
  - Name of the city(ies) and county(ies) where the project is located.
  - Name of the planning organization responsible for the project.
  - Limits of the proposed project, such as its logical termini and length.
  - Description of the existing or general characterization of a new facility; and

- Description of the proposed improvements. Provide as much information as available, such as the facility type, number of lanes, type of median, major structures, and potential right of way requirements (for example, a description of a road widening could indicate if the project intends to use existing right of way).
- A brief description of pedestrian and bicycle accommodation
- Navigational needs, for federally-aided or assisted projects involving bridges over waters

Refer to [\*\*PD&E Manual Part 2, Chapter 1, Project Description and Purpose and Need\*\*](#) for further guidance and an example.

- Indicate whether the project is being developed under the Local Agency Program (LAP). To be considered a qualifying LAP project, funding must already be programmed in the Five-Year Work Program and be listed in FDOT's federally mandated STIP.
- Indicate whether the project is being developed through the ACE process.
- Indicate whether the project is anticipated to use federal funds or require a federal action.
- Enter information showing the location of each project alternative or analysis area using the EST Map Editor or by uploading a GIS shapefile. The project features at this point generally represent planning-level study areas or corridor options rather than detailed alignments. For ACE process projects, delineate the study area surrounding potential alternatives or general alternative corridors. If available, preliminary alternatives should offer potential solutions to the transportation problem identified in the purpose and need. The range of alternatives depends on the nature and scope of the project, as well as the context and intensity of potential impacts.
- Describe the study area and preliminary alternative(s), if available. For each analysis area, include information about the mode(s) served by the project, type of alternative (widening, new alignment, etc.), termini location, and length. Include the estimated cost and the basis for the cost estimate, if available. When known, enter information about roadway functional classification, existing and projected Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), presence within an Urban Service Area, and whether it is designated as a SIS facility.
- Provide project plan consistency status information currently known or anticipated and the steps toward achieving consistency, as appropriate. Coordinate with FDOT District, MPO or Rural County Liaisons and either MPO/TPO or local government planning staff to compile and complete consistency information.

- Designate exempted agencies (if applicable). Exempted agencies are notified about the Planning Screen review but not expected to submit comments or act on the purpose and need. When making the decision to exempt an agency, consider the nature of a project. For instance, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) is exempt from reviewing any projects that do not impact navigable waterways. Additionally, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is exempt from reviewing ETDM projects (See **Section 2.3.4 Federal Involvement** of this *Manual* and [PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 14, Transit Project Delivery](#) when preparing FTA projects for screening). Other agencies that may be exempt from a review include the United States Army Corps of Engineers, United States Forest Service, and National Park Service. Due to the **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** Assignment Program (described in **Section 2.3.3** of this *Manual*), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is automatically exempt from ETDM reviews and therefore, does not need to be designated as exempt.
- Contact the Work Program Office to establish an ETDM Identifier (refer to [Work Program Instructions Part III, Chapter 22](#)).
- Summarize any public involvement activities and comments received about the project.

### 3.4.2 Review Standardized GIS Analyses and Project Data

Standardized EST GIS analyses identify natural, physical, social, and cultural resources within a specified buffer distance of the proposed project features to help identify potential project effects. These analyses are performed automatically in the EST prior to a project being released for review. The analyses provide counts or summaries of resources (for example, wetland acreage and demographic statistics) found in proximity to a transportation project. The EST includes analyses that have been requested by the ETAT, FDOT, or MPO representatives to help in their review of potentially affected resources. The results are organized within the EST by resource topic (see **Section 2.6 of this Manual** for a description of each) and reported along with resource-specific maps displaying project location and selected environmental resources.

Prior to initiating the Planning Screen review, the project team studies the results of the GIS analyses to gain additional understanding of the project area and to make any necessary refinements to the project. For projects on the SIS, the SIS Coordinators in the Systems Planning Office review the project for consistency with the SIS Plan. Once all data preparation steps are complete, the project status is updated in the EST to indicate that the project information is ready for final quality review. The PD&E Project Manager (if assigned), environmental specialists, other team members as appropriate and ETDM Coordinator perform quality reviews to verify the accuracy and completeness of all project information.

The mapped project features should be consistent with the location described in the EST in the **Project Description** report. Confirm, for example, that:

- The beginning and ending locations of linear alternatives recorded in the EST in the **Project Description** report match the mapped termini.
- Project features follow an existing facility, such as a highway or rail line, if intended.
- The project linework is digitized accurately in relation to other mapped features (e.g., if you intend for the project to go around a resource, verify the digitized linework shows that).

Specific data quality review procedures will depend on project context and scope. Refer to **Chapter 6, Section 6.4**, of this **Manual** for further guidance.

### 3.4.3 Develop Preliminary Environmental Discussion

After reviewing the standardized EST GIS analyses and considering information supplied by local knowledge, planning studies, internal FDOT coordination, and other evaluations in the project area, FDOT prepares a Preliminary Environmental Discussion (PED). FDOT completes the PED for each EST review topic (**Section 3.5.3.2** of this **Manual**) prior to a Planning Screen review. FDOT uses the PED to inform the ETAT and other agencies, as appropriate, of the District's initial examination of a project's potential involvement with the natural, physical, cultural, and community topics in a project study area. When known, FDOT describes the quality, quantity, and importance of potentially affected resources in the area. The PED also discusses the process FDOT plans to use to address or evaluate topics as the project advances through project development. The PED is based on local knowledge, planning studies, and any other evaluations relevant to the project area. The PED provides the ETAT with context and may help the ETAT provide focused and actionable comments.

The PED is required for projects undergoing a Planning Screen review. The PED can be submitted per topic and analysis area to highlight unique or known conditions. For MPO projects, FDOT coordinates the assessment with the MPO ETDM Coordinator.

For instructions on completing a PED, refer to [\*\*PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 3, Preliminary Environmental Discussion and Advance Notification\*\*](#).

### 3.4.4 OEM Pre-Screening Review

The ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager is responsible for checking the data for completeness and accuracy. Coordination and review by other District representatives are strongly encouraged. Other District representatives may include the Environmental Manager, Administrator over the District Environmental Unit, District Project Development Manager, and District Permits Coordinator, for example. After the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager verifies the project purpose and need, project description, and PED are each complete and accurate, they will then use the EST to initiate an independent OEM review for federal actions. The OEM Project Delivery Coordinator and OEM lead engineer review and provide comments about the project description, purpose and need, and PED before the screening event notification is distributed. Following

notification from the District, OEM reviewers have up to 14 days to provide comments. This review may also include subject matter experts. OEM and the project team work together to resolve any comments provided. When the OEM review is complete, the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager updates the information and distributes the Planning Screen review notification to the ETAT. The OEM Pre-Screening Review is not required for state-funded projects.

## 3.5 PLANNING SCREEN REVIEW

Before initiating a Planning Screen review, the ETDM Coordinator should consider holding an online meeting or webinar to introduce the project to the ETAT. The meeting allows the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager to present project details, highlight issues, and communicate specific expectations to help the ETAT provide quality comments. The EST “Send Email to User Group” can be used for communicating with ETAT. For assistance with setting up these meetings, contact the ETDM Help Desk by emailing [help@fla-etat.org](mailto:help@fla-etat.org).

### 3.5.1 Distribution of Planning Screen Notification

The ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager uses the EST to notify the ETAT about the start of a Planning Screen. The CLC also receives a copy of the email notification to begin the Sociocultural Effects (SCE) evaluation. The CLC or Project Manager can forward the notice to other stakeholders so they may:

- Review project information,
- Provide input about potential effects to resources, or
- Share information from previous planning activities.

See the [FDOT Public Involvement Handbook](#) for strategies to provide public involvement opportunities during the Planning Screen. Non-ETAT members and the public are referred to the ETDM Public Access Site at <https://etdmpub.fl-a-etat.org>.

### 3.5.2 Review Time Frame

As established in the ETDM agency operating agreements (AOAs), reviews occur within 45 calendar days of email notification. If additional review time is required, an ETAT member may request a 15-day extension. When needed, the ETAT member must submit a written request to the ETDM Coordinator within the initial 45-day comment period. Should a shorter extension period be necessary, it may be negotiated with the ETAT members; contact OEM for more information. When an extension is granted, it applies to all ETAT members and is announced via email.

ETAT members may submit and edit comments at any time during the review period using the EST. After the review period ends, the ETAT can no longer submit comments on the EST

or edit submitted comments. If an ETAT member misses the deadline or needs to revise comments, the member should contact the ETDM Coordinator.

### **3.5.3 Planning Screen Review**

Upon receipt of the Planning Screen notice, ETAT members review the purpose and need and provide comments about potential project effects to the natural, physical, social, and cultural resources related to their regulatory authority.

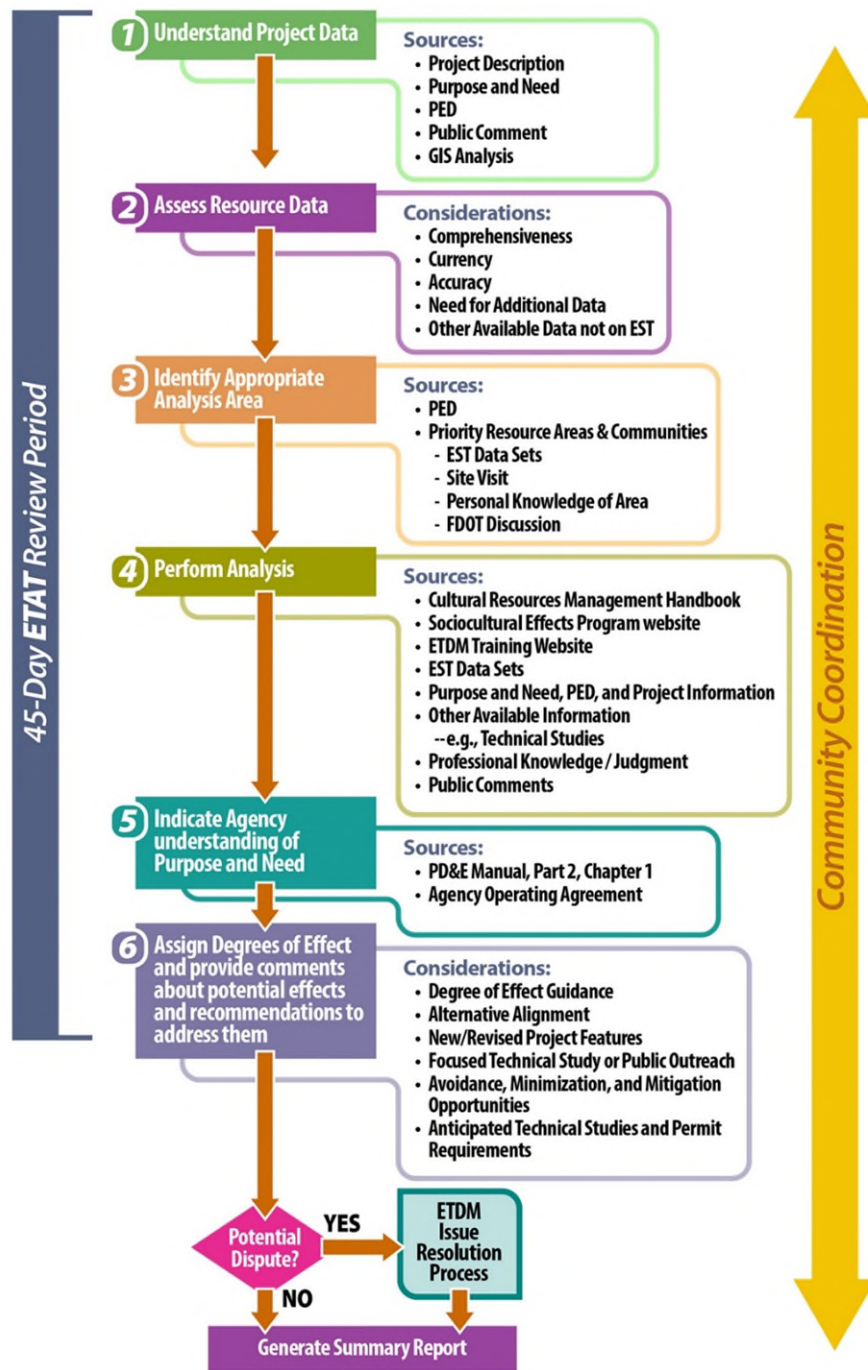


Figure 3-3: Planning Screen Review Tasks

### 3.5.3.1 ETAT Review Tasks

Steps one through six in **Figure 3-3** show the process ETAT members follow when reviewing projects during the Planning Screen. These tasks are described in detail below:



1. **Develop Understanding of Project** – Develop an understanding of the proposed transportation project by reviewing the project description, purpose and need, PED, EST GIS analyses, project and resource maps, any project attachments, and comments from previous planning activities.
2. **Assess Resource Data** – Verify that the information available in the EST is the best available; refer to **Chapter 6, Section 6.4.5.2** of this *Manual* for data review considerations. Identify information gaps or data needed to support further evaluation. ETAT members are expected to supplement the information in the EST with additional sources and personal knowledge, such as data gathered from site visits. If the ETAT members have relevant knowledge or information not already contained in the EST, provide and discuss such information.
3. **Identify Appropriate Analysis Area** – Typically, the analysis area for a project is influenced by the nature of the ETAT member’s resources of interest, the project’s context, and the potential for resource effects. The buffers used in the EST range from 100 feet to 5,280 feet [one (1) mile] in width. These areas represent typical distances used by the ETAT to evaluate a variety of resources in different contexts, although the size of any individual study area depends on the nature of the project. For example, a multi-use trail may only use a quarter-mile buffer, while an interstate project might use a half-mile.
4. **Perform Analysis** – Review projects for existing conditions and potential direct and indirect effects to jurisdictional resources. Assess the need for potential agency coordination in subsequent project phases. Each ETAT member performs analyses consistent with the criteria and methodologies that they established for each specific resource.
5. **Indicate Understanding of Purpose and Need** – Review the project’s purpose and need and acknowledge understanding or ask for clarification from the District ETDM Coordinator.
6. **Provide Comments about Potential Effects and Recommendations to Avoid or Address Effects** – Comment on project concepts and alternatives based on analysis in Step 4. Be as specific as possible. Submit comments in the EST for each screened alternative for the topics identified in the AOA. Comments should focus on fatal flaws and not just list resources found within the standard EST buffer areas. For example:
  - If potential direct and indirect effects exist, comment on the type, quality, and sensitivity of the resources involved in relation to their location to the proposed project and related activities. If the project does not impact resources of interest, or a detailed evaluation is not necessary during the PD&E phase, indicate this as well.

- ETAT members are not expected to evaluate nor assign Degrees of Effect (DOEs) for cumulative effects during the Planning and Programming Screens. If there is a concern for cumulative effects, provide considerations to help the Lead Agency decide on the level of evaluation needed in the environmental document (see **Section 2.5** of this Manual for an explanation about the Lead Agency role). Cumulative effects can be both positive and negative. See the [FDOT Cumulative Effects Evaluation Handbook](#) for more information.
- Provide information about agency plans, studies, regulatory information, or other data that may affect the project or are affected by the project. Fill in data gaps and validate data, as needed.
- Provide specific recommendations to address resource concerns which may arise during permitting, such as potential avoidance, minimization, or mitigation opportunities based on statutes and regulations.
- Specifically identify differences in potential jurisdictional resource impacts among alternatives.
- Identify specific activities FDOT or other ETAT member(s) could complete between Planning and Programming Screens to answer questions, address concerns, or fill in data gaps (e.g., seasonal studies, preliminary site inspections, or studies to support the permitting process).
- Indicate a DOE for each topic and analysis area being reviewed. A DOE reflects the magnitude of both potential direct and indirect effects caused by a particular alternative to a resource. **Section 3.5.4** provides guidance for assigning a DOE, but more specific evaluation criteria should be used by each ETAT member for the

To help carry forward information produced during the Planning phase to the Environmental Documents prepared during the PD&E phase, the ETDM process uses the following definitions:

**Direct effects...** are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place as the action.

**Indirect effects...** are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance but are still reasonably foreseeable.

**Cumulative effect** is the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

The terms “effects” and “impacts” are used interchangeably in this **Manual**.

resources under the member's jurisdiction. Include the rationale for selecting a DOE. During a Planning Screen, this is a preliminary assessment based on existing information. This early consideration helps to assess the feasibility of project alternatives. It can help better develop cost estimates by identifying flaws and other difficulties that may lead to unnecessary delays and expenses as the project moves into future phases.

- Indicate the need for future involvement (e.g., coordination/consultation, permits and technical studies).

### **3.5.3.2 ETDM Environmental Topics**

ETAT members comment on the potential project effects to one or more of the following ETDM topics as defined by their respective AOAs and/or in accordance with their regulatory authority:

#### ***Social and Economic***

- Social
- Economic
- Land Use Changes
- Mobility
- Aesthetic Effects
- Relocation Potential
- Farmland

#### ***Cultural***

- Section 4(f) Potential
- Historic and Archaeological Sites
- Recreational and Protected Lands

#### ***Natural***

- Wetlands and Surface Waters
- Water Resources
- Floodplains

- Protected Species and Habitat
- Coastal and Marine

### ***Physical***

- Noise
- Air Quality
- Contamination
- Infrastructure
- Navigation

### ***Special Designations***

Within the EST, ETAT members use the *Special Designations* topic to identify involvement with any of the following:

- Outstanding Florida Waters
- Aquatic Preserves
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Sole Source Aquifers

Refer to **Chapter 2, Section 2.6**, of this **Manual** for additional explanation and guidance regarding each ETDM topic.

### **3.5.4 Assigning a Degree of Effect**

ETAT members should use available information to evaluate and comment on the potential effects of a project. This includes using the data layers in the EST, historical documentation, and previous studies, site visits, talking to other agency experts and FDOT staff, as well as personal knowledge of the project area. These potential effects drive the DOE selection, which reflects the potential magnitude of project effects on a resource, not the level of coordination involved in addressing the effect. The level of coordination with the ETAT during future project phases reflects the comments that need to be addressed, regardless of the DOE. The ETDM Coordinator and PD&E Project Manager use the ETAT DOEs and comments to help identify potentially critical issues and determine how to address them. The OEM Project Delivery Coordinator may need to be involved if questions or conflicting comments exist. The ETAT responses, along with the internal coordination, help the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager assign a Summary Degree of Effect (SDOE). When FDOT is not the Lead Agency,

the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager coordinates with the Lead Agency representative to identify potential issues and assign the SDOE.

**Table 3-1** provides guidance on assigning a DOE. ETAT members are encouraged to develop a specific matrix to further clarify their own understanding of DOE levels and coordinate it with FDOT for mutual understanding and partnering. This promotes consistency when ETAT members assign a DOE.

**Table 3-1: Potential Project Effects Degree of Effect Guidance – Planning Screen**

Degree of Effect	Guidance	
	ETAT Resources	Sociocultural Resources
Not Applicable/No Involvement	The resource in question is not a part of, in any way involved with, or affected by, the proposed alternative.	
Enhanced	The proposed alternative has a positive effect on the resource or can reverse a previous adverse effect leading to environmental improvement.	The proposed alternative has a positive effect. The affected public supports the proposed alternative.
None	Resources exist, but there is no potential impact by the proposed alternative.	The proposed alternative has been evaluated for sociocultural effects. Resources exist, but the proposed alternative has no potential for effect and there is no concern about the alternative.
Minimal	The proposed alternative has little potential for negative effects on the resources.	The proposed alternative has little potential for negative effects. Initial outreach reveals little or no concern about the alternative.
Moderate	Resources are potentially affected by the proposed alternative, but avoidance, minimization, or mitigation options are available and can be addressed during the PD&E phase.	Resources are potentially affected by the proposed alternative, but avoidance, minimization, or mitigation options are available.
Substantial	The proposed alternative potentially affects unique or sensitive resources. Avoidance, minimization, or mitigation options may be difficult to identify.	Potential effects on the resources are anticipated, and/or are likely to be highly controversial.
Potential Issue Resolution	Potential effects are anticipated to the degree that the proposed alternative may need to be modified or eliminated. Issue resolution may be required.	

**Note:** The DOE reflects the potential magnitude of both direct and indirect project impacts.

The responsibility for performing SCE evaluations and assigning a DOE to the SCE topics (Social, Economic, Land Use Changes, Mobility, Aesthetic Effects, and Relocation Potential) rests with the MPOs/TPOs and FDOT. Farmlands, although a related Social and Economic topic, is addressed separately from the SCE evaluation through coordination with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and treated here as an ETAT Resource. Public involvement activities assist in identifying concerns and desired project features. The FDOT and MPO/TPO CLCs should take a collaborative team approach during these evaluations. Much of the data preparation and initial analysis involved with SCE evaluations can be

conducted prior to a Planning Screen review and made available to the ETAT as part of the PED. The [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 4, Sociocultural Effects Evaluation](#), the [FDOT Public Involvement Handbook](#), and FDOT's [Sociocultural Effects Evaluation Website](#) provide guidance on identifying SCE considerations and techniques for gathering public input.

For further guidance on how to evaluate cultural and historical resources, refer to [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 8, Archaeological and Historical Resources](#) and the [FDOT Cultural Resources Management Handbook](#). For guidance on potential **Section 4(f)** considerations, refer to [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 7, Section 4\(f\) Resources](#).

### 3.5.5 ETAT Coordination

During the Planning Screen review, the ETDM Coordinator should monitor preliminary ETAT responses and conduct personal communication to clarify ETAT comments or respond to questions. Specifically, they should review relevant ETAT commentary to identify actions necessary to advance the project. Actionable ETAT commentary should be transmitted to the appropriate staff as the project advances. Following the screening event, the ETDM Coordinator, CLCs, PD&E Project Managers, and other MPO/TPO or District staff assesses ETAT commentary in order to assign SDOEs and prepare the **Planning Screen Summary Report**. The ETDM Coordinator works with the ETAT to gain a better understanding of identified concerns, clarify any instances where DOEs for a topic may differ between ETAT members, and address commentary that raised additional questions or the need for additional information. When differences in DOE assignments occur between agencies for a topic, more weight should be given to the ETAT member with jurisdictional authority over the resource of concern. The OEM Project Delivery Coordinator may need to be involved if questions or conflicting comments exist.

### 3.5.6 Publish Planning Screen Summary Report

The **Planning Screen Summary Report** summarizes key recommendations and results from the review. If the project is an ACE process project, there is both a **Preliminary** and **Final Planning Screen Summary Report** (refer to **Section 3.6** of this **Manual**).

The ETDM Coordinator develops and publishes the **Planning Screen Summary Report** within 60 days from the end of the 45-day review period. In MPO areas, the District and MPO ETDM Coordinators work jointly, as appropriate, to review comments, coordinate with the ETAT, and assign SDOEs to all topics and alternatives based on ETAT DOEs and comments received from the ETAT or other stakeholders.

The SDOE represents the position of FDOT (or the MPO/TPO for projects occurring within MPO/TPO areas) and is based on known information about the project area, including ETAT member and public comments and other technical resources. There is no requirement to select the highest DOE assigned by an ETAT member. However, when assigning an SDOE lower than an ETAT member's assigned DOE, the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager must include a rationale for the decision, which could be based on input from an agency with jurisdiction over the resource. When selecting a lower SDOE than an ETAT's

assigned DOE, the ETDM Coordinator communicates with the respective ETAT member and documents the coordination in the EST during the development of the SDOE. The ETAT member does not need to agree but should be informed of the decision and rationale. The ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager should also coordinate with the FDOT team to discuss the comments and reach consensus on the proposed SDOE before publishing the summary report.

If an ETAT member indicates a Potential Issue Resolution DOE, the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager begins coordination with OEM and the agency to seek a mutually agreeable avoidance and minimization option. If they cannot identify a mutually agreeable option, the ETDM Coordinator may initiate the Potential Issue Resolution process. An unresolved issue resolution during the Planning Screen does not prohibit a project from advancing to the Programming Screen but signifies that the project has potential conflicts or issues that may require continued issue resolution activities. See **Chapter 2, Section 2.7**, of this **Manual** for more information about the Potential Issue Resolution process.

If no reviews are received on a specific ETDM topic and that topic is assigned to an ETAT member through an executed AOA, the ETDM Coordinator or PD&E Project Manager should contact the respective ETAT member(s) and ask for the member's comments. If the member does not have comments or concerns regarding the topic, the member should indicate this in the EST. The outcome of those efforts and FDOT's knowledge regarding the topic should be the basis for determining the SDOE. If agency coordination attempts fail, the ETDM Coordinator seeks assistance from OEM and other FDOT staff to help with the assessment and to provide the basis for the SDOE determination; documentation of a non-responsive member should be provided in the EST to support the project record.

During the development of the **Planning Screen Summary Report**, it may be determined, when multiple alternatives are screened, that a particular alternative should be eliminated from further consideration. For instance, an alternative that does not adequately meet the purpose and need of the project or is found to be unreasonable can be eliminated with justification, documentation, and approval by OEM (or other Lead Agency representative when FDOT is not the Lead Agency).

When the ETDM Coordinator publishes a **Planning Screen Summary Report**, ETAT members, OEM, relevant MPO/TPO and local government staff, and interested public (<https://etdmpub.flas-etat.org>) are notified by email that the report is available. ETAT members review the Planning Screen Summary Report and provide comments, if applicable, within 30 calendar days of notification.

### 3.6 ALTERNATIVE CORRIDOR EVALUATION (ACE) PROCESS

FDOT uses the ACE process to identify, evaluate, and eliminate alternative corridors on qualifying projects prior to the PD&E phase. The decisions made in ACE can be used to:

- Refine the purpose and need for a project

- Determine the project area
- Define general travel modes or corridors (including logical termini)
- Describe general environmental setting for a project
- Identify preliminary environmental impacts and environmental mitigation
- Develop and refine a range of alternatives to be refined in detail during the PD&E Study
- Document elimination of unreasonable alternatives

The ACE process links planning and **NEPA**. However, adoption and use of ACE decisions in the **NEPA** process is subject to a determination by the Lead Agency. (Note that OEM makes this determination and performs other Lead Agency actions under the **NEPA** Assignment Program.)

As illustrated in **Figure 3.4**, the ACE process is typically performed in conjunction with the ETDM screening efforts that precede the PD&E phase. Alternatives should support the purpose and need for a project in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations, through the balancing of engineering, environmental, and economic aspects while considering comments received through the Planning Screen. The Districts should use the ACE process in support of potential Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and certain Environmental Assessment (EA) projects. The ACE process may also be used to eliminate corridors that are part of the State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) when new alignments are under consideration. Projects that qualify for the ACE process include:

- New alignments – new roadways; new roadway connections or extensions
- Major realignments
- Major bypasses – truck bypasses, city/town bypasses
- Other alignments based on consultation with the Lead Agency

Additionally, new alignments or major realignments for freight corridors (that are not bypasses), and bicycle or trail corridors may be evaluated using the ACE process.

The FDOT process for early planning and evaluation of transit projects in Florida is documented in the ***Transit Concept and Alternatives Review (TCAR) Guidance***. The TCAR process is a uniform approach for advancing transit projects by linking early planning work to the PD&E and FTA Project Development processes. See [Part 1, Chapter 14, Transit Project Delivery](#), for guidance on corridor analysis for transit projects.



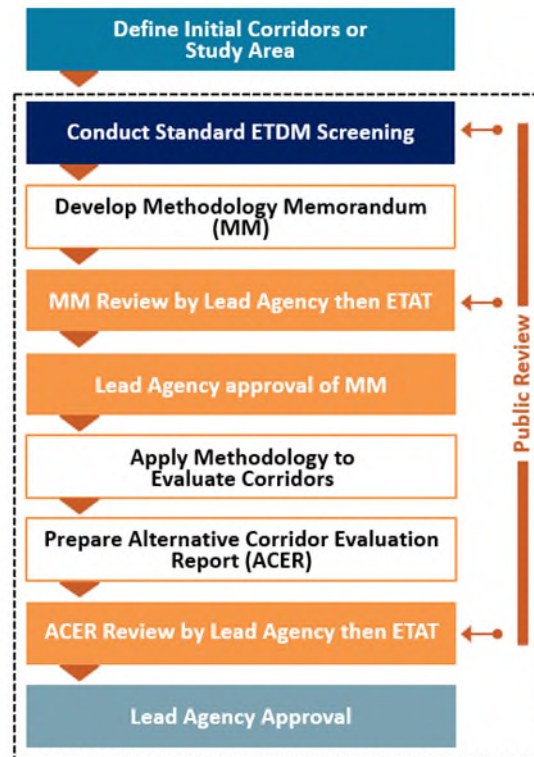


Figure 3-4: ACE Overview

The ACE identifies and evaluates corridor alternatives using *the Methodology Memorandum (MM)* agreed upon by the project stakeholders (local, state, tribal and federal agencies). The results of the ACE are documented in the *Alternative Corridor Evaluation Report (ACER)*. The *ACER* may be used in the *NEPA* process to support a federal decision to eliminate corridors from further study that are not feasible or do not meet the purpose and need for the project. Resource agency coordination in the ACE process is accomplished through the ETDM screening process. The ETDM screening facilitates demonstration and documentation that alternatives considered during the ACE process received support from regulatory and resource agencies and affected stakeholders. Public input regarding development of the ACE is received using public meetings and outreach.

The level of detail in the analysis of an ACE is higher than that used to prepare a typical planning product, but less than that of a PD&E Study. The *ACER* must establish and document criteria and the public involvement process used to evaluate and eliminate alternatives that are not feasible or do not meet the purpose and need for the project. Such documentation is essential to incorporate *ACER* results into the *NEPA* process.

Many transportation projects have identified existing corridor alternatives from completed action or master plans that should be incorporated into the Planning Screen review. These analyses should be evaluated and considered prior to advancing into the ACE process. Decisions made in these action or master plans should be included in the project

documentation, and during the PD&E phase should become part of the **NEPA** project record (e.g., project file, environmental document, etc.). All planning products incorporated into the **NEPA** process must follow the conditions of **23 U.S.C. § 168** as discussed below in Section 3.7. The ACE process varies depending on whether it is started in the Planning Screen, Programming Screen, or PD&E. The following sections explain how to conduct the ACE process during the Planning Screen. **Figure 3-5** illustrates the ACE process when initiated during the Planning Screen. See **Chapter 4** of this **Manual** when conducting ACE during the Programming Screen. Refer to [PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 4: Project Development Process](#) for a summary of the ACE process during PD&E. On-demand training and additional guidance are available on [OEM's ACE Training web page](#).

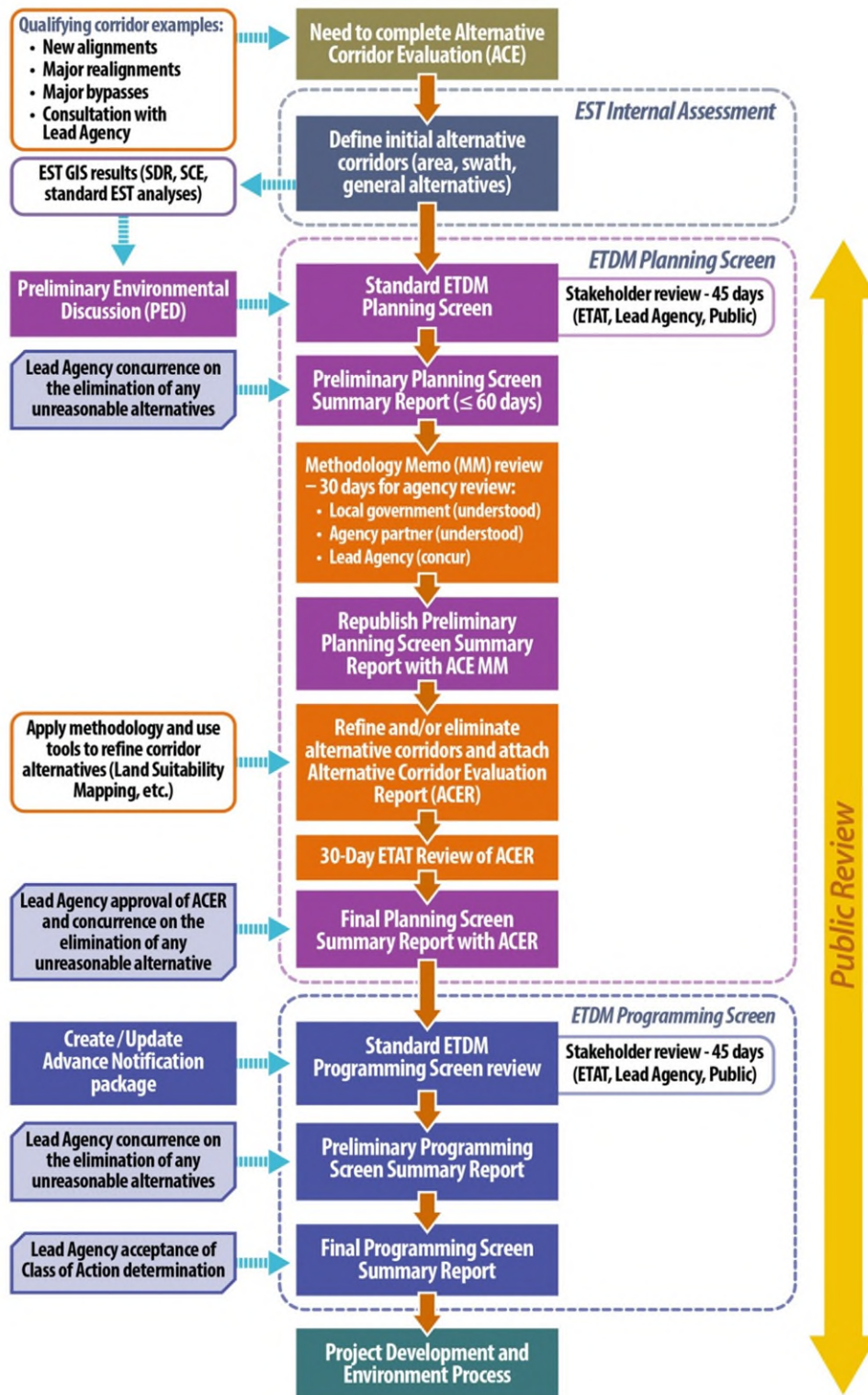


Figure 3-5: ACE Process when Initiated during the Planning Screen

### 3.6.1 Identify the Need to Complete the ACE Process

As illustrated in **Figure 3-5**, the first step of the ACE process is to determine whether the project involves a corridor improvement on an applicable project such as a new alignment, major realignment, or major bypass. Generally, MPO/TPO LRTPs, Rural County Master Plans, and the FDOT SIS Plan identify corridor improvement needs. Other local agencies and the public influence these assessments. Based on project characteristics, including the level of potential public controversy, the planning organization determines, in consultation with the potential Lead Agency, whether a corridor evaluation would support decisions about advancing a project to a Cost Feasible Plan or adopted Priority List. This determination will either facilitate the ACE process when the project is entered into the EST or the activities of non-ACE process Planning Screen reviews.

### 3.6.2 Define Initial Corridors

Based on initial data collection effort, the District should identify and define a reasonable range of initial alternative corridors (including alternative modes) that would address the project's purpose and need. At this point in the process, there may only be a single study area based upon the ability to meet purpose and need or more specific corridor alternatives from earlier Planning phase studies. Both types of corridor alternatives (i.e., a study area or specific corridor alternatives) can help identify sensitive resources and other issues that should be avoided. The naming of each corridor or alternative should remain consistent throughout the ACE and be carried through the PD&E phase. The District should also consider corridor alternatives from previously completed planning activities such as planning-level corridor/subarea/feasibility studies, multimodal corridor plans, vision plans, or master plans that might inform the ACE process. The District can add additional corridors at its discretion after consideration of known environmental issues, comments from ETAT members, and the ability of the corridor to meet the purpose and need for the project.

When evaluating major urban corridors, the District must consider the need for public transportation systems, facilities and services, and alternative corridors that will address multimodal transportation needs consistent with [Major Urban Corridor Studies Policy, Topic No. 000-725-010](#). Such consideration can include analysis for reasonable corridors based on the presence of alternative transportation modes and the feasibility of developing an interconnected multimodal transportation system. Multimodal options that must be considered include, but are not limited to, fixed guide way facilities and expanded bus service with supporting facilities. The policy requires each major urban corridor study to determine if there is justification for continued consideration of public transportation systems, and facilities or services in conjunction with the development of the corridor.

Consideration of alternative transportation modes, particularly in urban areas, should also include the need for bicycle and pedestrian facilities. See [PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapter 3, Engineering Analysis](#) for more guidance.

The project team enters the corridor alternatives into the EST, runs the standard GIS Analysis, develops the PED, and reviews the project information. See FDOT's [ETDM](#)

[Training Website](#) for instructions regarding data entry in the EST for study areas, as well as standard corridor alternatives. Refer to **Section 3.4** of this *Manual* for information about preparing and verifying project data. See [Part 1, Chapter 3 Preliminary Environmental Discussion and Advance Notification of the PD&E Manual](#) for information about developing the PED.

### 3.6.3 Decide to Advance Project

The District considers the involvement and potential impacts to environmental topics and the presence of issues that may prevent development of the project to decide if the project should be advanced. In making decisions, the District may perform GIS analysis and field observations; and consider potential permitting and mitigation options, known environmental issues in the area, early project stakeholders' comments, and other data and information that would help establish the appropriate level of detail of analysis for the range of alternatives being considered. Once the decision has been made to advance the project, the District defines the goals for the ACE process (e.g., performing an action plan corridor study or determining reasonable alternatives for the PD&E Study).

### 3.6.4 Conduct Standard EST Planning Screen Review

Following OEM's pre-screening review (**Section 3.4.4**), the Planning Screen review proceeds as described above in **Section 3.5** of this *Manual*. For ACE process reviews, the ETDM Coordinator assigns SDOEs following ETAT review and then publishes a **Preliminary Planning Screen Summary Report** (see **Section 3.5.6** of this *Manual*).

### 3.6.5 Develop the Methodology Memorandum

Following the Planning Screen review, the project team develops and documents the analysis methodology they will use to either replace the reviewed study area with more refined corridor alternatives or eliminate the already refined corridor alternatives in order to avoid and minimize potential impacts. When FDOT is the Lead Agency under the **NEPA** Assignment Program, the project team coordinates with OEM regarding the analysis methodology.

The District develops a **Methodology Memorandum (MM)** based on stakeholder comments and other information regarding the project environmental context. The **MM** is a technical memorandum that describes the goals of the ACE, identifies alternative corridors, and details the data and procedure the District will use to develop, evaluate, and screen alternative corridors. The MM also details the process, including public involvement, and criteria that form the basis for decision-making. The evaluation criteria may include purpose and need evaluation, engineering feasibility (i.e., traffic operational and safety performance measures, design components, urban design issues and opportunities, constructability, maintainability, utility conflicts), construction costs, avoidance of potential environmental impacts (social-economic, cultural, natural, and physical environmental resources), consistency with and/or impact on adopted plans, and other unique issues specific to the study area. It also highlights specific data, tools [e.g., Land Suitability Mapping (LSM) and Corridor Analysis Tool (CAT)], and timelines to govern corridor refinements. The MM includes the following:

## 1. Background

- a. Contact personnel
- b. Basic project information
  - i. Include any previous planning studies or relevant information
  - ii. Include any known issues of concern
- c. Brief project description
- d. Brief purpose and need of the project

## 2. Goals and objectives of the ACE

- a. Provide the status in project delivery
- b. Define the goals and objectives of the study
- c. Identify the decision points/milestones

## 3. Methods to analyze the alternative corridors and make decisions

- a. Describe needs for alternative modes such as transit, freight, or pedestrian/bicycle facilities
- b. Describe alternative corridors
- c. Describe data needs
- d. Describe criteria to evaluate and screen alternative corridors
- e. Describe the data analysis tools [i.e., EST, Land Suitability Mapping (LSM), Quantum]

### 3.6.6 Conduct Methodology Memorandum Review

The District submits the **MM** to OEM for a 14-day review using the EST. The OEM PDC coordinates the OEM review and provides OEM comments to the District through the EST. OEM comment resolution on the draft MM must occur prior to distribution to the ETAT for review and comment. The MM is then distributed to the ETAT through the EST. The ETAT members have 30 days to acknowledge their understanding of the **MM** and submit comments within the EST. Their commentary may necessitate updates to the **MM** before it is sent to the Lead Agency for review and approval. Depending on the nature of the ETAT comments, the Lead Agency may recommend that the ETAT review the revised **MM**. Subsequently, the District uses the EST to distribute the **MM** to the Lead Agency for

review. For federal highway projects, OEM serves as the Lead Agency. The Lead Agency is expected to review and respond to the **MM** within 30 days. Following Lead Agency approval of the **MM**, the ETDM Coordinator also republishes the **Preliminary Planning Screen Summary Report**. If there are substantive changes to an approved **MM**, the Lead Agency will need to reapprove it. Please coordinate with OEM to determine whether changes require reapproval. The reapproval may be processed through the EST or may be documented in an email saved in the project file. When reviewing a reapproval request, the Lead Agency will determine whether the changes are significant enough to necessitate review by the ETAT prior to reapproval.

### 3.6.7 Refine Corridor Alternatives

Once the Lead Agency approves the **MM**, the District begins the process of applying the methodology to refine or eliminate corridor alternatives. The District evaluates the corridors using initial data and the criteria established and agreed upon in the **MM**. In studying the alternatives and considering input from ETAT and other project stakeholders, the District may refine corridors, eliminate corridors, or develop additional corridors to avoid potential environmental effects. The refinement of corridors to avoid potential environmental effects also considers the corridor vision, purpose and need, public input, and engineering and economic feasibility. Alternative corridors that do not meet the purpose and need are eliminated from further study through the ACE process and documented in an **Alternative Corridor Evaluation Report** or **ACER**. Alternative corridors that meet purpose and need are developed to a conceptual planning level sufficient to evaluate their benefits and impacts relative to the purpose and need for the project. Preliminary design for alternative corridors that are recommended for further studies is done during the PD&E phase.

### 3.6.8 Prepare Alternative Corridor Evaluation Report

The **ACER** summarizes the alternative corridors analysis and documents the alternatives that are eliminated from further study or otherwise carried forward to the PD&E Study (pursuant to **23 U.S.C. § 168** and **Appendix A of 23 CFR Part 450**). The **ACER** documents the basis for eliminating alternatives. Documentation regarding the elimination of alternatives in the **ACER** must be included in the project file for the **NEPA** process. Therefore, it is critical to properly document the methodology, data, analysis, public and agency involvement, and resulting planning decisions in the **ACER** to ensure that these analyses meet requirements for use in the **NEPA** process. The **ACER** must document assumptions supporting planning analysis such as travel demand forecast year, forecast method and its rationale, and future year data. Additionally, the **ACER** should document policy assumptions related to land use, socio-economic factors, transportation costs, and the transportation network that were used to develop and evaluate alternatives. The **ACER** should document recent, current or near future planning studies or projects located in the vicinity and discuss their relationship with the ACE. The **ACER** should also document any unresolved project issues with the public, stakeholders or agencies and how they will be addressed in the subsequent phases of project development, if known. The following standard statement is included on the cover page of the **ACER**:

*This planning product may be adopted into the environmental review process, pursuant to Title 23 U.S.C. § 168 or the state project development process.*

The following outline is recommended for the **ACER** contents:

1. Introduction
2. Purpose and Need
3. Existing and Future Conditions
4. Alternatives Evaluation Methodology
5. Initial Corridors and Alternatives
6. Alternatives Evaluation
7. Public Involvement and Agency Coordination
8. Recommendations
9. Appendices

The complete **ACER** outline is available in word format and downloadable from FDOT's [OEM Publications Website](#).

When completed, the **ACER** is uploaded into the EST and sent to OEM for a 14- day review. The OEM PDC coordinates and compiles OEM comments and provides them to the District through the EST. OEM comment resolution on the draft ACER must occur prior to distribution to the ETAT for review and for comment. The ETAT members have 30 days to acknowledge their understanding of the **ACER** and submit comments in the EST. After ETAT review and ETAT comment resolution, the **ACER** is submitted to the Lead Agency for approval. When FDOT is the Lead Agency under the **NEPA** Assignment Program, the **ACER** is submitted to OEM for approval using the EST.

The Lead Agency considers the **ACER** for adoption and reviews the recommendations of the alternatives eliminated from further study or considered for additional study in the subsequent PD&E phase. When the ACE process is conducted during the Planning Screen, the District makes a formal request for adoption through the EST.

### **3.6.9 Publish Final Planning Screen Summary Report**

Corridor alternatives can only be eliminated with Lead Agency approval and concurrence by the Cooperating Agency, if any. (See Chapter 4 of this **Manual** for an explanation about the Cooperating Agency role.) Study areas replaced by more refined corridor alternatives do not require Lead Agency approval but still must be accompanied by an **ACER** detailing the outcomes from applying the evaluation methodologies agreed upon in the **MM**. The ETDM Coordinator publishes a **Final Planning Screen Summary Report** after:



- Uploading the **ACER** and replacing the study area with more refined corridor alternatives; or
- Uploading the **ACER** and receiving Lead Agency approval and Cooperating Agency concurrence on any corridor alternatives recommended for elimination.

### 3.6.10 Advancing the Project to Programming Screen

The corridor alternatives resulting from the actions described in **Section 3.6.5** of this *Manual* move into the Programming Screen. The Programming Screen provides another opportunity to further refine alternatives prior to detailed analysis in the PD&E phase. At the end of the Programming Screen, the Lead Agency determines the Class of Action (COA) and approves any new corridor alternatives recommended for elimination. During the PD&E phase, the Environmental Document summarizes and references the **ACER** which is made available for public review.

For more details about the Programming Screen, see **Chapter 4** of this *Manual*. For procedures used during the PD&E phase, refer to the [PD&E Manual](#).

## 3.7 LINKING PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Linking Planning and **NEPA**, also known as Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL), provides a connection between planning-level and environmental review decisions. Planning decisions and the environmental review process should be seamlessly integrated to eliminate duplication of both analysis effort and data and minimize delays in project delivery. The benefit of linking planning decisions and the PD&E Study is the ability to reuse data gathered, methodology developed, results obtained, and decisions made during the Planning phase to streamline the project delivery by minimizing duplication of efforts and data. Other benefits include the ability to identify environmental issues before developing the Scope of the PD&E Study and focus the analyses and technical studies conducted during the PD&E Study to issues that have potential to impact the project's delivery and recommendations.

Pursuant to **23 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 168**, **23 CFR § 450.212**, and **23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 450.318**, results or decisions from a system-level corridor or subarea planning study may be used in the **NEPA** analysis if they meet certain conditions. **Appendix A of 23 CFR Part 450 - Linking the Transportation Planning and NEPA Processes** details how to adopt or incorporate by reference information from transportation planning into **NEPA** documents and/or environmental review process under existing laws. **Appendix A of 23 CFR Part 450** is intended to be non-binding and voluntary.

The ACE process and ETDM screening may produce products which can be adopted for use in the **NEPA** process. The following decisions from a planning product for a transportation project, codified in **23 U.S.C. § 168(c)(1)**, may be adopted or incorporated by reference into the **NEPA** process:

1. Whether tolling, private financial assistance, or other special financial measures are necessary to implement the project.
2. A decision with respect to general travel corridor or modal choice, including a decision to implement corridor or subarea study recommendations to advance different modal solutions as separate projects with independent utility.
3. The purpose and need for the proposed action.
4. Preliminary screening of alternatives and elimination of unreasonable alternatives.
5. A basic description of the environmental setting.
6. A decision with respect to methodologies for analysis; and/or
7. An identification of programmatic level mitigation for potential impacts of a project, including a programmatic mitigation plan developed in accordance with **23 U.S.C. § 169**, that the relevant agency determines are more effectively addressed on a national or regional scale, including:
  - a. Measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts at a national or regional scale of proposed transportation investments on environmental resources, including regional ecosystem and water resources; and
  - b. Potential mitigation activities, locations, and investments.

The following planning analyses from a planning product for a transportation project, codified in **23 U.S.C. § 168(c)(2)**, may be adopted or incorporated by reference into the **NEPA** process:

1. Travel demands.
2. Regional development and growth.
3. Local land use, growth management, and development.
4. Population and employment.
5. Natural and built environmental conditions.
6. Environmental resources and environmentally sensitive areas.
7. Potential environmental effects, including the identification of resources of concern and potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on those resources; and

8. Mitigation needs for a proposed project, or for programmatic level mitigation, for potential effects that the Lead Agency determines are most effectively addressed at a regional or national program level.

The degree to which information, analyses, or decisions from the planning process can be adopted or incorporated by reference into the **NEPA** process depends upon how well the planning products meet standards applicable under the **NEPA** and associated implementing regulations (**23 CFR Part 771 and 40 CFR §§ 1500-1508**). The relevant agency in the environmental review process may adopt or incorporate by reference decisions from a planning product when the Lead Agency determines that the conditions set forth in **23 U.S.C. § 168(d)** and restated below are met:

1. The planning product was developed through a planning process conducted pursuant to applicable federal law.
2. The planning product was developed in consultation with appropriate federal and State resource agencies and Indian Tribes.
3. The planning process included broad multidisciplinary consideration of systems-level or corridor-wide transportation needs and potential effects, including effects on the human and natural environment.
4. The planning process included public notice that the planning products produced in the planning process may be adopted during a subsequent environmental review process in accordance with this section.
5. During the environmental review process, the relevant agency has:
  - a. Made the planning documents available for public review and comment by members of the general public and federal, state, local, and tribal governments that may have an interest in the proposed project.
  - b. Provided notice of the intention of the relevant agency to adopt or incorporate by reference the planning product; and
  - c. Considered any resulting comments.
6. There is no significant new information or new circumstance that has a reasonable likelihood of affecting the continued validity or appropriateness of the planning product.
7. The planning product has a rational basis and is based on reliable and reasonably current data and reasonable and scientifically acceptable methodologies.

8. The planning product is documented in sufficient detail to support the decision or the results of the analysis and to meet requirements for use of the information in the environmental review process.
9. The planning product is appropriate for adoption or incorporation by reference and use in the environmental review process for the project and is incorporated in accordance with, and is sufficient to meet the requirements of, the **NEPA** and **40 CFR § 1501.12** [as in effect on the date of enactment of the **Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act**].
10. The planning product was approved within the 5-year period ending on the date on which the information is adopted or incorporated by reference.

Linking planning and **NEPA** does not mean the planning products should be prepared to a level comparable to a **NEPA** analysis. Pursuant to **23 U.S.C § 134(q)**, **23 U.S.C. § 135(k)**, **49 U.S.C. §5303(q)** and **49 U.S.C. § 5304(j)**, transportation plans and programs are exempted from **NEPA** review. Environmental evaluations that are conducted during the Planning phase are not required to address all regulatory requirements that should be addressed by the **NEPA** analysis.

If the planning product to be adopted into the **NEPA** analysis is older than 5 years (from the date the product was approved), the information used to prepare the planning study must be reviewed to check whether conditions or planning context have changed since approval of the planning product. If the conditions or planning context have not changed, the PD&E Study may use the information from the planning product and explain why that information is valid to the **NEPA** decision-making process. The Lead Agency must be consulted when making this decision.

### 3.8 POTENTIAL ISSUE RESOLUTION PROCESS

ETAT commentary regarding potential project effects during the Planning Screen review offers the first opportunity to identify potential project issues that will need to be resolved. The ETDM Coordinator reviews the commentary, coordinates with the ETAT member who provided the comments, and when applicable, assigns a Potential Dispute Resolution SDOE to initiate the ETDM Issue Resolution process in the Planning Screen. A strong commitment exists among the ETAT to resolve disputes at the local level, prior to elevating them to higher level management. Refer to **Chapter 2, Section 2.7**, of this **Manual** for guidance on the ETDM Issue Resolution process.

### 3.9 PLANNING SCREEN ACTIVITIES

The ETDM process involves participants from a wide range of professions. As detailed throughout this chapter, ETDM process participants are engaged in a variety of activities to accomplish the Planning Screen. The list below provides a quick reference, summarizing the activities during the Planning Screen. For details, refer to the preceding sections of this chapter and **Chapter 2, Section 2.5, ETDM Coordination** of this **Manual**.

### **3.9.1 Planning Screen Preparation**

#### ***ETDM Project Information (FDOT or MPO/TPO)***

- Facilitate timely information flow among FDOT, MPOs/TPOs, local governments (as applicable), and Districts
- Identify and develop review schedule of qualifying transportation projects
- Develop project description and purpose and need
- Document planning consistency information
- Map the location of each project
- Identify previous studies and documents that can be included with project reviews
- Prepare the PED
- Enter information into the EST or coordinate with the GeoPlan Center to upload batch files of project data
- Perform quality assurance checks of project data and mappings (including project geometry and termini)
- For SIS projects, work with the SIS Central Office to ensure candidate projects are consistent with Florida transportation goals and objectives

#### ***ETAT Member Resource Data (ETAT members and GeoPlan Center)***

- Identify new or updated environmental resource information and coordinate with the GeoPlan Center to upload or secure these GIS files
- Perform quality assurance check of information provided to the GeoPlan Center after it has been made available through the EST

#### ***Community Information (FDOT or MPO/TPO)***

- Identify activities to gather community information to support the SCE Evaluation
- Gather or identify community characteristics data required for SCE Evaluation
- Enter community characteristics data into the EST or coordinate with the GeoPlan Center to upload or secure GIS files
- Perform quality assurance check of community characteristics data and mappings (including project geometry and termini)

### 3.9.2 Planning Screen Reviews

ETAT members perform the following tasks for their resources; the CLC performs the tasks for the six SCE topics:

- Conduct project reviews of potential direct and indirect effects using the EST
- Recommend cumulative effects considerations, as appropriate
- Recommend potential avoidance, minimization, and mitigation opportunities
- Conduct purpose and need reviews
- Electronically submit comments within the 45-day review period
- Review and comment on **MMs** and **ACERs** within 30 days, when requested

Lead agencies perform these additional tasks during the Planning Screen reviews:

- Review, comment, and approve the **MM**, within 30 calendar days when requested
- Approve elimination of unreasonable alternatives not meeting the purpose and need or criteria established in the approved methodology **MM** and documented in the **ACER**

### 3.9.3 ETAT Coordination

The ETDM Coordinator, Project Manager, or designee performs the following tasks during the Planning Screen:

- Initiate Planning Screen
- Promote awareness of the proposed project, including the purpose and need and the project description, and how the public can provide input
- Coordinate with ETAT members to ensure timely reviews of direct and indirect effects
- Monitor relevant ETAT commentary to identify actions necessary to advance the project
- Identify actionable commentary from the ETAT and transmit it to the appropriate staff as the project advances
- Communicate responses about transportation issues to the community during the Planning Screen

- For ACE process projects, coordinate reviews and Lead Agency concurrence for **MM** and **ACER**
- Participate in discussions regarding potential project effects or clarification of comments, as needed
- Conduct or participate in ETAT meetings and webinars
- Participate in issue resolution activities, if needed
- Initiate technical studies to support consultation process, if needed
- Convey to the ETAT members information about how project plans or concepts have been adapted to address their concerns, or communicate the rationale for not incorporating their input

### 3.9.4 Planning Screen Summary Report

The ETDM Coordinator, Project Manager, or designee, performs the following tasks related to developing and publishing the **Planning Screen Summary Report**.

- Review and respond to commentary received during the Planning Screen review
- Assign an SDOE to each ETDM resource topic
- Summarize public comments received during the Planning Screen review
- Publish the **Planning Screen Summary Report** (including Preliminary and Final, if applicable)
- Provide **Planning Screen Summary Report** to MPOs/TPOs and local governments for planning purposes, if applicable

## 3.10 REFERENCES

23 CFR Part 450. Planning Assistance and Standards.

40 CFR §§1500-1508. Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act.

23 U.S.C. Highways.

Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015 (FAST Act) (Pub. L. 112-141).

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). 2011. Guidance on Using Corridor and Subarea Planning to Inform NEPA. Accessed at [http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/corridor\\_nepa\\_guidance.asp](http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/corridor_nepa_guidance.asp) on 5/4/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. 2012. Cumulative Effects Evaluation Handbook. Accessed at <http://www.fdot.gov/environment/publications.shtm> on 5/4/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. FDOT Work Program Instructions (published annually). Accessed at <https://www.fdot.gov/workprogram/documents.shtm> on 11/23/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. 2021. Public Involvement Handbook. Accessed at <https://www.fdot.gov/planning/policy/publicinvolvement/index> on 5/4/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. 2013. Cultural Resources Management Handbook. Accessed at <http://www.fdot.gov/environment/publications.shtm> on 5/4/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. 2021. Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Training. Accessed at <https://www.fdot.gov/environment/sched/track7.shtm> on 5/4/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. 2021. ETDM Public Access Site. Accessed at <http://etdmpub.fla-etat.org> on 5/4/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. 2021. Metropolitan Planning Organization Program Management Handbook. Accessed at <http://www.fdot.gov/planning/policy/metrosupport> on 5/4/2021.

Florida Department of Transportation. 2024. Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Manual. Accessed at <https://www.fdot.gov/environment/pubs/pdeman/pdeman1.shtm> on 5/4/2021.

### **3.11 HISTORY**

**03/2006:** Original publication

**07/2013:** Updated to reflect current requirements and practices

**12/2015:** Updated to reflect current requirements and practices

**05/2017:** Updated to incorporate requirements of the Memorandum of Understanding dated 12/14/2016 and executed by FHWA and FDOT concerning the State of Florida's participation in the Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program pursuant to **23 U.S.C. § 327**

**03/2019:** Pen and ink updates to FDOT website links

**09/2019:** Updated to reflect current requirements and practices

**07/2020:** Pen and ink edits incorporating PD&E Manual updates

**12/2021:** Updated to reflect current requirements and practices



**12/2024:** Pen and ink edits to incorporate updates to the PD&E manual.