

## Environmental Review and the Final Approval of Interchange Access Requests

The approval of the interchange access request (IAR) proposals must comply with the requirements of the current Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Policy on Access to Interstate System (May 22, 2017). The 2017 FHWA Policy requirements focus on the technical feasibility of the proposals in support of the FHWA's determination of safety, operational, and engineering acceptability. Unlike the previous FHWA Policies (2009 and 1998), the 2017 Policy requires social, economic and environmental impacts evaluation and planning considerations of access proposals be addressed through the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) process or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. The 2017 Policy aims at streamlining the project reviews by eliminating the potential for duplicative analyses and documentation of issues in the IAR reports and NEPA documentations.

Under the 2017 Policy, IARs must address the following considerations and requirements<sup>1</sup>:

1. An operational and safety analysis has concluded that the proposed change in access does not have a significant adverse impact on the safety and operation of the Interstate facility (which includes mainline lanes, existing, new, or modified ramps, and ramp intersections with crossroad) or on the local street network based on both the current and the planned future traffic projections. This was the 2009 Policy point 3.
2. The proposed access connects to a public road only and will provide for all traffic movements. This was the 2009 Policy point 4.

The ***Interchange Access Request Users Guide (IRUG)*** contains the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) process for complying with the requirements of the 2017 Policy considerations and requirements. The ***IRUG*** incorporates the procedure for reviewing and approval of IARs that was agreed upon in the Programmatic Agreement<sup>2</sup> executed on April 2, 2015 by the FHWA Florida Division and FDOT. The Programmatic Agreement is based on the 2009 Policy and Title 23 United States Code Section 111(e).

The streamlining considerations and requirements that have been removed from the 2017 Policy are typically addressed and documented in the PD&E Study. As such, when requesting the final approval of IARs, FDOT will utilize the approach summarized in this paper to demonstrate how the access proposal PD&E Study has addressed social, economic and environmental impacts evaluation and planning considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> 2017 FHWA Policy on Access to the Interstate System, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/design/interstate/170522.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> 2015 Programmatic Agreement Between FHWA and FDOT regarding the Review and Approval of Specific Types of Changes in the Interstate System  
[http://www.fdot.gov/planning/systems/programs/SM/intjus/pdfs/Signed\\_IJR\\_PA\\_4\\_2\\_15.pdf](http://www.fdot.gov/planning/systems/programs/SM/intjus/pdfs/Signed_IJR_PA_4_2_15.pdf)

## Type 2 Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Statement

The PD&E study for access proposals includes the discussion of the 2009<sup>3</sup> Policy considerations and requirements as follows:

1. *(2009 Policy point 1) The need being addressed by the access request proposal cannot be adequately satisfied by existing interchanges to the Interstate, and/or local roads and streets in the corridor can neither provide the desired access, nor can they be reasonably improved.*  
This discussion is included in the Purpose and Need Section of the Environmental Document (Type 2 Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment, and Environmental Impact Study) and Preliminary Engineering Report (PER).
2. *(2009 Policy point 2) The need being addressed by the request cannot be adequately satisfied by reasonable transportation system management alternatives.*  
This is discussed in the Alternatives section of the PER and summarized as appropriate in the Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Statement.
3. *(2009 Policy point 5) Evaluation of consistency with local and regional land use and transportation plans.*  
Consistency with local and regional transportation plans is included in the Planning Consistency Section of the Environmental Document.  
  
Detail evaluation of consistency with local and regional land use plan is included in the PER and summarized in the Social and Economic section of the Environmental Document.
4. *(2009 Policy point 6) A comprehensive corridor or network study was completed within the context of a longer-range system or network plan if the potential for future multiple interchange additions exist.*  
If required, this is addressed and documented in the traffic analysis report and also summarized in the Alternatives section of the PER.
5. *(2009 Policy point 7) Appropriate coordination has occurred between the development and any proposed transportation system improvements when the proposal is due to a new, expanded, or substantial change in current or planned future development or land use.*  
If required, this is addressed through public involvement process and the Efficient Transportation Decision Making process and summarized in the Alternatives and Previous Planning Studies sections of the PER.

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<sup>3</sup> 2009 FHWA Policy on Access to the Interstate System, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2009-08-27/html/E9-20679.htm>

6. *(2009 Policy point 8) The proposal can be expected to be included as an alternative in the required environmental evaluation, review and processing.*

This is contained in the Project Description section of the Environmental Document and Preliminary Engineering and is part of the alternatives analysis documented in the Alternatives section of the PER.

FDOT will use the process summarized in Attachment A to request final approval of IARs from FHWA. After the determination of SO&E acceptability is made, the Systems Management Administrator will submit a letter to FHWA requesting final approval of the IAR (see Exhibit 1) only after the Location and Design Concept Approval (LDCA) for the access proposal is granted (final approval of the NEPA Document) by the Office of Environmental Management (OEM) pursuant to Title 23 United States Code Section 327 and the implementing Memorandum of Understanding executed on December 14, 2016 by FDOT and FHWA. The State Interchange Review Coordinator will use **Table 1** to verify social, economic and environmental impacts and planning considerations were addressed and documented during the PD&E study. The Systems Management Administrator will attach **Table 1** to the FDOT's letter requesting FHWA final approval of the IAR.

#### **Type 1 Categorical Exclusion**

Type 1 Categorical Exclusion (CE) projects do not have a PD&E study. Based on the scope of Type 1 CE projects, access proposal for these projects do not involve significant social, economic and environmental impacts. Environmental review for these projects is completed by the District Environmental Office after signing the Type 1 CE Checklist, pursuant to Title 23 United States Code Section 327 and the implementing Memorandum of Understanding executed on December 14, 2016 by FDOT and FHWA. **Table 1** may not be needed because of the scope of Type 1 CE projects.

Final approval of the IAR for these projects may be requested after the approval of Type 1 CE Checklist. See Exhibit 2 for a sample FDOT letter to FHWA requesting final approval of the IAR proposal for these projects.

**Table 1. Verification of Environmental Review and Planning Considerations for the** Choose IAR type.

<b>Project Name:</b> Click or tap here to enter text. <b>FPID No.:</b> Click or tap here to enter text.			
2009 FHWA Policy		Addressed in the PD&E Study	
Policy #	Short Description <sup>4</sup>	Section	Document
Point 1	The need being addressed by the access request proposal cannot be adequately satisfied by existing interchanges to the Interstate, and/or local roads and streets in the corridor can neither provide the desired access, nor can they be reasonably improved.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Purpose and Need	Specify document
Point 2	The need being addressed by the request cannot be adequately satisfied by reasonable transportation system management.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alternatives	Specify document
Point 5	The proposal considers and is consistent with local and regional land use and transportation plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning Consistency <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Land use	Specify document
Point 6	For corridors where the potential exists for future multiple interchange additions, a comprehensive corridor or network study was completed within the context of a longer-range system or network plan.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Alternatives	Specify document
Point 7	If the proposal is due to a new, expanded, or substantial change in current or planned future development or land use, appropriate coordination has occurred between the development and any proposed transportation system improvements.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Land Use <input type="checkbox"/> Public Involvement <input type="checkbox"/> Alternatives	Specify document
Point 8	The proposal can be expected to be included as an alternative in the required environmental evaluation, review and processing.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project Description <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alternatives	Specify document

<sup>4</sup> For long description, visit <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2009-08-27/html/E9-20679.htm>



July 2018

**Exhibit 1. Letter to FHWA Requesting Final Approval of Interchange Access Request for Proposals with a PD&E Study**

<<<<Insert Letterhead>>

Date

Dear Mr. Finch,

This letter serves as notification that the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has completed the two (2) parts needed to obtain an affirmative determination by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) of safety, operational, and engineering (SO&E) acceptability for the Subject project. FDOT is submitting a request to formally approve a change in access to FHWA.

Project Name and Location: XXX

Interchange Access Request Type: IJR/IMR/IOAR

Regarding this Interchange Access Request, this letter signifies that the SO&E acceptability determination has been completed and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document has been approved. Social, economic and environmental impacts and planning considerations were addressed and documented during the PD&E study as shown in Table 1. The SO&E acceptability determination was completed on -date-. The Location Design Concept Acceptance (LDCA) for this project was granted by FDOT Office of Environmental Management on -date-, pursuant to Title 23 United States Code Section 327 and the implementing Memorandum of Understanding executed on December 14, 2016 by FDOT and FHWA.

FDOT has verified that the location design concept of the preferred alternative in the NEPA document matches the design concept of the accepted SO&E proposal.

FHWA's signature on this letter constitutes the affirmative determination of the SO&E and approval of this Interchange Access Request.

Sincerely,

Maria J. Overton, P.E.  
Systems Management Administrator

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Nick Finch, P.E.  
Associate Division Administrator, FHWA Florida Division

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Date



July 2018

**Exhibit 2. Letter to FHWA Requesting Final Approval of Interchange Access Request for Type 1  
Categorical Exclusion Proposals**

<<<<Insert Letterhead>>

Date

Dear Mr. Finch,

This letter serves as notification that the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has completed the two (2) parts needed to obtain an affirmative determination by Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) of safety, operational, and engineering (SO&E) acceptability for the Subject project. FDOT is submitting a request to formally approve a change in access to FHWA.

Project Name and Location: XXX

Interchange Access Request Type: IMR/IOAR

Regarding this Interchange Access Request, this letter signifies that the SO&E acceptability determination and the environmental review process have completed. The SO&E acceptability determination was completed on -date-. The project meets the criteria for Type 1 Categorical Exclusion (CE) and the requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (Title 40 Code of Federal Regulation Section 1508.4 and Title 23 Code of Federal Regulation Section 771.117(a)). The Type 1 CE Checklist was approved by FDOT on -date-, pursuant to Title 23 United States Code Section 327 and the implementing Memorandum of Understanding executed on December 14, 2016 by FDOT and FHWA.

FDOT has verified that the location design concept evaluated in the Type 1 CE Checklist matches the design concept of the accepted SO&E proposal.

FHWA's signature on this letter constitutes the affirmative determination of the SO&E and approval of this Interchange Access Request.

Sincerely,

Maria J. Overton, P.E.  
Systems Management Administrator

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Nick Finch, P.E.  
Associate Division Administrator, FHWA Florida Division

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Date



July 2018

## **APPENDIX A**

### Environmental Review and Final Approval of Interchange Access Requests

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