PART 2, CHAPTER 5

AESTHETIC EFFECTS

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5.1 OVERVIEW

5.1.1 Purpose

FDOT considers Aesthetic Effects (AE) during project development because it influences community cohesion, community values, and can affect the travel experience. Transportation actions can affect communities and influence aesthetic qualities. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) ***Landscape, Policy No. 000-650-011*** was created to conserve, protect, and enhance Florida's natural resources and scenic beauty when planning, constructing, and maintaining the State Transportation System. FDOT identifies practical and feasible opportunities to improve project aesthetics during project delivery. AE are considered a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) topic; however, this chapter provides more detailed guidance on the AE analysis than in ***Part 2, Chapter 4, Community Impact Assessment***.

This chapter contains FDOT's procedures for evaluating AE during Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process and the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) phase. The chapter also includes special considerations for Outdoor Advertising (ODA) and scenic highways. AE can be either positive or negative and should be evaluated based on the existing and proposed context of the project area. The aesthetic qualities of a community or area are defined by a combination of visual resources and other qualities that define the character of that community. The evaluation of AE should address the community's aesthetic ideals while producing an affordable, biddable, constructible, and maintainable design.

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

1. Developing transportation facilities that are compatible with the surrounding natural and/or man-made environment;

2. Balancing transportation design concepts with the community vision;

3. Selecting appropriate design approaches, materials, forms, styles, scale, color, pattern and texture; and

4. Accommodating existing and proposed landscapes.

5.2 PROCEDURE

The evaluation of AE begins in the Planning phase with data collected as part of the ETDM process. The evaluation continues through the PD&E process and into the Design and Construction phases (***Figure 5-1***).

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

1. Identify current aesthetic resources (e.g., Florida Scenic Highways, other special roadway designations, existing forested areas, wildflower areas, trees, landscape, community features, stormwater ponds and drainage features, bridge structures and other architectural features);

2. Analyze and categorize the aesthetic resources that could be affected;

3. Assess the value of the aesthetic resources to the community or study area;

4. Assess potential impacts; and,

5. Identify potential avoidance, minimization, mitigation and enhancement measures.

Typical considerations for an AE evaluation are summarized in ***Table 5-1***.

Table 5-1 Typical Aesthetic Effects Considerations

CHARACTER	Used to understand the aesthetic resources unique to the studied community and its environment(s). Each of the following may be identified and described before any value and/or impact assessments begin: adjoining architectural styles; adjoining land uses; available transportation modes; corridor width and alignment; context classification; level of (historical) maintenance; lighting; common materials; visual rhythms, patterns, forms, lines, colors and textures; vegetation; and vehicle speed; sounds; odors; and vibrations.
COMPATIBILITY	These base considerations may be evaluated in the land use context proposed: access; community cohesiveness; existing design characteristics; existing outdoor advertising signs; planned growth and land use patterns; sense of ownership /public boundaries; traffic patterns/congestion; design compatibility with community setting; and color and materials coordination (with evident patterns).
COMMUNITY VALUES	To utilize in understanding how the transportation project can contribute to public perceptions and will inform the determination of the intensity of potential AE impact. May include the following: community goals; cultural significance; gateways and focal points; local plan consistency; open space; quality of life; safety; and special community designations such as scenic highways.
SENSITIVE AREAS	Many of these contribute subtly to a community's identity and may need to be considered in the broader Community Values context (level of sensitivity to each): areas of recognized beauty; bicycle routes; commercial centers; historic or other culturally-important resources; parks and recreation areas; pedestrian facilities; public facilities (hospitals, colleges, universities); public parking areas (and access to them); residential areas; specific historic or cultural features; transit facilities; and specially designated water bodies.
VISUAL FEATURES	These are usually rated as very important and highly valuable by communities. They should be considered in the context of potential for both short- and long-term impacts of the project. They may include: scenic spaces (views and vistas); tree cover; natural shade/shadow patterns; vegetation and screening; water bodies; light features and evident lighting levels; other natural green spaces; recognized safety features; visual clutter (if present); and simplicity and attractiveness of signage.

5.2.1 Efficient Transportation Decision Making Screening Evaluations

Projects qualifying for screening through the ETDM process receive early consideration of AE during the CIA (***Part 2, Chapter 4, Community Impact Assessment***). The results of the CIA conducted during the ETDM Planning and Programming Screens provide descriptions of the existing visual resources, experiences and features that could be affected (both positively or negatively) by the proposed transportation project, including forested areas, wildflower areas, trees, landscaping and other aesthetic features. The evaluation should include input provided by the public, local planning organizations, and the Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT). The AE evaluation builds upon information gathered during the CIA and is used to determine the level of effort necessary to adequately address aesthetic issues during the PD&E Study. The level of effort and expertise required are dependent upon the context, complexity and scope of the project and its potential for effects.

Generally, evaluating AE during ETDM includes describing the following information in the Preliminary Environmental Discussion (PED):

1. Planning Screen Evaluation – When conducted includes, identification of existing visual resources and features that could be affected or improved by the proposed transportation project, including forested areas, wildflower areas, trees, landscaping, scenic views, and other aesthetic features and the identification of issues related to aesthetics.

2. Programming Screen Evaluation - provides commentary about effects, summarize scoping recommendations, and identify public concerns to further understand the extent of potential aesthetic impacts and to determine methods for further evaluation during the PD&E phase.

5.2.2 Project Development & Environment

The AE evaluation during the PD&E phase builds upon previous planning and programming screening information by filling information gaps, analyzing issues of concern identified in ETDM, gathering public or community input, and completing the appropriate level of analysis.

5.2.2.1 Aesthetics Effects Evaluation

The AE evaluation should be tailored to the context, scope, complexity and public comments associated with the project. The ***Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects*** may be used for methods to determine the level of AE evaluation. The typical AE considerations presented in ***Table 5-1*** should be considered during each step of the AE evaluation. If the Project Manager (PM) determines the evaluation completed during ETDM screening efforts is sufficient to address aesthetic issues, then effects should be summarized in the Environmental Document and include evaluation in the project file within the StateWide Environmental Project Tracker (SWEPT).

PD&E projects that require AE evaluation should:

Describe Existing Conditions - The study area will vary depending on the project context, resources involved, visual effects, and potential project impacts. Once the study area has been defined, the existing aesthetic characteristics, such as existing forested areas, wildflower areas, trees, special highway designations and landscape, are described.

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

Evaluate Effects - This evaluation should identify the effects a project may have on the visual resources and qualitative physical characteristics of a study area.

Using the typical AE considerations in ***Table 5-1***, the positive and negative effects of the project on the study area's aesthetic resources are assessed. The interrelationship of effects varies with the type of transportation action and the affected community. Coordination takes place with appropriate program specialists (e.g., cultural resources, landscape architecture, scenic highways, water quality, noise) to determine how the project affects these areas from an aesthetic perspective. The effects are described with sufficient information to determine their magnitude. If there are multiple alternatives, sufficient information may be needed to differentiate between them (including the no-build alternative) when possible.

Determine Impacts - Based on knowledge of the affected area and the impact analysis, it is determined if the perceived AE is significant. Significance of the impact will vary with the setting of the proposed action and the surrounding area. To determine significance, the severity of the aesthetic impact is examined in terms of the type, quality and sensitivity of the aesthetic resource involved; the location of the proposed project; the duration of the impact (short or long term); and the community's value of the aesthetic resource. The determination of impacts is documented in the Environmental Document.

Recommend Measures to Resolve AE Issues - As a project moves through the PD&E process and AE are identified, potential solutions are considered to address effects or enhance the aesthetics of the proposed transportation project. In keeping with FDOT's ***Complete Streets, Policy No. 000-625-017***; consideration of solutions that would make the project fit the needs of the community may be warranted. Both standard and unique aesthetic enhancements should be considered based on community input. Coordination is needed with other internal offices to determine if a potential solution is feasible. There may be engineering, financial and maintenance reasons that make a potential solution not feasible.

Methods for resolving negative aesthetic effects associated with a transportation project can include **avoidance, minimization, mitigation,** and **enhancement measures**. Measures should consider short-term effects (during construction), and long-term effects as appropriate. The effects of these measures on the community are considered and it is determined whether the approach supports the project's purpose and need. The public is given the opportunity to provide input on measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse AE, or measures to enhance aesthetics through the public involvement process (***Part 1, Chapter 11, Public Involvement***).

Application of aesthetic enhancements that are to be considered on structural elements, such as bridges and noise or retaining walls, should reflect documented community desires. Possible options for a project should be identified, and evaluated for safety, constructability, maintainability and costs. Project enhancements may need to be funded and maintained by local government agencies.

Aesthetic features should avoid conflicts with permitted ODA. See ***Section 5.2.3*** for more information on outdoor advertising.

5.2.2.2 Commitments

Prior to finalizing any aesthetic commitments, the PM must coordinate with the District Design, Construction, Maintenance and other offices as appropriate, to ensure that FDOT standards are considered and that proposed commitments are feasible. Some aesthetic enhancements may require a local agreement before such commitments can be made. AE commitments are documented and tracked according to ***Part 2, Chapter 22, Commitments*** and ***Procedure No. 650-000-003, Project Commitment Tracking***.

5.2.2.3 Documentation

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

1. **Type 2 Categorical Exclusions (CE)** - The AE evaluation should be a brief summary documented in the ***Type 2 Categorical Exclusion Determination Form***. The AE summary should present the impact analysis and recommend avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement measures. Additional supporting information should be included in the SWEPT project file, if applicable. It is recommended that these documents be placed within the Aesthetic Effects folder in SWEPT.

2. **Environmental Assessments (EA) and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)** - The AE evaluation is summarized in the AE section of the EA or EIS. The AE summary should present the impact analysis and recommend avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement measures.

3. **State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR)** - The results of the AE evaluation are summarized in the SEIR. The AE summary should present the impact analysis and recommend avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement measures.

5.2.2.4 Re-evaluation

If major design changes have taken place since approval of the Environmental Document, the Re-evaluation must assess changes to AE per ***Part 1, Chapter 13, Re-evaluations***. Changes in AE will need to be documented and may need to be coordinated with other internal offices and the community.

5.2.3 Outdoor Advertising

ODA regulations are found in ***Chapter 479, Florida Statutes (F.S.)***, and in ***Chapter 14-10, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.)***. When there are existing permitted ODA signs, the ODA permit status and the (ODA) view zones should be reviewed as early as possible during project development. The District should coordinate with FDOT's Outdoor Advertising Office (OAO), as appropriate, as issues with the anticipated blocking of the view of or impacts to ODA signs are identified. Consideration of the view of or impacts to

ODA signs being affected by the proposed project should be carried throughout project delivery as summarized below:

1. **ETDM Screenings** – During the screening process, current permitted sign locations can be identified utilizing the EST or the Outdoor Advertising Database on FDOT's ***Outdoor Advertising Website*** and confirmed by contacting the OAO as needed. The District should begin to consider how the view or disposition of the permitted sign could be affected by the proposed project. Consider for example, whether a sign is conforming or non-conforming (coordinate with OAO). Also note if any community preferences have been identified regarding the role of ODA in the proposed project.

2. **PD&E –** During PD&E, the presence of existing signs and their permit status is identified or confirmed. It is determined how each sign and/or its view zone is affected by the proposed project. Coordination with OAO, and the District Right of Way (ROW) Office is continued as appropriate.

3. **Re-evaluation –** The District should initiate or continue coordination with OAO to identify or confirm existing signs and their permit status along with the status of any plans for proposed signs. The District should also update any pertinent signage related commitments as appropriate and advise the PD&E staff of any changes. Design plans are reviewed considering view zones (see ***FDOT Design Manual, Part 1 Chapter 127, Topic No. 625-000-002***).

5.2.4 Florida Scenic Highways and Other Specially Designated Highways

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

The intent of the Florida Scenic Highways Program (FSHP) is to protect and to promote awareness of community resources that are valued by Florida's residents and tourists. These can include scenic, natural, historic, cultural, recreational and archaeological resources in accordance with the ***Current Florida Scenic Highways Program Guidance*** and FDOT ***Procedure No. 650-050-005, Florida Scenic Highways Program***.

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

When practical and feasible, opportunities to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to the documented resources on scenic highways are identified. Accommodation of scenic resources on a designated highway within the limits of a project may require the application of flexibility in highway design through use of appropriate Design Exceptions

and Design Variations. Each Florida Scenic Highway is associated with a Byway Organization and a Byway Management Plan (BMP). The concept of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) allows for collaboration with the Byway Organization and other corridor stakeholders and should be considered during the development of projects.

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

1. **ETDM Screenings –** The District Scenic Highways Coordinator (DSHC) is contacted for identification of designated Florida Scenic Highways. The District should also review the ***FDOT Legislatively Designated Scenic & Historic Highways Report*** which identifies many of the scenic and historic highways and provides limitations on altering these highways. The guidance in ***Part 2, Chapter 8, Archaeological and Historical Resources*** is used to evaluate historic highways designated by special legislation. The presence of locally designated scenic or historic highways should be coordinated with the local authorities.

2. **PD&E Evaluation –** Results from the ETDM screenings used to determine whether the proposed project would impact these resources is confirmed. Additionally, coordination occurs with the DSHC to become familiar with the regulations and BMP for a designated scenic or historic highway. Coordination with the DSHC and District Environmental Manager occurs to evaluate the regulations and potential impact of the project on the designated corridor.

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

   If the project impacts the resources of a scenic highway, the byway organization and the public can provide additional input to identify ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse impacts or identify aesthetic enhancements during the public involvement process (***Part 1, Chapter 11, Public Involvement***). The Byway Organization's vision, goals and objectives as outlined in the BMP may be considered to collaboratively identify, preserve, maintain, or enhance the intrinsic qualities or resources while maintaining safety and mobility. Commitments are documented and tracked in accordance with ***Part 2, Chapter 22, Commitments*** and ***Procedure No. 650-000-003, Project Commitment Tracking***.

3. **Re-evaluation –** Collaboration occurs with the DSHC or District Environmental Manager to reconfirm/identify the presence of designated Florida Scenic Highways or other specially designated highways within the project boundaries. For Florida

Scenic Highways, coordination continues with the Byway Organization through the DSHC and updates on project status and AE commitments are provided.

5.3 REFERENCES

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

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FDOT, Landscape Policy No. 000-650-011

FDOT, Project Commitment Tracking, Topic No. 650-000-003

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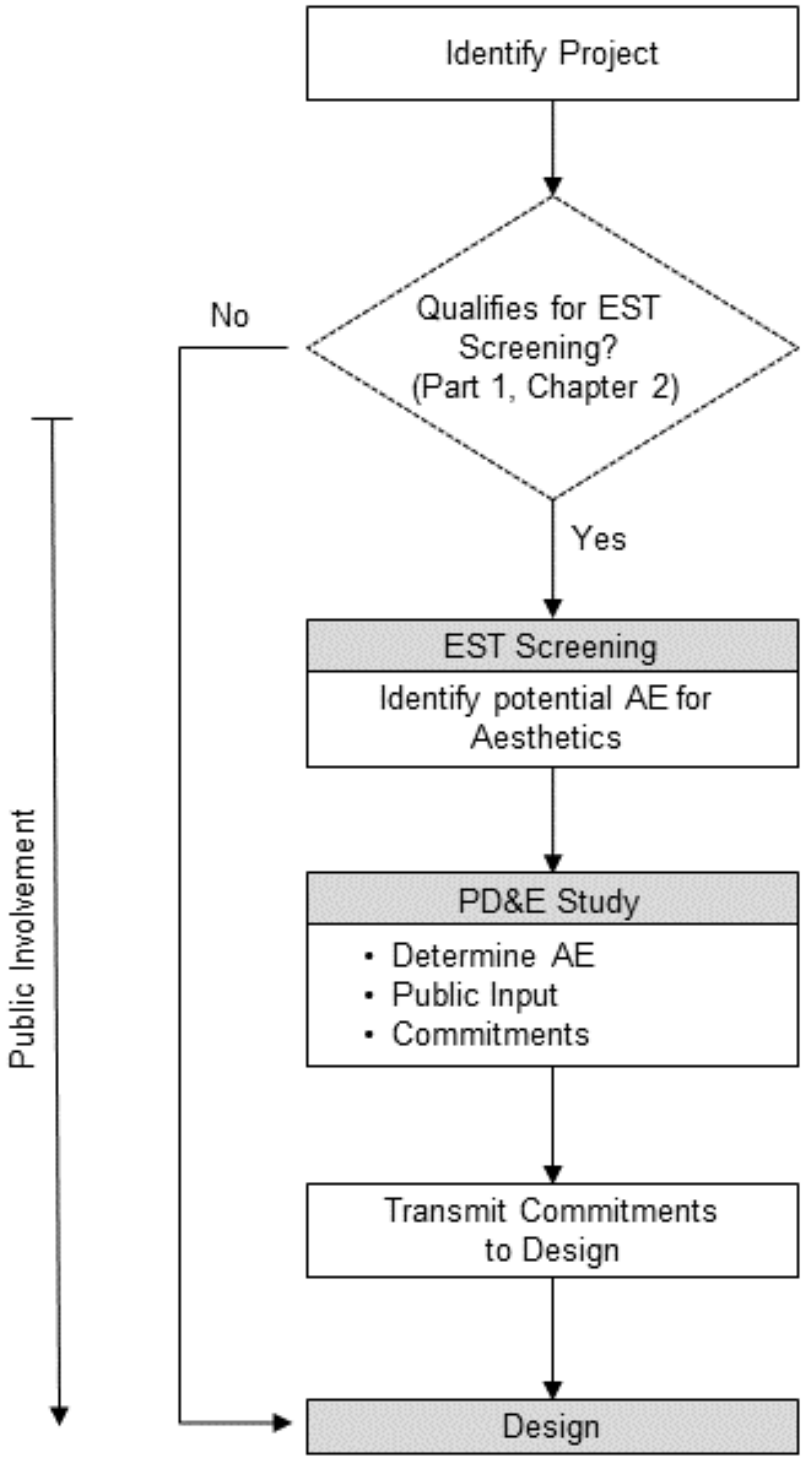

Figure 5-1 Aesthetic Effects Process Flow Chart