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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

The planning phase of project development involves integration and collaboration between statewide and metropolitan transportation planning processes and any project planning decisions, activities, or studies conducted to support future project development. The project planning process begins when transportation agencies identify needs or potential projects that could meet those needs.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Project Planning Manual (the Manual) promotes efficiency and consistency for the project development of transportation projects across the state by establishing clear guidance for the project planning phase. Its purpose is to provide an overview of the requirements that must be followed during project planning activities to ensure planning products and decisions can be used as a basis for subsequent project phases, including Project Development and Environment (PD&E) and Design, thereby streamlining overall project delivery. The Manual builds on regulatory requirements and outlines FDOT policies, key principles, best practices, and targeted outcomes for planning products and decisions.

This Manual serves as a reference for all transportation professionals involved in the project planning process. The Manual is organized as follows:

- ◆ **Chapter 1** – Describes the purpose of this manual and gives an overview of project planning.
- ◆ **Chapter 2** – Discusses the project planning process and considerations for determining if a project planning study is needed.
- ◆ **Chapter 3** – Details how to define the transportation problem and develop the project purpose and need.
- ◆ **Chapter 4** – Details how to develop and evaluate potential improvements.
- ◆ **Chapter 5** – Describes the documentation to include in project planning studies and linking the project planning study recommendations to the project programming process.

### 1.1.1 Applicability

The Manual is primarily intended for projects referred to as “qualifying projects” in FDOT’s [Efficient Transportation Decision Making \(ETDM\) Manual Chapter 2](#) and [PD&E Manual Part 1, Chapter 2](#) that require ETDM screening and may advance to a PD&E Study. Qualifying projects include select roadway projects, such as new or expanded highways, interchanges, and bridges, that add capacity or provide new access, and major public transportation projects. However, it is important to note that this guidance is primarily intended for roadway and bridge projects and may not be directly applicable to transit, rail, airport, seaport, and spaceport projects. These project types follow separate environmental review processes and involve different lead agencies, regulatory requirements, and review frameworks.

**FDOT's Transit Corridor and Project Evaluation Guidance** provides information on the planning process for transit projects. This Manual is intended to complement project planning practices developed by FDOT Districts and preserve each District's independent decision-making flexibility.

While “qualifying projects” are the focus, the Manual is built on planning best practices and therefore, the guidance within it is beneficial for all types of planning studies and planning-level analyses. This includes activities such as existing conditions analyses, safety audits, needs assessments, and any planning activities that may inform or support projects not requiring a PD&E Study. Applying the principles and best practices outlined in this Manual to these early or supporting analyses can help improve consistency, documentation quality, and subsequently the ability to efficiently carry the project through the project development phases to implementation.

### ***1.1.2 Relationship to Other Policies***

A key goal of the Manual is to support **FDOT's Project Development Policy (Document No.: 000-525-055)**, which establishes that:

- ◆ FDOT will program and fund preliminary engineering, PD&E, and Design phases of transportation projects with the requirement that project funding is available and programmed for construction within eight years from the start of the PD&E phase.
- ◆ PD&E studies for new alignment projects and capacity improvement projects must be completed to the maximum extent possible within 18 months after the date of commencement (**Section 334.63, Florida Statutes**).

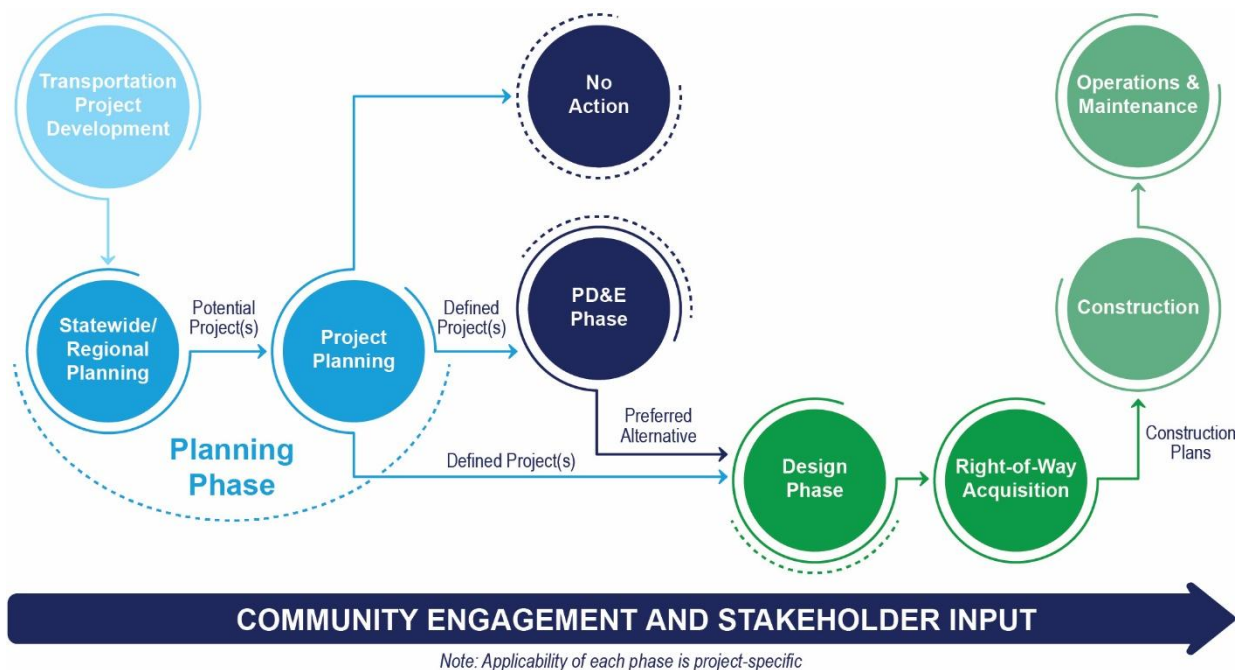
The Manual also reinforces Federal and State Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) guidance which promotes stronger connections between the planning phase and subsequent National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) environmental reviews. Both the Manual and PEL guidance serve to streamline project delivery, improve decision-making, and reduce duplication of effort by carrying forward relevant planning information into the environmental review process where appropriate.

## 1.2 FDOT Project Development Life Cycle

The Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) project development process is a structured, multi-phase approach used by FDOT and its partners to identify transportation needs and advance projects from initial concepts to construction. As shown in [Figure 1.2.1](#), the process moves sequentially through Planning, Project Development and Environment (PD&E), Design, Right-of-Way, Construction, and Operations and Maintenance, with decisions at each phase informing how the project advances.

This process may vary depending on the scale and complexity of a project. Each phase may not be required for all project types, or the phases may be overlapped or streamlined based on the nature of the project. Minor projects, such as resurfacing, safety improvements, or operational enhancements, may advance quickly because they involve limited environmental impacts, minimal design complexity, and no right-of-way acquisition. In contrast, larger or more complex projects, such as new roadway corridors, major widenings, or interchange reconstructions, typically require more extensive planning studies, consideration of multiple alternatives, and development of PD&E studies to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when applicable.

**Figure 1.2.1 Project Development Process**



## 1.2.1 Planning Phase

The Planning phase identifies and prioritizes transportation needs based on existing and future conditions and establishes the policy framework for investment decisions. This phase integrates statewide, regional, and metropolitan planning efforts to define problems, set goals, and identify potential projects. Once a project has been identified and prioritized, project planning activities help refine the project's purpose and need, consider preliminary alternatives, and position projects for advancement to subsequent phases of project development.

### 1.2.1.1 Statewide and Regional Planning

Project planning activities are often initiated after a potential project has been identified as part of statewide and regional transportation planning efforts. In urban areas with populations of 50,000 or more, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) develop Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) that identify regional transportation needs and project priorities to address those needs. FDOT collaborates with MPOs to fund their highest-priority projects through inclusion in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). In non-metropolitan areas outside MPOs, FDOT works directly with local governments to understand and document their transportation needs.

FDOT also uses various statewide transportation planning efforts to identify long-range transportation needs and near-term prioritized projects that may require further evaluation through project planning. FDOT documents statewide long-range transportation planning efforts in the Florida Transportation Plan (FTP), the state's single overarching plan guiding Florida's future transportation vision, goals, and objectives. FDOT also develops statewide plans for various modes, such as seaports, public transportation, aviation, and rail.

### 1.2.1.2 Project Planning

Project planning serves as the connection between an identified transportation problem and project implementation by building on the priorities established by statewide, metropolitan, and other planning processes. However, while many projects originate from MPOs, local governments, or statewide plans, others may be advanced by FDOT based on observed safety needs or traffic operations studies. In all cases, project planning seeks to move specific projects toward delivery by translating broad transportation goals into a project-specific framework that sets the stage for subsequent phases of project development.

Project planning studies are initiated to better define and create a stronger linkage to the components of future phases, including the PD&E phase. Project planning activities may involve refining the project's purpose and need, analyzing community and environmental data, developing and evaluating preliminary alternatives and associated cost estimates, and conducting outreach and engagement with affected communities, key stakeholders, and partner agencies. To streamline future project development, project

planning may also include technical studies that assess high-level feasibility, define project scope and priorities, and reduce risks in later phases. By evaluating transportation corridors, facilities, and services within their physical, environmental, and community contexts, project planning efforts help produce a defined transportation project with sufficient clarity to advance into the PD&E phase. More information on project planning studies and activities can be found in [Section 2.2: Types of Project Planning Activities](#).

Although this Manual is focused on the FDOT project development process, it can also be used by partner agencies, such as Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), city and county governments, expressway authorities, and other entities, to conduct project planning activities that align with FDOT's project development framework. The guidance in this Manual can assist partner agencies in structuring their own planning studies to better define purpose and need, evaluate preliminary alternatives, consider environmental and community context, and document decisions in a manner that facilitates coordination with FDOT and smooth transition into later project development phases. By promoting a shared understanding of expectations, terminology, and level of detail, this Manual helps improve consistency and alignment between locally led planning efforts and FDOT led project development.

### 1.2.2 Project Development and Environment Phase

The PD&E phase evaluates project alternatives for potential community and environmental impacts to comply with federal and state requirements, including NEPA. During this phase, FDOT refines the project's purpose and need, develops and evaluates alternatives, conducts technical and environmental studies, and engages agencies and the public to identify a preferred alternative. Cost estimates are also updated and refined based on the preferred alternative. The PD&E phase concludes with environmental approval which documents the selected alternative and establishes the project's location, conceptual design, and commitments for future phases.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to assess the environmental impacts of qualifying projects, including highway construction. For more information, refer to [Section 1.4.3 NEPA Framework](#).

### 1.2.3 Design Phase

The Design phase translates the approved project alternative into detailed engineering plans, specifications, and cost estimates needed for construction. This phase includes finalizing roadway geometry, drainage, structures, utilities, and other design elements, as well as obtaining required permits and coordinating with right-of-way acquisition where necessary. For certain types of projects, environmental review may be conducted concurrently with design, allowing projects to move more efficiently toward construction.

### ***1.2.4 Right of Way Phase***

The Right of Way phase involves acquiring property interests necessary to construct the project, including full or partial property acquisitions, easements, or relocations. This phase follows established federal and state procedures to ensure fair compensation and to protect property owner rights. Right of Way phase activities may occur concurrently with the Design phase and are not required for projects that can be constructed entirely within existing public right of way.

### ***1.2.5 Construction Phase***

The Construction phase is when the transportation improvement is built in accordance with approved plans and specifications. FDOT oversees construction activities to ensure compliance with design standards, environmental commitments, and contract requirements while minimizing impacts to the traveling public. Upon completion, the project transitions to ongoing operations and maintenance, completing the project development process.

### ***1.2.6 Operations and Maintenance Phase***

The Operations and Maintenance phase begins once a project is constructed and continues throughout the life of the facility. During this phase, FDOT and/or partner agencies are responsible for operating, monitoring, and maintaining transportation infrastructure to ensure safety, mobility, and asset preservation. Activities include, but are not limited to, routine maintenance of pavement, signage, striping, roadway markings, sidewalks, shared-use paths, and roadsides; inspection and maintenance of bridges, culverts, and other structures; and emergency response during storm events and traffic incidents.

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## **1.3 Benefits of Conducting Project Planning Studies**

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## **1.4 Relevant Regulations and Policies**

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