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Chapter 2 - Project Planning Process

This chapter identifies the decision-making process used to consider if a project planning study or project planning activities should be conducted prior to the subsequent project development phase. This chapter also outlines considerations for the timing of a project planning study, examples of types of project planning activities and studies, and concludes with the minimum requirements for linking project planning activities to the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) phase.

2.1 Determining the Need for Project Planning

As the first step in project development, project planning activities are initiated to **understand and document** transportation needs, **define** the transportation project to support prioritization and work programming, and **advance** the process for subsequent project development steps. Transportation projects are initially identified as a need or problem derived from a variety of sources including the statewide, metropolitan, and regional planning processes, comprehensive planning efforts, stakeholder input, or Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District offices (e.g., Operations). Long-range transportation planning efforts typically confirm that a transportation problem exists and there is an initial understanding of the need.

FDOT Districts collaborate with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and local governments through established metropolitan and statewide planning processes to identify candidate projects that may warrant a project planning study. Project planning is typically conducted after a potential project is identified as part of these long-range transportation planning efforts.

Project planning typically occurs after statewide or metropolitan planning efforts have identified a potential project with a general project location and a transportation problem or need to address.

Project planning is typically initiated to better define a transportation project prior to Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) screening and the detailed PD&E Study and may involve various planning activities such as data collection, needs assessment, development and evaluation of potential improvements, feasibility analysis, identification of implementation strategies, and community engagement. Project planning activities also **support the identification of prioritized, cost-feasible improvements**.

2.1.1 Project Planning Objectives

Project planning activities involve a high-level conceptual analysis of a potential project aimed at determining if a project:

1. Solves a transportation problem,
2. Is locally supported (both in local transportation plans and by the community),
3. Has a feasible funding opportunity (i.e., within eight years), and
4. Is environmentally feasible.

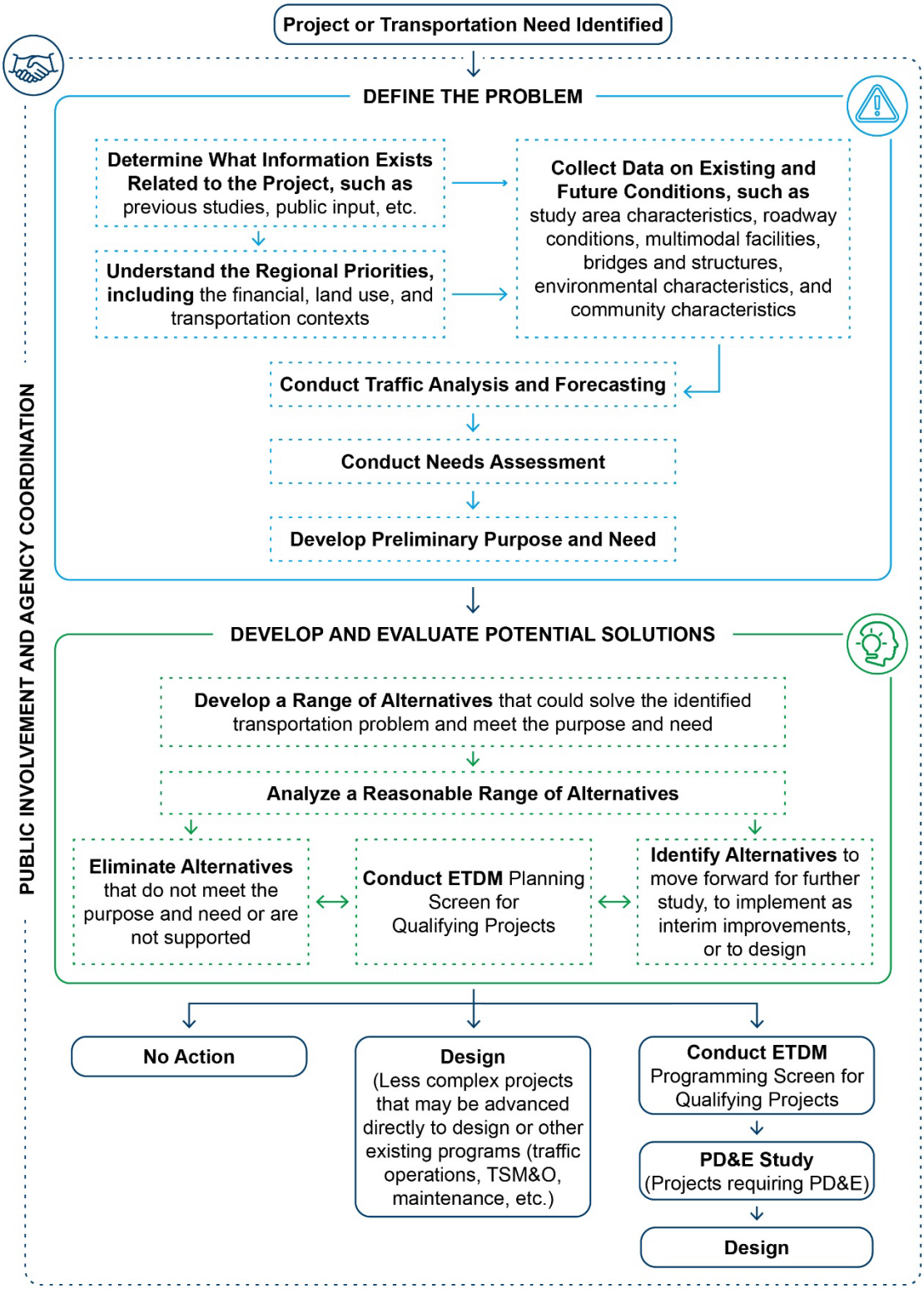
Project planning studies are often desired **to better understand the transportation demand, operational constraints, safety needs, and other deficiencies**. One example of where project planning can lead to a more clearly defined project is when a corridor is initially identified as needing widening to address future capacity. A project planning study can be initiated to confirm the need through data collection, analysis and stakeholder and community input, and to determine the severity of the need. The result of the analysis may find that the need can be met by providing minor improvements, such as intersection improvements or Transportation System Management and Operations (TSM&O) strategies rather than widening. **Project planning can also support the identification of interim or phased improvements** (i.e., segmentation) that are financially feasible. The overall project planning process is shown on ***Figure 2.1 Project Planning Process***. Each step of the process is further defined in **Chapter 3: Defining the Problem** (pending) and **Chapter 4: Developing and Evaluating Potential Improvements** (pending).

Project planning activities provide a **linkage** between the long-range transportation **planning** process and the more detailed engineering and **environmental review process** conducted during the PD&E or Design phase. When a project planning study is developed in accordance with the Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) requirements, further defined in **Section 2.3: Incorporating Planning into PD&E**, its planning-level decisions and analyses may be carried forward into the PD&E phase.

Environmental Review Process

FDOT's PD&E Manual defines "environmental review process" as the process of preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Environmental Assessment (EA), Categorical Exclusion (CE), or other document prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the process of permitting a project under any state or federal law other than NEPA.

Figure 2.1 Project Planning Process



A separate project planning study or phase is not a requirement but can be an effective tool to streamline overall project development and maximize efficiencies in fiscal responsibility for work programming. The outcome of project planning is the identification of defined project(s) that can proceed to the next phase of project development. Generally, a project planning study should be conducted if the planning activities will:

- Provide a better understanding and definition of the problem and needs of a corridor, as well as potential range of solutions, through data, analysis, and community engagement;
- Determine that the project is feasible prior to PD&E or Design phases;
- Maximize efficiencies between project planning and future project development activities while avoiding duplication of scope; and
- Meet the regulatory requirements for linking planning to the environmental review process.

FDOT prioritizes project planning studies based on factors such as:

- **Documented safety needs**
- **Projects included on the MPO's priority list**
- **Requests and input from external partners (local agencies, MPOs, etc.)**
- **Feasibility assessment needed prior to next phase**
- **Alternatives analysis during planning could reduce timeframe of future phases**
- **Available funds for planning phase**
- **Timeframe in which transportation improvements may be required**
- **Anticipated schedule for the next phase**
- **Evaluation of financial feasibility for future project development and implementation**

Project planning decision-making should take into account the type of planning activities needed to better define the project, if the project planning study will be incorporated into the PD&E phase, and the timing of the project planning study in relation to future phases of the project development (PD&E or design). The following sections provide more details on these topics.

2.2 Types of Project Planning Activities

2.2.1 Range of Planning Activities

There is a wide range of project planning activities, varying in scale and complexity, that occur at the outset and throughout the project development process of all transportation projects.

These activities are tailored to a project's context and needs, but all planning activities share a common purpose: to answer key questions that allow practitioners to advance a project to the next phase of implementation, or to determine that a project should not move forward. In general, planning activities are intended to address the following fundamental questions:

Examples of various project planning studies include:

- *Visioning plans*
- *Corridor studies or action plans*
- *Concept reports*
- *Feasibility assessments or studies*
- *Safety plans*
- *Mode-specific planning studies (ex. bicycle/ pedestrian and transit)*
- *Specific technical reports such as traffic, speed management, or access management studies*

1. What is the transportation problem?
2. Is there sufficient data and community concurrence to support this problem?
3. What potential solutions could address the problem?
4. How should a solution be advanced to implementation?

This manual focuses on *project* planning, which comprises planning activities that answer these questions for "qualifying projects" as identified in the **ETDM Manual** (see **Section 1.1.1: Applicability**). For projects considered less complex than "qualifying projects," those typically advanced through programmatic processes such as maintenance, resurfacing, safety audits, traffic operations "push button" projects; similar planning questions are addressed during a planning step, prior to concept or final design. While planning activities for these less complex projects may be more streamlined, the same principles and best practices apply, and responses to the questions above form the foundation of transportation project development.

2.2.2 Types of Activities within Project Planning

Project planning studies are not a one-size fits all solution, rather they must be considered within the framework of project-specific objectives. Before scoping project planning, practitioners should identify the primary objectives based on available information from prior planning efforts and input from

project stakeholders. While the majority of project planning studies are prepared by FDOT Districts, they may also be conducted by MPOs, expressway authorities, local governments, or private developers.

In project planning studies, the same planning questions are asked, but with a stronger **focus on evaluating project feasibility, seeking information to streamline the PD&E process, and potentially resolving issues identified at this stage**. These targeted questions include:

- What is the purpose of the project?
- Why is the project needed?
- What is the project?
- Is the project supported by the community and stakeholders?
- What improvements might be included in the project?
- What is the range of alternatives, or alternative mode(s), that could meet the purpose and need?
- What concepts might address the purpose and need?
- What are the anticipated funding needs through construction?

Project planning can also advance decisions that can be incorporated by reference into a PD&E Study, such as existing and future conditions analyses, the purpose and need, and/or the comparative evaluation and elimination of alternatives.

Project planning activities for adoption into the PD&E phase can involve either a comprehensive planning study or a more limited, context-specific effort (such as mode selection). A best practice is to identify the critical path, project-specific risks and benefits that could refine the future PD&E scope, schedule, budget, or controversy potential and focus the project planning scope efforts on those critical tasks that will best advance project development efficiently.

As shown in ***Table 2.1***, project planning activities can be generalized into several categories based on the study purpose. Transportation agencies determine whether a project planning study is needed to support programming or create efficiencies for project development.

Project planning activities can be conducted as a stand-alone effort to answer specific questions about a project or included as a part of the overall project planning study.

Table 2.1 Types of Project Planning Activities

Component	Purpose of Planning Component
Existing and Future Conditions Analysis	Get an understanding of existing and future traffic operations and transportation, land use, and environmental contexts.
Needs Assessment	Develop or refine the initial purpose and need.
Corridor Vision Plans	Determine corridor vision and potential strategies for addressing the purpose and need.
Concept or Alternatives Development	Identify a reasonable range of alternatives to meet the purpose and need.
Corridor or Feasibility Analysis	Evaluate the engineering, environmental, local support, or financial viability of a proposed project. This analysis examines the transportation needs, potential transportation improvements to meet those needs, and provides cost estimates and benefits to inform whether the project should advance to the PD&E phase. Considers feasibility (engineering, environmental, economic and controversy potential).
Alternatives Evaluation	Conduct planning-level alternatives evaluation (including purpose and need compatibility, engineering feasibility, environmental considerations, public input, and cost) to narrow the range of alternatives for PD&E phase by eliminating any alternative(s) and identifying the alternative(s) recommended for further evaluation in PD&E.
Scoping Reports or Checklists	Planning assessment to identify PD&E or design scoping activities. These reports and checklists typically screen if planning activities such as existing and future conditions, needs assessment, and concept development have been completed.
Transit Corridor and Project Evaluation (TCPE)	For major transit fixed guideway capital investment projects, this study assesses project readiness prior to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Project Development (PD) phase and identifies actions needed before a project is ready to enter PD.

2.3 Incorporating Planning into Project Development and Environment (PD&E)

This section of the Manual outlines the minimum requirements that must be documented as part of any project planning study intended to be adopted for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (**42 USC 4321 et. seq.** (*Congressional Declaration of Purpose*)) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) implementing regulations for NEPA in **23 CFR 771** (*Environmental Impact and Related Procedures*). **23 USC 168** (*Integration of Planning and Environmental Revie*w) provides the regulatory framework for the integration of planning and the environmental review process, relating to any NEPA Class of Action, which is often termed "linking planning and NEPA." The requirements discussed within this section are applicable to projects that are either federally funded by the FHWA or involve a federal action through FHWA that will require NEPA compliance (see FDOT's **NEPA Assignment webpage**). FDOT also conducts PD&E studies for "qualifying projects" that are state-funded and prepares a State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR). The guidance provided in this section can also be used for planning studies that will lead to a SEIR.

The information provided also integrates guidance from **FDOT's ETDM process**, **FDOT's PD&E Manual**, **FHWA PEL guidance**, and other resources aimed to better integrate the Planning and NEPA phases of a project. This section of the manual does not address additional specific project delivery requirements for transit projects which are further documented in both the **PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 14, Transit Project Delivery** and **FDOT's Transit Development Plan Handbook.**

PEL uses information, analyses, and products from transportation planning to inform the NEPA environmental review process.

FDOT's Office of Environmental Management (OEM) has developed a companion resource entitled *Best Practices Guidance for Linking Planning and Environmental Review* (pending) which documents guidance and best practices for planning products to be adopted or incorporated by reference into the environmental review process, as part of a PD&E Study.

2.3.1 Integrating Project Planning with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

2.3.1.1 Applicability of Project Planning

Activities conducted during project planning are essential to project development, as they may be used to **inform the next phase and the NEPA process**. Examples of project planning documentation that supports NEPA transportation decision-making include purpose and need, existing and future conditions considered during alternatives evaluations, alternatives considered and eliminated alternatives, agency input, community engagement, and implementation recommendations. Project planning is intended to support the environmental review process conducted during the PD&E phase.

FDOT initiates a PD&E Study to conduct the environmental review process required to comply with NEPA. Transportation projects that have a PD&E phase are those that are federally funded or involve a federal action (such as a federal permit or use of Interstate right of way) and are expected to require either a Type 2 Categorical Exclusion[1] (CE), Environmental Assessment (EA), or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). These federal actions and types of NEPA documents are defined in the **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 2, Class of Action Determination for Federal Projects.** Projects identified as a Type 1 CE do not typically have a PD&E phase. An example of a Type 1 CE is construction of a bike lane or sidewalk or adding turn lanes within the existing ROW and involving no individual or cumulatively significant environmental impacts. For a Type 1 CE (minor environmental actions), a separate project planning study would not typically be conducted but could be recommended if it is beneficial to better define a project from a larger range of alternatives. For projects on the State Highway System (SHS) or Local Agency Program (LAP) projects off the SHS, FDOT determines whether a project planning study is needed.

Types of PD&E Studies

- *Type 2 Categorical Exclusion (CE)*
- *Environmental Assessment (EA)*
- *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)*

The types of projects that normally require a PD&E Study are referred to as "qualifying projects" in FDOT's ETDM Manual. **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 2, Class of Action Determination for Federal Projects** provides guidance for multiple project types regarding whether a PD&E phase is typically conducted (i.e., Type 2 CE, EA, and EIS) or not (e.g., projects listed in **23 CFR 771.117(c)-(d)**). If the anticipated project type is not found in this chapter, consultation with the District Environmental Office should occur to confirm whether a PD&E Study is anticipated.

2.3.1.2 Defining a Planning Product

*The term "planning product" means a decision, analysis, study, or other documented information that is the result of an evaluation or decision-making process during the planning phase; including those carried out by either a MPO or a state, as appropriate, during metropolitan or statewide transportation planning under **23 USC 134** (Metropolitan Transportation Planning), **23 USC 135** (Statewide and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning), or **23 USC 168**, respectively.*

23 USC 168 defines the types of **planning decisions** and **planning analyses** that may be adopted or incorporated by reference from a **planning product**. **23 USC 168** also details the specific conditions, including planning processes, documentation, and agency and public engagement required to use a planning product in the NEPA phase. During a project planning study, a "planning product," is defined in federal regulations as a detailed decision, analysis, study, or document that is the result of an evaluation or decision-making process carried out during the planning phase.

[1] Not all Type 2 CEs will have a PD&E phase.

2.3.2 Conditions for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Adoption

According to **23 USC 168**, **a planning product may be adopted into the NEPA environmental review process if certain conditions, or minimum requirements outlined further below, are met**. These requirements are also summarized in the **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 4, Project Development Process** and the OEM PEL Guidance Checklist (pending development. The following subsections include more detail on these specific conditions and requirements for agency consultation, community engagement, documentation requirements, level of detail required, and timeline for integration with the PD&E phase.

For highway projects, FDOT serves as the Lead Agency under the NEPA Assignment Program with OEM providing Environmental Document approvals (except for Type 1 CEs which are signed at the District level). FDOT is the Lead Agency for non-federal FDOT projects with the applicable District providing Environmental Document approvals.

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 (Refer to **Section 2.3.2.3: Agency Consultation Requirements**).
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 (Refer to **Section 4.2: Alternatives Analysis** – pending).

Best Practice

FDOT's ETDM process was designed to streamline the environmental review and permitting process and involves collaboration between MPOs, local governments, federal and state resource agencies, Native American Tribes, and the public to ensure that transportation projects consider the effects on environmental resources. Use of the ETDM Planning Screen is encouraged to conduct the required consultation.

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. (Refer to **Section 2.3.2.2: Notice Requirements**).
5. During the environmental review process, the relevant agency has:
    - 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;

- Provided notice of the intent of the relevant agency to adopt or incorporate by reference the planning product; and,
- Considered any resulting comments.

(Refer to **Section 2.3.4 Adoption of Planning Study**)

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.

   Example: Land use impacts are a community impact that may change significantly between Planning and PD&E. For the planning product to be adopted, major land use changes may need to be reevaluated prior to adoption.

7. The planning product has a rational basis and is based on reliable and reasonably current data (from within the five years prior to the date the product was approved or completed) and reasonable and scientifically acceptable methodologies. (Refer to **Section 2.3.2.5 Timing of Documentation**)

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 (Refer to **Section 2.3.2.4: Level of Detail Required**).

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 NEPA (Refer to **Section 2.3: Incorporating Planning into PD&E**).

10. The planning product was approved (or updated and re-adopted) within the 5-year period ending on the date on which the information is adopted or incorporated by reference (Refer to **Section 2.3.2.5: Timing of Documentation**).

2.3.2.1 Community Engagement Requirements

FDOT's Community Engagement Policy encourages effective community engagement throughout the entire project lifecycle. Therefore, community engagement is a regular part of the planning process. **To meet the PEL regulations for adoption into the NEPA phase, project planning studies must meet certain community engagement requirements.**

Based on the intent of the PEL regulations, the public is provided with an opportunity to participate in the planning process leading to the development of the planning product. Additionally, public notice and an opportunity for public comment and review of the planning product must occur.

There are various community engagement activities that support opportunities for public comment including notice of opportunity for input, websites, direct mailing, webinars, public meetings, and

stakeholder meetings. The community engagement techniques should be determined based on project-specific stakeholders and level of controversy anticipated. For more information on benefits of varying engagement activities, refer to **FDOT's Public Involvement Handbook**.

2.3.2.2 Notice Requirements

During the planning process, public notice must be provided to members of the general public and federal, state, local, and tribal governments that may have an interest in the proposed project. The notice must include mention that the planning products produced in the planning process may be adopted during a subsequent environmental review process in accordance with **23 USC 168**. Per the FDOT **PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 4, Project Development Process**, **the following notice must be included on the cover page of planning products that are to be adopted** as well as materials used during community engagement:

> *The Florida Department of Transportation may adopt this planning product into the environmental review process, pursuant to Title 23 USC § 168 (d) or the state project development process.*

2.3.2.3 Agency Consultation Requirements

The FDOT OEM, as the Lead Agency per NEPA assignment, must concur the **23 USC 168** conditions were met prior to adopting a planning product to support the PD&E phase. If the Lead Agency decides to adopt or incorporate by reference and use a planning product, the agencies that participated in the development of the planning products must also be identified and documented. The agency roles and responsibilities are defined in **42 USC 4336a** (*Timely and Unified Federal Reviews*), **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 3, Preliminary Environmental Discussion, and Advance Notification,** and **ETDM Manual, Chapter 2, ETDM Process (Section 2.5)**.

2.3.2.4 Level of Detail Required

Project planning studies that comply with PEL are not required to reach the same level of detail as a PD&E Study. The level of detail needed in planning studies should reflect the type of proposed action and the magnitude of anticipated environmental impacts. A comparison of PD&E requirements and planning study considerations is provided in ***Table 2.2***.

As stated in the **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 4, Project Development Process**, the extent to which planning information, analyses, or decisions can be adopted or incorporated by reference into the NEPA process depends upon how well the planning products meet NEPA standards and implementing regulations (**23 CFR 771**); however, **they do not need to be at the same level of detail as the subsequent NEPA analysis**.

Project planning may advance critical-path PD&E activities (such as detailed traffic studies), helping to reduce overall project development time. Additional guidance on developing and evaluating alternatives, including appropriate levels of detail, is provided in **Chapter 4: Developing and Evaluating Potential Improvements** (pending).

Table 2.2 Level of Detail Comparison

General NEPA Requirements for PD&E Phase	Project Planning Study Expectations
Purpose and Need Statement	The purpose and need for a project is developed and/or refined during the Planning phase based on measurable evidence, data, and analysis. Input received during the ETDM Planning Screen can be used to further refine the purpose and need. For the ETDM Programming Screen, the purpose and need should be documented to the same level of detail as anticipated for NEPA, as it is the foundation of the alternatives development and evaluation process. The purpose and need is reviewed by resource agencies and the public during the ETDM Planning and/or Programming Screen and may be refined during NEPA if new data or needs are identified. Additional information on the development of the project's purpose and need statement is documented in **Section 3.5: Developing and Refining the Project Purpose and Need** (pending).
Alternatives Development	Alternatives development may begin during project planning. Planning decisions on alternatives considered or developed can be adopted for NEPA if the PEL conditions outlined in **Section 2.3: Incorporating Planning into PD&E** are met. Alternatives should be considered that meet the purpose and need. The level of detail of the engineering analysis for alternatives development during planning must be sufficient enough to assess the environmental effects. If multiple alternatives are developed, each alternative must be developed to the same level of detail for alternatives that are compared to each other during alternatives screening.

Alternatives Screening - Assessment of the Community, Economic, and Environmental Impacts of a Proposed Action or Project	The alternatives screening process involves evaluating the alternatives that were developed as described above and narrowing them down to a smaller group that will be analyzed in greater detail in the NEPA phase. Efficient project planning should limit the range of alternatives that must be considered in the NEPA process. Alternatives can be eliminated if they fail to address the purpose and need. If an alternative meets the purpose and need, it can still be eliminated based on the alternatives screening, including environmental impacts, engineering, and cost. All alternatives considered must be evaluated equally during project planning for future NEPA compliance (using the same evaluation factors and considerations for alternatives compared to each other). Either qualitative or quantitative evaluation criteria are sufficient for planning, however, the sole use of qualitative evaluation is not defensible for potential future NEPA decisions. An evaluation matrix of all alternatives considered is required. Logical termini for the project should be established as the determination of land use and environmental context is dependent on study area definition. Desktop Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis (instead of detailed field surveys conducted for NEPA) are appropriate for project planning. Limited field reconnaissance may be conducted to verify land use and resource potential. The ETDM Environmental Screening Tool (EST) is a valuable interactive database and mapping application that provides standardized GIS-based environmental screening and analysis.
Consideration of avoidance, minimization and mitigation	Avoidance and minimization of environmental resources with regulatory protection must be considered for the planning products. However, planning-level evaluations should not reach the level of detail required for NEPA. For example, desktop review of wetlands in GIS are appropriate for planning. However, identifying specific mitigation sites during this phase is not necessary. More detail on existing and future conditions analysis is provided in **Section 3.3: Existing and Future Conditions Analysis** (pending). Practitioners should also refer to the **PD&E Manual, Part 2, Chapters 1-21** for specific understanding of the appropriate level of detail for a PD&E Study to avoid replication of

	PD&E activities. Any potential mitigation strategies identified during planning should be documented along with any comments received during regulatory agency coordination.
Interagency participation: coordination and consultation	The opportunity for input is required and provided through the ETDM Planning and Programming Screens; however, regulatory agency (such as United States Fish and Wildlife Service or State Historic Preservation Office) concurrence with the proposed action is not requested during the Planning phase.
Public involvement including opportunities to participate and comment	Public involvement and the opportunity for public input is required, but a public hearing is not required. Public involvement can be conducted through various methods including online surveys, small group meetings, or optional public meetings, depending on the community that the project will serve and how they can best receive information and provide input.
Documentation and disclosure	Required to adopt planning products into NEPA as outlined in the OEM PEL Guidance and Questionnaire (pending) and the ETDM Manual Chapter 3 (pending).

2.3.2.5 Timing of Documentation

If the planning product to be adopted into the NEPA analysis is **more than five years old** (from the date the product was approved or completed), the information used to develop it must be reviewed to determine whether conditions or the planning context have changed. If conditions have not changed enough to alter the planning context supporting the planning decisions, the PD&E Study may rely on the planning product and must document why that information remains valid for NEPA decision-making. If the data or conditions have changed substantially since the completion of the planning product, even within the standard five-year threshold, the planning product must either be updated, or the agency must document why the information is still valid to the NEPA decision. OEM must be consulted when making this decision (refer to **Section 2.3.4: Adoption of Planning Study**). The timing of the planning phase and any resulting planning products should be well-coordinated with the programming of the PD&E phase in consideration of this timeline.

2.3.3 Planning Decisions and Analyses

2.3.3.1 Types of Planning Decisions

23 USC 168(c)(1) identifies the planning decisions from a planning product that may be adopted or incorporated into the environmental review process. These types of decisions applicable to transportation projects are also listed in the **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 4, Project Development Process**

and the OEM PEL Guidance (pending). If the PEL requirements documented in **Section 2.3.2: Conditions for NEPA Adoption** are met, **the following decisions from a planning product may be adopted 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 a 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 the 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 that the Federal Lead Agency, in consultation with federal, state, local, and Tribal resource agencies, determines are most effectively addressed at a regional or national program level, including:
    a. Measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts of proposed transportation investments on environmental resources, including regional ecosystem and water resources; and
    b. Potential mitigation activities, locations, and investments.

2.3.3.2 Types of Planning Analyses

23 USC 168(c)(2) identifies the planning analyses from a planning product that may be adopted or incorporated into the environmental review process. These types of analyses applicable to transportation projects are also listed in the **FDOT PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 4, Project Development Process** and the OEM PEL Guidance (pending). If the Conditions for Adoption documented above are met, **the following types of planning analyses may be adopted 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;
8. Mitigation needs for a proposed action, or for programmatic level mitigation, for potential effects that the Federal Lead Agency determines are most effectively addressed at a regional or national program level.

2.3.4 Adoption of Planning Study

Upon completion of the planning study or analyses, the *FDOT Questionnaire for Linking Planning and Environmental Review* (pending by OEM) must be submitted to the FDOT District Environmental Administrator for approval. Once approved by the District, the completed questionnaire should be forwarded to OEM for adoption of the planning products prior to the initiation of the PD&E Study. The questionnaire/checklist for projects that are anticipated to be either a Non-Major State Action (NMSA) or Type 1 CE projects should be approved by the District. Projects that advance to the PD&E phase as a SEIR may still adopt planning study decisions. These may be reviewed and adopted at the FDOT District or Florida's Turnpike Enterprise, as appropriate.

If the planning study is completed by an agency other than FDOT, the planning product will need to be reviewed by the appropriate Lead Agency (FDOT District and/or FDOT OEM). The District is the Lead Agency for State projects and Type 1 CEs. An FDOT State project is a project advanced through the FDOT Work Program using only state funding and/or does not affect the interstate during any phase of project development or implementation.

As the Lead Agency, **FDOT may adopt or incorporate by reference the entire planning product or certain aspects of the planning product**. The information adopted can then be incorporated directly into an environmental document and may be relied upon and used by other Federal agencies for project reviews to create efficiency between planning, NEPA, and permitting.

2.3.5 Summary

Collectively, these PEL requirements establish a **clear framework for developing planning products** that are both compliant with federal regulations and FDOT policy and procedures and positioned for **efficient use in subsequent NEPA reviews.** By ensuring early agency consultation, meaningful community engagement, appropriate levels of detail, and timely documentation, FDOT and its partners can confidently advance planning decisions and analyses into the PD&E phase. When the conditions in **23 USC 168** are met, planning products can be adopted or incorporated by reference to support purpose and need, alternatives evaluation, environmental setting, and mitigation strategies, thereby strengthening the technical foundation of NEPA documents and streamlining overall project delivery in accordance with **FDOT's Project Development Policy (Document No.: 000-525-055)**.

2.4 Timing of Project Planning Studies

There is flexibility in the timing of project planning studies, including when they start and end. Project planning activities typically begin after a project is identified through statewide, FDOT District, or metropolitan planning efforts and should end prior to scope development for the subsequent project development phase. If FDOT determines that a project planning study is needed to conduct a feasibility assessment and develop implementation recommendations, the study should be scheduled so that its results inform the optimal timing for programming the PD&E phase, while ensuring that construction is programmed to begin no more than eight years after the start of PD&E. The duration of a project planning study will vary based on the type of study and the level of detail required; but should be planned to promote efficiency over the entire project development lifecycle. Any FDOT planning analyses supporting a future PD&E Study must comply with federal regulations and FDOT policies for transportation decision-making between project phases.

Planning Study Age Threshold

Per the ETDM Manual, if the planning product being adopted into the PD&E Study is older than five years (from the date the planning product was approved or completed), the planning product must be reviewed to determine if the existing or future conditions or the planning context have changed to verify the planning decisions are valid for the NEPA decision-making process.

The goal in timing a project planning study is to complete it before scoping for the next phase (PD&E or Design), but not so far in advance that the study becomes outdated. For example, traffic forecasts and analysis may be prepared as part of a project planning study or initiated during the period between the Planning and PD&E phases.

FDOT Districts are encouraged to undertake project planning as needed and consider the timing of the planning project in relation to other project phases.

2.5 Scoping a Project Planning Study

Coming soon