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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

Coming soon

1.3 Benefits of Conducting Project Planning Studies

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1.4 Relevant Regulations and Policies

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