

Planning and Environment Linkages Program

Annual Report Fiscal Year 2012



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Contents

- 1. Introduction 4
- 2. Background 4
- 3. Technical Assistance and Training 4
- 4. Outreach and Communication 5
- 5. PEL Vision for Fiscal Year 2013 6

1. Introduction

This report highlights the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) program activities for Fiscal Year 2012 (FY12). The PEL program's purpose is to provide transportation agencies with tools and resources to introduce environmental considerations early in planning and to use documented planning information to inform the environmental review process. The goal of PEL is to develop a more seamless decision-making process that minimizes duplication of effort, promotes environmental stewardship, and reduces delays in project implementation.

Through the PEL initiative, FHWA provides state and local transportation and resource agencies with decision-making strategies, analytical tools, and technical assistance to link the transportation planning and environmental planning and review processes.

In FY12, FHWA focused on two primary avenues to promote PEL:

1. *Technical assistance and training*: Advancing the adoption of PEL initiatives nationwide through focused state or regional technical assistance.
2. *Outreach and communication*: Increasing the development and dissemination of resources for stakeholders to use in understanding and implementing PEL activities.

This FY12 Annual Report provides information on:

- Background of PEL program
- FY12 PEL technical assistance and training activities
- FY12 PEL outreach and communication activities
- PEL vision for FY13

2. Background

In 2006, the FHWA Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty developed the PEL program as an umbrella approach to help agencies integrate transportation and environmental planning processes and to streamline their project-development and environmental review processes. The early focus of the PEL program was on helping state and local agencies link the planning and environmental review processes through technical assistance, guidance, and participation in Linking Planning and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) workshops. In recent years, the PEL program has expanded beyond the area of Linking Planning and NEPA to promote a more integrated and collaborative approach to the transportation decision-making process, from planning through project development, design and construction. Today, the PEL program supports related FHWA priorities, such as Every Day Counts, Ecological, Context Sensitive Solutions, and Green Highways.

In FY12, FHWA continued to offer existing PEL initiatives and delivered a number of new resources to support state and local agencies in implementing the PEL approach.

3. Technical Assistance and Training

In FY12, FHWA advanced the adoption of PEL initiatives nationwide through the following focused

guidance materials, workshops, and trainings.

Guidance on Using Corridor and Subarea Planning to Inform NEPA

In April 2012, the PEL program conducted a webinar to help transportation planning and environmental practitioners better understand how to conduct corridor or subarea planning studies with the goal of using information and decisions to inform the environmental review process. The training provided information on planning and initiating a study, conducting a study, and making a study viable for NEPA. Over 270 participants from FHWA Division Offices, state and local transportation agencies, and resource agencies participated in the webinar.

Planning and Environment Linkages for Historic Preservation

In June 2012, FHWA published *Planning and Environmental Linkages for Historic Preservation* to showcase effective State DOT and local transportation agency programs that consider historic preservation factors in planning and early project development. The report includes 17 case studies within the following topics: Section 106 programmatic agreements (PA), historic property databases for State DOT rights-of-way, statewide management of historic bridges, and staff liaison programs with State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO).

State PEL Workshops

In FY12, the FHWA Resource Center began offering facilitated state-specific workshops on PEL. In August 2012, staff piloted the training course with the New York Division Office. The training provided an overview of both the metropolitan planning process and NEPA process and identified similar steps between the two decisionmaking processes. Participants also discussed opportunities to integrate PEL into the existing planning and NEPA processes.

4. Outreach and Communication

In FY12, FHWA delivered PEL program information to stakeholders through its website, as well as through conferences and publications.

Website

The PEL website (<http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/index.asp>) serves as a comprehensive resource for transportation agencies and stakeholders to learn about and apply PEL concepts. The PEL website is continually updated to reflect current information and resources. The sidebar shows the monthly numbers of PEL website visitors for FY12.

Corridor Guidance Outreach Materials

The FHWA developed a one-page fact sheet focused on using corridor and subarea planning to inform NEPA.

Number of Monthly Visitors to the PEL Website		
Month	FY12	FY11
October	1,788	1,798
November	2,263	1,773
December	1,939	1,325
January	2,335	1,500
February	1,996	1,753
March	2,356	1,966
April	2,282	1,807
May	2,244	1,800
June	2,037	2,273
July	1,929	2,274
August	2,374	1,872
September	2,599	1,984

Presentations

During FY12, the FHWA made the following presentations to increase awareness and understanding of PEL:

- Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, January 2012. Presentation on *Guidance on Using Corridor and Subarea Planning to Inform NEPA*.
- FHWA Learning and Development Seminar for Planning, Environment, Air Quality, Realty and Civil Rights (PEAR+C), May 2012. Presentation on PEL as it relates to the Every Day Counts Initiative. Tools for implementing PEL were highlighted.

5. PEL Vision for Fiscal Year 2013

During FY2013, FHWA's PEL program will focus on the following activities:

1. Technical Assistance and Training
 - a. Conduct additional sessions of the state-specific PEL workshops.
 - b. Deliver additional PEL training webinars focused on specific topics and tools for implementing PEL.
 - c. Identify current and potential information needs to establish performance measures.
2. Outreach and Communication
 - a. Identify PEL website improvements to provide a more user-friendly site encouraging more viewers and sharing of effective practices.
 - b. Develop PEL talking points to describe opportunities and requirements in MAP-21.