

Planning and Environment Linkages Program

Annual Report Fiscal Year 2013



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Contents

- 1. Introduction 1
- 2. Background 1
- 3. Technical Assistance and Training 2
- 4. Outreach and Communication 2
- 5. PEL Vision for Fiscal Year 2014 3

I. Introduction

This report highlights the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) program activities for Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13). 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 review processes.

In FY13, 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 FY13 Annual Report provides information on:

- Background of PEL program
- FY13 PEL technical assistance and training activities
- FY13 PEL outreach and communication activities
- PEL vision for FY14

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, Strategic Highway Research Program 2 (SHRP2), Eco-Logical, Context Sensitive Solutions, and Green Highways.

In FY13, 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 FY13, FHWA advanced the adoption of PEL initiatives nationwide through the following focused guidance materials, workshops, and trainings.

Planning and Environment Linkages for Historic Preservation

In February and March 2013, FHWA conducted webinars to present the results of a nationwide study to identify best practices for integrating planning and environmental review for projects affecting historic preservation. The training provided information on programmatic agreements, historic property databases, statewide management plans for historic bridges, and staff liaison programs with State Historic Preservation Offices. The webinars were based on the FHWA report *Planning and Environmental Linkages for Historic Preservation*, published in June 2012. Over 250 participants from FHWA Division Offices, State and local transportation agencies, and resource agencies participated in each webinar.

State PEL Workshops

In FY13, the FHWA Resource Center continued offering facilitated State-specific workshops on PEL. Workshops were held in Idaho, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas (Austin and Amarillo), and Wyoming. The training provided an overview of both the metropolitan planning process and NEPA process, and identified similar steps between the two decision-making processes. Participants discussed opportunities to integrate PEL into their existing planning and NEPA processes.

4. Outreach and Communication

In FY13, 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. In FY13, the PEL website was completely redesigned to reflect modern user experience and design aesthetics, with the goal to make PEL resources easier to find. In addition, the content was updated with new resources. The sidebar shows the monthly numbers of PEL website visitors for FY13, showing an average 35% increase in visitors between FY12 and FY13.

Number of Monthly Visitors to the PEL Website		
Month	FY13	FY12
October	2,533	1,788
November	2,347	2,263
December	2,206	1,939
January	2,407	2,335
February	2,822	1,996
March	3,110	2,356
April	3,279	2,282
May	3,210	2,244
June	2,941	2,037
July	3,209	1,929
August	3,297	2,374
September	3,963	2,599

Presentations

During FY13, FHWA presented at the following event to increase awareness and understanding of PEL:

- AASHTO Standing Committee on the Environment Annual Meeting 2013

5. PEL Vision for Fiscal Year 2014

During FY2014, FHWA's PEL program will focus on the following activities:

1. Technical Assistance and Training
 - a. Conduct at least four sessions of the State-specific PEL workshops.
 - b. Coordinate with the Second Strategic Highway Research Program C19 Expediting Project Delivery implementation activities to track progress and showcase successes related to PEL.
2. Outreach and Communication
 - a. Continue to update the PEL website to reflect current information and resources.
 - b. Develop information resources to describe opportunities and requirements in MAP-21 related to PEL, once updates to 23 CFR 450 are published.
3. Research
 - a. Conduct a state-of-the-practice review of corridor plans to identify elements of PEL implementation.
 - b. Develop case studies of successful PEL implementation in State DOTs and MPOs.