



## Environmental Streamlining & TxDOT

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### Environmental Streamlining Summit September 23, 1999

The first summit to discuss the implementation of the environmental streamlining process was held in Irving, Texas, Sept. 23, 1999.

Representatives of the following agencies were present:

Environmental Protection Agency  
Federal Highway Administration  
Federal Transit Administration  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Texas Department of Transportation

The following is a brief summary of points discussed at the summit:

- TEA 21 – Congress clearly intended to simplify federal environmental review of transportation projects. The goal is more timely and cost-effective delivery of projects while protecting the environment.
- TxDOT and federal resource agencies have their credibility at stake. These agencies must work together to improve the review process and meet public expectations.
- Nationwide, one-third of all 1998 transportation projects took more than seven years to get the projects ready for construction.
- FHWA and TxDOT's partnership efforts to improve the transportation system can be broadened to include federal and state resource agencies to streamline the environmental review process and provide a product that the public wants and deserves.
- TxDOT wants to improve the way it invests the public's money; streamlining efforts prove its commitment and stewardship.
- TxDOT has developed memorandums of understanding with its resource agencies that reflect some of the concepts laid out in Section 1309 of TEA 21.
- Congress has spent most of its oversight interest on streamlining (Section 1309 of TEA 21). Section 1309 language was carefully crafted. This section directs the Secretary of Transportation to develop a coordinated environmental review process with cooperatively set time frames and concurrent, not sequential review, for any major highway and transit

project that requires environmental review or approval by federal agencies. This section also includes a dispute resolution procedure for working out disagreements.

- Federal resource agencies have a tremendous workload, with a large number of mandated duties other than transportation project review. These agencies must annually review 50,000 Environmental Assessments and 350 Environmental Impact Statements (most by the U.S. Forest Service).
- Timeframes for implementing environmental streamlining must be established.
- Environmental streamlining must be a concurrent, rather than a sequential process.
- It is important to establish a climate that will make streamlining work.
  
- There is a perception that there is more concern at the federal level about getting funding to pay for "business as usual" rather than retooling the way federal officials do their jobs. Federal officials must prioritize and use their staff and existing agency funds better, like state agencies have done.

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