

OVERVIEW

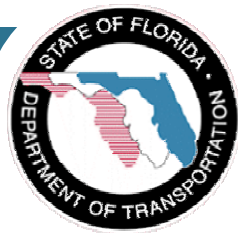
Transportation actions can affect communities and influence the quality of life of its citizens. The significance of these effects must be determined through careful evaluation and professional judgment on a case-by-case basis. This is particularly true because communities view these sociocultural effects from different perspectives. SCE Evaluation is the FDOT's preferred process to evaluate these effects and avoid or mitigate potentially unacceptable consequences of a proposed transportation action.

The process starts at the earliest stages of project planning and continues through project construction and maintenance. Evaluating sociocultural effects yields a better understanding of community concerns and encourages the design of projects that *fit* communities. The SCE Evaluation process also encourages the coordination and integration of transportation plans with land use plans. It identifies and involves all potentially affected populations.

1.1 EVOLUTION OF SCE

In the last decade, federal and state transportation agencies have refocused their efforts to involve communities when evaluating the sociocultural effects of proposed transportation actions. These efforts include more extensive public involvement, better training, and stricter adherence to regulations, instructional manuals, and other guidance for transportation professionals. A variety of techniques and tools have evolved into the SCE Evaluation process. Considerable resources have been directed toward these efforts in Florida.

SCE Evaluation is *the process of determining and evaluating the effects a transportation action may have on a community and the quality of life of the citizenry*. SCE Evaluation is a proactive process to ensure that community values and concerns receive adequate attention during transportation development. The evaluation process is an integral part of project planning and development. The process focuses on a



transportation project's potential effects on social, economic, land use, mobility, aesthetic, and relocation issues. The SCE Evaluation process involves affected communities and citizens, as well as transportation planners and decision-makers, to evaluate the potential effects of a transportation action on a community. In addition, it provides that human values and concerns receive due attention. The success of an SCE evaluation is based largely on the partnerships formed by the FDOT, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and cooperating agencies throughout Florida to collect, analyze, document and evaluate pertinent community information to better understand the effects of transportation plans, programs, and projects on people and their communities.

Data collected through the SCE Evaluation process:

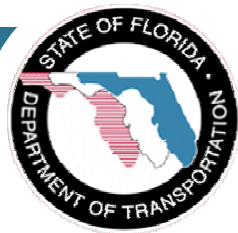
- Supports the Metropolitan Planning Organization Long Range Transportation Planning (LRTP) process;
- Supports the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) process;
- Supports FDOT's Public Involvement and Transportation Design for Livable Communities (TDLC) policies; and
- Supports the integration of coordinated plans for land use, economics, and transportation to achieve community goals.

Transportation Design for Livable Communities Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the Florida Department of Transportation to consider the incorporation of Transportation Design for Livable Communities (TDLC) on the State Highway System when such features are desired, appropriate, and feasible. TDLC features shall be based upon consideration of the following principles:

- Safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transit users
- Balancing community values and mobility needs
- Efficient use of energy resources
- Protection of the natural and manmade environment
- Coordinated land use and transportation planning
- Local and state economic development goals
- Complementing and enhancing existing standards, systems, and processes.

(Policy 000-625-060, effective 12/22/98)



1.2 FLORIDA'S PHILOSOPHY

In Florida, the philosophy of SCE Evaluation has developed an inclusionary focus on the community highlighting *comprehensiveness, accommodation, networking, and partnering*.

Community Impact Assessment Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the Florida Department of Transportation to work proactively with communities in implementing the principles, concepts, and philosophy of Community Impact Assessment (SCE Evaluation) throughout the transportation project development process. Transportation facilities and services make an important contribution to a community's economy and quality of life. Understanding the vision, goals and objectives, and the values of a community's citizenry is essential to providing effective, community based solutions to transportation while addressing appropriate community concerns.

(Policy 000-650-015a, effective 8/15/02)

Maintaining a comprehensive perspective...

provides a holistic approach to understanding potential social, cultural, and economic effects of a transportation action. This system-wide perspective evaluates the interrelationship among cumulative transportation actions, rather than viewing each one separately.

Accommodating community values...

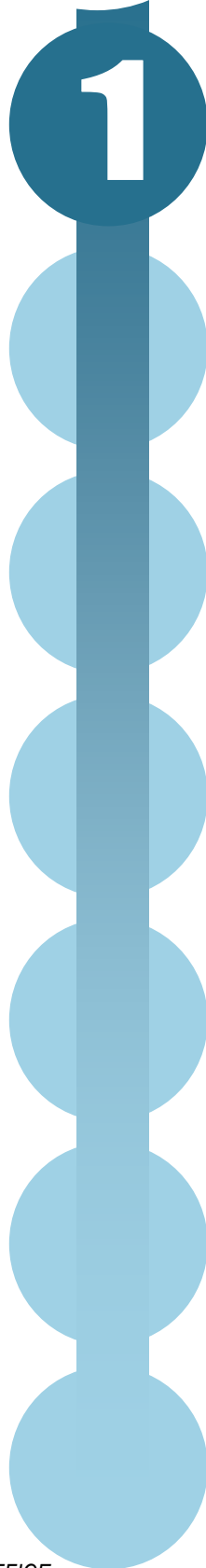
and concerns addresses community issues within the context of the project. SCE Evaluation integrates community involvement into transportation planning resulting in more projects that *fit* better into the communities.

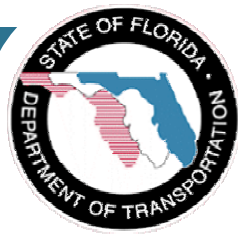
Networking...

with other government agencies and communities establishes a continuing, two-way dialogue that can efficiently facilitate information exchange.

Partnering...

with other government agencies and non-governmental groups enhances the ability to sustain community goals by developing joint use strategies





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for the application of limited resources addressing competing community priorities.

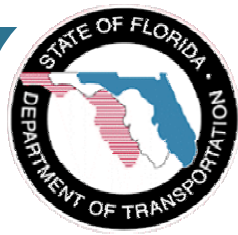
Since its inception in Florida as Community Impact Assessment and the Department's practical evolution of this process into Sociocultural Effects Evaluation, the focus has been to balance natural environmental considerations with those of the human environment.

Realistically, a rigid demarcation of natural versus human environment evaluation is not practical. Professional evaluation of the SCE characteristics of Social, Economic, Land Use, Mobility, Aesthetics, and Relocation will almost certainly open a discussion about interrelated natural environmental systems and linkages.

For example, a discussion of SCE evaluations on land use is not limited to the comprehensive plan and adjacent land use compatibilities but would transcend this narrow evaluation and include human infrastructure (i.e., schools, parks, libraries) as well as natural elements of wetlands, waterbodies, wildlife corridors, and similar land use characteristics.

Likewise, an SCE evaluation of economic factors is not solely a human environmental analysis wherein one typically thinks in terms of jobs created or lost, business displacements, or accessibility to business sites. Other economic factors which warrant study and analysis might include the economic impact of parkland loss on a community's quality of life or the economic impact of health costs due to increased vehicular emissions as a result of a capacity enhancement project.

The SCE Evaluation process of weighing a project's positive and not so positive effects actually is an overarching analytical process tying the human and natural environmental systems analysis into a comprehensive assessment.



This Handbook focuses on the human analytical aspects of SCE evaluations since in many instances in the past, project effects on people have not received adequate attention. Regulations and permitting requirements instituted to protect numerous natural and physical resources tended to emphasize the natural environment versus the human environment.

1.3 LEGAL MANDATES

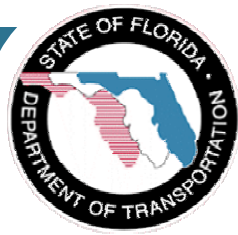
The *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969* (Appendix B) requires that agencies take into account the potential effects of transportation actions on the human environment. Transportation investments have major influences on society, often with significant economic and social effects.

The FDOT has long recognized and encouraged the use of a community assessment process to provide valuable information for:

- Evaluating the effects of transportation actions on communities;
- Providing a vehicle for conducting effective public involvement; and
- Demonstrating and documenting compliance of state and federal regulations protecting specific populations.

In addition to NEPA, other federal statutes, regulations, policies, technical advisories, and Executive Orders (Appendix B) relevant in transportation planning and project development include:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;
- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (1966), as amended;
- 23 USC 109(h), Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970;
- Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act (1970, referred to as the Uniform Act), as amended in 1987;
- 23 CFR 771, Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (1987);
- Technical Advisory 6640.8A (1987), Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and Section 4(f) Documents;
- FHWA Environmental Policy Statements (1990 & 1994);



- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA);
- Farmland Protection Policy Act (1981), as amended in 1994 (7 CFR 658);
- Executive Order on Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments (2000);
- Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21);
- Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) (2005);
- 49 U.S.C. Title 23, Highways; and
- Growth Management (SB360) (2005).

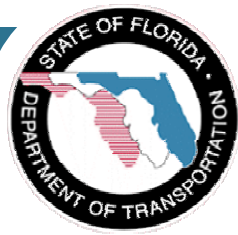
Additional excerpts from the Code of Federal Regulations and Florida Statutes supporting the evaluation of the human environment in relation to transportation planning and project development include the following:

1) 23 USC 109(h), Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970

Requires FHWA to fully consider the possible adverse economic, social, and environmental effects of any proposed project on any Federal-aid system in developing the project...and stipulates that the final project decisions be made in the best overall public interest.

This determination is made with the consideration of the following:

- The need for fast, safe, and efficient transportation;
- Public services;
- The costs of eliminating or minimizing such adverse effects (the cost of mitigation);
- The potential sociocultural effects, such as
 - Destruction or disruption of man-made and natural resources, aesthetic values, community cohesion, and the availability of public facilities and services;
 - Adverse employment effects, and tax and property values losses; and
 - Injurious displacement of people, businesses and farms; and disruption of desirable community and regional growth.



2) *Section 105, 23 CFR 771, Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (1987)*

It is the policy of the Administration that

- (a) To the fullest extent possible, all environmental investigations, reviews, and consultations be coordinated as a single process, and compliance with all applicable environmental requirements be reflected in the environmental document.
- (b) Alternative courses of action be evaluated and decisions made in the best overall public interest based upon a balanced consideration of the need for safe and efficient transportation; of social, economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed transportation improvement; and of national, state, and local environmental protection goals.

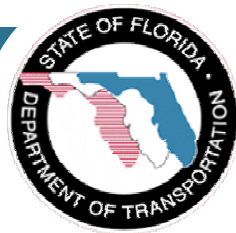
The regulation goes on to set forth public involvement requirements, mitigation policy, documentation requirements, and other process specifics of the project development process.

3) *23 C.F.R. 450.316(a) Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process: Elements.*

The following factors shall be explicitly considered, analyzed as appropriate, and reflected in the planning process: ...13) The overall social, economic, energy, and environmental effects of transportation decisions including consideration of the effects of the plan on the human, natural and man-made environment...

4) *339.175 (5)(b), F.S.*

In developing the long-range transportation plan and the transportation improvement program required under paragraph (a), each MPO must at a minimum, consider ...13) The overall social, economic, energy, and environmental effect of transportation decisions...



1.4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

There is no cookie-cutter approach to informing, educating and involving the public. Every project is different and will require the use of different public involvement strategies. Each public involvement program will outline and incorporate a variety of techniques, some more than others. Each FDOT district and MPO has its own public involvement

Public Involvement Policy:

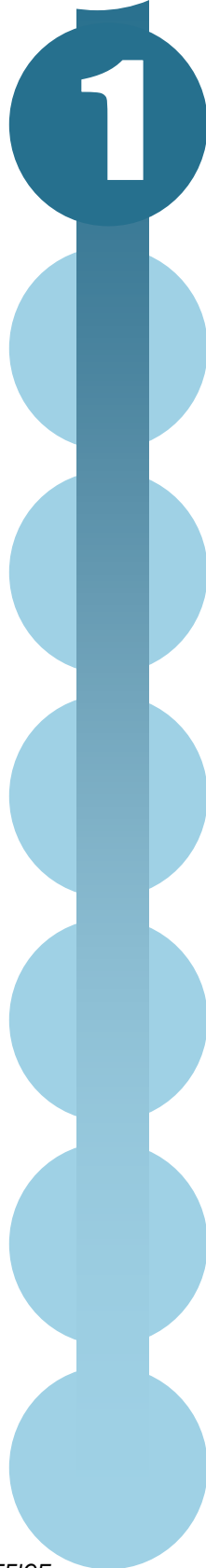
"The Department recognizes the importance of involving the public in information exchange when providing transportation facilities and services to best meet the state's transportation challenges. Therefore, it is the policy of the Florida Department of Transportation to promote public involvement opportunities and information exchange activities in all functional areas using various techniques adapted to local area conditions and project requirements."

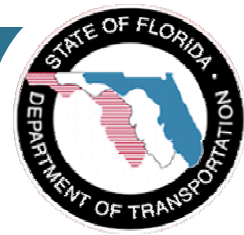
(Policy 000-525-050, effective September, 2001)

procedures that supplement state and federal requirements. Nevertheless, every project has one thing in common: there will be some level of public involvement, ranging from local government notification to formal public hearings. The level of public involvement should be tailored to the nature and scope of the project and its potential effects.

Active public involvement leads to transportation improvements that meet community needs and desires, provide greater acceptance of projects, engender a sense of community and enhance agency credibility. Public involvement builds a credible and trusting relationship between the transportation agency and the community it serves through partnering, outreach, active listening, and two-way communication. Understanding the relationship between transportation decisions and the community needs will minimize conflict and help prevent potential problems.

The FDOT *Public Involvement Handbook* provides guidance for developing and implementing effective public involvement activities to involve the public in transportation decision-making. This Handbook is available on the FDOT website at www.dot.state.fl.us/emo.





1.5 SUMMARY

The focus areas for the SCE Evaluation process combined with early and meaningful community involvement throughout all phases of project development may provide:

1. Early identification of significant community or sociocultural issues;
2. Enhancements to the community's quality of life through more compatible transportation solutions that complement the community's vision;
3. Assurance that special needs populations are considered;
4. Better documentation that allows FDOT to meet commitments to agencies and the public at various stages of project implementation;
5. Agency-responsive decision making, ensuring transportation policies and investments recognize community goals and plans; and
6. Active public engagement leading to more informed decisions and greater citizen involvement in the transportation planning process while fostering a sense of community ownership.

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