

## Appendix I – Local Concept Development

The 13-county NJTPA region is made up of diverse ecological, stormwater, and cultural resources making for a variety of approaches to program and project delivery that includes carefully considered environmental mitigation. Environmental concerns and mitigation in the region are outlined in Chapter 6, Environment. . This appendix discusses the Local Concept Development phase, where a host of project-related issues and concerns are discovered and analyzed, and draft solutions found. These solutions establish the foundation for environmental mitigation strategies to be implemented in local projects.

One of the goals identified in Plan 2050 is to “protect and improve the quality of natural ecosystems and the human environment.” The NJTPA’s planning and project development programs are designed to consider the impacts transportation projects can have on both the human and natural environments. Multi-disciplined teams from the subregion, NJTPA, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, New Jersey Department of Transportation and others work together with a focus on avoiding adverse impacts when possible. When impacts cannot be avoided, efforts are made to minimize and/or mitigate impacts.

Project delivery processes can be streamlined through early coordination with environmental agencies during the planning phase. Early coordination can produce time and cost savings for future phases of work as well, resulting in a well-constructed project that meets identified needs without causing unintentional disbenefits to the surrounding area’s residents or the environment.

Considering the complexity and diversity of the environment across the region, the NJTPA uses readily available published environmental inventories to identify protected landscapes and historical features. The NJTPA also conducts site visits and coordinates with review and permitting agencies. Beginning at the early stages in the planning process and continuing throughout, this information is used in part as a contextual backdrop for the identification of transportation need, and later as an important factor in prioritizing and selecting the most appropriate transportation improvement alternatives for specific locations. Early consideration of environmental impacts also helps address National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements more effectively than if such issues would be left for consideration later in the project development process.

It is almost impossible to throw a rock in the NJTPA region and not hit an environmental resource. These natural resources give the region extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna and a rich and diverse human legacy. The NJTPA region is home to miles of fragile Atlantic seashore and dunes, as well as dozens tidal wetlands, rivers, and streams, and critical forest, grassland, and mountainous resources. This region has also been home to indigenous peoples for thousands of years, as well as people from around the world for hundreds of years. All these human settlements have left behind historic cultural resources and artifacts, ranging from ancient sacred sites, industrial revolution artifacts, important routes and stops on the Underground Railroad (particularly in Jersey City and Warren County), historic colonial settlements, and a rich and diverse multicultural legacy.

## Partnerships

In addition, an important part of the process of identifying resources and mitigating impacts is coordination with partner agencies and the public. As appropriate on the planning and project levels the following agencies are consulted:

- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- N. J. Highlands Council
- Delaware & Raritan Canal Commission
- New Jersey Department of Transportation, Bureau of Environmental Program Resources
- NJ TRANSIT
- New Jersey Office of Planning Advocacy
- Federal Highway Administration, Environmental Coordinator
- Federal Transit Administration
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
- U. S. Coast Guard
- All NJTPA Member Agencies and municipalities, as appropriate

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act continued to streamline project delivery and enhance environmental consideration with the implementation of Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) in 2015. The PEL approach to project delivery calls for a collaborative approach to transportation decision making which considers the impacts of proposed transportation system improvements to the environment, community and economy during the planning process.

In the NJTPA region, PEL has played a critical role in the advancement of subregional projects. The NJTPA’s Morris Canal Greenway Study, completed in 2018, and subsequent Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) projects that grew out of this study exemplify this approach. The Morris Canal Greenway study can be found at [https://www.njtpa.org/NJTPA/media/Documents/Planning/Regional-Programs/Studies/Morris%20Canal%20Greenway%20Study/180628\\_MCG\\_Final-Report\\_Entire.pdf?ext=.pdf](https://www.njtpa.org/NJTPA/media/Documents/Planning/Regional-Programs/Studies/Morris%20Canal%20Greenway%20Study/180628_MCG_Final-Report_Entire.pdf?ext=.pdf) The study identifies a continuous route of 111 miles for development of a world-class greenway, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, along or close to the route of the historic Morris Canal. The study identified 76 projects categorized as short, medium, and long-term projects to be built over a 10-year period. Since the study has concluded, municipalities along the greenway route have submitted projects identified in the study for funding through the Transportation Alternatives Program, a program overseen by NJDOT and New Jersey’s MPOs.

PEL plays a critical role in the Local Concept Development (LCD) program, which is the planning phase of the Local Capital Project Delivery (LCPD) program, discussed in Chapter 5, Strategies and Implementation. This LCD phase is designed to ensure early coordination with review agencies, collaboration with local governments and communities, all while identifying and comparing reasonable alternatives and the selection of a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA). The PPA meets the project’s purpose and need (P&N) as well as identifies the NEPA document that should be pursued during Local Preliminary

Engineering. Once a concept development report is completed, the Project Sponsor presents the project, including the PPA and NEPA recommendations, to the Interagency Review Committee (IRC) for their final review and approval. The IRC is comprised of NJTPA, NJDOT-Local Aid, NJDOT-Bureau of Environmental Program Resources, and FHWA. The IRC is a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary committee of decision makers who either recommend or oppose the advancement of the LCD project.

**Figure I-1: Local Capital Project Delivery Process**

<b>Local Concept Development</b>	<b>Local Preliminary Engineering</b>	<b>Final Design</b>	<b>Construction</b>
Data Collection and Environmental Screening Report	Preliminary Design Plans	Final Design Plans	Completed Construction
Final Purpose and Need Statement	Cost Estimates (Final Design, Right of Way & Construction)	Environmental Reevaluations	As-Builts
Alternatives Development	Approved Project Plan	Environmental Permits	Close-out Documentation
Recommendation of Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA)	Approved Design Exception Report	Acquisition of Right of Way	
Local Concept Development Report	Approved Environmental Document	Construction Contract Documents, and Plans, Specs. & Estimates	
	Preliminary Engineering Report		
Approximately 2 years	Approximately 2 years	Approximately 2 years	Design Dependent

Projects in the LCD phase often come from larger planning efforts at the subregional level such as the Subregional Studies program or municipal master plans. Local bridges accepted for funding in the LCPD come from NJDOT’s annual Bridge Inspection Program. As local projects are in diverse and often dense and complex locations, the NJTPA uses readily available environmental inventories and data sources to identify protected landscapes, historical and cultural resources and underserved communities near or

within project limits. Central staff also conducts site visits with partner agencies for all locations to verify field conditions. Beginning at the early stages in the planning process and continuing throughout, this information is used in part as a contextual backdrop for the identification of transportation needs, and later as an important factor in prioritizing and selecting the most appropriate transportation improvement strategies for specific locations. Early consideration of environmental impacts and early coordination also helps address National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements more effectively than if such issues would be left for consideration later in the project development process.

Environmental mitigation during project development are established in consultation with numerous federal, state and local agencies as well as interested parties responsible for and interested in environmental stewardship, including the agencies listed under partnerships.

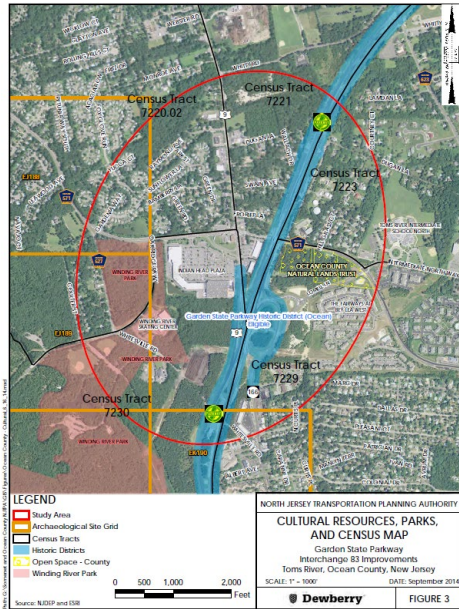
The specific types of environmental mitigation activities implemented are ultimately determined by the governing regulatory authority and are dependent upon the resource being impacted and the severity of that impact. Among the key environmental areas of concern to the NJTPA are shown in Figure I-2.

Figure I-2: Major Tasks in the Early Transportation Project Development Process

Tasks	Disciplines	Descriptions
<b>Project Development</b>	Project Prioritization Purpose and Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criteria considers resiliency, environmental impacts, land use compliance, and economic impacts</li> <li>• Data and Criteria Evaluations shared with Subregions</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Screening</b>	National Environmental Policy Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Resources</li> <li>• Air &amp; Water Quality Management</li> <li>• Stormwater Management</li> <li>• Flood Hazard Areas</li> <li>• Wetlands</li> <li>• Wildlife (including threatened/endangered species)</li> <li>• hazardous/contaminated sites</li> <li>• Parks and Recreation Area</li> <li>• Environmental Justice</li> <li>• NEPA Classification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) tools to streamline the project delivery process</li> <li>• Protecting historical and cultural resources</li> <li>• Maintaining/Improving air and water quality</li> <li>• Determine permit requirements</li> <li>• Avoid or minimize impacts to Green Acres</li> <li>• Identify Title VI, Environmental Justice communities</li> </ul>
<b>Public Outreach</b>	Consult with Environmental Agencies  Stakeholder Coordination  Local Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate Environmental mitigation discussion</li> <li>• Environmental Agencies consulted</li> <li>• Identify EJ communities for each project and evaluate potential impacts and public participation strategies in the Public Involvement Action Plan (PIAP)</li> <li>• Identify Context Sensitive Solutions</li> </ul>

Using this approach, insights gained from stakeholders, established and new interagency partners, and contextual use of gathered data often lead to innovative solutions. Outlined below are examples of successful approaches to PEL in the NJTPA region.

## Garden State Parkway Interchange 83 Improvements



The Garden State Parkway Interchange 83 Improvements study in Ocean County included ongoing coordination with NJDOT, the NJ Turnpike Authority, NJDEP Land Use Management (LUM) and NJDEP Historic Preservation Office (HPO). During early coordination with the NJ DEP-Historic Preservation Office (NJDEP-HPO), it was determined that the entire Garden State Parkway is a Historic District and is eligible for listing in the National Register. The coordination with these agencies allowed for coordination of stormwater management needs with the requirements to preserve the Parkway’s historic designation. This

coordination of historic and stormwater needs will allow for mitigation strategies that address these concerns. Mitigation strategies are finalized during the Preliminary Engineering phase of project development. In addition to utilizing Public Information Centers (PICs) to hear the concerns of the community, the project study also followed the NJTPA’s Congestion Management Process (CMP) and determined that the proposed improvements will reduce congestion and delays for all roadways and users within the project study area while also meeting environmental and historic preservation goals.

## Clay Street Bridge over the Passaic River



Clay Street Bridge is a Bi-County bridge in Hudson and Essex County. The movable bridge is structurally deficient with a sufficiency rating of 33 out of 100. The bridge is historic and is eligible for listing in the National Register. Extensive public outreach was conducted during alternative analysis and during the development of the Navigational Impact Report (NIR). The project team closely coordinated with United States Coast Guard (USCG), a new interagency partner, during the development of the NIR.

Due to the partnership with the USCG, the study team came to understand the importance of the Passaic River as a valuable transportation resource, even though it currently does not have much river traffic. Roadway and bridge projects often focus on how vehicles cross rivers and have less understanding of travel needs on the waterways. Despite its current light usage, the Passaic River is used by the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission and local fire and police boats during emergencies, as well as DEP dredging activities. This understanding of USCG needs and perspective will inform mitigation strategies, to be finalized in the Preliminary Engineering phase of project development.

At the Interagency Review Committee (IRC) meeting, it was decided to advance both a movable and a fixed bridge alternative to the preliminary engineering (PE) phase due to additional engineering analysis requirements. In addition, during the public outreach it was discovered that the catchment area for bridge users on foot and by bicycle was larger than initially thought. The IRC also recommended extensive public outreach during the PE phase be conducted to ensure that the concerns of all neighboring Environmental Justice communities are heard and documented.