

Scoping Process

Project Development and Environmental Analysis Unit		Approved: December 10, 2013 Version: 2.2
[Contents]		
Purpose Background Definitions Responsibility	Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Internal Scoping- External Scoping Contact Information	

Purpose

The Scoping Process provided in this document is intended to give the Project Development Engineer a framework for thoroughly scoping a project without spending an enormous amount of time in intensive data collection that may not be required.

Background

The Council on Environmental Quality regulations (CEQ Sec. 1501.7) defines scoping as the “early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying significant issues related to a proposed action.” In addition, part (a) 3 states that this process should identify and eliminate from detailed study the *issues* which are not significant or that were covered under a previous environmental review.

On March 6, 2012, CEQ issued a memo ([CEQ memo](#)) discussing the efficiencies in the environmental review process already in place in the regulations. Scoping and the integration of long-range planning and project development are some of the first items pointed out as “basic principles” of NEPA.

NCDOT charged an interdisciplinary team with reducing the time between the start of a project and ROW acquisition. The Streamlining Team determined that the early planning phase of a project offered an opportunity to get a more informed start by relying initially on the information gathered in the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) Process and GIS level data. The Team felt that effective scoping is critical for developing a project, and it was important to provide a framework that lends consistency to NCDOT’s approach while allowing flexibility to customize to specific project needs. In February 2012, the NCDOT Director of Preconstruction issued a memo ([Project Development Streamline Initiative - Scoping Implementation memo](#)) notifying staff that the scoping approach as defined under the streamlining initiative is mandatory for all R, U, I and W projects managed by the central Raleigh offices.

Definitions

Internal Scoping – the range of communications, coordination and collaborative actions conducted to orient transportation personnel to a project, identify potential issues, and serve as the framework for strategically planning the efficient and effective development of the project. Transportation personnel typically include representation from NCDOT business units, FHWA, MPOs/RPOs, and transportation planning personnel from cities or local communities.

External Scoping – the range of communication, coordination and collaboration actions conducted to orient and involve personnel and organizations outside of the transportation discipline to a transportation project. This phase of scoping serves to integrate their input and expertise into the plan for a project’s development. The audience includes the state and federal regulatory and environmental resource agencies, especially those engaged in the Merger Process. This audience does not include the general public.

Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for the various project team members are mentioned throughout this procedure. In general, it is the responsibility of each team member to adequately prepare for and participate in the scoping process by providing existing information that is readily available about the project area or draw on past project experience in the area with regards to trends, attitudes, and specific issues. NOTE: There will be projects where there is very little existing data and experience.

Procedures

Internal Scoping

The purpose of Internal Scoping (formerly called Project Initiation) is to orient transportation personnel within NCDOT, FHWA, and local planning organizations (i.e. MPOs/RPOs) to a project and reach a consensus on the need for and purpose of the project, potential project issues, and a plan for moving the project forward. Internal Scoping occurs before substantial investment of time and money has been made on a project. Internal Scoping is an opportunity for participants to:

- Transfer known information and project history developed during long range planning studies
- Understand the problem(s) that the project is addressing.
- Understand the relevant context and background concerning the problem.
- Exchange known information concerning the project area
- identify questions, concerns, major constraints or issues that may influence the project decisions
- Identify an initial list of potential issues that will affect decisions made about the problem and potential resolutions.
- Examine potential solutions for the problem including the recommended alternative from the long range plan, which is a pre-NEPA alternative, best professional assessment for the CTP.
- Discuss the project’s schedule
- SEPA/NEPA class of action and potential status as a merger project.
- Identify and plan actions, assignments, and timeframes for moving the project forward through further scoping and engaging partners from other organizations.

The section below provides guidance for holding an internal scoping meeting. The discussion covers the following basic topics:

- Scheduling scoping meetings
- Information sent prior to meetings
- Meeting preparation
- Conducting the Meeting (agenda topics)
- Potential Meeting Results and outcomes
- Meeting Minutes

Scheduling an Internal Scoping Meeting:

The PDEA Project Development Engineer (PDE) should:

- Begin planning the Internal Scoping Meeting 6-8 weeks before the desired meeting date.
- Communicate (either by phone or e-mail) with each branch or unit, if necessary, to verify the representative who will be attending the meeting and add the meeting to the NCDOT electronic calendar for each participant.
- Place all meeting materials in Project Store and notify Teresa Hart; she will place the same materials on the website located at <http://207.4.62.65/PDEA/MergerMeetings/>. The website will allow non-NCDOT internal scoping participants, such as FHWA and MPOs/RPOs, to access the information.

The list of recommended attendees can be found by clicking here - [NCDOT Internal Scoping Distribution List](#). It is encouraged that one representative per unit be involved. When in doubt about units that should attend, the PDE should talk with the unit(s) in question and determine if they need to attend the meeting

Information to Send Prior to the Meeting:

Send scoping information to attendees a minimum of 4 weeks before the meeting. The information that is sent should be existing data that is readily available or takes very little time and effort to produce. Always send the following:

- [Internal Scoping Meeting Letter](#)
- Vicinity Map
- [Internal Scoping Meeting Roles and Responsibilities](#)
- Environmental Features Map

Information that *may be* provided as well, if available and applicable, includes:

- Project photos (with captions or labeling)
- Feasibility Studies
- Problem Statement from TPB (we should be currently receiving these, as of November 2013)
- Various reports from TPB such as the Alternatives Scenario Analysis report, Community Understanding Report, etc. (as of November 2013, we are not routinely receiving these, but we will in the future)
- Any mapping from the CTP/LRTP/Feasibility Study showing alternatives considered in long range planning
- Traffic data used in long range planning (Do not ask or request traffic forecasts at this point.)

TPB and PDEA share the responsibility in transferring this information. TPB's responsibility is to provide what they have in response to the internal scoping invitation; if TPB doesn't have anything, they should let PDEA know this. PDEA's responsibility is to contact TPB to retrieve any existing information.

Meeting Preparation:

NCDOT Division staff, Roadway Design Staff, TPB staff, and MPO/RPO staff will play a key role at the internal scoping meeting. The first step for the PDE is to contact the TPB Regional Group Supervisor responsible for that area to identify a TPB Engineer who will serve as the point of contact for the project. The PDE and the TPB Engineer should identify the appropriate representatives from the MPO/RPO for the project and include

them in any meetings or discussions that PDEA and TPB have to prepare for internal scoping. The PDE, the TPB Engineer, MPO/RPO representatives, and any others as needed (e.g. Division personnel) will meet to discuss what data (including traffic data) is available from the CTP and map out the background and project history section of the agenda).

It is important to coordinate with the Division staff to get any background information and project history they may have, including efforts taken to solve the problem in the past. PDEA, TPB, MPO/RPO and the Division should plan the topics and messages that each one will deliver at the meeting.

Conducting the Meeting (Agenda Topics):

It is important to have a meeting agenda.

Below is an outline of the types of agenda topics for the Internal Scoping meeting. This list is not exhaustive and the topics you discuss at the Internal Scoping meeting will be project dependent. It is important, however, to always start by establishing an understanding of the transportation problem that the project concerns. This meeting is part education and part work/planning session. It is not expected that participants conduct exhaustive research or field work to prepare for the meeting. Rather, participants can help provide information that is readily available about the project area or draw from past project experience in the area. An outline of a sample meeting agenda can be found by clicking [HERE](#). Examples of the type of information or questions that should be covered under each topic are provided in the [Scoping Guidance](#).

Potential Meeting Results/Outcomes:

The outcomes of an internal scoping meeting will depend on the nature and complexity of the specific transportation project. In addition to the items on the sample agenda, you may have some information or direction on the following topics:

- Purpose and Need. (Is it well supported?)
- Key issues and topics, and their associated data needs, which most influence the direction of the project and/or require the most time and effort from staff.
- The project's likely Merger status and a plan for Merger Screening. (e.g. Should the PDE call the USACE and DWQ reps?)
- Realistic project schedule and strategy for moving forward
- Opportunities for streamlining the project development process for this particular project
- Immediate next steps/actions based on meeting discussion and due dates/deadlines for completing those actions.
- Identify when external scoping should be conducted and which regulatory and environmental resource agencies should be involved. Identify who from NCDOT should attend an external scoping meeting, based on anticipated issues or topics where expertise or support is needed.
- Identify the potential target month for the external scoping meeting and make everyone aware of the [Merger Days](#) for that month for the pertinent region. The people at the internal scoping meeting who will also attend the external scoping meeting should hold these days open until the exact meeting day and time is established (approximately 3 weeks in advance of the meeting). The target month should consider the actions identified during internal scoping and the time

needed to complete those, especially if resolution of those actions is critical for conducting external scoping.

Finalized Meeting Summary

Ensure that final meeting materials (including any revisions) are in Project Store. Prepare and submit meeting summary within 2 weeks after the meeting. Remember that the meeting minutes are not intended to be a transcript of the meeting, but a summary of issues discussed, decisions made, and next steps for the project team. Enlist someone from your group to take notes during the meeting so that you are free to facilitate. Consider having a flip chart/easel available so that key issues, decisions, actions, etc. can be recorded. All of these tools will help make producing meeting minutes less tedious. The meeting minutes will serve as “to dos” for the NCDOT Business Units and the MPO/RPO representatives in preparation for External Scoping. Finalized meeting summary should be stored in the appropriate folder in Project Store.

Start of Study Letters

The Start of Study Letter is used to inform agencies or other stakeholders whom NCDOT *does not normally coordinate with* about the start of the project development phase. The letter invites their comments as well as offering them a chance to request to be involved throughout the life of the project. The Start of Study letter is sent to the NCDOT Board of Transportation member that represents the project area. The Start of Study letter has a limited audience depending on the project.

The Start of Study letter is **not** sent to internal NCDOT units, the State Environmental Review Clearinghouse, or the resource agencies that normally comprise the project team.

External Scoping

The purpose of External Scoping (formerly Scoping Meeting) is to begin early coordination efforts with resource agencies and other stakeholders. Only NCDOT staff that is needed to assist in explaining information at the meeting should attend. During the Internal Scoping Meeting, or shortly thereafter, it will be determined and confirmed what NCDOT staff needs to attend the External Scoping Meeting. The external scoping meeting should provide an opportunity to acquaint our agency partners with the project by providing background and history, known information about the project area, and the purpose and need for the project. The agency representatives will bring information about their particular resource and any potentially significant issues or concerns to the meeting to discuss.

The following section is intended to give the PDE a framework for an External Scoping Meeting.

The discussion covers the following basic topics:

- Scheduling scoping meetings
- Information sent prior to meetings
- Meeting preparation
- Conducting the Meeting (agenda topics)
- Potential Meeting Results and outcomes
- Meeting Minutes

Scheduling an External Scoping Meeting

- External scoping meetings should be held on Merger Meeting days, if possible.
- PDE requests a slot for the external scoping meeting from the PDEA Concurrence Meeting Coordinator in the same format as a Merger Meeting request.
- PDE provide the Concurrence Meeting Coordinator with a list of *all* attendees, as determined through internal scoping.

Information to Send Prior to Meeting

- The PDE will prepare an External Scoping letter and “packet”. The packet will consist of:
 - [Scoping Cover Letter](#)
 - [Project Data Sheets](#) (formerly Scoping Sheets)
 - Vicinity Map
 - Environmental Features Map
 - Feasibility Study (If available)
 - Draft Purpose and Need statement
 - Any other pertinent information to assist attendees in preparing for the meeting
- The PDE will put the letter/packet on Project Store and the website at least 3 weeks in advance of the external scoping meeting. Provide the Project Store link to the PDEA Concurrence Meeting Coordinator so he can post the letter/packet on the website (<http://207.4.62.65/PDEA/MergerMeetings/>). Please make a pdf of mapping files at the appropriate size and scale to reduce storage size.
- The Concurrence Meeting Coordinator will send all invitees (NCDOT and agency) an electronic calendar meeting invitation with a link to the external scoping letter/packet a minimum of 3 weeks before the external scoping meeting. The PDE has the option of emailing or sending a hardcopy of the external scoping letter and packet as needed.

Meeting Preparation:

After the internal scoping meeting, the PDE will continue to coordinate with the appropriate staff on the external scoping meeting agenda. The PDE may work on information that will be needed for the meeting such as a draft Purpose and Need Statement and an updated Environmental Features Map. The PDE should also contact the other Merger primary signatory agencies (FHWA, NCDENR, and USACE) to initiate Merger Screening, as appropriate.

If information gained from internal scoping indicates that the project will follow Merger *and* the P&N is straight forward and well supported, then you may choose to hold a combined External Scoping/CP1 meeting. This type of meeting must be clearly stated in the meeting invitation so that all attendees are aware. It is also important to coordinate with the USACE representative in advance. Obtaining Concurrence Point 1 is NOT a goal of the External Scoping Meeting, and you do not have to finalize whether the project will follow the Merger Process *before* the external scoping meeting. The discussion at the external scoping meeting should help resolve the project’s Merger status.

Each attendee is responsible for studying the Scoping Packet ahead of the meeting date. Agency representatives are responsible for researching their resources and gathering data on possible constraints and issues of relevance in the project area. Although basic data is available by GIS, agency representatives should add insight based on their expertise and experience. NCDOT staff should review the packet, even if

they attended the Internal Scoping Meeting, for revisions or updated information on the project.

If the attendees have questions about the data in the Scoping Packet or the project in general, they are responsible for contacting the Project Development Engineer to discuss **before the meeting**.

Conducting the Meeting (agenda topics):

It is important to have a meeting agenda. The basic agenda for an external scoping meeting is very similar to that used during Internal Scoping. The primary difference is that resource agencies are providing their information, perspective and input on the project and potential issues. That input will influence how the project moves forward. Agenda topics could cover:

- Orientation to the Project Problem and History
- Discuss and understand the project area's human and natural resources/features
- Identify known data, issues, constraints, questions and possible data needs based on the issues
- Discuss potential solutions
- Develop next steps and actions, which would likely include when and how to begin external scoping with the agencies

This list of agenda topics carries the discussion from understanding the project purpose and need to potential alternatives or solutions. However not all meetings may get to the point of discussing potential solutions.

The PDE must tailor the meeting discussion to the specific project. This guidance is not intended to be used as an exhaustive checklist of every topic that must be discussed. The [Scoping Guidance](#) offers questions that the PDE can use during the meeting to assess the value of moving forward to the next major topic.

Potential Meeting Results/Outcomes

The exact outcomes will depend on the nature and complexity of the specific transportation project. Work to obtain information or direction on the following topics:

- Any issues with the project purpose and need
- Other issues that will be critical to the project
- Data and methodology needs for those issues
- Agencies that need to be on the project team
- Specific actions items with target dates (based on issues, questions raised)
- Project's status in the Merger Process
- Next steps, strategies, and overall schedule (Merger CP meeting? Public Involvement? Field work?)

Meeting Summary

See Internal Scoping. Be sure to email minutes to meeting attendee no later than 2 weeks after the meeting.

