

## **Section 7. Consideration of Environmental Mitigation**



The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which was passed by Congress and signed by the President in August of 2005, established new requirements for the preparation of long range transportation plans (LRPs). One of these new requirements is that plans include a

discussion of potential environmental mitigation activities associated with proposed development, and potential implementation strategies for such activities.

Other provisions focus on the need for earlier and more extensive consultation with resource agencies:

- SAFETEA-LU requires the MPO to consult with the regulatory and resource agencies “responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation concerning the development of the transportation plan,” (23 C.F.R. § 450.322(g))
- Consultations shall involve “comparison of transportation plans to inventories of natural or historic resources, if available.” (23 C.F.R. § 450.322(g)(1))
- Consultations shall involve “comparison of transportation plan with State conservation plans or maps, if available” (23 C.F.R. § 450.322(g)(2))
- SAFETEA-LU requires “a discussion of types of potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities, including activities that may have the greatest potential to restore and maintain the environmental functions affected by the plan. The discussion may focus on policies, programs, or strategies, rather than at the project level. ” (23 C.F.R. § 450.322(f)(7))

These provisions originate from a desire to extract benefits for overall transportation project development by considering environmental resources early in the transportation planning process. The early consideration of environmental resources during the transportation planning

process can assist the subsequent environmental clearance process and compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) on individual transportation projects. This concept is referred to as “linking planning and NEPA” or, more generally, “planning and environmental linkage”. This concept can assist in program predictability, project decisions, project deliverability, and mitigation decisions while responding to the desire to improve both transportation and the environment.

## **Regional Environmental Resource Inventory**

Southwestern Pennsylvania is a geographically and geologically diverse area, with a generally rolling to mountainous terrain. The varied terrain and the natural and environmental resources found in the region have done much to shape the history of the region, and the future.

Natural resource extraction has been a leading industry for more than 200 years, and remains a leading employment sector in many areas of the region. Many of the region’s natural amenities, including waterways, forested areas and hillsides have been protected from future development through preservation as State or Regional Parks, viewsheds or conservation areas.



The regional landscape also reflects the presence of some operating surface mines, old strip mined areas, and many reclaimed stripping areas. In areas, valley sides and hillsides can be moderately steep and may be susceptible to landslides, which create a range of development opportunities and limitations.

The 2040 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania promotes and protects the many environmental *resources* in the southwestern Pennsylvania region. The Plan also identifies the many environmentally based development limitations in the region, and makes deliberate efforts to divert development away from such areas.

## **Identification of Environmental Resource Impacts**

In concert with the development of the 2040 Long Range Plan, SPC has produced a companion document, the *Planning and Environmental Linkages in Southwestern Pennsylvania Report (as updated through the 2040 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania)* to address these enhanced transportation planning and environmental linkage requirements. The interactive version of the full Environmental Linkages Report is available on the SPC website at <http://www.spcregion.org/lrpenv/>

The Environmental Addendum to the LRTP includes the following sections to address the planning and environmental linkage requirements of SAFETEA-LU:

- *Regulatory Context* – summarizes major environmental resources and regulations related to the resources that influence transportation project development. The section also lists the available planning level data to identify these “red flag” resources.
- *Agency Consultation Process* – discusses and summarizes the activities that were conducted in consulting the regulatory environmental resource and cultural resource agencies.
- *Environmental Inventory* – presents a detailed inventory of available planning level data for environmental and cultural resources in the region; including numerous resource mapping figures.
- *Existing “State Conservation Plans and Maps”* - presents a review of current state conservation plans and maps.
- *Environmental Screening* – discusses and presents the analysis comparing a sample of LRTP projects (TIP candidate transportation projects from each of the ten counties in the SPC region) to the inventory of environmental and cultural resources. This section includes a summary matrix, project environmental checklist, and various preliminary constraint maps for the projects included in the screening.
- *Potential Environmental Mitigation Activities* – discusses the potential options and strategies for environmental mitigation activities for resources with the greatest potential to restore and maintain environmental functions and a discussion of spatial factors for identifying areas to carry out potential mitigation activities.
- *Summary and Next Steps* – summarizes the Addendum and provides some potential future regional planning activities to extend planning and environmental linkages.

## **Environmental Consultation**

Dozens of statewide and regional environmental resource agencies and PennDOT environmental specialists were active participants in the development of SPC environmental resource mapping capabilities.

In the development of a formal Planning and Environmental Linkage *process* with SPC, multiple meetings have been held with these environmental agencies and specialists to determine the frequency of on-going coordination and update efforts. Any impacts of the proposed 2040 Transportation and Development Plan activities on these environmental resources, and the identification of potential strategies for the mitigation of any potential adverse impacts will be considered through a Statewide Agency Coordination Meeting.