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300.01 Introduction and Overview

During the project scoping and programming phase, WSDOT develops a plan to identify and address transportation facility performance needs and creates a preliminary budget for consideration by the state legislature. The process is required by state law ([RCW 47.05.010](#)) and is limited to solving safety and operational performance needs identified in WSDOT's modal plans, as well as addressing environmental factors.

Scoping defines time and cost-of-work estimates for each proposed project. It is important that estimates be as realistic as possible and consider budget and schedule implications of environmental documentation, permitting and compliance monitoring, as well as engineering work.

Programming refines and prioritizes the list of proposed projects. The process is based on the recommendations gathered during Planning from community engagement activities and the costs and schedules developed during Project Scoping. Scoping and programming fulfills the needs for WSDOT to:

- Create and submit to the legislature a ten-year investment program as defined in [RCW 47.05.030](#). The legislature considers and approves this program along with a 2-year budget. The approved program and budget can include legislative modifications. For details, see WSDOT's [project delivery plan](#) website.
- Create fiscally-constrained lists of projects to be submitted for inclusion on the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as required by CFR 450.218. Projects on the STIP are eligible for particular federal funding. For details on this process, see WSDOT's [Local Programs](#) website.

Through this process:

- WSDOT creates a financially constrained list of projects for consideration by the legislature. The list is based on realistic schedules and cost estimates that include all phases of the work.
- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approve the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). A project must be included in the Transportation Improvement Plan (the TIP) and the [STIP](#) to be eligible for federal funding (Title 23 USC and the Federal Transit Act). For details on this process, see WSDOT's [Local Programs](#) website.
- The legislature considers and approves WSDOT's 6- to 10-year Capital Improvement and Preservation Program (CIPP) along with a 2-year budget. The approved plan and budget can include legislative modifications.

300.02 Project Scoping

[Practical Solutions](#) is a two-part strategy that includes practical solutions planning and practical design, as defined in WSDOT Executive Order (EO) [E 1090](#) and described in detail in [Chapter 1100](#) of the [Design Manual](#) and the [Practical Solutions planning](#) webpage. This process, redefines the method WSDOT uses to scope and design projects.

WSDOT's practical design process consists of seven primary procedural steps listed below, providing the basis for modal choice, alternative development and selection of design elements. The process resembles the NEPA process and every effort should be made to minimize re-work by documenting the Practical Design process in enough detail to fulfill the NEPA documentation requirements.

WSDOT's Practical Design Process Steps include:

1. Assemble an advisory team. Environmental staff will usually be invited to participate on the Advisory Team by the Project Engineer (see [Design Manual](#) Section 1100.04).
2. Clearly identify the baseline and contextual needs (see [Design Manual Chapter 1101](#)).
3. Identify the land use and transportation context for the project location (see [Design Manual Chapter 1102](#)), including the environmental, economic, and social demographic data that indicate livability and travel characteristics.
4. Select design controls compatible with the context (see [Design Manual Chapter 1103](#)).
5. Formulate and evaluate potential alternatives that resolve the baseline/contextual need and are bound by design controls (see [Design Manual Chapter 1104](#)).
6. Select design elements employed and/or changed by the selected alternative(s) (see [Design Manual Chapter 1105](#)).
7. Determine design element dimensions consistent with the alternatives' performance needs, context, and design controls (see [Design Manual Chapter 1106](#)).

The Basis of Design (BOD) is used to document the outcomes of applying these procedural steps. A BOD is required for all projects. The BOD should serve as the background and context for detailed environmental analysis and documentation. One of the major responsibilities of the advisory team environmental staff is to assist the team in establishing appropriate environmental measures, such as the number of square feet of impact to Category I and II wetlands (metric) and 0 square feet of impact (target). The environmental staff also ensure:

- The process, participants, and decisions made by the team comply with NEPA and SEPA requirements.
- The team considers all appropriate environmental disciplines (such as Section 4(f), Section 106, ESA, noise, etc.). See the User Guide for Corridor Sketch Summaries for additional key WSDOT environmental assets to consider.
- Decisions are included in the project's administrative record.

During project scoping, all major costs of the project are used to prepare a realistic schedule and cost estimate. Scoping is described in the [Design Manual Chapter 300](#). The process is documented in the Project Profile and identifies the transportation needs that have generated the project, the purpose or goal of the work, and the recommended solution.

The Environmental Review Summary (ERS) is attached to the Project Profile as a part of the Project Summary package. It:

- Documents known baseline environmental conditions.
- Describes potential environmental impacts, mitigation options, and anticipated permits necessary for the project.
- Establishes project classification (see [Section 300.03](#)) and anticipated level of environmental documentation required (see [Chapter 400](#)) for the project. The Region Environmental Manager approves the ERS, which indicates concurrence with the anticipated project NEPA and/or SEPA Classification.

For many projects, the WSDOT Geographic Information system (GIS) Workbench coupled with a site visit provides sufficient information to complete the ERS for projects classified as Categorical Exclusions. Additional detailed analysis may be required for projects that require an EA or EIS. The ERS database includes fully integrated help screens that provide detailed guidance. Contact your Region Environmental Office or Program Management Office to get set up to work in the database.

For CE level projects, the information in the ERS is exported to the ECS database and becomes the basis for NEPA/SEPA environmental documentation.

300.03 Project Classification

The project classification determines the level of environmental documentation required for a WSDOT project. It is based on the information contained in the Environmental Review Summary and can change as more information is discovered. State projects with a federal nexus are subject to NEPA and SEPA. Projects that have only state funding and no federal nexus follow SEPA guidelines. If future funding is undetermined, NEPA guidelines are usually followed so the project can qualify for federal funding in the future.

300.04 NEPA Classifications

Projects subject to NEPA fall into one of the three classifications described below.

1. **NEPA Class I Projects** – Actions that are likely to have significant impact on the environment because of their effects on land use, planned growth, development patterns, traffic volumes, travel patterns, transportation services, or natural resources. They require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (see [Chapter 400](#)) because the action is likely to have significant adverse environmental impacts. Projects that usually require an EIS, as defined in [23 CFR 771.115](#), are:

- New controlled-access freeways.
- Highway project of four or more lanes in a new location.
- New construction or extension of fixed rail transit facilities (e.g., rapid rail, light rail, commuter rail, automated guideway transit).
- New construction or extension of a separate roadway for buses or high occupancy vehicles not located within an existing highway facility.

Although examples are given, it is important to remember that the context and intensity of the potential impacts, and the level of controversy on environmental grounds, determine the need for an EIS, not the size of the project.

2. **NEPA Class II Projects** – are Categorical Exclusions (CE). These actions are not likely to cause significant adverse environmental impacts, meet the definitions contained in [40 CFR 1508.4](#), and are excluded from completing an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. The Environmental Classification Summary (ECS) serves as the environmental documentation for these types of projects (see [Chapter 400](#)).

Each federal agency is required to identify its own categories of actions that qualify as CEs, although all USDOT agencies agree that Class II projects typically:

- Do not induce significant impacts to planned growth or land use.
- Do not require the relocation of significant numbers of people.
- Do not have a significant impact on any natural, cultural, recreational, historic, or other resource.
- Do not involve significant air, noise, or water quality impacts.
- Do not have significant impacts on travel patterns.
- Do not otherwise, either individually or cumulatively, have significant environmental impacts.

- a. **FHWA Categorical Exclusions (CE)** – Under the May [2020 CE Programmatic Agreement \(PCE\) with FHWA](#), WSDOT approves the NEPA documentation for all Class II (CE) Projects described in [23 CFR 771.117\(c\)](#) and (d). These actions are generally minor actions that have little or no physical impacts. These actions normally do not require further approval or documentation by FHWA. Environmental documentation for CE projects is accomplished by completion of the Environmental Classification Summary (ECS), which is approved by the Region Environmental Manager (see [Chapter 400](#)). The NEPA documentation process for Local Agencies is described in the WSDOT Local Programs [NEPA Categorical Exclusions Guidebook](#).

WSDOT may request FHWA review and signature for individual projects on a case-by-case basis (PCE - Section IV(B)(3)).
 - b. **FTA Categorical Exclusion (CE)** – CEs are described in [23 CFR 771.118\(c\)](#) as minor actions that have little or no physical impacts that have been designated as CEs by FTA. These actions do not require further approval or documentation by FTA. FTA has its own process and worksheets for documenting CEs.
 - c. **FRA Categorical Exclusions (CE)** – CEs are described in [23 CFR 771.116](#) FRA has its own process and worksheets for documenting CEs. Contact the WSDOT Rail Division Environmental Compliance Manager for assistance.
3. **NEPA Class III Projects** – When the potential environmental impacts of a proposed project are not clearly understood, an environmental assessment (EA) is prepared. The EA determines the extent and level of environmental impact.

An EA may satisfy the requirements for a SEPA DNS, but it does not include sufficient detail to satisfy the requirements of a SEPA EIS.

The content and complexity of an EA will vary depending on the project. See the WSDOT [Environmental Impact Statement \(EIS\)/Environmental Assessment \(EA\) Processes](#) webpage for details on EA documentation and procedure.

300.05 SEPA Classifications

While all agency actions technically require a SEPA determination, many of the operational and administrative tasks we undertake are exempt from the SEPA process. If an action is not exempt, it is either found to have non-significant or significant impacts.

WSDOT serves as the SEPA lead agency on actions undertaken by our agency. As such, we are required to determine the level of environmental review and documentation required for an action. The SEPA determinations fall into one of three broad categories: Determination of Significance (DS), Determination of Non Significance (DNS) and Categorically Exempt (CE).

- **Determination of Significance (DS)** – Issued for actions that are likely to result in a probable significant adverse environmental impact. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be completed for these projects.
- **Determination of Non-Significance (DNS)** – Issued for actions that are not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact. A SEPA checklist is required for these projects.

- **Categorically Exempt (CE)** – Issued for actions identified by statute or rule that are unlikely to cause significant adverse environmental impacts.

The types of projects that qualify as categorically exempt can be found in:

- [RCW 43.21C.035 – 43.21C.0384](#) – Statutory Exemptions
- [WAC 197-11-800](#) – Categorical exemptions listed in state SEPA rules.
- [WAC 197-11-860](#) – Nine categorical exemptions specific to WSDOT.
- [WAC 468-12-800](#) – DOT’s agency SEPA procedures including how WSDOT has interpreted the categorical exemptions listed in state SEPA rules.

NEPA CE (Class II) projects are not always categorically exempt under SEPA. If the project is not exempt under SEPA, WSDOT must consider environmental information for the project and prepare a threshold determination (DS, DNS, or mitigated DNS).

The NEPA EA may be adopted by WSDOT to satisfy the SEPA checklist requirement ([WAC 197-11-610](#)). An addendum may be required to assure all elements of the environment, as required by SEPA, are described. In this case, WSDOT is still required to issue the DNS for the project.

300.06 Revision of Project Scope and Classification

See [Section 400.06](#) for details on project re-evaluations and preparation of supplementary environmental documentation.

300.06(1) *NEPA Reclassification*

A revised ECS must be processed for any major change in a project classification if the project involves federal funds. The 2015 PCE with FHWA allows WSDOT to approve the NEPA classification. Minor changes may be handled informally.

300.06(2) *SEPA Reclassification*

A significant change in the scope of a state funded project usually requires revision of the ERS. This may include reassessment of the environmental classification. The Region Environmental Office, in coordination with the Region Program Management Office, determines if the ERS needs to be revised and the environmental classification changed. Any changes in classification are documented by a note to the file or a follow-up memo.

300.07 Highways Over National Forest Lands

WSDOT and the United States Forest Service (USFS) established procedures for coordination of transportation activities on national Forest lands in 1991 (updated in June 2013). The agreement covers coordination, project programming and planning, pre-construction, rights of way, construction/reconstruction, maintenance, signs, access control, and third party occupancy. The agreement does not apply to local agency projects. Elements that pertain to environmental analysis and documentation include the stipulation that:

- WSDOT will coordinate with USFS at project inception for projects using or affecting National Forest Service lands or interests.

- WSDOT and USFS will agree on needed environmental documents and lead agency responsibilities. WSDOT will have the primary responsibility for highway related projects.
- WSDOT and USFS will cooperate in development of a single set of environmental documents for each project and jointly seek public involvement when necessary.
- Draft and final environmental documents will be circulated to each agency for review before distribution for public comment.

300.08 Environmental Database Resources

300.08(1) *WSDOT's GIS Workbench*

WSDOT's GIS Workbench is an internal data system available for use by WSDOT staff in preparing the "Environmental Considerations" portion of the ERS. The Workbench is a user-friendly interface covering a wide range of environmental resources gathered from a variety of public agency and WSDOT sources.

The database has over 500 layers of environmental and natural resource management data, in the following major data categories:

- **General Reference** – Transportation routes, political and administrative boundaries, major public lands, geographic reference.
- **Environmental Data** – Air quality, fish and wildlife, priority species and habitats, geology and soils, groundwater and wells, hazardous materials, hydrography, plants, and water quality.

WSDOT users can access these data sets through the WSDOT GIS Workbench webpage.

The data provided to WSDOT staff through the GIS Workbench are sufficient for Project Summary's ERS form purposes, for most disciplines. However, wetland data available from the GIS Workbench are not reliable, and may show wetlands as absent when they are present or may show wetlands as present when they are not. Field work by a qualified wetland biologist is necessary to determine the presence or absence of wetlands.

Consult Ecology's Facility/Site database to identify potentially contaminated sites Hazardous Materials and Problem Waste sites (see [Chapter 447](#) for additional guidance).

300.08(2) *Expansion of GIS Workbench*

GIS resources for environmental data are expanding rapidly. WSDOT staff works with federal, state, and local agencies to maintain a collection of the best available data for statewide environmental analysis. New data resources are being incorporated into the WSDOT GIS Workbench. To facilitate getting the best data into the system, contact the [ESO Environmental Information Program](#) with information about newly identified data resources.

300.08(3) **Citing a GIS Database**

The GIS Workbench itself should not be cited as a data source, or referenced on paper or digitally. Data source or reference citation should be specific to the exact dataset viewed using the GIS Workbench. Proper form for citations referring to a digital database is evolving, but typically includes the name of the data system, the name of the agency that maintains/updates the database, and date of the data retrieval. If the data comes from an Internet website, the title of the site should be included with the full Uniform Resource Locator (URL). The citation information can be found in the Metadata (Item Description) for each Workbench dataset.

300.09 **Applicable Statutes and Regulations**

- [42 United States Code \(USC\) 4321](#) *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)*
- [23 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) Part 771](#) *Environmental Impact and Related Procedures*
- [23 CFR Part 774](#); [49 USC Section 303](#) *Policy on Lands, Parks, Recreation Areas, Wildlife and Waterfowl Refuges, and Historic Sites*
- [36 CFR Part 800](#) *Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties*
- [40 CFR Parts 1500-1508](#) *Council for Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing NEPA*
- [WAC 197-11](#) *SEPA Rules*
- [WAC 468-12](#) *WSDOT Agency SEPA Procedures*
- [RCW 43.21C](#) *State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)*

300.10 **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

BOD	Basis of Design
CE	Categorical Exclusion (NEPA) or Categorical Exemption (SEPA)
CIPP	Capital Improvement and Preservation Program
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DNS	Determination of Nonsignificance (SEPA)
DS	Determination of Significance (SEPA)
EA	Environmental Assessment (NEPA)
ECS	Environmental Classification Summary
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
ERS	Environmental Review Summary
ESO	Environmental Services Office
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration

GIS	Geographic Information System
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PCE	CE Programmatic Agreement with FHWA
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
RTPO	Regional Transportation Planning Organization
SEPA	State Environmental Policy Act
STIP	Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
USDOT	United State Department of Transportation
USFS	United States Forest Service
WAC	Washington Administrative Code

300.11 Glossary

Categorical Exclusion – A NEPA action defined by a specific agency through CFR or FR that does not individually or cumulatively have a significant environmental effect (see [Section 300.04\(a\)](#)).

Categorical Exemption – A SEPA action defined through WAC that does not individually or cumulatively have a significant environmental effect (see [Section 300.05](#)).

Documented Categorical Exclusion – A NEPA action that requires additional environmental documentation to qualify as categorically excluded (see [Section 300.04\(b\)](#)).

Federal Nexus – A project has a federal nexus when a federal agency must take an action on a project. Before the federal agency takes an action environmental impacts must be evaluated under NEPA. Common actions that create a Federal Nexus include:

- Federal land decision required within the project area.
- Federal money is used on the project.
- Federal permits or approvals are required.

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