

Successes In Stewardship

New Web Resource Helps States and MPOs Improve Collaborative Transportation Decisionmaking

Developed as part of the second Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP2), [PlanWorks](#) is a web resource that supports collaborative decisionmaking in transportation planning and project development. PlanWorks is designed to help users deliver projects that meet environmental, community, and mobility needs by suggesting when and how users should engage cross-disciplinary partners and stakeholder groups. PlanWorks helps State, regional, and local transportation practitioners identify and overcome obstacles—such as managing many stakeholders or multiple phases—that arise in projects of various scales. PlanWorks is designed to help entities find solutions to these obstacles to improve collaboration and integrate new and emerging topics into the decisionmaking process.

Tracing PlanWorks' Development and Evolution

PlanWorks, formerly known as Transportation for Communities – Advancing Projects through Partnerships (TCAPP), was the centerpiece of the capacity focus area research conducted under SHRP2. Originally piloted in 2010, TCAPP was tested by transportation agencies and revised based on the results. Using stakeholder and user feedback, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) worked with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and the Transportation Research Board to rebrand the content and organize it in a way that was more user-friendly. The result of these efforts is the recently launched [PlanWorks website](#).

PlanWorks features four major components: Decision Guide, Assessments, Applications, and Library. PlanWorks' capabilities include: resources that aid collaboration such as suggested policy questions, stakeholder inputs, data, and examples that can help facilitate decisionmaking; assessments designed to help users identify barriers to successful planning and project development; a series of special topics, including subjects like performance measures, visioning, freight, and land use, which offer information and approaches for how each topic can be considered in a collaborative decisionmaking process; and lastly, case studies and reports that highlight examples of successful interagency cooperation.



PlanWorks is an updated and rebranded version of TCAPP. The new version is a result of SHRP2 capacity focus area research. (Courtesy of FHWA)

What's New in PlanWorks?

PlanWorks' new website expands on and transforms TCAPP by including additional features, such as the "How do I get started?" interactive questionnaire, which leads users through a series of questions to determine which PlanWorks resources will be most applicable to their needs. The questionnaire covers topics related to planning roles, development phases, and assessing collaboration. Once users complete the questionnaire, they are provided with a brief summary of results and links to each suggested resource or tool. PlanWorks also incorporates components of other SHRP2 products into the Decision Guide, Assessments, Applications, and Library. Two such products are [Implementing Eco-Logical](#) and [Expediting Project Delivery Assessment](#). The Eco-Logical approach organizes current methods for addressing natural



Eco-Logical has been incorporated into PlanWorks to assist with environmental decisionmaking. (Courtesy of FHWA)


resource identification, avoidance, minimization, and mitigation into a systematic, step-by-step process that starts at the beginning of the transportation planning process and concludes with establishing programmatic approaches to recurring natural resource issues that can be implemented at the project level. PlanWorks links the Eco-Logical process with key decisions in the Decision Guide.

The Expediting Project Delivery Assessment streamlines project development and delivery by identifying constraints to accelerating project delivery time and offering strategies for addressing those constraints. The constraints are grouped into categories, such as inefficient public involvement, slow decisionmaking, stakeholder controversy and opposition, and lack of allocated staff.

State DOTs and MPOs Facilitate Better Planning and Decisionmaking with PlanWorks

South Carolina Improves Collaboration on Bridge Replacement Project with PlanWorks

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) turned to PlanWorks to help improve collaboration among SCDOT and agency partners during the Environmental Review/National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Merged with Permitting processes. SCDOT piloted PlanWorks on the Hoopstick Creek Bridge Replacement project in Johns Island, South Carolina, which was a relatively routine project for the agency. Smaller projects like Hoopstick typically require a disproportionate amount of time in the environmental review process compared to large or complex projects, so PlanWorks had the potential to provide a significant amount of support through the Decision Guide for environment permitting.

| Environmental Review/NEPA Merged with Permitting | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|---|--|
| ENV-1 Reach Consensus on Scope of Environmental Review | ENV-2 Approve Notice of Intent | ENV-3 Approve Purpose and Need/Reach Consensus on Project Purpose | ENV-4 Reach Consensus on Study Area | ENV-5 Approve Evaluation Criteria, Methods and Measures | ENV-6 Approve Full Range of Alternatives | ENV-7 Approve Alternatives to be Carried Forward | ENV-8 Approve Draft EIS with Conceptual Mitigation | ENV-9 Approve Resource Agency Public Notice | ENV-10 Approve Preferred Alternative / LEDPA |
|  ENV-11 Approve Final Jurisdictional Determination | ENV-12 Reach Consensus on Avoidance and Minimization for the LEDPA | ENV-13 Approve Final EIS | ENV-14 Approve the Record of Decision | ENV-15 Render Permit Decision and Approve Avoidance and Minimization | | | | | |

SCDOT used PlanWorks to identify specific points in the environmental review process where the agency could improve collaboration with its partners. (Courtesy of FHWA)

SCDOT was particularly interested in how PlanWorks could provide guidance on ways to work collaboratively with project partners on environmental permitting decisions. The Decision Guide suggested various roles for agency partners in the permitting process and helped SCDOT facilitate discussions among the partners on the project's alternatives. These discussions included decisions about the geographic study area, which helped the partners prioritize resources for each agency, including FHWA, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Using PlanWorks resulted in an increased understanding and dialogue among SCDOT and its partners regarding each agency's role in the permitting process. This led to an improved level of environmental analysis for the project and revealed places where the process can be improved. The project partners also gained a better understanding of how each agency makes decisions and the importance of frequent communication about project status. SCDOT is considering integrating the following practices into the environmental permitting process based on feedback provided through PlanWorks: improve application and submission practices (e.g., assemble complete application packages and decrease administrative efforts from repetitive tasks) and hold regular meetings to discuss the quality of submissions and how they can be improved.

Charlottesville-Albemarle, Virginia MPO Improves 2040 LRTP with PlanWorks

The Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) used PlanWorks to assist with their long-range transportation plan (LRTP) for 2040. The goal of the 2040 LRTP is to create regional solutions for transportation and land use planning challenges. The MPO determined that the PlanWorks Decision Guide complemented the LRTP by providing a framework for developing the plan and performance measurement. The Decision Guide provided a focused structure including FHWA requirements for developing the LRTP. The MPO utilized the Decision Guide in conjunction with the Performance Measures application to help assess and determine which projects to ultimately include in the LRTP. The MPO found that the Decision Guide aided in approaching future transportation system planning by providing a structured framework. The Decision Guide also provided information on how to refine and update goals identified in the 2040 LRTP and develop transportation-specific evaluation criteria.

What's Next for PlanWorks?

PlanWorks is a featured product in [Round 6](#) of the SHRP2 Implementation Assistance Program, a program that is available to help State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and MPOs deploy SHRP2 Solutions. The Round 6 application process opened on May 29, 2015 and will close on June 26, 2015. An informational webinar that discussed the transition from TCAPP to PlanWorks, and PlanWorks' new capabilities was held on May 14, 2015; [a recording is now available](#). Moving forward, FHWA will also consult with an Expert Task Group to provide support and advice on how to best implement PlanWorks, including technical assistance for users. The group includes stakeholders from State DOTs, MPOs, and organizations such as the National Association of Regional Councils. The Round 6 recipients will be announced in August 2015, and will begin using PlanWorks to improve collaborative decisionmaking on new and existing transportation projects.

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Look What's New!

- The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) developed guidance in 2013 that provides consistent and efficient procedures for determining the indirect land use and environmental effects of transportation projects in the State. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials recently released a [case study](#) on the MDT guidance that describes why the resource was developed and how it has helped transportation practitioners in Montana to date.
- The FHWA Offices of [Human Environment](#), [Natural Environment](#), [Planning](#), and [Real Estate](#) updated their Research Fact Sheets, which highlight specific research activities within each office.
- The White House released the [Federal Resource Guide for Infrastructure Planning and Design](#), which describes the importance of planning and design in the life of infrastructure projects. This guide includes environmental review considerations and case studies that cover a variety of planning scenarios and potential challenges.
- FHWA will host the second webinar in a [series](#) based on [Advancing a Sustainable Highway System: Highlights of FHWA Sustainability Activities](#). A webinar on Linking Asset Management and Planning in a sustainability context will be held on June 25, 2:00-3:00 PM Eastern.

Successes in Stewardship is a Federal Highway Administration newsletter highlighting current environmental streamlining and stewardship practices from around the country. [Click here](#) to subscribe, or call (617) 494-3719 for more information.