



March 16, 2022

Streamlining Project Development Through Planning & Environmental Linkages

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Welcome and Agenda

What is a PEL Study?

PEL Framework

Tools and Resources for Success

Agency and Stakeholder Engagement

PEL Best Practices

Q&A / Discussion



What is a PEL Study?

A PEL Study Is...

- 1 A FHWA tool for **creating efficiency** in transportation development
- 2 Considers **environment, community & economy**
- 3 **Collaborative & integrated** approach to decision-making



Benefits of a PEL Study



Combines
planning,
engineering, &
NEPA



Minimizes
duplication; uses
decisions and
analysis to inform
NEPA



Encourages early,
meaningful public
engagement



Promotes
environmental
stewardship



Reduces delays
in
implementation

FHWA and State DOT Coordination

- Set expectations and outcomes
- Formal coordination at identified key milestones
- Regular progress meetings
- Expedite transition to NEPA





PEL Framework

Considerations for the PEL

- Flexibility in funding
- FHWA support
- Concurrence points
- Agency/stakeholder coordination
- Consensus building
- Public engagement

526 EAST
LOWCOUNTRY
CORRIDOR

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

PLANNING & ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is intended to act as a summary of the Planning process and ease the transition from planning to a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. Often, there is no overlap in personnel between the planning and NEPA phases of a project, so consequently much (or all) of the history of decisions made in the planning phase is lost. Different planning processes take projects through analysis at different levels of detail. NEPA project teams may not be aware of relevant planning information and may re-do work that has already been done. This questionnaire is consistent with the 23 CFR 450 (Planning regulations) and other FHWA policy on Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) process.

The Planning and Environmental Linkages study (PEL Study) is used in this questionnaire as a generic term to mean any type of planning study conducted at the corridor or subarea level which is more focused than studies at the regional or system planning levels. Many states may use other terminology to define studies of this type and those are considered to have the same meaning as a PEL study.

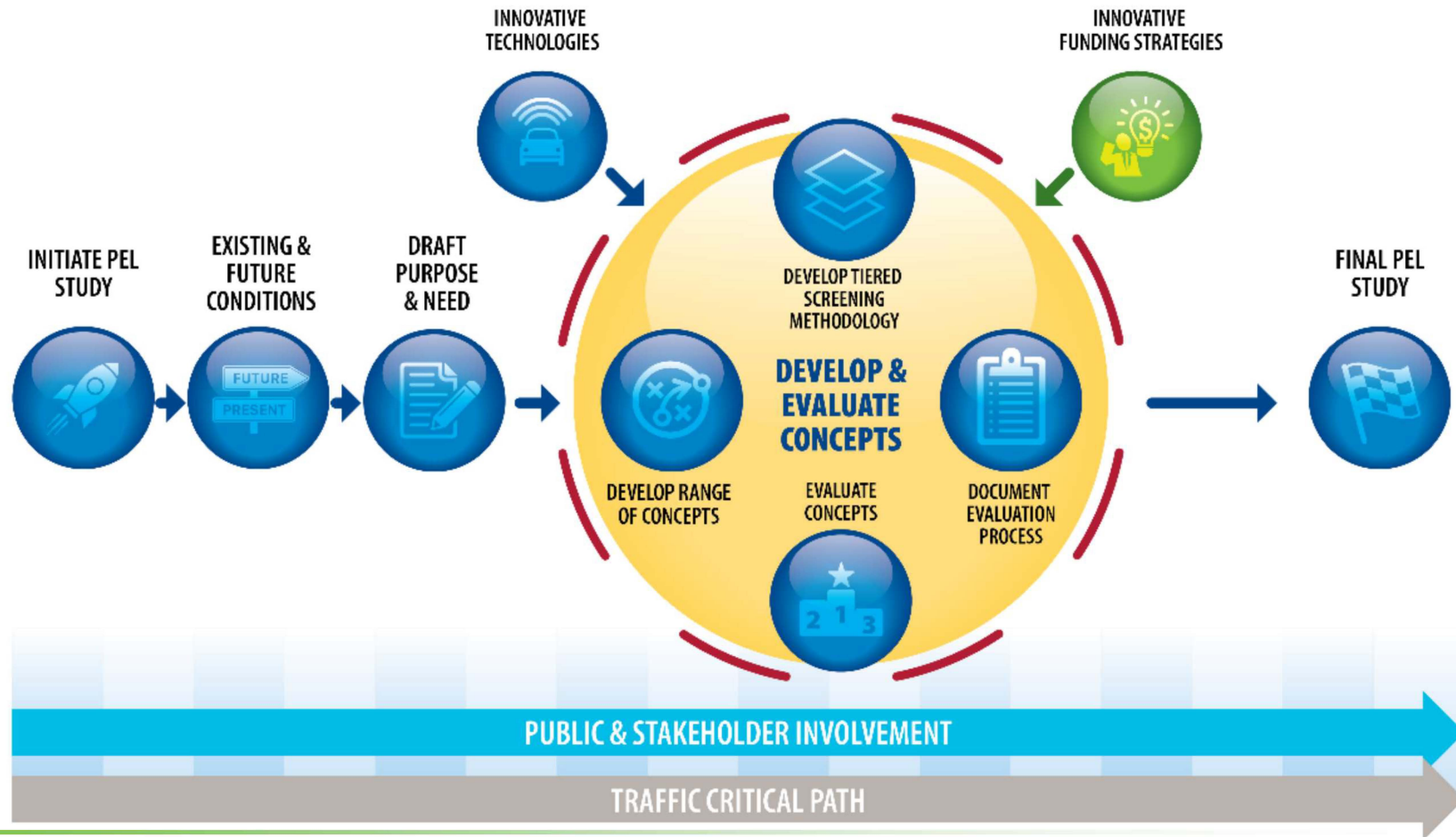
At the inception of the PEL study, the study team should decide how the work may later be incorporated into subsequent NEPA efforts. A key consideration is whether the PEL study will meet standards established by NEPA regulations and guidance. One example is the use of terminology consistent with NEPA vocabulary (e.g. purpose and need, alternatives, affected environment, environmental consequences).

Instructions: These questions should be used as a guide throughout the planning process, not just answered near completion of the process. When a PEL study is started, this questionnaire will be given to the project team. Some of the basic questions to consider are: "What did you do?", "What didn't you do?", and "Why?". When the team submits a PEL study to FHWA for review, the completed questionnaire will be included with the submittal. FHWA will use this questionnaire to assist it in determining if the study meets the requirements of 23 CFR §§ 450.212 or 450.31B. The questionnaire should be included in the planning document as an executive summary, chapter, or appendix.

PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT LINKAGES

FHWA

PEL Study Process and Milestones



Streamlining Project Development Through Planning & Environmental Linkages

Pulling It All Together



From PEL to Project Implementation

Planning & Environmental Linkages Study (PEL)

- Purpose & need
- Study goals
- Existing conditions analysis
- Reasonable alternatives
 - Cost estimates
 - Mitigation requirement
- Recommendations
- Action plan

Next Steps

- Identify short-term and long-term projects to fund
- Identify available funding
- Determine Class of Actions: CE, EA, or EIS
- Define logical termini/study area
- Finalize purpose & need for each project

Preliminary Design/NEPA

- Initiate NEPA
- Detailed environmental studies
- Identification of preferred alternative
- Prepare NEPA document
- Public involvement

Design/Construction

- Final design
- Right-of-way acquisition
- Permitting
- Mitigation and commitments
- Let project for construction

Agency Coordination / Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Streamlining Project Development Through Planning & Environmental Linkages



Tools and Resources for Success

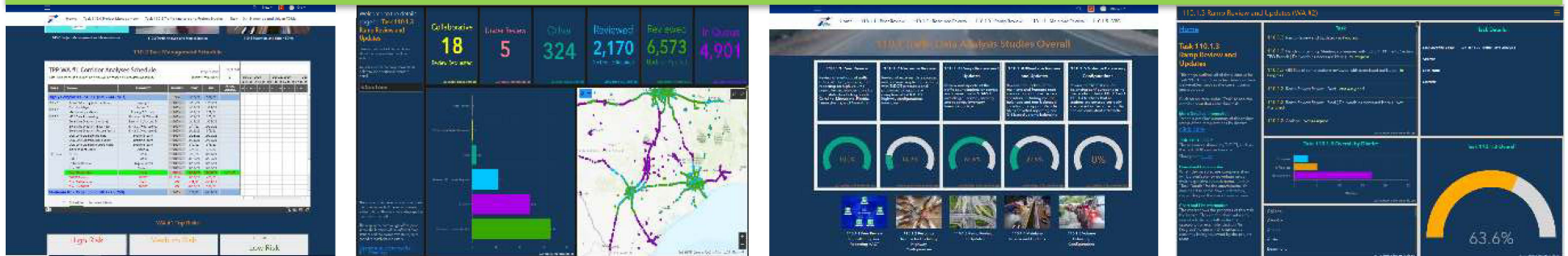
PEL Milestones

- FHWA Coordination Points
 - PEL Initiation
 - Purpose and Need
 - Alternatives Analysis
 - Final PEL/FHWA Questionnaire
- COG/MPO Coordination
- Interagency coordination meetings
- Virtual, in-person or hybrid public information meetings

Data and Management Dashboards

- Available online 24/7
- Up-to-date on schedules, milestone dates, progress reports, and deliverable due dates
- Visual display of data
- Online mapping tools
- Repository for project data and analysis for the team's review
- Document retention

Cost-Effective. Customizable. Collaborative.



Streamlining Project Development Through Planning & Environmental Linkages

Multi-Scale Traffic Engineering

- Traffic and Operations
 - Travel demand modeling (TransCAD, VISSUM)
 - Simulation (TransModeler, VISSIM)
 - Deterministic (HCS, Synchro)
- Safety Analysis
 - Corridor-wide systemic analysis
 - Localized hot-spot identification and diagnosis
- Collaborative approach with other technical disciplines



Visualization as a Tool



BENEFITS:

- Aids public understanding
- Provides clarity to alternatives analysis





Agency and Stakeholder Engagement

Agency Coordination



Engagement Strategies

- Project branding
- Digital outreach tools
 - Website
 - Social media
 - Newsletters
 - Surveys
- In-person engagement
 - Community storefront
 - Flyer boxes
 - Pop-up events
 - Open houses/meetings



Outreach + Communications Approach

Stakeholder Engagement

- Local perspectives
 - Kitchen table talks
 - Bus tours
 - Community Advisory Committees
- Regional Roundtables
 - Equity and inclusion
 - Economic development
 - Freight industry
 - Healthcare
 - Agriculture
 - Tourism
 - Workforce/labor/minority-owned businesses

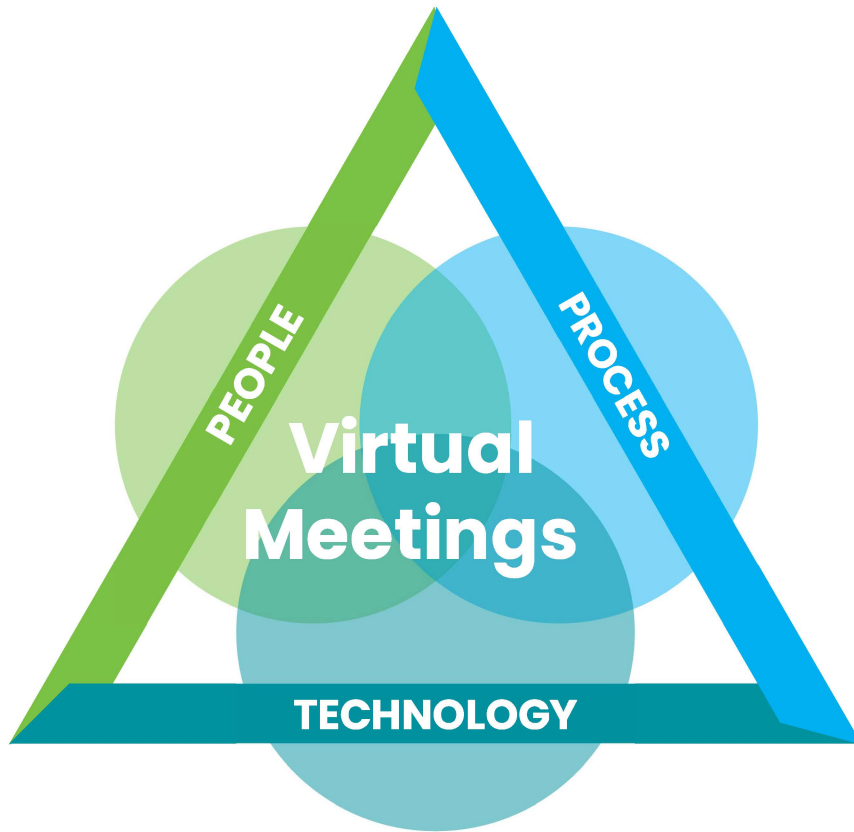


Clear and Consistent Messaging

- Educate, inform & reset expectations
- What are the issues and concerns?



Virtual or Hybrid Public Engagement



360 Degree Virtual Rooms



PEL Best Practices

Why Should You Conduct a PEL Study?



Critical Elements to PEL Success



FHWA Coordination

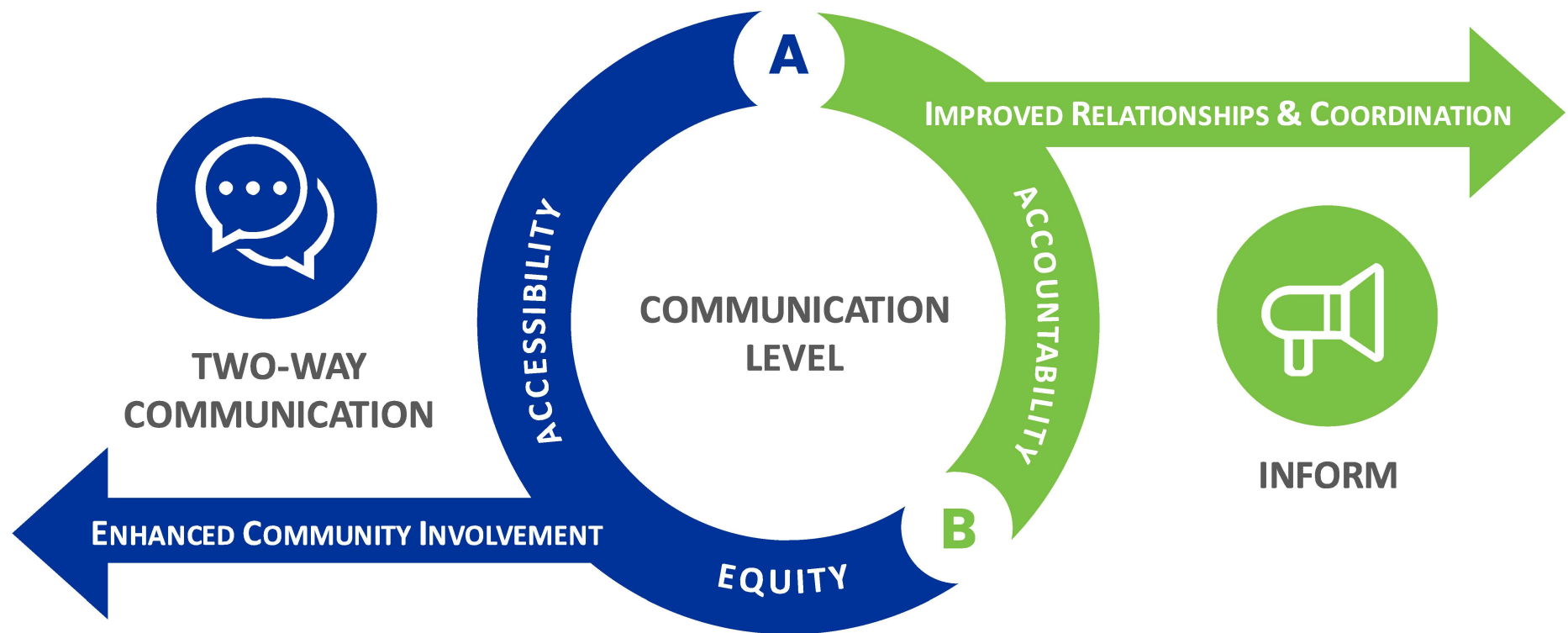


Engagement

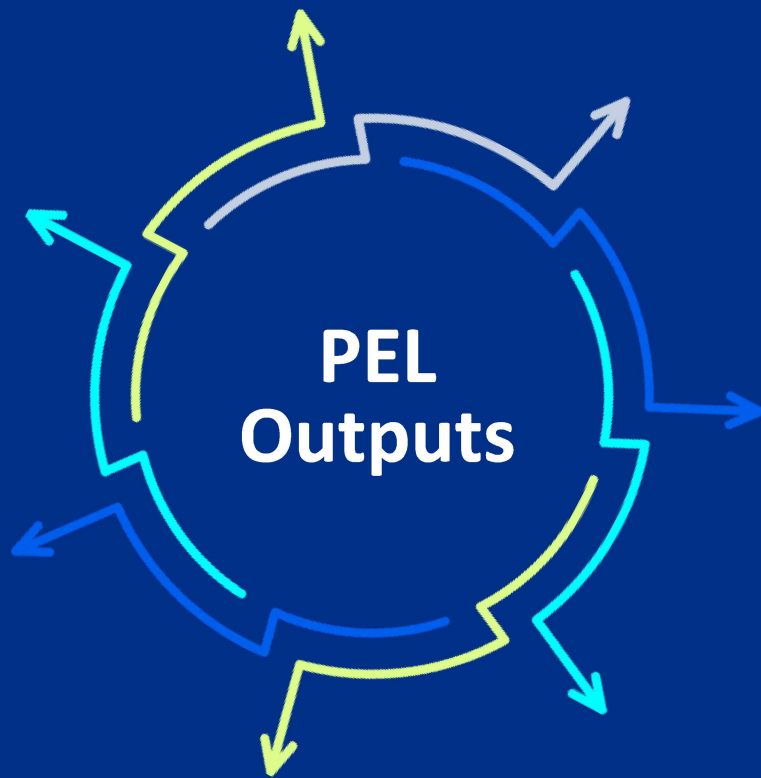


Traffic Engineering

Building Trusted Relationships



PEL Outputs and Expediting NEPA

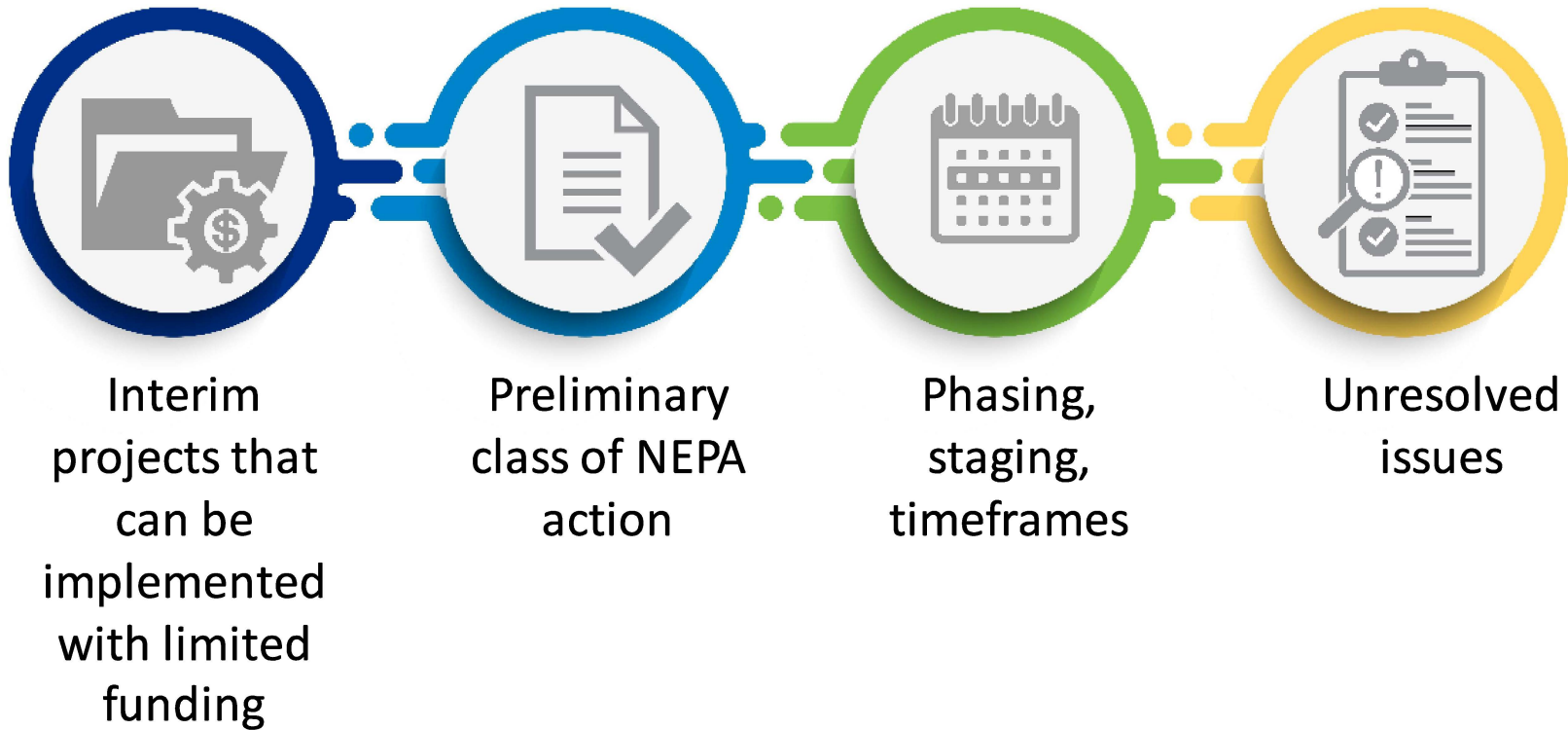


- Existing + future conditions
- Purpose and need
- Reasonable alternatives
- Preliminary impacts, potential permits, and mitigation assessment
- Engaged/educated public and resource partner agencies
- Action plan

PEL Leads to NEPA Success



NEPA-Ready Project Opportunities



PEL Best Practices and Lessons Learned



Best Practices

- Implement PEL with NEPA end-game mindset
- Engagement with FHWA during key milestones
- Develop clear Purpose and Need Statement
- Documentation of studies, decisions, outreach
- Data and management dashboards

Lessons Learned

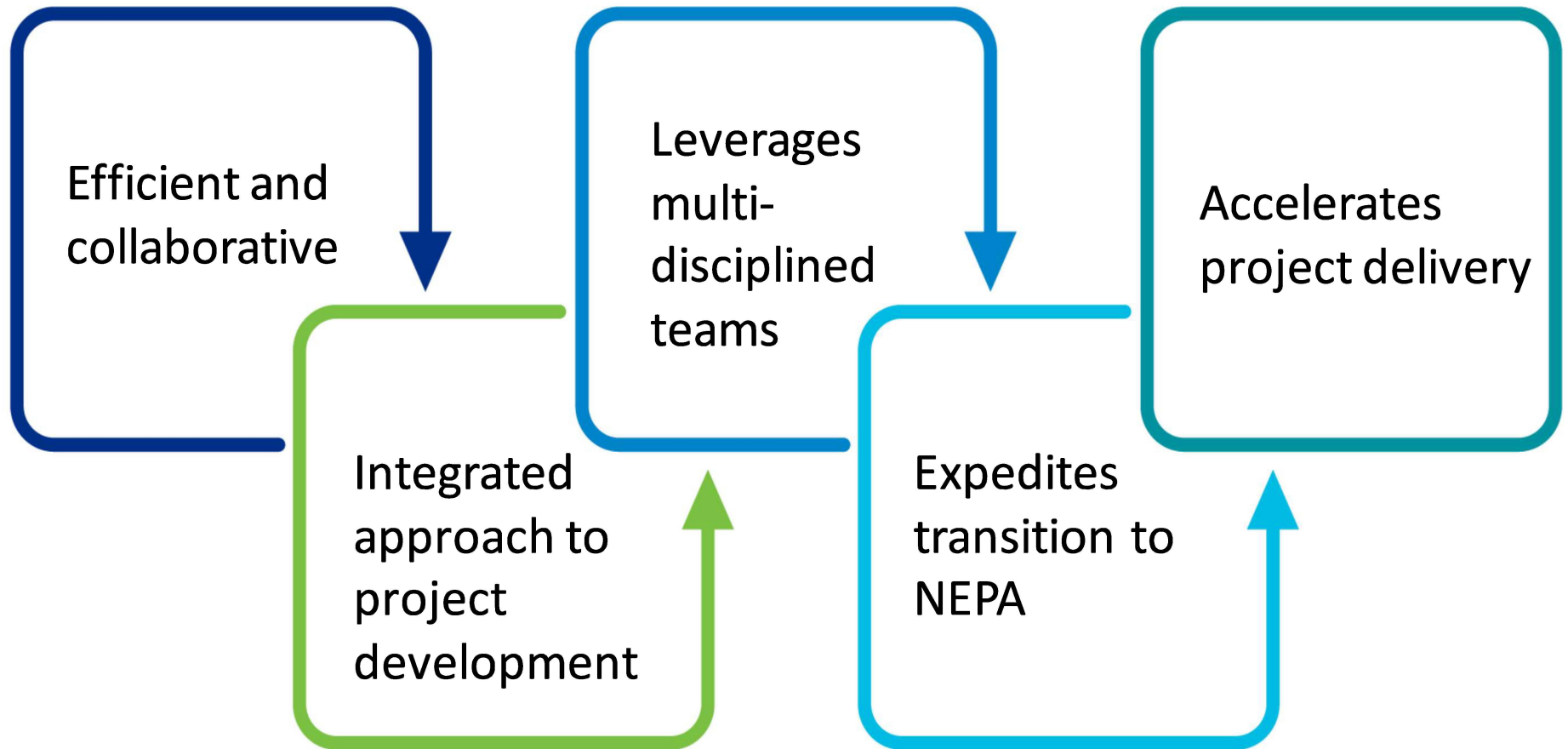


- Scoping PEL studies vs. NEPA
- Communication with stakeholders, identify desired goals and outcomes
- Engage traffic and safety early
- Manage expectations throughout the process



Summary

PEL is...



Flexibility in Funding

- Planning funds
- Grants – Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG)
 - Corridor and feasibility studies

Things to Keep in Mind

- **When not to do a PEL study:**
 - ✓ Does not involve state or US highway → **transportation/corridor study**
 - ✓ Not seeking federal funds → **transportation/corridor study**
 - ✓ Project has identified funding → **NEPA study**
 - ✓ Not seeking federal funds for 5+ years → **transportation/corridor study**
- **PEL studies require upfront investment**
 - ✓ Results in overall cost savings

PEL Resources

- FHWA
 - <https://go.usa.gov/xfwBW>

- National Highway Institute PEL Course
 - <https://go.usa.gov/xfwKY>

The screenshot shows the 'Environmental Review Toolkit' website. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Legislation, Regulations, and Guidance, NEPA and Project Development, FHWA Initiatives to Accelerate Project Delivery, Environmental Topics, Publications, Resources, and Tools, and About. A search bar is located on the right.

The main content area is titled 'Initiatives to Accelerate Project Delivery' and features a sidebar with categories: Eco-Logical, Every Day Counts, Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL), and Programmatic Agreements. The 'PEL' category is selected, showing a list of items: Implementation, Effective Practices, Publications, Training & Workshops, and Archived Material.

The main content area is titled 'Planning and Environment Linkages' and includes a description: 'Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) represents a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that 1) considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and 2) uses the information, analysis, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process.'

Below the description are three sections: 'Who is Involved?' (listing Transportation planners, NEPA practitioners, and Resource agency staff involved in), 'Featured Items' (listing On-Demand Webinar: PEL Today and PEL in Practice: Examples from Discussions with States), and 'Related Links' (listing Eco-Logical, PEL Legislation, and PlanWorks).

The bottom section of the screenshot shows a 'Course Description' for the 'Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL)' course. It includes the program area (Environment), course number (FHWA-NHI-142078), and instructor-led training (ILT) status. A table lists the course details for the year 2022:

Calendar Year	Length	CEU	Host Price
2022	2 Days	1.2 Units	\$500 Per Participant

Buttons for 'View Sessions' and 'Host this Course' are visible at the bottom right of the course description section.

Thank You!

Questions?



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Slides Parking Lot

Agency Coordination

- Collaborative and integrated approach
- Development of protocols for working with various resources agencies
- Key milestones to achieve consensus and agreement

