

Federal, State, and Local Coordination of Highway Projects

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The Illinois Department of Transportation (Illinois DOT) conducts regularly scheduled coordination meetings for the development of our Federal-aid program. These meetings are held to discuss all issues involved in the development of a Federal-aid project. When they began in 1976, they were called “environmental coordination meetings.” However, over the years, the discussion of design issues evolved and currently at the meetings we discuss any issues involved in the development of a Federal-aid project through its final design.

Illinois DOT is sold on the coordination meeting concept. It has been our experience that these meetings minimize project flow time, eliminate wasted effort by keeping the project on track throughout its development, and improve communication among the agencies involved in project development.

Before discussing the meeting procedures that make this possible, I would like to tell you about our organization. Within the Illinois DOT, there is the Division of Highways, and in that division, two bureaus located in the central office are involved in the meetings: the Bureau of Location and Environment, which is responsible for the design of projects on the state system, and the Bureau of Local Roads and Streets, which is responsible for administering federal projects on the local system.

In the Bureau of Location and Environment are field engineers who attend the meetings. Likewise, in the Bureau of Local Roads and Streets are project development engineers who attend the local portion of the meetings.

Illinois DOT is divided into nine highway districts. Within each district is a Bureau of Planning, which is responsible for administering federal projects on the state system. Within each district also is the Bureau of Local Roads and Streets, which is responsible for administering Federal-aid projects on the local system.

In all districts, two separate meetings are held. One concerns projects on the state system and the other concerns projects on the local system. I will emphasize the local portion of our meetings and discuss meeting procedures by examining these areas: the scheduling of the meetings, who participates in the meetings, the agenda, and the documentation of actions taken at the meetings.

SCHEDULING

At the beginning of the year, the central Bureau of Location and Environment develops an annual schedule for all district meetings. In most districts, the meetings are held every other month. However, in one office, which covers the City of Chicago and collar counties, the meetings are held monthly. This is because of the length of the agenda and the number of local agencies involved.

PARTICIPANTS

The districts are responsible for organizing and conducting the meetings and for inviting the agencies that should attend. Local agencies and their consultants attend the meetings to present project information and make any requests necessary for the project. For the local portion of the meeting, a development engineer for the Bureau of Local Roads and Streets attends. The development engineer grants approvals under our certification acceptance procedures, which are based on an agreement between Illinois DOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) whereby we act for FHWA in granting certain approvals, such as design approval and final plan approval. In addition, the development engineer provides project guidance. Together with an FHWA district engineer, the development engineer provides approvals outside of certification acceptance. When appropriate, outside agencies, such as state conservation agencies, Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Fish and Wildlife, Army Corps of Engineers, and railroad companies, are invited to the meeting.

AGENDA

An agenda is sent to all participants as far in advance of the meeting as possible. It contains the project identifications, summaries of the proposed work, and topics to be discussed concerning each project. A length of time is allotted to each project, and each is assigned a time of the day so that local agencies discussing projects do not have to sit through the whole meeting.

DOCUMENTATION

The documentation, or minutes, of the meeting include the project information from the agenda and any actions taken or approvals given at previous meetings. One person, normally from the district office, is assigned to take meeting minutes. After each project is discussed, the minutes are reviewed with the person writing them to assure that all decisions of the current meeting were documented. The minutes are circulated in draft form to all meeting participants for their review. The final, approved minutes are added to the project file.

In review, we schedule our meetings on an annual basis. They are regularly held in the district offices. All parties involved in project development are invited to attend. Agendas are sent early. All issues involved in the development of a project are discussed, and each meeting is documented and preserved in each project file.