80/94 FlexRoad: INDOT’s First PEL Study

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What is PEL?

Planning and Environment Linkages

It's a federally recognized, pro-active first Step of a larger process and approach

It's the Blending of Planning and NEPA

It brings more voices into the planning process

It captures the value of the investment within the planning process
The PEL Approach

is... Is Not...

- Simple to Set up
- Public & Stakeholder Engagement
- NEPA Equivalent that Reduces Rework
- Fewer Alternatives to Evaluate in NEPA

A NEPA Replacement
- Identifying the Preferred Alternative
- Extra Requirement

*NEPA timelines for EAs and EISs can be reduced to meet CEQ regulations.*
PEL’s Integrated Approach

- Land Development Proposal
- Road Improvement Proposal
- Wetlands Identification
- Habitat or Historic Places to Preserve

Source: FHWA.
• Agencies are informed and involved early to resolve differences and minimize conflicts with resource agencies
• Environmental analyses are conducted early to identify and weed out potential fatal flaws or issues (e.g. hazard mitigation...not resolvable)
• Enhanced public and stakeholder understanding of the project development process and more involvement
• Faster project development process and few issues on the back-end

Visit https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federalaid/projects.pdf for funding options and verifying funding eligibility
Blending Planning and NEPA

Traditional Process

Plan → NEPA → Final Design/Construction

PEL Process

Plan → NEPA → Final Design/Construction

PEL Outputs
- Logical Termini
- Design Year
- P&N
- Screening of Alternatives

Establish NEPA Foundation
Head start on NEPA clock
PEL Origins

(Psst: It’s not new)

2005
Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)

2007
“Vital Few” goal to reduce median EIS time to 3 years

2008
FHWA PEL Program Initiation

2016
“Final Rule”: 23 CFR 450.212
GENERAL CHALLENGES WITH PEL

• Lack of training and exposure.
• Getting everyone onboard
• When should you do PEL? How early is early?
• It is a study, NOT a project!
• The process is not firm in Indiana. We are still learning.
• Considering upfront resources. Attention is needed for early coordination.
• Documentation of planning actions in a form that can be utilized in a NEPA document may seem like too much!
INDOT’s approach to PEL

- Peer Exchange
- PEL Implementation Plan
- National Highway Institute Course
INDOT’s approach to PEL

- PEL Committee
  - Technical Planning and Programming
  - Environmental Services
  - Traffic Engineering
- PEL Project Evaluation
- Definition of Study Goals, Scope, and Outcomes
**Project evaluation criteria**

- **Large geographic scale and/or regionally significant** proposal could result in multiple programmable projects with independent utility and logical termini.

- **Known or anticipated public controversy about scope, need, purpose, and/or potential alternatives**

- **Complex community impacts or complex environmental constraints**

- **Need and purpose is unclear, unstable, or requires additional definition**

- **Too many possible alternatives for an efficient NEPA process**

- **High cost and/or construction funding not programmed**

Even with a lot of initial work, NEPA process will not meet EA (1 year) or EIS (2 year) time limits.
Indiana PEL Studies

80/94 FlexRoad

Greater Northern Lafayette Connectivity Study
INDOT and Tippecanoe County Area Plan Commission

US 30/31 Corridor
- 180 miles
- Multiple PEL Studies
I-80/94 Borman Expressway

Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO)
The Borman Expressway

IL 394 to I-65
The Borman Expressway
What is TSMO?
Transportation Systems Management and Operations

• A set of strategies that focus on operational improvement
• Get the most out of the existing transportation facilities.
• Real-Time Monitoring and Response
• Flexibility: Demand-Responsive Roadways
WHY PEL ON THIS PROJECT

- Manageable scope for a pilot project
- Wide range of potential solutions
- Uncertain funding needs
GOALS

- Termini
- Design year
- P&N
- Screening of alternatives/Defining NEPA alternatives
INDOT is studying how to apply the latest technologies to cost-effectively improve traffic on Indiana’s busiest highways so that drivers get less stop and more go.

INDOT held one in-person and one virtual public meeting on October 19 and 21, 2021. See the ‘PUBLIC MEETINGS’ page for more information! Be sure to sign up for email updates below.

**OUTREACH**

- Public outreach
  - Community Advisory Committee (3)
  - Public Open Houses (2)
- Agency coordination
  - Resource Agency Committee (3)
- Website/Social
CHALLENGES

- Being first
- Public outreach in a pandemic
- Public interest in this project
- Bi-state project
- Non-traditional “Alternatives”
ALTERNATIVES

- Dozens of TSMO Strategies
- Initial High-Level Assessment
- Screened out strategies that were:
  - Not applicable
  - Not feasible
  - Didn’t meet purpose and need

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integrated Corridor Management (ICM)</th>
<th>Connected and Autonomous Vehicle (CAV)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transit Signal Priority</td>
<td>Freight Management</td>
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<td>Transit</td>
<td>Tolling</td>
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</tbody>
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Alternatives

ALTERNATIVE 1
- Base Package
- Dynamic Shoulder Lanes
- Event Management
- Broadway Interchange and I 65 Interchange Modifications
- Signing Enhancements

ALTERNATIVE 2
- Base Package
- Ramp Metering

ALTERNATIVE 3
- Base Package
- Mainline Safety
  - Variable Speed Limits
  - Dynamic Lane Control
  - Queue Warning

ALTERNATIVE 4
- Base Package
- Ramp Metering
- Mainline Safety
MOVING FORWARD

• PEL Study Report and Questionnaire expected March 2022
• Getting ready for NEPA
What We’ve Learned So Far

Looks and feels like NEPA

Communication is critical

Making intentions clear

- Terminology: Study vs. project
- What’s the final product?
- Materials and public notice
Future of PEL in Indiana

- Building PEL in Processes
- PEL Committee
- Capacity Limitations