Federal Aid Programming and Project Development Problems

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From the above title, one would think there may be some problems with the programming and project development of local public agency projects. Sometimes, I like to refer to problems as job security. If there were no problems would our jobs be eliminated? No, but it sure would make the job easier. What I do want to emphasize are some of the problems that are occurring. If these can be emphasized whereby minimizing future problems, everyone should benefit in completing their desired projects.

FEDERAL AID HIGHWAY PROGRAM AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

First, what is the federal aid program as it relates to local units of government. The program started with a very modest beginning in 1944 of about $1.8 million. These funds were allocated to the 92 Indiana counties for road and bridge construction on the Federal Aid Secondary (FAS) system. Today, that figure has grown to more than $60 million and includes funds for cities, towns and counties for projects both on and off the federal aid highway system. Along with the growth of available funds there also has been a growth of procedural requirements to utilize these funds. Now there are environmental considerations, public involvement including hearings, location and design studies, right-of-way purchase requirements, various permits, etc. It is not as easy and simple to construct a needed project today as it was years ago. These are problems that are being overcome but yet it takes longer and costs more to develop this project.

HIGHWAY PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL RESPONSIBILITIES

To develop a federal aid highway project what are the responsibilities of the local unit of government?

(a) A selected project must be for construction or reconstruction (maintenance work is not eligible).
(b) Selected project must be on an approved system of roads or streets specified for the funding category.

(c) Projects in urbanized areas of 50,000 or greater population must be selected through the 3C planning process (continuing, cooperative, comprehensive) with priorities determined through the respective MPO (metropolitan planning organization) forum.

(d) Projects must be designed and constructed to design standards equal to or above the minimum AASHTO approved standards for the class of project in question, unless exceptions are documented and approved.

(e) The project plans must be prepared by a qualified engineer, either a consulting firm or a local public agency employee. The local agency would monitor the progress of the project development and evaluate the performance of the project developer both in quality and time.

(f) The project construction must be under the supervision of a resident project representative employed by the local agency, or a representative provided through a special agreement with the IDOH. A representative employed by the local agency may be either a consulting firm or a local public agency employee. The employee never the less receives directions from the IDOH district area engineer.

(g) Most projects are not 100% federally funded. The local unit of government must match the non federal aid portion of the project. This includes preliminary engineering (design), right-of-way, construction and construction supervision costs. The local unit of government must have a long range plan to finance their total share in all phases of a project(s). Do not spend money for preliminary engineering unless you have a financial plan to pay for the higher cost of construction at the later date. Remember, any federal funds expended on a project that does not materialize to construction, except for legitimate reasons, the local agency is liable for repayment of those federal funds.

**IDOH AND FEDERAL FUNDING OF LOCAL AGENCY PROJECTS**

Now, how does the Department of Highways, Division of Local Assistance fit into the federal aid funding process for local agency projects.
Federal statutes and regulations make the Department of Highways responsible for the administration of all federal highway construction programs. In this role we are responsible for:

(a) Receiving and acting on local agency requests for federal aid funds.
(b) Advises local agencies on project development procedures and amount of federal aid funds available by category.
(c) Reviews annual programs, construction plans, project agreements, project documentation, and processes claims for federal reimbursement by local agencies.
(d) Advertises for bids, awards construction contracts, administers construction and assures that qualified supervision of construction is performed.

Remember, the Department of Highways does not select your projects, nor prepare the construction plans and required documentation, or pay any part of the cost except passing through the reimbursable federal funds.

A federal aid funded projected will normally, in most cases, cost more dollars and take longer to develop and build than if you funded a similar project totally with local funds. You must consider that on a federal aid project you will only be paying from 25% to 10% of the total project cost versus all of the cost for a locally funded project. Generally speaking, the federal aid project will be better designed, better constructed and will provide more and better safety features at a lower cost to the local agency than the totally local funded project. This does not always apply for small cost projects. The federal dollar still has 100 cents, the same as your local dollar. You may be able to spend 25 cents and receive 75 cents from federal aid to construct your needed road improvements. But make sure you will have each 25 cents along the way through design, right-of-way and construction.

PROBLEMS IN PROJECT PROGRAMMING AND DEVELOPMENT

I would like to discuss and outline some of the specific problems that are encountered in our office in the programming and development of your projects. I will try to outline the major problems as I see them into the categories of:

I. Annual Programming
II. Local Agencies
III. Consultants
IV. General

I must emphasize that all problems are not associated to all parties
involved with local federal aid projects but the nature of the problems should be brought to the attention of all.

**Annual Programming**

A. Federal-aid programming requests (FA-2's) are being received after the due date of February 15 for submission. Remember, you don't have to wait until we mail information in December to start your planning, scheduling and preliminary drafting of a federal aid application. Last year we were receiving late submittals of FA-2's in June. This year so far we have received 865 applications totaling $214,440,256 in federal aid funds. The
obligation ceiling for spending will be about $49,500,000 plus the Minimum Allocation funds of approximately $12,000,000. A lot of work is involved on our part in analyzing all submitted projects to fit into a realistic annual program.

B. FA-2's are incomplete and/or pages are missing.
   1. Category of funds being requested are not indicated.
   2. Total costs and federal share costs for future phases are not included.
   3. Program year incorrectly labeled.
   4. Character of proposed work incorrect, i.e. construction when phase should be right-of-way.

C. Required attachments to FA-2's are missing such as project location map and R/W Introduction form. Some location maps are of poor quality and difficult to read — see Exhibit 2. Project location is not indicated on the map, or is not clearly indicated. Also, incorrect or wrong maps are attached.
D. Submittal of FA-2’s requesting funds which are no longer available such as PMS, SOS, etc. Categories of available funds are included each year in the mailout information distribution.

E. An FA-2 is submitted for a funding category in which the local agency is in the process of revising the road classification such as off-system to rural secondary, etc. The FA-2 cannot be acted on until the system change is approved by IDOH and FHWA. Many times the requested system change is to make a desired project eligible for federal funds.

F. The amount of funds being requested is greatly in excess of availability. Individual local agencies will submit up to ten FA-2’s in the same funding category and not submit a priority listing of the projects. Could the local agency fund the matching if all projects were approved, or would some be delayed or deleted.

G. Scheduled dates for different phases of project are not realistic, i.e. all phases of P.E., R/W, and construction in the same program year. Projects are being programmed for construction whereas the current project status is early in the P.E. phase. Some of these are major projects on relocation with considerable R/W to purchase.

H. Local agency desires to substitute a new or different project for one already programmed and approved. The local agency changes mind entirely and stops project in progress, and in some cases concentrates on another project. There are projects approved, consultant agreements reviewed and executed, funds obligated, local agency given notice to proceed but the local agency never authorizes the consultant to proceed. Local agency programs project for construction letting, notifies area engineer to schedule project for letting, plans are updated by IDOH and then local agency desires to let another project that is not programmed.

I. Submitted FA-2’s do not have proper signatures or accompanying release of urban funds from the mayor of the urbanized area. FA-2’s for projects in urbanized areas over 50,000 in population must be submitted through the respective MPO.

J. There are submittals of FA-2’s in February listing costs for P.E. and construction, then a LPA/consultant agreement is submitted in May with P.E. and construction costs 70% higher than in February. How can our office systematically approve an annual program with this variance of costs in just three months.

**Local Agencies**

A. The indecision of local agencies of using funds and project
priority is a problem. It is poor planning by local agencies without a long or short range program of matching the priority needs versus available local and federal funds. Many projects are developed without due consideration of how or when they will be funded. Projects in the development stage which will not be built or funded for years are delaying other projects from being completed in a reasonable time.

B. Most local agencies do not understand the time and steps required to develop a federal-aid project. A singular local agency expects the IDOH to process a project in a very short time...
period without consideration of all other local agency and IDOH projects.

C. Agreements are lost at the local level necessitating the IDOH to re-start the agreement process. Agreements are not fully executed and must be returned to the local agency to complete.

D. Local agencies do not administer or monitor the progress and development of their projects. The payments and schedules of the projects are contained in their consultant agreement. They do not read and/or understand agreements before signing. The agreement contains a provision that the consultant is to inform the local agency each month of the project progress.

E. The local agency allows the consultant to completely handle the project including preparing claim vouchers for the local agency. There is no correspondence between local agency and consultant including transmittals to IDOH by consultant rather than from local agency. No interest in project by local agency until they want it for letting.

F. Material and instructions mailed to local agencies and consultants are not followed and complied with. Consequently, local agencies are not aware of what is going on or understand their role and responsibility. There probably is not a central location at the local level where this material is filed, or the interested people are not informed of the location.

G. Project priorities are constantly being revised by political considerations or administrative changes.

H. In some cases, the local agencies are very slow in acquiring the necessary right-of-way. Reluctance to acquire R/W by condemnation, or start acquiring R/W until funding is available delays the project.

I. Local agencies, after almost completing a project, decides against construction phase either through a change of political office, public disinterest, or lack of funds. This is a lack of input by the populace, no master plan to insure continuity from one administration to another, or an unrealistic undertaking from a financial standpoint. This is a waste of human resources and funds.

Consultants

A. The number of projects and/or workload of some consultants is more than can be developed in a reasonable length of time. Consequently, projects are delayed in the development stage. If the local agency exerts pressure to the consultant for their projects, those are the projects that receive priority by the consultant.
B. Some consultants do not correspond or inform the local agency of the status or problems with their projects.

C. Some consultants do not follow known standard procedures of project development. Some try short cuts in the development, particularly if the project is being funded with local funds. This only causes delays in the project development by having to back up to complete earlier required items.

D. Some consultants do not analyze and engineer a project. They will submit a problem to the IDOH and ask what should the solution be. The consultant should analyze and determine dif-
ferent solutions to the problem and make a recommendation to
the IDOH.

E. Some consultants are not familiar with the federal aid process,
procedures, and standards/design department requirements
for a project development process. Some must be guided
through the development process step by step, informing them
of what has to be accomplished next, including furnishing
samples.

F. Plans are not reviewed and checked by the consultant before
submitting to the IDOH for review and approval. Consultant is
not acquainted with proper design and detailing procedures, or
does not know the solution to a problem area, and therefore
relies on IDOH to check, markup the plans and return to the
consultant for the corrections or solution.

G. Environmental is not completed and approved in the early
stages of plan development thereby delaying the progressive de­
development of project design plans.

General

A. Changes in the funding categories and funding levels.

B. Changes in the regulations, procedures and requirements of en­
vironmentals.

C. Processing of more projects of increasing complexity and cost
than available construction funds. This increases the work load,
resulting in additional time frame with the available man­
power.

D. The number of projects being processed concurrently without
firm schedule for construction. There is no priority system
among all local agencies for scheduling of these projects. Ex­
hibit 5 details the number of projects and dollar volume for
known projects. This exhibit will not reflect any projects being
developed at the local level which have not been submitted to
this office for review.

E. The local agency should evaluate the performance of the con­
sultant on each local project in the design and construction
phase. The IDOH is doing this for future information in the se­
lection process of consultants.

I arbitrarily selected three bridge replacement projects that were on a
construction letting last year. Progress charts were developed from
history of our project files.
### Exhibit 5

#### PROJECTS VERSUS FUNDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNDING</th>
<th>AVAIL. FEDERAL FUNDS</th>
<th>NO. PROJ.</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>LOCAL</th>
<th>FEDERAL</th>
<th>NO. YRS</th>
<th>AVAIL. FEDERAL FUNDS</th>
<th>NO. PROJ.</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>LOCAL</th>
<th>FEDERAL</th>
<th>NO. YRS</th>
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<td>38,781</td>
<td>8,881</td>
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<td>Br. Replacement</td>
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<td>ARP &amp; MRS</td>
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<td>18,104</td>
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<td>196,042</td>
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#### 3 YEAR FUNDS

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<th>FUNDING</th>
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<th>NO. PROJ.</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>LOCAL</th>
<th>FEDERAL</th>
<th>NO. YRS</th>
<th>AVAIL. FEDERAL FUNDS</th>
<th>NO. PROJ.</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>LOCAL</th>
<th>FEDERAL</th>
<th>NO. YRS</th>
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<td>Br. Replacement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td>399,320</td>
<td>78,581</td>
<td>316,739</td>
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Exhibit 6.

This project was funded in the P.E. phase with federal funds. The project agreement schedule is as shown by the dotted line on the progress chart. The actual progress of the project is as shown by the solid line. The local agency evaluated the consultant performance of this project. Two of the rating items were evaluated as follows:
— Actual progress compared to schedule = 4
— Agreement compliance, emphasis on work sequence and approvals = 4
where: 4 = Good performance as desired and expected (a full credit rating)
These two projects were developed in the P.E. phase with local funds in the same county by two different consultants. This office doesn't have dates for the start of the projects, only the dates a first submission of plans were received. Note the difference in performance by the two consultants.