

Florida's Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Process

1.0 Overview

The purpose of the ETDM process is to incorporate environmental considerations into transportation planning to inform project delivery. This process supports the environmental policy of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) “to help preserve and enhance Florida’s natural, physical, cultural, and social environment as we develop, implement, and maintain transportation facilities and services” (**Policy No.: 000-625-001-I**). The ETDM process provides agencies and other stakeholders the opportunity for early input and consideration of the environment in transportation planning. ETDM process objectives include:

- Early identification of potential issues for project scope development
- Timely decision making that includes consideration of environmental quality
- Full and early public and Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT) member participation
- Linkage between planning and Project Development and Environment (PD&E) [including **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**]
- Incorporation of appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms during the planning process

These objectives are accomplished through stakeholder involvement, early consideration of environmental effects, integrating processes which were previously conducted sequentially, using interactive techniques and innovative technologies.

Intergovernmental interaction is accomplished through an ETAT assigned to each of the seven FDOT Districts. Each ETAT includes representatives from Metropolitan Planning Organizations/Transportation Planning Organizations (MPOs/TPOs), federal and state agencies, and participating Native American Tribes. Agency Operating Agreements (AOAs) between the FDOT/Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other state and federal agencies document the interagency understandings and agency-specific requirements for participating as an ETAT member in the ETDM process.

ETAT members use the Environmental Screening Tool (EST) to review project information, identify potential project effects, and submit comments to FDOT. This web-based GIS database and mapping tool provides access to project information and data about natural, physical, cultural, and community resources in the project area. The comments and other information are made available to the public on the ETDM Public Access Site (<https://etdmpub.flh-etat.org>).

Key Features of the ETDM Process

- Early and continuous agency and community involvement
- Early identification of potential avoidance, minimization and mitigation opportunities
- Access to Geographic Information System (GIS) data in standardized formats
- Identification of potential key issues
- Maximized use of technology for coordination and project screening

1.1 What projects qualify for the ETDM process?

ETDM projects may originate from a variety of FDOT, MPO/TPO, or local government programs and plans. The project sponsor (FDOT or MPO/TPO) selects qualifying projects and then enters project information into the EST. The ETDM process applies to certain types of state and federal transportation projects that meet additional conditions described in Chapter 2 of the ETDM Manual.

Qualifying project types include:

- Roadway Projects
 - Additional through lanes which add capacity to an existing road
 - A new roadway, freeway or expressway
 - A highway which provides new access to an area
 - A new or reconstructed arterial highway (e.g., realignment)
 - A new circumferential or belt highway that bypasses a community
 - Addition of interchanges or major interchange modifications to a completed freeway or expressway (based on coordination with FHWA)
 - A new bridge which provides new access to an area, bridge replacements (e.g., non-Programmatic Categorical Exclusions)
- Public Transportation
 - Major capital improvements, including Intermodal Centers, Rail, and Transit Centers
 - Rail - new commuter rail, passenger rail, or new freight rail extending beyond current footprint
 - Transit - new facility, new terminal, New Start/Small Start/Very Small Start project extending beyond current footprint
 - A new seaport, airport, or non-passenger rail project on the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS)

1.2 What are the steps of the ETDM process?

The ETDM process occurs during the Planning phase of transportation project development and is composed of the Planning Screen and the Programming Screen. The Planning Screen occurs when considering projects for inclusion or prioritization within a Cost Feasible Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The Programming Screen supports development of the FDOT Five Year Work Program. The results of the screening events link the transportation Planning phase and the PD&E phase. Each screening event centers on a project review and includes project preparation activities and follow-up tasks occurring before and after the review.

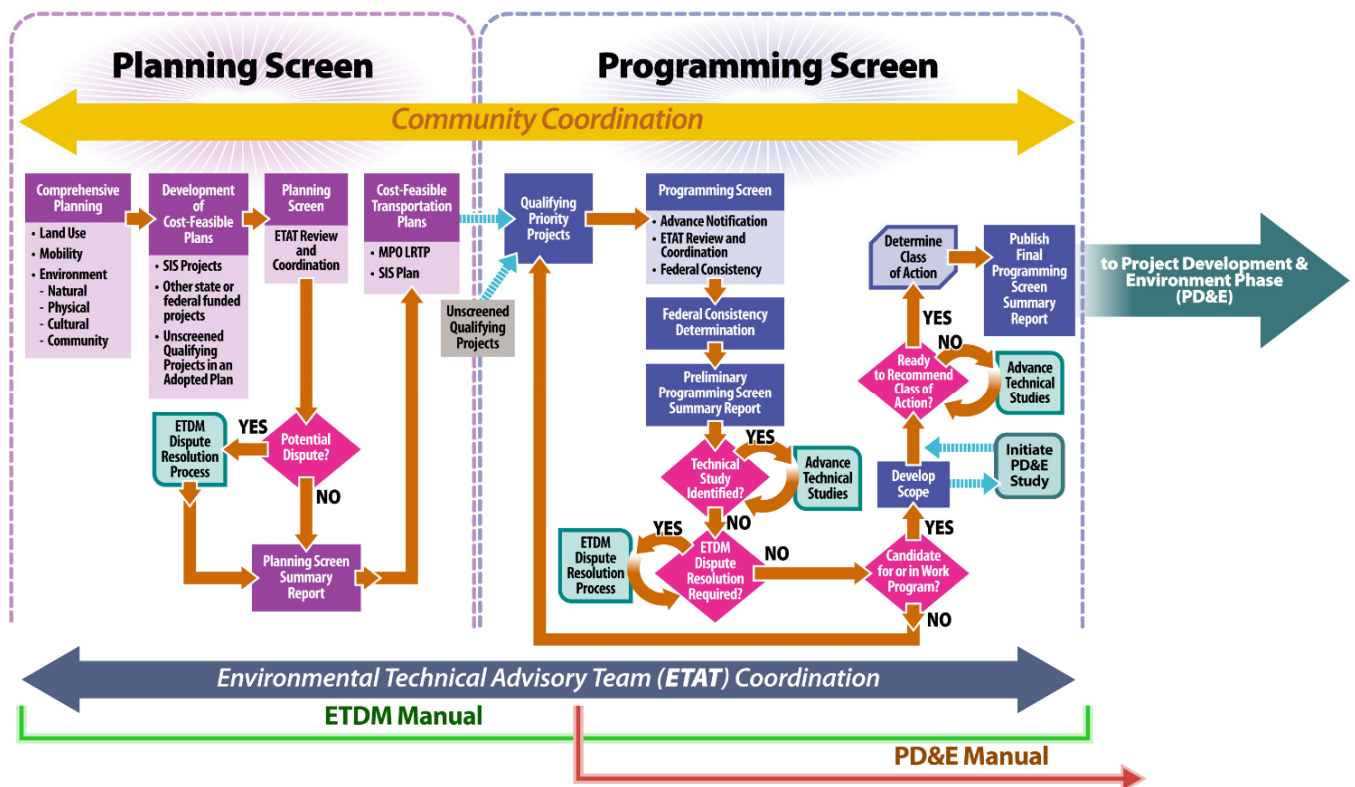
The ETDM Coordinator for the project sponsor (i.e., FDOT District, Turnpike, or MPO/TPO) uses the EST to notify the ETAT when a project is ready for review. At the same time, the information is published on the ETDM Public Access Site. During the review period, ETAT members and the public have the opportunity to provide input about potential project effects. FDOT or MPO/TPO personnel also begin to identify potential effects on surrounding communities. They seek to develop an understanding of community desires, concerns, as well as identify potential controversies related to the project. ETAT members perform multidisciplinary reviews specific to their area of expertise (e.g., wetlands or land use).

These reviews help to:

- Determine the feasibility of a proposed project.
- Allow for early identification of potential avoidance, minimization, and mitigation opportunities.
- Focus the issues to be addressed during the PD&E phase.
- Create documentation and support information which may be carried forward into the PD&E phase.

At the end of the review period, the project sponsor (FDOT or the MPO/TPO) summarizes the comments gathered from the reviews. FDOT subsequently uses this information to focus the issues that need to be addressed during the PD&E phase and develop the scope of services for the PD&E Study.

The following diagram provides a visual overview of the ETDM process.



ETDM Process Diagram

1.3 The Environmental Screening Tool (EST)

The State of Florida has developed a comprehensive digital database, the Florida Geographic Data Library (FGDL), at the University of Florida's GeoPlan Center. The EST is a web application that uses FGDL data and provides for an interactive review of proposed transportation projects by ETAT members. Project team members and ETAT members access the EST through a secure site which is password protected to allow updates to the database. Other stakeholders may view the information on the read- ETDM Public Access Site (<https://etdmpub.flh-etat.org/est/>).

FDOT and the MPO/TPOs enter information into the EST to advance consideration of environmental effects on their qualifying transportation projects. ETAT representatives provide new and updated GIS data to the FGDL for use within the EST, as available.

The EST performs standardized GIS analyses and queries using information supplied by ETAT members and contained in the FGDL. Moreover, it:

- Integrates data pertinent to natural, physical, cultural, and community resources and transportation programs into a standardized format.
- Analyzes GIS data within project buffers to support ETAT member commentary.
- Provides a platform for dissemination of information among ETAT representatives and the public.
- Provides storage and access to ETAT reviews.

EST users receive automatic email announcements about the availability of new data or analyses, project review deadlines, and training opportunities. User guides, technical documents, program agreements, manuals, and handbooks related to the ETDM process are available within the EST Library to assist ETAT members. A staffed help desk is available during normal business hours to provide technical assistance. The following diagram displays the concept for the EST.



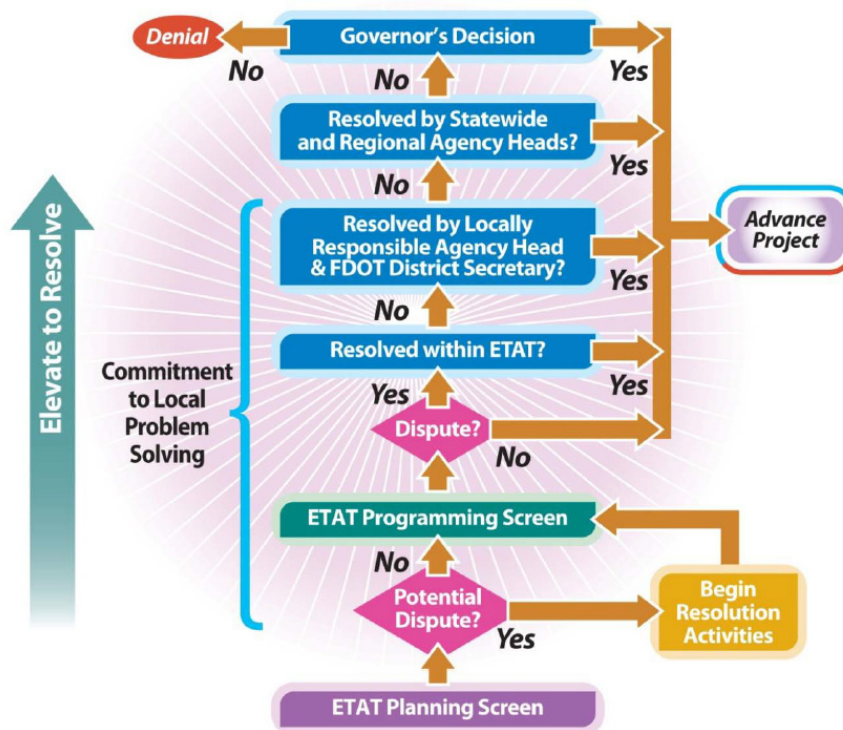
Environmental Screening Tool Concept Diagram

1.4 Dispute Resolution

Florida's ETDM process was created under the authority of the **Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)**, specifically **Section 1309 – Environmental Streamlining**. The purpose of **Section 1309** was to create a “coordinated environmental review process for highway construction projects” that require an EIS or any other type of federal approval; see **Section 1309(a)**. **Section 1309(c)** directed agency heads to resolve environmental issues within 30 days.

Consistent with the intent of **Section 1309**, and in recognition of the mutual benefits to be obtained, FDOT and the signatories to the **December 14, 2001 ETDM Process Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** agreed to implement dispute resolution on projects during the planning process. The intent is to identify mutually agreeable activities or conditions that will address the concern while meeting the transportation need. This will assist in project advancement. Dispute resolution activities may continue through future phases as more information becomes available. If there are unresolved disputes for projects undergoing **NEPA** review, and those disputes persist after completing the ETDM process, then the “issue resolution” process set out in **Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21)** would be applicable. That process sets a series of forums for disputes to be resolved, and if not resolved, to which the disputes would then advance. There are also new potential financial penalties for unexcused delays by participating agencies.

A strong commitment exists among the participants in the ETDM process to resolve disputes within the ETAT, prior to elevating them to a higher authority. To facilitate meeting this commitment, disputes should be addressed as early as possible to make the best use of agency skills and resources. Projects with unresolved issues following the Programming Screen require dispute resolution as illustrated below.



Dispute Resolution Process

1.5 For More Information about the ETDM Process

Information regarding the ETDM Process can be found at the following internet pages:

- Overview of the ETDM Process – <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/emo/ETDM.shtm>
- Description of the EST – <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/emo/EST-Overview.shtm>
- ETDM Manual – <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/emo/pubs/etdm/etdmmanual.shtm> .

Information about the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) process can be found in the *PD&E Manual*, located at <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/emo/pubs/pdeman/pdeman1.shtm> .