



Streamlining, Stewardship, and Sustainability

Streamlining in Washington State

MEASURING THE PERFORMANCE OF MULTI-AGENCY PROGRAMMATIC PERMITS FOR WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

In 2001, the Washington State Legislature established the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee (TPEAC) to identify measures to streamline permit procedures for transportation activities and improve environmental outcomes. A programmatic subcommittee was created to develop a multi-agency approach for developing programmatic permits that would cover 60 to 70 percent of Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) activities (mostly maintenance and preservation work). The subcommittee envisioned that the process for developing programmatic permits would involve establishing common conditions between jurisdictional agencies for similar categories of transportation-related activities. Agreement on common conditions would lead to programmatic permit approval issued by each agency that would cover the subject activities as they occur throughout the state. Agencies involved in this effort included NOAA Fisheries, USFWS, Corps, Washington State Departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, local agency representatives and tribe representatives.

In July 2004, the subcommittee had completed developing multi-agency programmatic approval for bridge and ferry terminal painting and washing, bridge and ferry terminal deck replacement, bridge and ferry terminal maintenance and repair, fish way maintenance, channel maintenance, culvert maintenance, culvert replacement, LWD removal from bridges, beaver dam removal, sediment test boring in all state waters, and 40 pile replacement in marine water. Much of this work was performed in the field during 2004 using programmatic permit coverage.

In January 2005, WSDOT received and compiled information regarding the performance of these programmatic permits during the 2004 calendar year. This presentation compares the performance results from 2004 with the initial goals and expectations established by the subcommittee (mainly focusing on percent activities covered). The presentation further expands on results including time and cost savings for both WSDOT and permit agencies, environmental benefit, and other lessons learned.

STREAMLINING TRANSPORTATION PERMITTING IN WASHINGTON THROUGH USE OF INTEGRATED WEB-BASED PERMITTING TOOLS AND APPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The State of Washington, under the sponsorship and leadership of the State Office of Regulatory Assistance (Agency of the Governor's Office), has embarked on a multi-agency, multi-phased effort to integrate permitting and regulatory requirements across the state for Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) projects through use of innovative web-based technologies, applications, and leveraged partnerships. Partner agencies involved in this multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction integration effort include:

- **Federal.** US Army Corps of Engineers for Section 10 and Section 404 permits; US Coast Guard for Section 9 permits; and Federal Highways (WA);
- **State.** Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife for HPA permits; Washington State Department of Ecology for Section 401, CZM consistency, and shoreline permits; Washington State Department of Natural Resources for Aquatic Use Authorizations; Washington State Department of Health for on-site septic approvals; Washington State Department of Transportation; Washington State Office of Regulatory Assistance; Washington State Office of Financial Management; and Washington State Natural Resources Information Portal Project; and
- **Local.** King County for local shoreline, critical areas, and zoning permits.

Key elements of the web-based permitting approach include:

- **One-Stop JARPA Permitting Site.** Interactive web application providing WSDOT and others with: (i) a single, integrated source of local, state, and federal permitting and regulatory guidance, glossary, tips, FAQs, examples, and step-by-step instruction from the above permitting and regulatory agencies; (ii) downloadable "one-stop" permitting forms (e.g., web-enabled multi-agency Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application (JARPA) form); (iii) secure upload functionality to ensure all regulatory agencies are looking at and seeing the same application materials and environmental discipline reports; and (iv) on-line search, retrieve, and archive capability. See <http://www.one-stop-jarpa.org>
- **On-Line Permit Assistance System (OPAS).** Interactive, query-based application designed to help applicants and WSDOT determine permitting requirements based upon answers given to select project questions and the extent to which certain regulatory thresholds are met or exceeded. Conclusion of query session is a customized, narrative report of applicable permits and their descriptions. See <http://apps.ecy.wa.gov/opas/>
- **Permit Process Schematics.** Interactive process and timeline flowcharts depicting sequence and steps associated with select permitting and regulatory processes, including Section 404, Section 10, HPA, Shoreline, CZM, SEPA, NEPA, NPDES Stormwater, Air Operating, Water Rights, NPDES, and more. Permit Process Schematics coupled with customized OPAS narrative reports provide applicants and WSDOT with a comprehensive overview of applicable permit and regulatory requirements. See http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/pac/ppds_info/review.htm

Project Purpose Statement: The purpose of the Office of Regulatory Assistance's effort to work with WSDOT and others to advance integration of permitting and regulatory requirements through the above described web elements is largely to:

- Provide clear, accessible, and uniformly presented information in a similar format and level of detail;
- Enhance and promote permitting and regulatory accountability and transparency;
- Provide a means to foster and enable continuous process improvement and innovation; and
- Improve by lessening decision-making review and transaction times and increasing overall quality of submitted application materials and documentation.

Brief Project Overview and Methodology: Development of the above described web elements has largely occurred through cooperative agreement and participation from the above agencies. Leadership and staffing from the Office of Regulatory Assistance has provided the vision and sense of direction necessary to unify and secure the engagement and participation from the agencies. Development occurs through a consultant, agency IT staff, and a multi-agency steering group.

Explanation of Current or Anticipated Results: Beta testing to date has resulted in higher quality permit applications being submitted to local, state, and federal regulatory agencies (via the Washington State Multi-Agency Permitting Team for Transportation). Additionally, web elements have generated productive process improvement and process clarity changes within the regulatory agencies. Clear and accurate information, acquired and factored in early in the process, results in greater attention to regulatory and permitting requirements as well as better and more fully informed compliance (or better yet, impact avoidance as a result of likely regulatory obligation).

Recommendations for Future Research: Advance thinking and planning is underway for merging and linking work done in the environmental and natural resources realm with the work occurring in parallel with State Departments of Licensing, Revenue, and Community, Trade, and Economic Development.

THE USE OF A MULTI-AGENCY PERMITTING TEAM (MAP TEAM)

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Abstract

Environmental permitting for transportation projects is complex and time consuming. Communication and sharing of information between permitting agency staff can be inefficient, partially due to staff location in different geographic areas. The establishment of a Multi-Agency Permitting (MAP) Team is a project to demonstrate the advantages of co-locating regulatory staff from multiple agencies in a common office to enhance interpersonal communication and interagency coordination. Effective communication early in project development is key to risk identification and project management and consequently, maintaining the planned schedule and budget. The purpose of the MAP Team is to cooperatively process environmental permits for Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) transportation projects while protecting natural resources in the public interest. Participating agencies hope to demonstrate the efficiency and cost effectiveness of this new concept of focused governmental cooperation. The primary goal is to provide thorough, expedited review of permit applications to ensure that transportation projects are consistent with environmental regulations and agency agreements and policies.

Project overview and methodology

The State of Washington is investing in strategies intended to streamline environmental regulatory and permit processes. The creation of the MAP Team is one such strategic investment that is designed to demonstrate how WSDOT and regulatory agencies can work together to meet transportation and environmental goals. The MAP Team charter agencies include: WSDOT, Washington State Department of Ecology, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, United States Army Corps of Engineers, and King County Department of Development and Environmental Services. MAP Team members are co-located together a minimum of one day a week at the Department of Ecology's Northwest Regional Office in Bellevue. The MAP Team concept is being tested on approximately 52 transportation projects primarily in western Washington. The MAP Team has been up and running since early November 2003 and is scheduled through June of 2007.

After initially defining how to work together, the team began communicating with their customer base in an attempt to make permitting processes more consistent and predictable. The MAP Team has been using this feedback to initiate streamlining opportunities to: define complete application(s), create early project coordination and MAP Team permit processes, identify improvement opportunities within each agency, and to create model business practices that will use existing project experiences to deliver future projects. These investments in early project coordination are being tracked through eight performance measures. The MAP Team model is based on developing a foundation of trust and open communication between a diverse, highly capable group of decision makers from the five agencies. This formula provides an accountable, transparent process that is able to identify risks and opportunities and to address and avoid conflicts early, thereby achieving permit decisions in a predictable and timely manner.

Current results

To date, the MAP Team has been involved in reviewing permits for over 25 transportation projects. The MAP Team work is being evaluated against a number of performance standards. These include permit processing time, baseline comparisons, agency investments, initiating change, conflict resolution, and meeting customer expectations. Evaluation of these performance standards will be used to determine the success of the MAP Team concept.

Recommendations for the future

Based on the initial stakeholder feedback from this pilot project, the MAP Team business model appears to be a good investment toward the delivery of transportation improvement projects. Because of this feedback, the MAP Team pilot project, which was to sunset in June 2005, was extended to June 30, 2007. After further evaluation, it is possible that Washington State may institute the MAP Team concept as a permanent business practice with the potential for growth in other transportation, intergovernmental, and private venture applications.

WASHINGTON STATE'S TRANSPORTATION PERMIT EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE (TPEAC)

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Abstract: Washington State is about to complete a five-year effort to improve the environmental-permitting process for transportation projects. From its start in 2001, the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee (TPEAC) sought to streamline the environmental-permitting process for transportation projects in Washington State. Some of the goals of TPEAC are to reduce mitigation cost, increase environmental benefit, reduce the redesign of transportation projects, and reduce time required to obtain permits. Passage of the Transportation Streamlining Act by the Washington State Legislature in 2001 began the work of this committee. TPEAC has provided a valuable forum to bring together representatives of all entities involved in transportation permitting. TPEAC participants recognize the relationship between their individual roles and the importance of working together to bring about a more streamlined and integrated permitting process in order to use public resources more efficiently and achieve better environmental results. Several technical subcommittees established by TPEAC have developed some important transportation-streamlining tools and policies that help reduce costs and increase environmental benefits. TPEAC's work to improve Washington State's transportation permitting process serves as a model for collaborative, multi-stakeholder efforts to increase regulatory efficiency while maintaining high environmental standards.

Introduction

This paper is intended to share the experience and lessons learned from Washington State's five-year effort to improve the environmental-permitting process for transportation projects. From its start in 2001, the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee (TPEAC) has sought to streamline the environmental-permitting process for transportation projects in Washington State. One of the basic assumptions of TPEAC was that successful streamlining activities were thought to be those that balanced transportation permit delivery goals and environmental protection and could be measured by the following four criteria:

- Reduced project delivery time
- Reduced project delivery costs
- Increased environmental performance
- Customer/stakeholder satisfaction

The TPEAC experience serves as a case study of a collaborative, multi-stakeholder effort to reform environmental permitting for transportation projects. TPEAC has provided a valuable forum for bringing together representatives of all entities involved in transportation permitting. There now exists a much better understanding of the challenges faced in environmental permitting of transportation projects and solutions needed to improve and simplify the process. TPEAC fosters a cooperative relationship where WSDOT works together with other state and federal agencies, local governments, and tribes in establishing common goals to minimize project delays, develop consistency in the application of environmental standards, and maximize environmental benefits. TPEAC's greatest success has been the creation of a forum for airing issues and developing relationships between agencies. TPEAC's work to improve Washington State's transportation permitting process serves as a model for collaborative, multi-stakeholder efforts to increase regulatory efficiency while maintaining high environmental standards.

How the Process Began

WSDOT and the Washington State Legislature recognized the need for transportation-permit reform. The Legislature established TPEAC to create a forum to discuss, develop, and test innovative approaches for permit streamlining. The goal of the TPEAC is to develop a streamlined approach to environmental-permit decision making in order to optimize limited public resources for transportation system improvements and environmental protection.

In 2001, the Washington State Legislature passed Engrossed Senate Bill 6188 – Streamlining the Environmental Permit Process for Transportation Projects to ensure that transportation dollars are used efficiently and effectively while increasing the environmental benefit. The act mandated the creation of a Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee (TPEAC). TPEAC was extended by the 2003 legislature until March of 2006. Goals of the new act are to reduce environmental mitigation costs, increase environmental benefits, and increase WSDOT's performance in meeting environmental regulations.

The TPEAC committee includes senators and representatives from the state legislature, state agencies, local government, business, trade, and environmental organizations. Federal and tribal agencies also participate. TPEAC funding is used to support technical staff participation from the Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, the Upper Columbia United Tribes, the Columbia River Intertribal Fisheries Commission, the Association of Washington Cities and the Washington Association of Counties. These agencies are working with WSDOT in technical and policy development to improve regulatory processes. TPEAC funding is also used for consultant services for research and policy work in support of permit development and creating better project-mitigation alternatives. Other resource agencies dedicate staff time for participation in TPEAC activities.

Explanation of Current Results

TPEAC has provided a valuable forum to bring together all those involved in transportation permitting. All participants now recognize the relationships between their roles and the importance of working together to bring about a more streamlined permitting process to use government resources more efficiently and achieve better environmental results. Some of the TPEAC innovations have been institutionalized (such as a variety of programmatic permits) and more are planned, including watershed characterization; improvements to environmental mitigation; and on-line permitting tools to improve permit applications.

Work of TPEAC's Technical Subcommittees

TPEAC Legislation directed the establishment of several technical subcommittees to evaluate and develop streamlining tools and policies. The following sections provide examples of some of the work of TPEAC's technical subcommittees.

Watershed-based mitigation

TPEAC tasked the Subcommittee with creating a watershed approach to environmental mitigation. The TPEAC legislation directed that the subcommittee undertake specific activities, including:

- Developing technical tools that use a watershed-based approach to identify mitigation sites
- Developing a multi-agency watershed-based mitigation policy guidance document to expedite environmental permitting
- Completing a test of the policy and technical tools
- Developing a schedule to integrate watershed tools, policies, and procedures.

A watershed approach seeks to understand natural resource impacts, assess the condition of environmental processes, and evaluate restoration options in a landscape context. Using a watershed approach to permitting ensures that decisions on mitigation opportunities are evaluated based on their potential to provide measurable environmental benefits at landscape scales, rather than just an on-site replacement of habitat lost in the transportation project. The subcommittee developed a methodology to characterize the ecological health of a watershed and to use that information to identify areas that would provide the greatest environmental benefit for impacts caused by transportation projects.

The watershed characterization method outlines a scientific framework and set of procedures for identifying, screening, and prioritizing a suite of options for mitigating environmental impacts on large transportation projects with complex environmental issues. The method includes:

- Characterizing the condition of the watershed to support, maintain, and improve restoration and mitigation efforts
- Assessing potential environmental impacts of a project
- Optimizing avoidance and minimization opportunities
- Identifying, assessing, and prioritizing potential mitigation sites

A watershed characterization technical team has developed a landscape-scale method for evaluating watersheds in association with a transportation corridor and identifying and prioritizing potential mitigation opportunities that have the greatest potential to mitigate transportation impacts and maximize environmental benefits. The team has completed four projects located in Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties to develop, test, and refine the methodology. On the I-405/SR 520 project, the team used the watershed characterization tool to identify 4,888 potential wetland, riparian, and floodplain mitigation sites.

Multiple mitigation sites provide opportunities to maximize environmental benefits and reduce project costs. For example, treating stormwater flow control through the restoration of degraded wetlands provides a new mechanism for meeting mitigation needs and increasing environmental benefits. A wetland restored upstream of a highway project can provide the same stormwater flow control benefits as a detention pond next to the project or a stormwater vault built underneath the highway. Meanwhile, it has many other benefits: wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, water quality improvement, etc. At the same time, the wetland option may be far less expensive than the engineered option.

The Watershed Subcommittee also developed a transportation-screening tool to help engineers identify projects with the potential for excessive mitigation costs early in project planning. Work is currently underway to automate and integrate the screening tool into WSDOT's Environmental Work Bench. The Environmental Work Bench is a geographical information system (GIS) that includes several layers of environmental information so that project engineers can readily access relevant information for project locations across the state. Automating the screening tool will make it more convenient for project engineers and others to analyze environmental risks and the need for watershed-characterization work.

Permit compliance and training subcommittee

TPEAC was interested in improving permit compliance. The subcommittee was formed to meet that need and addressed this issue by adopting clear reporting procedures for construction and operations managers. This was combined with enhanced environmental training for staff to ensure that permit terms and conditions are understood and enforced.

Environmental compliance includes planning, designing, building, maintaining, and operating a transportation system while:

- Avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating environmental impacts
- Meeting federal, state, and local legal requirements
- Meeting permit conditions
- Being accountable for results

The purpose of the subcommittee was to develop tools to improve on these items for WSDOT construction and hired contractors. The goal of the subcommittee was to Develop a compliance, training, and reporting framework that:

- Meets environmental requirements
- Clarifies assignment of responsibilities
- Protects the environment while building, maintaining, and operating the transportation system

The objectives follow:

- Improve and demonstrate impact avoidance and minimization from project scoping through construction, operation, and maintenance.
- Ensure dedicated and adequate compliance, training, and reporting funding for DOT and NR agencies.
- Establish system to develop, track, and analyze environmental performance and create a feedback loop using monitoring results.
- Respect the differences of missions and operational approaches of DOT and NR agencies while recognizing that all agencies need to be willing to change in order to cooperate and collaborate effectively.
- Increase accountability by using timely clear communication. This will improve trust among all parties and the public.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of all WSDOT staff, contractors, and NR agencies relative to environmental compliance.

The subcommittee established enhanced environmental training for staff to ensure that permit terms and conditions are understood and enforced. While the policy issues for this Subcommittee have been resolved, training efforts are still ongoing with new classes still in development.

To date, TPEAC has funded training of over 2,000 staff members in a variety of areas including Endangered Species Act compliance, permit training for design engineers and environmental practitioners, field application of best management practices, conflict resolution, environmental-compliance assurance procedures, permit compliance for inspectors, environmental-justice regulation, and river mechanics.

Permit delivery

This subcommittee was created to streamline the permitting process. When the environmental review and permit-decision process is duplicative and uncoordinated, projects are delayed, which increases project costs and decreases service levels without necessarily improving environmental protection. The subcommittee looked at ways to coordinate environmental review and permit decision-making among federal, state, and local agencies while involving stakeholders more efficiently and effectively. The objectives of the work on permit streamlining were to:

- Develop a new process focused on streamlining.
- Apply new process to pilot projects.
- Evaluate the pilots' process for usability.
- Institutionalize those identified improvements.

Current activities focus on ensuring that the permit applicant knows what the regulations require, ensuring that initial permit applications are complete, and ensuring that permit review are coordinated among resource agencies. This committee is currently working on developing an electronic web-based permit-application process.

The Permit Delivery Subcommittee's work has supported development of on-line permitting tools for WSDOT projects. Key elements of the web-based permitting approach for WSDOT projects include the One-Stop Joint Aquatic Resources Application (JARPA) Permit Site. Development of a web-based JARPA application has included the creation of a web-

based worksheet and guidance database designed to help WSDOT offices complete permit applications. The site provides WSDOT and others with a single, integrated source of local, state, and federal permitting and regulatory guidance, glossary, tips, FAQs, examples, and step-by-step instructions from the permitting agencies. The permit application consists of a downloadable source of “one-stop” permitting forms. It has a secure upload functionality to ensure all regulatory agencies are looking at and seeing the same application materials and environmental-discipline reports.

Programmatic subcommittee

TPEAC created the Programmatic Subcommittee to develop permits for routine transportation maintenance and construction activities. A programmatic permit is a consistent set of permit conditions for environmental protection that are used whenever a certain type of project is constructed. The approach is best suited for simple or often-repeated activities.

The Programmatic Subcommittee and WSDOT completed the following programmatic permits:

- Bridge and Ferry Terminal Structure Washing
- Bridge and Ferry Terminal Painting
- Bridge Structure Repair
- Channel Maintenance
- Fish Way Maintenance
- Culvert Maintenance
- Culvert Replacement in Non-Fish Bearing Streams
- Bridge Deck and Drain Cleaning
- Bridge and Ferry Terminal Deck Overlay and Replacement
- Pile Replacement in Marine Waters

Programmatic-permit coverage is suitable for low-impact and routine activities that are typically funded by the highway maintenance and preservation program. Programmatic permits provide coverage for approximately 90 percent of WSDOT’s Maintenance Program, 30 percent of WSDOT’s Preservation Program (e.g., bridge painting and washing, bridge deck replacement, and pile replacement), and less than 3 percent of WSDOT’s Improvement Program (e.g., culvert replacement and sediment-test boring). The current programmatic coverage reflects the initial expectation of the programmatic subcommittee: that programmatic permits were suitable for low-impact activities.

Local government task force

TPEAC directed a small task force to look at the collective experiences of local governments and WSDOT as they relate to permitting transportation projects at the local government level. The purpose of the Local Government Task Force is to:

- Identify one or more county and city permits for activities for which uniform standards can be developed for application by local governments.
- Identify strategies for local governments to adapt standards and best practices to include in local permits.

A case-study approach was used to review joint WSDOT and local government projects that have been delayed during the past biennium. At the end of the 2001-2003 biennium, WSDOT recorded 89 construction projects with deferrals. Only 11 of the 89 projects were attributed to a city or county. Based on the case study, the task force met with representative staff from all six WSDOT regions, the Washington State Ferries environmental office, WSDOT Maintenance, WSDOT Bridge, and WSDOT Hydraulics. Using the survey as a platform for discussion, the meetings focused on:

- What is working well with local jurisdictions?
- What challenges do you have with local jurisdictions in obtaining permits?
- Of the identified challenges, what potential solutions would you like to see?

As part of the balance of the discussion, local jurisdictions were compared to state and federal agencies as part of the overall project delivery. In addition, local governments were asked to identify potential uniform standards and identify process improvements with WSDOT.

Feedback from WSDOT and local governments was extensive and generally positive from both perspectives. Overall, they found that the relationships with local governments are good and that cities and counties were found to be small part of the concern for construction delays. The following findings, categorized under some general-topping headings, were identified as issues:

- Staff turnover and understanding of transportation issues at the local level can be a problem (revisiting prior decision, new staff tends to be more conservative in analysis, lack of experience dealing with larger transportation projects, etc.).

- Both WSDOT and a jurisdiction's own public-works staff may not fully understand what is required in a permit.
- There is a continued desire for more locals to use the Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application (JARPA).
- In larger jurisdictions, working with a city or county's public-works department and planning office is key to project delivery.
- Pre-application process with WSDOT is supported and frequently used.
- Early involvement on WSDOT projects with locals usually occurs; the exceptions tend to be with cities/counties that operate their permits on an enterprise-fund basis.
- Permit issuance was relatively fast, but WSDOT did not approach the jurisdiction until after the other permits had been obtained.
- The actual permit is issued relatively quickly, but negotiations leading to a permit can take months.
- Better clarification of emergency or imminent maintenance work is needed, e.g., preventative bank stabilization before flood events.
- Clarification is needed on WSDOT mitigation requirements as they relate to critical area ordinances.
- Watershed mitigation has potential but requires continued development.
- Greater review of local government planning processes (ordinance updates etc.) Better Internet access to local ordinances is needed.

Further clarification is provided for the following three issues that were highlighted by the task force:

1. **Developer Services Manual:** During the interview process, the task force received feedback from both local government and WSDOT staff referencing a manual that has proved to be a useful tool for permitting transportation projects. State agency and local government staff found the manual useful, particularly in the case of staff turnover. It was suggested that:
 - The draft WSDOT Developer Services Manual be institutionalized.
 - Local utilities-notice requirements be incorporated as part of the NEPA hearing process to reduce one public-outreach loop.
2. **Development of programmatic and noise permits:**
 - Consistency in noise variances or exemptions is desirable.
 - Programmatic permits have potential for high benefit since counties/cities have similar maintenance activities.
3. **Shoreline Management Act:**
 - Shoreline Management Act exemptions are being applied inconsistently by local jurisdictions throughout the state. Streamlining an exemption process for routine roadside and ferry service maintenance activities would be beneficial.
 - Notification of WSDOT activities that are occurring within the jurisdiction, even if it is an exempt activity within WSDOT right of way, is desirable.

How Successful Has TPEAC Been?

The Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee was established by the Legislature in 2001, reauthorized in 2003, and is now mid-way through its fourth year of developing and demonstrating efficiency and accountability measures to improve transportation-project permitting. TPEAC is scheduled to sunset in March 2006 and while several of the technical subcommittees established by TPEAC have concluded their work, many of the streamlining tools and products developed by the subcommittees are being used and are starting to be evaluated. The use of multi-agency programmatic permits, web-based permit applications, watershed-based mitigation, and local permitting improvements are some of the TPEAC tools that are being implemented by WSDOT and resource agencies to increase both efficiency in transportation-project permitting and environmental benefits.

In addition to developing streamlining tools and products, TPEAC has continued to provide a valuable forum to bring together all of those involved in transportation permitting. Participants recognize the relationship between their roles and the importance of working together to bring about a more streamlined permitting process in order to more efficiently use government resources and achieve better environmental results.

As with any process aiming to foster collaboration between a diverse group of stakeholders, the TPEAC experience was not without its challenges. Participants' individual perceptions varied, but there were several commonly identified issues that can be captured in general lessons about the TPEAC process and its products.

The TPEAC experience serves as a case study of a collaborative, multi-stakeholder effort to reform environmental permitting for transportation projects in Washington State. Reflecting on the Committee's Process, Products, and Lessons Learned reveals tips, tools, and resources to assist both in the implementation of transportation streamlining tools and in the pursuit of future collaborative efforts.

Since its start in 2001, the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee has sought to improve the permitting process for transportation projects while maintaining high standards for environmental protection. The permitting tools developed and enhanced by TPEAC and its subcommittees are a testament to the value of this endeavor. However, as evidenced by lessons from the TPEAC experience, the committee was not without its limitations. TPEAC participants have identified several areas/issues where further progress could be made and/or where efforts are ongoing.

As with any process aiming to foster collaboration between a diverse group of stakeholders, the TPEAC experience was not without its challenges. Participants' individual perceptions varied, but there were several commonly identified issues that can be captured in general lessons about the TPEAC process and its products.

TPEAC Process Lessons Learned

- Clearly understanding and defining the problems(s) is crucial to developing an effective approach.
- Building effective relationships is both the challenge and the reward of the collaborative process.
- Appropriate participation at all phases in the process is critical to the overall effectiveness of a group's efforts.
- There needs to be a clear, collective understanding of the roles and responsibilities of participants.
- Effective and appropriate meeting management is critical to ensuring engagement and productivity.

Recommendations for the Future

TPEAC created a Successes Steering Committee to develop a vision for the future after TPEAC sunsets in March 2006 and to strategize on how to communicate results that have been achieved through TPEAC. There is an interest and a need identified by TPEAC for resource agencies, Tribes, local governments, and WSDOT to have an ongoing relationship and to continue to implement and expand on the work of TPEAC after TPEAC formally sunsets in March 2006. On the topic of how to maintain momentum on improving the regulatory process, the group agreed that the Office of Regulatory Assistance (ORA) could take the lead. This office is well positioned to bring state agencies, along with federal, local, and tribal government representatives together to continue to streamline regulatory processes. This new structure could offer the opportunity to broaden the regulatory focus for improvements beyond the transportation sector.

The Steering Committee identified ideas and strategies to communicate TPEAC successes including:

- Developing a TPEAC website
- Holding streamlining workshops
- Using other workshops/conferences as a forum to talk about streamlining.

Additional Information on TPEAC can be found at WSDOT's TPEAC website:
<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/environment/streamlineact/default.htm>

Biographical Sketch: Barbara Aberle serves as the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability (TPEAC) Implementation Manager for the Washington State Department of Transportation in Olympia, Washington. Previously she has developed wetland mitigation banks and managed WSDOT's retrofit programs for fish passage and chronic environmental deficiencies. She also has experience working at the Washington State departments of Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources, and Ecology. Barbara has a B.S. degree in ecosystems analysis from Huxley College as well as a Master of Environmental Studies degree from the Evergreen State College.

