# eNEPA

FHWA Publication No.: FHWA-HRT-21-092.

FHWA Contact: Mary Huie, Innovation Management and Technology Transfer Project Manager, 202-493-4360, Mary.Huie@dot.gov

This document is a technical summary of the FHWA Research and Technology Evaluation: eNEPA Final Report (FHWA-HRT-20-044).

## Introduction

This brief summarizes an evaluation of how the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA's) investment in eNEPA, an electronic tool, has affected interagency collaboration in developing environmental documents and conducting environmental reviews for major projects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).[1]

## Background

FHWA's Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty (HEP) developed eNEPA in 2012 to improve the quality of interagency collaboration in developing environmental documents and to reduce the time it takes to conduct environmental reviews for major projects under NEPA.[1]

eNEPA allows State departments of transportation (DOTs) to share documents, track comments, schedule tasks with participating agencies (including Federal agencies), and perform concurrent reviews for their environmental documents. Improving the process of concurrent agency reviews enables State DOTs to identify and deal with issues early and in real time. This step will simplify and clarify the review process and help agencies fulfill their NEPA responsibilities.[2]

FHWA released the first version of the tool in August 2013. HEP marketed eNEPA to stakeholders using a variety of methods, including the Every Day Counts program, and conducted individual demonstration meetings and training for State DOTs and other stakeholders who requested it. In 2016, FHWA rewrote eNEPA to address issues with its overall architecture and enhance specific functions of the tool. FHWA released eNEPA version 2.0 in January 2017.[1]

## Findings

This evaluation assessed eNEPA's breadth and depth of use, usability, and effectiveness at reducing projects' environmental-review timeline. The evaluation also looked at whether the timing, quantity, and quality of interagency collaboration improved. The findings for these evaluation areas are given in the following subsections.

### Breadth and Depth of eNEPA Use

eNEPA is most useful for complex projects involving multiple agencies. However, few State DOTs are using eNEPA, and active users are not using the tool's full functionality. Users have primarily explored eNEPA's document manager and file-sharing functions but have not fully used eNEPA to coordinate document reviews with resource and regulatory agencies. Coordination of documents is one of the primary features of eNEPA that differentiates it from other document management systems available to State DOTs.

### Usability of eNEPA

While the State DOTs that are using eNEPA have found version 2.0 more user-friendly than the original version, respondents continued to identify user interface issues. These types of issues make it more challenging for novice users to build up their familiarity and comfort level with using the tool.

### Impact on Environmental Review Timeline and Interagency Collaboration

Due to eNEPA's limited use to date, there have not been enough data to assess the extent to which eNEPA has affected the time required to complete the environmental review process. There also are not enough data to assess the extent to which eNEPA has affected the timing, quantity, and quality of collaboration among agencies while developing environmental documents.

## Recommendations

Like any new technology, eNEPA involves a steep learning curve before it can be effectively and efficiently used. There may be some stumbling blocks along the way as each State DOT figures out how to best use the tool for managing and facilitating the environmental review process. The more State DOTs use the tool and build their comfort level and expertise with it, the more benefits they are likely to experience.

To promote greater use of eNEPA, the evaluation report includes the following recommendations for FHWA's consideration:

- Target outreach and education at State DOTs that conduct a higher number of environmental impact statements (EIS).

- Engage with State DOTs to identify those that will be starting a complex environmental assessment or EIS in the short term and encourage them to use eNEPA.

- Identify a specific project for which State DOTs can use eNEPA to maximize the impact of eNEPA training. Tailor training and technical assistance to the project team when they are ready to begin using eNEPA.

- Use the latest features of eNEPA, which allows videos to be uploaded to the tool, to develop short training videos that guide users through key actions such as setting up an account, creating and using project templates, reviewing documents, and so forth.

- Increase outreach to select resource and regulatory agencies to educate them about the benefits of using eNEPA and address any concerns they may have with using the tool.

- Create guidance documents and training resources tailored to resource agencies that only use the tool intermittently to contribute to document reviews.

- Collect more user feedback and tailor future enhancements of the tool to address user needs.

## References

1. Filosa, G. 2021. *FHWA Research and Technology Evaluation: eNEPA*. Report No. FHWA-HRT-20-044. Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration.

2. FHWA. 2017. *Documentation for Electronic National Environmental Policy Act (eNEPA 2.0): User Handbook*. Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration.