

## Overview of the Project Development Process

Transportation decision-making is complex and can be influenced by legislative mandates, environmental regulations, financial limitations, agency programmatic commitments, and partnering opportunities. Decision-makers and reviewing agencies, when consulted early and often throughout the project development process, can ensure that all participants understand the potential impact these factors can have on project implementation. Project development is the process that takes a transportation improvement from concept through construction.

The MassDOT Highway Division has developed a comprehensive project development process which is contained in Chapter 2 of the *MassDOT Highway Division's Project Development and Design Guide*. The eight-step process covers a range of activities extending from identification of a project need, through completion of a set of finished contract plans, to construction of the project. The sequence of decisions made through the project development process progressively narrows the project focus and, ultimately, leads to a project that addresses the identified needs. The descriptions provided below are focused on the process for a highway project, but the same basic process will need to be followed for non-highway projects as well.

### **1. Needs Identification**

For each of the locations at which an improvement is to be implemented, MassDOT leads an effort to define the problem, establishes project goals and objectives, and defines the scope of the planning needed for implementation. To that end, it has to complete a Project Need Form (PNF), which states in general terms the deficiencies or needs related to the transportation facility or location. The PNF documents the problems and explains why corrective action is needed. For this study, the information defining the need for the project will be drawn primarily, perhaps exclusively, from the present report. Also, at this point in the process, MassDOT meets with potential participants, such as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and community members, to allow for an informal review of the project.

The PNF is reviewed by the MassDOT Highway Division district office whose jurisdiction includes the location of the proposed project. MassDOT also sends the PNF to the MPO, for informational purposes. The outcome of this step determines whether the project requires further planning, whether it is already well supported by prior planning studies, and, therefore, whether it is ready to move forward into the design phase, or whether it should be dismissed from further consideration.

### **2. Planning**

This phase will likely not be required for the implementation of the improvements proposed in this planning study, as this planning report should constitute the outcome of this step. However, in general, the purpose of this implementation step is for the project proponent to identify issues, impacts, and approvals that may need to be obtained, so that the subsequent design and permitting processes are understood.

The level of planning needed will vary widely, based on the complexity of the project. Typical tasks include: define the existing context, confirm project need, establish goals and objectives, initiate public outreach, define the project, collect data, develop and analyze alternatives, make recommendations, and provide documentation. Likely outcomes include consensus on the project definition to enable it to move forward into environmental documentation (if needed) and design, or a recommendation to delay the project or dismiss it from further consideration.

### **3. Project Initiation**

At this point in the process, the proponent, MassDOT Highway Division, fills out a Project Initiation Form (PIF) for each improvement, which is reviewed by its Project Review Committee (PRC) and the MPO. The PRC is composed of the Chief Engineer, each District Highway Director, and representatives of the Project Management, Environmental, Planning, Right-of-Way, Traffic, and Bridge departments, and the MassDOT Federal Aid Program Office (FAPO). The PIF documents the project type and description, summarizes the project planning process, identifies likely funding and project management responsibility, and defines a plan for interagency and public participation. First the PRC reviews and evaluates the proposed project based on the MassDOT's statewide priorities and criteria. If the result is positive, MassDOT Highway Division moves the project forward to the design phase, and to programming review by the MPO. The PRC may provide a Project Management Plan to define roles and responsibilities for subsequent steps. The MPO review includes project evaluation based on the MPO's regional priorities and criteria. The MPO may assign project evaluation criteria score, a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) year, a tentative project category, and a tentative funding category.

### **4. Environmental Permitting, Design, and Right-of-Way Process**

This step has four distinct but closely integrated elements: public outreach, environmental documentation and permitting (if required), design, and right-of-way acquisition (if required). The outcome of this step is a fully designed and permitted project ready for construction. However, a project does not have to be fully designed in order for the MPO to program it in the TIP. The sections below provide more detailed information on the four elements of this step of the project development process.

#### Public Outreach

Continued public outreach in the design and environmental process is essential to maintain public support for the project and to seek meaningful input on the design elements. The public outreach is often in the form of required public hearings, but can also include less formal dialogues with those interested in and affected by a proposed project.

#### Environmental Documentation and Permitting

The project proponent, in coordination with the Environmental Services section of the MassDOT Highway Division, will be responsible for identifying and complying with all applicable federal, state, and local environmental laws and requirements. This includes determining the appropriate project category for both the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). Environmental documentation and permitting is often completed in conjunction with the **Preliminary Design** phase described below.

#### Design

There are three major phases of design. The first is **Preliminary Design**, which is also referred to as the 25-percent submission. The major components of this phase include full survey of the project area, preparation of base plans, development of basic geometric layout, development of preliminary cost estimates, and submission of a functional design report. Preliminary Design, although not required to, is often completed in conjunction with the Environmental Documentation and Permitting. The next phase is **Final Design**, which is also referred to as the 75-percent and 100-percent submission. The major components of this phase include preparation of a subsurface exploratory plan (if required), coordination of utility relocations, development of traffic management plans through construction zones, development of final cost estimates, and refinement and finalization of the construction plans. Once Final Design is complete, a full set of **Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E)** is developed for the project.

## Right-of-Way Acquisition

A separate set of Right-of-Way plans are required for any project that requires land acquisition or easements. The plans must identify the existing and proposed layout lines, easements, property lines, names of property owners, and the dimensions and areas of estimated takings and easements.

### **5. Programming (Identification of Funding)**

Programming, which typically begins during the design phase, can actually occur at any time during the process, from planning to design. In this step, which is distinct from project initiation, the proponent requests that the MPO place the project in the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The proponent requesting the project's listing on the TIP can be the community or it can be one of the MPO member agencies (the Regional Planning Agency, MassDOT, and the Regional Transit Authority). The MPO then considers the project in terms of state and regional needs, evaluation criteria, and compliance with the regional Transportation Plan and decides whether to place it in the draft TIP for public review and then in the final TIP.

### **6. Procurement**

Following project design and programming of a highway project, the MassDOT Highway Division publishes a request for proposals. It then reviews the bids and awards the contract to the qualified bidder with the lowest bid.

### **7. Construction**

After a construction contract is awarded, MassDOT Highway Division and the contractor develop a public participation plan and a management plan for the construction process.

### **8. Project Assessment**

The purpose of this step is to receive constituents' comments on the project development process and the project's design elements. MassDOT Highway Division can apply what is learned in this process to future projects.

## Project Development Schematic Timetable

Description	Schedule Influence	Typical Duration
<p><b>Step I: Problem/Need/Opportunity Identification</b> The proponent completes a Project Need Form (PNF). This form is then reviewed by the MassDOT District office which provides guidance to the proponent on the subsequent steps of the process.</p>	<p>The Project Need Form has been developed so that it can be prepared quickly by the proponent, including any supporting data that is readily available. The District office shall return comments to the proponent within one month of PNF submission.</p>	<p>1 to 3 months</p>
<p><b>Step II: Planning</b> Project planning can range from agreement that the problem should be addressed through a clear solution to a detailed analysis of alternatives and their impacts.</p>	<p>For some projects, no planning beyond preparation of the Project Need Form is required. Some projects require a planning study centered on specific project issues associated with the proposed solution or a narrow family of alternatives. More complex projects will likely require a detailed alternatives analysis.</p>	<p>Project Planning Report: 3 to 24+ months</p>
<p><b>Step III: Project Initiation</b> The proponent prepares and submits a Project Initiation Form (PIF) and a Transportation Evaluation Criteria (TEC) form in this step. The PIF and TEC are informally reviewed by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and MassDOT District office, and formally reviewed by the PRC.</p>	<p>The PIF includes refinement of the preliminary information contained in the PNF. Additional information summarizing the results of the planning process, such as the Project Planning Report, are included with the PIF and TEC. The schedule is determined by PRC staff review (dependent on project complexity) and meeting schedule.</p>	<p>1 to 4 months</p>
<p><b>Step IV: Design, Environmental, and Right of Way</b> The proponent completes the project design. Concurrently, the proponent completes necessary environmental permitting analyses and files applications for permits. Any right of way needed for the project is identified and the acquisition process begins.</p>	<p>The schedule for this step is dependent upon the size of the project and the complexity of the design, permitting, and right-of-way issues. Design review by the MassDOT district and appropriate sections is completed in this step.</p>	<p>3 to 48+ months</p>
<p><b>Step V: Programming</b> The MPO considers the project in terms of its regional priorities and determines whether or not to include the project in the draft Regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) which is then made available for public comment. The TIP includes a project description and funding source.</p>	<p>The schedule for this step is subject to each MPO's programming cycle and meeting schedule. It is also possible that the MPO will not include a project in its Draft TIP based on its review and approval procedures.</p>	<p>3 to 12+ months</p>
<p><b>Step VI: Procurement</b> The project is advertised for construction and a contract awarded.</p>	<p>Administration of competing projects can influence the advertising schedule.</p>	<p>1 to 12 months</p>
<p><b>Step VII: Construction</b> The construction process is initiated including public notification and any anticipated public involvement. Construction continues to project completion.</p>	<p>The duration for this step is entirely dependent upon project complexity and phasing.</p>	<p>3 to 60+ months</p>
<p><b>Step VIII: Project Assessment</b> The construction period is complete and project elements and processes are evaluated on a voluntary basis.</p>	<p>The duration for this step is dependent upon the proponent's approach to this step and any follow-up required.</p>	<p>1 month</p>

Source: MassDOT Highway Division Project Development and Design Guide