

Regionally Significant Transportation Investment Studies (RSTIS) Coordination Process

Adopted September 2010

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE RSTIS PROCESS

The Southern California Association of Governments' (SCAG) Regionally Significant Investment Studies (RSTIS) Coordination Process is intended to provide a forum for coordination and discussion around the preparation of major corridor studies to ensure that:

- Regional partners are informed regarding major corridor studies and area plans underway in the SCAG region;
- Major corridor studies and area plans include consideration of how projects support regional goals and objectives; and
- Major corridor studies and area plans are prepared in a manner consistent with recent Federal guidance and state legislation, specifically:

- **Federal guidance on linking planning and NEPA.** The Federal Highway Administration's final planning rule for metropolitan transportation emphasizes the need to strengthen linkages between planning processes and environmental review. "Appendix A" of the planning rule (23 CFR part 450) lists issues to be considered during the preparation of corridor studies to ensure that information, analysis, and products from transportation planning can be incorporated into NEPA documents. The RSTIS process provides a forum for identifying where linkages between

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major corridor studies and NEPA analysis can be strengthened.

- **Greenhouse gas legislation.** California's Senate Bill 375 requires regional governments to coordinate the reduction of transportation greenhouse gas emissions through transportation planning efforts. Senate Bill 97 requires projects undergoing California Environmental Quality Act analysis to consider greenhouse gas emissions. The RSTIS process provides a forum for discussion of how major corridor projects impact regional greenhouse gas reduction goals.
- **Corridor system management plans (CSMP).** Corridor system management planning is a new approach to highway traffic management that emphasizes performance monitoring and operational improvements to achieve long-term highway performance objectives. The RSTIS process provides a forum for discussion of how all corridor projects can incorporate the principles of performance monitoring and operational solutions to transportation challenges.

2.0 DEFINITION OF A REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT STUDY

SCAG requests that all sponsors of major transportation projects participate in the RSTIS process.

Major corridor or area study projects qualify as a RSTIS if they:

- Involve expenditure of funds from the Federal Highway Administration or Federal Transit Administration;
- Are expected to undergo National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis at the level of a Environmental Impact Statement; and
- Are expected to have a significant effect on corridor performance or accessibility, which could include addition of transit or highway capacity; delay reduction; expansion of travel choices; or effect on modeshare.

Examples of projects that would qualify as a RSTIS include those where the following are being considered among alternative project strategies:

- New or expanded capacity on freeways or partially controlled principal arterials greater than one lane-mile in either direction (this includes high-occupancy vehicle or high-occupancy toll lanes);

- Major investments in improved highway corridor operations, such as those that extend over multiple highway miles;
- Construction or major extension of a fixed guideway transit facility or a bus rapid transit facility involving dedicated lanes.

Examples of projects that would not qualify as a RSTIS include:

- Localized safety or operational improvements;
- Resurfacing, replacement, rehabilitation projects;
- Changes to transit routing and scheduling; and
- Projects on local roads which are not freeways or principal arterials.

Caltrans PSR/PID documents only qualify as a RSTIS if they rise to the level of regional significance as defined above.

SCAG's web site lists examples of recent projects that met the definition of a RSTIS: <http://www.scag.ca.gov/corridor/>. If an agency project sponsor is uncertain as to whether its project qualifies, contact the SCAG RSTIS coordinator, Philip Law, at 213-236-1841 or law@scag.ca.gov.

3.0 PREPARING CORRIDOR STUDIES

The RSTIS process provides a regional forum for discussion of the development of major corridor studies. Project sponsors should follow applicable Caltrans or Federal Transit Administration requirements in preparing the corridor studies.

The RSTIS coordination process is intended to provide an opportunity for peer review of the study direction, especially in the areas not covered by existing Caltrans and FTA processes. The table below outlines these processes and indicates where the RSTIS Regional Coordination Process helps to strengthen the linkages between planning and NEPA in areas not covered by Caltrans and FTA processes.

	Caltrans PID and PEAR Process	FTA AA for New Starts Projects	RSTIS Process
Requirements	Project initiation documents (PID) are required for capital improvements on the State Highway System. Preliminary Environmental Analysis Reports (PEAR) are required for all projects programmed with Project Study Report requiring an environmental document.	Alternative Analysis (AA) is required for all major fixed guideway transit projects that will receive New Starts funding.	Requested by SCAG for major regional projects to be included in the RTP.
Purpose and Needs Statement	Required.	Required.	RSTIS encourages it to be prepared with NEPA in mind.
Alternatives Analysis	Required.	Required – Must be evaluated according to specific performance measures.	RSTIS encourages corridor strategies to be prepared with regional objectives in mind.
Early consultation with resource agencies; early review of environmental impacts; and early consideration of mitigations	Occurs through PEAR process.	Not required during alternatives analysis, but AA may be conducted as part of NEPA analysis.	RSTIS encourages early consultation with resource agencies unless covered by PEAR; and early identification of possible mitigations.
Public Involvement	Must be described in PSR, but few specific requirements.	Encouraged as “guiding principle” of new starts alternatives analysis; no specific requirements.	RSTIS encourages development of a public involvement plan and documentation of public involvement for NEPA.

4.0 RSTIS REGIONAL COORDINATION PROCESS

The RSTIS regional coordination process consists of five steps shown in the figure at right. The core component of the process is for sponsors of RSTIS projects to present project information to the Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee.

Step 1 – Notify Regional Partners

Project sponsors are requested to notify the SCAG RSTIS coordinator at the inception of a new corridor study. Contact information is available on the SCAG web site at <http://www.scag.ca.gov/corridor/>.

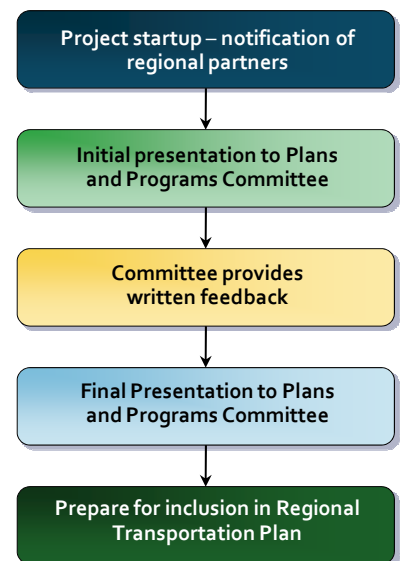
The coordinator will identify a time when the project sponsor can present to the Regional Plans and Programs Committee.

Step 2 – Initial Presentation to Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee

The project sponsor is requested to present a 10- to 20-minute overview of the study plan to the Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee. The presentation should be given early (approximately three to six months) in the study, around the time when the project purpose and need statement is being developed.

The presentation should cover the following topics:

- Overall project scope, schedule, and budget;
- Project purpose and need (a written purpose and need statement may be submitted to the committee for review at the meeting if available);
- Likely strategies to be analyzed and their relationship to regional goals;
- Stakeholder outreach plan, including resource agencies. Sponsors are asked to note if they are following Caltrans procedures for early outreach to resource agencies;



- Approach to public outreach; and
- Status of the project in relation to county-wide plans, if applicable, and the Regional Transportation Plan.

In preparing their presentations, sponsors should refer to the goals and strategies outlined in the Regional Transportation Plan, and are requested to address to the extent possible the degree to which project alternatives support them. In particular, presenters are requested to address the following three areas:

- How do project strategies incorporate best practices for cost-effective management of roadway capacity (if applicable)? For example, do project alternatives incorporate a performance-driven approach to long-term management of capacity using techniques such as intelligent transportation systems, safety improvements, or demand management?
- How do project strategies incorporate multimodal solutions and address the needs of a

variety of system users, including transit, nonmotorized, and freight users?

- Are any project strategies expected to have major natural resource impacts? In particular, are they expected to affect greenhouse gas emissions by changing vehicle miles of travel, vehicle trips, or by changing operating conditions in a manner that impacts vehicle fuel efficiency? Are some strategies expected to have a greater or lesser impact than others? How is land use development being coordinated with expected

investments? If supporting analysis is not available, the sponsor may simply describe the types of impacts that could occur.

If the project changes significantly in scope or schedule after the first presentation, the sponsor is asked to notify SCAG to determine whether an additional presentation and update is needed.

Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee

The Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee (P&P TAC) is charged with ensuring the technical integrity of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), including proposed plan strategies. The P&P TAC includes representatives of county transportation commissions, subregional councils of government, ports, universities, air and water quality management districts, Caltrans, cities, the Federal Highway Administration, the Southern California Association of Governments, and others.

A full membership roster is available on the committee web site:
<http://www.scag.ca.gov/pptac/index.htm>

Step 3 – Committee Feedback

Members of the Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee will provide verbal feedback on the sponsor's presentation, including comments on:

- The purpose and need statement, especially the degree to which it may be able to be used in a NEPA context;
- The range of alternative strategies presented, especially in how they support regional goals and objectives; and
- Plans for public outreach and stakeholder outreach

The Members of the Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee will also be provided a form with specific questions upon which they can submit written commentary if desired. Appendix A contains the review form. The SCAG RSTIS coordinator will synthesize the verbal and written commentary and provide documentation to the project sponsor within three weeks of the presentation.

Step 4 – Final Presentation to Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee

Approximately three months prior to the expected conclusion of the corridor study, the project sponsor is requested to make a final presentation to the Plans and Programs Committee. The purpose of this presentation is to ensure project decisions and products are documented thoroughly to reduce duplication of effort during NEPA review, and to ensure the project is ready for inclusion in the Regional Transportation Plan.

The presentation should cover the following topics:

- Results of analysis of project strategies and documentation of decision-making process;
- Results and documentation of stakeholder outreach, especially as it pertains to any resource issues identified;
- Results and documentation of any public outreach;
- Plan for handing off study products to NEPA analysis team; and
- Intended schedule for incorporating the project in the RTP, including status and results of analysis to support RTP requirements (air quality and financial constraint).

Step 5 – Preparation for Inclusion in the Regional Transportation Plan

At the conclusion of the RSTIS process, the project sponsor should coordinate with SCAG regarding the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). If the project already is in the RTP, it may have to be amended to reflect changes in project scope, cost, or schedule. If the project is not in the RTP, it may have to be added either through an amendment or through the next regularly scheduled update, which occurs every four years. Completion of the RSTIS process does not remove standard requirements for projects to be included in the RTP, such as air quality conformity analysis, financial constraint, etc.

Appendix A – Committee Member Feedback Form

The following tables present possible questions to be asked by the committee during sponsor presentations.

FIRST PRESENTATION

Presentation Topic	Questions for Consideration and Feedback
<p>Project purpose and need statement</p> <p>Purpose and need statements developed during corridor studies are more likely to be able to be reused during NEPA review if they define a specific problem; are vetted by stakeholder groups; and consider concerns beyond transportation.</p>	<p>Does the purpose and need statement define a problem and a proposed action to correct the problem, or is it a statement of a solution?</p> <p>Does it address a variety of concerns beyond transportation? (Refer to FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A for possible considerations.)</p> <p>Will it be vetted with resource agencies and the public?</p> <p>Does it reflect regional goals, objectives, and priorities?</p>
<p>Relationship of alternative strategies to regional goals</p>	<p>Will the alternative strategies include multimodal solutions and address the needs of multiple user groups? How will multimodal solutions be analyzed or incorporated?</p> <p>Do the strategies include high-efficiency system management techniques such as ITS improvements, safety improvements, or demand management? Is it appropriate to include these elements?</p> <p>Are project strategies expected to have a significant effect on natural resources? In particular, are any expected to have significant effects on greenhouse gas emissions?</p>
<p>Agency outreach plan</p> <p>Involvement of resource agencies early in the planning process can help to identify major resource issues associated with alternative project strategies. This can help project sponsors identify possible fatal flaws with certain strategies or be aware that resource permits may be required, saving time and effort during NEPA analysis.</p>	<p>Does the stakeholder outreach plan include resource agencies to ensure resource issues are detected early on? Are all the appropriate agencies included? The appropriate agencies should be determined based on the context and the likely resource issues, but typically include Federal, Tribal, state, and local environmental, regulatory and resource agencies (such as those responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation).</p>
<p>Public outreach plan</p> <p>Public outreach early in the planning process may help to build community support for the project or help identify options that lack support.</p>	<p>Are there any plans for early public outreach? Is public outreach being structured to allow community members to have input into the vision for the corridor?</p>

SECOND PRESENTATION

Presentation Topic	Questions for Consideration and Feedback
<p>Results of strategy analysis</p>	<p>Are strategies selected for further review consistent with regional goals and objectives?</p> <p>Were any major resource impacts identified? If so, are possible mitigations being proposed or considered?</p> <p>Were any resource issues significant enough to be considered fatal flaws?</p>
<p>Results and documentation of study products and stakeholder outreach</p> <p>Decisions made during the corridor planning stage; public outreach results; and stakeholder outreach results can be documented and included in the NEPA administrative record. This can save time in NEPA analysis by avoiding revisiting of decisions made during the corridor planning phase.</p>	<p>Is there a plan in place for documenting data and decisions made during the study, especially documentation of resource agency input; public outreach results; and decisions made on alternative strategies?</p>
<p>Expected timeframe and process for transitioning to NEPA analysis; plan for handing off study products.</p> <p>Ensuring that all corridor study products are handed off to the project development team can reduce duplication of effort during NEPA analysis.</p>	<p>Is there a plan in place for handing off study products to a project development team?</p>
<p>Coordination with the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)</p>	<p>Is the project currently in the adopted, financially constrained RTP?</p> <p>If so, is the RSTIS expected to result in a change to the scope, cost, and/or schedule of the project as it is defined in the RTP? If yes, what are the project sponsor’s plans and schedule for amending the revised project in the RTP?</p> <p>If not, what are the project sponsor’s plans and schedule for adding the project to the RTP?</p>

Appendix B – Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE RSTIS PROCESS?

SCAG originally created the RSTIS process to address the Federal Highway Administration’s requirement that Major Investment Studies (referred to as RSTIS in the SCAG region) follow certain procedures in order to receive Federal funds. The process formerly required project sponsors to develop a RSTIS study for all major projects receiving Federal funds; to present project information to a regional Peer Review Group throughout the project development process; and to obtain a Letter of Completion from SCAG. The Federal requirement for Major Investment Studies was eliminated with the passage of Federal transportation legislation (SAFETEA-LU); planning studies are no longer required for major projects to receive Federal funds. However, SCAG has chosen to continue to request that projects seeking to be included in the regional transportation plan follow the RSTIS process.

HOW DID THE RSTIS PROCESS CHANGE IN 2010?

In 2010, SCAG revised the RSTIS process into a forum for interagency coordination around major corridor studies in the SCAG region. If project sponsors elect to undertake a major area or corridor study that meets the definition of a RSTIS, they are requested to present information about the project to SCAG’s regional Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee in order for that project to be included in the Regional Transportation Plan.

WHAT DOES THE RSTIS PROCESS INVOLVE?

The RSTIS process includes a minimum of two presentations to SCAG’s Regional Plans and Programs Technical Advisory Committee to ensure coordination of the project with regional goals and early consideration of NEPA review in project development.

IS A LETTER OF COMPLETION STILL REQUIRED?

No, a letter of completion is no longer required.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY PROJECT IS A RSTIS?

These Guidelines contain a definition of regionally significant transportation investment studies. If you are not sure if your project meets the definition, please contact the SCAG RSTIS coordinator to discuss.