What Is an Environmental Review?

Why do projects undergo environmental review?

- Both the federal government and New York State have established environmental review requirements to ensure that agencies consider potential environmental effects of projects that they are undertaking or approving. The federal and state legislation are known as:
  - **NEPA** National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
  - **SEQRA** [New York] State Environmental Quality Review Act

- Both processes are similar, and in the event that FHWA and NYSDOT are involved (as is the case with the I-81 Viaduct Project), one Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) can be prepared to satisfy the requirements of both.

- The environmental review process provides a valuable way for agencies to gather public input, coordinate with other public agencies, and make decisions that involve engineers, planners, ecologists, landscape architects, and others.

What are the steps in the environmental review process?

1. **Notice of Intent**
   - Formally announces project and initiates environmental review.

2. **Scoping Process**
   - Establishes framework for environmental review.

3. **Draft Environmental Impact Statement**
   - Documents potential environmental, social, and economic effects.

4. **Public Review**
   - Minimum 45-day public review period of Draft EIS, including a public hearing.

5. **Final Environmental Impact Statement**
   - Addresses public and agency comments on Draft EIS as well as any project refinements.

6. **Record of Decision**
   - FHWA and NYSDOT decision document that officially identifies the preferred alternative and mitigation commitments. It ends the NEPA process and allows the project to enter design and construction.
WHERE ARE WE NOW?
Development and Refinement of Project Alternatives

► During scoping, alternatives will be identified and explored further

- Multiple options to be developed for each alternative (e.g., explore different number of lanes and configuration, etc.)
- Develop and engineer multiple options under each scenario and determine their feasibility
- Reasonable alternatives may be suggested during the scoping process and will be considered
- Refined options will be presented for public review at future scoping meeting

Highway Design
- Number of lanes
- Lane widths
- Median and shoulder widths
- Grades and curves
- Elevation

Highway Operations
- Traffic volumes
- Ramp location and spacing
- Roadway safety
- Snow and ice removal
- Maintenance costs

Community Impacts
- Effects on local street traffic
- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety
- Property requirements
- Visual quality
- Traffic noise
- Historic resources

Quality of Life
- Explore sustainable design elements
- Explore different pedestrian and bicycle designs
- Urban design improvements
- Opportunities to enhance economic development
WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Next Step: Alternatives Screening

**Develop Alternatives**
- Explore and engineer multiple alternatives
- Screen alternatives based on engineering studies and public input
- Important Considerations in the Screening
  - How does the alternative meet project goals and objectives?
  - What are the potential property impacts?
  - What are the effects on regional and local street connections?
  - How well does the alternative correct I-81’s nonstandard features (shoulder/lane widths, etc.)?
  - Is the alternative consistent with community needs?
  - What will the solution cost to construct, operate, and maintain?

**Screen and Evaluate Alternatives**

**RESULT**
Alternatives to be Studied in DEIS

*Future scoping meeting will present results of the ongoing alternative development process*
Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

An EIS is a comprehensive document that analyzes potential effects of a project on the natural, man-made, social, and economic environments. It is prepared following procedures of federal and state mandates.

EIS technical studies are often organized by the following three primary considerations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affected Environment</th>
<th>Existing conditions, or base line conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Consequences</td>
<td>Potential effects, or a comparison to existing conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigation</td>
<td>Explore opportunities to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### WHERE ARE WE GOING?

**The EIS will examine...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Overview</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transportation</strong></td>
<td>Evaluates potential effects on the movement of people and goods and looks at traffic, public transit, and pedestrian and bicycle movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Use and Community Character</strong></td>
<td>Looks at development patterns (e.g., residential, commercial, recreational, etc.) to determine potential effects on land use operations and the character of an area and also considers community visions for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socioeconomic Conditions</strong></td>
<td>Evaluates demographic and employment characteristics and the potential impacts and/or benefits on businesses, tax bases, and other economic indicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land Acquisition, Displacement, and Relocation</strong></td>
<td>Determines if the project would require acquisition of or easements on any property outside the existing highway right-of-way and whether that would result in displacement or relocation of any occupants and whether that would affect tax revenues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual Resources and Aesthetic Conditions</strong></td>
<td>Evaluates whether the project would affect any views to or from resources where such views are considered defining or important, and evaluates the aesthetic quality of the project itself and its potential effects on the visual character of the surrounding area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Resources</strong></td>
<td>Considers potential impacts to historic and archaeological resources. Historic resources may include buildings, districts, monuments, or sites of architectural, cultural or historic significance. Archaeological resources include buried artifacts or remains that have cultural or historic significance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The EIS will examine...

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<tr>
<td>Air Quality</td>
<td>Evaluates how a project may affect (increase or decrease) pollutants in the air we breathe, typically related to vehicle emissions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and Climate Change</td>
<td>Considers potential energy consumption of a project and its effect on greenhouse gases and climate change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>Analyzes potential changes in ambient noise levels (typically from highway traffic) and potential effects on sensitive receptors (e.g., residences, schools, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>Considers potential effects on the natural environment, such as plants and wildlife (including endangered or threatened species), wetlands and other water resources, floodplains, and geologic conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous Wastes and Contaminated Materials</td>
<td>Identifies the potential to disturb or expose hazardous wastes and contaminated materials and the measures that would be implemented to protect public health from the removal, transport, and disposal of these materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Effects</td>
<td>Considers the short-term effects in each of the subject areas described above that could result from construction of the project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Indirect and Cumulative Effects
Indirect effects consider a project’s potential to induce separate actions later in time or farther removed in distance and result in secondary impacts. Cumulative impacts consider the combined effects of a project with other independent but simultaneous or reasonably foreseeable actions.

### Environmental Justice
Evaluates potential effects on minority and low-income populations to ensure these communities do not suffer disproportionately high and adverse effects from a project.

### Other NEPA and SEQRA Considerations
Considers more general or global aspects of a project, such as potential short-term effects that are necessary for its long-term productivity; irreversible and irrevocable commitment of resources; a summary of unavoidable impacts, which cannot be partially or fully mitigated; and consistency with New York State smart growth principles.

### Section 4(f) Evaluation (Assessment of Effects on Public Parks, Wildlife Refuges, or Historic Resources)
An independent evaluation that is often incorporated into an EIS and evaluates compliance with Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Act of 1966, which prohibits USDOT (including FHWA) from approving any project that “uses” or adversely affects public parks, wildlife refuges, or historic resources unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative to that use and all measures to minimize harm have been implemented.

### Section 6(f) Evaluation (Consistency with Land and Water Conservation Act)
An independent evaluation that documents coordination with respect to Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964. A Section 6(f) analysis is needed when a project would alter parklands or other sites that previously received federal money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. There is potential that parklands near the existing alignment of I-81 have received Land and Water Conservation Funds.