
9.0 Next Steps

9.1 Overview

This chapter identifies the next steps in the Federal Transit Administration New Starts Program project development process.

9.2 Background and Assumptions

The project development process for FTA New Starts projects are illustrated in Figure 9.1. This process includes the Alternatives Analysis (AA), Environmental Impact Statement (Draft and Final), Preliminary Engineering (PE), Final Design (FD), Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA), and Construction.

9.3 Environmental Impact Statement

The environmental review process required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related laws includes environmental impact analyses and the preparation of documentation for public review. The refinement of project costs, benefits, and impacts is further undertaken as part of the environmental review process, along with documentation of the project sponsor's ability to manage the development, implementation and operation of the project.

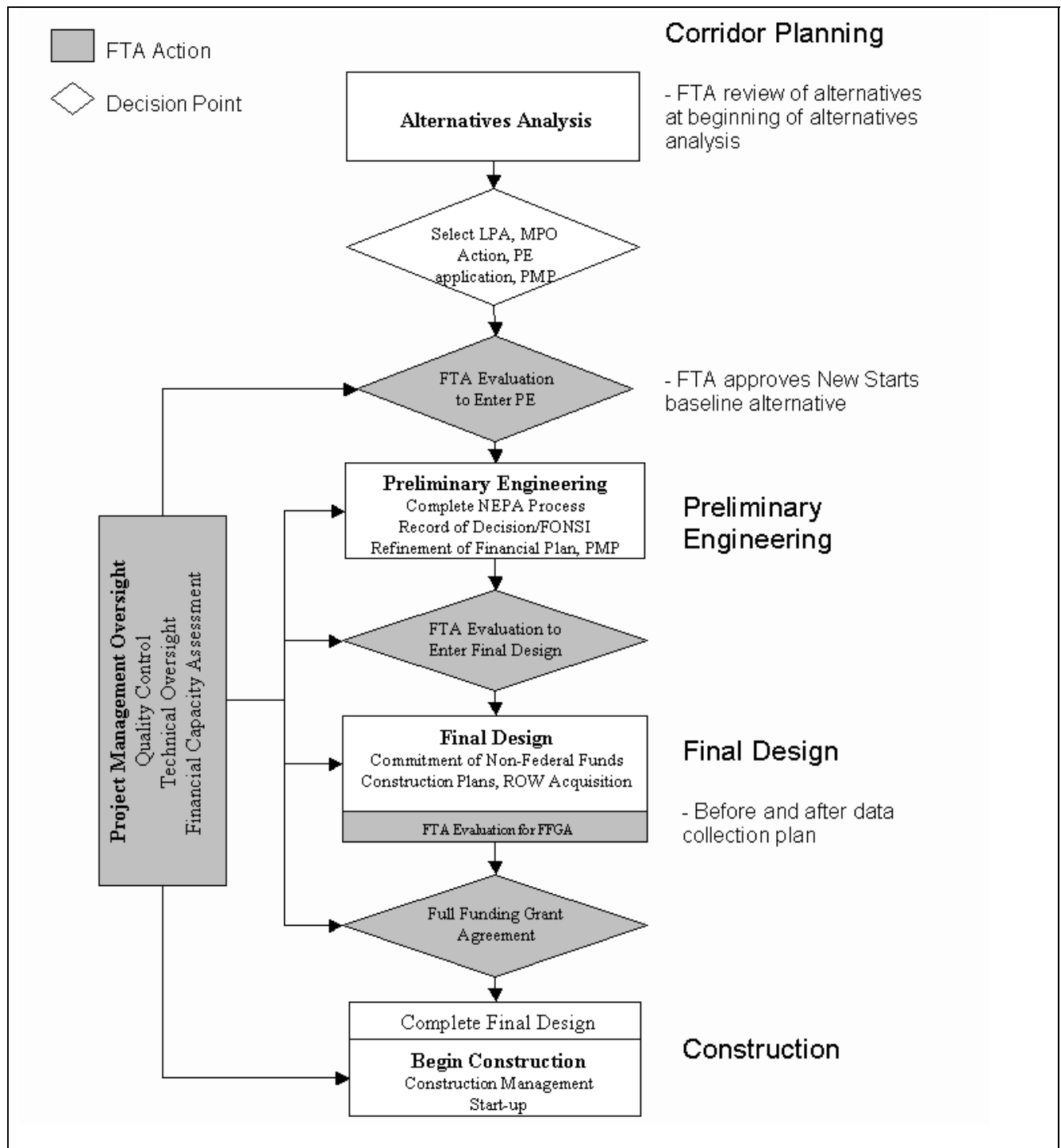
Typically fixed-guideway projects funded through the FTA New Starts program involve significant environmental and community impacts and that require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which is completed as a Draft (DEIS), followed by a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The scoping process is the first step in the DEIS process and confirms decisions made during the AA phase of project development. In the case of the Southwest Transitway, the DEIS process will be used to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the proposed alternatives in order to select a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for inclusion in the Metropolitan Council's long-range transportation plan, the Transportation Policy Plan (TPP).

The FEIS is completed during the Preliminary Engineering phase of project development, after an LPA has been identified. The FEIS addresses comments and questions generated from the public review of the DEIS, and focuses on the avoidance and mitigation of impacts. Mitigation decisions often require substantive collaboration with local, state, and Federal resource agencies, and may require significant additional analysis and refinement of the LPA's design concept in order to adequately mitigate identified environmental, socioeconomic, and transportation impacts. The FTA requires that local project sponsors provide firm commitments to implementing the required mitigation measures.

9.4 Preliminary Engineering

Once the LPA is selected and adopted into the region's long range plan, and the project has progressed through NEPA scoping, a project may request permission from FTA to enter into the Preliminary Engineering (PE) phase of project development. Preliminary Engineering includes additional engineering analysis, refining the design work done in earlier planning phases and results in the completion of all environmental requirements. Preliminary Engineering also typically marks the beginning of FTA's project management oversight function.

Figure 9.1 Planning and Project Development Process for New Starts Projects



Source: FTA, Advancing Major Transit Investments through Planning and Project Development - January 2003

Preliminary Engineering results in a level of design that permits a high degree of confidence in the identification of the full costs, benefits, and impacts of the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). In contrast to alternatives analysis, which involves an evaluation of multiple alternatives at a relatively broad level of detail, Preliminary Engineering requires a higher degree of detailed analysis on a single alternative. Preliminary Engineering generates more detailed analysis on how to implement the preferred solution, mitigate undesirable impacts, and estimate capital costs at a much higher level of detail than necessary in earlier planning.

9.5 Final Design

Engineering, operating, funding and project management plans are completed during Final Design. This last phase of project development includes right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, the preparation of final construction plans (including construction management plans), detailed specifications, construction cost estimates, and bid documents. The project's financial plan is finalized, and a plan for the collection and analysis of data needed to undertake a *Before and After Study* is developed.

Current FTA procedures require that project sponsors seeking a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) submit a complete plan for the collection and analysis of information to identify the impacts of their projects and the accuracy of their forecasts. This requirement reflects the FTA's desire to develop a greater understanding of the actual benefits of New Starts projects, once implemented and in operation. The FTA also requires Before and After Studies to learn the degree to which forecasts prepared as part of project planning and development are realized and the reasons why.

9.6 Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA)

A Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) defines the terms of the Federal commitment to a specific project, including funding. Upon receipt of a FFGA, the Federal funding commitment has been finalized, and additional Federal project funding will not be recommended. Additional costs beyond the scope of the Federal commitment are the responsibility of the grantee. Firm funding commitments, embodied in FFGAs, are not made until the final design process has progressed to the point where costs, benefits, and impacts are accurately forecasted.

9.7 Construction

Construction typically follows completion of Final Design, when funding and project management are fully in place, although alternative approaches are possible. As an example, the Hiawatha project used the "design-build" construction approach. Design-build allows construction to begin on fully-designed elements while other elements are finalizing design. This method is used in some cases to shorten construction periods for major highway and transit projects.