

NEPA CFR Guidance

Title 23: Highways

PART 771—ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND RELATED PROCEDURES

§771.117 FHWA categorical exclusions.

(a) CEs are actions that meet the definition contained in 40 CFR 1508.4, and, based on FHWA's past experience with similar actions, do not involve significant environmental impacts. They are actions that: Do not induce significant impacts to planned growth or land use for the area; do not require the relocation of significant numbers of people; do not have a significant impact on any natural, cultural, recreational, historic or other resource; do not involve significant air, noise, or water quality impacts; do not have significant impacts on travel patterns; or do not otherwise, either individually or cumulatively, have any significant environmental impacts.

(b) Any action that normally would be classified as a CE but could involve unusual circumstances will require the FHWA, in cooperation with the applicant, to conduct appropriate environmental studies to determine if the CE classification is proper. Such unusual circumstances include:

- (1) Significant environmental impacts;
- (2) Substantial controversy on environmental grounds;
- (3) Significant impact on properties protected by Section 4(f) requirements or Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; or
- (4) Inconsistencies with any Federal, State, or local law, requirement or administrative determination relating to the environmental aspects of the action.

(c) The following actions meet the criteria for CEs in the CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.4) and paragraph (a) of this section and normally do not require any further NEPA approvals by the FHWA:

- (1) Activities that do not involve or lead directly to construction, such as planning and research activities; grants for training; engineering to define the elements of a proposed action or alternatives so that social, economic, and environmental effects can be assessed; and Federal-aid system revisions that establish classes of highways on the Federal-aid highway system.
- (2) Approval of utility installations along or across a transportation facility.
- (3) Construction of bicycle and pedestrian lanes, paths, and facilities.
- (4) Activities included in the State's highway safety plan under 23 U.S.C. 402.
- (5) Transfer of Federal lands pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 107(d) and/or 23 U.S.C. 317 when the land transfer is in support of an action that is not otherwise subject to FHWA review under NEPA.
- (6) The installation of noise barriers or alterations to existing publicly owned buildings to provide for noise reduction.
- (7) Landscaping.
- (8) Installation of fencing, signs, pavement markings, small passenger shelters, traffic signals, and railroad warning devices where no substantial land acquisition or traffic disruption will occur.
- (9) The following actions for transportation facilities damaged by an incident resulting in an emergency declared by the Governor of the State and concurred in by the Secretary, or a disaster or emergency declared by the President pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. 5121):

- (i) Emergency repairs under 23 U.S.C. 125; and
- (ii) The repair, reconstruction, restoration, retrofitting, or replacement of any road, highway, bridge, tunnel, or transit facility (such as a ferry dock or bus transfer station), including ancillary transportation facilities (such as pedestrian/bicycle paths and bike lanes), that is in operation or under construction when damaged and the action:
 - (A) Occurs within the existing right-of-way and in a manner that substantially conforms to the preexisting design, function, and location as the original (which may include upgrades to meet existing codes and standards as well as upgrades warranted to address conditions that have changed since the original construction); and
 - (B) Is commenced within a 2-year period beginning on the date of the declaration.
- (10) Acquisition of scenic easements.
- (11) Determination of payback under 23 U.S.C. 156 for property previously acquired with Federal-aid participation.
- (12) Improvements to existing rest areas and truck weigh stations.
- (13) Ridesharing activities.
- (14) Bus and rail car rehabilitation.
- (15) Alterations to facilities or vehicles in order to make them accessible for elderly and handicapped persons.
- (16) Program administration, technical assistance activities, and operating assistance to transit authorities to continue existing service or increase service to meet routine changes in demand.
- (17) The purchase of vehicles by the applicant where the use of these vehicles can be accommodated by existing facilities or by new facilities that themselves are within a CE.
- (18) Track and railbed maintenance and improvements when carried out within the existing right-of-way.
- (19) Purchase and installation of operating or maintenance equipment to be located within the transit facility and with no significant impacts off the site.
- (20) Promulgation of rules, regulations, and directives.
- (21) Deployment of electronics, photonics, communications, or information processing used singly or in combination, or as components of a fully integrated system, to improve the efficiency or safety of a surface transportation system or to enhance security or passenger convenience. Examples include, but are not limited to, traffic control and detector devices, lane management systems, electronic payment equipment, automatic vehicle locaters, automated passenger counters, computer-aided dispatching systems, radio communications systems, dynamic message signs, and security equipment including surveillance and detection cameras on roadways and in transit facilities and on buses.
- (22) Projects, as defined in 23 U.S.C. 101, that would take place entirely within the existing operational right-of-way. Existing operational right-of-way means all real property interests acquired for the construction, operation, or mitigation of a project. This area includes the features associated with the physical footprint of the project including but not limited to the roadway, bridges, interchanges, culverts, drainage, clear zone, traffic control signage, landscaping, and any rest areas with direct access to a controlled access highway. This also includes fixed guideways, mitigation areas, areas maintained or used for safety and security of a transportation facility, parking facilities with direct access to an existing transportation facility, transportation power substations, transportation venting structures, and transportation maintenance facilities.
- (23) Federally funded projects:
 - (i) That receive less than \$5,000,000 (as adjusted annually by the Secretary to reflect any increases in the Consumer Price Index prepared by the Department of Labor, see www.fhwa.dot.gov or www.fta.dot.gov) of Federal funds; or
 - (ii) With a total estimated cost of not more than \$30,000,000 (as adjusted annually by the Secretary to reflect any increases in the Consumer Price Index prepared by the

Department of Labor, see www.fhwa.dot.gov or www.fta.dot.gov) and Federal funds comprising less than 15 percent of the total estimated project cost.

(24) Localized geotechnical and other investigation to provide information for preliminary design and for environmental analyses and permitting purposes, such as drilling test bores for soil sampling; archeological investigations for archeology resources assessment or similar survey; and wetland surveys.

(25) Environmental restoration and pollution abatement actions to minimize or mitigate the impacts of any existing transportation facility (including retrofitting and construction of stormwater treatment systems to meet Federal and State requirements under sections 401 and 402 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1341; 1342)) carried out to address water pollution or environmental degradation.

(26) Modernization of a highway by resurfacing, restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, adding shoulders, or adding auxiliary lanes (including parking, weaving, turning, and climbing lanes), if the action meets the constraints in paragraph (e) of this section.

(27) Highway safety or traffic operations improvement projects, including the installation of ramp metering control devices and lighting, if the project meets the constraints in paragraph (e) of this section.

(28) Bridge rehabilitation, reconstruction, or replacement or the construction of grade separation to replace existing at-grade railroad crossings, if the actions meet the constraints in paragraph (e) of this section.

(29) Purchase, construction, replacement, or rehabilitation of ferry vessels (including improvements to ferry vessel safety, navigation, and security systems) that would not require a change in the function of the ferry terminals and can be accommodated by existing facilities or by new facilities that themselves are within a CE.

(30) Rehabilitation or reconstruction of existing ferry facilities that occupy substantially the same geographic footprint, do not result in a change in their functional use, and do not result in a substantial increase in the existing facility's capacity. Example actions include work on pedestrian and vehicle transfer structures and associated utilities, buildings, and terminals.

(d) Additional actions that meet the criteria for a CE in the CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.4) and paragraph (a) of this section may be designated as CEs only after Administration approval unless otherwise authorized under an executed agreement pursuant to paragraph (g) of this section. The applicant must submit documentation that demonstrates that the specific conditions or criteria for these CEs are satisfied, and that significant environmental effects will not result. Examples of such actions include but are not limited to:

(1)-(3) [Reserved]

(4) Transportation corridor fringe parking facilities.

(5) Construction of new truck weigh stations or rest areas.

(6) Approvals for disposal of excess right-of-way or for joint or limited use of right-of-way, where the proposed use does not have significant adverse impacts.

(7) Approvals for changes in access control.

(8) Construction of new bus storage and maintenance facilities in areas used predominantly for industrial or transportation purposes where such construction is not inconsistent with existing zoning and located on or near a street with adequate capacity to handle anticipated bus and support vehicle traffic.

(9) Rehabilitation or reconstruction of existing rail and bus buildings and ancillary facilities where only minor amounts of additional land are required, and there is not a substantial increase in the number of users.

(10) Construction of bus transfer facilities (an open area consisting of passenger shelters, boarding areas, kiosks and related street improvements) when located in a commercial area or other high activity center in which there is adequate street capacity for projected bus traffic.

(11) Construction of rail storage and maintenance facilities in areas used predominantly for industrial or transportation purposes where such construction is not inconsistent with existing zoning, and where there is no significant noise impact on the surrounding community.

(12) Acquisition of land for hardship or protective purposes. Hardship and protective buying will be permitted only for a particular parcel or a limited number of parcels. These types of land acquisition qualify for a CE only where the acquisition will not limit the evaluation of alternatives, including shifts in alignment for planned construction projects, which may be required in the NEPA process. No project development on such land may proceed until the NEPA process has been completed.

(i) Hardship acquisition is early acquisition of property by the applicant at the property owner's request to alleviate particular hardship to the owner, in contrast to others, because of an inability to sell his property. This is justified when the property owner can document on the basis of health, safety or financial reasons that remaining in the property poses an undue hardship compared to others.

(ii) Protective acquisition is done to prevent imminent development of a parcel that may be needed for a proposed transportation corridor or site. Documentation must clearly demonstrate that development of the land would preclude future transportation use and that such development is imminent. Advance acquisition is not permitted for the sole purpose of reducing the cost of property for a proposed project.

(13) Actions described in paragraphs (c)(26), (c)(27), and (c)(28) of this section that do not meet the constraints in paragraph (e) of this section.

(e) Actions described in (c)(26), (c)(27), and (c)(28) of this section may not be processed as CEs under paragraph (c) if they involve:

(1) An acquisition of more than a minor amount of right-of-way or that would result in any residential or non-residential displacements;

(2) An action that needs a bridge permit from the U.S. Coast Guard, or an action that does not meet the terms and conditions of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers nationwide or general permit under section 404 of the Clean Water Act and/or section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899;

(3) A finding of "adverse effect" to historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act, the use of a resource protected under 23 U.S.C. 138 or 49 U.S.C. 303 (section 4(f)) except for actions resulting in de minimis impacts, or a finding of "may affect, likely to adversely affect" threatened or endangered species or critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act;

(4) Construction of temporary access or the closure of existing road, bridge, or ramps that would result in major traffic disruptions;

(5) Changes in access control;

(6) A floodplain encroachment other than functionally dependent uses (e.g., bridges, wetlands) or actions that facilitate open space use (e.g., recreational trails, bicycle and pedestrian paths); or construction activities in, across or adjacent to a river component designated or proposed for inclusion in the National System of Wild and Scenic Rivers

(f) Where a pattern emerges of granting CE status for a particular type of action, the FHWA will initiate rulemaking proposing to add this type of action to the list of categorical exclusions in paragraph (c) or (d) of this section, as appropriate.

(g) FHWA may enter into programmatic agreements with a State to allow a State DOT to make a NEPA CE certification or determination and approval on FHWA's behalf, for CEs specifically listed in paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section and that meet the criteria for a CE under 40 CFR

1508.4, and are identified in the programmatic agreement. Such agreements must be subject to the following conditions:

- (1) The agreement must set forth the State DOT's responsibilities for making CE determinations, documenting the determinations, and achieving acceptable quality control and quality assurance;
- (2) The agreement may not have a term of more than five years, but may be renewed;
- (3) The agreement must provide for FHWA's monitoring of the State DOT's compliance with the terms of the agreement and for the State DOT's execution of any needed corrective action. FHWA must take into account the State DOT's performance when considering renewal of the programmatic CE agreement; and
- (4) The agreement must include stipulations for amendment, termination, and public availability of the agreement once it has been executed.

(h) Any action qualifying as a CE under §771.116 or §771.118 may be approved by FHWA when the applicable requirements of those sections have been met. FHWA may consult with FRA or FTA to ensure the CE is applicable to the proposed action