

## Environmental Discussion

### Background

NEPA is the environmental review process required by TxDOT and the Federal Government whenever Federal or state dollars are used in a transportation project. NEPA is a process to evaluate whether or not a project has an adverse environmental effect on the surrounding area. The environmental impact includes biological (water, etc.) and societal (property values, racial makeup, etc.) reviews. The typical NEPA process for a large project takes 4-6 years, costs millions of dollars in study preparation, and requires preliminary engineering on multiple routes as part of the submission process. No construction or acquisition of ROW can occur on a state or federally funded project until NEPA clearance has been received. Once NEPA clearance is received, a project must progress (construction) within 3 years or be resubmitted for additional review. The 3 year review process is not as extensive and time consuming as the initial review.

Approval of a NEPA submission by the Federal government for a project is called a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

Because of the time involved in receiving NEPA approval, state and federal programs do not award grants or loans for projects until a FONSI has been issued. A “shovel ready” project has been issued a FONSI.

The Outer Loop was originally expected to be developed in the same manner as DNT or PGBT. Collin County or the CCTRA expected to construct 2 lane service roads to generate demand for main lanes. Main lanes would be constructed when traffic revenues were expected to be sufficient to pay for the maintenance, debt and operation of the road.

The benefit of building a service road first with local funds, is that the project does not require NEPA clearance and the service roads establish an alignment. The service road alignment then assists with the NEPA study by possibly limiting the alternative route research work and limiting the impact on the area of future road construction in the corridor.

Because DNT and PGBT were not built with State or Federal funds, The NTTA did not submit those projects to the State of Federal Government for NEPA review. The NTTA board performed the NEPA review process themselves and issued their own “FONSI” by Board

vote. The NTTA Board issuing the FONSI themselves instead of submitting to the State and Fed is known as “NEPA-Like”.

NEPA-Like does not qualify a project for State or Federal funds but could shorten the NEPA submission and review process if and when a project does seek alternative funding sources.