

# SPS-02: Integrated Planning: Natural Environment

State

1-15 points

**Goal:** Integrate ecological considerations into the transportation planning process, including the development of long range transportation plans (LRTP), corridor plans, and the STIP. Proactively support and enhance long-term ecological function through the coordination of transportation and natural resource planning.



## Sustainability Linkage

Integrating transportation planning with natural resource planning supports the environmental principle by ensuring the transportation system supports and enhances sustainable ecological function.

## Background and Scoring Requirements

### Background

The agency conducts transportation planning activities in a comprehensive and integrated manner, and incorporates ecological considerations into the transportation planning process. The agency's LRTP is consistent with, and supports, applicable environmental plans, policies, and goals.

For the purposes of this criterion, the key terms are defined as follows:

- **“Applicable environmental plans, policies, and goals”** include any local, metropolitan or statewide plan that addresses ecological considerations and natural resources within the agency's jurisdiction.
- **“Consistent”** Transportation plans are consistent with ecological sustainability when planned transportation projects support and enhance sustainable ecological function and support local, metropolitan and/or state natural resource plans, policies, and goals.
- **“Ecological”** refers to the natural environment—specifically the ecosystems and natural resources on which life depends.
- **“Engage”** means to successfully involve and interact with an institution or stakeholder.
- **“Environmental plans, policies, and goals”** include air quality management plans, watershed and/or stormwater management plans, integrated natural resource management plans, climate change and energy plans, and/or habitat conservation or connectivity plans, among others.
- **“Institutional mechanisms”** refers to an agreed-upon, two-way communication process for sharing information and collecting feedback.
- **“Integrated”** plans and planning means and ends are consistent, internally and with each other, and when they are developed in a collaborative manner.
- **“Regularly”** Early, often, and on an on-going basis throughout the planning process.
- **“Sustainable Actions”** maintain or enhance our capacity to endure. The goal of sustainability is the satisfaction of basic social and economic needs, both present and future, and the responsible use of natural resources, all while maintaining or improving the well-being of the environment on which life depends.

- “**System or landscape-scale**” refers to the geographic extent of the system under study. Implies a level of detail sufficient for making decisions at that scale (note: the detail needed for a corridor level analysis is not required).

## Scoring Requirements

An agency can achieve points under this criterion through developing goals and objectives, engaging natural resource agency stakeholders, applying system or landscape-scale evaluation techniques, and demonstrating sustainable outcomes. Both the content of LRTP and the transportation planning process may be considered for points. An agency can achieve points under this criterion according to the following scoring requirements:

### **Requirement SPS-02.1**

#### **1-2 points. Develop and Adopt Goals and Objectives**

Scoring is based on the following, cumulative requirements. The first requirement must be accomplished to earn the second.

- **Requirement SPS-02.1a**

##### **1 point. Develop Goals and Objectives**

The agency has developed goals and objectives for the integration of metropolitan and/or statewide transportation planning with applicable environmental plans, policies, and goals. The goals and objectives are incorporated into the LRTP and encourage transportation investments that support and enhance long-term ecological function. Examples of transportation investments that support and enhance ecological function include those that improve surface water quality, maintain or enhance groundwater recharge (e.g., through innovative stormwater design features), or improve habitat connectivity (e.g., by increasing wildlife crossings, etc.), among others.

- **Requirement SPS-02.1b**

##### **1 additional point. Goals and Objectives Consistent with Environmental Plans, Policies, and Goals**

The goals and objectives are consistent with or surpass local, metropolitan, and/or statewide environmental plans, policies, and goals, as applicable.

### **Requirement SPS-02.2**

#### **2-3 points. Engage Natural Resource and Regulatory Agencies**

Scoring is based on the following, cumulative requirements.

- **Requirement SPS-02.2a**

##### **2 points. Engage Natural Resource and Regulatory Agencies**

The agency goes above and beyond current consultation requirements by regularly engaging natural resource and regulatory agencies throughout the transportation planning process and incorporates their feedback into the creation of transportation plans and programs.

- **Requirement SPS-02.2b**

##### **1 additional point. Utilize Institutional Mechanisms**

The agency utilizes institutional mechanisms (such as ad hoc or standing technical advisory committees) to facilitate the engagement.

### **Requirement SPS-02.3**

#### **2 or 4 points. Apply System or Landscape-Scale Evaluation Techniques**

The agency has applied system or landscape-scale evaluation techniques using natural resource data to (1) assess ecological conditions throughout the system, (2) identify opportunities to avoid and/or minimize potential impacts

of planned transportation projects to the natural environment (such as participating in mitigation banking, etc.), and (3) identify opportunities to support and enhance long-term ecological function through planned transportation investments. Note that landscape-level natural resource data is collected at a higher resolution than project-level data and may be available through natural resource and regulatory agencies and/or non-profit organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy. An example of a landscape-level evaluation technique includes, but is not limited to, the regional ecosystem framework methodology as described in FHWA's [Eco-Logical: An Ecosystem Approach to Developing Infrastructure Projects website](#)<sup>1</sup>.

Conducting system or landscape-level evaluations during the planning process has many benefits, including potentially identifying major environmental issues before project-level TIP/STIP decisions are made. Additionally, a system or landscape-level analysis can help lay the groundwork for satisfying future project-level federal environmental review requirements (see SPS-17 Linking Planning and NEPA). Note that doing project-level NEPA analyses on transportation projects does not meet the intent of this requirement.

One of the following scores applies:

- **0 points.** The agency does not apply system or landscape-scale evaluation techniques using natural resource data during the transportation planning process.
- **2 points.** The agency applies system or landscape-scale evaluation techniques using natural resource data during the transportation planning process and has completed the first two items cited in the paragraph above.
- **4 points.** The agency applies system or landscape-scale evaluation techniques using natural resource data during the transportation planning process and has completed all three of the items cited in the paragraph above.

#### **Requirement SPS-02.4**

##### **1-6 points. Demonstrate Sustainable Outcomes**

Scoring is based on the following, cumulative requirements:

- **Requirement SPS-02.4a**  
**1 point. Integrate LRTP with Environmental Plans, Policies, and Goals**  
The LRTP is integrated with applicable environmental plans, policies, and goals, and the agency implements transportation investments that support and enhance long-term ecological function.
- **Requirement SPS-02.4b**  
**2 points. LRTP Includes Performance Measures for Long-Term Ecological Function**  
The LRTP includes performance measures for long-term ecological function. Examples of sustainability-related ecological performance measures include, but are not limited to, “the number of projects programmed consistent with regional ecosystem framework(s)” and the “the number of projects programmed to maintain or improve water quantity or quality,” among others. Additional examples of sustainability-related performance measures can be found in NCHRP’s [Report 708: A Guidebook for Sustainability Performance Measurement for Transportation Agencies](#)<sup>2</sup>.
- **Requirement SPS-02.4c**  
**3 points. Monitor Progress and Demonstrate Sustainable Outcomes**  
Monitor progress towards goals for at least one year after goal establishment using the performance measures established in SPR-02.4b and show measurable advancement towards stated goals.

## Resources

The following resources are referenced in this criterion and consolidated here:

1. FHWA, Eco-Logical: An Ecosystem Approach to Developing Infrastructure Projects website, [http://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/ecological/eco\\_index.asp](http://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/ecological/eco_index.asp)
2. NCHRP, *Report 708: A Guidebook for Sustainability Performance Measurement for Transportation Agencies*, [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp\\_rpt\\_708.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_708.pdf)

## Scoring Sources

The program is considered to have met this criterion if the requirements above can be reasonably substantiated through the existence of one or more of the following documentation sources (or equal where not available):

1. Adopted state or metropolitan transportation plans and supporting documentation that demonstrate how ecological considerations were integrated into the transportation planning process, including the development of the LRTP, corridor plans, and the TIP/STIP.
2. Documentation of regular natural resource and regulatory agency engagement and the incorporation of their feedback into transportation plans and programs. Documentation may include technical advisory committee membership rosters, meeting agendas and minutes, and interview summaries, among others.
3. Evaluation results that document the use of system or landscape-scale natural resource data, and system or landscape-scale evaluation techniques, and how the results of the assessment influenced project-level TIP/STIP decisions.
4. Documentation of the use of ecological criteria for the prioritization and selection of transportation projects included in the LRTP and/or TIP/STIP.
5. Documentation of the agency's monitoring process and progress to date at meeting the agency's goals and objectives for long-term ecological function.