



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Federal Highway  
Administration**

The Office of  
Federal Lands

Central Federal  
Lands Highway  
Division

Eastern Federal  
Lands Highway  
Division

Western Federal  
Lands Highway  
Division

# Program Assessment

## The Federal Lands Access Program Implementation Phase

**June 2014**



**FINAL REPORT**



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Cover photo: Taylor River Rd.  
Gunnison National Forest,  
Gunnison County, Colorado



## Executive Summary

The purpose of this effort was the assessment of the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) implementation phase. The Federal Lands Access Program Assessment was included in the PY2014 National Program Stewardship & Oversight Plan (NPSO) portion of the FHWA PY2014 Strategic Implementation Plan.

The assessment team consisted of two representatives from Federal Lands Highway (FLH) Headquarters and one representative from each of the FLH Divisions. The team reviewed documented processes and procedures; information posted on FLH Division's webpages; conducted interviews of Programming Decision Committee (PDC) members and Federal Land Management Agencies (FLMA) representatives; and facilitated listening sessions with the FLH Divisions' Planning and Programming staff.

The team concluded that each of the FLH Divisions successfully utilized the information and guidance available at the time to implement the new program. Based on the information and feedback collected it was observed that:

- Communication was essential. The FLH Divisions need to continue learning from each other, request feedback from the Federal-Aid offices, and include the FLMAs more actively. Webpages and web workshops were very effective ways to share the information within the interested parties. However, being available to take one-on-one phone calls was greatly appreciated by the partners.
- Flexibility was an advantage and a key element for the successful implementation of the Access Program. The FLH Divisions adapted and evolved within their own specific situations to create opportunities and accomplish the goals.
- Consistency will need to be a focus area. As the program matures, FLH Divisions will be working with multiple partners, they are highly scrutinized in how they conduct their business. As the FLH Divisions continue communicating with each other and sharing their experiences, the Access Program will improve.



Several successful practices were observed: involving the FHWA Federal-Aid Division Offices and State Departments of Transportation (SDOT) for input on the local PDC representative; involvement of the FLMAs during the project application screening process; use of webinars to help promote/market the program; flexibility in each state on how the PDCs manage the program; allowing a joint application process; and implementing a phased application process.

As part of the feedback received, the following ideas for consideration were presented: development of different procedures and strategies to account for differences in programs size; have multi-divisional staff give presentations on the Access Program at regional/national FLMA conferences; provide guidance and FAQs regarding the program through FLH Division's webpages; and develop a master calendar for the "call for projects" across the country.



## **Background**

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), (Public Law 112–141—enacted on July 6, 2012) established the Federal Lands Access Program (Access Program) under 23 U.S.C. § 204 to improve transportation facilities that provide access to, are adjacent to, or are located within federal lands. A total of \$250 million Access Program funds are distributed by formula to the states each year.

The Access Program emphasis is on projects servicing high-use recreation sites and economic generators. The programming decisions in each state are performed by a Programming Decision Committee (PDC). The committee has three voting members: a Federal Lands representative, a State Transportation Agency official, and a local government representative. Each PDC can determine the project selection process to prioritize local needs, additional match requirements, and other administrative tasks. This provides program flexibility, local involvement, and allows a wide range of transportation projects to be considered. The PDCs are to cooperate with the FLMA before the final programming decisions are made.

Due to the PDC diversities, FLMA coordination, project administration, match, and stewardship and oversight requirements, the implementation of the Access Program presents new challenges to the FLH Divisions.

The Federal Lands Access Program Assessment was included in the PY2014 National Program Stewardship & Oversight Plan (NPSO) portion of the FHWA PY2014 Strategic Implementation Plan. This assessment includes examination of current federal, state and local agency experiences to identify opportunities for improvement, and share successful practices by the FLH Divisions.



## Successful Practices

During this assessment the team noted the following successful practices among one or more FLH Divisions:

- Involvement of the FLMAs during the screening and evaluation process. This helped the PDCs by providing context, history, usage, and additional road information. Where this was practiced, positive comments were made by the FLMAs and PDC members. It also promoted communication between longtime FLMA partners and new ones. The level of involvement and interest appeared to be correlated to the size of the state's allocation.
- Use of webinars to help promote/market the program to local agencies and individual FLMA units. It was noted by the FLH Divisions that in certain states it was difficult to "spread the word" on the new program. Webinars provided a cost effective way to deliver the information and answer questions. They also provided a forum for multiple parties to hear a consistent response to the questions asked.
- Flexibility in each state on how the PDCs managed the program. Different states have different processes and relationships in place. The FLH Divisions and PDCs built upon this framework. The flexibility allows for changes based upon lessons learned.
- Joint application process with the FLMA and maintaining agency. This promoted early involvement and buy-in at the application stage. By having both the maintaining agency and FLMA be signatories on the application, all parties felt communication was improved and better projects were submitted.



## Ideas for Consideration

The following ideas were presented to the team during the interviews. Most came from non-FLH staff, but some were suggested by staff. Some could be initiated by a single office; most would be more effective if done by all offices. The order does not reflect any ranking by the team.

- Development of different sets of procedures and strategies to account for differences in programs from \$40,000 to \$40,000,000. It was noted that many of the smaller states and regions felt the need to re-evaluate the benefit of dealing with such small programs and how to best utilize the limited funding.
- Have multi-divisional staff give presentations on the Access Program at regional/national FLMA conferences. Due to the regional boundaries of the FLMAs crossing FLH Division boundaries, there were some inconsistent messages being delivered to FLMAs. Having multi-divisional staff present at regional FLMA gatherings, their message would highlight that the basic framework is the same across the country but at the same time explain why FLH Division differences exist. This could also be viewed as a way to promote the program to a wider audience.
- Develop and provide guidance and FAQs regarding the program to all stakeholders through FLH Division's webpages. With the new program there appeared to be many similar questions regarding the program, project eligibility, and guidance on the implementation of the program. Although it was noted that all of the FLH Divisions provided timely and helpful answers to these questions on a one-on-one basis, the FLH Divisions and stakeholders felt that having these answers easily accessible on the FLH webpages would be very helpful.
- Develop a master calendar for the "call for projects". The FLMA representatives who deal with multiple states said this would help them plan their workload and give their units a heads up. Presently, they need to be looking at multiple state sites on a regular basis to know when the calls are scheduled. Initially some calls might only give the quarter of the year and would need to be updated as the PDC finalizes dates.
- Incorporating a phased application process. Western Federal Lands is requesting a document called a Notice of Intent (NOI). The NOI is being used in calls for projects in two states presently. It is shared with the FLMAs so they are aware that an entity is considering submitting a project that affects the FMLA. It



provides an early check on eligibility ensuring that applicants don't invest time in proposals for ineligible projects. It works as a planning tool to determine how many project proposals are expected in a particular state.



## Conclusion

The team would like to thank all of the interviewees and survey respondents who carved time out of their busy schedules to participate in the assessment. Their open and candid feedback was greatly appreciated. Without their voluntary participation, meeting the objectives of the assessment would have been impossible.

The FHWA Executive Director has stated numerous times that MAP-21 was a piece of transformational transportation legislation. The Access Program is one of many changes contained in it. The Access Program replaced a program that had been in place for nearly 30 years. It is not an understatement to say FLH was comfortable with the previous program and had it running like a proverbial “Swiss watch”. It changed existing relationships and brought a large number of new, potential partners to Federal Lands Highway.

The FLH Division offices used existing relationships and built new ones in order to standup the PDCs. They moved forward with the best information they had at the time. They attempted to apply lessons learned from each other. The quick passage of MAP-21 and the short timeframes it contained for the Access Program did not allow for FLH Divisions to work out all the bugs before moving forward.

The assessment verified anecdotal comments FLH had been receiving during the standup of the PDCs and the initial call for projects. It showed that what is in place for the basic operation is workable and is being refined by the FLH Divisions as the program moves forward. The FLH Divisions have identified changes and refinements they want to make. They realize that the best approach is to communicate and work closely with the Federal-Aid offices, state highway agencies, local governments, FLMAs, and amongst themselves.

As we approach the end of MAP-21, the FLH Divisions are poised to continue refining the program or to use the knowledge and skills gained to stand up a new program should the legislation require it.



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