

**Federal Highway Administration
Office of Planning, Environment, and Realty (HEP)
Agency Information Collection Activities: Request for Comments for
Information Collection Supporting Statement**

This is to request an OMB three year approval for a new information collection entitled: "Surface Transportation Environment and Planning (STEP) Cooperative Research Program".

Part A. Justification.

1. Circumstances that make collection of information necessary:

Section 5207 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users of 2005 (SAFETEA-LU) established a new cooperative research program for environment and planning research in section 507 of Title 23, United States Code, Highways (23 U.S.C. 507). The general objective of the STEP is to improve understanding of the complex relationships between surface transportation, planning, and the environment.

Within the proposed framework for implementing STEP, FHWA envisions several key points in the process where stakeholder input will be needed. These will likely include, but not be limited to: Input and feedback on STEP programmatic structure, governance, implementation strategy, goals, and eighteen emphasis areas; Input from potential funding partners on collaborative research opportunities; Input, advice, and feedback on yearly-proposed Research Activities (both programmatically and by emphasis area); Input and advice during listening and outreach sessions at the TRB Annual Meeting, and other venues; and Input and feedback on the STEP Annual Report.

This IC supports the Human and Natural Environment DOT Strategic Goal: Federal Highway Programs are effectively and consistently delivered through successful partnerships, value-added stewardship, and risk-based oversight. Objectives three and four are supported: Objective three - Program and Project Decision Making: Improve FHWA's ability to make operational and strategic decisions to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of our programs; Objective Four - Program Management: Continually improve the ability of FHWA and our partners to efficiently manage Federal Highway Programs through innovation, stream-lining, and value-added stewardship.

2. How, by whom, and for what purpose is the information used:

Section 5207 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users of 2005 (SAFETEA-LU) established a new cooperative research program for environment and planning research in section 507 of Title 23, United States Code, Highways (23 U.S.C. 507). The general objective of the STEP is to improve understanding of the complex relationship between surface transportation, planning, and the environment. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) anticipates that the STEP program will provide resources for national research on issues related to planning, environment and realty. These resources are likely to be included in future surface transportation legislation. The research program established under this section shall ensure that stakeholders are involved in the governance of the program, at the executive, overall program, and technical levels, through the use of expert panels and committees.

FHWA will be collecting feedback via a STEP Web site on the 18 emphasis areas. This information will be used to identify potential research for an annual Research Plan. The number of stakeholders with an interest in environment and planning research includes three groups:

Group One: Federal Agencies and Tribal Governments

Group Two: State and Local Governments

Group Three: Nongovernmental Transportation and Environmental Stakeholders

There is an estimated 270 participants annually for a total of approximately 810 participants during the three-year period while the OMB clearance is in effect. The frequency will be annually. The Estimated Average Burden per Response is estimated at 30 minutes each year. Due to the specialized nature of the 18 emphasis areas, most commenters will provide input in only one area. The Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours is approximately 135 hours annually (405 hours total for the three-year period).

3. Extent of automated information collection:

Stakeholder feedback will be collected via the STEP website. The following table indicates the data collection topics that stakeholders can select:

STEP Feedback Topics		
	Overall STEP Comments	
ENVIRONMENT	PLANNING	REAL ESTATE SERVICES
Air Quality and Climate Change	Congestion	Real Estate Program Stewardship
Water/Wetlands/Vegetation/Wildlife/Habitat	Safety Planning	Outdoor Advertising Control
Historic Preservation	Freight Planning	
Bicycles/Pedestrians	Public Involvement, Visualization in Planning/ Environmental Justice	TOOLS TO SUPPORT ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING
Noise	Other Activities that Support State/Local/Tribal Planning Capacity Building	Travel Modeling
Environmental Streamlining/Stewardship	U.S./ Canada and U.S./ Mexico Border Planning	GIS/Spatial Information for Improved Decision Making
Context Sensitive Solutions	National Security, Defense, and Interstate Planning	

Once a STEP Stakeholder selects a topic from the 18 STEP Emphasis Areas or the “Overall STEP Comment” area above, the next computer screen will request the following information from the stakeholder:

Subject	Last Name	First Name	Organization	Organization Type	Tier	Date
Topic Area	Insert	Insert	Insert Name	Insert Type	Insert Tier	Date
<p>Tell us more about potential lines of research for this emphasis area:</p> <p>Tell us about current or planned research in this area:</p>						

Subject	Last Name	First Name	Organization	Organization Type	Tier	Date
<p>Tell us more about possible funding sources related to research activities in this emphasis area:</p> <p>Other comments about research in this emphasis area:</p> <p>Other comments about the STEP program:</p>						

It is estimated that there will be 270 annual electronic data submissions. Since this collection is paperless, it complies with the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA) that requires Federal agencies to allow the option of electronic filing and record keeping (meaning no paper from the public is required) when practicable.

4. Efforts to identify duplication:

Similar information does not exist since the STEP Program is a unique government program mandated by Section 5207 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users of 2005 (SAFETEA-LU). The STEP website is unique and customized to the STEP Program.

5. Efforts to minimize the burden on small businesses:

The information to be collected is very minimal and will not burden small businesses. FHWA will be collecting feedback via a STEP Web site on the 18 emphasis areas. This information will be used to identify potential research for an annual Research Plan. The number of stakeholders with an interest in environment and planning research includes three groups:

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6. Impact of less frequent collection of information:

An annual data collection will allow FHWA to incorporate stakeholder feedback into the Research Planning Process to promote successful partnerships and to provide value-added stewardship. If we do not collect or report on this information annually Congress could redirect the necessary funding elsewhere.

7. Special circumstances:

There are no special circumstances with this request.

8. Compliance with 5 CFR 1320.8:

The FHWA published a Federal Register notice on Dec. 29, 2010, which solicited public comments about our intention to obtain approval for this new information collection. No comments were received. [Federal Register: (Volume 75, Number 249)] [Page 82135]

9. Payments or gifts to respondents:

There are no payments or gifts to the respondents.

10. Assurance of confidentiality:

No confidential information will be collected; therefore, no assurances of confidentiality will be provided.

11. Justification for collection of sensitive information:

The information collected is not of a sensitive nature.

12. Estimate of burden hours for information requested:

FHWA will be collecting feedback via a STEP Web site on the 18 emphasis areas and an "Overall STEP Comment" topic. This information will be used to identify potential research for an annual Research Plan. The number of stakeholders with an interest in environment and planning research includes three groups:

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Group Three: Nongovernmental Transportation and Environmental Stakeholders

There is an estimated 270 participants annually for a total of approximately 810 participants during the three-year period while the OMB clearance is in effect. The frequency will be annually. The Estimated Average Burden per Response is estimated at 30 minutes each year. Due to the specialized nature of the 18 emphasis areas, most commenters will provide input in only one area. The Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours is approximately 135 hours annually (405 hours total for the three-year period).

The estimated annual costs for the hourly burdens (based on wage rate categories) is included for each stakeholder by tier:

Group One: GS-14 (\$1, 512.30/Year)

Group Two: Engineer (\$901.50/Year)

Group Three: Non-Profit Project Manager (\$50.15/Year)

13. Estimate of total annual costs to respondents:

There are no costs to the respondents.

14. Estimate of cost to the Federal government:

Federal Web Site Manager: GS-13 [52 Hours (2 hours per week) X \$42.66 = \$2,218.32]

Contractor Annual Costs:

Estimated Cost \$18,252

Fixed Fee \$1,461.00

Total \$19,723.00

15. Explanation of program changes or adjustments:

This is a new collection.

16. Publication of results of data collection:

Results of the feedback survey would be published on the FHWA STEP website by 2Qtr FFY 2013.

17. Approval for not displaying the expiration date of OMB approval!

Not applicable. We are not requesting an exemption from publishing the expiration date.

18. Exceptions to certification statement:

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.