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CONCLUSION

After a century of roadbuilding, the need to address conflicts between transportation and biodiversity has never been greater. Science has revealed the effects of roads on wildlife. Engineering has responded with methods to improve existing roads and ameliorate impacts. Better planning and policy can guide future infrastructure investments away from sensitive natural areas and toward improved mobility and communities.

Many states and agencies are beginning to recognize that there are ways to both meet transportation needs and do a better job of protecting environmental and cultural resources. Current efforts to weaken the environmental review process under the National Environmental Policy Act could seriously jeopardize the country's natural and cultural resources, while doing little to reduce project delays. Indeed, an FHWA study recently found that the most common reason that projects were delayed was because of lack of funding or low priority (32 percent), local controversy (16 percent), or the inherent complexity of the project (13 percent). All of these issues, as well as changing or expanding the scope of the project (8 percent) surpass environmental factors as causes of project delay.¹

The states and agencies profiled in this report have found that expedited project delivery and improved environmental protection can be achieved by comprehensively planning for biodiversity conservation, proactively mitigating environmental impacts through conservation banking and wildlife crossings, improving coordination among transportation and resource agencies, reducing road impacts and promoting alternative transportation on public lands, and promoting the use of native vegetation in roadway landscaping and maintenance. Rather than being the exception to the rule, these practices can become “second nature” to transportation and resource professionals across the nation.



CORBIS

1. FHWA. Reasons for EIS Project Delays. September 2000.