

What is scoping?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) defines "scoping" (40 CFR, Part 1501.7) as an "early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action." Scoping typically takes place early in the environmental study phase of a proposed transportation project, such as the Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Environmental Impact Study.

Scoping often is initiated with a meeting, which is specifically designed for government agencies at the local, state and federal levels to meet to exchange information. Because scoping meetings are an important part of the public involvement process, they are open to attendance by the general public.

As part of the scoping process, which is ongoing and continuous through the study phase of a project, the sponsoring or lead agency must:

- Include the participation of local, state and federal agencies, as well as proponents and opponents of the proposed project.
- Determine the scope and significant issues to be analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Identify and eliminate from detailed study those issues that are not significant, or issues that have been analyzed in previous environmental reviews.
- Identify other agencies that have a role in the study and make assignments where necessary.
- Indicate other environmental studies that are related to the EIS under consideration.
- Determine any other environmental reviews or requirements that may be necessary, and integrate this information into the EIS.
- Coordinate the environmental review with the planning and decision-making processes.

The federal regulations also allow the lead agency, as a part of the scoping process, to set page limits on the environmental documents; set time limits for the study; adopt procedures for the scoping process; and integrate scoping meetings with other planning meetings.

Ultimately, the scoping process helps the lead agency to define the issues to be examined (usually environmental, economic, social or transportation issues); to identify the concerns of the public and governmental agencies; and to initiate effective communication and open interaction among all involved.