

## The Oregon of Transportation's Programmatic Permitting Method

### What the innovation is:

The Oregon Department of Transportation and 11 state and federal regulatory agencies have developed a single set of environmental performance standards for more than 300 state highway bridges scheduled for work in the agency's \$1.3 billion OTIA III State Bridge Delivery Program. Now, because designers are equipped with the environmental, cultural and historical data and requirements before they begin, the design process is dramatically shorter.

### Why it is innovative:

Obtaining permits and approvals for a single bridge project typically takes several months and costs tens of thousands of dollars. To save time and costs, ODOT collaborated with state and federal agencies to develop a streamlined, programmatic approach to environmental regulatory compliance.

As a first step, ODOT conducted environmental assessments for every bridge in the program up front, using common data-collection methods and a common reporting format. Then the agency worked with its regulatory partners to establish permitting requirements for the entire bridge program. In that way, if the design and construction proposed for a particular bridge meets the programmatic requirements, the permits or approvals addressed by those requirements are assured.

This streamlined environmental permitting approach does not avoid or short-cut any regulations. Rather, it coordinates the requirements of multiple agencies, eliminates the confusion and duplication of effort that can result from attempting to meet conflicting or redundant regulatory requirements, and ensures comprehensive environmental protection. While each bridge still must be reviewed individually, the programmatic permits are already in place and the requirements to obtain those permits have already been defined. As a result, permitting for individual bridges is more efficient in terms of time, money and design efforts than the traditional approach.

### What the innovation changed or replaced:

ODOT is making a historic shift from being an agency that produces engineering designs and construction to one that manages the statewide transportation system. The agency realized early on that permitting for the bridge program would be a major challenge. As a result, ODOT took the initiative to address regulatory requirements, as much as feasible, on a *programmatic* basis. The alternative agency-by-agency permitting process would have taken years.

### Where the innovation has been used and is expected to be used in the future:

Programmatic permitting originated with the inception of the bridge program in 2003. Since then it has been used on numerous projects. One excellent example of successful programmatic permitting is the Coast Fork-Willamette River Bridge project, which is a part of the Clarks Branch-Tunnel Mill Race bundle of bridge projects. Coast Fork-Willamette River Bridge is the first of many bridges to use the new process, and the results have been impressive. The new way of doing business shaved 105 days off of the permitting time frame required to prepare for construction and reduced costs by \$1 million on this bundle alone.

ODOT intends to use this method on the majority of its future bridge projects. As of January 2006, the agency has had 14 bridges successfully complete the process, 67 bridges are currently in the process, 50 bridges have initiated the process, and another 104 are anticipated to apply.

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The programmatic permitting method was recently completed on the Coast Fork – Willamette River Bridge Project. Programmatic permitting shaved 105 days off the permitting time and reduced costs by \$1 million on this bundle alone.

