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ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE THROUGH THE MITIGATION MONITORING PROGRAM

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Abstract

Environmental objectives must be considered continually throughout all phases of project development (planning, project definition, final design, construction and post-construction). In preparation of anticipated expansion of Dallas Area Rapid Transit's (DART) Light Rail System (LRT), HOV System, Commuter Rail System, and associated support facilities, DART has recently drafted Environmental Impact Assessment and Mitigation Guidelines for Transit Projects. The primary purpose of this document is to provide a consistent approach in the consideration of environmental impacts, mitigation, and the implementation of mitigation monitoring programs for those actions requiring mitigation. This paper will focus on the development of the mitigation monitoring program as a tool to ensure that environmental commitments made during planning and project development and identified in the environmental documents are implemented during construction, maintenance and operations.

Whenever a proposed project will result in potentially significant adverse environmental impacts, measures must be taken which will minimize or avoid that impact. These mitigation measures may require additional project elements, revised locations, additional activities, modified operations, or other commitments. Where such measures are identified and committed by DART during project planning, a program for monitoring or reporting on the project's compliance with those measures will be established.

The purpose of the Mitigation Monitoring Program is fourfold:

- To specify recommended mitigation measures identified during the project development process and ensure that the appropriate mitigation measures are incorporated into the final design process;
- To monitor the implementation of the mitigation measures as the project proceeds through the final design process, construction, and its operation;
- To resolve issues identified during the environmental process that are contingent upon the outcome of the design as it progresses through the more detailed stages of development; and
- To report on progress towards implementation of mitigation measures to responsible parties.

The Mitigation Monitoring Program is designed to guide transportation planners, project managers, project engineers, and environmental specialists, as well as neighborhood and community leaders and others in the implementation of mitigation measures identified in the appropriate environmental document. The Mitigation Monitoring Program provides DART with a tool to finalize and monitor the implementation of mitigation measures in order to minimize impacts on the surrounding community and ensure NEPA compliance. This \$250,000 effort resulted in an 18-month study of DART's policies and procedures and compared the monitoring programs of other transit agencies around North America.

Biographical Sketch: Jerry Smiley, AICP, is an Environmental Division Manager with Wendy Lopez & Associates, Inc, and is also a certified planner with more than 12 years of experience providing consulting and technical services associated with environmental, comprehensive, and transportation planning. He has served as a project manager for environmental impact statements, assessments, and baseline reports, as well as major investment studies for numerous state and federal clients, including the Texas Department of Transportation, DFW International Airport, US Army Corps of Engineers and Trinity River Authority. He is currently the Program Manager for Dallas Area Rapid Transit's General Planning Consultant – a multi-year, multimillion-dollar contract to provide transit and environmental planning services. Mr. Smiley graduated with a Masters in Environmental Science and a Masters in Public Administration from Indiana University in 1989. He is completing his tenure as Environmental Network Chair for the state chapter of the American Planning Association.