

Communicating Forecasts in the Transit New Starts Process



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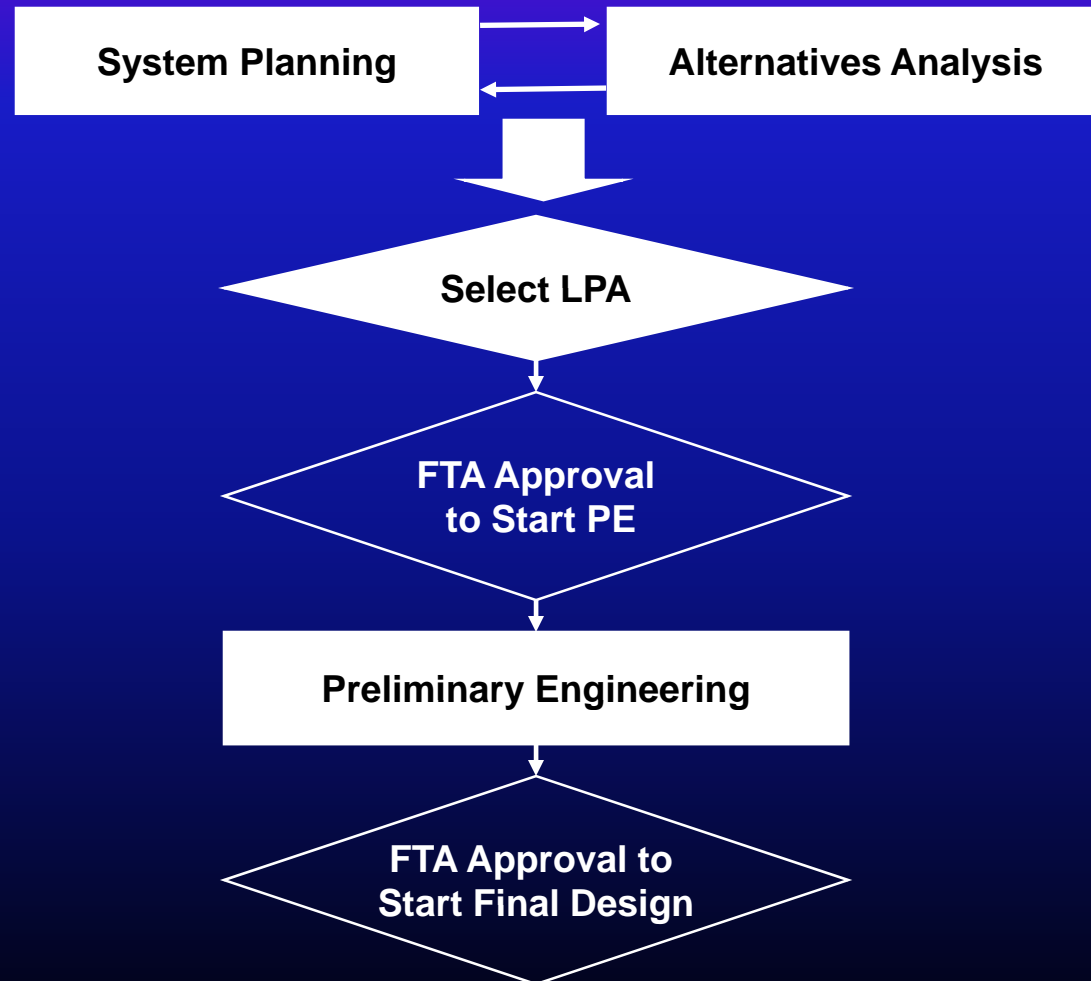
Agenda

- What is New Starts?
- Audience for communicating forecasts
- Show insights, not just numbers
- Examples
- Closing thoughts

What is New Starts?

- Federal government's primary financial resource for supporting locally-planned, implemented, and operated major transit capital investments
- Discretionary funding program
 - \$1.6 billion annually
- FTA stewardship

Planning/Project Development



Know Your Audience

- General public
- Local decision makers
 - Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)
- FTA (regional offices and headquarters)
 - Help FTA make Federal decisions
 - Congress
- Project sponsor
- Other agencies

FTA Perspective

- FTA approves forecasts, not the models themselves
 - Information for decision-making
 - Good models known by their forecasts
 - Forecasts must be coherent (not perfect)
 - What the model does and does not know
 - Advance models optional (but must be coherent)
 - Helps set standards for review/quality control

Communicating Validation Results

- Coherent story!
- Calibration – matching within reasonable tolerances to observed data
- Plausibility – behavioral implications of the parameters are reasonable
- Tests – response to changing inputs make sense

Communicating Insights

- Numbers essential but not sufficient
- Gained from an examination of the results
- Clarity is essential
 - “To write well is to think clearly. That’s why it’s so hard.” – David McCollough, 2003
 - Allow sufficient time and assign the right person(s) to do the analysis and the writing
 - Begin (and proceed) with the end in mind: what to say and how to substantiate?

Example (Make the Case)

- Current conditions and apparent problems
- Changes from today to 2030 and additional problems
- Specific purpose(s) of the project
- Inadequacy of lower-cost alternatives
- Response in transit ridership and associated benefits / key markets served
- Uncertainties in the forecasts

Standard Reporting

- Summit reports
 - No-Build (2030) versus “today”
 - Base (TSM) alternative versus No-build
 - Build 2030 versus Base 2030 alternative
 - Build opening year versus “today”
- Template on “Travel Forecasts”
- Transit assignment results

Closing Thoughts

- Ethics / truth in forecasting
 - Optimism bias
- Post-implementation assessments
 - Before versus after
 - Predicted versus actual
- Contractor performance assessment
- Peer comparisons
- Data collection / Quality control