2. Utility Communication and Coordination

The Department recognizes that it is in the public interest for utilities to jointly use public transportation rights-of-way, as long as such use does not interfere with the primary use of the transportation infrastructure. In this way, the transportation right-of-way can be used to transmit and distribute utility services for the benefit of the public, as well as to serve conventional transportation needs.

The Department and utility companies have a mutual obligation to coordinate programs and projects in an effort to:

- Maximize the use of rights-of-way
- Eliminate unnecessary costs to the public, recognizing that the "tax payer is the rate payer"
- Avoid undue delays in project schedules through design and construction

Communication and coordination between the Department and utility companies is an essential component of accommodating utilities in the rights-of-way and for integrating utility relocations with the Department's capital works projects.

2.1. Purpose

This chapter contains the recommended procedures and practices for the exchange of information between the Department, utility companies, and other local public agencies (LPA).

2.2. Responsibilities

All utility personnel, utility consultant coordinators, and individual utility companies are jointly responsible for promoting and maintaining coordination for all aspects of utility work within the Department rights-of-way, whether the utility is seeking accommodation in the right-of-way, or a Department project is requiring utility relocation or adjustment.

The state headquarters chief of right-of-way is responsible for developing and maintaining communication within the Department and between the utility industry, federal agencies, and professional associations.

The regional utility engineers are responsible for developing and maintaining communication within the Department, and between the utility companies and local public agencies within their respective regions.

All regions utility staff and consultant utility coordinators are responsible for effective and professional communication with utility companies, local public agencies, and where appropriate, the public.

2.3. Communication and Coordination

Utility communication and coordination is not limited to the following practices, as initiative and imagination will often lead to alternative approaches to effectively coordinate both the Department's and utility company's programs and projects.

Communication

The objectives of maintaining effective communication are to:

- Promote cooperation and working relationships where the Department and utility companies can exchange mutual concerns and establish realistic objectives
- Promote efficiency through ongoing collaboration and clear, concise direction
- Facilitate advance identification and resolution of right-of-way and utility issues
- Reduce the need for future utility relocation and/or adjustments relating to the Department's or other utility company's projects
- Reduce costs to projects associated with utility relocations
- Reduce construction project delays associated with utility relocations

Coordination

The objectives of coordination are to:

- Adopt procedures and processes that allow sufficient lead time for coordination

- Eliminate costly delays to either party that result from unresolved right-of-way and utility issues

Best Management Practices to develop and maintain coordination include the items found in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1.
Best Management Practices for Utility Coordination

Department	Utility/LPA
• Provide the Department's long-range construction and maintenance schedules annually.	• Provide the long-range system improvement plans and maintenance schedules annually.
• Involve utilities in the design process by inviting comment on preliminary stage plans and alignment options.	• Involve the Department in the design process for projects seeking accommodation in the right-of-way by inviting review and comment on preliminary stage plans and alignment options.
• Involve utility companies in the right-of-way phase of project development.	• Provide updated utility system maps to the Department every two to five years.
• Conduct on-site meetings.	• Conduct on-site meetings.
• Encourage the use of Subsurface Utility Engineering (SUE) technology in the preconstruction phase of project developments.	• Participate in Subsurface Utility Engineering (SUE) in the design process.
• Schedule weekly utility meetings during construction. Attend coordination meetings organized by the utility.	• Schedule or attend weekly construction meetings throughout project relocation.

2.4. Recommended Practices

The following is a list of additional suggestions for encouraging communication and coordination.

- Regional representation and membership in utility coordination or professional associations (e.g., the American Public Works Association [APWA], South Central Alaska Utility Association [SCAUA], Juneau Utility Council, and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials [AASHTO] Subcommittee for Right-of-Way, Utilities, and Outdoor Advertising.)
- Develop public information websites listing projects in design and construction, including contact information. For example, Anchorage Water and Wastewater Public Information Center : https://www.awwu.biz/website/awwu_projects/awwuprojectsframe.htm
- Institute a regional newsletter to utilities and local agencies informing them of future projects that may require relocations or may affect permit work, new or retiring utility section staff, establish point of contacts, changes to documents or processes, and other issues of note.
- Annual or semi-annual statewide utility meetings, rotating the host region.
- Periodic meetings or no-host lunches with regional utility staff and local utility company representatives.
- Invite a design project manager on a rotating basis to each weekly regional utility staff meeting.
- Project post mortems that include project designers, construction utility inspection personnel as well as utility representatives for

design and construction to discuss the good and bad occurrences during the project.

2.5. Additional Resources

The FHWA stresses communication with utility companies. In 2009, FHWA launched the "Every Day Counts" initiative to support innovation and technology to shorten project delivery time and provided a "Shortening Project Delivery Toolkit" with recommendations for key components of project delivery, including utilities and right-of-way.

The AASHTO "Right-of-Way and Utilities Guidelines and Best Practices" was published in January 2004. It includes communication and coordination practices to reduce delivery time, reduce costs, and improve quality in the utility process.

The APWA prepared for FHWA the "Highway/Utility Guide" in June 1993. It provides useful information relevant to joint use issues, including a historical perspective and sections on planning and coordination.

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