

INSTRUCTIONAL MEMORANDUMS

To Local Public Agencies



To: Counties and Cities	Date: June 12, 2024
From: Local Systems Bureau	I.M. No. 3.400
Subject: Preliminary Plans	

Contents: This Instructional Memorandum (I.M.) includes guidelines and procedures for preparation, submittal, and review of preliminary plans for Local Public Agency (LPA) Federal-aid projects and certain State-aid projects that will be let by the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT). This I.M. also includes the following attachments:

- [Attachment A](#) – Preliminary Plan Guidelines
- [Attachment B](#) – Preliminary Plan Checklist ([Word](#))
- [Attachment C](#) – Preliminary Plan Process Flowchart

Preliminary Plan Reviews are required for the following situations:

- Projects that include improvements to the Primary Highway System and that will be maintained by the Iowa DOT.
- Federal-aid projects administered through the Local Systems Bureau Grant Team.
- For projects administered through the Local Systems Bureau Project Development Team, Federal-Aid, Federal-Aid Swap, State-aid, and Farm-to-Market projects that include any of the following:
 - Projects needing a hydraulic review, according to [I.M. 3.500](#), Bridge or Culvert Plans.
 - Projects involving the construction of roundabouts. All projects that are constructing a roundabout require a roundabout review.
 - Projects involving Railroad Crossings within or immediately adjacent to the project limits.
 - Projects where extending the limits of participation meet special considerations as shown in [I.M. 1.100, Attachment C](#) “Touchdown Points and Limits of Participation”.

Preliminary plan reviews are not required for the following situations:

- Federal-aid, Federal-aid Swap, State-aid, and Farm-to-Market projects not involving any of the above listed items.
- Projects that do not include improvements that will be maintained by the Iowa DOT, unless otherwise specified in the project agreement.
- Projects funded with local funds.

Refer to [I.M. 3.010](#), Project Development Submittal Dates and Information, for more information.

Preparation

Content and Format

Preliminary plans shall be prepared in accordance with [Attachment A](#), Preliminary Plan Guidelines, and [Attachment B](#), Preliminary Plan Checklist. [Attachment A](#) provides general guidelines and instructions applicable for all types of projects. [Attachment B](#) provides a checklist of specific items that will be reviewed by the Iowa DOT Administering Team. The Iowa DOT strongly recommends that the LPA or its consultant use both these attachments to perform an internal plan review prior to submitting the project plans to the Iowa DOT.

Design Guidelines

For new or complete reconstruction projects, refer to either the Iowa Statewide Urban Design and Specifications (SUDAS) [Design Manual](#), Chapter 5, for urban design guidance, or [I.M. 3.210](#), Rural Design Guidelines. For Resurfacing, Restoration, or Rehabilitation (3R) projects, refer to [I.M. 3.220](#), 3R Guidelines.

Federal-aid projects that do not meet these guidelines will require a design exception. If the need for a design exception has been identified at the preliminary plan stage, the design exception request and supporting documentation should be submitted with the preliminary plans. For more information, refer to [I.M. 3.260](#), Design Exception Process.

The Iowa DOT reviews design criteria for projects funded with Federal-aid. Even though the Iowa DOT does not review design criteria for projects funded with Federal-aid Swap, Farm-to-Market, or local funds; the Iowa DOT strongly recommends that LPAs properly document any design features that do not meet the current applicable AASHTO design guidelines. The Iowa DOT strongly recommends the LPA properly document the design exceptions in their project files.

Submittals

Timely submission of preliminary plans is important. Electronic submittals are required. All submittals shall be made to the Administering Team in accordance with [I.M. 3.010](#), Project Development Submittal Dates and Information. LPAs are strongly encouraged to use the Transportation Program Management System (TPMS), Development module, for all project submittals and correspondence. Submittals shall include the following items, as applicable:

- A TPMS Message including the following information:*
 - The project number, location, and proposed letting date.
 - Identification of all changes from the previously approved project Concept Statement, if any.
 - Whether or not a hydraulic review is being requested, as per [I.M. 3.500](#), Bridge or Culvert Plans.
 - Notification if the project includes a roundabout so the roundabout review can be coordinated.
 - Whether or not the project may involve work within the right-of-way of an Interstate or Primary highway.

* Information that is already available in TPMS Development does not need to be repeated in the TPMS Message.
- Preliminary Plans.
 - A completed Preliminary Plan Checklist, as per [Attachment B](#) (use of the checklist is encouraged, but not required).
 - Design exception documentation, if required as per the SUDAS [Design Manual](#), Chapter 5, for urban design guidance, or [I.M. 3.210](#), Rural Design Guidelines.
 - If the project includes a roundabout, please have the following documentation prepared and ready to provide to the roundabout review consultant:
 - Geometric layout in CAD format and PDF
 - Operational analysis, if completed
 - Any traffic information, preferably peak hour information that was used for the operational analysis
 - Any constraints to the design such as properties to avoid, large utilities to avoid, etc.
 - Design vehicle(s), including any oversize/overweight vehicle
 - Fast path calculations
 - Sight distance checks
 - Expectations for future development in the area
 - Expectations for future bike and pedestrian volumes

Roundabout reviews are provided via two on-call roundabout consultants. The process is as follows:

- The Administering Team will assign the roundabout consultant and provide the contact information to the LPA.
- While documents may be uploaded to TPMS, it is preferred to have the designer provide the documents directly to the roundabout consultant.
- Initial reviews usually take about 2-4 weeks depending on design stage, consultant workload, and project complexity. However, the overall process will likely take longer as it tends to involve several rounds of back-and-forth updates to refine the design.

- Please send a TPMS message to the Administering Team when the roundabout review process is complete.

☐ Hydraulic review documents, as per I.M. 3.500, Bridge or Culvert Plans

Utility Coordination

In addition to submitting preliminary plans to the Iowa DOT, preliminary plans should also be submitted to all utilities within the project limits or corridor. For more information, refer to [I.M. 3.640](#), Utility Accommodation and Coordination.

Review

Plans submitted in conformance with this I.M. should be returned by the Administering Team in a timely manner with relatively few comments. If the plans do not conform to these guidelines, the review process will require more time and effort by the LPA and the Iowa DOT, which could delay the project letting.

The process for submittal, distribution, and review of project plans is illustrated in [Attachment C](#), Preliminary Plan Process Flowchart. As the flowchart shows, if the project involves bridge or culvert that requires a hydraulic review, or requires work on an Interstate or Primary highway, the plans will need additional reviews by other Iowa DOT offices. Because these reviews may require additional time, early submittal of such plans is strongly encouraged.

Note: Federal-aid projects may not proceed to final design or acquire right-of-way with Federal funds until after FHWA Environmental Concurrence has been received. For more information, refer to Sections 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1 of the [Federal-aid Project Development Guide](#).