

HB 1277 – Increase Cost Threshold for Projects Requiring Environmental Review

Legislative Rubric from Science for Georgia

[HB 1277](#) - The cost threshold for required environmental evaluations on public road and airport projects will be increased to \$200 million from \$100 million. The threshold can also increase along with inflation. The bill also attempts to simplify Department of Transportation (DOT) property sales and reporting.

Criteria	Variables			
Impact Who is going to be impacted? Is it equitable? List stakeholders & opinions.	Negative		Positive	
	Meh - Environmental impact evaluations can increase long-term sustainability of road projects, leading to reduced environmental pollution with less life cycle costs. However, the cost threshold increase may at least partially reflect an increase in road cost pricing . In Georgia, between 2020 and 2023, the highway construction cost index increased by 51%, road widening increased by 118% to \$19 million per mile, and road resurfacing increased by 80% to \$335,000 per mile. The proposed cost threshold increase is a 100% increase.			
Reach Does it reach its target audience?	0 - No impact on target audience.	1 - Impacts narrow segment.	2 - Impacts Majority; Exceptions	3 - Impacts entire target audienc
	Environmental impact evaluations will not be required on projects under \$200 million, which can accommodate the average cost of many projects, such as a ten-mile road widening project. Environmental evaluations are still to be considered in the decision-making process if there is an expected impact on historical sites, buildings, and cultural resources.			
Scientific Merit Does it utilize scientific research accurately?	YES - this does follow scientific research accurately. Here's why....		NO - this does not present scientific research accurately.	
	Environmental evaluations are critical to ensuring long-term sustainability of road projects. Pavement projects have strong ecological effects . Vehicle related mortality for wildlife is the most visible concern, while roads also act as barriers to movement and breeding, fish movement through culverts, noise pollution, heavy metal and chemical pollution, vehicle-generated pollutants, runoff changes, and biodiversity. Environmental evaluations can help address these concerns by adjusting factors such as traffic volume, road surface area, heavy-duty vehicle ration, traffic speed, and other design features such as layer thickness and drainage coefficients.			



Financial Feasibility Is it financially feasible? or does this have burdensome finances (higher taxes, future costs, etc)?	0 - Extremely high costs	1 - Expensive but can be done	2 - Slight	3 - No financial burden
	<p>The proposed bill provides cost savings in reducing the need for environmental evaluations, which can be costly, reaching up to \$100,000 to prepare for large projects. These reports can reach over thirty pages long and are highly detailed. The process includes initiating resource identification, coordinating with agencies and stakeholders, identifying other federal and state actions for compliance, local coordination, an avoidance and minimization measures meeting, a technical study, and permitting. However, these financial cost savings do not consider increased environmental costs, which environmental evaluation requirements were put in place to protect against.</p>			
Political Feasibility Level of opposition and partisan disagreement.	0 - Majority disagreed, regardless of party.	1 – Split along party lines	2 - Minimal Opposition	3 - Complete consensus (zero to five 'Nays').
	<p>This bill is highly partisan, with Republican support and a split vote of 26 yeas and 22 nays in the Senate.</p>			
Measurable Metrics? We recommend looking at these 3 metrics. Is the data available or being measured?	0 - no data	1 - some data / not accessible	2 - most data / somewhat accessible	3 - complete transparency
	<p>Average project costs, environmental effects, and some past environmental evaluations are all available and transparent to view the effects of environmental impact assessments.</p>			