



Managing Traffic for Improved Access to Voting Events

Source: USDOT/Getty

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Updated (7/21/2022)

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) supports the use of traffic analysis and enhanced work zone management to improve access to voting events. This effort aids the United States Department of Transportation's support for Executive Order 14019¹, "Promoting Access to Voting."

This document provides a list of FAQs around the topic.

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¹ E.O. 14019, Promoting Access to Voting, [86 FR 13623](#) (Mar. 10, 2021).



Q1: Why is it important to manage traffic around polling sites during voting events?

A1: Voting events, like special events, cause changes in traveler behavior and traffic patterns, which can lead to wider effects, both spatial and temporal, on travel patterns, mobility, and safety. Routine travel disruptions during voting events can create larger travel issues, affecting voters' ability to get to polling places while they are open. Temporary changes to street use and curb space can create unfamiliar conditions. All of these can lead to unexpected traffic congestion and longer travel times, inhibiting voters from accessing polling sites. Additionally, these changes and travel burdens may affect some communities more than others.

Q2: How can traffic management improve access to polling sites during voting events?

A2: Managing traffic in a proactive manner can help minimize congestion and delays during voting events. Analyzing traffic patterns near and around polling sites can help anticipate where the congestion hotspots will be during voting events. Predicting the congestion hotspots can help agencies plan traffic management strategies to mitigate hotspots and minimize traffic delays and congestion. If underserved communities are disproportionately affected by these transportation disruptions, agencies can communicate with local stakeholders to address these communities' transportation needs.

Q3: How can traffic analysis help improve access to voting events?

A3: Traffic analysis tools and methods are a proven and established approach to help make decisions in evaluating and recommending optimal traffic management strategies. Traffic analysis can help agencies prepare for traffic impacts on a variety of scales, including the following:

- Major routes to and from polling sites.
- Circulation on local roads in the vicinity of polling sites.
- Parking access and availability near polling sites.
- Pedestrian and nonmotorized considerations.
- Temporal and spatial nature of traffic impacts across communities.

Q4: How can agencies start using traffic analysis for improved voting access?

A4: It is important to conduct some initial diagnostics to understand if there are problem areas that can be addressed through traffic analysis of polling sites. This process could include analyzing travel data and trends to see if and where there were previously issues with voting access at specific polling sites. This process could also include discussions with stakeholders who may be aware of previous polling site access issues during voting events. Some polling sites within a locality may not have issues with voting access, so it is important to focus the analysis on specific areas with known previous or possible future issues. For example, there could be more issues with congestion and traffic volume during



voting events at certain polling sites in underserved communities that already have difficulties accessing transit.

Q5: Is there a recommended approach for traffic analysis during voting events?

A5: Traffic analysis for polling place access is not a one-size-fits-all process, as each polling place has unique features and conditions. There are several analytical tools and methods that can support these varying analysis needs and contexts. In fact, there is no single recommended standard traffic analysis tool or model.

Rather, agencies should approach any traffic analysis in a stepwise manner to match needs and context of the region/agency. The following diagram shows the steps within this process of determining what the best traffic analysis method is for a given locality.

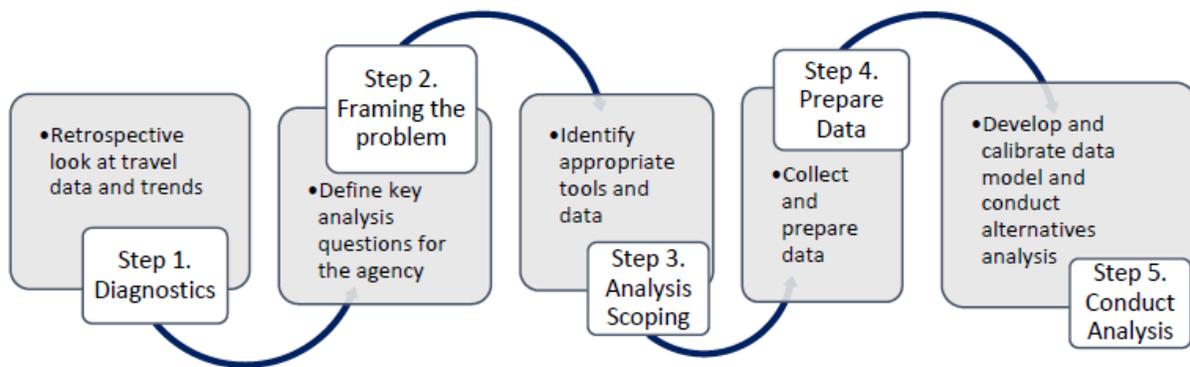


Figure 1. Diagram. Steps for Conducting a Traffic Analysis.

Source: Federal Highway Administration.

By taking a measured, quantitative, and data-driven approach to voting events, agencies can develop a deeper understanding of travel concerns during voting events.

Q6: What types of traffic analysis tools and methods can be implemented to support voter access?

A6: There are many tools and methods that can be implemented. The following are several examples, from simple to more complex:

- Sketch Planning Tools: Sketch planning and analysis tools can be used to quickly analyze a potential hotspot. For example, critical movement analysis is a simplified technique to estimate traffic signal timing parameters and phasing and allows an analyst to identify the critical phase pairs at an intersection, calculate the critical volume, and approximate the required cycle length.
- Deterministic Analysis Tools: The Transportation Research Board’s [Highway Capacity Manual](#) provides planning-level and more detailed operations-level methodologies for analyzing a variety of transportation facilities, including intersections, urban



streets, highways, freeways, and the effects of transit, pedestrians, and bicycles on the performance of these systems.

- **Data Analytics Tools:** Data analytics platforms fuse data from a variety of sources to assist agencies in monitoring and evaluating the performance of a transportation system. These platforms typically allow retrospective identification and analysis of congestion hotspots, and some allow real-time monitoring capabilities.
- **Traffic Signal Optimization Tools:** Signal optimization tools can be used to evaluate and optimize signal timings on election day to ensure easy access to the polling site.
- **Simulation Tools:** Simulation software programs can model complex scenarios such as traffic incidents, work zones, weather events, complex roadway geometries, and multimodal facilities.
- **Sensitivity Testing:** Sensitivity testing methods can answer “what if” questions. These methods are especially useful during analyses that have data gaps that cannot be filled.

Q7: How can agencies determine the potential effectiveness of traffic analysis tools and methods in a given locality?

A7: After identifying mobility problems that could be addressed through traffic analysis, agencies can determine appropriate tools and methods to address voter access issues. Consider asking the following questions to find traffic analysis methods that best suit your situation:

- What has happened historically with voter access at this location?
- What data is available or is needed?
- What facility types and travel modes should be evaluated?
- What are the geographic limits of the analysis?
- What resources are available to perform the analysis?
- What time period(s) should be analyzed? Are there mobility problems during a specific time on election day, or are there challenges throughout the day?
- What measures of effectiveness are we trying to report?

Selecting an appropriate traffic analysis tool is critical to analyzing traffic for voting events, and the [FHWA Traffic Analysis Toolbox](#) includes helpful guidance for selecting an appropriate traffic analysis tool.

Q8: What opportunities are there to minimize roadwork-related traffic delays?

A8: Agencies can easily modify their in-house maintenance activities to avoid travel disruptions during voting events. Agencies may also be able to make permitting decisions for oversize and overweight load travel, utility work, or even lane and sidewalk closures for



vertical construction to restrict activities that impede voting location access during voting events.

Existing construction contracts may or may not be as easy to address. Some work zone contracts may contain language that gives the agency flexibility to approve or restrict work zone activities that affect traffic. In those situations, the agency can simply restrict such activities if they are deemed likely to impede travel to and from poll locations. However, other contracts may not include such language other than restricting lane closures on specific days called out in the contract itself (for certain holidays, special events, etc.). In those cases, the agency and the contractor will need to negotiate a resolution to ensure that work activities do not impede traffic to and from polling locations.

Q9: What work zone impacts should be examined to ensure that voter access to polling sites is not hampered?

A9: The potential effects of work zone activities on or near polling sites include the following:

- Capacity and availability of vehicular traffic, bicycle, and pedestrian travel paths.
- Driveway access to polling site parking lots and on-street parking availability.
- Routing and scheduling of mass transit that serves the polling site.
- Environmental issues (e.g., fumes from asphalt paving, silica dust from concrete cutting or grinding).

Q10: How can an agency support voter access during the planning and design phases of a construction project?

A10: During election years, when projects are located near polling sites, consider contract language that treats Election Day as a holiday with no construction activities allowed or prohibits certain construction activities (i.e., temporary lane closures) during polling site hours. It may also be necessary for a contract to specifically state that sidewalk continuity and Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility standards will be maintained to and from voting locations.

Q11: Where can agencies find information on developing a good detour plan for a sidewalk closure?

A11: [Minnesota DOT](#) and [Wisconsin DOT](#) have some resources on accommodating pedestrians in work zones. Other resources can be found on the [National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse](#).

Q12: What is the best way to prepare for unexpected issues that are likely to arise on election day?

A12: Although there is no all-encompassing answer for handling unexpected issues, contingency planning exercises should be considered for the following:

- Adverse weather conditions that may affect traffic and pedestrian travel paths.



- Traffic incidents, unplanned infrastructure problems, and other traffic disruptions on travel paths.
- Work vehicle access into and out of work zones.
- Unforeseen events that might prevent a work zone from being configured to its planned temporary traffic control condition for when the polling site is open.

Q13: What resources are being made available to State and local agencies on this topic?

A13: The FHWA is assembling resource lists, info briefs, and other materials for taking actions related to traffic analysis and work zone management for voting events. The [FHWA Office of Operations](#) website also has many resources related to assessing traffic impacts of planned events and managing potential disruptions, including the [FHWA Traffic Analysis Tools](#) and [FHWA Work Zone Management](#) web pages. The [Americans with Disabilities Act and Other Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities](#) provides information on supporting access to voters with disabilities.

Q14: Who can agencies contact for more information or discussions on this topic?

A14: For further assistance on this topic, please email FHWAVotingAccess@dot.gov or contact the local FHWA division office staff (see <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/about/field.cfm>).

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