

# Integrated Approach of SEA in Washington State, U.S.

## - Focusing on Early Involvement of the Public -

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### Abstract

In Japan, though an SEA Guideline was published in April 2007 from the Ministry of the Environment, some difficulties for introducing SEA are still recognized. Due to reluctance of information disclosure, some agencies hesitate to involve the public into early stages of their plan-making process. The agencies therefore, often prepare the EIA/SEA documents after developing their plans, so that the documents justify the decisions predetermined internally. With this Japanese background, we conducted a survey to analyze an advanced SEA system in Washington State (WS) which has been improved through public involvement at the early stage. In WS, Nonproject Review system which is considered to be equivalent with SEA, has been established under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). The Puget Sound Regional Council has developed their Growth Management Policy (=VISION2040) by integrating the Nonproject Review process into the plan-making process concurrently. Therefore, both environmental reviewing and public involvement have been initiated at the early stage of the process. We examine the whole VISION2040 process which interlinks the plan-making process and environmental reviewing process in order to clarify the method for an integrated approach of SEA. We also discuss the effects and future challenges of the public involvement at the early stage.

Key word: SEA, Public Participation, Washington State

### 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, project level EIA has been familiar and produced effects for environmental conservation under the EIA Act (1997) in Japan. However, many researches have pointed the limitations of the EIA Act, such as, exclusion of no-action alternative analysis, mitigation for the cumulative impact, because the coverage of the Act just focuses on the project level. Therefore, national and some local governments have been trying to apply the EIA to policy or plan level and introduce SEA. A panel survey (2002 - 2006) on ordinances of local governments in Japan showed that the number of local government introducing SEA has increased moderately (Harashina, et al. 2007). At this present, 8 local governments adopted their own SEA ordinance and national government also issued SEA guideline in 2007.

On the other hand, the survey also figured out that governments have faced difficulty in adjusting an

SEA process to the conventional planning process. This fact suggests that a methodology of integrating the SEA process into the conventional planning process needs to be designed in Japan.

In contrast, Washington State (WS) U.S. has developed the SEA system which is integrated with the planning process. The SEA system has been characterized as the most advanced system in the U.S. in terms of integration with land use planning (APA 1998). In the WS, the environmental reviews based on conventional the EIA method had been applied to policy and plan level as the SEA under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) since 1972. However, because of the deprioritization of the policy/plan level EIA, the system had lost substance. Therefore, the state government has started to design the integration of the SEA process and planning process. Shibata *et al.* (2008) suggests that the integrated SEA in WS has a potential to involve the general public at the early stage of the planning process and to

influence the strategic decision.

The main purpose of this case study reported here is to clarify the public involvement process and interaction between the SEA process and the planning process used for developing a growth management policy in WS.

## 2. Framework

### 2.1. Conceptual models on SEA

The interrelationship of the SEA process and the planning process is extremely important. Therefore the concept of the interrelationship has been argued in many literatures. According to the literature review, the two main types of conceptual modes are the conventional EIA methodology and the strategic methodology. The former is a methodology based on a formulated procedure used for project EIA, while the latter is a new methodology to address strategic decisions in a sustainability context (Partidario, 2007).

Furthermore, a conventional EIA methodology is divided into two categories, a consent related model (Fig.1. a) and an integrated model (Fig.1. b). Under the consent related model, the SEA process is initiated when the draft of the plan gets almost complete, while SEA process is initiated concurrently with the planning process under the integrated model. Consequently, the integrated model enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of the public involvement much more than the consent related model, because of the early input of the SEA (Schmidt, et al. 2004) . In contrast,

under the strategic methodology (Fig.1. c), SEA is led by the planning process and becomes an ad-hoc process for the planning process (Partidario, 2007).

### 2.2. SEA-planning interrelationship in Japan

In this section, we try to review the arguments in favor of the SEA-planning interrelationship in Japan from three key literatures (Harahina 2000, Study Meeting for SEA 2000, Ministry of Environment 2007). As the most basic Japanese instructional book on environmental assessment, Harashina (2000) insisted that the SEA process needs to be initiated as early as possible in the decision making process. The Study Meeting for SEA established by the Ministry of Environment (2000) concluded that “environmental issues and other factors are needed to be considered concurrently ... the outcome of SEA should to be integrated into the decision at the final stage of the process”. After the seven years, an administrative guideline for SEA issued by the Ministry of Environment (2007) encourages to initiate the SEA process at the early stage of the planning process.

As these literatures show, the concept of the integration of the SEA process and planning process has also prevailed in Japan. Nevertheless, the concrete method of this integrated approach is at present unclear.

### 2.3. Analysis framework

In this paper, we concretely clarify the method of

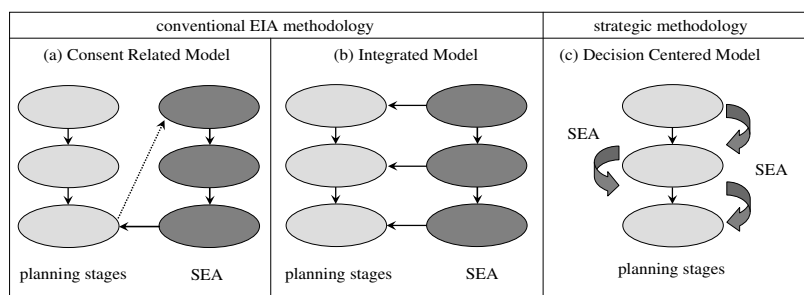


Fig.1. Conceptual models of SEA (a)(b)Schmidt, et al. 2004, (c) Partidario, 2007

an integrated approach of SEA from the case of developing a growth management policy VISION2040 in WS. In order to achieve the aim, we assume that the developing process of VISION2040 consists of

four stages, “agenda setting”, “alternative setting”, “preferred option” “final decision”. Based on this assumption, we grasp the SEA procedures conducted at each stage, and also analyze the public involvement method used in the process.

### 2.4. Materials and method

The material for this study consists mainly of the administrative documents. This includes official planning documents, EISs, the conference minutes, and workshop proceedings about VISION2040. In addition, we conducted interview surveys with main the planning body PSRC (Puget Sound Regional Council) and the environmental authority of the state government DOE (Department of Environment).

## 3. VISION2040, Planning and SEA Processes

### 3.1. Overview of the case, VISION2040

As one of the MPOs (Metropolitan Planning Organization) in the central Puget Sound region, PSRC is required to develop and adopt the regional long-range growth policy (=VISION) by the State Growth Management Act (Fig.2). The region is the principal urban region in the Pacific

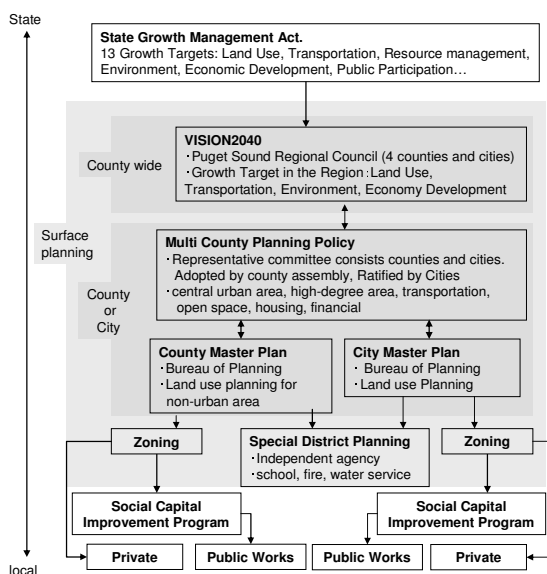
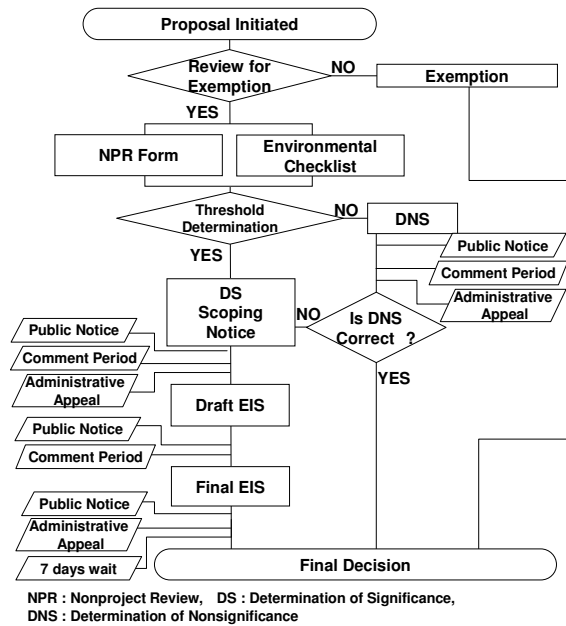


Fig.2. Land use planning system in WS.



NPR : Nonproject Review, DS : Determination of Significance, DNS : Determination of Nonsignificance

Fig.3. NPR flowchart

Northwest of the United States. It includes King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties and their 82 cities and towns.

In this region, 1.7 million additional residents are anticipated by the year 2040. In order to maintain and improve the quality of life in the face of this growth, PSRC started developing the new regional long-range growth planning policy, VISION2040 in 2003. In this process, EISs on VISION2040 have been prepared in accordance with SEPA. Presently, the final VISION2040 is scheduled to be adopted in April 2008.

### 3.2. SEA in Washington State

Under the SEPA, all public agencies are required to conduct SEA which is called NPR (Nonproject Review) before making a decision on the PPP. The NPR procedure is regulated to consist of “screening”, “scoping”, “draft EIS”, “final EIS” and public involvement, such as “comment period”, “Administrative Appeal”. As can be seen in Fig. 3, this procedure is based on the conventional EIA procedure. However, the planning agency is required to initiate the NPR process at the beginning of the planning process, and to perform the NPR and planning process

concurrently. This requirement is different from common SEA systems in U.S. and Japan.

### 3.3. Process of VISION2040

This VISION2040 process (Table 1) started from the proposal of updating the 1995 version of VISION2020 in Oct. 2003. At the same time, the PSRC declared to prepare EISs in accordance with SEPA, because adapting the land use policy

Table 1. Process of VISION2040

Timing		Activities	
2003	Oct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposal for revision</li> <li>• Issue of DS (Determination of Significant)</li> </ul>	
	Dec.	Scoping Workshop at Seattle Comment Period	
2004	Jan.	Scoping Workshop Summary Report	
	Feb.   Mar.	Open House Kitsap County, Snohomish County, King County, Pierce County, King County 2nd	
	Jan.	Issue Paper Health (Jan. 2005), Subregional Center (Mar. 2005), Growth Target (Jul. 2005), Rural Area (Aug. 2005), Housing (Aug. 2005), Environment (Aug. 2005), Demographics (Aug. 2005), Economics (Nov. 2005), Social Environmental Justice (Aug. 2005), Transportation (Jan. 2006)	
2006	Jan.	Issue of Draft EIS	
	May	Open House on Draft EIS in Seattle	
		Open House Summary Report	
	Jun.	Comment Period (60 days)	
	Jul.   Sep.	Draft EIS Workshop King County, King County 2nd, Kitsap County, Snohomish County, Pierce County	
	Sep.	Issue of Outreach Summary Report	
		Issue of Draft Evaluation Criteria	
	Oct.	Public Review and Comment on the Draft EIS Summary Report	
	Oct.	Release Pre-Preferred Option	
	2007	Jan.	Preferred Option Feasibility Test Report
Mar.		Release Preferred Option	
Apr.		Comment Period	
		Jul.	Issue of Supplemental Draft EIS
			Issue of Draft VISION2040 Comment Period (60 days)
Aug.		Public Meeting, Kitsap County, Snohomish County, King County, Pierce County	
		Public Comment and Outreach Summary of Draft EIS / Draft VISION2040	
Nov.		Public Hearing in Seattle	
2008	Mar.	Public Hearing in Seattle	
	Apr.	Issue of Final EIS	
		Adoption of VISION2040	
	Aug.	Enforcement of VISION2040	

was expected to have adverse environmental impact. This declaration virtually acted as the scoping result.

After the proposal, the PSRC held workshops and open houses at each county, and issued 10 papers (see “issue paper” in Table 1). In this period, the PSRC investigated the current state of issues regarding the land use. Based on the investigation, the PSRC issued a Draft EIS in May 2006. In this Draft EIS, four alternatives were compared in terms of population growth pattern scenarios. Then, the PSRC had open houses and workshops in addition to the regulated comment period. After these outreach activities, the PSRC issued a summary report of the activities in order to reply to all the public comments, and also issued evaluation criteria for selecting a single scenario from the alternatives based on the public input.

According to the evaluation criteria, the PSRC refined the alternatives into the Pre-Preferred Option, and released it in Oct. 2006. Then, the PSRC modified it along the requests from counties, private sectors, and general public. After the modification, the PSRC issued the Draft VISION2040 and Supplemental Draft EIS. The Draft VISION2040 showed a single growth scenario for 2040, and the environmental impacts were reviewed in the supplemental Draft EIS. As a final stage, the PSRC plans to issue a Final EIS, and to adopt the VISION2040 in April 2008.

### 4. Integrated approach

First, we will categorize all the activities shown in Table 1 into the four stages mentioned above. The first period from the proposal in 2003 to Jan. 2006 is considered to be “Agenda Setting”. The second period from the 2005 to “Issue of Outreach Summary Report” in Sep. 2006 is “Alternative Analysis”. The third period from “Issue of Draft Evaluation Criteria” to Mar. 2008 is “Preferred Option”. The final period consisting of “Issue of Final EIS” and “Adoption of VISION2040” is the

Table 2. Planning stage and SEA Procedure

Planning Stages	Public Involvement procedures	Type
Agenda Setting	Comment Period on DS	R
	Scoping Workshop	D
	Public Meeting	D
	Issue Papers	D
Alternative Analysis	Developing DEIS	R
	Comment Period on DEIS	R
	Workshop on DEIS	D
Preferred Option	Draft of Evaluation Criteria	D
	Pre-Preferred Option	D
	Comment Period	D
	Supplemental DEIS	D
	Comment Period	D
Final Decision	FEIS	R

R: Regulated, D: Discretionary

equivalent of “Final Decision”. Although the NPR is based on a formulated procedure used for project EIA, this SEA was initiated from the first planning stage “Agenda Setting”. Hence, the SEA used in this case is considered to be based on an integrated model.

In order to focus on the advantage of this integrated approach from the perspective of the public participation, we organize the public involvement procedures of the whole process into the four stages (Table 2). It shows that the public was involved at the first stage of the planning “agenda setting” which discussed needs and objectives of the decision. Furthermore, the “Type” in the table shows that not only regulated procedures, but also discretionary procedures were conducted as the public involvement. The overall results are inferable that each public involvement procedure fitted for each stage played different role respectively. As a result, discretionary procedures were conducted to cover the role which conventional EIA has not addressed (e.g. discussing the needs and objectives of the decision).

In addition to this, our interview survey showed that the environmental authority, DOE, has been involved throughout the whole process, and the PSRC has also actively accepted the DOE. In fact, both the DOE and the PSRC recognize the cooperation based on their reliability as vital for performing the integrated approach containing

many discretionary procedures. It seems that DOE acts not only as reviewing authority, but also as an adviser to the PSRC in the process.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the SEA procedures were conducted for every stage of the planning process in the case of VISION2040. In addition to this, it is also worth noting that many discretionary procedures were performed in the process.

Based on above results, the case study reported in this paper shows strong possibilities that an integrated approach has a potential for enhancing the public involvement at the early stage of the planning process. On the other hand, it is considered that the involvement of either the environmental authority or an SEA expert is important to manage the integrated approach which is a more complex process than conventional EIA.

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