

"de minimis"

Main Entry: de minimis

Part of Speech: *adj*

Definition: so small or minimal in difference that it does not matter or the law does not take it into consideration

Etymology: Latin 'of minimum importance, trifling'

Usage: law

Word Origin & History

de minimis

from L. de minimis, lit. "of little things," thus, "so minor as to not be worth regarding."

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Legal Dictionary

Main Entry: de min·i·mis

Pronunciation: dE-'mi-n&-m&s, dA-'mE-ni-mis

Function: *adjective*

Etymology: New Latin, concerning trifles

: lacking significance or importance : so minor as to be disregarded

NOTE: An action may be dismissed if the claim or cause is considered de minimis.

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FHA – Section 4(f) Review

Program Overview

The Department of Transportation Act (DOT Act) of 1966 included a special provision - Section 4(f) - which stipulated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other DOT agencies cannot approve the use of land from publicly owned parks, recreational areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historical sites unless the following conditions apply:

- There is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of land.
- The action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from use.

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation (DOT) Act of 1966 was set forth in Title 49 United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 1653(f). A similar provision was added to Title 23 U.S.C. Section 138, which applies only to the Federal-Aid Highway Program.

Since 1966, Section 4(f) has undergone several changes. The first of these changes was a 1968 amendment to Section 4(f)'s wording—an effort by lawmakers to reconcile the language of 49 U.S.C. Section 1653(f) and 23 U.S.C. Section 138. The wording in the two provisions was somewhat different; therefore, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1968 amended the wording in both sections to be consistent. The second change was a result of the 1983 recodification of the DOT Act, in which Section 4(f) became 49 U.S.C. Section 303.

In August 2005, [Section 6009\(a\) of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users \(SAFETEA-LU\)](#), made the first substantive revision to Section 4(f) since the 1966 US Department of Transportation Act. Section 6009, which amended existing Section 4(f) legislation at both Title 49 U.S.C Section 303 and Title 23 U.S.C. Section 138, simplified the process and approval of projects that have only de minimis impacts on lands impacted by Section 4(f). Under the new provisions, once the US DOT determines that a transportation use of Section 4(f) property results in a de minimis impact, analysis of avoidance alternatives are not required and the Section 4(f) evaluation process is complete. Section 6009 also required the US DOT to issue regulations that clarify the factors to be considered and the standards to be applied when determining if an alternative for avoiding the use of a section 4(f) property is feasible and prudent. On March 12, 2008 FHWA issued a [Final Rule](#) on Section 4(f), which clarifies the 4(f) approval process and simplifies its regulatory requirements. In addition, the Final Rule moves the Section 4(f) regulation to [23 CFR 774](#).

SAFETEA-LU Section 6009(c) requires that US DOT study the implementation of Section 6009 and the amendments to Section 4(f) and provide two reports to Congress, the Department of Interior, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The Phase I Report of the [SAFETEA-LU Section 6009 Implementation Study](#) was submitted to them on September 15, 2010.

For questions or feedback on this subject matter content, please contact [MaryAnn Naber](#). For general questions or web problems, please send feedback to the [web administrator](#).

23 CFR 774

Title 23: Highways (as of September 23, 2011)

PART 774—PARKS, RECREATION AREAS, WILDLIFE AND WATERFOWL REFUGES, AND HISTORIC SITES (SECTION 4(F))

§ 774.3 Section 4(f) approvals.

The Administration may not approve the use, as defined in §774.17, of Section 4(f) property unless a determination is made under paragraph (a) or (b) of this section.

(a) The Administration determines that:

(1) There is no feasible and prudent avoidance alternative, as defined in §774.17, to the use of land from the property; and

(2) The action includes all possible planning, as defined in §774.17, to minimize harm to the property resulting from such use; or

(b) The Administration determines that the use of the property, including any measure(s) to minimize harm (such as any avoidance, minimization, mitigation, or enhancement measures) committed to by the applicant, will have a *de minimis* impact, as defined in §774.17, on the property. [\[see below\]](#)

(c) If the analysis in paragraph (a)(1) of this section concludes that there is no feasible and prudent avoidance alternative, then the Administration may approve, from among the remaining alternatives that use Section 4(f) property, only the alternative that:

(1) Causes the least overall harm in light of the statute's preservation purpose. The least overall harm is determined by balancing the following factors:

(i) The ability to mitigate adverse impacts to each Section 4(f) property (including any measures that result in benefits to the property);

(ii) The relative severity of the remaining harm, after mitigation, to the protected activities, attributes, or features that qualify each Section 4(f) property for protection;

(iii) The relative significance of each Section 4(f) property;

(iv) The views of the official(s) with jurisdiction over each Section 4(f) property;

(v) The degree to which each alternative meets the purpose and need for the project;

(vi) After reasonable mitigation, the magnitude of any adverse impacts to resources not protected by Section 4(f); and

(vii) Substantial differences in costs among the alternatives.

(2) The alternative selected must include all possible planning, as defined in §774.17, to minimize harm to Section 4(f) property.

(d) Programmatic Section 4(f) evaluations are a time-saving procedural alternative to preparing individual Section 4(f) evaluations under paragraph (a) of this section for certain minor uses of Section 4(f) property. Programmatic Section 4(f) evaluations are developed by the Administration based on experience with a specific set of conditions that includes project type, degree of use and impact, and evaluation of avoidance alternatives.¹ An approved programmatic Section 4(f) evaluation may be relied upon to cover a particular project only if the specific conditions in the programmatic evaluation are met

¹ FHWA has issued five programmatic Section 4(f) evaluations: (1) Final Nationwide Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation and Determination for Federal-Aid Transportation Projects That Have a Net Benefit to a Section 4(f) Property; (2) Nationwide Section 4(f) Evaluations and Approvals for Federally-Aided Highway Projects With Minor Involvement With Public Parks, Recreation Lands, Wildlife and Waterfowl Refuges, and Historic Sites; (3) Final Nationwide Section 4(f) Evaluation and Approval for Federally-Aided Highway Projects With Minor Involvements With Historic Sites; (4) Historic Bridges; Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation and Approval; and (5) Section 4(f) Statement and Determination for Independent Bikeway or Walkway Construction Projects.

(1) The determination whether a programmatic Section 4(f) evaluation applies to the use of a specific Section 4(f) property shall be documented as specified in the applicable programmatic Section 4(f) evaluation.

(2) The Administration may develop additional programmatic Section 4(f) evaluations. Proposed new or revised programmatic Section 4(f) evaluations will be coordinated with the Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Housing and Urban Development, and published in the Federal Register for comment prior to being finalized. New or revised programmatic Section 4(f) evaluations shall be reviewed for legal sufficiency and approved by the Headquarters Office of the Administration.

(e) The coordination requirements in §774.5 must be completed before the Administration may make Section 4(f) approvals under this section. Requirements for the documentation and timing of Section 4(f) approvals are located in §§774.7 and 774.9, respectively.

[73 FR 13395, Mar. 12, 2008, as amended at 73 FR 31610, June 3, 2008]

§ 774.17 Definitions.

The definitions contained in 23 U.S.C. 101(a) are applicable to this part. In addition, the following definitions apply:

Administration. The FHWA or FTA, whichever is making the approval for the transportation program or project at issue. A reference herein to the Administration means the State when the State is functioning as the FHWA or FTA in carrying out responsibilities delegated or assigned to the State in accordance with 23 U.S.C. 325, 326, 327, or other applicable law.

All possible planning. All possible planning means that all reasonable measures identified in the Section 4(f) evaluation to minimize harm or mitigate for adverse impacts and effects must be included in the project.

(1) With regard to public parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, the measures may include (but are not limited to): design modifications or design goals; replacement of land or facilities of comparable value and function; or monetary compensation to enhance the remaining property or to mitigate the adverse impacts of the project in other ways.

(2) With regard to historic sites, the measures normally serve to preserve the historic activities, features, or attributes of the site as agreed by the Administration and the official(s) with jurisdiction over the Section 4(f) resource in accordance with the consultation process under 36 CFR part 800.

(3) In evaluating the reasonableness of measures to minimize harm under §774.3(a)(2), the Administration will consider the preservation purpose of the statute and:

(i) The views of the official(s) with jurisdiction over the Section 4(f) property;

(ii) Whether the cost of the measures is a reasonable public expenditure in light of the adverse impacts of the project on the Section 4(f) property and the benefits of the measure to the property, in accordance with §771.105(d) of this chapter; and

(iii) Any impacts or benefits of the measures to communities or environmental resources outside of the Section 4(f) property.

(4) All possible planning does not require analysis of feasible and prudent avoidance alternatives, since such analysis will have already occurred in the context of searching for feasible and prudent alternatives that avoid Section 4(f) properties altogether under §774.3(a)(1), or is not necessary in the case of a *de minimis* impact determination under §774.3(b).

(5) A *de minimis* impact determination under §774.3(b) subsumes the requirement for all possible planning to minimize harm by reducing the impacts on the Section 4(f) property to a *de minimis* level.

Applicant. The Federal, State, or local government authority, proposing a transportation project, that the Administration works with to conduct environmental studies and prepare environmental documents. For transportation actions implemented by the Federal government on Federal lands, the Administration or the Federal land management agency may take on the responsibilities of the applicant described herein.

CE. Refers to a Categorical Exclusion, which denotes an action with no individual or cumulative significant environmental effect pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.4 and §771.117 of this chapter; unusual circumstances are taken into account in making categorical exclusion determinations.

De minimis impact. (1) For historic sites, *de minimis* impact means that the Administration has determined, in accordance with 36 CFR part 800 that no historic property is affected by the project or that the project will have “no adverse effect” on the historic property in question.

(2) For parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, a *de minimis* impact is one that will not adversely affect the features, attributes, or activities qualifying the property for protection under Section 4(f).

EA. Refers to an Environmental Assessment, which is a document prepared pursuant to 40 CFR parts 1500–1508 and §771.119 of this title for a proposed project that is not categorically excluded but for which an EIS is not clearly required.

EIS. Refers to an Environmental Impact Statement, which is a document prepared pursuant to NEPA, 40 CFR parts 1500–1508, and §§771.123 and 771.125 of this chapter for a proposed project that is likely to cause significant impacts on the environment.

Feasible and prudent avoidance alternative. (1) A feasible and prudent avoidance alternative avoids using Section 4(f) property and does not cause other severe problems of a magnitude that substantially outweighs the importance of protecting the Section 4(f) property. In assessing the importance of protecting the Section 4(f) property, it is appropriate to consider the relative value of the resource to the preservation purpose of the statute.

(2) An alternative is not feasible if it cannot be built as a matter of sound engineering judgment.

(3) An alternative is not prudent if:

- (i) It compromises the project to a degree that it is unreasonable to proceed with the project in light of its stated purpose and need;
- (ii) It results in unacceptable safety or operational problems;
- (iii) After reasonable mitigation, it still causes:
 - (A) Severe social, economic, or environmental impacts;
 - (B) Severe disruption to established communities;
 - (C) Severe disproportionate impacts to minority or low income populations; or
 - (D) Severe impacts to environmental resources protected under other Federal statutes;
- (iv) It results in additional construction, maintenance, or operational costs of an extraordinary magnitude;
- (v) It causes other unique problems or unusual factors; or
- (vi) It involves multiple factors in paragraphs (3)(i) through (3)(v) of this definition, that while individually minor, cumulatively cause unique problems or impacts of extraordinary magnitude.

FONSI. Refers to a Finding of No Significant Impact prepared pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.13 and §771.121 of this chapter.

Historic site. For purposes of this part, the term “historic site” includes any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register. The term includes properties of traditional religious and cultural importance to an Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization that are included in, or are eligible for inclusion in, the National Register.

Official(s) with jurisdiction. (1) In the case of historic properties, the official with jurisdiction is the SHPO for the State wherein the property is located or, if the property is located on tribal land, the THPO. If the property is located on tribal land but the Indian tribe has not assumed the responsibilities of the SHPO as provided for in the National Historic Preservation Act, then a representative designated by such Indian tribe shall be recognized as an official with jurisdiction in addition to the SHPO. When the ACHP is involved in a consultation concerning a property under Section 106 of the NHPA, the ACHP is also an official with jurisdiction over that resource for purposes of this part. When the Section 4(f) property is a National Historic Landmark, the National Park Service is also an official with jurisdiction over that resource for purposes of this part.

(2) In the case of public parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, the official(s) with jurisdiction are the official(s) of the agency or agencies that own or

administer the property in question and who are empowered to represent the agency on matters related to the property.

(3) In the case of portions of Wild and Scenic Rivers to which Section 4(f) applies, the official(s) with jurisdiction are the official(s) of the Federal agency or agencies that own or administer the affected portion of the river corridor in question. For State administered, federally designated rivers (section 2(a)(ii) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 16 U.S.C. 1273(a)(ii)), the officials with jurisdiction include both the State agency designated by the respective Governor and the Secretary of the Interior.

ROD. Refers to a Record of Decision prepared pursuant to 40 CFR 1505.2 and §771.127 of this chapter.

Section 4(f) evaluation. Refers to the documentation prepared to support the granting of a Section 4(f) approval under §774.3(a), unless preceded by the word “programmatic.” A “programmatic Section 4(f) evaluation” is the documentation prepared pursuant to §774.3(d) that authorizes subsequent project-level Section 4(f) approvals as described therein.

Section 4(f) Property. Section 4(f) property means publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local significance, or land of an historic site of national, State, or local significance.

Use. Except as set forth in §§774.11 and 774.13, a “use” of Section 4(f) property occurs:

- (1) When land is permanently incorporated into a transportation facility;
- (2) When there is a temporary occupancy of land that is adverse in terms of the statute's preservation purpose as determined by the criteria in §774.13(d); or
- (3) When there is a constructive use of a Section 4(f) property as determined by the criteria in §774.15.