



## Office of the Secretary

14 CFR Part 300, 302, 399

49 CFR Part 1, 5, 7, 106, 389, 553, 601

[Docket No. DOT-OST-2025-0007]

RIN 2105-AF32

### Administrative Rulemaking, Guidance, and Enforcement Procedures

**AGENCY:** Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).

**ACTION:** Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM).

**SUMMARY:** This NPRM proposes to reinstate and expound upon procedural reforms for the Department’s rulemakings, guidance documents, and enforcement actions rescinded by a final rule published by the Department on April 2, 2021, “Administrative Rulemaking, Guidance, and Enforcement Procedures.” Accordingly, this proposed rule would revise and update the Department’s internal policies and procedures relating to the issuance of rulemaking documents. In addition, this NPRM proposes updates to the Department’s procedural requirements governing the review and clearance of guidance documents, and the initiation and conduct of enforcement actions, including administrative enforcement proceedings and judicial enforcement actions brought in Federal court.

**DATES:** Comments must be received by [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. DOT will consider late-filed comments to the extent practicable.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- *Federal Rulemaking Portal:* <https://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments.

- *Mail:* Docket Management System; U.S. Department of Transportation, Docket Operations, M-30, Ground Floor, Room W12-140, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20590-0001.
- *Hand Delivery:* U.S. Department of Transportation, Docket Operations, M-30, Ground Floor, Room W12-140, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20590-0001 between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.
- *Instructions:* You must include the agency name and docket number DOT-OST-2025-007 or the Regulatory Identification Number (RIN 2105-AF32) for the rulemaking at the beginning of your comment. All comments received will be posted without change to <https://www.regulations.gov>, including any personal information provided.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Jill Laptosky, Office of Regulation and Legislation, Office of the General Counsel, 202-493-0308, [Jill.Laptosky@dot.gov](mailto:Jill.Laptosky@dot.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

The Department proposes to reinstate procedural reforms to its policies and procedures governing the issuance of rulemakings and guidance documents, and the initiation and conduct of enforcement actions repealed by a final rule published by the Department on April 2, 2021, “Administrative Rulemaking, Guidance, and Enforcement Procedures” (86 FR 17292), which the Department issued in response to two Executive Orders that were revoked by the President in Executive Order 14148, “Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions” (January 20, 2025).<sup>1</sup> The reforms proposed in this NPRM set forth (1) updated policies and procedures governing the development and issuance of regulations by the Department’s operating administrations and components of

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Order No. 14148, “Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions,” 90 FR 8237 (January 28, 2025).

the Office of the Secretary; (2) enhanced procedures for the review and clearance of guidance documents; and (3) improved procedural requirements governing the Department's administrative enforcement actions and judicial enforcement actions brought in Federal court, including express rights of regulated parties to enforce the protections proposed in this NPRM through administrative proceedings.

In rescinding these procedures in 2021, the Department argued that many of the provisions that would be reinstated through this action were already contained in existing internal procedures, could be accomplished by internal directives as necessary and appropriate, and could slow important regulatory efforts. The Department has reconsidered these justifications for the 2021 rulemaking and supports the recodification of the procedures. While many of the procedures contained in this notice of proposed rulemaking are contained in internal procedures, they are not found in one comprehensive and consolidated source. Codifying the Department's procedures concerning enforcement and the development and issuance of rulemaking and guidance documents into the Code of Federal Regulations leaves no doubt to departmental staff and regulated entities on the expectations regarding the procedural safeguards and expectations governing the Department's administrative actions. In addition, the Department finds that any administrative delay associated with these procedures would not only be minimal, based on past practice with these procedures, but also would be outweighed by the Department's production of higher quality rulemaking, guidance documents, and enforcement actions. The Department produces its best work when it is informed by robust public input, the best available data, and sound law and economics, and these procedures increase opportunities to receive those essential building blocks for good governance that would strengthen the overall quality and fairness of the Department's administrative actions. In addition, the Department proposes to revise the existing policies and procedures because they are inconsistent with current departmental and

Administration policy, and do not consider the costs and implications of government regulation and intervention adequately.

### **Rulemaking Procedures**

The procedures set forth in this proposed rule would apply to all phases of the Department's rulemaking process, from advance notices of proposed rulemakings to the promulgation of final rules, including substantive rules, rules of interpretation, and rules prescribing agency procedures and practice requirements applicable to outside parties. The proposal outlines regulatory policies, such as ensuring that there are no more regulations than necessary, that where they impose burdens, regulations are narrowly tailored to address identified market failures or statutory mandates, and that they specify performance objectives when appropriate.

The proposal would reestablish the Department's Regulatory Reform Task Force and assign it an important role in the development of the Department's regulatory portfolio and ongoing review of regulations. As proposed, the Regulatory Reform Task Force would be chaired by the Regulatory Reform Officer and tasked with evaluating proposed and existing regulations and making recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation regarding their promulgation, repeal, replacement, or modification, consistent with applicable law. The proposed rule outlines the structure, membership, and responsibilities of the Regulatory Reform Task Force at proposed 49 CFR 5.9.

This NPRM also proposes procedures the Department would follow for all stages of the rulemaking process, including the initiation of new rulemakings, the development of economic analyses, the contents of rulemaking documents, their review and clearance, and the opportunity for fair and sufficient public participation. The proposed rule also updates the Department's policies regarding contacts with outside parties during the rulemaking process as well as the ongoing review of existing regulations.

Consistent with the current Administration and Department regulatory philosophy that rules imposing the greatest costs on the public should be subject to heightened procedural requirements, the NPRM proposes reinstating enhanced procedures for economically significant and high-impact rulemakings that were rescinded by the 2021 amendments. Economically significant rulemakings are defined as those rules that would result in a total annualized cost on the U.S. economy of \$100 million or more, or a total net loss of at least 75,000 full-time jobs in the United States over 5 years. These changes can be found at proposed 49 CFR 5.17(a)(1). High-impact rulemakings would result in a total annualized cost on the U.S. economy of \$500 million or more, or a total net loss of at least 250,000 full-time jobs in the United States over 5 years as set forth in proposed 49 CFR 5.17(a)(2). Under this proposal, these costly rulemakings would be subject to enhanced rulemaking procedures, such as advance notices of proposed rulemakings and formal hearings. The procedures for economically significant and high-impact rulemakings are provided at proposed 49 CFR 5.17. DOT invites public comment on whether the thresholds chosen for net job losses at the economically significant and high-impact levels are the most appropriate or whether DOT should consider a different number. DOT also requests any data or studies that show net job loss estimates in connection with past DOT rulemakings.

The NPRM proposes to retain and revise some procedures. For example, the Department's existing procedures for the filing of rulemaking petitions would be retained but revised to clarify the public's opportunities to petition the Department. As amended in 2021, the Department's procedures removed references to retrospective reviews of existing rules and the modification or rescission of guidance documents but noted that the Department would nevertheless continue to accept those type of petitions in addition to petitions for rulemakings and exemptions. This proposal would amend the procedures to reference explicitly again the public's ability to file petitions for retrospective regulatory

reviews of existing rules and the modification or rescission of guidance documents. The Department also proposes to reinstate the enhanced policies governing the issuance of direct final rules.<sup>2</sup>

This rulemaking would update references throughout DOT regulations as needed to account for updated internal procedures. This proposed rule would also revise the regulations at 14 CFR 300.2 to delete a reference to rescinded DOT Orders 2100.6 and 2100.6A, and replace it with DOT Order 2100.6B, and update the procedures for petitions for rulemakings found in 14 CFR 302.16 to provide explicitly that interested parties may file petitions for the Department to perform retrospective reviews as noted above. Other minor conforming amendments are proposed for our regulations at 49 CFR parts 1 and 7. Finally, this NPRM proposes to reinstate the DOT policy regarding contacts with outside parties during the rulemaking process, which can be found at proposed 5 CFR 5.19.

### **Guidance Document Procedures**

This NPRM proposes to reinstate into the Code of Federal Regulations at 49 CFR part 5, subpart C, policies and procedures that would apply to all guidance documents, which the Department defines as an agency statement of general applicability, intended to have future effect on the behavior of regulated parties, that sets forth a policy on a statutory, regulatory, or technical issue, or an interpretation of a statute or regulation, but which is not intended to have the force or effect of law in its own right and is not otherwise required by statute to satisfy the rulemaking procedures of the Administrative Procedure Act. This proposal would reinstate procedures regarding the review and clearance of guidance documents rescinded with the 2021 amendments. The proposed

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<sup>2</sup> This aspect of the proposal would also amend the direct final rule procedures for the following operating administrations: Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

procedures would ensure that all guidance documents receive legal review and, when appropriate, Office of the Secretary review. The proposal would also require that, before guidance documents are issued, they must be reviewed to ensure they are written in plain language and do not impose any substantive legal requirements above and beyond statute or regulation. In addition, if a guidance document purports to describe, approve, or recommend specific conduct that stretches beyond what is required by existing law, the proposal would require that it include a clear and prominent statement effectively stating that the contents of the guidance document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way, and the guidance document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies. The proposed procedures for the review and clearance of guidance documents can be found at proposed 49 CFR 5.27, 5.29, and 5.35.

In recognition of the fact that, even though guidance documents are not legally binding, they could nevertheless have a substantial economic impact on regulated entities that alter their conduct to conform to the guidance, this proposed rule would require a good faith cost assessment of the impact of the guidance document. This policy is outlined at proposed 49 CFR 5.33.

This proposed rule also seeks to reinstate other policies and procedures rescinded by the 2021 amendments, such as those describing when guidance documents are subject to notice and an opportunity for public comment and how they will be made available to the public after issuance. See proposed 49 CFR 5.31 and 5.39. These proposed procedures are intended to ensure that the public has access to guidance documents issued by the Department and a fair and sufficient opportunity to comment on guidance documents when appropriate and practicable. The proposed rule also provides a process for interested parties to petition the Department for the withdrawal or modification of guidance documents at proposed 49 CFR 5.43. It would also reinstate a requirement that

the comment period for significant guidance documents be at least 30 days, except when the agency for good cause finds that notice and public comment are impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest. See proposed 49 CFR 5.41.

### **Enforcement Procedures**

This proposed rule would reinstate into the Code of Federal Regulations at 49 CFR part 5, subpart D, policies and procedures rescinded by the 2021 amendments. The proposed policies clarify the requirements governing enforcement actions initiated by DOT, including administrative enforcement proceedings and judicial enforcement actions brought in Federal court. The proposed policies establish standard operating procedures within the Department's various enforcement programs and are intended to ensure that DOT enforcement actions satisfy principles of due process and remain lawful, reasonable, and consistent with current Departmental and Administration policy.

The proposed rule consolidates these procedural requirements into one centralized location. The Department is committed to proper due process in enforcement proceedings and encourages regulated entities to contact a supervisor or the U.S. Small Business Administration, when appropriate, with any concerns arising from our duty to review compliance with the Department's regulations related to our authority and jurisdiction. In addition, the Department is proposing to add certain new provisions, including provisions conferring express rights on regulated parties to enforce the protections of the rule through administrative proceedings. As proposed, these proceedings include the opportunity for the subject of a DOT enforcement action to petition the General Counsel (with potential for appeal to the Secretary) for a determination that responsible DOT personnel violated provisions of this rule with respect to the enforcement action. The proposed remedies for the violations include the removal of the enforcement team from the particular matter, and, where appropriate, a recommendation from the General Counsel to the relevant agency decisionmaker for appropriate administrative discipline of personnel



found to have violated the rule; the elimination of certain issues or the exclusion of certain evidence or the directing of certain factual findings in the course of the enforcement action; and a requirement to restart the enforcement action again from the beginning or recommence the action from an earlier point in the proceeding.

With these changes, the proposed rule would ensure that DOT provides affected parties appropriate due process in all enforcement actions, that the Department's conduct is fair and free of bias and concludes with a well-documented decision as to violations alleged and any violations found to have been committed, that the penalties or corrective actions imposed for such violations are reasonable, and that proper steps needed to ensure future compliance were undertaken by the regulated party. It is in the public interest and fundamental to good government that the Department carry out its enforcement responsibilities in a fair and just manner.

This proposed rule incorporates requirements related to cooperative information sharing, the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness (SBREFA) Act, and ensuring reasonable administrative inspections.

### **Administrative Procedure**

Under the Administrative Procedure Act, an agency may waive the normal notice and comment procedures if the action is a rule of agency organization, procedure, or practice. See 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(A). The Department did not request comment for the 2021 amendments because that rule merely incorporated existing internal procedures applicable to the Department's administrative procedures into the Code of Federal Regulations. However, because this proposed rule confers express rights on regulated parties to enforce the protections of the rule through administrative proceedings, the Department seeks public comment on this proposal.

Before these proposed policies and procedures are adopted as final regulations, consideration will be given to comments that are submitted timely to the Department as

prescribed in the preamble under the **ADDRESSES** section. The Department seeks comment on all aspects of this proposal. Any comments submitted will be made available at <https://www.regulations.gov> or upon request.

## **Rulemaking Analyses and Notices**

### *A. Executive Order 12866 and DOT Regulatory Policies and Procedures*

This proposed rulemaking is a significant regulatory action under Executive Order 12866. However, the Department does not anticipate that this rulemaking will have a direct economic impact on regulated entities. This is a rule of agency procedure and practice. The NPRM describes the proposed updates and amendments to the Department's internal procedures for the promulgation and processing of rulemaking and guidance documents, and for initiating and conducting enforcement proceedings. The Department proposes to adopt these internal procedures as part of its regulatory reform initiative and has not incurred any additional resource costs in doing so. The adoption of these practices will be accomplished through a realignment of existing agency resources, and it is anticipated that the public will benefit from the resulting increase in efficiency and transparency in delivery of government services.

This proposed rule would establish procedures on rulemaking as a comprehensive set of regulations that will increase accountability, ensure more robust public participation, and strengthen the overall quality and fairness of the Department's administrative actions. The Department has a long history of Federal leadership in adopting good regulatory practices, and this action is consistent with that history. While it is anticipated that the direct impact of this rule will be experienced internally to the Department in the form of streamlined and clarified regulatory processes, additional secondary and positive impacts due to improved decision making are expected.

Regulated entities and the public will continue to benefit from these enhanced procedures through increased agency deliberations and more opportunities to comment

on rulemakings and guidance documents. With regard to the enforcement procedures, we anticipate that there will be no additional costs on regulated entities, as individual regulations already published by DOT agencies account for current costs of compliance. This final rule will simply clarify the internal DOT procedural requirements necessary to ensure fair and reasonable enforcement processes where violations are alleged to have occurred by the regulated community.

*B. Executive Order 14192 (Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation)*

This proposed rule is not an EO 14192 (90 FR 9065, January 31, 2025) regulatory action because this rulemaking is related to agency organization, management, or personnel.

*C. Regulatory Flexibility Act*

The Regulatory Flexibility Act (Pub. L. 96–354, 5 U.S.C. 601–612) (RFA) imposes certain requirements with respect to Federal rules that are subject to the notice and comment requirements of section 553(b) of the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 551 *et seq.*) and that are likely to have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. Unless an agency determines that a proposal will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities, section 603 of the RFA requires the agency to present an initial regulatory flexibility analysis (IRFA) of the proposed rule. An IRFA is not required if the agency head certifies that a rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities (5 U.S.C. 605).

While most of this proposed rule’s provisions concern internal management of the Department, one provision of it would confer express rights on regulated parties, some of

whom are small entities, to enforce the protections of the rule through administrative proceedings. The Department expects the impact of that provision would be entirely beneficial to small entities. Accordingly, I hereby certify that this rulemaking would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities.

*D. Executive Order 13132 (Federalism)*

Executive Order 13132 requires agencies to ensure meaningful and timely input by State and local officials in the development of regulatory policies that may have a substantial, direct effect on the States, on the relationship between the national government and the States, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government. This action has been analyzed in accordance with the principles and criteria contained in Executive Order 13132 (August 4, 1999), and DOT has determined that this action will not have a substantial direct effect or federalism implications on the States and would not preempt any State law or regulation or affect the States' ability to discharge traditional State governmental functions. Therefore, consultation with the States is not necessary.

*E. Executive Order 13175*

This proposed rule has been analyzed in accordance with the principles and criteria contained in Executive Order 13175, "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments." Because this rulemaking does not significantly or uniquely affect the communities of the Indian tribal governments or impose substantial direct compliance costs on them, the funding and consultation requirements of Executive Order 13175 do not apply.

*F. Paperwork Reduction Act*

The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) (44 U.S.C. 3501, *et seq.*) requires that DOT consider the impact of paperwork and other information collection burdens imposed on the public and, under the provisions of PRA section 3507(d), obtain approval

from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for each collection of information it conducts, sponsors, or requires through regulations. The DOT has determined there are no new information collection requirements associated with this final rule.

*G. National Environmental Policy Act*

The agency has analyzed the environmental impacts of this action pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) and has determined that it is categorically excluded pursuant to DOT Order 5610.1C, “Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts” (44 FR 56420, October 1, 1979). Categorical exclusions are actions identified in an agency’s NEPA implementing procedures that do not normally have a significant impact on the environment and therefore do not require either an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS). Paragraph 4(c)(5) of DOT Order 5610.1C incorporates by reference the categorical exclusions for all DOT Operating Administrations. This action is covered by the categorical exclusion listed in the Federal Transit Administration's implementing procedures, “[p]lanning and administrative activities that do not involve or lead directly to construction, such as: . . . promulgation of rules, regulations, directives. . .” 23 CFR 771.118(c)(4) and Federal Highway Administration’s implementing procedures, “[p]romulgation of rules, regulations, and directives.” 23 CFR 771.117(c)(20). The purpose of this rulemaking is to update the Department’s administrative procedures for rulemaking, guidance documents, and enforcement actions. The agency does not anticipate any environmental impacts, and there are no extraordinary circumstances present in connection with this rulemaking.

**Regulation Identifier Number**

A regulation identifier number (RIN) is assigned to each regulatory action listed in the Unified Agenda of Federal Regulations. The Regulatory Information Service Center publishes the Unified Agenda in the spring and fall of each year. The RIN contained in

the heading of this document can be used to cross reference this action with the Unified Agenda.

### **List of Subjects**

#### **14 CFR Part 300**

Administrative practice and procedure, Conflicts of interests.

#### **14 CFR Part 302**

Administrative practice and procedure, Air carriers, Airports, Postal Service.

#### **14 CFR Part 399**

Consumer protection, Policies, Rulemaking proceedings, Enforcement, Unfair or deceptive practices.

#### **49 CFR Part 1**

Authority delegations (Government agencies), Organization and functions (Government agencies).

#### **49 CFR Part 5**

Administrative practice and procedure.

#### **49 CFR Part 7**

Freedom of information, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

#### **49 CFR Part 106**

Administrative practice and procedure, Hazardous materials transportation.

#### **49 CFR Part 389**

Administrative practice and procedure, Highway safety, Motor carriers, Motor vehicle safety.

#### **49 CFR Part 553**

Administrative practice and procedure, Motor vehicle safety.

#### **49 CFR Part 601**

Authority delegations (Government agencies), Freedom of information, Organization and

functions (Government agencies).

Issued in Washington, D.C.

Sean Duffy,  
Secretary.

In consideration of the foregoing, the Office of the Secretary of Transportation proposes to amend 14 CFR parts 300, 302, and 399, and 49 CFR parts 1, 5, 7, 106, 389, 553, and 601, as follows:

**Title 14—Aeronautics and Space**

**PART 300—RULES OF CONDUCT IN DOT PROCEEDINGS UNDER THIS  
CHAPTER**

1. The authority citation for part 300 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. subtitle I and chapters 401, 411, 413, 415, 417, 419, 421, 449, 461, 463, and 465.

2. Amend § 300.2 by revising paragraph (b)(4)(ii) to read as follows:

**§ 300.2 Prohibited Communications.**

\* \* \* \* \*

(b) \* \* \*

(4) \* \* \*

(ii) A rulemaking proceeding involving a hearing as described in paragraph (b)(4)(i) of this section or an exemption proceeding covered by this chapter. (Other rulemaking proceedings are covered by the ex parte communication policies of DOT Order 2100.6B and 49 CFR 5.19.)

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## **PART 302—RULES OF PRACTICE IN PROCEEDINGS**

3. The authority citation for part 302 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 39 U.S.C. 5402; 42 U.S.C. 4321, 49 U.S.C. Subtitle I and Chapters 401, 411, 413, 415, 417, 419, 461, 463, and 471.

4. Revise § 302.16 to read as follows:

### **§ 302.16        Petitions for rulemaking.**

Any interested person may petition the Department for the issuance, amendment, modification, or repeal of any regulation or guidance document, or for the Department to perform a retrospective review of an existing rule, subject to the provisions of part 5, Rulemaking Procedures, of the Office of the Secretary regulations (49 CFR 5.13(c) and 5.43).

## **PART 399—STATEMENTS OF GENERAL POLICY**

5. The authority citation for part 399 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. 40113(a), 41712, 46106, 46107, and 42305.

6. Amend § 399.75 by revising paragraph (b) introductory text to read as follows:

### **§ 399.75 Rulemakings relating to unfair and deceptive practices.**

\* \* \* \* \*

(b) Procedural requirements. When issuing a proposed regulation under paragraph (a) of this section that is defined as high impact or economically significant within the meaning of 49 CFR 5.17(a), the Department shall follow the procedural requirements set forth in 49 CFR 5.17. When issuing a proposed regulation under paragraph (a) of this section that is not defined as high impact or economically significant within the meaning of 49 CFR 5.17(a), unless the regulation is specifically required by statute, the Department shall adhere to the following procedural requirements:

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Title 49—Transportation**



## **PART 1—ORGANIZATION AND DELEGATION OF POWERS AND DUTIES**

7. The authority citation for part 1 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. 322.

8. Amend § 1.27 by revising paragraph (e) to read as follows:

### **§ 1.27 Delegations to the General Counsel.**

\* \* \* \* \*

(e) Respond to petitions for rulemaking or petitions for exemptions in accordance with 49 CFR 5.13(c)(2) (Processing of petitions), and notify petitioners of decisions in accordance with 49 CFR 5.13(c)(4)(v).

\* \* \* \* \*

9. Revise part 5 to read as follows:

## **PART 5—ADMINISTRATIVE RULEMAKING, GUIDANCE, AND**

## **ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURES**

### **Subpart A—GENERAL**

5.1 Applicability.

### **Subpart B—Rulemaking Procedures**

5.3 General.

5.5 Regulatory policies.

5.7 Responsibilities.

5.9 Regulatory Reform Task Force.

5.11 Initiating a rulemaking.

5.13 General rulemaking procedures.

5.15 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions (Unified Agenda).

5.17 Special procedures for economically significant and high-impact rulemakings.

5.19 Public contacts in informal rulemaking.

5.21 Policy updates and revisions.

## **Subpart C—Guidance Procedures**

- 5.25 General.
- 5.27 Review and clearance by Chief Counsels and the Office of the General Counsel.
- 5.29 Requirements for clearance.
- 5.31 Public access to effective guidance documents.
- 5.33 Good faith cost estimates.
- 5.35 Approved procedures for guidance documents identified as “significant” or “otherwise of importance to the Department’s interests.”
- 5.37 Definitions of “significant guidance document” and guidance documents that are “otherwise of importance to the Department’s interests.”
- 5.39 Designation procedures.
- 5.41 Notice-and-comment procedures.
- 5.43 Petitions for guidance
- 5.45 Rescinded guidance.
- 5.47 Exigent circumstances.
- 5.49 Reports to Congress and GAO.

## **Subpart D—Enforcement Procedures**

- 5.53 General.
- 5.55 Enforcement attorney responsibilities.
- 5.57 Definitions.
- 5.59 Enforcement policy generally.
- 5.61 Investigative functions.
- 5.63 Clear legal foundation.
- 5.65 Proper exercise of prosecutorial and enforcement discretion.
- 5.67 Duty to review for legal sufficiency.
- 5.69 Fair notice.

- 5.71 Separation of functions.
- 5.73 Avoiding bias.
- 5.75 Representation of regulated parties.
- 5.77 Formal enforcement adjudications.
- 5.79 Informal enforcement adjudications.
- 5.81 The hearing record.
- 5.83 Contacts with the public.
- 5.85 Duty to disclose exculpatory evidence.
- 5.87 Use of guidance documents in administrative enforcement cases.
- 5.89 Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).
- 5.91 Duty to adjudicate proceedings promptly.
- 5.93 Termination of investigation.
- 5.95 Initiation of additional investigations.
- 5.97 Agency decisions.
- 5.99 Settlements.
- 5.101 OGC approval required for certain settlement terms.
- 5.103 Basis for civil penalties and disclosures thereof.
- 5.105 Publication of decisions.
- 5.107 Coordination with the Office of Inspector General on criminal matters.
- 5.109 Standard operating procedures.
- 5.111 Cooperative information sharing.
- 5.113 Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act (SBREFA).
- 5.115 Referral of matters for judicial enforcement.
- 5.117 Publicly available decisional quality and efficiency metrics.
- 5.119 Enforcement rights.

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. 322(a).

## **Subpart A—General**

### **§ 5.1           Applicability.**

- (a) This part prescribes general procedures that apply to rulemakings, guidance documents, and enforcement actions of the U.S. Department of Transportation (the Department or DOT), including each of its operating administrations (OAs) and all components of the Office of Secretary of Transportation (OST).
- (b) For purposes of this part, *Administrative Procedure Act (APA)* is the Federal statute, codified in scattered sections of chapters 5 and 7 of title 5, United States Code, that governs procedures for agency rulemaking and adjudication and provides for judicial review of final agency actions.

## **Subpart B—Rulemaking Procedures**

### **§ 5.3           General.**

- (a) This subpart governs all DOT employees, contractors, and others subject to supervision and control by DOT officials involved with all phases of rulemaking at DOT.
- (b) Unless otherwise required by statute, this subpart applies to all DOT regulations, which shall include all rules of general applicability promulgated by any components of the Department that affect the rights or obligations of persons outside the Department, including substantive rules, rules of interpretation, and rules prescribing agency procedures and practice requirements applicable to outside parties.
- (c) Except as provided in paragraph (d) of this section, this subpart applies to all regulatory actions intended to lead to the promulgation of a rule and any other generally applicable agency directives, circulars, or pronouncements concerning matters within the jurisdiction of an OA or component of OST that are intended to have the force or effect of law or that are required by statute to satisfy the rulemaking procedures specified in 5 U.S.C. 553 or 5 U.S.C. 556.
- (d) This subpart does not apply to:

- (1) Regulations issued with respect to a military or foreign affairs function of the United States;
- (2) Rules addressed solely to internal agency management or personnel matters;
- (3) Regulations related to Federal Government procurement; or
- (4) Guidance documents, which are not intended to, and do not in fact, have the force or effect of law for parties outside of the Department, and which are governed by part 5, subpart C of this chapter.

### **§ 5.5 Regulatory policies.**

The policies in paragraphs (a) through (j) of this section govern the development and issuance of regulations at DOT:

- (a) There should be no more regulations than necessary. In considering whether to propose a new regulation, policy makers should consider whether the specific problem to be addressed requires agency action, whether existing rules (including standards incorporated by reference) have created or contributed to the problem and should be revised or eliminated, and whether any other reasonable alternatives exist that obviate the need for a new regulation.
- (b) All regulations must be supported by statutory authority and consistent with the Constitution.
- (c) Where they rest on scientific, technical, economic, or other specialized factual information, regulations should be supported by the best available evidence and data.
- (d) Regulations should be written in plain English, should be straightforward, and should be clear.
- (e) Regulations should be technologically neutral, and, to the extent feasible, they should specify performance objectives, rather than prescribing specific conduct that regulated entities must adopt.

(f) Regulations should be designed to minimize burdens and reduce barriers to market entry whenever possible, consistent with the effective promotion of safety. Where they impose burdens, regulations should be narrowly tailored to address identified market failures or specific statutory mandates.

(g) Unless required by law or compelling safety need, regulations should not be issued unless their benefits are expected to exceed their costs. For each new significant regulation issued, agencies must identify at least ten existing regulatory burdens to be revoked.

(h) Once issued, regulations and other agency actions should be reviewed periodically and revised to ensure that they continue to meet the needs they were designed to address and remain cost-effective and cost-justified.

(i) Full public participation should be encouraged in rulemaking actions, primarily through written comment and engagement in public meetings. Public participation in the rulemaking process should be conducted and documented, as appropriate, to ensure that the public is given adequate knowledge of substantive information relied upon in the rulemaking process.

(j) The process for issuing a rule should be sensitive to the economic impact of the rule; thus, the promulgation of rules that are expected to impose greater economic costs should be accompanied by additional procedural protections and avenues for public participation.

## **§ 5.7 Responsibilities.**

(a) The Secretary of Transportation supervises the overall planning, direction, and control of the Department's Regulatory Agenda; approves regulatory documents for issuance and submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under Executive Order (E.O.) 12866, "Regulatory Planning and Review" (Oct. 4, 1993); identifies an approximate regulatory budget for each fiscal year as required by E.O.

14192, “Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation” (Jan. 31, 2025); establishes the Department’s Regulatory Reform Task Force (RRTF); and designates the members of the RRTF and the Department’s Regulatory Reform Officer (RRO) in accordance with E.O. 13777, “Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda” (Feb. 24, 2017).

(b) The Deputy Secretary of Transportation assists the Secretary in overseeing overall planning, direction, and control of the Department’s Regulatory Agenda and approves the initiation of regulatory action, as defined in E.O. 12866, by the OAs and components of OST. Unless otherwise designated by the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary serves as the Chair of the Leadership Council of the RRTF and as the Department’s RRO.

(c) The General Counsel of DOT is the chief legal officer of the Department with final authority on all questions of law for the Department, including the OAs and components of OST; serves on the Leadership Council of the RRTF; and serves as the Department’s Regulatory Policy Officer pursuant to section 6(a)(2) of E.O. 12866.

(d) The RRO of DOT is delegated authority by the Secretary to oversee the implementation of the Department’s regulatory reform initiatives and policies to ensure the effective implementation of regulatory reforms, consistent with E.O. 13777 and applicable law.

(e) DOT’s noncareer Deputy General Counsel is a member of the RRTF and serves as the Chair of the RRTF Working Group.

(f) DOT’s Assistant General Counsel for Regulation and Legislation supervises the Office of Regulation and Legislation within the Office of the General Counsel (OGC); oversees the process for DOT rulemakings; provides legal advice on compliance with APA and other administrative law requirements and executive orders, related OMB directives, and other procedures for rulemaking and guidance documents; circulates regulatory documents for departmental review and seeks concurrence from reviewing officials; submits regulatory documents to the Secretary for approval before issuance or

submission to OMB; coordinates with the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) within OMB on the designation and review of regulatory documents and the preparation of the Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions; publishes the monthly internet report on significant rulemakings; and serves as a member of the RRTF Working Group.

(g) Pursuant to delegations from the Secretary under part 1 of this title, OA Administrators and Secretarial officers exercise the Secretary's rulemaking authority under 49 U.S.C. 322(a), and they have responsibility for ensuring that the regulatory data included in the New Environment for Information and Leadership on Rules (NEIL Rules), or a successor data management system, for their OAs and OST components is accurate and is updated at least once a month.

(h) OA Chief Counsels supervise the legal staffs of the OAs; interpret and provide guidance on all statutes, regulations, executive orders, and other legal requirements governing the operation and authorities of their respective OAs; and review all rulemaking documents for legal sufficiency.

(i) Each OA or OST component responsible for rulemaking will have a Regulatory Quality Officer, designated by the Administrator or Secretarial office head, who will have responsibility for reviewing all rulemaking documents for plain language, technical soundness, and general quality.

## **§ 5.9 Regulatory Reform Task Force.**

(a) *Purpose.* The Regulatory Reform Task Force (RRTF) evaluates proposed and existing regulations and makes recommendations to the Secretary regarding their promulgation, repeal, replacement, or modification, consistent with applicable law, E.O. 14192, E.O. 13777, and E.O. 12866.

(b) *Structure.* The RRTF comprises a Leadership Council and a Working Group.



(1) The Working Group coordinates with leadership in the Secretarial offices and OAs, reviews and develops recommendations for regulatory and deregulatory action, and presents recommendations to the Leadership Council.

(2) The Leadership Council reviews the Working Group's recommendations and advises the Secretary.

(c) *Membership.* (1) The Leadership Council comprises the following:

(i) The Regulatory Reform Officer (RRO), who serves as Chair;

(ii) The Department's Regulatory Policy Officer, designated under section 6(a)(2) of E.O. 12866;

(iii) A representative from the Office of the Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy;

(iv) At least three additional senior agency officials as determined by the Secretary.

(2) The Working Group comprises the following:

(i) At least one senior agency official from the Office of the General Counsel, including at a minimum the Assistant General Counsel for Regulation, as determined by the RRO;

(ii) At least one senior agency official from the Office of the Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy, as determined by the RRO;

(iii) Other senior agency officials from the Office of the Secretary, as determined by the RRO.

(d) *Functions and responsibilities.* In addition to the functions and responsibilities enumerated in E.O. 13777, the RRTF performs the following duties:

(1) Reviews each request for a new rulemaking action initiated by an OA or OST component; and

(2) Considers each regulation and regulatory policy question (which may include proposed guidance documents) referred to it and makes a recommendation to the Secretary for its disposition.

(e) *Support.* The Office of Regulation and Legislation within OGC provides support to the RRTF.

(f) *Meetings.* The Leadership Council meets approximately monthly and will hold specially scheduled meetings when necessary to address particular regulatory matters. The Working Group meets approximately monthly with each OA and each component of OST with regulatory authority, and the Working Group may establish subcommittees, as appropriate, to focus on specific regulatory matters.

(g) *Agenda.* The Office of Regulation and Legislation prepares an agenda for each meeting and distributes it to the members in advance of the meeting, together with any documents to be discussed at the meeting. The OA or OST component responsible for matters on the agenda will be invited to attend to respond to questions.

(h) *Minutes.* The Office of Regulation and Legislation prepares summary minutes following each meeting and distributes them to the meeting's attendees.

#### **§ 5.11 Initiating a rulemaking.**

(a) Before an OA or component of OST may proceed to develop a regulation, the Administrator of the OA or the Secretarial officer who heads the OST component must consider the regulatory philosophy and principles of regulation identified in section 1 of E.O. 12866 and the policies set forth in section 5.5 of this subpart. If the OA Administrator or OST component head determines that rulemaking is warranted consistent with those policies and principles, the Administrator or component head may prepare a Rulemaking Initiation Request.

(b) The Rulemaking Initiation Request should specifically state or describe:

(1) A proposed title for the rulemaking;

- (2) The need for the regulation, including a description of the market failure or statutory mandate necessitating the rulemaking;
  - (3) The legal authority for the rulemaking;
  - (4) Whether the rulemaking is expected to be regulatory or deregulatory;
  - (5) Whether the rulemaking is expected to be significant or nonsignificant, as defined by E.O. 12866;
  - (6) Whether the rulemaking in question is expected to be an economically significant rule or high-impact rule, as defined in section 5.17(a) of this subpart;
  - (7) A description of the economic impact associated with the rulemaking, including whether the rulemaking is likely to impose quantifiable costs or cost savings;
  - (8) The tentative target dates for completing each stage of the rulemaking; and
  - (9) Whether there is a statutory or judicial deadline, or some other urgency, associated with the rulemaking.
- (c) The OA or OST component submits the Rulemaking Initiation Request to the Office of Regulation and Legislation, together with any other documents that may assist in the RRTF's consideration of the request.
- (d) The Office of Regulation and Legislation includes the Rulemaking Initiation Request on the agenda for consideration at the OA's or OST component's next Working Group meeting.
- (e) If the Working Group recommends the approval of the Rulemaking Initiation Request, then the Request is referred to the Leadership Council for consideration. In lieu of consideration at a Leadership Council meeting, the Working Group, at its discretion, may submit a memorandum to the RRO seeking approval of the Rulemaking Initiation Request.

(f) The OA or OST component may assign a Regulatory Information Number (RIN) to the rulemaking only upon the Leadership Council's (or RRO's) approval of the Rulemaking Initiation Request.

(g) The Secretary may initiate a rulemaking on his or her own motion. The process for initiating a rulemaking as described in this section may be waived or modified for any rule with the approval of the RRO. Unless otherwise determined by the RRO, the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) may promulgate an emergency rule under 49 U.S.C. 106(f)(4)(B)(iii) and 49 U.S.C. 46105(c), without first submitting a Rulemaking Initiation Request.

(h) Rulemaking Initiation Requests will be considered on a rolling basis; however, the Office of Regulation and Legislation will establish deadlines for submission of Rulemaking Initiation Requests so that new rulemakings may be included in the Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions.

### **§ 5.13 General rulemaking procedures.**

(a) *Definitions.* (1) *Significant rulemaking* means a regulatory action designated by OIRA under E.O. 12866 as likely to result in a rule that may:

(i) Have an annual effect on the U.S. economy of \$100 million or more or adversely affect in a material way the economy, a sector of the economy, productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, local, or tribal governments or communities;

(ii) Create a serious inconsistency or otherwise interfere with an action taken or planned by another agency;

(iii) Materially alter the budgetary impact of entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs or the rights and obligations of recipients thereof; or

(iv) Raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President's priorities, or the principles set forth in E.O. 12866.

(2) *Nonsignificant rulemaking* means a regulatory action not designated significant by OIRA.

(b) *Departmental review process.* (1) OST review and clearance.

(i) Except as provided in this part or as otherwise provided in writing by OGC, or otherwise prescribed by law, all departmental rulemakings are to be reviewed and cleared by the Office of the Secretary.

(ii) The FAA Administrator may promulgate emergency rules pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 106(f)(4)(B)(iii) and 49 U.S.C. 46105(c), without prior approval from OST; provided that, to the maximum extent practicable and consistent with law, the FAA Administrator will give OST advance notice of such emergency rules and will allow OST to review the rules in accordance with the provisions of this subpart upon promulgation, at the latest.

(2) Leadership within the proposing OA or component of OST shall:

(i) Ensure that the OA's or OST component's Regulatory Quality Officer reviews all rulemaking documents for plain language, technical soundness, and general quality;

(ii) Ensure that the OA's Office of Chief Counsel (or for OST rules, the Office within OGC responsible for providing programmatic advice) reviews all rulemaking documents for legal support and legal sufficiency; and

(iii) Approve the submission of all rulemaking documents, including any accompanying analyses (*e.g.*, regulatory impact analysis), to the Office of Regulation and Legislation through the New Environment for Information and Leadership on Rules (NEIL Rules), or a successor data management system, for OST review and clearance.

(3) To effectuate departmental review under this subpart, the following Secretarial offices ordinarily review and approve DOT rulemakings: The Office of the Under Secretary for Policy, the Office of Public Affairs, the Office of Budget and Programs and Chief Financial Officer, OGC, and the Office of Governmental Affairs. The Office of

Regulation and Legislation may also require review and clearance by other Secretarial offices and OAs depending on the nature of the particular rulemaking document.

(4) Reviewing offices should provide comments or otherwise concur on rulemaking documents within 7 calendar days, unless exceptional circumstances apply that require expedited review.

(5) The Office of Regulation and Legislation provides a passback of comments to the proposing OA or OST component for resolution. Comments should be resolved and a revised draft submitted to the Office of Regulation and Legislation by the OA or OST component within 14 calendar days.

(6) The Office of Regulation and Legislation prepares a rulemaking package for the General Counsel to request the Secretary's approval for the rulemaking to be submitted to OMB for review and for its subsequent issuance (for significant rulemakings) or to the **Federal Register** for publication (for nonsignificant rulemakings). These rulemaking packages are submitted through the General Counsel to the Office of the Executive Secretariat.

(7) The Office of Regulation and Legislation notifies the proposing OA or OST component when the Secretary approves or disapproves the submission of the rulemaking to OMB or its issuance and submission to the **Federal Register**.

(8) The Office of Regulation and Legislation is responsible for coordination with OIRA staff on the designation of all rulemaking documents, submission and clearance of all significant rulemaking documents, and all discussions or meetings with OMB concerning these documents. OAs and OST components should not schedule their own meetings with OIRA without Office of Regulation and Legislation involvement. Each OA or OST component should coordinate with the Office of Regulation and Legislation before holding any discussions with OIRA concerning regulatory policy or requests to modify regulatory documents.

(c) *Petitions for rulemaking, exemption, and retrospective review.* (1) Any person may petition an OA or OST component with rulemaking authority to:

- (i) Issue, amend, or repeal a rule;
- (ii) Issue an exemption, either permanently or temporarily, from any requirements of a rule; or
- (iii) Perform a retrospective review of an existing rule.

(2) When an OA or OST component receives a petition under this paragraph (c), the petition should be filed with the Docket Clerk in a timely manner. If a petition is filed directly with the Docket Clerk, the Docket Clerk will submit the petition in a timely manner to the OA or component of OST with regulatory responsibility over the matter described in the petition.

(3) The OA or component of OST should provide clear instructions on its website to members of the public regarding how to submit petitions, including, but not limited to, an email address or Web portal where petitions can be submitted, a mailing address where hard copy requests can be submitted, and an office responsible for coordinating such requests.

(4) Unless otherwise provided by statute or in OA regulations or procedures, the following procedures apply to the processing of petitions for rulemaking, exemption, or retrospective review:

(i) *Contents.* Each petition filed under this section must:

(A) Be submitted, either by paper submission or electronically, to the U.S. Department of Transportation, Docket Operations, West Building Ground Floor, Room W12–140, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20590;

(B) Describe the nature of the request and set forth the text or substance of the rule or specify the rule that the petitioner seeks to have issued, amended, exempted, repealed, or retrospectively reviewed, as the case may be;

(C) Explain the interest of the petitioner in the action requested, including, in the case of a petition for an exemption, the nature and extent of the relief sought and a description of the persons to be covered by the exemption;

(D) Contain any information and arguments available to the petitioner to support the action sought; and

(E) In the case of a petition for exemption, unless good cause is shown in that petition, be submitted at least 60 days before the proposed effective date of the exemption.

(ii) *Processing.* Each petition received under this paragraph (c) is referred to the head of the office responsible for the subject matter of that petition, the Office of Regulation and Legislation, and the RRO. No public hearing, argument, or other proceeding must necessarily be held directly on a petition for its disposition under this section.

(iii) *Grants.* If the OA or component of OST with regulatory responsibility over the matter described in the petition determines that the petition contains adequate justification, it may request the initiation of a rulemaking action under §5.11 or grant the petition, as appropriate.

(iv) *Denials.* If the OA or component of OST determines that the petition is not justified, the OA or component of OST denies the petition in coordination with the Office of Regulation and Legislation.

(v) *Notification.* Whenever the OA or OST component determines that a petition should be granted or denied, and after consultation with the Office of Regulation and Legislation in the case of denial, the office concerned prepares a notice of that grant or denial for issuance to the petitioner, and issues it to the petitioner.

(d) *Review of existing regulations.* (1) Except as otherwise required by law, all departmental regulations are on a 10-year review cycle, except economically significant



and high-impact rules, which are reviewed every 5 years in accordance with section 5.17(f) of this subpart.

(2) The OA or OST component that issued the regulation will review it for the following:

(i) *Continued cost justification*: Whether the regulation requires adjustment due to changed market conditions or is no longer cost-effective or cost-justified in accordance with section 5.5(h);

(ii) *Regulatory flexibility*: Whether the regulation has a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities and, thus, requires review under 5 U.S.C. 610 (section 610 of the Regulatory Flexibility Act);

(iii) *Innovation*: Whether there are new or emerging technologies, especially those that could achieve current levels of safety at the same or lower levels of cost or achieve higher levels of safety, use of which is precluded or limited by the regulation.

(iv) *General updates*: Whether the regulation may require technical corrections, updates (e.g., updated versions of voluntary consensus standards), revisions, or repeal;

(v) *Plain language*: Whether the regulation requires revisions for plain language; and

(vi) Other considerations as required by relevant executive orders and laws.

(3) The results of each OA's or OST component's review will be reported annually to the public.

(4) Any member of the public may petition the Department to conduct a retrospective review of a regulation by filing a petition in accordance with the procedures contained in paragraph (c) of this section.

(e) *Supporting economic analysis*. (1) Rulemakings shall include, at a minimum:

(i) An assessment of the potential costs and benefits of the regulatory action (which may entail a regulatory impact analysis) or a reasoned determination that the expected

impact is so minimal or the safety need so significant and urgent that a formal analysis of costs and benefits is not warranted; and

(ii) If the regulatory action is expected to impose costs, either a reasoned determination that the benefits outweigh the costs or, if the particular rulemaking is mandated by statute or compelling safety need notwithstanding a negative cost-benefit assessment, a detailed discussion of the rationale supporting the specific regulatory action proposed and an explanation of why a less costly alternative is not an option.

(2) To the extent practicable, economic assessments shall quantify the foreseeable annual economic costs and cost savings within the United States that would likely result from issuance of the proposed rule and shall be conducted in accordance with the requirements of sections 6(a)(2)(B) and 6(a)(2)(C) of E.O. 12866 and OMB Circular A-4, as specified by OIRA in consultation with the Office of Regulation and Legislation. If the proposing OA or OST component has estimated that the proposed rule will likely impose economic costs on persons outside the United States, such costs should be reported separately.

(3) Deregulatory rulemakings (including nonsignificant rulemakings) shall be evaluated for quantifiable cost savings. If it is determined that quantification of cost savings is not possible or appropriate, then the proposing OA or OST component shall provide a detailed justification for the lack of quantification upon submission of the rulemaking to the Office of Regulation and Legislation. Other nonsignificant rulemakings shall include, at a minimum, the economic cost-benefit analysis described in paragraph (e)(1) of this section.

(f) *Regulatory flexibility analysis.* All rulemakings subject to the requirements of 5 U.S.C. 603-604 (sections 603-604 of the Regulatory Flexibility Act), and any amendment thereto, shall include a detailed statement setting forth the required analysis regarding the potential impact of the rule on small business entities.

(g) *Advance notices of proposed rulemaking.* Whenever the OA or OST component responsible for a proposed rulemaking is required to publish an advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPRM) in the **Federal Register**, or whenever the RRTF determines it appropriate to publish an ANPRM, the ANPRM shall:

(1) Include a written statement identifying, at a minimum:

(i) The nature and significance of the problem the OA or OST component may address with a rule;

(ii) The legal authority under which a rule may be proposed; and

(iii) Any preliminary information available to the OA or OST component that may support one or another potential approach to addressing the identified problem;

(2) Solicit written data, analysis, views, and recommendations from interested persons concerning the information and issues addressed in the ANPRM; and

(3) Provide for a reasonably sufficient period for public comment.

(h) *Notices of proposed rulemaking—* (1) *When required.* Before determining to propose a rule and following completion of the ANPRM process under paragraph (g) of this section, if applicable, the responsible OA or OST component shall consult with the RRTF concerning the need for the potential rule. If the RRTF thereafter determines it appropriate to propose a rule, the proposing OA or OST component shall publish a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) in the **Federal Register**, unless a controlling statute provides otherwise or unless the RRTF (in consultation with OIRA, as appropriate) determines that an NPRM is not necessary under established exceptions.

(2) *Contents.* The NPRM shall include, at a minimum:

(i) A statement of the time and place for submission of public comments and the time, place, and nature of related public rulemaking proceedings, if any;

(ii) Reference to the legal authority under which the rule is proposed;

(iii) The terms of the proposed rule;

(iv) A description of information known to the proposing OA or OST component on the subject and issues of the proposed rule, including but not limited to:

(A) A summary of material information known to the OA or OST component concerning the proposed rule and the considerations specified in §5.11(a) of this subpart;

(B) A summary of any preliminary risk assessment or regulatory impact analysis performed by the OA or OST component; and

(C) Information specifically identifying all material data, studies, models, available voluntary consensus standards and conformity assessment requirements, and other evidence or information considered or used by the OA or OST component in connection with its determination to propose the rule;

(v) A reasoned preliminary analysis of the need for the proposed rule based on the information described in the preamble to the NPRM, and an additional statement of whether a rule is required by statute;

(vi) A reasoned preliminary analysis indicating that the expected economic benefits of the proposed rule will meet the relevant statutory objectives and will outweigh the estimated costs of the proposed rule in accordance with any applicable statutory requirements;

(vii) If the rulemaking is significant, a summary discussion of:

(A) The alternatives to the proposed rule considered by the OA or OST component;

(B) The relative costs and benefits of those alternatives;

(C) Whether the alternatives would meet relevant statutory objectives; and

(D) Why the OA or OST component chose not to propose or pursue the alternatives;

(viii) A statement of whether existing rules have created or contributed to the problem the OA or OST component seeks to address with the proposed rule, and, if so, whether or not the OA or OST component proposes to amend or rescind any such rules and why; and

(ix) All other statements and analyses required by law, including, without limitation, the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601–612) or any amendment thereto.

(3) *Information access and quality.* (i) To inform public comment when the NPRM is published, the proposing OA or OST component shall place in the docket for the proposed rule and make accessible to the public, including by electronic means, all material information relied upon by the OA or OST component in considering the proposed rule, unless public disclosure of the information is prohibited by law or the information would be exempt from disclosure under 5 U.S.C. 552(b). Material provided electronically should be made available in accordance with the requirements of 29 U.S.C. 794d (section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended).

(ii) If the proposed rule rests upon scientific, technical, economic, or other specialized factual information, the proposing OA or OST component shall base the proposal on the best and most relevant scientific, technical, economic, and other specialized factual information reasonably available to the Department and shall identify the sources and availability of such information in the NPRM.

(iii) A single copy of any relevant copyrighted material (including consensus standards and other relevant scientific or technical information) should be placed in the docket for public review if such material was relied on as a basis for the rulemaking.

(i) *Public comment.* (1) Following publication of an NPRM, the Department will provide interested persons a fair and sufficient opportunity to participate in the rulemaking through submission of written data, analysis, views, and recommendations.

(2) The Department, in coordination with OIRA for significant rulemakings, will ensure that the public is given an adequate period for comment, taking into account the scope and nature of the issues and considerations involved in the proposed regulatory action.

(3) Generally, absent special considerations, the comment period for nonsignificant DOT rules should be at least 30 days, and the comment period for significant DOT rules should be at least 45 days.

(4) Any person may petition the responsible OA or OST component for an extension of time to submit comments in response to a notice of proposed rulemaking. Petitions must be received no later than 3 days before the expiration of the time stated in the notice. The filing of the petition does not automatically extend the time for comments. The OA or OST component may grant the petition only if the petitioner shows a substantive interest in the proposed rule and good cause for the extension, or if the extension is otherwise in the public interest. If an extension is granted, it is granted as to all persons and published in the **Federal Register**.

(5) All timely comments are considered before final action is taken on a rulemaking proposal. Late-filed comments may be considered so far as possible without incurring additional expense or delay.

(j) *Exemptions from notice and comment.* (1) Except when prior notice and an opportunity for public comment are required by statute or determined by the Secretary to be advisable for policy or programmatic reasons, the responsible OA or OST component may, subject to the approval of the RRTF (in consultation with OIRA, as appropriate), publish certain final rules in the **Federal Register** without prior notice and comment. These may include:

- (i) Rules of interpretation and rules addressing only DOT organization, procedure, or practice, provided such rules do not alter substantive obligations for parties outside the Department;
- (ii) Rules for which notice and comment is unnecessary to inform the rulemaking, such as rules correcting de minimis technical or clerical errors or rules addressing other

minor and insubstantial matters, provided the reasons to forgo public comment are explained in the preamble to the final rule; and

(iii) Rules that require finalization without delay, such as rules to address an urgent safety or national security need, and other rules for which it would be impracticable or contrary to public policy to accommodate a period of public comment, provided the responsible OA or OST component makes findings that good cause exists to forgo public comment and explains those findings in the preamble to the final rule.

(2) Except when required by statute, issuing substantive DOT rules without completing notice and comment, including as interim final rules (IFRs) and direct final rules (DFRs), must be the exception. IFRs and DFRs are not favored. DFRs must follow the procedures in paragraph (l) of this section. In most cases where an OA or OST component has issued an IFR, the RRTF will expect the OA or OST component to proceed at the earliest opportunity to replace the IFR with a final rule.

(k) *Final rules.* The responsible OA or OST component shall adopt a final rule only after consultation with the RRTF. The final rule, which shall include the text of the rule as adopted along with a supporting preamble, shall be published in the **Federal Register** and shall satisfy the following requirements:

(1) The preamble to the final rule shall include:

(i) A concise, general statement of the rule's basis and purpose, including clear reference to the legal authority supporting the rule;

(ii) A reasoned, concluding determination by the adopting OA or OST component regarding each of the considerations required to be addressed in an NPRM under paragraphs (h)(2)(v) through (ix) of this section;

(iii) A response to each significant issue raised in the comments to the proposed rule;

(iv) If the final rule has changed in significant respects from the rule as proposed in the NPRM, an explanation of the changes and the reasons why the changes are needed or are more appropriate to advance the objectives identified in the rulemaking; and

(v) A reasoned, final determination that the information upon which the OA or OST component bases the rule complies with the Information Quality Act (section 515 of Pub. L. 106–554— Appendix C, 114 Stat. 2763A–153–54 (2001)), or any subsequent amendment thereto.

(2) If the rule rests on scientific, technical, economic, or other specialized factual information, the OA or OST component shall base the final rule on the best and most relevant evidence and data known to the Department and shall ensure that such information is clearly identified in the preamble to the final rule and is available to the public in the rulemaking record, subject to reasonable protections for information exempt from disclosure under 5 U.S.C. 552(b). If the OA or OST component intends to support the final rule with specialized factual information identified after the close of the comment period, the OA or OST component shall allow an additional opportunity for public comment on such information.

(3) All final rules issued by the Department:

(i) Shall be written in plain and understandable English;

(ii) Shall be based on a reasonable and well-founded interpretation of relevant statutory text and shall not depend upon a strained or unduly broad reading of statutory authority; and

(iii) Shall not be inconsistent or incompatible with, or unnecessarily duplicative of, other Federal regulations.

(4) Effective dates for final rules must adhere to the following:

(i) Unless required to address a safety emergency or otherwise required by law, approved by the RRTF (or RRO), or approved by the Director of OMB (as appropriate),



no regulation may be issued by an OA or component of OST if it was not included on the most recent version or update of the published Unified Agenda.

(ii) No significant regulatory action may take effect until it has appeared in either the Unified Agenda or the monthly internet report of significant rulemakings for at least 6 months prior to its issuance, unless good cause exists for an earlier effective date or the action is otherwise approved by the RRTF (or RRO).

(iii) Absent good cause, major rules (as defined by the Congressional Review Act, 5 U.S.C. 801–808) cannot take effect until 60 days after publication in the **Federal Register** or submission to Congress, whichever is later. Nonmajor rules cannot take effect any sooner than submission to Congress.

(l) *Direct final rules.* (1) Rules that the OA or OST component determines to be noncontroversial and unlikely to result in adverse public comment may be published as direct final rules. These include noncontroversial rules that:

(i) Affect internal procedures of the Department, such as filing requirements and rules governing inspection and copying of documents,

(ii) Are nonsubstantive clarifications or corrections to existing rules,

(iii) Update existing forms,

(iv) Make minor changes in the substantive rules regarding statistics and reporting requirements,

(v) Make changes to the rules implementing the Privacy Act, or

(vi) Adopt technical standards set by outside organizations.

(2) The **Federal Register** document will state that any adverse comment must be received in writing by the OA or OST component within the specified time after the date of publication and that, if no written adverse comment is received, the rule will become effective a specified number of days after the date of publication.

(3) If no written adverse comment is received by the OA or OST component within the original or extended comment period, the OA or OST component will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** indicating that no adverse comment was received and confirming that the rule will become effective on the date that was indicated in the direct final rule.

(4) If the OA or OST component receives any written adverse comment within the specified time of publication in the **Federal Register**, the OA or OST component may proceed as follows:

(i) Publish a document withdrawing the direct final rule in the rules and regulations section of the **Federal Register** and, if the OA or OST component decides a rulemaking is warranted, a proposed rule; or

(ii) Any other means permitted under the Administrative Procedure Act. (5) An “adverse” comment for the purpose of this subpart means any comment that the OA or OST component determines is critical of the rule, suggests that the rule should not be adopted or suggests a material change that should be made in the rule. A comment suggesting that the policy or requirements of the rule should or should not also be extended to other Departmental programs outside the scope of the rule is not adverse. A notice of intent to submit an adverse comment is not, in and of itself, an adverse comment.

(m) *Reports to Congress and GAO.* For each final rule adopted by DOT, the responsible OA or OST component shall submit the reports to Congress and the U.S. Government Accountability Office to comply with the procedures specified by 5 U.S.C. 801 (the Congressional Review Act), or any subsequent amendment thereto.

(n) *Negotiated rulemakings.* (1) DOT negotiated rulemakings are to be conducted in accordance with the Negotiated Rulemaking Act, 5 U.S.C. 561–571, and the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. App. 2, as applicable.

(2) Before initiating a negotiated rulemaking process, the OA or OST component should:

(i) Assess whether using negotiated rulemaking procedures for the proposed rule in question is in the public interest, in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 563(a), and present these findings to the RRTF;

(ii) Consult with the Office of Regulation and Legislation on the appropriateness of negotiated rulemaking and the procedures therefor; and

(iii) Receive the approval of the RRTF for the use of negotiated rulemaking.

(3) Unless otherwise approved by the General Counsel, all DOT negotiated rulemakings should involve the assistance of a convener and a facilitator, as provided in the Negotiated Rulemaking Act. A convener is a person who impartially assists the agency in determining whether establishment of a negotiated rulemaking committee is feasible and appropriate in a particular rulemaking. A facilitator is a person who impartially aids in the discussions and negotiations among members of a negotiated rulemaking committee to develop a proposed rule. The same person may serve as both convener and facilitator.

(4) All charters, membership appointments, and **Federal Register** notices must be approved by the Secretary. Any operating procedures (*e.g.*, bylaws) for negotiated rulemaking committees must be approved by OGC.

#### **§ 5.15 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions (Unified Agenda).**

(a) Fall editions of the Unified Agenda include the Regulatory Plan, which presents the Department’s statement of regulatory priorities for the coming year. Fall editions also

include the outcome and status of the Department's reviews of existing regulations, conducted in accordance with §5.13(d).

(b) The OAs and components of OST with rulemaking authority must:

(1) Carefully consider the principles contained in E.O. 14192, E.O. 13777, and E.O. 12866 in the preparation of all submissions for the Unified Agenda;

(2) Ensure that all data pertaining to the OA's or OST component's regulatory and deregulatory actions are accurately reflected in the Department's Unified Agenda submission; and

(3) Timely submit all data to the Office of Regulation and Legislation in accordance with the deadlines and procedures communicated by that office.

**§ 5.17 Special procedures for economically significant and high-impact rulemakings.**

(a) *Definitions.* (1) *Economically significant rule* means a significant rule likely to impose:

(i) A total annual cost on the U.S. economy (without regard to estimated benefits) of \$100 million or more, or

(ii) A total net loss of at least 75,000 full-time jobs in the U.S. over the five years following the effective date of the rule (not counting any jobs relating to new regulatory compliance).

(2) *High-impact rule* means a significant rule likely to impose:

(i) A total annual cost on the U.S. economy (without regard to estimated benefits) of \$500 million or more, or

(ii) A total net loss of at least 250,000 full-time jobs in the U.S. over the five years following the effective date of the rule (not counting any jobs relating to new regulatory compliance).

(b) *ANPRM required.* Unless directed otherwise by the RRTF or otherwise required by law, in the case of a rulemaking for an economically significant rule or a high-impact rule, the proposing OA or OST component shall publish an ANPRM in the **Federal Register**.

(c) *Additional requirements for NPRM.* (1) In addition to the requirements set forth in §5.13, an NPRM for an economically significant rule or a high-impact rule shall include a discussion explaining an achievable objective for the rule and the metrics by which the OA or OST component will measure progress toward that objective.

(2) Absent unusual circumstances and unless approved by the RRTF (in consultation with OIRA, as appropriate), the comment period for an economically significant rule shall be at least 60 days and for a high-impact rule at least 90 days. If a rule is determined to be an economically significant rule or high- impact rule after the publication of the NPRM, the responsible OA or OST component shall publish a notice in the **Federal Register** that informs the public of the change in classification and discusses the achievable objective for the rule and the metrics by which the OA or OST component will measure progress toward that objective, and shall extend or reopen the comment period by not less than 30 days and allow further public comment as appropriate, including comment on the change in classification.

(d) *Procedures for formal hearings—* (1) *Petitions for hearings.* Following publication of an NPRM for an economically significant rule or a high- impact rule, and before the close of the comment period, any interested party may file in the rulemaking docket a petition asking the proposing OA or OST component to hold a formal hearing on the proposed rule in accordance with this section.

(2) *Mandatory hearing for high-impact rule.* In the case of a proposed high- impact rule, the responsible OA or OST component shall grant the petition for a formal hearing if the petition makes a plausible prima facie showing that:

(i) The proposed rule depends on conclusions concerning one or more specific scientific, technical, economic, or other complex factual issues that are genuinely in dispute or that may not satisfy the requirements of the Information Quality Act;

(ii) The ordinary public comment process is unlikely to provide the OA or OST component an adequate examination of the issues to permit a fully informed judgment on the dispute; and

(iii) The resolution of the disputed factual issues would likely have a material effect on the costs and benefits of the proposed rule or on whether the proposed rule would achieve the statutory purpose.

(3) *Authority to deny hearing for economically significant rule.* In the case of a proposed economically significant rule, the responsible OA or OST component may deny a petition for a formal hearing that includes the showing described in paragraph (d)(2) of this section but only if the OA or OST component reasonably determines that:

(i) The requested hearing would not advance the consideration of the proposed rule and the OA's or OST component's ability to make the rulemaking determinations required under this subpart; or

(ii) The hearing would unreasonably delay completion of the rulemaking in light of a compelling safety need or an express statutory mandate for prompt regulatory action.

(4) *Denial of petition.* If the OA or OST component denies a petition for a formal hearing under this section in whole or in part, the OA or OST component shall include a detailed explanation of the factual basis for the denial in the rulemaking record, including findings on each of the relevant factors identified in paragraph (d)(2) or (3) of this section. The denial of a good faith petition for a formal hearing under this section shall be disfavored.

(5) *Notice and scope of hearing.* If the OA or OST component grants a petition for a formal hearing under this section, the OA or OST component shall publish notification of

the hearing in the **Federal Register** not less than 45 days before the date of the hearing.

The document shall specify the proposed rule at issue and the specific factual issues to be considered in the hearing. The scope of the hearing shall be limited to the factual issues specified in the notice.

(6) *Hearing process.* (i) A formal hearing for purposes of this section shall be conducted using procedures borrowed from 5 U.S.C. 556 and 5 U.S.C. 557, or similar procedures as approved by the Secretary, and interested parties shall have a reasonable opportunity to participate in the hearing through the presentation of testimony and written submissions.

(ii) The OA or OST component shall arrange for an administrative judge or other neutral administrative hearing officer to preside over the hearing and shall provide a reasonable opportunity for cross-examination of witnesses at the hearing.

(iii) After the formal hearing and before the record of the hearing is closed, the presiding hearing officer shall render a report containing findings and conclusions addressing the disputed issues of fact identified in the hearing notice and specifically advising on the accuracy and sufficiency of the factual information in the record relating to those disputed issues on which the OA or OST component proposes to base the rule.

(iv) Interested parties who have participated in the hearing shall be given an opportunity to file statements of agreement or objection in response to the hearing officer's report, and the complete record of the proceeding shall be made part of the rulemaking record.

(7) *Actions following hearing.* (i) Following completion of the formal hearing process, the responsible OA or OST component shall consider the record of the hearing and, subject to the approval of the RRTF (in consultation with OIRA, as appropriate), shall make a reasoned determination whether:

(A) To terminate the rulemaking;

(B) To proceed with the rulemaking as proposed; or

(C) To modify the proposed rule.

(ii) If the decision is made to terminate the rulemaking, the OA or OST component shall publish a notice in the **Federal Register** announcing the decision and explaining the reasons therefor.

(iii) If the decision is made to finalize the proposed rule without material modifications, the OA or OST component shall explain the reasons for its decision and its responses to the hearing record in the preamble to the final rule, in accordance with paragraph (e) of this section.

(iv) If the decision is made to modify the proposed rule in material respects, the OA or OST component shall, subject to the approval of the RRTF (in consultation with OIRA, as appropriate), publish a new or supplemental NPRM in the **Federal Register** explaining the OA's or OST component's responses to and analysis of the hearing record, setting forth the modifications to the proposed rule, and providing an additional reasonable opportunity for public comment on the proposed modified rule.

(8) *Relationship to interagency process.* The formal hearing procedures under this section shall not impede or interfere with OIRA's interagency review process for the proposed rulemaking.

(e) *Additional requirements for final rules.* (1) In addition to the requirements set forth in §5.13(k), the preamble to a final economically significant rule or a final high-impact rule shall include:

(i) A discussion explaining the OA's or OST component's reasoned final determination that the rule as adopted is necessary to achieve the objective identified in the NPRM in light of the full administrative record and does not deviate from the metrics previously identified by the OA or OST component for measuring progress toward that objective; and



(ii) In accordance with paragraph (d)(7)(iii) of this section, the OA's or OST component's responses to and analysis of the record of any formal hearing held under paragraph (d) of this section.

(2) Absent exceptional circumstances and unless approved by the RRTF or Secretary (in consultation with OIRA, as appropriate), the OA or OST component shall adopt as a final economically significant rule or final high-impact rule the least costly regulatory alternative that achieves the relevant objectives.

(f) *Additional requirements for retrospective reviews.* For each economically significant rule or high-impact rule, the responsible OA or OST component shall publish a regulatory impact report in the **Federal Register** every 5 years after the effective date of the rule while the rule remains in effect. The regulatory impact report shall include, at a minimum:

(1) An assessment of the impacts, including any costs, of the rule on regulated entities;

(2) A determination about how the actual costs and benefits of the rule have varied from those anticipated at the time the rule was issued; and

(3) An assessment of the effectiveness and benefits of the rule in producing the regulatory objectives it was adopted to achieve.

(g) *Waiver and modification.* The procedures required by this section may be waived or modified as necessary with the approval of the RRO or the Secretary.

#### **§ 5.19 Public contacts in informal rulemaking.**

(a) *Agency contacts with the public during informal rulemakings conducted in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 553.* (1) DOT personnel may have meetings or other contacts with interested members of the public concerning an informal rulemaking under 5 U.S.C. 553 or similar procedures at any stage of the rulemaking process, provided the substance of material information submitted by the public that DOT relies on in

proposing or finalizing the rule is adequately disclosed and described in a memorandum in the public rulemaking docket such that all interested parties have notice of the information and an opportunity to comment on its accuracy and relevance. The responsible OA or OST component may either prepare the memorandum or ask the party requesting the meeting or initiating the contact to submit the memorandum memorializing the communication.

(2) DOT personnel should avoid giving persons outside the Executive Branch information regarding the rulemaking that is not available generally to the public.

(3) If DOT receives an unusually large number of requests for meetings with interested members of the public during the comment period for a proposed rule or after the close of the comment period, the issuing OA or component of OST should consider whether there is a need to extend or reopen the comment period, to allow for submission of a second round of “reply comments,” or to hold a public meeting on the proposed rule.

(4) If the issuing OA or OST component meets with interested persons on the rulemaking after the close of the comment period, it should be open to giving other interested persons a similar opportunity to meet.

(5) If DOT learns of significant new information, such as new studies or data, after the close of the comment period that the issuing OA or OST component wishes to rely upon in finalizing the rule, the OA or OST component should reopen the comment period to give the public an opportunity to comment on the new information. If the new information is likely to result in a change to the rule that is not within the scope of the NPRM, the OA or OST component should consider issuing a Supplemental NPRM to ensure that the final rule represents a logical outgrowth of DOT’s proposal.

(b) *Contacts during OIRA review.* (1) E.O. 12866 and E.O. 13563 lay out the procedures for review of significant regulations by OIRA, which include a process for

members of the public to request meetings with OIRA regarding rules under OIRA review. Per E.O. 12866, OIRA invites the Department to attend these meetings. The Office of Regulation and Legislation will forward these invitations to the appropriate regulatory contact in the OA or component of OST responsible for issuing the regulation.

(2) If the issuing OA or OST component wishes to attend the OIRA- sponsored meeting or if its participation is determined to be necessary by the Office of Regulation and Legislation, the regulatory contact should identify to the Office of Regulation and Legislation up to two individuals from the OA or OST component who will attend the meeting along with a representative from the Office of Regulation and Legislation. Attendance at these meetings can be by phone or in person. These OIRA meetings are generally listening sessions for DOT.

(3) The attending DOT personnel should refrain from debating particular points regarding the rulemaking and should avoid disclosing the contents of a document or proposed regulatory action that has not yet been disclosed to the public, but may answer questions of fact regarding a public document.

(4) Following the OIRA meeting, the attendee(s) from the issuing OA or OST component will draft a summary report of the meeting and submit it to the Office of Regulation and Legislation for review. After the report is reviewed and finalized in coordination with the Office of Regulation and Legislation, the responsible OA or OST component will place the final report in the rulemaking docket.

#### **§ 5.21 Policy updates and revisions.**

This subpart shall be reviewed from time to time to reflect improvements in the rulemaking process or changes in Administration policy.

### **Subpart C—Guidance Procedures**

#### **§ 5.25 General.**

(a) This subpart governs all DOT employees and contractors involved with all phases of issuing DOT guidance documents.

(b) Subject to the qualifications and exemptions contained in this subpart, these procedures apply to all guidance documents issued by all components of the Department after the effective date of this subpart.

(c) For purposes of this subpart, the term *guidance document* includes an agency statement of general applicability, intended to have future effect on the behavior of regulated parties, that sets forth a policy on a statutory, regulatory, or technical issue, or an interpretation of a statute or regulation, but which is not intended to have the force or effect of law in its own right and is not otherwise required by statute to satisfy the rulemaking procedures specified in 5 U.S.C. 553 or 5 U.S.C. 556. The term is not confined to formal written documents; guidance may come in a variety of forms, including (but not limited to) letters, memoranda, circulars, bulletins, advisories, and may include video, audio, and Web-based formats. *See* OMB Bulletin 07–02, “Agency Good Guidance Practices,” (January 25, 2007) (“OMB Good Guidance Bulletin”).

(d) This subpart does not apply to:

- (1) Rules exempt from rulemaking requirements under 5 U.S.C. 553(a);
- (2) Rules of agency organization, procedure, or practice;
- (3) Decisions of agency adjudications under 5 U.S.C. 554 or similar statutory provisions;
- (4) Internal executive branch legal advice or legal advisory opinions addressed to executive branch officials;
- (5) Agency statements of specific applicability, including advisory or legal opinions directed to particular parties about circumstance-specific questions (*e.g.*, case or investigatory letters responding to complaints, warning letters), notices regarding particular locations or facilities (*e.g.*, guidance pertaining to the use, operation, or control

of a government facility or property), and correspondence with individual persons or entities (*e.g.*, congressional correspondence), except documents ostensibly directed to a particular party but designed to guide the conduct of the broader regulated public;

(6) Legal briefs, other court filings, or positions taken in litigation or enforcement actions;

(7) Agency statements that do not set forth a policy on a statutory, regulatory, or technical issue or an interpretation of a statute or regulation, including speeches and individual presentations, editorials, media interviews, press materials, or congressional testimony that do not set forth for the first time a new regulatory policy;

(8) Guidance pertaining to military or foreign affairs functions;

(9) Grant solicitations and awards;

(10) Contract solicitations and awards; or

(11) Purely internal agency policies or guidance directed solely to DOT employees or contractors or to other Federal agencies that are not intended to have substantial future effect on the behavior of regulated parties.

#### **§ 5.27 Review and clearance by Chief Counsels and the Office of the General Counsel.**

All DOT guidance documents, as defined in §5.25(c), require review and clearance in accordance with this subpart.

(a) Guidance proposed to be issued by an OA of the Department must be reviewed and cleared by the OA's Office of Chief Counsel. In addition, as provided elsewhere in this subpart, some OA guidance documents will require review and clearance by OGC.

(b) Guidance proposed to be issued by a component of OST must be reviewed and cleared by OGC.

#### **§ 5.29 Requirements for clearance.**

DOT's review and clearance of guidance shall ensure that each guidance document proposed to be issued by an OA or component of OST satisfies the following requirements:

- (a) The guidance document complies with all relevant statutes and regulation (including any statutory deadlines for agency action);
- (b) The guidance document identifies or includes:
  - (1) The term "guidance" or its functional equivalent;
  - (2) The issuing OA or component of OST;
  - (3) A unique identifier, including, at a minimum, the date of issuance and title of the document and its Z-RIN, if applicable;
  - (4) The activity or entities to which the guidance applies;
  - (5) Citations to applicable statutes and regulations;
  - (6) A statement noting whether the guidance is intended to revise or replace any previously issued guidance and, if so, sufficient information to identify the previously issued guidance; and
  - (7) A short summary of the subject matter covered in the guidance document at the top of the document.
- (c) The guidance document avoids using mandatory language, such as "shall," "must," "required," or "requirement," unless the language is describing an established statutory or regulatory requirement or is addressed to DOT staff and will not foreclose the Department's consideration of positions advanced by affected private parties;
- (d) The guidance document is written in plain and understandable English; and
- (e) All guidance documents include a clear and prominent statement declaring that the contents of the document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way, and the document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

### **§ 5.31 Public access to effective guidance documents.**

Each OA and component of OST responsible for issuing guidance documents shall:

- (a) Ensure all effective guidance documents, identified by a unique identifier which includes, at a minimum, the document's title and date of issuance or revision and its Z–RIN, if applicable, are on its website in a single, searchable, indexed database, and available to the public in accordance with 49 CFR 7.12(a)(2);
- (b) Note on its website that guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, except as authorized by law or as incorporated into a contract;
- (c) Maintain and advertise on its website a means for the public to comment electronically on any guidance documents that are subject to the notice- and-comment procedures described in §5.39 and to submit requests electronically for issuance, reconsideration, modification, or rescission of guidance documents in accordance with §5.41; and
- (d) Designate an office to receive and address complaints from the public that the OA or OST component is not following the requirements of OMB's Good Guidance Bulletin or is improperly treating a guidance document as a binding requirement.

### **§ 5.33 Good faith cost estimates.**

Even though not legally binding, some agency guidance may result in a substantial economic impact. For example, the issuance of agency guidance may induce private parties to alter their conduct to conform to recommended standards or practices, thereby incurring costs beyond the costs of complying with existing statutes and regulations.

While it may be difficult to predict with precision the economic impact of voluntary guidance, the proposing OA or component of OST shall, to the extent practicable, make a good faith effort to estimate the likely economic cost impact of the guidance document to determine whether the document might be significant. When an OA or OST component is assessing or explaining whether it believes a guidance document is significant, it should,

at a minimum, provide the same level of analysis that would be required for a major determination under the Congressional Review Act.<sup>3</sup> When an agency determines that a guidance document will be economically significant, the OA or OST component should conduct and publish a Regulatory Impact Analysis of the sort that would accompany an economically significant rulemaking, to the extent reasonably possible.

**§ 5.35 Approved procedures for guidance documents identified as “significant” or “otherwise of importance to the Department’s interests.”**

(a) For guidance proposed to be issued by an OA, if there is a reasonable possibility the guidance may be considered “significant” or “otherwise of importance to the Department’s interests” within the meaning of §5.37 or if the OA is uncertain whether the guidance may qualify as such, the OA should email a copy of the proposed guidance document (or a summary of it) to the Office of Regulation and Legislation for review and further direction before issuance. Each proposed DOT guidance document determined to be significant or otherwise of importance to the Department’s interests must be approved by the Secretary before issuance. In such instances, the Office of Regulation and Legislation will request that the proposing OA or component of OST obtain a Z-RIN for departmental review and clearance through the New Environment for Information and Leadership on Rules (NEIL Rules), or a successor data management system, and OGC will coordinate submission of the proposed guidance document to the Secretary for approval.

(b) As with significant regulations, OGC will submit significant DOT guidance documents to OMB for coordinated review. In addition, OGC may determine that it is appropriate to coordinate with OMB in the review of guidance documents that are otherwise of importance to the Department’s interests.

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<sup>3</sup> See OMB Memorandum M-19-14, Guidance on Compliance with the Congressional Review Act (April 11, 2019).



(c) If the guidance document is determined not to be either significant or otherwise of importance to the Department's interests within the meaning of §5.37, the Office of Regulation and Legislation will advise the proposing OA or component of OST to proceed with issuance of the guidance either through the Office of the Executive Secretariat (for **Federal Register** notices) or through its standard clearance process. For each guidance document coordinated through the Office of the Executive Secretariat, the issuing OA or component of OST should include a statement in the action memorandum indicating that the guidance document has been reviewed and cleared in accordance with this process.

**§ 5.37 Definitions of “significant guidance document” and guidance documents that are “otherwise of importance to the Department’s interests.”**

(a) The term “significant guidance document” means a guidance document that will be disseminated to regulated entities or the general public and that may reasonably be anticipated:

(1) To lead to an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more or adversely affect in a material way the U.S. economy, a sector of the U.S. economy, productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, local, or tribal governments or communities;

(2) To create serious inconsistency or otherwise interfere with an action taken or planned by another Federal agency;

(3) To alter materially the budgetary impact of entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs or the rights and obligations of recipients thereof; or

(4) To raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President's priorities, or the principles set forth in E.O. 12866, as further amended.

(b) The term “significant guidance document” does not include the categories of documents excluded by §5.25(b) or any other category of guidance documents exempted

in writing by OGC in consultation with OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA).

(c) Significant and economically significant guidance documents must be reviewed by OIRA under E.O. 12866 before issuance; and must demonstrate compliance with the applicable requirements for regulations or rules, including significant regulatory actions, set forth in E.O. 12866, E.O. 13563, E.O. 13609, E.O. 13777, and E.O. 14192.

(d) Even if not "significant," a guidance document will be considered "otherwise of importance to the Department's interests" within the meaning of this paragraph if it may reasonably be anticipated:

- (1) To relate to a major program, policy, or activity of the Department or a high-profile issue pending for decision before the Department;
- (2) To involve one of the Secretary's top policy priorities;
- (3) To garner significant press or congressional attention; or
- (4) To raise significant questions or concerns from constituencies of importance to the Department, such as Committees of Congress, States or Indian tribes, the White House or other departments of the Executive Branch, courts, consumer or public interest groups, or leading representatives of industry.

#### **§ 5.39 Designation procedures.**

(a) The Office of Regulation and Legislation may request an OA or OST component to prepare a designation request for certain guidance documents. Designation requests must include the following information:

- (1) A summary of the guidance document; and
- (2) The OA or OST component's recommended designation of "not significant," "significant," or "economically significant," as well as a justification for that designation.

(b) Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (c) of this section, the Office of Regulation and Legislation will seek significance determinations from OIRA for certain guidance documents, as appropriate, in the same manner as for rulemakings. Prior to publishing these guidance documents, and with sufficient time to allow OIRA to review the document in the event that a significance determination is made, the Office of Regulation and Legislation should provide OIRA with an opportunity to review the designation request or the guidance document, if requested, to determine if it meets the definition of “significant” or “economically significant” under Executive Order 13891.

(c) Unless they present novel issues, significant risks, interagency considerations, unusual circumstances, or other unique issues, the categories of guidance documents found in Appendix A do not require designation by OIRA.

#### **§ 5.41 Notice-and-comment procedures.**

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, all proposed DOT guidance documents determined to be a “significant guidance document” within the meaning of §5.37 shall be subject to the following informal notice-and- comment procedures. The issuing OA or component of OST shall publish a notice in the **Federal Register** announcing that a draft of the proposed guidance document is publicly available, shall post the draft guidance document on its website, shall invite public comment on the draft document for a minimum of 30 days, and shall prepare and post a public response to major concerns raised in the comments, as appropriate, on its website, either before or when the guidance document is finalized and issued.

(b) The requirements of paragraph (a) of this section will not apply to any significant guidance document or categories of significant guidance documents for which OGC finds, in consultation with OIRA, the proposing OA or component of OST, and the Secretary, good cause that notice and public procedure thereon are impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest (and incorporates the finding of good cause

and a brief statement of reasons therefor in the guidance issued). Unless OGC advises otherwise in writing, the categories of guidance documents listed in Appendix A will be exempt from the requirements of paragraph (a) of this section.

(c) Where appropriate, OGC or the proposing OA or component of OST may recommend to the Secretary that a particular guidance document that is otherwise of importance to the Department's interests shall also be subject to the informal notice-and-comment procedures described in paragraph (a) of this section.

#### **§ 5.43 Petitions for guidance.**

Any person may petition an OA or OST component to withdraw or modify a particular guidance document by using the procedures found in §5.13(c). The OA or OST component should respond to all requests in a timely manner, but no later than 90 days after receipt of the request.

#### **§ 5.45 Rescinded guidance.**

No OA or component of OST may cite, use, or rely on guidance documents that are rescinded, except to establish historical facts.

#### **§ 5.47 Exigent circumstances.**

In emergency situations or when the issuing OA or component of OST is required by statutory deadline or court order to act more quickly than normal review procedures allow, the issuing OA or component of OST shall coordinate with OGC to notify OIRA as soon as possible and, to the extent practicable, shall comply with the requirements of this subpart at the earliest opportunity. Wherever practicable, the issuing OA or component of OST should schedule its proceedings to permit sufficient time to comply with the procedures set forth in this subpart.

#### **§ 5.49 Reports to Congress and GAO.**

Unless otherwise determined in writing by OGC, it is the policy of the Department that upon issuing a guidance document determined to be "significant" within the meaning of

section 5.37, the issuing OA or component of OST will submit a report to Congress and GAO in accordance with the procedures described in 5 U.S.C. 801 (the “Congressional Review Act”).

## **Subpart D—Enforcement Procedures**

### **§ 5.53 General.**

The requirements set forth in this subpart apply to all enforcement actions taken by each DOT operating administration (OA) and each component of the Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST) with enforcement authority.

### **§ 5.55 Enforcement attorney responsibilities.**

All attorneys of OST and the OAs involved in enforcement activities are responsible for carrying out and adhering to the policies set forth in this subpart. All supervising attorneys with responsibility over enforcement adjudications, administrative enforcement proceedings, and other enforcement actions are accountable for the successful implementation of these policies and for reviewing and monitoring compliance with this subpart by the employees under their supervision. These responsibilities include taking all steps necessary to ensure that the Department provides a fair and impartial process at each stage of enforcement actions. The Office of Litigation and Enforcement within the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) is delegated authority to interpret this subpart and provide guidance on compliance with its policies. The Office of Litigation and Enforcement shall exercise this authority in coordination with the Chief Counsels of the OAs and subject to the direction and supervision of the General Counsel.

### **§ 5.57 Definitions.**

*Administrative enforcement proceeding* is to be interpreted broadly, consistent with applicable law and regulations, and includes, but is not limited to, administrative civil penalty proceedings; proceedings involving potential cease-and-desist or corrective action orders; preemption proceedings; safety rating appeals; pilot and mechanic

revocation proceedings; grant suspensions, terminations, or other actions to remedy violations of grant conditions; and similar enforcement- related proceedings.

*Administrative law judges* (ALJs) are adjudicatory hearing officers appointed by a department head to serve as triers of fact in formal and informal administrative proceedings and to issue recommended decisions in adjudications. At DOT, ALJs are to be appointed by the Secretary of Transportation and assigned to the Office of Hearings.

*Adversarial personnel* are those persons who represent a party (including the agency) or a position or interest at issue in an enforcement action taken or proposed to be taken by or for an agency. They include the agency's employees who investigate, prosecute, or advocate on behalf of the agency in connection with the enforcement action.

*Decisional personnel* are employees of the agency responsible for issuing decisions arising out of the agency's enforcement actions, which include formal or informal enforcement adjudications. These employees include ALJs, hearing officers, Administrative Judges (AJs), and agency employees who advise and assist such decision makers.

*Due process* means procedural rights and protections afforded by the Government to affected parties to provide for a fair process in the enforcement of legal obligations, including in connection with agency actions determining a violation of law, assessing a civil penalty, requiring a party to take corrective action or to cease and desist from conduct, or otherwise depriving a party of a property or liberty interest. Due process always includes two essential elements for a party subject to an agency enforcement action: adequate notice of the proposed agency enforcement action and a meaningful opportunity to be heard by the agency decision maker.

*Enabling act* means the Federal statute that defines the scope of an agency's authority and authorizes it to undertake an enforcement action.

*Enforcement action* means an action taken by the Department upon its own initiative or at the request of an affected party in furtherance of its statutory authority and responsibility to execute and ensure compliance with applicable laws. Such actions include administrative enforcement proceedings, enforcement adjudications, and judicial enforcement proceedings.

*Enforcement adjudication* is the administrative process undertaken by the agency to resolve the legal rights and obligations of specific parties with regard to a particular enforcement issue pending before an agency. The outcome of an enforcement adjudication is a formal or informal decision issued by an appropriate decision maker. Enforcement adjudications require the opportunity for participation by directly affected parties and the right to present a response to a decision maker, including relevant evidence and reasoned arguments.

*Formal enforcement adjudication* means an adjudication required by statute to be conducted “on the record.” The words “on the record” generally refer to a decision issued by an agency after a proceeding conducted before an ALJ (or the agency head sitting as judge or other presiding employee who is not an ALJ) using trial-type procedures. It is usually the agency’s enabling act, not the APA, that determines whether a formal hearing is required.

*Informal enforcement adjudication* means an adjudication that is not required to be conducted “on the record” with trial-like procedures. The APA provides agencies with a substantial degree of flexibility in establishing practices and procedures for the conduct of informal adjudications.

*Investigators, inspectors, and special agents* refer to those agency employees or agents responsible for the investigation and review of an affected party’s compliance with the regulations and other legal requirements administered by the agency.

*Judicial enforcement proceeding* means a proceeding conducted in an Article III court, in which the Department is seeking to enforce an applicable statute, regulation, or order.

*Procedural regulations* are agency regulations setting forth the procedures to be followed during adjudications consistent with the agency's enabling act, the APA, and other applicable laws.

#### **§ 5.59 Enforcement policy generally.**

It is the policy of the Department to provide affected parties appropriate due process in all enforcement actions. In the course of such actions and proceedings, the Department's conduct must be fair and free of bias and should conclude with a well-documented decision as to violations alleged and any violations found to have been committed, the penalties or corrective actions to be imposed for such violations, and the steps needed to ensure future compliance. It is in the public interest and fundamental to good government that the Department carry out its enforcement responsibilities in a fair and just manner.

No person should be subject to an administrative enforcement action or adjudication absent prior public notice of both the enforcing agency's jurisdiction over particular conduct and the legal standards applicable to that conduct. The Department should, where feasible, foster greater private-sector cooperation in enforcement, promote information sharing with the private sector, and establish predictable outcomes for private conduct.

#### **§ 5.61 Investigative functions.**

DOT's investigative powers must be used in a manner consistent with due process, basic fairness, and respect for individual liberty and private property. Congress has granted the Secretary (and by delegation from the Secretary to the OAs) and the FAA Administrator broad investigative powers, and it is an essential part of DOT's safety and consumer protection mission to investigate compliance with the statutes and regulations administered by the Department, including through periodic inspections. The OAs and components of OST with enforcement authority are appropriately given broad discretion



in determining whether and how to conduct investigations, periodic inspections, and other compliance reviews, and these investigative functions are often performed by agency investigators or inspectors in the field. The employees and contractors of DOT responsible for inspections and other investigative functions must not use these authorities as a game of “gotcha” with regulated entities and should follow existing statutes and regulations. Rather, to the maximum extent consistent with protecting the integrity of the investigation, the representatives of DOT should promptly disclose to the affected parties the reasons for the investigative review and any compliance issues identified or findings made in the course of the review. The responsible enforcement attorneys within the relevant OA or component of OST shall provide effective legal guidance to investigators and inspectors to ensure adherence to the policies and procedures set forth in this part.

#### **§ 5.63 Clear legal foundation.**

All DOT enforcement actions against affected parties seeking redress for asserted violations of a statute or regulation must be founded on a grant of statutory authority in the relevant enabling act. The authority to prosecute the asserted violation and the authority to impose monetary penalties, if sought, must be clear in the text of the statute. Unless the terms of a relevant statute, or of a regulation with government-wide applicability such as 2 CFR part 180, clearly and expressly authorize the OA or component of OST to enforce the relevant legal requirement directly through an administrative enforcement proceeding, the proper forum for the enforcement action is Federal court, and the enforcement action must be initiated in court by attorneys of the Department of Justice acting in coordination with DOT counsel.

#### **§ 5.65 Proper exercise of prosecutorial and enforcement discretion.**

The Department’s attorneys and policy makers have broad discretion in deciding whether to initiate an enforcement action. Nevertheless, in exercising discretion to initiate an

enforcement action and in the pursuit of that action, agency counsel must not adopt or rely upon overly broad or unduly expansive interpretations of the governing statutes or regulations and should ensure that the law is interpreted and applied according to its text. All decisions by DOT to prosecute or not to prosecute an enforcement action should be based upon a reasonable interpretation of the law about which the public has received fair notice and should be made with due regard for fairness, the facts and evidence adduced through an appropriate investigation or compliance review, the availability of scarce resources, the administrative needs of the responsible OA or OST component, Administration policy, and the importance of the issues involved to the fulfillment of the Department's statutory responsibilities.

#### **§ 5.67 Duty to review for legal sufficiency.**

In accordance with established agency procedures, enforcement actions should be reviewed by the responsible agency component for legal sufficiency under applicable statutes and regulations, judicial decisions, and other appropriate authorities.<sup>4</sup> If, in the opinion of the responsible agency component or its counsel, the evidence is sufficient to support the assertion of violation(s), then the agency may proceed with the enforcement action. If the evidence is not sufficient to support the proposed enforcement action, the agency may modify or amend the charges and bring an enforcement action in line with the evidence or return the case to the enforcement staff for additional investigation. The reviewing attorney or agency component may also recommend the closure of the case for lack of sufficient evidence.<sup>5</sup> The Department will not initiate enforcement actions as a

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<sup>4</sup> Though it may not always be feasible or necessary for agency personnel to consult with counsel before initiating an enforcement action, particularly since the OAs utilize a variety of enforcement personnel to staff their enforcement programs, including personnel located in the field, agency personnel should ensure that the basis for an enforcement action is legally sufficient before initiating it.

<sup>5</sup> Attorneys at many of the OAs issue Notices of Probable Violations, Notice of Claims, or Demand Letters to initiate enforcement proceedings. At other OAs, these documents are issued by non-attorney program officials. The duty to review applies equally to all agency attorneys whether deciding to issue a document to initiate enforcement proceedings or to continue to prosecute based upon a document previously issued by a non-attorney program official. In the latter situation, it is important that attorneys provide legal input, training, and review of the work product of the program office. At all times, DOT attorneys are encouraged

“fishing expedition” to find potential violations of law in the absence of sufficient evidence in hand to support the assertion of a violation.

#### **§ 5.69 Fair notice.**

Notice to the regulated party is a due process requirement. All documents initiating an enforcement action shall ensure notice reasonably calculated to inform the regulated party of the nature and basis for the action being taken to allow an opportunity to challenge the action and to avoid unfair surprise. The notice should include legal authorities, statutes or regulations allegedly violated, basic issues, key facts alleged, a clear statement of the grounds for the agency’s action, and a reference to or recitation of the procedural rights available to the party to challenge the agency action, including appropriate procedure for seeking administrative and judicial review.

#### **§ 5.71 Separation of functions.**

For those OAs or OST components whose regulations provide for a separation of decisional personnel from adversarial personnel in an administrative enforcement proceeding, any agency personnel who have taken an active part in investigating, prosecuting, or advocating in the enforcement action should not serve as a decision maker and should not advise or assist the decision maker in that same or a related case. In such proceedings, the agency’s adversarial personnel should not furnish ex parte advice or factual materials to decisional personnel. When and as necessary, agency employees involved in enforcement actions should consult legal counsel and applicable regulations and ethical standards for further guidance on these requirements.

#### **§ 5.73 Avoiding bias.**

Consistent with all applicable laws and ethical standards relating to recusals and disqualifications, no Federal employee or contractor may participate in a DOT enforcement

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to exercise their best professional judgment in deciding to initiate, continue, or recommend closing a case, consistent with applicable legal and ethical standards.

action in any capacity, including as ALJ, adjudication counsel, adversarial personnel, or decisional personnel, if that person has:

- (a) A financial or other personal interest that would be affected by the outcome of the enforcement action;
- (b) Personal animus against a party to the action or against a group to which a party belongs;
- (c) Prejudgment of the adjudicative facts at issue in the proceeding; or
- (d) Any other prohibited conflict of interest.

#### **§ 5.75 Representation of regulated parties.**

Subject to ethical standards governing post-Federal employment and applicable State bar requirements, regulated entities are free to choose their representatives—attorney or non-attorney—who will represent them before an OST component or OA. Each OST component or OA should assist *pro se* litigants and those who are unfamiliar with our procedures to the extent practical and allowable under ethical and State bar requirements.

#### **§ 5.77 Formal enforcement adjudications.**

When a case is referred by the decision maker to the Office of Hearings or another designated hearing officer for formal adjudication (an “on the record” hearing), the assigned ALJ or hearing officer should use trial-type procedures consistent with applicable legal provisions. In formal adjudication, the APA requires findings and reasons on all material issues of fact, law, or discretion (policy). In all formal adjudications, the responsible OA or component of OST shall adhere faithfully and consistently to the procedures established in the relevant procedural regulations. Agency counsel engaged in formal adjudications on behalf of DOT are accountable for compliance with the requirements of this subpart.

#### **§ 5.79 Informal enforcement adjudications.**

Even though informal adjudications do not require trial-type procedures, the responsible OA or component of OST should ordinarily afford the applicant or the regulated entity that is the subject of the adjudication (as the case may be), as well as other directly affected parties (if any), adequate notice and an opportunity to be heard on the matter under review, either through an oral presentation or through a written submission. Except in cases of a safety emergency or when the clear text of the relevant enabling act or government- wide regulation, such as 2 CFR part 180, expressly authorizes exigent enforcement action without a prior hearing, the responsible OA or component of OST shall give the regulated entity appropriate advance notice of the proposed enforcement action and shall advise the entity of the opportunity for an informal hearing in a manner and sufficiently in advance that the entity's representatives have a fair opportunity to prepare for and to participate in the hearing, whether in person or by writing. The notice should be in plain language and, when appropriate, contain basic information about the applicable adjudicatory process. In all informal adjudications, the responsible OA or component of OST shall adhere faithfully and consistently to the procedures established in any applicable procedural regulations.

**§ 5.81 The hearing record.**

In formal hearings, the agency shall comply with the APA and shall include in the record of the hearing the testimony, exhibits, papers, and requests that are filed by parties to the hearing, in addition to the ALJ's or hearing officer's decision or the decision on appeal. For informal hearings, the record shall include the information that the agency considered "at the time it reached the decision" and its contemporaneous findings. The administrative record does not include privileged documents, such as attorney- client communications or deliberative or draft documents. Agencies are encouraged to make the record available to all interested parties to the fullest extent allowed by law, consistent with appropriate protections for the handling of confidential information.

### **§ 5.83 Contacts with the public.**

After the initiation of an enforcement proceeding, communications between persons outside the agency and agency decisional personnel should occur on the record.

Consistent with applicable regulations and procedures, if oral, written, or electronic ex parte communications occur, they should be placed on the record as soon as practicable.

Notice should be given to the parties that such communications are being placed into the record. When performing departmental functions, all DOT employees should properly identify themselves as employees of the Department, including the OA or component of OST in which they work; they should properly show official identification if the contact is made in person; and they should clearly state the nature of their business and the reasons for the contact. All contacts by DOT personnel with the public shall be professional, fair, honest, direct, and consistent with all applicable ethical standards.

### **§ 5.85 Duty to disclose exculpatory evidence.**

It is the Department's policy that each responsible OA or component of OST will voluntarily follow in its civil enforcement actions the principle articulated in *Brady v. Maryland*,<sup>6</sup> in which the Supreme Court held that the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment requires disclosure of exculpatory evidence "material to guilt or punishment" known to the government but unknown to the defendant in criminal cases. Adopting the "Brady rule" and making affirmative disclosures of exculpatory evidence in all enforcement actions will contribute to the Department's goal of open and fair investigations and administrative enforcement proceedings. This policy requires the agency's adversarial personnel to disclose materially exculpatory evidence in the agency's possession to the representatives of the regulated entity whose conduct is the subject of the enforcement action. These affirmative disclosures should include any

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<sup>6</sup> *Brady v. Maryland*, 373 U.S. 83 (1963).

material evidence known to the Department’s adversarial personnel that may be favorable to the regulated entity in the enforcement action—including evidence that tends to negate or diminish the party’s responsibility for a violation or that could be relied upon to reduce the potential fine or other penalties. The regulated entity need not request such favorable information; it should be disclosed as a matter of course. Agency counsel should recommend appropriate remedies to DOT decision makers where a *Brady* rule violation has occurred, using the factors identified by courts when applying the *Brady* rule in the criminal context.

#### **§ 5.87 Use of guidance documents in administrative enforcement cases.**

Guidance documents cannot create binding requirements that do not already exist by statute or regulation. Accordingly, the Department may not use its enforcement authority to convert agency guidance documents into binding rules. Likewise, enforcement attorneys may not use noncompliance with guidance documents as a basis for proving violations of applicable law. Guidance documents can do no more, with respect to prohibition of conduct, than articulate the agency or Department’s understanding of how a statute or regulation applies to particular circumstances. The Department may cite a guidance document to convey this understanding in an administrative enforcement action or adjudication only if it has notified the public of such document in advance through publication in the **Federal Register** or on the Department’s website. Additional procedures related to guidance documents are contained in part 5, subpart C, of this chapter.

#### **§ 5.89 Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).**

The OAs and the components of OST with enforcement authority are encouraged to use ADR to resolve enforcement cases where appropriate. The Department’s ADR policy describes a variety of problem-solving processes that can be used in lieu of litigation or other adversarial proceedings to resolve disputes over compliance.

#### **§ 5.91 Duty to adjudicate proceedings promptly.**

Agency attorneys should promptly initiate proceedings or prosecute matters referred to them. In addition, cases should not be allowed to linger unduly after the adjudicatory process has begun. Attorneys should seek to settle matters where possible or refer the case to a decision maker for proper disposition when settlement negotiations have reached an impasse. Absent the showing of unusual or extenuating circumstances, or if necessitated for good cause, each OST component or OA with enforcement authority shall apply limiting principles to the duration of investigations. On-site investigations should generally be limited to 10 business days or less and enforcement staff shall make a decision on pursuing an administrative action within 30 days of the completion of the inspection or investigation and commence an enforcement action as soon as possible thereafter—unless otherwise required by statute.

**§ 5.93 Termination of investigation.**

When the facts disclosed by an investigation indicate that further action is not warranted, the OST component or OA with enforcement authority will close the investigation without prejudice to further investigation and will notify the person being investigated of the decision. This notification requirement should only be applied where a subject of an investigation has previously been made aware of the investigation, or other pre-enforcement activity. Nothing in this section precludes civil enforcement action at a later time related to the findings of the investigation.

**§ 5.95 Initiation of additional investigations.**

OST components and OAs should not initiate additional investigations of a party after commencing an enforcement action absent a showing of good cause (*e.g.*, new complaints, accidents, or incidents), except when the additional investigation is prompted by facts uncovered in the initial investigation.

**§ 5.97 Agency decisions.**



Agency counsel may be used in the conduct of informal hearings and to prepare initial recommended decisions for the agency decision maker. The agency must notify the directly affected parties of its decision, and the decision must reasonably inform the parties in a timely manner of the additional procedural rights available to them.

#### **§ 5.99 Settlements.**

Settlement conferences may be handled by appropriate agency counsel without the involvement of the agency's decision maker. Once a matter is settled by compromise, that agreement should be reviewed and accepted by an appropriate supervisor. The responsible OA or component of OST should issue an order adopting the terms of the settlement agreement as the final agency decision, where and as authorized by statute or regulation. No DOT settlement agreement, consent order, or consent decree should be used to adopt or impose new regulatory obligations for entities that are not parties to the settlement. Unless required by law, settlement agreements are not confidential and are subject to public disclosure.

#### **§ 5.101 OGC approval required for certain settlement terms.**

Whenever a proposed settlement agreement, consent order, or consent decree would impose behavioral commitments or obligations on a regulated entity that go beyond the requirements of relevant statutes and regulations, including the appointment of an independent monitor or the imposition of novel, unprecedented, or extraordinary obligations, the responsible OA or OST component should obtain the approval of OGC before finalizing the settlement agreement, consent order, or consent decree.

#### **§ 5.103 Basis for civil penalties and disclosures thereof.**

No civil penalties will be sought in any DOT enforcement action except when and as supported by clear statutory authority and sufficient findings of fact. Where applicable statutes vest the agency with discretion with regard to the amount or type of penalty sought or imposed, the penalty should reflect due regard for fairness, the scale of the

violation, the violator's knowledge and intent, and any mitigating factors (such as whether the violator is a small business). The assessment of proposed or final penalties in a DOT enforcement action shall be communicated in writing to the subject of the action, along with a full explanation of the basis for the calculation of asserted penalties. In addition, the agency shall voluntarily share penalty calculation worksheets, manuals, charts, or other appropriate materials that shed light on the way penalties are calculated to ensure fairness in the process and to encourage a negotiated resolution where possible.

**§ 5.105            Publication of decisions.**

The agency's decisions in informal adjudications are not required to be published under the APA. However, where the agency intends to rely on its opinions in future cases, those opinions must generally be made available on agency websites or in agency reading rooms (and publication on Westlaw, Lexis, or similar legal services is also highly recommended). The APA has been read to require that opinions in formal adjudications must be made "available for public inspection and copying." Agencies are strongly encouraged to publish all formal decisions on Westlaw, Lexis, or similar legal services.

**§ 5.107            Coordination with the Office of Inspector General on criminal matters.**

All Department employees must comply with the operative DOT Order(s) addressing referrals of potential criminal matters to the Office of Inspector General (OIG), consistent with the respective roles of the OIG and DOT OAs and components of OST in criminal investigations and the OIG's investigative procedures under the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

**§ 5.109            Standard operating procedures.**

All legal offices that participate in or render advice in connection with enforcement actions should, to the extent practicable, operate under standard operating procedures. Such offices include, but are not limited to, those that oversee investigatory matters and

serve as adversarial personnel in the agency's enforcement matters. These standard operating procedures, which can be contained in manuals, can be used to outline step-by-step requirements for attorney actions in the investigative stage and the prosecution stage; the role of an attorney as counselor, adjudicator, or litigator; the rulemaking process; and the process for issuance of guidance documents, letters of interpretation, preemption decisions, legislative guidance, contract administration, and a variety of other legal functions performed in the legal office. Each DOT OA and each OST component that conducts administrative inspections shall operate under those procedures governing such inspections and shall adopt such administrative inspection procedures if they do not exist. Those procedures shall be updated in a timely manner as needed.

**§ 5.111 Cooperative Information Sharing.**

The Department, as appropriate and to the extent practicable and permitted by law, shall:

- (a) Encourage voluntary self-reporting of regulatory violations by regulated parties in exchange for reduction or waivers of civil penalties;
- (b) Encourage voluntary information sharing by regulated parties; and
- (c) Provide pre-enforcement rulings to regulated parties (formal and informal interpretations).

**§ 5.113 Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act (SBREFA).**

The Department shall comply with the terms of SBREFA when conducting administrative inspections and adjudications, including section 223 of SBREFA (reduction or waivers of civil penalties, where appropriate). The Department will also cooperate with the Small Business Administration (SBA) when a small business files a comment or complaint related to DOT's inspection authority and when requested to answer SBREFA compliance requests.

**§ 5.115 Referral of matters for judicial enforcement.**

In considering whether to refer a matter for judicial enforcement by the Department of Justice, DOT attorneys should consult the applicable procedures set forth by the General Counsel, including in the document entitled “Partnering for Excellence: Coordination of Legal Work Within the U.S. Department of Transportation,” and any update or supplement to such document issued hereafter by the General Counsel. The specific procedures for initiating an affirmative litigation request are currently found in the coordination document at Section 11.B.1., “Affirmative Litigation Requests to the Department of Justice.” In most instances, requests to commence affirmative litigation must be reviewed by OGC, with such reviews coordinated through the Office of Litigation and Enforcement.

**§ 5.117          Publicly available decisional quality and efficiency metrics.**

Each OST component or OA should annually identify, collect, and make publicly available decisional quality and efficiency metrics regarding adjudication under administrative, judicial, and split enforcement models (of adjudication), to include, *e.g.*, the number of matters that have been pending with the agency over relevant time periods, the number of matters disposed by the agency annually, and data on the types of matters before and disposed of by the agency. This data shall be made available and prominently published on the OST component or OA’s website within 180 days of the close of the fiscal year.

**§ 5.119          Enforcement rights.**

Regulated parties that are the subject of a DOT enforcement action may, during the course of the enforcement action, petition the DOT General Counsel for a determination that responsible DOT personnel violated provisions of this rule with respect to the enforcement action. Upon finding a violation by DOT personnel, the General Counsel shall remedy the violation by directing the relevant agency decisionmaker to award the following type of relief, as warranted by the circumstances and consistent with law: (a)

removal of the enforcement team from the particular matter; (b) elimination of certain issues or the exclusion of certain evidence or the directing of certain factual findings in the course of the enforcement action; and (c) restarting the enforcement action again from the beginning or recommencing the action from an earlier point in the proceeding. The General Counsel may also make a recommendation to the relevant agency decisionmaker for appropriate administrative discipline of personnel found to have violated the rule. The General Counsel's determination on a petition, including any relief awarded, may be appealed to the Secretary.

## **PART 7—PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION**

10. The authority citation for part 7 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 5 U.S.C. 552; 31 U.S.C. 9701; 49 U.S.C. 322; E.O. 12600; E.O. 13392.

11. Amend § 7.12 by revising paragraph (a)(2) to read as follows:

### **§ 7.12 What records are available in reading rooms, and how are they accessed?**

(a) \* \* \*

(2) Statements of policy and interpretations, including guidance documents as defined in 49 CFR 5.25(c), that have been adopted by DOT;

\* \* \* \* \*

## **PART 106—RULEMAKING PROCEDURES**

12. The authority citation for part 106 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. 5101-5128; 49 CFR 1.81 and 1.97.

13. Amend § 106.40 by revising the introductory text, the first sentence of paragraph (c), and paragraph (d)(1) to read as follows:

### **§ 106.40 Direct final rule.**

A direct final rule makes regulatory changes and states that the regulatory changes will take effect on a specified date unless PHMSA receives an adverse comment within the

comment period—generally 60 days after the direct final rule is published in the **Federal Register**.

\* \* \* \* \*

(c) *Confirmation of effective date.* We will publish a confirmation document in the **Federal Register**, generally within 15 days after the comment period closes, if we have not received an adverse comment. \* \* \*

(d) \* \* \*

(1) If we receive an adverse comment, we will either publish a document withdrawing the direct final rule before it becomes effective and may issue an NPRM or proceed by any other means permitted under the Administrative Procedure Act, consistent with procedures at 49 CFR 5.13(l).

\* \* \* \* \*

## **PART 389—RULEMAKING PROCEDURES—FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY REGULATIONS**

14. The authority citation for part 389 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. 113, 501 *et seq.*, subchapters I and III of chapter 311, chapter 313, and 31502; sec. 5204 of Pub. L. 114-94, 129 Stat. 1312, 1536; 42 U.S.C. 4917; and 49 CFR 1.87.

15. Amend § 389.39 by revising the introductory text and paragraphs (c) and (d)(1) to read as follows:

### **§ 389.39 Direct final rulemaking procedures.**

A direct final rule makes regulatory changes and states that those changes will take effect on a specified date unless FMCSA receives an adverse comment by the date specified in the direct final rule published in the **Federal Register**.

\* \* \* \* \*

(c) *Confirmation of effective date.* FMCSA will publish a confirmation rule document in the **Federal Register**, if it has not received an adverse comment by the date specified in the direct final rule. The confirmation rule document tells the public the effective date of the rule.

(d) \* \* \*

(1) If FMCSA receives an adverse comment within the comment period, it will either publish a document withdrawing the direct final rule before it becomes effective and may issue an NPRM or proceed by any other means permitted under the Administrative Procedure Act, consistent with procedures at 49 CFR 5.13(l).

\* \* \* \* \*

## **PART 553—RULEMAKING PROCEDURES**

16. The authority citation for part 553 is revised to read as follows:

**Authority:** 49 U.S.C. 322, 30103, 30122, 30124, 30125, 30127, 30146, 30162, 32303, 32502, 32504, 32505, 32705, 32901, 32902, 33102, 33103, and 33107; delegation of authority at 49 CFR 1.95.

17. Amend § 553.14 by revising paragraph (d) to read as follows:

### **§ 553.14 Direct final rulemaking.**

\* \* \* \* \*

(d) If NHTSA receives any written adverse comment within the specified time after publication of the direct final rule in the **Federal Register**, the agency will either publish a document withdrawing the direct final rule before it becomes effective and may issue an NPRM or proceed by any other means permitted under the Administrative Procedure Act, consistent with procedures at 49 CFR 5.13(l).

\* \* \* \* \*

## **PART 601—ORGANIZATION, FUNCTIONS, AND PROCEDURES**

18. The authority citation for part 601 is revised to read as follows:

**Authority:** 5 U.S.C. 552; 49 U.S.C. 5334; 49 CFR 1.91.

19. Amend § 601.36 by revising paragraphs (b), (c), and (d) to read as follows:

**§ 601.36 Procedures for direct final rulemaking.**

\* \* \* \* \*

(b) The **Federal Register** document will state that any adverse comment must be received in writing by FTA within the specified time after the date of publication and that, if no written adverse comment is received, the rule will become effective a specified number of days after the date of publication.

(c) If no written adverse comment is received by FTA within the specified time of publication in the **Federal Register**, FTA will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** indicating that no adverse comment was received and confirming that the rule will become effective on the date that was indicated in the direct final rule.

(d) If FTA receives any written adverse comment within the specified time of publication in the **Federal Register**, FTA will either publish a document withdrawing the direct final rule before it becomes effective and may issue an NPRM, or proceed by any other means permitted under the Administrative Procedure Act, consistent with procedures at 49 CFR 5.13(l).

\* \* \* \* \*

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