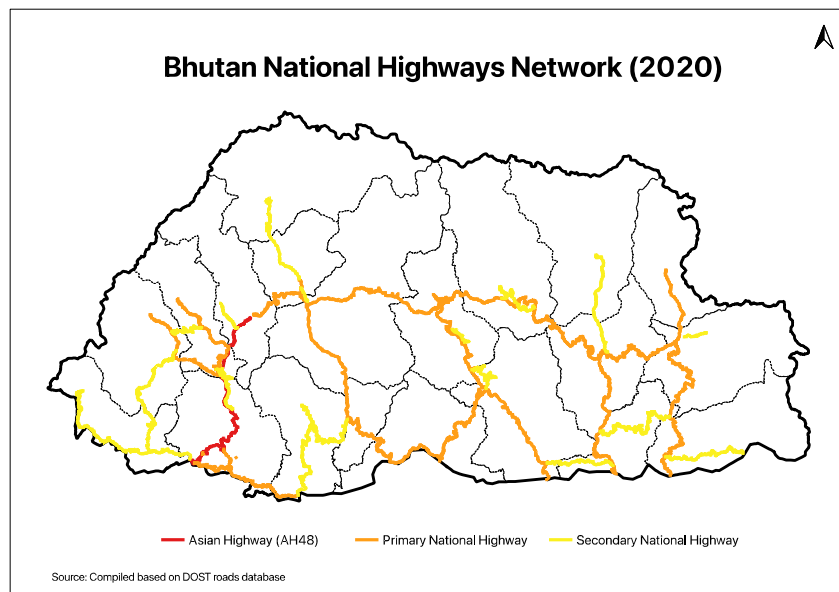


## DOST and ADB to Develop the Bhutan National Highways Connectivity Master Plan to 2040, Strategic Environmental Assessment Underway

Bhutan currently has some 2,841 km of roads classified as highways, including Primary National Highways (1,531 km), Secondary National Highways (1,161 km), and Asian Highway (149 km). The country's complement of highways has grown rapidly, with all having been built just since 1968. Expansion and improvement of the highways system is a powerful tool enabling Bhutan's ongoing development, and also poses significant infrastructure planning and management challenges. At the center of these challenges is ensuring that the network of highways is configured to serve the mobility needs of people and economy efficiently, and maintained for optimal performance and cost effectiveness.



Responsibility for the national highways network rests primarily with the Department of Surface Transport (DOST), under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation (MOIT). In order to strengthen the agency's capacity to meet the challenges of planning and maintaining a growing highway system, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is supporting a Technical Assistance initiative (TA-6916 BHU: Bhutan National Highways Connectivity Master Plan), to be implemented in collaboration with DOST during 2023–2024.

The firm David Lupton and Associates, Ltd. (New Zealand), working in association with APECS Consultancy (Bhutan) and Maxwell Stamp (Bangladesh), has been engaged to provide consulting services under the Technical Assistance.

The ADB Technical Assistance aims to support the Royal Government of Bhutan's efforts to develop and maintain the national highways system through (1) formulation of a 3-year road maintenance plan; (2) development of a national highways master plan to 2040; and (3) capacity-building activities to strengthen DOST's capabilities for transport planning and road asset management. The Bhutan National Highways Connectivity Master Plan will be developed using advanced methods in mobility measurement and prediction, network analytics and economic forecasting, as well as consultation with affected sectors. The master plan, which will encompass both highway maintenance and highway development activity through 2040, is scheduled for completion in October 2024.

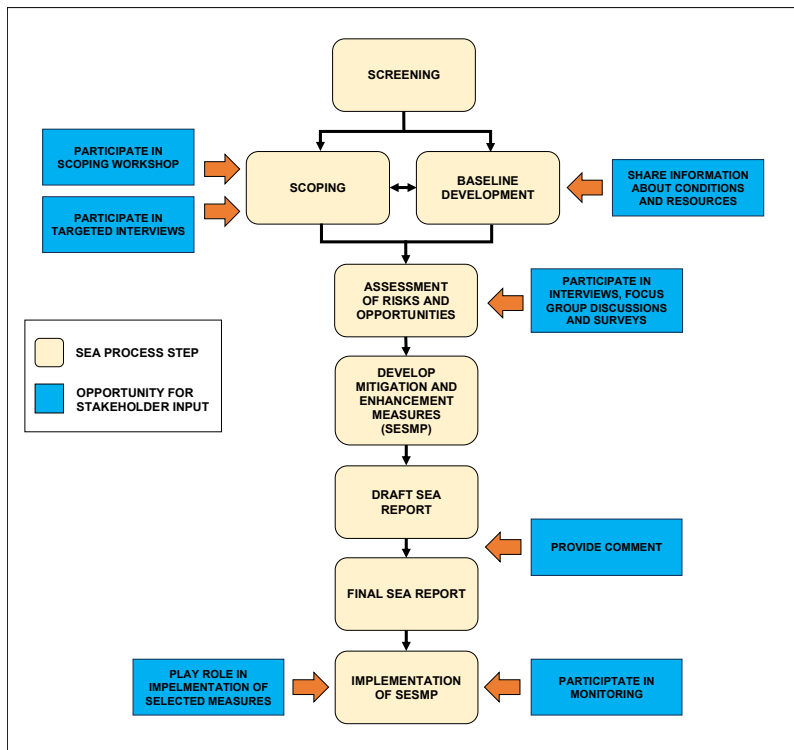
## Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Bhutan National Highways Connectivity Master Plan

In Bhutan, all policies, plans and programs (PPPs) with significant potential to affect the environment are required to undergo assessment to help ensure that their potential effects on the country's ecology and sustainable development prospects are understood and appropriately addressed prior to approval, as stipulated by the *Regulation on Strategic Environmental Assessment (2002)*. Strategic environmental

assessment (SEA) enables critical foresight, through identification of foreseeable problems and opportunities to maximize benefits, that can inform the design of better national PPPs. Early 'upstream' consideration of the potential real-world effects of a PPP may pre-empt problems that could emerge when 'downstream' initiatives (e.g., individual road projects) enabled by the PPP are developed. In addition, 'upstream' assessment may also support proactive measures to build synergies with other PPPs, which is typically difficult to achieve once implementation is already underway. A comprehensive SEA study will be conducted in parallel with development of the Bhutan National Highways Connectivity Master Plan.

**The SEA Process and Opportunities for Stakeholders to Get Involved**

Although the process of conducting an SEA is orchestrated by specialists, the interests, insights and opinions of stakeholders are important inputs to how the study is scoped, and stakeholders are typically an important source of information needed for both baseline development and impact assessment. In addition, the participation of stakeholders in monitoring can be critical to successful implementation of mitigation and enhancement measures prescribed in the Strategic Environmental and Social Management Plan (SESMP), which is embedded in the SEA report. The steps involved in an SEA, and the various points in the process at which stakeholders may get involved, are shown in the diagram at right. Note that the SEA process does not end with completion of the SEA report, but continues into the implementation phase of the PPP.



**SEA Scoping Workshop**

A workshop was held on the morning of February 14 at Hotel Migmar in Thimphu, for the purpose of defining the scope of the SEA study for the Bhutan National Highways Connectivity Master Plan. Scoping is a critical step in the SEA process, and an important window for direct involvement of stakeholders in the SEA study. The workshop benefited greatly from the participation of a wide range of stakeholder representatives, with 30 joining in person, and a further 30 remotely. In all, 37 stakeholder entities were represented, including government agencies, NGOs, and dzongkhag administrations. The scoping workshop was hosted by Tenzin, DG-DoST and orchestrated by master of ceremonies Sonam Choden, DGD-DoST, and featured presentations by Janusz Sobieniak and Simeon Stairs, both representing the TA Consultants David Lupton and Associates (New Zealand). Workshop participants learned about the



highways master planning process and the parallel SEA process, and subsequently engaged in an extended discussion of the key themes that will animate the SEA study.

Further opportunities to participate in the SEA process will be publicized periodically, and stakeholders may also be contacted directly by the SEA study team. Reports generated during the SEA process will be disclosed on this web page upon completion (see links below).

***Want to Get Involved, or Know More?***

Questions, comments, concerns and requests for involvement in the SEA process will be received at the following email address: [seata6916@gmail.com](mailto:seata6916@gmail.com)

***SEA Reports Available for Download (pdf)***

- SEA Scoping Report [coming soon]