

The Fast Track

Getting Construction Done in a Timely Manner

by Michael Norman

The construction industry is a fertile field for colorful jargon. New words and terms spring up regularly, usually for promotional purposes or to gain an economic advantage. A popular term used over the past several years is “Fast Track” construction. It rolls easily off the tongue and conjures up images of expedition, economy, and efficiency. Fast Track is not a contractual arrangement, but rather an approach used to allow for the earliest possible project completion time.

In order to keep construction projects on the fast track, the owner/manager, architect/engineer, and contractor must be completely acquainted with the process, be willing to engage in a give and take of compromise, and assume reasonable and flexible attitudes. Most importantly, they must all be committed to maintaining efficiency without sacrificing quality or safety. Planning ahead is critical, which starts during the estimating process and continues through project completion.

Under the Fast Track approach, overall costs can often be reduced due to faster occupancy and a cost-effective design from the architect/engineer.

Streamlining the Project

Streamlining the project to produce early completion by the technique of concurrent or overlapping time scheduling is the essence of Fast Track construction.

One way of shortening the time frame is by completing each function as efficiently as possible and initiating each new phase immediately upon completion of the preceding phase. Everything is accomplished in proper order and no time is wasted.

Compressing the schedule by overlapping certain functions is another way of saving total elapsed time. This can be accomplished by initiating a new work phase where possible before the preceding phase is completed.

Selecting the Contractor

In Fast Track construction, there are basically two approaches to contractor selection. One approach is for the owner/manager and architect/engineer to interview one or more qualified contractors during the conceptual and design

phase of the project. This allows candidate contractors to present its strategy for Fast Tracking the job, considering such factors as phasing and sequencing, material and equipment choices, and labor. The contractors' advisory input can be valuable to the owner/manager and architect/engineering team in developing their design concept, and can influence contractor selection.

The second approach is to select the contractor after the design phase has been completed. While this approach may seem more expedient, it could limit the exchange of ideas in conceptualizing the job.

Advances in Communication

During the past decade, advances in communication technology have been a huge aid to Fast Tracking. Project documents, including meeting notes and other records, can be routinely posted on the Internet for all team members to access and modify. Revisions can be recorded in a matter of hours instead of days.

Longview Housing Cooperative

A prime example of Fast Tracking is a recently completed masonry repair project at the Longview Housing Cooperative in Cambridge, MA. Mother Nature had the greatest impact on the time frame of the project as all masonry work had to be completed prior to onset of cold weather as the project involved masonry repairs to the exterior envelope of the rear of the building.



All About Teamwork

To initiate the process, the project management team -- including the owner, architect, and contractor -- conducted a pre-construction meeting to develop the most efficient approach to the project. Important considerations were sequencing, phasing, equipment mobilization, and labor requirements to meet the tight construction schedule. Based on the concepts discussed at the meeting, the contractor value engineered a plan that was approved by the building owner and architect. Work began on September 8, less than a week after the contract had been awarded.

Sequencing and Mobilization

One key to the schedule was evaluating the scope of work and sequencing the project based on anticipated weather conditions. The project specifications called for the masonry work to be performed only when the temperatures were “40 degrees and rising.” As all weather sensitive masonry work had to be completed within the temperature specifications, the schedule was compressed to approximately 3-4 months. This included brick work, stone replacement, repointing, resealing, and installation of window trim. Non-weather related work, such as storm window installation, could be performed at later date.

Another key to the schedule was mobilization – assembling the proper amount of equipment on the building to create an efficient production schedule without interfering with the lifestyle of the building occupants. To maximize efficiency, the project was divided into two phases. Two-point suspended swing scaffolding was assembled to cover the entire wall on one half of the elevation and the masonry work was performed in its entirety. Once the first phase was completed, the scaffolding was moved to cover the other half of the building wall and masonry work proceeded. Once the scaffolding was moved, the storm window installation commenced on the completed section of the building.

Implementing the right sequencing, the right phasing, the right mobilization, and the right amount of labor allowed the project to be substantially completed on December 24, 2010, well within the desired time frame.

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