The High Stakes of Early Schedule Approval in Construction Projects

Introduction: Why Timing of Baseline Approval Matters

In construction and infrastructure projects, time is not just money – it's also risk. A project's baseline schedule (the initial approved plan) serves as the roadmap against which progress is measured, and changes are managed. Yet all too often, this critical baseline is not agreed upon until well after work has begun [(1)]. Late approval of a baseline programme can spell trouble, correlating with cost overruns, delays, and strained relationships. In contrast, securing an early, high-quality baseline approval aligns all stakeholders from the start and lays the foundation for successful project delivery. This article explores why getting project schedules approved early is so crucial, how it ties into contract compliance and risk reduction, and how modern tools like **XER Schedule Toolkit** help ensure schedule quality for the benefit of both clients and contractors.

Late-Approved Baselines and Poor Project Performance

When baseline schedules are approved late (or not at all), the project begins without a clear, agreed roadmap. The result is often misalignment between the owner and contractor on key milestones and expectations [(1)]. Early delays and disruptions may go unrecognised or unresolved, accumulating into bigger problems. Studies have shown that one hallmark of successful projects is active involvement of the full project team (owners, project controls, contractors) in reviewing and agreeing the schedule early on [(1)]. In practice, failure to establish an accepted baseline in a timely manner weakens the ability to analyse delays or disputes in the early stages [(1)].

Without an agreed baseline, it becomes difficult to objectively determine what is "on schedule" versus "behind." For example, if design information is delayed or a subcontractor starts late, an approved baseline would allow clear identification of the impact and potential entitlement to an extension of time [(1)]. But without that reference point, such delays may not be properly identified or allocated, leading to confusion and conflict. As one industry analysis explains, when there is no baseline in place, early delays "just accumulate and corrode the collaborative culture necessary for a successful project" [(1)]. This often translates into reactive firefighting, mutual frustration, and an erosion of trust between client and supplier.

Empirical data and case studies consistently link late baseline approval to poor outcomes. Projects that operate for months without an accepted schedule frequently suffer greater schedule slip and cost growth than those that have a baseline locked in early [(1)]. In fact, the very absence of an accepted programme can be symptomatic of deeper issues: either the contractor is disorganised with little control of progress or is intentionally withholding a

schedule due to concerns about its viability [2]. Both scenarios are red flags that often foreshadow schedule crises. Put simply, a project flying blind without an approved plan is at higher risk of delays, budget overruns, and contentious disputes over what went wrong. Early baseline approval, by contrast, aligns the team on a common plan, enabling proactive management and smoother project execution.

Contract Compliance: Baseline Schedules in NEC, and Other Contracts

Contractual requirements drive the urgency of early schedule approval. Different standard forms of contract handle baseline programmes in varying ways, but all recognise the importance of a timely, realistic plan:

NEC (New Engineering Contract)

The NEC suite (particularly NEC3/NEC4 Engineering and Construction Contract) arguably sets the gold standard for integrating the schedule into contract compliance. Under NEC, the contractor must submit a detailed programme for acceptance shortly after contract award (as defined in Contract Data, often within 2 to 4 weeks of Notice to Proceed). The Project Manager then has two weeks to review and either accept the programme or provide reasons for non-acceptance. The "Accepted Programme" becomes the contractual baseline against which progress, and compensation events are assessed [9]. Crucially, NEC incentivises timely submission: one quarter of the contractor's payment is withheld until a first programme is submitted for acceptance [2]. This 25% withholding (per NEC3 clause 50.3) underscores how "the programme is integral to administration of the NEC" [2]. If a contractor fails to ever produce an acceptable baseline, the contract simply cannot be properly administered [2]. For instance, many compensation events (variations or delay events) under NEC are evaluated by reference to the Accepted Programme; without one, the Project Manager is empowered to assess impacts unilaterally using his own view of the remaining work plan [2]. In effect, delay entitlement decisions are taken out of the contractor's hands, often to their detriment. Non-compliance can even trigger penalties: a persistently missing or non-compliant programme might lead to management intervention or, in extreme cases, termination for default under bespoke contract clauses. The NEC's rigorous approach – *submit early, get it approved, keep it updated* – is designed to foster collaboration and "good management of risks and uncertainties" in the spirit of mutual trust [9].

FIDIC (International – e.g. used in Middle East, Asia)

The FIDIC forms (such as the Red Book and Yellow Book) require the contractor to submit a detailed construction programme, typically within 28 days of the commencement date [3]. This submission usually must include critical path network details and a supporting report explaining methods and resources. Interestingly, under unamended FIDIC, the programme does not require the engineer's formal approval to become the baseline, and it is not listed among contract documents that can override other obligations [3]. However, FIDIC does explicitly obligate the contractor to "proceed with the Works in accordance with the programme", and a failure to do so can be grounds for default termination [3]. In essence, FIDIC expects an early baseline and compliance with it, but handles it more as a contractor's means-and-methods responsibility than a jointly agreed contract instrument. In practice, many Middle Eastern clients (using FIDIC-based contracts) will still insist on approving the baseline schedule and may write in provisions linking a credible baseline to payment milestones or mobilisation. Some contracts allow the engineer to withhold certificates for interim payment until a satisfactory baseline programme is

received. Thus, while the standard FIDIC clause lacks a formal acceptance step, the spirit is similar: an early, well-thought-out baseline is critical and ignoring it can carry severe consequences (including loss of rights or contract termination in extreme cases). It's also worth noting that a solid baseline under FIDIC is vital for evaluating claims: without it, demonstrating the impact of employer delays or variations (for Extension of Time claims) becomes contentious and complex.

United States (e.g. AIA Contracts)

In the U.S., industry-standard contracts like the AIA A201 General Conditions also mandate an early baseline schedule, though the language is framed as submission for the owner/architect's *review* rather than formal approval. For example, AIA A201-2017 requires the contractor to submit a construction schedule (with a defined critical path) to the owner and architect within a set period, often 30 days after contract award [(4)]. This baseline schedule must not exceed the overall contract duration and typically aligns with any phasing or milestone requirements in the contract. The architect reviews it to ensure it conforms to the contract time requirements, but the contractor retains responsibility for means and methods. Importantly, AIA contracts and related project specifications usually require regular schedule updates – often monthly updates submitted with each payment application [(4)]. Failing to provide an updated schedule can justify withholding of payment, as owners need up-to-date progress information to evaluate work performed. So, while the process is a bit less formal than NEC (no "accepted programme" stamp), there is still a clear expectation: get a baseline in place early, and keep it accurate through updates. Large U.S. infrastructure projects (especially those funded by government agencies) may have even stricter scheduling specs, sometimes following guidelines like the GAO Schedule Assessment Guide or DCMA 14-point analysis to ensure schedule quality. The bottom line is that in the U.S. context, an early baseline approval (or at least no objection from the owner) is critical because it becomes the yardstick for measuring delay and performance, and any significant delays in producing the baseline can hinder project control from day one.

Canada (e.g. CCDC contracts)

Canadian standard contracts (such as CCDC 2 – Stipulated Price Contract) closely mirror the U.S. approach. Contractors are required to submit a baseline construction schedule to the consultant or owner shortly after contract award, and to provide periodic updates (often monthly) as the work progresses. While the contract might not label it as an "accepted baseline," in practice owners will review and often comment on the schedule submission. Major projects in Canada often include detailed scheduling specifications (similar to those in U.S. projects) that set out required schedule content, software (e.g. Primavera P6), and update frequency. There may not be a specific contractual penalty for late baseline submission beyond possible delay in payment or in extreme cases, owner intervention, but the expectation is clear: a timely baseline schedule is part of the contractor's fundamental obligations to enable project monitoring. Canadian contracts also typically allow the owner's consultant to request schedule revisions if the plan is deemed not credible or detailed enough. As such, both sides benefit when that baseline is hashed out and agreed early – it creates a mutual reference for coordination and performance evaluation.

Australian Contracts (e.g. GC21)

Australia's government contracts like GC21 (General Conditions of Contract) place heavy emphasis on upfront planning and continuous schedule management. For instance, NSW's GC21 (Edition 2) requires the contractor to submit a detailed baseline "Contract Program" before commencing work on site (). This baseline must

include all activities, logic links, critical path, resource allocation, cash flow, and so on – often even specifying the software format (such as Primavera P6) to ensure a robust CPM schedule [5]. The contractor is then obliged to update the Contract Program monthly and whenever otherwise directed, reflecting actual progress and any changes [5]. While the Principal (owner) under GC21 does not formally "accept" the program in writing (and is not required to respond each time [4]), they can reject a program that doesn't meet contract requirements and instruct the contractor to resubmit a compliant version [5]. In effect, there is a back-and-forth until the program is satisfactory. Moreover, the contractor must carry out the works in accordance with the "Scheduled Progress" defined by the latest program – if they fall behind, the Principal can direct recovery measures. Thus, GC21 creates a contractual imperative to have an accurate baseline from the start and to keep it up to date, very much aligning with the ethos that early approval and continuous monitoring of the schedule are central to risk management.

In summary, across various contracts (NEC, FIDIC, AIA, GC21, etc.), the message is consistent: an early baseline schedule is critical. NEC and GC21 make it a contractual linchpin with formal acceptance and even financial withholding for non-compliance [3]. whereas AIA stress early submission and review without formal acceptance, and FIDIC sits somewhat in between. Regardless of formality, clients and contractors ignore the baseline at their peril. A late or unapproved schedule can trigger contractual remedies (withheld payments, denial of time extensions, or even termination in severe cases) and invariably leads to greater risk. Conversely, complying with contract scheduling requirements – by producing a quality baseline on time – sets the project on a firm footing and reduces downstream disputes.

The All-Party Benefits of Early Schedule Approval

Getting the baseline programme approved early isn't just a box-ticking exercise for compliance – it delivers tangible benefits to all parties involved. When clients and contractors treat the baseline development and approval as a collaborative priority, both sides stand to gain in multiple ways:

Clarity and Alignment on Rules and Expectations:

Clients (owners) can set detailed scheduling requirements and business rules upfront and have them reflected in the baseline. This can include requirements such as specific milestones, interface points, resource constraints, format of reporting, etc. By articulating these expectations early (often in tender documents or pre-contract meetings) and insisting they appear in the baseline, the client ensures the contractor understands the "rules of the game." An early approved baseline confirms that the contractor's plan meets the client's criteria. On the other side, contractors benefit from knowing exactly what is expected. They enter the project with full awareness of key dates, sequencing priorities, and any phasing or access restraints the client has defined [3]. This alignment helps prevent misunderstandings later. Essentially, early approval aligns the project objectives and reduces the chance of "I thought you meant this date, not that date" scenarios. Everyone starts on the same page.

Reduced Rework and Iteration

From a contractor's perspective, few things are worse than spending weeks developing a detailed CPM schedule, only for the client or consultant to reject it due to non-compliance with requirements or perceived flaws. Early engagement and approval mean that schedule iterations are minimised. If the contractor can ensure compliance before the formal submission (for example, by running internal checks or even sharing a draft for comment), the baseline is more likely to be accepted on the first pass or after minimal adjustments. This saves time and effort for both contractor

and client. It also means the project can transition into execution mode faster, instead of lingering in a protracted cycle of "schedule resubmittal." Moreover, an early-approved baseline reduces downstream *changes* to the plan. With a solid plan in place, the project is less likely to need major resequencing or re-baselining later, avoiding the cascade of rework that often follows a shaky start.

Improved Risk Identification and Mitigation

Early approval forces a thorough review of the plan when it matters most – at project kick-off. Clients and consultants can scrutinise the baseline for any red flags (over-optimistic durations, missing scope, unrealistic logic) and require improvements before work starts. Contractors, by engaging in this process, can address issues in a proactive environment rather than under the pressure of an ongoing delay. This collaborative refinement of the baseline surfaces risks early. For example, the review might reveal that a key design deliverable was scheduled too late, prompting mitigation like expediting design or resequencing some tasks. By catching these issues in the baseline stage, both parties reduce the risk of surprises later. Early schedule sign-off also ties into risk reduction contractually – for instance, under NEC, once the baseline is accepted, it becomes the basis for evaluating compensation events, which greatly reduces subjectivity and dispute over the impact of changes [(9)] [(1)]. Both client and contractor have a common reference, which makes the assessment of delays or variations more straightforward and less contentious.

Strengthened Client-Contractor Relationship

Approving a baseline early sets a tone of partnership. It demonstrates that the contractor is organised and committed to transparency, and that the client is engaged and supportive. One professional scheduling article noted that achieving early deliverables like the baseline "increases the chances to build stronger and lasting relations" with project stakeholders [(1)]. The client gains confidence that the contractor's team is competent and has a clear plan, while the contractor gains confidence that the client will fairly acknowledge and work with that plan. This mutual confidence is invaluable. It can lead to a more collaborative culture where issues are flagged and resolved in real time against the agreed plan, rather than turning into blame games. In essence, early baseline approval functions as an early win for the project team – a demonstration that they can work together effectively – which bodes well for collaboration throughout the job.

Predictable Cash Flow and Resource Planning

For clients, an approved schedule provides a credible forecast of cash flow requirements and resource deployment. It allows better financial planning and coordination of third parties (designers, regulators, etc.) on the timeline. For contractors, it gives a clear timeline for procurement, labour mobilisation, and subcontractor engagements. Early approval solidifies these plans so that everyone can gear up with confidence. It also means that payments tied to schedule progress will commence smoothly. (Consider NEC's 25% withholding – the sooner a baseline is accepted, the sooner the contractor avoids that cash flow hit [(3)]. Thus, both sides benefit financially from the certainty an approved baseline brings.

Ensuring Schedule Quality and Integrity with Automated Tools (The XER Schedule Toolkit Advantage)

Achieving an early approved baseline is not just about *when* the schedule is approved, but also *what* is being approved – in other words, the quality and integrity of the schedule. A fast

approval of a flawed schedule does little good. This is where tools like XER Schedule Toolkit come into play, by elevating the quality of schedules through automated, objective analysis. In the push for early approval, XER Schedule Toolkit ensures that speed does not sacrifice rigor, benefiting both clients and suppliers.

XER Schedule Toolkit is a schedule analytics platform known for its powerful automated checks and comparisons on project schedules. It acts as an impartial "guardian of quality," scanning schedules for issues and verifying compliance with best practices and contract requirements. By doing so, it significantly reduces the subjectivity that traditionally plagues schedule reviews[(6)]. Instead of debates based on opinions, the tool provides clear metrics and flags. For example, XER Schedule Toolkit can quickly highlight missing logic links, out-of-sequence activities, unrealistic float or durations, violations of contractual scheduling constraints (like exceeding a mandated milestone date), and other integrity problems – all in a matter of seconds. One project controls director noted that XER Schedule Toolkit "removes subjectivity, providing clear, objective insights" when assessing schedule quality [(6)]. This kind of objectivity is crucial for early baseline approvals: both the contractor and client can agree on the tool's findings and trust that the schedule has been vetted against industry standards and the contract's criteria.

Another advantage is speed and efficiency in schedule analysis. Manual schedule review can be painstaking and time-consuming, which often contributes to delays in baseline approval. Every iteration might take days or weeks of back-and-forth. XER Schedule Toolkit accelerates this by automatically pinpointing issues so they can be fixed *before* formal submission. Neal Taylor, a director at a leading consultancy, observed that XER Schedule Toolkit "has significantly reduced the time we spend analysing programme integrity and identifying problem areas." [(6)]. Faster analysis means faster turnaround on schedule approval – a critical factor when trying to baseline a project quickly after award. Contractors can run their schedule through XER Schedule Toolkit prior to sending it to the client, catching and correcting issues proactively. Likewise, clients using the tool can independently verify the contractor's schedule upon receipt, confident that they're catching any hidden flaws. The result is a more efficient review cycle with far fewer iterations, moving the project to an accepted baseline with speed and confidence.

Importantly, XER Schedule Toolkit is not a one-size-fits-all checker; it can be tailored or has built-in profiles for different contract requirements. Users praise its ability to run schedule data "against NEC and other contract types" seamlessly [(6)]. This means the tool can, for instance, verify that an NEC schedule shows the required details (like float, risk allowances, etc., per NEC clause 31.2) or check that a schedule intended for a FIDIC contract meets any stipulated requirements (like the 28-day submission window and inclusion of a detailed critical path). The toolkit's adaptability to various standards makes it valuable in international projects where each contract might have unique mandates. It ensures contract compliance in the schedule itself – a major step toward getting that early approval. For example, if a client's scheduling specification says "no artificial constraints or negative lags allowed," XER Schedule Toolkit can flag any violations instantly, so the contractor can fix them pre-emptively. By the time the baseline hits the client's desk, it's already been objectively vetted for compliance and quality, increasing the likelihood of one-and-done approval. This greatly boosts confidence for both clients and suppliers. Clients feel assured that the baseline they are asked to approve has been through rigorous QA/QC, and contractors feel protected from subjective or inconsistent criticisms of their schedule, because an objective tool has validated it.

Furthermore, XER Schedule Toolkit's comprehensive reports and visualisations turn schedule data into digestible insights that both parties can understand. It can produce quality scorecards, dashboards, and even Excel-based Gantt charts that make communication easier [(6)]. In the context of baseline approval, this transparency means a contractor can *demonstrate* the soundness of their schedule with hard data. Instead of simply saying "we

believe this is a good plan," they can show the XER Schedule Toolkit report indicating that the plan meets, say, 98% of all quality checks and 100% of the client's specific requirements. That is a persuasive supplement to the baseline submission, often tipping the scales toward approval. As one user noted, it brings "valuable insights into project management—something that was hard to come by before… it removes subjectivity" from conversations about schedule quality [6].

The tool's role in fostering mutual confidence cannot be overstated. In many client-contractor dynamics, schedules can become a point of tension – the client worries the contractor's plan is too optimistic or missing scope, while the contractor worries the client will arbitrarily reject their programme. XER Schedule Toolkit serves as a neutral arbiter. Both sides can agree on using the same checking criteria and trust the results. This aligns with the collaborative philosophy of modern contracts. In fact, some have called XER Schedule Toolkit *"the ultimate collaboration tool for construction projects… the go-to platform for collaborative programme management on major projects."* [6]. When baseline development becomes a collaborative rather than adversarial process, the approval naturally comes more easily and early.

Maintaining Compliance Through Regular Updates

Securing an early baseline approval is a critical milestone, but it is not the finish line. Schedule compliance and risk management continue through the life of the project via regular updates and adherence to reporting periods. A baseline, no matter how well-crafted and timely, can become obsolete if not maintained. Thus, both contracts and best practices call for periodic schedule updates to reflect actual progress, changes, and forecast completion.

Virtually all major contract forms stipulate some cadence for schedule updates:

- Under NEC, after the initial Accepted Programme, the contractor is required to submit updated programmes at regular intervals (often every 4 weeks, or as defined in contract data) or when events occur that alter the schedule significantly. Each revised programme is subject to acceptance by the Project Manager just like the baseline [3]. This keeps the "Accepted Programme" a living document. If a contractor fails to provide updates, they risk the same problems as a late baseline – loss of entitlement on compensation events and potential withholding. In fact, NEC explicitly notes that failing to submit updates is a considerable disadvantage to the contractor, as the Project Manager may have to make their own assessments of delay impacts in the absence of an updated plan [7]. Regular updates ensure that compensation events (change orders, delays, etc.) are assessed using the most current agreed schedule, maintaining fairness.

- FIDIC contracts require the contractor to "whenever appropriate, revise the programme" and resubmit to the engineer. Many project specifications under FIDIC will enforce monthly updates in line with progress reporting. If the contractor falls behind, the engineer can request a recovery or revised programme. While FIDIC doesn't make update approval as formal as NEC, a prudent contractor will regularly update the schedule to maintain a realistic plan, since FIDIC's approach to delay analysis (for claims or for imposing damages) will consider what a reasonable current programme is. Not updating the programme can hurt the contractor's credibility and ability to prove delays were excusable.

- AIA (U.S.) contracts are very clear: AIA A201 requires the contractor to submit an updated construction schedule with each monthly pay application [8]. This ensures the owner and architect can verify that the work is on track relative to the baseline and note any delays. If a contractor fails to update, the owner may have grounds to withhold a portion of the payment until an update is provided (since the contract

typically allows withholding for failure to comply with contract requirements, which include providing an updated schedule). The monthly update cycle also dovetails with project management practice – it provides a regular opportunity to course-correct. For instance, if an activity slipped in one month's update, the team could discuss mitigation in the next job meeting, rather than discovering the slip only at the end.

- GC21 (Australia), as noted, requires monthly updated Contract Programs to be submitted [5]. The contract even allows the client (Principal) to demand an out-of-cycle update at any time, with as little as 7 days' notice for submission of a revision, if circumstances warrant [5]. The updated program must consider actual progress to date, ensuring it remains a realistic plan. Importantly, GC21 uses these updated programs in administering the contract – for example, in assessing any entitlement to extensions of time for delays, the contractor must demonstrate the impact on the critical path in the current updated program [5]. Regular updating is thus baked into the contract's operation.

What these provisions across various contracts illustrate is a consensus that reporting periods matter. A baseline is a static snapshot; without updates, it loses relevance as soon as something changes (which is inevitable on any project). Regular schedule updates serve multiple critical functions:

- They re-baseline the remaining work considering actual progress. This means future activities are scheduled based on where things stand *now*, not where they were expected to be months ago. It keeps everyone working to a plan that is achievable and reflective of reality.
- They highlight deviations from the original baseline early. By comparing each update to the baseline (or to the previous update), one can identify trends: is the project slipping? Is float being consumed? Are certain trades lagging? Early identification allows timely mitigative action – perhaps adding resources, resequencing tasks, or negotiating a change in approach. It's far better to implement a corrective plan in Month 3 than to wait until Month 9 when a six-week delay has accumulated unnoticed.
- They maintain compliance with contract mechanisms. Many contracts treat an updated schedule as a condition for evaluating claims. For instance, under NEC, if an event delays the project, the contractor's entitlement to a time extension is assessed by demonstrating the delay on the Accepted Programme (or latest accepted update) [9]. If the contractor never updated the programme to show a realistic sequence, proving impact becomes contentious. Regular updates, approved by the client, provide a clean record: "At the time this delay occurred, here is what the plan said and here is how the delay affected it." This is powerful in avoiding disputes or in resolving them efficiently. Without updates, each delay analysis turns into a forensic retroactive exercise, which is ripe for dispute.
- They provide a forum for communication. The act of updating the schedule usually coincides with progress meetings where the client and contractor review the past period and plan the next. These meetings improve client-contractor communication and trust. The schedule update report is a common point of reference to discuss status. If the project is on track, the update reconfirms that; if not, the update quantifies the slip and becomes the basis of a recovery plan or a joint discussion on how to mitigate risk. Thus, regular updates keep the client-supplier relationship proactive rather than reactive, much like the early baseline approval set it on the right path initially.

Given these benefits, it's wise for project teams to treat schedule updates with the same diligence as the initial baseline approval. XER Schedule Toolkit is again valuable here – it

will compare the updated schedule against the baseline to quickly flag changes or run the same quality checks to ensure the update hasn't introduced new issues (e.g., out-of-sequence work or invalid logic). In fact, XER Schedule Toolkit's schedule comparison feature makes it easy to identify every change between versions, which can be invaluable during update approvals [(6)]. This further reduces friction: both parties can see exactly what changed and why.

Conclusion: Early Approval as a Cornerstone of Project Success

Early baseline schedule approval is much more than an administrative hurdle – it is a cornerstone of effective project management and a predictor of project success. When baseline schedules are approved late, projects often stumble with avoidable delays, cost overruns, and adversarial tensions. Conversely, an early-approved, high-quality baseline provides a strong launchpad: it aligns stakeholders, satisfies contract requirements, and enables proactive management of time and risk from day one [(1)]. By focusing on schedule quality and integrity – and leveraging modern tools like XER Schedule Toolkit to enforce that quality – both clients and contractors can approach the baseline approval with confidence instead of apprehension.

Crucially, early approval is not the end of the road; it must be followed by regular updates and mutual vigilance to keep the schedule on track and in compliance. Contracts like NEC, FIDIC, AIA, and GC21 give us the framework to do this [(4)(9)]. The onus is on project teams to treat those requirements seriously, for their own benefit. After all, the goal of these contract provisions and best practices is the same: to ensure that time is managed as tightly as money or scope, with an agreed plan that can only be changed through transparent, agreed processes.

For organisations looking to improve their performance, investing in the discipline of early schedule approval yields high returns. It reduces subjectivity and disputes (thanks to clear baselines), fosters collaboration (through shared expectations and frequent communication), and often correlates with finishing on time and on budget [(1)]. As a thought leader in this space, XER Schedule Toolkit advocates for this best practice not only in principle but also by providing the practical means to achieve it: automated checks and powerful analytics to get your baseline "right first time" and keep it that way.

In a construction landscape where projects are increasingly complex and stakes are high, we cannot afford to treat the baseline schedule as an afterthought. It must be a priority deliverable – one that is developed early, vetted thoroughly, and approved swiftly. The evidence is clear that when you "agree on a baseline early in the project" it solves many misalignments and sets up the project for success [(1)]. Early schedule approval, supported by rigorous quality tools and regular maintenance, is not just a contractual nicety, but a strategic advantage in delivering projects safely, efficiently, and amicably. It is time for both clients and suppliers to elevate the baseline schedule to the attention it truly deserves – right from the very start.

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