

ACTION TRANSMITTAL – 2020-18

DATE: April 2, 2020
TO: Transportation Advisory Board
FROM: Technical Advisory Committee
PREPARED BY: Steve Peterson, Manager of Highway Planning and TAB/TAC Process (651-602-1819)
Joe Barbeau, Senior Planner (651-602-1705)
SUBJECT: Regional Solicitation Application Deadline Changes
That TAB allow:

REQUESTED ACTION / RECOMMENDED MOTION:

1. Required letters of support to be submitted by 9/1/2020,
2. Outreach meetings cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak be considered for points in the equity outreach scoring measure, and
3. Use of either use StreetLight Insights intersection turning movement count data or data older than three years be allowed in lieu of collecting data when atypical traffic patterns are present.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF ACTION: At its March 18, 2020 meeting, the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) voted to extend the Regional Solicitation deadline from April 16, 2020 to May 15, 2020 due to the additional strain placed on partner agency resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak. Given uncertainty surrounding the outbreak, the TAB agreed to revisit the Regional Solicitation deadline at its April 15, 2020 meeting to see if an additional extension or other accommodation would be warranted.

To gather additional information for TAB, Council staff sent out an email notice to potential applicants asking them to identify continued concerns with the new extended application due date. The attached responses were received from Carver County, Move MN, Anoka County, and Washington County.

At its April 1, 2020 meeting, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) discussed potential concerns with completing Regional Solicitation applications by the May 15 deadline, including the feedback received from the three counties and Move MN. Key information gathered from these potential applicants along with TAC's discussion on these items includes the following:

- **Required application elements:** most should be able to be completed by May 15.
- **Required letters of support from partner agencies:** with boards meeting less frequently, potential applicants are not certain they will be able to secure required support letters prior to May 15.
 - TAC members agreed that letters will be difficult to obtain in a timely manner but should be able to be acquired by a later deadline (e.g., September 1, 2020) without impacting the rest of the application process.

- **Public engagement:** Planned and scheduled public meetings have been required to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This is a concern related to 20 points in the equity scoring measure.
 - TAC members expressed concern with the fact that public meetings and engagement opportunities scheduled for Spring of 2020 needed to be canceled and it is uncertain when they will be able to occur. It is ideal that early and on-going engagement, particularly with equity populations, inform both project selection and design. Completed in-person or online engagement that has already occurred and influenced the project selection and design will score more points, but in-person engagement that was planned to occur but canceled due to the COVID-19 outbreak and that will be rescheduled, will be awarded points as well.
- **Staff time:** due to the current situation, staff may have other/additional priorities that make it difficult to work on Regional Solicitation applications.
 - TAC members discussed that some staff are being used in human services areas (this seems to be a bigger concern for counties than others). Additionally, there is uncertainty regarding staff availability if people are not able to work due to the pandemic.
- **Data collection:** collecting peak-hour, intersection turning movements (to assess delay and emissions reduced in many of the roadway applications) may be an issue, especially due to atypical travel behavior present right now. It may also be more difficult to obtain required data from stakeholders. Council staff received a question about how to collect these turning movement counts from Dakota County and advised that they could use the StreetLight Insight platform to generate pre-COVID-19 data. Agencies that do not have access to a Streetlight Insight license can request this data from Council staff. A second option would be for applicants to use previously collected turning movement counts that are older than three years old (the application asks that traffic counts be from the past three years).
- **Additional:** securing local match from non-profit agencies may be hindered or impossible.
 - TAC members said this could be a concern for public agencies as well, given the overall economic impact of the pandemic.

TAC views this situation as fluid and want to have a check-in prior to the April 15, TAB meeting to see whether anything has changed that warrants a further deadline extension.

RELATIONSHIP TO REGIONAL POLICY: TAB develops and issues a Regional Solicitation for federal transportation funding.

STAFF ANALYSIS: Based on the feedback received from partner agencies and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) described above, staff recommends the following modifications to the Regional Solicitation application process:

1. Allow required letters of support to be added to already submitted applications by a later deadline of September 1, 2020.
2. Allow applicants to describe previously-planned in-person outreach that were canceled due to the COVID-19 outbreak to be considered for points in the equity scoring measure.

3. Allow applicants to either use StreetLight Insight intersection turning movement count data (with Council assistance, if needed) or data older than three years in lieu of collecting new data when atypical traffic patterns are present.

Staff also shares the following two observations:

- TAB had indicated interest in having the final program of projects approved by December to avoid large turnover in TAB members at the end of the year. The May 15 deadline should enable a December approval, though later deadlines would push approval into early 2021.
- There is the potential for a federal infrastructure funding stimulus bill and having a list of projects ready at the end of the year will be beneficial.

ATTACHMENT

1. CARVER COUNTY

We appreciate the needed extension granted by the Transportation Advisory Board for the submittal of the Regional Solicitation applications through May 15th. This extension addresses the majority of our concern related to data and staff coordination needs for the logistical success of submitting our applications; however, there are still some areas of uncertainty due to the state of emergency. We encourage the Technical Advisory Committee to discuss the following areas:

1. **Required letters of support or resolutions from partner agencies**

- a. Area of uncertainty: Councils and Boards are changing the way they meet with many going to a virtual format and some only considering critical business items at their upcoming meetings. For example, previously scheduled workshops to discuss the proposed project applications are being canceled or delayed. We do not know how our letter of support and/or resolution approval schedule will be impacted by these changes.
- b. Potential change: Allow a secondary date, after the application deadline, for submittal of all required resolutions and letters of support.

2. **Public engagement and outreach to disadvantaged populations**

- a. Area of uncertainty: Our public engagement and outreach activities scheduled for March and April were canceled. This included four public meetings with specific outreach to disadvantaged populations. We are shifting our outreach strategy to do as much as possible through online surveys and project websites, but we recognize this is not a replacement strategy for the meetings we planned to hold. It is highly unlikely we will be able to hold any public meetings prior to the May 15th deadline.
- b. Potential change: Consider planned public engagement and outreach activities that were canceled due to the state of emergency as valid for the purposes of scoring applications. Agencies should not receive lower scores due to cancelations made in the interest of public health. There could be a deadline to complete the activity once circumstances allow (e.g. 3 month window).

3. **Data collection related to traffic counts including turning movements**

- a. Area of uncertainty: The Congestion Reduction/Air Quality criterion requires detailed turning movement data be collected within the previous 3 years. Traffic counts including turning movements should not be completed during this time due to the significant change in travel patterns from the state of emergency. It is unknown when it will be possible to collect this data again.
- b. Potential change: This is not an area of need for Carver County, but other agencies should be asked to weigh in on if this is an obstacle for completing the required analysis. One way forward would be to allow the use of existing data even if it was not collected in the last 3 years.

2. Move MN

Thanks to the entire Regional Solicitation team for this opportunity to provide feedback about challenges in this uncertain time. Below are a few things our team has identified.

- **Letters of support.** Contacting and confirming with potential partners has proven challenging in this time. With additional layers of uncertainty for partners at all levels (agencies focused elsewhere, community organizations closed or closing) our initial conversations about letters of support are proving to move very slowly, if at all.
- **Secured match two years out for nonprofits.** The last funding cycle in 2018 was the first cycle in which all applicants, including nonprofits, were required to have already secured their 20% local match. This requirement, if still in place, will prove even more challenging than in previous rounds. Corporate and foundation funders are focusing almost exclusively on the current crisis, and not funding programming two years out. Individual donations and earned income contracts are reliable and proven for our organization, but secured year-by-year rather than held in advance.
- **Final stages of community engagement around the project.** At a TDM level, projects are planned on much different timelines. While our proof of concept originated out of community engagement efforts, planned community engagement specific to our proposed project has seen seriously impacted. While we have adapted our strategies as best we are able, many community members are declining to engage in this time and focusing their energy elsewhere.

3. Anoka County

Thank you for reaching out to us regarding the new Regional Solicitation application deadline. We are very appreciative that the Met Council has pushed the application back one month to May 15th.

In regards to your request below, at this time we are concerned about the following items:

- Performing traffic final counts with the Stay at Home order in place. One concern is simply getting them completed. Another concern is that the counts won't reflect normal operating conditions.
- Obtaining letters of support from all communities. Some communities are operating with minimal staff and/or working remotely. Also, in many cases City Council action items and approval processes have been adjusted to address only critical items.

Our recommendation would be to continue monitoring this serious situation and revisit the deadline date at the next TAB meeting. We're all adjusting to this new reality and it's difficult to say for certain how the COVID-19 situation will unfold over the next several weeks.

4. Washington County

We are so far on track to get our applications together by 5/15 but have the following concerns.

- Obtaining letters of supports – Many of our communities only provide letters of support through their council, as a rule. A lot of our smaller communities don't have the ability to go online and therefore getting a letter will be tough. The communities that do have online meetings now have a COVID-19 filled agenda and it's getting harder and harder to put Regional Solicitation on the agenda.
- Data from local communities and stakeholders – a lot of our applications rely on data from our communities, schools, and stakeholder. Similar to our first concern, a lot of these agencies have more pressing COVID-19 concerns and cannot make Regional Solicitation a priority right now.
- Community Engagement – Any upcoming engagement has had to be rescheduled. We have the ability to move to an online platform but we are aware that creates barriers to engaging with many populations
- Staffing – although it hasn't happened yet, we are anticipating that our staff and staff around the region will get sick or need to take care of sick loved ones. Or staff will need to move to more essential functions as coworkers get sick. We're concerned as a smaller agency with less staff that we will be at a disadvantage compared to larger agencies who are submitting applications.