

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAC FUNDING & PROGRAMING COMMITTEE

Thursday, June 17, 2021

Committee Members Present: Michael Thompson (Chair, Plymouth), Jerry Auge (Anoka County), Angie Stenson (Carver County), Jenna Fabish (Dakota County), Jason Pieper (Hennepin County), Craig Jenson (Scott County), Joe Ayers-Johnson (Washington County), Elaine Koutsoukos (TAB), Cole Hiniker (Metropolitan Council), Anna Flintoft (Metro Transit), Molly McCartney (MnDOT Metro District), Colleen Brown (MnDOT Metro District State Aid), Innocent Eyoh (MPCA), Mackenzie Turner Borgen (MnDOT Bike & Ped), Nancy Spooner-Mueller (DNR), Ben Picone (MVTA), Ken Ashfeld (Maple Grove), Karl Keel (Bloomington), Paul Oehme (Lakeville), Robert Ellis (Eden Prairie), Jim Kosluchar (Fridley), Ethan Fawley (Minneapolis), Ann Weber (St. Paul)

Committee Members Absent: John Mazzitello (Ramsey County)

I. CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, chair Thompson called the regular meeting of the Funding & Programming Committee to order at 1:31 p.m. on Thursday, June 17, 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held via teleconference.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved without a vote. A vote is only needed if changes are made to the agenda.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: It was moved by Spooner-Mueller and seconded by Pieper to approve the minutes of the May 21, 2021, regular meeting of the Funding & Programming Committee. The motion was approved unanimously via roll call.

IV. TAB REPORT

Koutsoukos reported on the June 16, 2021, TAB meeting.

V. BUSINESS

None.

VI. INFORMATION

1. Regional Solicitation: Measure Changes

Barbeau said that while roadway measure changes may be discussed in July, there are two measures to discuss at this meeting: risk assessment and affordable housing.

Within risk assessment, the layout sub-measure provided confusion in terms of what a layout is. Brown, who scores most of the risk assessment, said that a definition of what a layout is, and is not, is needed. Some applicants show an arial photo with a line drawn over it. Further, some applications, like for signalization projects, may not need a layout at all. Stenson asked what is meant by "MnDOT approval," sharing an example of a layout that had had a lot of MnDOT input, but had not received approval through the MnDOT layout committee. Brown replied that a letter could perhaps be provided by MnDOT stating their approval. Barbeau asked whether that opens up to more ambiguity. McCartney said that letters from impacted communities are needed early. Thompson suggested that more point tiering can be used.

The right-of-way sub-measure of risk assessment caused some confusion in that some applicants do not understand that any acquisition is a right-of-way acquisition. Brown said that the wording is clear, though limited use permits are a risk. Barbeau said that this can be added to the language. Ashfeld said that once a project is fully funded, a municipality has the right to complete a 90-day quick-take, to which Thompson replied that there is less risk for a project that does not need to purchase right-of-way. Brown added that partial points are received if the acquisition process is underway. Keel asked whether right-of-way still leads to projects not being completed, to which Brown replied in the affirmative.

The public involvement piece of the risk assessment, not scored by Brown, created confusion in that there were several tallies for applicants to fill out along with check boxes and an open-ended response. One question is whether the goal is to provide the opportunity for public input or receipt of quality input. Members suggested that within the risk assessment, the objective is to provide the opportunity for input. Kosluchar asked whether the Council can provide best practices. Keel said that there should be tiering, showing things like outreach to neighborhoods and inclusion of decisionmakers along the way. Kosluchar said that the focus on meetings might neglect other means of reaching out to residents. Eyoh said that larger MnDOT projects such as Rethinking I-94 document their processes with a lot of details, particularly in areas where there are high concentrations of environmental justice areas. Lacking outreach to environmental justice areas could lead to a risk of a lawsuit occurring. In response to Eyoh and Kosluchar, Thompson suggested that using “meetings” could be archaic and other outreach methods should be rewarded. Members generally suggested that the dates and number of meetings should be removed in favor of the tiered checkboxes. Thompson suggested that the written responses should remain. Ayers-Johnson suggested that applicants of non-construction applications should have to fill out the public involvement part of the risk assessment. Barbeau asked if the written responses remain whether the scorers should have some discretion within a point range, to which Thompson suggested that the checkboxes should be used.

Barbeau said that for the last four cycles, housing scoring has been based on the housing performance score (HPS) and is meant to incentivize better affordable housing processes. Following sentiment for housing to be judged on more project-specific traits, a 10-point breakout trying to do that was created. This included finding existing and future affordable housing, which proved difficult for applicants. Koutsoukos said that it was particularly difficult for transit applicants because the length of the projects led to having a lot of properties to find. She added that while existing properties were easy to find, planned developments were difficult. Pieper said that Hennepin County figured out how to get the information but it was time-consuming, particularly given that it was only worth 10 points. Ayers-Johnson said that it was time consuming, particularly for a project that ran along the border of two counties. He added that the text limit was too small. He suggested that either the HPS be used or a more easily accessible database be used. Turner Bergen asked whether something more easily accessible could be more easily measured, such as something from the Accessibility Observatory at the University of Minnesota. Koutsoukos said that the HPS is a citywide score, while TAB was interested in funds going to where affordable housing is being developed. Stenson said she would prefer to explain a direct benefit to affordable housing.

2. Regional Solicitation: Outlier Adjustments

Barbeau said that in 2016, scorers found a lot of “outlier” situations in proportionate scores, in which one application would dominate the scoring and the other applications would see limited point distribution. Starting in 2018, scoring committees were able to adjust for these outliers. However, there is no definition for what an outlier is, prescription for when to adjust for an outlier, or standard for how to adjust for an outlier. Traditionally committees “know one when

they see it” and tend to adjust by proportionately rating each application to the second-ranked application. Barbeau added that the adjustments, while improving the spread of the scores within a measure, reduce the advantage of the top-performing application.

Chair Thompson said that there should be trust in the judgement of the scoring committees, though a way to maintain an advantage for the top-scoring application should be found.

Reading from the chat, Barbeau shared Picone’s question of whether adjusting for an outlier assumes that the outlier is going to be funded and stated that this is not the case; a lost advantage in one measure can impact a final score. Ayers-Johnson shared that he liked the example shown in the materials that adjusts the top-rated application above 100% in order to maintain its advantage. Stenson agreed that there should be a benefit to rating as the best application in a measure, adding that she would advocate for direction being provided to the scoring committees. Hiniker said that he does not prefer to be prescriptive on when an outlier is used but does like guidance on how to adjust, for example adjusting the second-ranked application to 50%. Chair Thompson suggested that a range, such as 50% to 75% could be provided.

Koutsoukos pointed out that in the second example shared in the handout, the scores were increased, but the margins between applications were only adjusted negligibly. Therefore, the biggest impact was the reduced benefit on the top-performing application.

Thompson suggested that an outlier adjustment should be a “last resort.”

Flintoft suggested that an adjustment is more important in heavily weighted measures.

Kosluchar suggested the use of log scores, which would provide more transparency.

Stenson suggested definitive guidance that would be defined ahead of time to create consistency. For example, if the top-scoring application was over double the score of all others, move the second-rated application to 50% and adjust others to that.

3. Regional Solicitation: Geographic Balance

Barbeau said that over many Regional Solicitation cycles, TAB and its technical committees have struggled with the concept of geographic balance. In the 2020 funding cycle, overprogramming funds were used to address geographic balance by assuring that at least one project within each county was funded. “Geographic balance” has never been defined and seems to mean different things to different participants. He said that the focus has primarily been on county population versus federal dollars allocated in the region. There may be other geographies to measure and statistics beyond simple population to weigh against federal funding. Other questions include looking at individual Regional Solicitation cycles versus considering distribution over time; whether HSIP applications are part of the discussion; and, assuming each county should be awarded in each cycle, is one small project adequate? In 2020, TAB weighed Roadway Strategic Capacity heavily in order to fund an application from each county.

Keel suggested that Streetlight data or other technology could be used to see who benefits from projects. He added that funding is well-distributed over time. Kosluchar said that while scores could in theory be geographically unbalanced, spread comes out evenly because there is need everywhere. He added that the county data is used because the TAB process is very county driven.

Hiniker said that balance should be examined over time as opposed to one cycle at a time.

Ayers-Johnson said that this is a policy decision that should not be codified. He added that the spread appears to be balanced over time and that HSIP should not be included in the discussion.

4. Regional Solicitation: Funding Guarantees

Barbeau said that there are “guaranteed” project types to be funded. This includes funding at least one project in each eligible roadway classification, the \$25M arterial bus rapid transit (ABRT) project, which includes a \$32M maximum for bus rapid transit and ABRT and funding at least one project in Transit Market Area III, IV, or V.

5. Regional Solicitation: Criteria Measures and Weights

Barbeau said that criteria weights were established by TAB in 2014 and some changes have occurred. Each criterion is scored by one to four scoring measures, which are informed by technical input.

Fawley suggested examining the balance in congestion versus safety in the Spot Mobility and Safety category, where each is weighted the same. He said that the Roadway Reconstruction/Modification category favors safety, while Strategic Capacity weighs them the same and suggested targeting a split in between the two.

Ayers-Johnson asked whether the weighting of equity is likely to change, to which Chair Thompson said that change is unlikely.

Pieper suggested comparing the weights to the purpose statements. He said that the Roadway Reconstruction/Modernization statement, “to fund arterial preservation projects that improve infrastructure condition, safety, and multimodal travel options” indicates that there are four or five measures that could be directly connected to projects. He said that multimodal travel options is not weighted as highly as safety and usage, which could be examined in light of the statement.

Stenson said that some Spot Mobility and Safety applications scored well in safety and congestion but were not funded. Thompson asked whether an example of an improvement would be to change Role in the Region to 10% and bump safety and congestion each to 28%, which which Stenson replied in the affirmative. Chair Thompson said that the direction to staff is increasing safety and congestion in the Spot Mobility and Safety category to have some parity with the others. Barbeau said that while Regional Solicitation weightings tend not to change a lot, 2020 was the first time this category was used, so it may be appropriate to look at this category harder.

6. Regional Solicitation: Purpose Statements

Barbeau said that in response to applicants expressing confusion about the goals that the funding categories are trying to achieve, staff created a draft “purpose statement” for each. Technical committee members had expressed interest in providing feedback into these statements, which will be included in the final Regional Solicitation materials. Thompson encouraged members to share feedback with staff.

Barbeau read two suggestions provided by TAC member Bill Dermody from St. Paul. First, Dermody suggested rephrasing the Traffic Management Technologies statement “to fund traffic

technology projects that improve travel time reliability and predictability, and reduce emissions.” Second, he suggested that “...that improve reliable, predictable access to destinations” be added to the end of the Strategic Capacity statement.

Flintoft suggested that the ABRT statement change the prohibition of Capital Investment Grants to New Starts so that the later is not precluded.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Thompson adjourned the meeting.

Joe Barbeau
Recording Secretary