



# POLICYMAKER WORKING GROUP REGIONAL SOLICITATION

November 20, 2024

## Working Group Attendees:

James Hovland; Deb Barber; Glen Johnson; Chris Geisler; Khani Sahebjam; Mark Windschittl; Mark Steffenson; Brian Martinson; Toni Carter; Mary Liz Holberg; Jon Ulrich; Anjuli Cameron; Peter Dugan, Victor Lake

## Other Attendees:

Steve Peterson, Elaine Koutsoukos, Joe Barbeau, Bethany Brandt-Sargent, Cole Hiniker, Amy Vennewitz, Robbie King, Dennis Farmer, Joe Widing, Bradley Bobbitt, Steve Elmer, Jed Hanson, Anika Whittington, Wendy Duren (Met Council); Molly Stewart, Lydia Statz (SRF Consulting Group); Katie Caskey (HDR); Paul Oehme (Lakeville); Aaron Tag (MnDOT); Molly McCartney (MnDOT).

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

390 Robert St N St Paul, MN 55101; Conference Room 1A

## Welcome and Introductions

Chair Hovland and Molly Stewart started the meeting by sharing the goals and expectations for the meeting. The goal of the meeting is for the group to recommend either a modal- or goal-based application structure, which will then be approved through TAB committees.

## Decision Point #1: Select preferred solicitation structure by January 2024

Molly and Steve Peterson recapped discussion from previous meetings, including sharing feedback from the PWG and listening sessions on recommendations to more closely tie the solicitation structure to the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan. They provided examples of a modal structure (the solicitation's current structure) and an example goal-based structure, and some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Today's discussion focuses on recommended the preferred structure that incorporates Imagine 2050 and 2050 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) goals, objectives, and policies. The application structure will be further detailed in a December 18 workshop, and additional details provided in future work tasks throughout 2025.

## Discussion

Members discussed whether the two options presented were really the only options, or whether the current structure could be altered to more closely align with the TPP. Molly confirmed that selecting the "modal" structure would not mean carrying forward the current structure exactly, but that there would be opportunities to make additional adjustments.

Member Geisler noted many projects already don't align with the mode they apply under. For example, Minneapolis has received bikeway funding under the roadway category, because it required road reconstruction to accomplish the project. This point is in favor of changing to a goal-focused structure, to more closely align with the "reasoning" for the project, rather than the mode.

Some members and Met Council staff noted that the current structure partially aligns with how federal funding is structured, how technical staff traditionally think about and classify projects, and how Met Council's work groups are organized. But none of that means it can't be altered to a different structure.

Members discussed the idea that a mode-focused structure has "less clear outcomes that are difficult to track." Met Council noted it would be more transparent to track outcomes if they more closely aligned with a goal area and could say "we're making progress on safety." Member Geisler agreed, and said tracking the top-level outcomes on safety, equity, and climate were more important than tracking the miles of roadway, etc. Member Windschitl noted that accurately measuring and tracking greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the past has been a challenge. Steve noted that studies are currently being conducted, and that hopefully there will be more direction on this by the time the 2026 solicitation begins. Member Barber noted that this direction all comes from the legislature, and that everyone is trying to figure it out "in real time." Member Martinson noted that GHG should be measured on a regional basis and not a project basis and that vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction projects are safety projects as reducing cars translates to reducing potential for crashes.

Members discussed how projects that align with multiple goals would be captured. This issue was largely unresolved, and technical staff will be examining various options for projects that align with multiple goals in the coming months.

Members discussed the difficulty of creating discrete project categories, knowing whatever structure is determined, some projects may be left out, "cut in half" or unclear where they fit. Some members discussed the question of weighting – whether all categories would receive equal funding or be weighted equally in the scoring process. Molly Stewart and Met Council staff noted that this is a decision for future meetings and work groups and will be determined in 2025.

Member Holberg noted that funding streams are modal based which she thinks is a disadvantage of a goal-focused structure. It was noted that STP funding is not modal based and has more flexibility.

Overall, members decided to continue exploring the goal-focused option to provide more information on this structure. Member Geisler supported this structure option and noted that the goal is to focus on outcomes, and not what modes the project is. This would allow the best safety or equity projects to rise to the top. Member Barber agrees with the focus on outcomes, but wanted to ensure the structure is aligned with differences of communities. Member Ulrich noted that having a balance of funding between modes should be considered under this structure.

Member Barber noted it would be challenging to have an equity project category and maybe it should be a criterion. Member Holberg was not in favor of having equity as a criterion for all categories.

Member Steffenson and Chair Hovland expressed concern about geographic balance, Steve noted it could be considered under either structure approach and would be discussed more next year.

Member Sahebjam noted that the project will need to keep an eye on the national funding picture, because the funding available is likely to change with a new federal administration. Met Council staff noted that the projects for the next four years have already been selected, so it's unlikely to impact those. This project is really looking for long-term (2030 and beyond) and can adjust to federal funding programs.

Member Johnson said he came into the meeting not clear on the goal-focused idea but is now convinced it's the best way to focus on the outcomes of the funding because it's easier to tie investments back to the goals of the TPP and there is more flexibility than a modal approach. He noted the change in structure will require a lot of education and working with communities on where and how

their project fits. He also noted that the application could be simplified more likely with a goal-focused approach.

Member Martinson agreed that a goal-focused approach is more flexible. He also noted it would be good to encourage projects that span multiple jurisdictions.

Member Carter noted that this is a great opportunity to “do something better,” and that moving toward goal-alignment structure seems to be that opportunity. She noted making this decision is a first step, and that there are still a lot of implementation questions to work out.

Member Holberg noted that while she’s not entirely convinced, she believes there is value in continuing to explore this option at the December workshop.

The group consensus was to continue to explore a goal-focused structure. The December workshop agenda will focus on application categories utilizing the TPP policies with investment priorities as a starting point for the potential applications. Then draft application categories will be developed and brought to the Technical Steering Committee for technical input. There was also consensus from the group have TAB alternates participate in the December workshop.

Volunteers for a practice session of the group exercise for the December workshop were requested. If members are interested, they are to reach out to Elaine.

### Next Steps

Policymaker Workshop for TAB and Council Members – December 18, 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. at US Bank Center (Next to Metropolitan Council)

TAB meeting – March – Action item for a base structure and application categories recommendation

| Action Item  | Timeline    |
|--|-------------|
| Organize “practice session” for December workshop to review materials and activity       | December 4  |
| Develop and finalize materials to gather feedback on application categories and criteria | December 18 |