



POLICYMAKER WORKING GROUP REGIONAL SOLICITATION

January 15, 2025

Working Group Attendees:

James Hovland; Mark Steffenson; Mary Liz Holberg; Debbie Goettel; Jon Ulrich; Brian Martinson; Peter Dugan; Victor Lake; Khani Sahebjam; Toni Carter; Glen Johnson

Other Attendees:

Steve Peterson, Elaine Koutsoukos, Charles Carlson, Joe Barbeau, Bethany Brandt-Sargent, Cole Hiniker, Amy Vennewitz, Robbie King, Joe Widing (Met Council); Molly Stewart, Lydia Statz (SRF Consulting Group); Paul Oehme (Lakeville); Joe McPherson (Anoka County); Molly McCartney (MnDOT); Lyssa Leitner (Washington County); Carla Stueve (Hennepin County); Innocent Eyoh (MPCA); Julie Jeppson (Anoka County); Lisa Freese (Scott County)

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

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

Welcome and introductions (James Hovland, Chair)

10:00

Steve Peterson presented background slides and discussed goals of the project.

Workshop Recap

Molly Stewart provided a recap of the December 18 Policymaker workshop, and invited feedback from the group. Generally, policymakers appreciated the ability to provide input, but said in the future it would be helpful to have technical staff provide input alongside policymakers.

Overall Discussion

Members discussed the overall project progress and merits of a hybrid solicitation structure.

Member Ulrich noted that he felt there is less ability to advance safety if it's its own category, because theoretically projects in other categories won't look at safety. Steve Peterson noted this feedback has been provided before, and that there are several items that should maybe be evaluation criteria for all projects (like safety, GHG, and equity). This will be discuss at future meetings.

Member Holberg asked about schedule and how long will the group continue to explore this as an option before making a decision. Molly Stewart noted the goal is to have a decision point by April – so will spend another month or two exploring before making a decision. The decision could be made before that.

Member Holberg expressed that she felt there should be equal effort to look at what you would tweak about the modal structure moving forward and the current process feels very one-sided. Member Goettel expressed similar misgivings about not looking at both equally. Policymakers were at a disadvantage in the workshop without having technical feedback. Some people at the workshop didn't have good insight into how programming and TAB works.

Member Ulrich said he believed the modal structure could be updated to measure the outcomes you want to achieve.

Elaine Koutsoukas noted this was a discussion during the 2024 solicitation, including a question about how to add safety in. At the time TAB just added points, but people were generally in favor of waiting until the next process to figure out a process for incorporating safety into the solicitation. She also noted that the common category groupings from the workshop look very similar to the current modal categories.

Joe McPherson recapped key feedback from the January TAC which included desire to avoid adding too many criteria for each application which “waters down” the overall focus of the project outcome. TAC desires a focus on 1-2 criteria that really measure the intended outcomes of the application categories/projects being selected. He noted that preservation asset management projects are a priority around the region.

Paul Oehme added that the TPP really doesn’t address asset management outright, but its important to make sure regional solicitation adequately funds these types of projects. This funding source is critical for many agencies.

Member Goettel noted we don’t want a system that scores only newly developed projects higher, because it ignores the rest of the aging system. Need to be mindful of that.

Member Johnson said there were some categories policymakers didn’t quite understand, and clarification will be needed in the future. In some cases, policymakers and technical staff are just talking past each other. It will be important to stress test the proposed structure with previous project to make sure the structure gets the intended results and doesn’t exclude project types.

Hybrid Structure Discussion

Member Goettel said the proposal still seems very goal-oriented, not very hybrid. She presented a few ideas from Hennepin County staff. Noted her biggest concern is that this would be a vast change and will cause confusion. Need to make sure this is simple. Also need to make it clear what isn’t working with the current modal structure. Joe MacPherson noted that the current modal structure applications are watered down with too many criteria.

Member Holberg noted it would be helpful to include funding buckets in the structure discussion. Molly Stewart noted that this is something that will be discussed in the future.

Charles Carlson said he believes this is completing the arc of what the workgroup asked us to explore in December. Another articulation could be tweaking the current modal based structure is what lead to the hybrid structure.

Safety Category Discussion

Steve Peterson and Molly Stewart noted that the aim is to simplify and really focus on safety. The findings from the before and after study showed that projects selected through a safety focused application category (e.g. MnDOT’s Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)) yield the greatest safety benefits.

Joe McPherson said over the years project readiness was added as a criterion, and some smaller agencies don’t necessarily score well on that. Could this criterion be removed to simplify the application? Paul Oehme agrees that the criteria should focus on what our goal is, and how we can best measure getting to that outcome. The more focused, the better.

Member Goettel wanted to clarify that technical staff will have the ability to move things or re-organize a bit. Technical staff should have broad flexibility.

Dynamic and Resilient Category Discussion

Member Goettel said there are a lot of project types in this category. Policymakers will need technical feedback to make sure this category remains competitive. Hennepin County also has a lot of bridges that are very old, and wants to ensure that this project category doesn’t disappear.

Steve Person noted that staff has looked at how current funding sources would map to these categories, and the consensus is most funding sources are flexible. There is a minimum amount of investment that must go to active transportation. Charles Carlson reminded the Policymaker Working Group that this is some of the most flexible transportation funding we have. The regional solicitation funding represents about 2 percent of total transportation funding. Elaine Koutsoukas clarified that there are specific requirements with each funding source, but staff handles this on the back end to ensure minimum amounts are allocated.

Some policymakers asked about setting funding ranges, and whether funding would be allocated modally or by goal, and whether funding would be equal across the categories. Steve Peterson noted that it is primarily a policy decision and will be discussed at future meetings. Elaine Koutsoukas said that is a decision TAB has historically made after technical groups finalize the applications.

Some policymakers requested that technical staff (TAC) provide input on funding ranges.

In the discussion about simplifying the number of project categories, Met Council staff noted that simplifying the project categories will make it more difficult to score because they're broader. A smaller number of categories likely means measures will be applied across a broader range of projects.

Member Holberg again advocated for a mode-based process as her preference.

Equity Category Discussion

Member Goettel noted that equity is a huge issue and it should be included in the solicitation. She would like to see technical staff weigh in on the topic. Charles Carlson noted that the ongoing Highway Harms study will answer broad questions such as the definition of a harm and projects that would be eligible under this category.

Member Holberg pointed out that the workshop did not support repair harms as a separate category and should be removed from the discussion. Member Johnson agreed that it's premature to include this as a category right now, but it makes sense to add this as a category in the future. He also noted that the hybrid structure allows for this flexibility.

Innocent Eyoh provided input that equity criteria should include what type of impacts project cause, specifically on BIPOC populations and what are the health impacts, etc.

The group agreed that this category isn't ready for the 2026 solicitation but could be considered in a future solicitation. Additionally, more input is needed to determine how to include equity elsewhere in the structure.

Natural Systems

Consensus was there are not a lot of specific projects under this category, but maybe it's applied as a criterion. The PWG agreed to combine Nature Systems with Climate or just use it as a criterion on other projects.

Next Steps

There was consensus that the hybrid structure proposed should be presented to the Technical Steering Committee for technical feedback and a revised version will be presented at the February PWG meeting. The hybrid structure proposed will be updated based on Policymaker feedback and presented at the Technical Steering Committee meeting on January 28.

Action Item	Timeline
Update structure and present to Technical Steering Committee for technical feedback.	January 28