



## **POLICYMAKER WORKING GROUP REGIONAL SOLICITATION**

February 19, 2025

### **Working Group Attendees:**

James Hovland; Deb Barber; Glen Johnson; Peter Dugan; Khani Sahebjam; Mary Liz Holberg; Brian Martinson; Debbie Goettel; Victor Lake; Toni Carter; Jon Ulrich; Julie Jeppson

### **Other Attendees:**

Steve Peterson, Elaine Koutsoukos, Charles Carlson, Joe Barbeau, Bethany Brandt-Sargent, Cole Hiniker, Amy Vennewitz, Robbie King, Joe Widing, Steve Elmer, Wendy Duren (Met Council); Molly Stewart, Lydia Statz (SRF Consulting Group); Paul Oehme (Lakeville); Joe McPherson (Anoka County); Molly McCartney (MnDOT); Lyssa Leitner (Washington County); Gina Mitteco (Dakota County)

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

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

### **Technical Group Feedback**

Steve Peterson provided a recap of technical meetings that have occurred since the last Policymaker Working Group meeting. Paul Oehme stated that a lot of work is still to come, but good discussions have happened so far at the Technical Steering Committee.

Joe McPherson added that other conversations have occurred around active transportation regional sales tax funding, and that the Active Transportation Working Group is discussing this funding source in more detail. One major question still to be decided is whether regional sales tax dollars will supplement federal funding already allocated to bike/ped projects as part of the solicitation or substitute for some of the federal funding which would then be used for other project types. No consensus reached from a technical point of view – the group is looking for policymaker feedback.

Chair Hovland asked whether the proposed structure will lead to simpler applications, as this is a major goal of the project. Steve Peterson noted that the group is relying mostly on the scoring measures and criteria as the way to simplify the application process. Minimizing the number of scoring measures and criteria is key to simplification and this could translate into having more application categories to achieve this. It was noted that not co-mingle funding sources (federal vs regional sales tax) could be a way to minimize the requirements projects need to respond to as both funding sources have different requirements.

### **Federal Priorities**

The group had a discussion regarding the solicitation's approach to changing federal requirements pertaining to equity, climate change, etc. It was noted that some other organizations such as the counties are already pulling programs that they know won't be in compliance with federal guidance. General consensus is to continue with the project and analysis as planned and retain some flexibility to make changes as federal guidance becomes clearer.

Joe McPherson noted that there are many conversations still to happen on how equity should be factored into applications. Equity is a goal and a priority of the 2050 TPP but the group agreed

consideration of potential impacts, given federal guidance, on federal funding should be taken into account. The group also discussed that the definition of equity and geographic equity should be considered as part of the solicitation. Equity might look differently based location within the metro region and should be discussed at future Policymaker Working Group meetings.

The group also discussed the topic of geographic balance and how this would be factored into the solicitation. It was noted that this is a future discussion topic.

## Structure Discussion

Molly Stewart began the discussion by acknowledging there are many questions still to be answered on the details of the structure, which will be determined by the Special Issue Working Groups and future policymaker discussions. She noted that all the changes between the January meeting and now were driven by feedback from the technical groups.

Member Barber brought up that Hennepin County is concerned about aging bridges and wants to ensure that need is considered as part of the structure. The group discussed that bridges could be funded within the proposed categories, as long as the project supports the priorities of the TPP.

Member Jeppson noted that TAB historically has not supported pure asset management projects. Steve Peterson said that's true, and previously bridges have been funded through a separate funding source, which is no longer there. Member Martinson said that bridges speak to several categories, so a way of funding bridges is still there, but not specifically called out with its own bridge category right now.

Previous conversations have centered on whether planning studies should be eligible for regional solicitation funding. Member Goettel said that the infrastructure needs of the region already outpace the available resources, so she would be concerned about spending some of the regional solicitation money on planning. Member Barber agreed that with the uncertainty around resources, the region should focus on completing infrastructure projects rather than planning studies.

Member Johnson noted that the regional sales tax funds for active transportation require there to be a plan in place, so it may be prudent to allow that funding source to fund planning studies. Member Holberg agreed and noted that in the last solicitation, many said that there should be a separate category for planning studies.

Member Johnson supported the proposed approach to dividing the safety category into proactive and reactive safety projects and noted that this is a good way to simplify the application criteria. He supported widening that approach to the rest of the categories as well. He also noted that the bike/ped category will be complex because it needs to integrate both federal and regional sales tax funding sources. However, he likes the way it currently separates out regional projects and local projects, noting that they serve different purposes.

Member Jeppson asked whether the active transportation regional sales tax funding could be used for recreational trail projects. Steve Peterson noted in the past the federal funding has been limited to trail projects that serve a transportation purpose, but that was a decision made by TAB and could be changed. Molly Stewart said that is a topic that will be discussed with the Special Issue Working Groups.

Overall, Member Martinson voiced some concerns about the process to get to the proposed structure presented today. Initially, he said the Policymaker Working Group was supposed to provide the primary input on the structure. He noted concern over the recent input that technical staff have provided which has shaped the structure currently presented. Chair Hovland said that the current proposal has been heavily synthesized based on input from technical groups which was based on direction from the Policymaker Working Group in January. Steve Peterson said the eligible project types will likely rely on technical input, while criteria weighting will likely be policy driven.

Chair Hovland then asked whether this was supported by the technical staff currently in attendance. Lyssa Leitner noted that when technical staff say "simplification" they are referring to scoring factors (e.g. criteria and measures), rather than number of categories. She noted that most of the complexity is

in the details of the criteria and measures in the application and the data sources and efforts needed complete questions. It was noted that these details will be a future conversation to ensure the applications are simplified.

### Discussion about Special Issue Working Groups

The approach for the Special Issue Working Groups was then discussed. The Special Issue Working Groups will discuss and make recommendations on many of the technical details about each category application such as eligible project types, scoring criteria and measures, and minimum and maximum grant awards. Molly Stewart said that these groups are currently being formed and will work through many of the questions the group is discussing today.

The group then discussed whether the working groups will be comprised of primarily technical staff or also include some policymakers. Steve Peterson noted the initial intent was to keep the groups primarily technical staff as the topics are technical in nature, but the issue is up for discussion. The consensus was to have the working groups remain primarily technical and bring any policy issues forward to the policymaker working group for discussion. Meeting summaries from each working group meeting will also be shared with the Policymaker Working Group.

### Next Steps

Overall, the group gave consensus to move forward with presenting the proposed hybrid modal+ structure for additional feedback at TAC Planning on March 13, at TAC Funding & Programming on March 20, at TAC on April 2, and at TAB on April 16. The group also gave consensus to move forward with forming the Special Issue Working Groups. The intent is to begin these meetings in March or April.

The next Policymaker Working Group meeting is scheduled for May 21 at 10 a.m. in person.

Action Item	Timeline
Present proposed structure to TAC Planning, TAC F&P, TAC, and TAB to gather additional input.	March 13 – April 16