



POLICYMAKER WORKING GROUP REGIONAL SOLICITATION

April 25, 2024

Working Group Attendees:

James Hovland; Deb Barber; Glen Johnson; Chris Vaughan; Chris Giesler; Peter Dugan; Khani Sahebjam; Mark Steffenson; Mary Liz Holberg; Brian Martinson; Debbie Goettel; Mark Windschitl; Reva Chamblis; Toni Carter; Anjuli Cameron; Jess Robertson; Jon Ulrich

Other Attendees:

Steve Peterson (Met Council); Elaine Koutsoukos; (Met Council); Joe Barbeau (Met Council); Bethany Brandt-Sargent (Met Council); Cole Hiniker (Met Council); Charles Carlson (Met Council); Amy Vennewitz (Met Council); Robbie King (Met Council); Scott Mareck (FHWA); Kate Nelson (Office of CM Chamblis); Molly Stewart (SRF Consulting Group); Marie Cote (SRF Consulting Group); Madeleine Garces (SRF Consulting Group); Katie Caskey (HDR)

Welcome and Introductions

Molly Stewart introduced the project and expectations for meetings throughout.

Role of the Working Group

Molly presented the role that the working group would play in the project.

Regional Solicitation Background and Current Process

History and Current Regional Solicitation Process

Elaine Koutsoukos presented the regional solicitation process as a requirement for accessing federal funding. She also presented on process changes since the last Regional Solicitation Evaluation completed 10 years ago.

Steve Peterson presented the Regional Solicitation funding sources and recent additions to those sources including the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation Program (PROTECT) and Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) funds.

Congressional Legislative Language Review for Regional Solicitation

Steve presented the legislative language rules and requirements to receive federal funding from the sources included in the Regional Solicitation. (For example, Transportation Alternatives (TA) and Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) improvement programs require a competitive process for project selection). Other requirements listed include:

- The project must align with the TPP.
- JUSTICE40 – 40 percent of benefits must go to underserved communities (applies to all except STBG).

National MPO Peer Review desktop review findings on federal funding distribution

Katie Caskey presented the initial Peer Review findings. This will be used to observe how the distribution of funding is done in other states and what the Met Council can learn from others.

The Desktop Peer Review that looked at 18 regions has been completed. Peer regions in the study were selected based on past reviews and “best practice” regions. The desktop review is intended to narrow down which peers to look at more in depth and follow up with. Katie mentioned that the dual-modal approach is gaining attraction with regional projects and subregional/local projects being more common.

Member Giesler expressed interest in learning more about what other regions are doing that’s more complex and estimate how many staff hours/ resources go into the effort. He wants to know whether the benefits justify the costs of a more complex process. The question was also raised regarding “what does more complex actually mean”. Are applicants spending more time?

Member Ulrich raised the question about how additional complexity affects applicants and their resources (time, labor). What is the cost to the applicant?

Katie responded that these questions would be used in interviews with regions that are narrowed down from the 18-region list. One question being considered: “Who’s leading and championing applications within their region?”

Several additional questions were proposed to include in peer region interviews including:

- How are other MPOs spending GHG reduction money appropriately? How are they allocating Carbon/GHG reduction funds?
- How are other regions addressing the emerging themes such as resiliency?
- How are they balancing suburban, urban, and rural needs, specifically where rural and urban areas are very close in proximity?
- What are agencies’ guiding principles? Regional vision or Regional Solicitation? How do they interact?
- For regions with 360-degree growth (no major geographic boundaries) like ours – How does distribution differ in regions that do have or don’t have similar limitations? Better way to get at the diversity of needs. Especially when the local needs don’t match the MPOs.
- How does the funding distribution compare to other regions and how important is equitable distribution of funds? Measured by population? Economic activity?
- How tied into land use are peer Regional Solicitation processes and what does their land use look like?

There were several comments on the importance of looking at regions with similar characteristics including growth patterns (360 degrees with few geographic limiting factors and meteorological characteristics).

Chair Hovland commented that the work done in a recent governance study may help with peer selection. There was a lot of information supplied by the MPOs that we should try to include.

Steve remarked that the Met Council has more jurisdictions (counties and cities) than other MPOs, making it unique and creating different challenges.

Katie presented a preliminary list of six regions which would be reevaluated to consider input from this meeting. Member Holberg asked to include one with the 360-degree development with no mountains or bodies of water. Member Barber would like to see Denver included. Katie will send a revised list out to the TAB members.

The peer evaluation conversation was concluded with final comments on whether peer agencies should be considered on how they compare based on demographics and growth or based on their difference and similarities in their funding distribution processes.

Regional Solicitation Evaluation Process

Molly presented on the Regional Solicitation Evaluation process including the decision-making process and timeline.

Open Discussion on Evaluation Goals

Chair Hovland presented the goals of the Regional Solicitation Evaluation.

The evaluation is an opportunity to consider how categories and money spent have changed every year and what should be added or removed from the process to best align with regional and local goals.

Member Martinson remarked that among the changes there has been an increase in safety and equity – climate and sustainability. How can the transportation system and investments in it be part of achieving goals in these subject areas *and* coincide with land use evolution.

Another question was asked regarding how unique our MPO is in having the substantial regional funds that are now accruing to our counties specifically earmarked for transit and active transportation?

Member Holberg mentioned considering a simpler process, more concentration on safety, and the ability for sub regions to get funding to address their priorities.

Member Barber mentioned that the TPP and 2050 regional development guide are being worked on which include land use policy and that public input from these processes could affect the Regional Solicitation Evaluation. These need to align.

Several comments and questions were made about data and metrics used in the application. Including:

- The solicitation should express a clear intent on where to spend money and why it's important to fund.
- The solicitation should clearly explain why certain data points are critical for application performance. Some categories have very high scoring criteria – why do they matter so much?
- Make sure that all metrics are valuable and help achieve goals.
 - We need to use more forward-thinking metrics that tie projects to future.
 - Shift more towards a governance model. Suggested a blind funding scenario where we do not know the location of the project.
 - It doesn't matter where the funding goes so much as whether it is meeting goals.

Chair Hovland remarked on the amount of work being done simultaneously by members of the group (the 2050 TPP, Regional Development Guide, Active Transportation, Regional Solicitation) and proposed that staff could look at how these efforts align.

Charles Carlson mentioned that the Regional Solicitation is required to align with the TPP. A core function is to advance the goals of the TPP.

Steve Peterson responded that this evaluation is exploring how much success the Regional Solicitation has had lining up with the 2040 TPP.

Additional comments were made about project selection:

- If we look at bigger projects, it could be helpful to look at past large projects that haven't quite achieved geographic equity.
- Regarding infrastructure needs of the future – is there a need for a new category that applies to studies? This could create a need for “growth going to occur” metrics.

Upcoming Meetings and Goals

Molly presented a timeline for decision point one.

Listening Session Summary

Katie presented the engagement plan and summary of listening sessions hosted so far.

The goals for listening sessions were to introduce the idea of the evaluation process to stakeholders and introduce ways to get involved.

Members commented about the need to conduct outreach to the business community who rely on the transportation system when the evaluation reaches the public input stage.

For next meeting:

The group reflected on the meeting format and will consider holding some meetings in-person to increase conversation, when it's important to be together. Future meeting dates in June and August were discussed.

| Action Item | Timeline |
|--|-----------------|
| Schedule June and August Policymaker Working Group Meetings. | Early May |
| Refine and finalize peer interview list based on feedback. | Early May |
| Develop interview questions for selected peer agencies incorporating feedback from Working Group meeting. | Early May |
| Track Developments in the TPP and 2050 Regional Development Guide processes to ensure alignment with the Regional Solicitation Evaluation process. | May - July |