



REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION SPECIAL ISSUE WORKING GROUPS WORKSHOP 1 SUMMARY

Friday, April 25, 2025

Overview

On Friday, April 25, 2025, a workshop at the Metropolitan Council offices brought together seven distinct special issue working groups as part of the Regional Solicitation Evaluation. The purpose of this gathering was to allow these technical groups to share their perspectives and develop recommendations for the Technical Steering Committee and Policymaker Working Group related to the proposed application categories. The discussions focused on elements such as primary/secondary scoring criteria, eligibility requirements, and minimum/maximum project award amounts, which will ultimately guide the creation of the 2026 Regional Solicitation applications.

The day was divided into a morning and afternoon session, each of which began with an overview of the event's purpose and objectives, followed by an interactive period in which participants circulated among various stations to review and provide feedback on each group's initial ideas, which were developed at kickoff meetings in early April, for scoring criteria using a dot-voting exercise. The dot-voting exercise allowed participants to provide input on draft scoring criteria for applications. Following this, each attendee participated in one guided small group discussion, with sessions on Safety, Climate, Travel Demand Management (TDM), and Community Considerations (Equity) held in the morning and Bicycle/Pedestrian, Transit, and Roadways held in the afternoon.

A total of 103 individuals participated from state agencies, counties, cities, and other organizations.

Key takeaways

High-level takeaways from each working group session are outlined below.

Bicycle/Pedestrian

Members emphasized the need to categorize projects to ensure small and mid-sized communities are competitive. Suggestions included setting a funding cap for each applicant, aligning funding with community designation, and ensuring smaller, locally significant projects, especially in areas without Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) coverage, can still compete. There was concern expressed that more populated counties and cities may score more favorably using historic performance measures due to capacity and scale advantages.

The group also stressed the importance of clearly defining what constitutes "regional" versus "local" impact, especially in relation to the RBTN and potential pedestrian networks. There was strong support for establishing a non-infrastructure category, such as planning grants and safety education, specifically for smaller communities. Recommendations for this category included setting clear guidelines, defining eligible activities, and ensuring that funding available for construction of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects remains undiluted.

Climate/GHG/EV

This group discussed the need to strengthen criteria related to access to amenities, EV infrastructure, and public health impacts, highlighting the importance of usage, equity, and network connectivity in project evaluation as part of the potential EV Charging application category.

Initial prioritization of the criteria made in the meeting were:

1. Network Connectivity
2. Reduce Green House Gases (GHG)
3. Improve Access to Charging
4. Investment in Priority Areas (from the forthcoming Metropolitan Council regional prioritization study)
5. Amenities
6. Address Public Health Through Siting
7. Project Readiness

Council staff discussed the desire to better understand total GHG performance for the entire Regional Solicitation program of projects. For some application categories, this could be used as a scoring measure. For other categories it may not be scored; however, inputs to calculate GHG performance will be required as part of the application submittal. More discussion will be needed at the second workshop. Additional discussion centered on the new GHG Impact Assessment state law and what it means for the one to three potential trunk highway expansion or interchange projects that would be required to do the analysis.

The group determined that more input from the Technical Steering Committee was required to inform the overall goals of the GHG criteria and measurement.

Community Considerations (Equity)

Participants highlighted the need to shift equity evaluation toward a focus on process, intent, and community need, especially considering the challenges of engaging communities early on in project development. Members agreed that requiring detailed engagement at the application stage can disadvantage smaller communities and increase costs, further disadvantaging smaller applicants. Instead, they supported using broader, qualifying criteria and narrative justifications to assess equity-related impacts.

The challenge is for applicants to tell their stories in a way that is scoreable. There was consensus on the importance of establishing clear definitions for equity and community to guide scoring, along with better guidance for connecting data to project narratives. Members supported focusing on project need and proposed that applicants demonstrate meaningful engagement and planning, particularly in communities historically impacted by inequitable infrastructure decisions.

Roadways

The group recommended to remove the “Stormwater Improvements & Flood Mitigation” category (and reconsider it for the 2028 funding cycle when a new federal transportation bill is in place). Instead, the group wanted to incorporate these concepts as scoring criteria under the other roadway applications.

The group emphasized the role of the Congestion Management Process (CMP) and whether a CMP analysis should serve as qualifying or scoring criteria. Concerns were raised about vagueness, feasibility, and project misalignment with broader goals like GHG reduction, with some suggesting that criteria could be combined or moved to secondary status.

Participants stressed the importance of context sensitivity, system-level planning, and flexibility in how projects are scored and categorized. There was broad support for reducing the cost and complexity of applications and ensuring competitiveness and feasibility for smaller agencies. As the focus of the roadway modernization category is not delay reduction, the group wanted to remove the required Synchro analysis as it is burdensome, costly, and often requires hiring a consultant. The group also

discussed splitting off interchange projects into a separate category with a different maximum award amount.

Safety

The group discussed separation of proactive and reactive safety projects. This approach aligns with MnDOT's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). Generally, the group agreed to keep proactive and reactive projects in separate buckets for now, with the possibility of merging later based on criteria. The following criteria were initially recommended by the group for both reactive and proactive safety applications.

Primary Scoring Criteria for both Reactive and Proactive Safety Applications:

- Expected reduction/risk reduction in fatal or serious injury crashes (crash modification factor (CMF) calculations using 3 or 5 years of crash data)
- Connection to existing plan (how a project connects to Regional Safety Action Plan, existing safety plan, road safety audit, corridor study, other safety study)
- Impact on vulnerable road users (pedestrian safety worksheet or similar)
- Correctable crash history (10-year crash history fatal and serious injury crashes only)

TDM

The group emphasized that while project effectiveness is a key priority for the TDM group, it received little support from other groups, likely due to confusion around its definition and difficulty in scoring. There was agreement on the need to simplify and standardize how effectiveness is evaluated and reported, with support provided to help smaller organizations meet requirements.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)/GHG reduction and connections to opportunity were the highest-rated scoring criteria, reflecting shared climate and equity goals. The group proposed adding completing the CMP process as a qualifying criterion for roadway reliability/excessive delay category. Participants highlighted the importance of integrating TDM into roadway expansion projects, prioritizing scalable efforts, and aligning project selection with broader planning and policy objectives.

Transit

Transit Expansion application discussions revealed a disconnect between technical criteria (e.g., transit market area) and priorities identified by workshop participants, suggesting a need to simplify and clarify evaluation metrics. There was strong support for emphasizing new ridership, multimodal connections, and equity-based needs assessments, while some traditional criteria like inclusion in a plan were considered outdated or redundant.

Transit Customer Experience application discussions focused on service improvements and rider-focused metrics, with broad support for consolidating related criteria (e.g., safety, wayfinding, and amenities) and reassessing the role of new ridership as an evaluation goal. Safety remains a complex and perception-driven issue that impacts ridership but needs clearer definition in scoring.

Next steps

Special issue working groups will convene again on May 30, 2025, for a second workshop. Groups will seek to gain consensus on scoring measures, eligibility requirements, funding minimums and maximums, and have initial discussions on scoring guidance and geographic considerations. Some groups may have additional interim meetings to seek resolutions on key topics discussed at the April 25 workshop.