



# REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION SPECIAL ISSUE WORKING GROUPS WORKSHOP 2 SUMMARY

Friday, May 30, 2025

## Overview

On Friday, May 30, 2025, a workshop at the Metropolitan Council offices brought together six 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 provide recommendations to the Technical Steering Committee and Policymaker Working Group on the details of each proposed application category. The workshop was used to confirm scoring criteria measures and methodology, eligible project types, qualifying requirements, funding minimums and maximums, and begin discussions on scoring guidance.

The day was divided into a morning and afternoon session, with three groups meeting in the morning and three in the afternoon. Each attendee participated in at least one guided small group discussion, with sessions on Bicycle/Pedestrian, Climate, Safety, Transit, and Roadways.

The Community Considerations working group met concurrently with the other groups and followed a different format. The TDM working group met virtually on June 17, 2025.

A total of **68** 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

For the Regional Bike Facilities category, to be funded with federal funds through the traditional Regional Solicitation, the group recommended including Met Council-approved Regional Trails alongside Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) and Regional Bicycle Barrier Study (RBBS) criteria. While scoring based on RBTN/RBBS priority tiers was discussed, concerns about outdated data led the group to recommend removing that as a scoring criterion. A new scoring question on community destinations was added, and the criteria will emphasize transportation connectivity. The existing funding minimum award (\$1 million) and maximum award (\$5.5 million) were recommended for retention.

The below categories will be funded with Active Transportation funding.

For the Local Bike Facilities category, reconstruction of existing trails was recommended to be an eligible project but would likely score lower than new construction. Inclusion in local plans and a Complete Streets policy were recommended to move from scoring criteria to qualifying criteria. Scoring was recommended to prioritize gap-filling projects, and a tiered approach was supported. RBTN projects can apply here but will not receive additional points for being part of the regional network. The group also recommended lowering the funding minimum to \$50,000 and no consensus was reached on the maximum.

For the Local Pedestrian Facilities category, the group agreed to recommend allowing reconstruction and ADA upgrades but emphasized sidewalk construction as the primary intent of the category. Scoring

will reward gap-filling and barrier-removal projects, with new attention to clarity and consistency in application responses (e.g., use of checkboxes and clearer data definitions).

For the Active Transportation Planning category, the group endorsed modeling the scoring after MnDOT's approach for Active Transportation Planning grants, with significant emphasis on equity and flexibility in responses. Corridor plans were removed as an eligible type, and the maximum award will likely be reduced from \$250,000 to \$150,000–\$200,000. The group also discussed the possibility of a “bench contracting” model, where the Council would handle contracting and awardees would be able to use one of the retained contractors.

### **Community Considerations**

The group discussed refining how equity is evaluated, not just through data, but through the story of community input and impact. There was strong agreement that the current “Community Considerations” measure needs better, more focused questions, potentially category-specific, that prompt applicants to explain who was engaged, how feedback shaped the project, and how the data supports this.

There was broad support for scoring equity across all Regional Solicitation application categories, possibly with an added standalone equity category or bonus structure to elevate high-quality equity efforts. The group also noted concerns that applicants with more grant-writing capacity tend to score better, regardless of the quality of their engagement. Suggestions included offering training, clarifying expectations with examples, and even creating a set-aside or capacity-building fund to support under-resourced applicants. There was a desire to increase the scoring weight for equity, possibly up to 30%, and reduce points allocated to less impactful criteria like risk or cost-effectiveness. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that equity considerations lead to stronger projects, better funding decisions, and more inclusive outcomes, with a feedback loop back to TAB for alignment.

### **Climate/GHG/EV**

The group explored whether operations and maintenance (O&M) costs should be eligible under the Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure category. While the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) guidelines allow for O&M funding, there was mixed support due to concerns about administrative burden and potential misuse. The consensus leaned toward allowing limited O&M funding for up to five years, aligning with federal maintenance requirements, but questions remain about who would manage it and how to structure reimbursements efficiently. Council staff will reach out to FHWA and MnDOT State-Aid on general eligibility and ease of grant management with these costs.

Project eligibility discussions centered on charger types, with strong support for including Level 2 chargers when matched to appropriate contexts and dwell times. The group also discussed expanding eligibility to infrastructure upgrades (if narrowly defined), fleet projects (if chargers are publicly accessible), and potentially allowing large-scale awards if justified by scoring. Through a mentimeter polling exercise, the group recommended that scoring should be based on the following criteria, listed by weight from most points to least points in the scoring rubric: 1) Improve Access to Charging; 2) Invest in Priority Areas; 3) Address Public Health Through Siting; 4) Amenities/Destinations. Additional considerations included integrating renewable energy incentives, measuring equity and environmental impact through tracking rather than scoring, and adjusting funding minimums and maximums to support both large and small projects equitably.

### **Roadways**

The group discussed renaming the “Reliability/Excessive Delay” application category to “Congestion Management Process (CMP) Strategies” to better reflect potential project types, with interchange modifications moving to a new interchange category. There was consensus that interchange, and Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) projects may need tailored approaches. For project types, there was no consensus on whether to allow major and minor collectors to be eligible for the Roadway Modernization and CMP Strategies categories. There was consensus to allow collectors to compete in the Safety category and Bridge Connections category as the region wants to fund the best safety projects in the region, for example, regardless of functional class. For scoring, the Roadway

Modernization category emphasized prioritizing multimodal/complete streets and safety, with some debate on including greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as a scoring metric. The group ultimately had a consensus to use GHG emissions for tracking only, like all other application categories. Freight criteria will be broadened to include additional indicators like truck traffic counts. In the CMP Strategies category, low-cost, high benefit ITS projects were prioritized, with revised scoring criteria placing CMP strategies first, followed by excessive delay, safety, multimodal, freight, natural resource protection, and community connections. The group consensus was to recommend a \$1 million minimum and \$10 million maximum for both categories.

The group supported adding the Interchanges category as subcategory in CMP Strategies and expanding it to include modifications but raised concerns about the large amount of funding for this category and the impact that it has on the other categories. The group consensus was to recommend a \$20-\$25 million maximum award with additional discussion needed on how these projects would address the state's GHG impact assessment. For the Bridge Connections category, the group supported the proposed project types and criteria, suggested adding scoring measures for load posting, and discussed potentially raising the funding maximum from \$7 million to \$10 million to reflect rising costs.

## Safety

The group discussed the proposed application structure and project types, clarifying that small safety projects would be directed to MnDOT's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) and larger projects to the Regional Solicitation funding program. This led to suggesting a minimum federal award that matches the maximum HSIP award. The group reached consensus that bundled safety projects across multiple corridors could be eligible for funding. While Safe Routes to School (SRTS) projects weren't called out specifically, the group concurred that these types of projects could qualify under the safety or bike/pedestrian categories depending on the project's details. The group decided to recommend that no extra points be awarded to projects near schools, as data showed that locations near transit stops are higher-risk areas from a safety perspective than locations near schools. Concerns were raised about traffic signals being eligible as safety improvements, and the group stressed needing clear guidance as traffic signals are not a safety strategy. Although there was some support for providing funding for safety planning efforts, the group ultimately recommended it not be eligible in the 2026 Regional Solicitation cycle, though it could be revisited in subsequent funding years. The group also discussed allowing interchange projects to apply in the safety category if the current Interchange category is removed, provided the projects show clear safety benefits.

For the Proactive Safety category, the group reviewed and refined scoring criteria, emphasizing that more than half of the points should be tied to the project's connection to an existing safety plan, followed by a smaller number of points for the project's correctable crash history, expected risk reduction, and safety benefits to people outside of vehicles. For connection to an existing safety plan, the group recommended prioritizing projects that showed a connection to Metropolitan Council's Regional Safety Action Plan over projects that only had a connection to a local safety plan. The group also supported creating a transparent list of Crash Modification Factors (CMFs), with some flexibility for narrative justification, and recommended using five years of crash data.

For the Reactive Safety category, the group emphasized that most of the points should be tied to the project's expected reduction in fatal and serious injury crashes, followed by a smaller number of points for the project's connection to an existing safety plan, correctable crash history, and safety benefits to people outside of vehicles.

The group consensus was to recommend a \$2 million minimum award and \$8 million maximum award for both categories.

## **TDM**

The group agreed on a refined list of eligible project type examples including shared mobility, telework strategies, parking management, TDM ordinance development, traveler incentive programs, car/bike/van sharing promotion, and other related projects. Eligibility of bikesharing projects still needs to be coordinated with the bike/ped group, with the TDM group preferring to fund projects that promote bikesharing or small infrastructure projects (e.g., single sites) rather than large-scale purchasing of bicycles and equipment. Scoring criteria emphasized VMT reduction, effectiveness, and innovation, though members recommended limiting innovation points and clarifying definitions. Outreach and education were seen as important but hard to measure, prompting interest in guidance tools. Concerns were raised about organizational capacity, particularly for smaller applicants. The group supported keeping the \$100,000 minimum award and raising the maximum award to \$1 million, depending on total available funding.

## **Transit**

The group reviewed proposed elements for the Transit Customer Experience category and discussed whether facility and fleet upgrades should be included or if a separate category was warranted. While there was interest in integrating these improvements, the group noted that it would likely have to be a separate category to be competitively scored and there was concern about adding a category for this project type given the relative low number of potential projects. The group agreed that support facilities and fleet improvements could be eligible if part of a larger project and fit within an already proposed category.

The group recommended that scoring should emphasize outcomes, like improved travel time, safety, or comfort, rather than just quantifying physical features. The group supported more flexible scoring and clearer guidance on the geographic limits of multimodal access. They also recommended eliminating project readiness and cost effectiveness criteria and suggested raising the maximum award to \$10 million due to rising project costs.

For the Transit Expansion category, the group discussed aligning projects with local systems and emphasized criteria that balance ridership, transit access, and community needs. They supported weighting coverage and ridership equally and emphasized the importance of effective service in the transit market area. Air pollutant and readiness criteria were recommended to be removed from scoring, and microtransit projects were encouraged to demonstrate integration with the broader system. The group recommended raising the maximum award for Transit Expansion projects to \$10 million.

In a brief discussion on Arterial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), members debated increasing the funding maximum to \$35 million, noting higher costs and alignment with long-term goals. The group was not asked to provide a recommendation on this but did provide feedback on the considerations for policymaker discussion.

## **Next steps**

- Specific next steps will vary by group but may include review of draft application documents via email and/or additional virtual follow-up meetings related to specific topics.
- The Community Considerations working group will be meeting in person on July 15, 2025 for an additional follow-up discussion. There are no additional in-person meetings planned with the other working groups at this time.