

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD
Metropolitan Council
390 N. Robert St., St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1805

Minutes of a Meeting of the
FUNDING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
September 17, 2015

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tim Mayasich (chair), Colleen Brown, Bob Byers, Innocent Eyoh, Jenifer Hager, Craig Jenson, Jane Kansier, Mary Karlsson, Karl Keel, Andrew Korsberg, Jim Kosluchar, Elaine Koutsoukos, Bruce Loney, Eriks Ludins, Molly McCartney, Gina Mitteco, Ryan Peterson, Steve Peterson, Carla Stueve, Michael Thompson, and Joe Barbeau (staff)

OTHERS PRESENT: Karen Scheffing (MnDOT), Jonathan Ehrlich (Metropolitan Council), and Carl Ohrn (Metropolitan Council)

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m.

2. Adoption of Agenda

Mayasich said that Jonathan Ehrlich will present on the potential impact of new federal Environmental Protection Agency ozone standards after the TAB report.

Motion: Karlsson moved to adopt the amended agenda. Seconded by Steve Peterson. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Approval of the Minutes

MOTION: Thompson moved to approve the minutes. Seconded by Loney. The motion was approved unanimously.

4. TAB Report

Koutsoukos said that the TDM application deadline was last Friday, Sept. 11; 11 applications were received requesting \$2.4 M federal funding out of \$1.8 M available. Shannon Lotthammer from Minnesota Pollution Control Agency announced that EPA will be releasing new ozone standards on October 1. This may affect the Twin Cities' attainment status. Steve Albrecht, TAC Chair, reported that there is ongoing discussion on de-federalization. A Scott County proposal is going through the process. The Scott County proposal and a draft policy will come to TAB at future meetings. The remaining items from TAC are on the TAB agenda. Proposed changes to the TAB bylaws were approved, including adding the new TAB member added by the legislature representing the Suburban Transit Association and changes to quorum and voting. Three action items were approved, A scope change for a CSAH 116 STIP project; the accompanying TIP amendment-to be released for public comment, and the Unified Planning Work Program.

5. Potential Impact of New Federal Environmental Protection Agency Ozone Standards – Information Item

Jonathan Ehrlich from the Metropolitan council reported that the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will be releasing updated ozone standards on October 1. The draft standards have shown that the standard for nonconformity will be reduced from 75 parts per billion (ppb) to 65 or 70 ppb. The Twin Cities is currently measured at 67 ppb so where the final standard is set will directly impact the region's status. If the Twin Cities falls into non-attainment, transportation planning will be impacted. The State would eventually need to complete a State Implementation Plan (SIP) that would show how the region will come back into attainment. The Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) would need to conform to the SIP. It is estimated that the change could reduce the rate of deaths caused by ozone by over 50 percent. The geography of the area not in attainment could cover half of the State.

Ryan Peterson asked whether any other regions are likely to lose attainment status. Ehrlich replied that the Twin Cities is the largest metro area currently in ozone attainment.

Loney asked whether the fact that naturally occurring ozone is present in some areas is taken into account. Ehrlich replied that the EPA's role is to bring pollutants to acceptable levels, regardless of the source of pollution.

6. Regional Solicitation Changes and Key Topics – Information Item

Review of Survey Results

Barbeau reported on the results of the 2014 Regional Solicitation Surveys. The survey provided to TAB had 9 respondents. The survey provided to TAC and Funding & Programming Committee members had 16 respondents. The survey provided to applicants had 17 respondents. The survey provided to scoring committee members had had 24 respondents. There were few themes established in the surveys. Several respondents commented on the equity criterion. Many commented on the need for better understandability in the scoring guidelines. Thirteen applicants reported that application preparation was easier compared to past years while only one reported that it was more difficult. Karlsson expressed appreciation for the extensive effort put forth by Koutsoukos in preparing the online application system.

Discussion Questions

Staff members discussed the following discussion questions.

1. Should interchange projects be required to complete the Metropolitan Council/MnDOT Highway Interchange Request Process prior to applying to the Regional Solicitation?

Staff's preference would be to require interchange approval prior to applying for the Regional Solicitation. However, staff wishes to hear from localities whether this is feasible for the 2016 Regional Solicitation. The interchange process takes roughly one month, though preparation can take more time. Karen Scheffing from MnDOT said that candidates awarded STP funding have traditionally participated in a workshop that in the future could be held in advance of the Regional Solicitation's release.

Another option would be for staff to add having completed the process as a point-scoring component of the Risk Assessment measure.

Thompson expressed support for the idea of using the Risk Assessment.

Keel said that he would support staff's recommendation if the process is completed before time and financial commitment have to be made.

Hager and Ryan Peterson expressed support for making completion of the process a qualifying criteria.

Keel suggested adding completion of the process to the Risk Assessment and exploring inclusion as a qualifying criteria for the future.

Mittec asked whether putting it in the Risk Assessment would cause a late rush of projects trying to go through the process.

Brown said that applicants not familiar with the process will mark that they completed it. Mayasich suggested adding lines about the interchange process and contact information in the application.

General consensus was to include completion of the process in the Risk Assessment.

2. Should the scoring be modified to equalize the competition for projects on all roadway functional classifications (i.e., expander, connector, reliever, augmentor, and non-freeway principal arterial)?

TAB could take several approaches to address this question. Given that TAB has decided not to fund projects based on roadway functional classification, eliminating the splitting of classifications in measure 1A (Role in the Regional Transportation System) is an option. TAB could guarantee a minimum of one funded project per functional classification. Finally TAB could adjust the scoring so that each functional classification is scored separately, allowing for maximum score to be given to each functional classification in multiple categories.

Keel suggested that if there is a will to provide certain roadway classifications with preference that money should just be set aside for them. An example could be that one connector could be funded so long as one finishes in the top half of the scoring.

Karlsson expressed concern that no connectors were funded during the 2014 Regional Solicitation, as connectors tend to be older roads that should score well on age and carry safety concerns.

Keel suggested adding “classification points” that would give the top performing project in each classification a set number of extra points.

General consensus was to further explore scoring changes to make all four sub-classifications competitive for funds, as recommended in the A-Minor Arterial System Evaluation.

3. Should the scoring be modified to make railroad grade-separation projects more competitive for funding?

As currently constructed, the safety category will not likely provide many of points to railroad grade-separation projects because the measure is based on the number of crashes experienced. Railroad crossings do not tend to see enough crashes to compete with intersection projects in this category.

Some options include:

1. Create a separate “railroad crossing safety” category. Staff cautions that this would create an expectation of a project from the category being funded, despite a history of very few such applications.
2. Do not adjust the scoring.
3. Adjust the safety category to allow for proactive safety elements:
 - a. Allow for a portion of the safety points to be for railroad safety
 - b. Allow for a “proactive” score that incorporates points for railroad crossing safety

Karlsson suggested addressing this issue in the Multimodal criterion. She added that person throughput, rather than vehicle throughput, could be measured.

General consensus was that railroad crossing projects are important to the region and should continue to be eligible for funding. However, due to the already high demand for Regional Solicitation funds and the desire to simplify the process, the group did not want to change the scoring measures.

4. How and where should cost-effectiveness be measured?

Concern has been raised regarding cost effectiveness criteria measurements. Some of this concern is related to the rating of scope change requests. Staff has explored the idea of rating cost-effectiveness on federally eligible, as opposed to total, cost.

Today there are cost effectiveness sub-criteria measures for safety and air quality. A method used for bridge projects is to calculate the cost-effectiveness given the total points the project received on all other criteria. These points are then divided by the total project costs. This may be more in line with the intent to promote lower-cost/high-benefit projects in that it measures all aspects of the project against all costs.

Keel expressed support for both of these changes.

General consensus was to measure cost effectiveness only on federally-eligible project elements and to eliminate criteria-specific cost effectiveness measures and measure cost-effectiveness on the total score of the project.

5. Should “new roadways” be a separate application category or can the expansion scoring criteria be adjusted to so that new roadways can be more easily compared to expansions of existing roadways?

In the 2014 Regional Solicitation, applications for four new roadways were submitted. These were extensions of existing highways. Several criteria were not good fits for a new highway versus the expansion or modernization of an existing highway. A number of people responding to the survey or critiquing the process suggested these problems would go away if there was a separate category for new highways.

While a new category would resolve confusion about specific criteria, there are ramifications of creating another category of highway projects. These include:

1. Creating a separate category creates the expectation that at least one, and maybe more, new highways will be funded. Having a separate category will therefore likely allocate funds for the sub-category. Historically, there are only one or two new alignment project applications in any one Solicitation.
2. Creating a new category with needed criteria and scoring guidelines is time-consuming for staff and policy-makers as the Solicitation package moves through the review and approval process. It also increases the number of scorers needed.

Staff believes the Solicitation process can be made fair to new highway projects without creating a new category. All criteria for the highway expansion category will be reviewed and modifications of the appropriate criteria for a new highway will be developed. These modifications will be brought to the F&PC as the Solicitation is revised for 2016.

General consensus was not to create a new category for new roadways. Staff will bring adjusted roadway measures that account for new alignments to a future meeting.

6. Should B-minor bridges be eligible for funding in the bridge category?

The STP Bridge Improvement and Replacement fund was not continued for MAP-21, leading to the inclusion of a Bridge category for the Regional Solicitation, but with only A-minor roadways eligible. Staff recommends continuing to limit the Bridge category to “A” minor arterials.

While there were members that expressed a desire for expanding bridge eligibility, general consensus was to leave the A-minor requirement as is. There are plenty of unfunded A-Minor bridges as exhibited by the fact that TAB only funded one of six A-Minor bridges in the last solicitation.

7. Should bundling be allowed and how wide of a geographic area can projects cover?

This issue has three parts: bundling of projects, geographic dispersal, and unique projects.

Staff prefers not to allow bundling. Bundled projects must fall into one of three types:

1. Projects located along the same corridor
2. Systemwide improvements
3. Similar improvements within a concentrated geographic area

Hager suggested that eliminating bundling in order to reduce scoring confusion is short-sighted. Carl Ohrn replied that a geographic area needs to be defined if bundling is to be allowed; census tracts, for example.

Kansier expressed support for bundling as long as the project elements are related. General consensus was to continue to allow bundling with census tracts used to define an area.

8. Should trail usage be based on actual counts rather than number of residents or employees within one mile of the trail facility?

As part of the Regional Solicitation Redesign in 2014, some bicycle and pedestrian technical workgroup members requested that project usage should be measured by doing actual trail counts. However, the group noted that the collection equipment, techniques, and methodologies were not ready to be deployed on a regional level for the Regional Solicitation. Instead, the group recommended that people and jobs within one mile of the proposed trail be used as a proxy to measure potential usage. As part of the recent online survey, people asked for a better way to measure usage. Ridership counts or a new qualitative method could be used.

Jenson said that a lot of trail applications will be for new trails. Steve Peterson said that it has been suggested to use trail connections as proxies.

Kosluchar suggested that if counting is used applicants should share their methodologies.

Karlsson expressed concern that the region is not ready for counting and suggested that this may be something to explore for future Solicitations.

General consensus was to leave the measure as is.

9. Should the scoring for transit expansion projects further favor new riders more than existing riders?

In the survey, concern was expressed that awarding a lot of points for existing transit riders under-values expansion of the transit system; expansion is not meant to “capture” riders that already ride, but to create new ridership. This concern was in part based on the survey response that rewarding existing ridership is not consistent with CMAQ goals to attract new riders. At present, 245 of the 350 points awarded in Usage are directed entirely toward new ridership. The other 105 points are awarded for each existing and new rider. Therefore, 30% of the usage criterion is dedicated to total ridership; a portion of which is existing riders.

Kansier said that existing routes being replaced by better service is not as true to federal guidance for CMAQ funds as new service in unserved places.

Karlsson said that she feels existing riders should be weighted more heavily but, as was discussed with new roadways, tweaks should be made to accommodate new routes.

General consensus was not reached. The 2014 Transit Scoring Committee members will be invited to participate in a one-time work group to try to come to consensus.

7. Other Business

No other business.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.