

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

Metropolitan Council Building, 390 Robert Street No., Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101

TAB PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes: August 12, 2010
Metropolitan Council Chambers.

Members Present: Jim Hovland, Co-Chair, Tony Bennett, Jan Callison, David Gepner, Dennis Hegberg, Robert Lilligren, Scott McBride, Richard Mussell.

Guests and Staff: Tim Mayasich, Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority.
Arlene McCarthy, Metropolitan Council Transportation Services.
Kevin Roggenbuck, TAB Coordinator.

I. Call to order.

Co-Chair Hovland called the meeting to order at 12:40 PM. Mr. Hovland noted that a quorum was not present and directed the committee to take up discussion of the 2011 Regional Solicitation under agenda item IV.

IV. Information Items and Action Transmittals.

Discussion: 2011 Regional Solicitation Policy Issues.

Mr. Roggenbuck said the policy issues before the committee will be discussed by the TAC Funding and Programming Committee to develop a position paper or a list of "pros and cons" for the TAB's information. The technical committees also appreciate feedback from the TAB to help focus the discussion and development of alternatives. These policy issues are being discussed simultaneously by the technical committees and the TAB to exchange comments and insights.

Ms. McCarthy presented three requested changes in the CMAQ program to the committee from a letter dated July 15, 2010 from Metropolitan Council Chair Peter Bell.

Preservation: Use a portion of CMAQ funds for transit maintenance and preservation.

Referring to the July 15 letter, Ms. McCarthy said federal rules allow a portion of the CMAQ funds to be transferred to the Surface Transportation Program. The Metropolitan Council suggests that approximately \$5 million in CMAQ funds could be transferred annually to the Surface Transportation Program and the money be used to purchase replacement buses for the regional fleet. Ms. McCarthy explained how using these transferred funds for preservation is consistent with the Transportation Policy Plan.

Expansion Priorities: Align CMAQ transit grants with the region's transit expansion priorities.

Ms. McCarthy said CMAQ has been one of the main funding sources for increasing suburban park and ride capacity and express bus service, but there are more urgent transit expansion needs in the region now. Ms. McCarthy said the 2030 TPP adopted in January of 2009 calls for the Council to create a Regional Service Improvement Plan (RSIP) to prioritize transit expansion in the region based on need and demand. The Council requests that the RSIP become an important part of the regional solicitation.

Timing: Consider implementing a shorter, more flexible solicitation process.

Ms. McCarthy said the regional solicitation provides funding for projects that will not be built for 4 or 5 years. This timing works well for highway projects, but it often does not work well for transit projects. Statewide MVST funding has experienced an unforeseen decline; the legislature has reduced general fund appropriations to the Council and has not fulfilled its statutory commitment to fund 50% of rail operating costs. A 2-year implementation window would be better than a 4 to 5 year window.

Ms. McCarthy answered questions from the committee. Mr. Hovland referred to the bottom of page 2 of the July 15 letter and asked what are the Council's priorities? Ms. McCarthy said the RSIP will be developed for the region and will include projects from all transit providers. The projects will be prioritized and ranked into tiers.

Mr. Hovland asked if the RSIP means the TAB ships CMAQ funds off to the Council and they use it as they see fit, possibly to the detriment of suburban transit providers. Ms. McCarthy said the Council would like the RSIP to be reflected in the solicitation criteria, not be treated as an automatic selection. Mr. Lilligren added that it is important for the elected members of the MPO to make funding decisions and that is reflected in the *Prospectus*.

Mr. Mayasich and Mr. Roggenbuck led the discussion on the remaining five regional solicitation policy issues. Mr. Roggenbuck said these policy issues were raised by applicants and reviewers during the 2009 regional solicitation and by the technical committees as we began discussing the 2011 regional solicitation.

Elevating preservation as a goal.

Mr. Roggenbuck said the regional solicitation criteria for the "A" Minor Arterials and Non-freeway Principal Arterials tend to favor capacity expansion projects and there are no criteria that involve preservation. The regional solicitation criteria are aimed at meeting the goals, policies and implementation strategies in the Transportation Policy Plan, such as reducing congestion, reducing auto crashes, reducing automobile emissions, integrating the project with other modes and managing access. The criteria are not specifically written to favor capacity expansion projects.

Mr. McBride suggested having technical groups assess the need for preservation projects and assess the state of the minor arterial system and get the counties to comment. The committee discussed the role of the minor arterial system and the difficulty in adding capacity to minor arterials in the more densely developed urban area.

Improving cost estimating.

Mr. Roggenbuck said all the STP and CMAQ categories in the regional solicitation have cost effectiveness criteria intended to measure the benefits in air quality, congestion relief, crash reduction, etc... compared to the total cost of the proposed project. Projects submitted in the regional solicitation are often just conceptual ideas and it is difficult for project sponsors to provide accurate cost estimates. In some cases, as programmed projects are developed through Metro State Aid, the costs increase significantly. This calls into question whether the project would have scored as highly in the cost effectiveness criteria and whether the project would have been selected by the TAB.

The technical committees are looking for a way to help applicants develop more accurate cost estimates without incurring up-front costs.

Ms. Callison said the TAB should be rewarding accuracy and asked what is the typical cost change on a STP project? Perhaps there should be an upper limit to the cost increase that is acceptable to the TAB? Staff said they will research cost changes from selection to authorization. Ms. Callison asked why applicants would not intentionally lowball the cost estimate. Mr. Mayasich said the federal funds awarded to the project are capped and the project sponsor is responsible for the cost increase.

Mr. McBride said there should be some assessment of risk in the cost estimate. For example, public involvement in the project prior to submitting it in the regional solicitation helps determine whether noise walls will be part of the project. Mr. McBride suggested that project risk be discussed with the local agencies and try to quantify the risk for cost increases.

Non-freeway Principal Arterials and consistency with the 2030 Transportation Policy Plan.

Mr. Roggenbuck said the new 2030 TPP emphasizes preservation and management of the metropolitan highway system over capacity expansion. The metro highway system includes all the principal arterials, not just the interstate and trunk highway freeways, and the question was raised at a technical committee meeting that the new policy should be applied to the non-freeway principal arterials in the regional solicitation.

The committee referred the issue to the TAC Funding and Programming Committee.

Complete Streets/Integration of modes.

Mr. Roggenbuck said the regional solicitation has included an "Integration of Modes" criterion in the five roadway categories for many years. All of the roadway projects selected by the TAB over the last two solicitations have included a bicycle, pedestrian or transit component. The technical committees have discussed whether accommodation of all transportation modes should be a qualifying criterion.

Mr. Bennett said there are safety issues with bicyclists and pedestrians on trails. Education, training and enforcement is needed. Mr. Lilligren said the TAB needs a better understanding of Complete Streets and what it means to the regional solicitation.

CMAQ system management

Mr. Roggenbuck explained that transportation system management projects that reduce traffic congestion and automobile emissions are eligible for CMAQ funding and the TAB has a category in the regional solicitation for these types of projects. The TAB did not receive many traffic signal upgrade projects from cities and counties because the minimum project cost was too high for projects to be eligible and they were more focused on submitting projects in other categories. The technical committees discussed setting aside some CMAQ funds for a program where cities and counties can upgrade traffic signals in a corridor or grid and the projects could be processed through MN/DOT State Aid under one Project Memorandum.

The committee felt this was a good concept and referred it to the TAC Funding and Programming Committee.

A quorum was still not present, Mr. Hovland said the action items on the Programming Committee agenda will be taken up at the full TAB meeting and the July 21 Programming Committee minutes will be approved at the next meeting.

V. Other Business.

Mr. Gepner reminded the committee about the Sixth Annual TAB Bike Tour through the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes scheduled for August 20.

VI. Adjourn

Mr. Hovland adjourned the Programming Committee meeting at 1:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted:
Kevin Roggenbuck,
TAB Coordinator.