

Transportation Advisory Board
of the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities

ACTION TRANSMITTAL

No. 2010-65

DATE: October 6, 2010
TO: Transportation Advisory Board
FROM: Technical Advisory Committee
SUBJECT: 2011 Regional Solicitation: Encouraging more signal timing projects to compete in the CMAQ solicitation.

MOTION: That the TAB establish a new CMAQ funding program for signal re-timing projects.

DISCUSSION: System Management projects typically involve technological approaches to better manage traffic flow such as coordinating signal timing on a roadway or roadway network, installing traffic management systems as well as roadway design and signals that help high occupancy vehicles move more quickly and efficiently. These types of projects are highly effective at reducing air pollution and reducing congestion but the TAB has not received many applications for these types of projects in the last two solicitations since this category was established. This may be because potential applicants are too burdened with applications for larger transportation projects that they do not bother to put applications together for these projects, which are typically much smaller. The minimum project amount may also be too high to justify using federal funds.

The committee suggested setting aside some amount of CMAQ funding to create a new program whereby cities and counties can complete eligible simple signal improvements. The program would encourage "bundling" of smaller signal system projects by a large agency such as a county public works department or Mn/DOT. Only the largest cities or counties would likely find it worthwhile to do a small project such as this with federal dollars. While the purpose of signal timing projects is better traffic flow, ADA improvements to the pedestrian signals should also be made with these projects.

Bundling projects would require interest on the part of counties to administer projects for their cities. If there is no interest in doing this on the part of the counties, it may not be worth setting up this program.

ROUTING

TO	ACTION REQUESTED	DATE COMPLETED
TAC Funding and Programming Committee	Review and Recommend	September 16, 2010
Technical Advisory Committee	Review & Recommend	October 6, 2010
TAB Programming Committee	Review & Recommend	
Transportation Advisory Board	Review & Approve	

CMAQ System Management

System Management projects typically involve technological approaches to better manage traffic flow such as coordinating signal timing on a roadway or roadway network, installing traffic management systems as well as roadway design and signals that help high occupancy vehicles move more quickly and efficiently. These types of projects are highly effective at reducing air pollution and reducing congestion but the TAB has not received many applications for these types of projects in the last two solicitations since this category was established. This situation may not reflect a lack of need or interest but instead that potential applicants are too burdened with applications for larger transportation projects (like STP and TE projects) that they do not bother to put applications together for these projects, which are typically much smaller. A suggestion has been made to change the way that the region allocates resources to these types of projects by setting aside some amount of CMAQ funding to create a program whereby cities and counties can complete eligible signal improvements and other system management improvements using these federal funds on an ongoing basis. These projects do not typically require the same amount of time to complete as highway and trail projects.

Pros:

- A programmatic approach may allow smaller projects to be funded. The minimum project amount is currently \$500,000 which is too high for many eligible system management projects.

Cons:

- We have many systems that we need to manage. How do priorities get determined without receiving applications? The freeway system is eligible to receive CMAQ funding. Support of managed lanes on freeways could be eligible but should not be allowed to compete with management of the minor arterial and collector systems.

Issues to consider:

- It is difficult to establish a setaside amount when we do not know what demand there is for these kinds of projects.
- Any work on signals should also include ADA upgrades.
- The TAB should drop its prohibition on funding engineering and planning work for this kind of project since that is often the largest need for these kinds of projects. The construction costs are low compared to the engineering.

Staff comments: In large-scale signal re-timing and upgrade projects, the engineering work to develop a signal timing plan can be approached two ways. One, it could be required as part of an application and used to compare to other similar projects. Two, it does not need to be part of the application and include the cost of development in the application request. Without receiving a applications, how do we know the corridors need funding at all? We have to define the problem and use the proposed improvement to show an air quality benefit.