

Transportation Advisory Board
of the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities

Committee Report

DATE: October 6, 2010
TO: Transportation Advisory Board
FROM: Technical Advisory Committee
SUBJECT: CMAQ Transit Issues

COMMITTEE INTENT: Consider comments brought up by Metropolitan Council Chair Bell about issues with the transit expansion category of CMAQ and the committee discussion about those issues. There was no committee consensus on these issues.

DISCUSSION: There are three main issues that Metropolitan Council leadership brought to the attention of the TAB. The first issue is a perceived lack of flexibility in the CMAQ program when the dynamic nature of the transit market demands more flexibility. The Council Chair recommended a shorter timeframe between application and program year to help make applications more responsive to current market conditions. The second issue is lack of funding for preservation of the bus system while the expansion of the bus system, partially funded by CMAQ, has increased the need for preservation in recent years. The Council Chair recommended setting aside some CMAQ funding to be transferred to a program to buy replacement buses. The third issue identified was a divergence of regional transit priorities and some local priorities for transit. The Council Chair suggested using the Regional Service Improvement Plan (RSIP). The RSIP will be developed with regional transit partners and will include all proposed capital improvements for each agency divided into priority groupings.

There was no consensus on the three proposals put forward by the Metropolitan Council, but there were statements that the issues were noteworthy and deserved further consideration in the future.

On the 2-year timeframe: Some committee members stated that they have projects that they plan to make applications for in 2011 and that they would have trouble getting some new services such as the Rush Line Commuter Coach if they only had two years to put it together.

On the setting up a preservation fund: There was concern at TAB that this is not the intent of the CMAQ program and that it would set a precedent for the use of these funds to solve a short-term problem. There was a concern that this approach does not fit in with the goal of doubling transit ridership in the region. The next transportation act has not been developed and may completely alter the landscape for federal funding and it may not be wise to make substantial changes to this program prior to a major federal policy change.

On the use of a regional service improvement plan, it was decided that since the RSIP is not developed it is not ready to be implemented for the 2011 regional solicitation.

ROUTING

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

390 North Robert St., St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1805 (651) 602-1728 Fax (651) 602-1739

Implement a shorter timeframe between application and program year (not conduct a CMAQ solicitation next year)

Pros:

- Transit projects do not require the same amount of time to develop as highway and trail projects so the 4 to 5 year lead time is not necessary.
- The transit business is subject to changing conditions in the market for transit service and funding paradigms. Soliciting for projects closer to the program year would result in projects that are more responsive to these changing conditions.

Cons:

- This approach may allow transit agencies to switch their priorities continuously; it would not reward long-range planning.

Issues to Consider:

- If the timeframe is changed, there will be no solicitation for CMAQ in 2011.

Setting aside \$5 million per year in CMAQ to build a preservation account to buy replacement buses

Pros:

- There are fewer funding sources for preservation than for expansion and the biggest unfunded need on the system is to replace buses.
- This approach is better aligned with the regional transit priorities to ensure that the existing system is maintained.

Cons:

- Federal funding should be used as a seed to do new projects, not to help with basic operation of the system.

Issues to Consider:

- Should this be a set-aside or a competitive process? We want to make sure that all eligible entities have access to this funding and that the most worthwhile projects are selected but we do not want to make an application process that is too costly on applicants for a limited program like replacement buses.
- Should this be limited to replacement buses or can it be opened up to park-and-ride maintenance and other preservation projects in the transit system?
- There should be a forum with all transit providers to weigh in on how this program should be set up.

Better align the solicitation with the region's transit expansion priorities after the development of the Regional Service Improvement Plan (RSIP)

Pros:

- The Regional Service Improvement Plan will be developed by the end of this year. All transit providers are involved in this effort being led by the Metropolitan Council. This kind of plan was not available in previous years. It would not need to be the only criteria but a new criterion for prioritization. Projects would be grouped into priority areas and not ranked individually in the RSIP.
- In the 2009 Solicitation, the Council did not provide local match for all proposed CMAQ projects because some of the proposals were not high priorities for the region reflecting a divergence in the CMAQ priorities from the regional priorities.

Cons:

- There is a concern that the RSIP will not reflect individual transit agency priorities and local priorities.
- There is a concern that the process to develop the priorities in the RSIP is not open and fair.

- The TAB does not have influence on the priorities in the RSIP. Is it shifting all decision-making to the Metropolitan Council to use as it sees fit?
- The TAB must have a say in how this funding is spent; its involvement is in the Prospectus.

Issues to Consider:

- How this proposal is handled is not fully developed. There seems to be some concern that the RSIP will replace the solicitation but Council staff stated that they are not proposing this. The RSIP priority rating could instead be a major prioritizing criterion in the CMAQ solicitation.