

2021 – 2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Update Project Prioritizing & Selection Process

The Northwest Rural Planning Organization (NW RPO) utilized the following process for the 2021-2024 TIP Update project selection to effectively choose the best projects that meet the needs of our five-county region while maintaining fiscal constraint. Preservation and asset management continue to be the highest priority in PA and the RPO strives to emphasize both.

Several TIP meetings were held between the county planners, PennDOT Districts, the RPO, and PennDOT Center for Program Development and Management (CPDM) to review projects and solicit input and comment. The table below illustrates and documents this process.

DATE	ATTENDEES	PURPOSE
September 18, 2019	PennDOT District 1-0, PennDOT CPDM, RPO	Go through initial proposed projects
October 24, 2019	PennDOT District 1-0 and RPO	Go through initial proposed projects for Warren County
October 28, 2019	PennDOT District 1-0, County Planners, RPO	Go through initial proposed projects for Forest, Crawford, and Venango Counties
November 14, 2019	Clarion County Commissioners, Clarion County Planning, PennDOT District 10-0, RPO	Go through initial proposed projects in Clarion County
November 19, 2019	NW RPO Transportation Advisory Committee, RPO	Present a revised list of draft projects to the TAC
March 25, 2020	NW RPO Transportation Advisory Committee, RPO	Last look at projects before Public Comment Period
June 23, 2020	NW RPO Transportation Advisory Committee, RPO	TIP Adoption

The final approval of the TIP will take place at the TAC meeting on June 23, 2020. To meet the environmental justice requirements, the draft TIP was advertised and distributed for public review for the 30-day period of May 11, 2020 – June 9, 2020 with the public meeting being held on June 4, 2020 from 1pm – 2:30pm.

The public meeting was advertised in accordance with the RPO’s PPP regarding the notification of the public to ensure there is access to all meetings, especially since being held virtually. Attendees could join via the web as well as by phone. Additional outreach with electronic DM signs was done to help further get the word out. These signs were placed in several EJ communities. The meeting web link was also placed on the STC website and district public meeting website for public involvement in efforts to extend the RPO reach even further.

General Procedural Guidance as well as Financial Guidance was issued on 7/11/19 and RPO staff quickly began the initial efforts in assembling the different TIP documents. Later in the year, Spike

funding determinations announced on 11/14/2019. The RPO was then notified of any additional funds that could be used above and beyond financial guidance (TSMO, RRR sHSIP).

The TIP development required that ongoing projects from the 2019-2022 TIP are carried forward onto the 2021-2024 Draft TIP. (Projects that are still advancing through the project delivery process; Projects with unforeseen cost increases; Projects with anticipated Advance Construct (AC) conversions, etc.)

Roles and Responsibilities of the RPO/CPDM/PennDOT Districts

Highway/bridge carryover project scopes, costs, and schedules were reviewed and updated based on information obtained from the district project managers. PennDOT District 1-0's role was to insure that accurate project information was inputted into PennDOT's Multimodal Project Management System (MPMS) and shared this information with the RPO and PennDOT CPDM at the previously mentioned meetings. (i.e....Carryover TIP)

PennDOT District 1-0/Northwest RPO/CPDM worked to produce clear and understandable project descriptions with details including the location and scope of work that were easily understood by the public and reduced potential confusion during discussions with county planners.

PennDOT Districts, RPO staff and PennDOT CPDM staff collaborated to evaluate highway/bridge project ideas or additional needs that have been identified through the Transportation Performance Management (TPM) process and informed by the TAMP, transportation performance measures (these are further explained in the PM narrative), the regional LRTP, and from local input/outreach sources such as the STC Public Survey, RPO public involvement (MetroQuest/Listening tours), PennDOT Connects, and Environmental Justice Core Elements and Analysis.

Based on the above continued coordination throughout the TIP development process, PennDOT District staff created project scopes, costs, and schedules in MPMS for the mutually agreed-upon new projects and attached the TIP to MPMS.

This allowed for more open discussion maintaining and improving the 3C process (cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing). The collaboration and cooperative discussions between the RPO, Districts and CPDM continued, and the TIP was finalized prior to preparation of a fiscally constrained project list.

The district took the lead role in working through funding eligibility for each project within the limitations laid out by financial guidance.

In January, PennDOT held MPO/RPO/ CPDM/District meetings. CPDM then ran selected reports to assure that the TIP was fiscally constraint. (TIP 250 allocation report). A TIP review spreadsheet

was shared by CPDM noting some funding concerns, but they were addressed and a TIP was updated prior to public comment. (NHPP/BOF)

Transit TIP

The process for the transit component of the TIP works a little differently and is a much more cut-and-dry process. The NW RPO has two transit providers—The Crawford Area Transportation Authority (CATA) and the Transit Authority of Warren County (TAWC). All PA transit agencies are required to utilize Pennsylvania’s transit Capital Planning Tool (CPT) as part of their capital planning process. The CPT is an asset management and capital planning application that works as the central repository for all Pennsylvania transit asset and performance management activities and really helps guide the development of the transit portion of the TIP. The RPO staff relies heavily on the CPT, and works closely with the PennDOT Bureau of Multimodal Transportation and in accordance with the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA’s) guidelines. A draft TIP was shared with RPO and PennDOT CPDM staff members in early 2020. As with past updates, most projects fund transit vehicles, facilities, equipment and other capital expenditures that allow the transit system to operate efficiently and safely. Operating assistance is also included within the TIP. Projects typically fall under similar categories year-to-year and older TIPs look rather similar to the 2021 TIP.

It was the responsibility CPDM staff to create the transit projects and narratives in MPMS. Then they attached the projects in MPMS, thus creating the Transit TIP. Then CPDM staff coordinated the Transit TIP. The RPO’s role then was to provide this to the transit agencies to confirm information accuracy. Upon approval, CPDM’s responsibility was to provide the TIP to Bureau of Public Transit (BPT) and FTA for review and comment.

The additional funding received from Act 89 continues to be used for Decade of Investment Projects. Line Item Reserves are included for bridge/highway, All Weather Pavement Markings and Betterment Projects. Using the line item reserve process provides for a faster, more efficient, method to complete projects.

As funds allow, additional projects were selected in collaboration with the county planning directors from the prioritized list included in the 2015-2040 NWPA Long Range Transportation Plan. Those projects are consistent with the county and/or regional comprehensive plans and were prioritized using the ranking a rating process software tool, Decision Lens. The criterion utilized in this process included the following:

- Safety
- Connectivity to other modes
- Traffic
- Sustainability/Smart Growth
- Project Impact/Benefit
- Feasibility

- Condition
- Economic Development
- Return on Investment and
- Quality of Life

The 2020-2045 LRTP was also being developed at the same time as the TIP. New candidate projects that were identified in the 2020-2045 LRTP update were ranked against a new set of criteria. These criteria included:

- **Safety and Security** – considers safety for motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists.
- **Infrastructure Condition**– considers the condition of the existing infrastructure
- **System Performance and Operations** – considers the travel reliability of the existing infrastructure.
- **Sustainability and Smart Growth** – considers the economic and land use impacts of transportation improvements.
- **Traffic Congestion and Network Classification** – considers traffic volume, truck volume, and various transportation networks.
- **Multimodal Accessibility and Mobility** – considers mobility and interconnectivity of transportation modes, including trucks/freight, automobiles, pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and airports.
- **Project Impact and Benefit** – considers impacts on environmental justice populations and environmental resources.

These projects are prioritized with a strong emphasis on preservation and operating efficiency of the existing infrastructure for all modes to ensure consistency between the regional LRTP, comprehensive plans, and regional TIP.

The RPO works closely with PennDOT and members of the NW RPO Transportation Advisory Committee to select the criteria and assign each of the criteria a weight. The final result is a list used as a starting point for and project selection deliberation.

PennDOT District 1-0 and 10-0 Priorities

Even before initial meetings between the Districts and the RPO begin, PennDOT’s Planning and Programming staff has already worked with several other departments within PennDOT District 1-0 to get an idea of what their highest priorities are. These include:

- Traffic (Safety)
- Maintenance
- Highway Design
- Bridge Design
- Executive Team

District 1-0's Planning and Programming staff took this information into consideration, and also looked at carryover projects from the current TIP (e.g. projects partially funded but not yet fully complete during the current/2019 TIP cycle). These carryover projects typically constitute a very large portion of our total dollars available. These departments' priorities were incorporated into an initial, "rough draft" TIP and this was presented to the RPO staff. Project-specific discussions between District 1-0 and RPO staff took place several times over the next two months. The district then attached the document to MPMS. Later, CPDM reviewed the attached TIP and coordinated with the District to update narratives.

Local Planning Studies

Local studies that have been conducted by PennDOT as well as the RPO are taken into consideration as well. Most studies have recommendations in them that assist in the decision-making process. A list of transportation studies completed by the Northwest RPO can be found at <http://www.northwestpa.org/studies/>.

Statewide Administered Programs:

Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO) – The TSMO programs are defined by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as "a set of integrated strategies to optimize the performance of operations on existing infrastructure through implementation of multimodal, cross-jurisdictional systems, services, and projects designed to preserve capacity and improve security, safety, and reliability of a transportation system." In simplest terms, TSMO is a way to address reliability, mobility, and congestion by utilizing strategies rather than only building out of congestion. Northwest RPO falls within the western TSMO region.

An application period was open from November 1, 2019 through December 13, 2019. Selected projects were shared with FHWA on January 15, 2020. Selected projects were shared with MPO/RPOs and Districts on February 6, 2020. The RPO was provided an overview of these potential projects by the district staff and asked if they would commit to the 50% match of regional TIP funds.

Northwest RPO voted to match the 50% to these projects via e-ballot on December 6, 2019:

- I-80 Barkeyville ITS Addition - TSMO MPMS 114785; \$50,000 sSTP funds in FFY 2021
- I-79 Northern Crawford County ITS Addition - TSMO MPMS 114784; \$175,000 sSTP funds in FFY 2022

Rail-Highway Crossing Safety Program (RRX) –The RRX Program provides funding to eliminate hazards associated with at-grade highway and railroad crossings. Funding is used for installation of gates and flashing light warning systems, to upgrade existing warning systems, and for the removal of at-grade crossings.

The RRX program is developed by PennDOT CPDM and Bureau of Project Delivery staff in coordination with District Grade Crossing Engineers/Administrators (DGCE/As) at the annual Statewide Grade Crossing meeting held in October. Projects are prioritized first at locations in the top 25% highest hazard rating from the FRA Web Accident Prediction System (WBAPS). MPO/RPO concerns communicated through their DGCE/A, which may not be identified in WBAPS are also considered. These include issues such as increased train traffic, limited sight-distance, near-miss history or antiquated warning devices. The projects for the 2021 Draft RRX Program that the NW RPO received are listed below.

- Mt Pleasant Rd RR Crossing MPMS 106162; \$118,500 RRX funds in FFY 2021 and \$200,000 RRX funds in FFY 2022
- Shaw's Landing RRX MPMS 113216 \$250,000 RRX funds in FFY 2022 and \$125,000 RRX funds in FFY 2023
- 13th Street Franklin RRX MPMS 113217 \$250,000 RRX funds in FFY 2022 and \$250,000 RRX funds in FFY 2023
- Mead Ave RR Crossing MPMS 111140 \$100,000 RRX funds in FFY 2023 and \$150,000 RRX funds in FFY 2024.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Set-aside – The purpose of the HSIP is to achieve a significant reduction in fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads. Implementation of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) through data driven safety analysis supports achieving these reductions. A data-driven safety analysis in the form of Benefit/Cost (B/C) Life Cycle analysis or Highway Safety Manual (HSM) analysis was required. Priority locations were recommended to be identified through HSM Network Screening, Speed Management Action Plan locations, or Road Safety Audit locations. Evaluation criteria were weighted, and each project was scored and ranked. Evaluation criteria included B/C analysis, HSM analysis, fatal and injury crashes, application of systematic improvements, improvement on local roads, and deliverability.

A conference call was held in February 2019 with the Districts and in April 2019 with the MPOs/RPOs to outline the schedule and application requirements for the FFY 2021 HSIP Set-aside. Set-aside funding application were accepted from August 1 – September 30, 2019. The HSIP Set-aside continually monitored by Central Office CPDM and Bureau of Maintenance and Operations staff to maximize funding and project delivery. NW RPO received the below project funding from this application round.

- PA 8 and PA 77 Intersection MPMS 109996; \$1,000,000 sHSIP funds in FFY 2021

Transportation Alternatives Set-aside (TAP) – The Transportation Alternatives Set-aside of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (TA Set-aside) provides \$25 million a year for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities, infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation and enhanced mobility, community improvement activities, environmental mitigation, trails that serve a transportation purpose, and safe routes to school projects. The RPO

formed a selection committee comprised of members from each county to rank TAP submissions. The RPO coordinated these rankings with the PennDOT CPDM TA Set-aside state coordinator prior to initiating a project selection round. These NW RPO TAP projects are carried over from the May 8, 2018 TAP application round:

- Allegheny Blvd Trail MPMS 98571; \$500,000 TAP funds in FFY 2021 and \$500,000 TAP funds FFY 2022
- Franklin Ped Streetscape Safety Project MPMS 111433; \$400,000 TAP funds in FFY 2021, \$496,760 TAP funds in FFY 2022

Transportation Performance Measures

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) and the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act include performance management requirements. Performance-based planning will ensure that PennDOT and the RPOs collectively invest Federal transportation funds efficiently towards achieving national goals.

Transportation Performance Management (TPM) is strategic approach that uses data to make investment and policy decisions to achieve national performance goals. Four transportation performance measures addressing five topics were evaluated as part of the 2021 TIP development process as noted below:

- PM1 - Safety
- PM2 – Pavement Condition
- PM2 – Bridge Condition
- PM3 – System Performance
- TAM – Transit Asset Management

The previous (2019) TIP was the first one to directly consider TPMs, but only the PM-1 (Safety) PM was formally evaluated. As specific guidance and approaches have been refined, a more holistic look at the (additional) PMs has become part of the TIP development process.

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice (EJ) is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Presidential Executive Order 12898 of 1994 requires Federal agencies to achieve Environmental Justice by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. In layman's terms, it is essential for the RPO to evaluate the effects/impacts of all TIP projects on traditionally underserved minority and low-income populations and mitigate any inequities in the disbursement of funds or the process itself.

In April 2019, the FHWA PA Division, FTA Region III, PennDOT Central Office, PennDOT Engineering District 8-0, and six MPOs within District 8-0 Pennsylvania, jointly developed the

South Central Pennsylvania Environmental Justice Unified Process and Methodology Guide. This was developed to help these agencies collaboratively analyze potential EJ impacts to minority and low-income populations in a straightforward manner. This “best practice” guidance was then shared with the RPO for consideration of their future programs including their respective Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP) and the Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTP).

The Guide outlines several strategies for accomplishing the core elements of an EJ analysis acceptable to FHWA and FTA. It identifies specific core activities that MPOs in Pennsylvania should complete

PennDOT Connects

The PennDOT Connects Project Initiation Forms are used to initiate all new projects being considered for the 2021 – 2024 draft TIP and the Long Range Transportation Plan. This supports the vision of the Northwest transportation system with an integrated system that offers convenient, efficient, effective and safe travel choices for both people and goods, while preserving the character and livability of our communities.

Meetings in Forest, Venango and Crawford County were held early in 2020 and then due to the Covid-19 situation, were required to be put on hold as the RPO and PennDOT were not permitted to meet with the remaining municipalities. To deal with this uncertain situation, The RPO and District staff sent out the following certified letter to all remaining municipalities:

Municipal Representatives,

During these unprecedented times, PennDOT is doing our very best to provide business as usual to all our customers. This includes completing the PennDOT Connects process for each of our projects that are being added to the 2021 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Update. While PennDOT expected to hold these meetings in a face-to-face format, the COVID-19 pandemic has required us to change how we can gather this information with the safety for all parties as our highest priority.

This letter provides several options available to municipalities to provide PennDOT with your comments. Along with this letter we have enclosed a Project Information Form (PIF). The PIF document provides various information on the project as well as the questions we are requesting the municipality to complete. Please choose one of the available options below for completion and return the corresponding documents that pertain to your choice. Please return this cover letter in the included stamped return envelope for PennDOT documentation purposes. If we do not receive a response by July 8, 2020, the PIF will be noted as non-responsive.

Return via Postal Mail

Return via email

☐ Conference Call Requested

☐ Decline to provide comment

In May of 2020, the TIP entered into a 30-day public comment period. A legal ad was placed in 3 of the major newspapers in the RPO region, while the TIP documents were posted on the Northwest Commission website, and various notifications were sent out to the transportation community, including native tribes, stating that the TIP was available for public comment. A Public Hearing was also scheduled during this 30-day public comment period (documentation of this process is included within this TIP submittal).

The final TIP is to be approved at the June 2020 TAC meeting, and will then be processed by PennDOT. After their review, PennDOT will bundle together this and all other PA MPO/RPO TIPs, and submit as one Statewide TIP (STIP) to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for final approval. After final approval of the STIP by FHWA and FTA, the TIP takes effect at the beginning of the federal fiscal year on October 1, 2020.

GLOSSARY: These abbreviations and acronyms can be found throughout the TIP Document.

FEDERAL FUNDING SOURCES:

BOF– Bridge Off-System
CAQ– Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality
HSIP– Highway Safety Improvement Program
NHPP– National Highway Performance Program
STP– Surface Transportation Program
SXF– Special Federal Earmarked Funds
TAP– Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside
NFP– National Highway Freight Program

STATE FUNDING SOURCES:

183– State Bridge Funds for Local Bridges
185– State Bridge Funds for State Bridges
409– Maintenance Funds from Act 89
581– State Highway Funds
LOC– Local Funds

PROJECT PHASES:

P– Preliminary Engineering
F– Final Design
U– Utility
ROW– Right of Way
C– Construction
