

CDTC TIP Task Force: Meeting #1

Meeting Minutes

Date: December 14, 2022

Time: 1:00 - 2:30 pm

Attendees:

Name	Organization
Sandra Misiewicz	CDTC
Jacob Beeman	CDTC
Andrew Tracy	CDTC
Randy Milano	City of Albany
John Scavo	Town of Clifton Park
Susan Barden	City of Saratoga Springs
Andrew Kreshik	City of Troy
Greg Wichser	NYS DOT
Kim Lambert	Saratoga County
Lisa Ramundo	Albany County
Steve Feeney	Schenectady County
Chris Wallin	City of Schenectady
Megan Quirk	CDTA
Ross Farrell	CDTA
Mike Valentine	Saratoga County

1) Welcome and Introduction to TIP Working Group

The meeting began with all in attendance introducing themselves.

i. CDTC Objectives

Jacob presented the objective of the TIP Task Force, "To develop a TIP Policy Document that discusses recommended improvements to how the TIP is developed and managed. This document will then be brought to the Planning Committee for review and approval. Approval of this document will empower CDTC staff to prepare updates to the TIP application, evaluation, and programming processes in accordance with guidelines established by the TIP Task Force."

ii. Task Force Timeline

Jacob presented the TIP Task Force timeline. The Task Force is intended to meet four times through June 2023. At the fourth meeting, the draft TIP Policy Document will be presented. Following the conclusion of the four planned meetings, the Task Force may continue as an Infrastructure Advisory Committee if there is sufficient interest.

iii. TIP History Discussion

Sandy presented slides relating to the history of the CDTC TIP evaluation process. Sandy stated that the TIP must be consistent with the long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan. The current project selection process originated at the 1992 TIP Working Group and has remained largely unchanged since. Greg Wichser added that, sometime between 2000 and 2010, USDOT changed its policy regarding preservation projects, and began permitting mill-and-fill and other preservation projects to be federally funded.

Sandy continued, stating that the current evaluation process is burdensome to staff, and the merit scores are too subjective and should be revisited. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also brings in new fund sources that the current evaluation process is not designed for. Mike Valentine asked what in particular needs to be changed. Sandy responded that one thing is the merit scoring process. Andrew Kreshik asked about the quantitative component of the scoring process, specifically about the User Cost Savings component. Andrew Tracy responded that User Cost accounts for less than 1% of each project's quantitative score, while Mobility Benefits makes up the majority.

Mike Valentine expressed concern about the merit score process favoring urban areas. Sandy responded that the merit score process can be re-evaluated, and that buy-in from the TIP Task Force and the Planning Committee is important.

On the topic of TIP project categories: Mike Valentine expressed that different geographic areas have different transportation needs; for example, there is demand for shoulder widening on rural highways, but no clear TIP project category for it. Greg Wichser added that preservation projects, by definition, don't change anything, but are evaluated against projects that do.

Sandy stated that new considerations may be included in an updated TIP project evaluation process. For example, greenhouse gas emission impact could be considered.

On the topic of the TIP application timeframe: Mike Valentine stated that the compressed schedule is a challenge. Greg Wichser stated that the State should begin the process earlier, and that the MPO can get ahead by issuing a project solicitation before funding targets are available. Mike Valentine added that another challenge is that county budgets are not known well in advance.

Regarding the participation of small communities in the TIP process: Andrew Kreshik stated that many small communities could benefit from federal funding, but don't have the capacity to do so. Sandy replied that smaller communities have few federal-aid eligible roads, and face staffing challenges as well. Andrew Kreshik suggested that adopting a simpler 'plug-and-chug' approach to TIP applications could benefit smaller communities.

Mike Valentine continued on this topic by suggesting that outreach to small communities could help, and that CDRPC conferences may be a good forum. Greg Wichser stated that the State has made efforts to partner with locals on building more comprehensive projects. Greg refers small communities to the TAP program and to the MPO table when appropriate.

Chris Wallin suggested that it would be beneficial if the TIP process focused more on the needs of municipalities. The City of Schenectady prepared applications for a small number of ready-to-go projects and prioritized them, but other applicants may have placed tenuous projects as their highest priorities. With regards to project scoring, Chris suggested that a lower-priority project on a

small local road could score more points if it 'checked all the boxes' for merit points, even if the project would ultimately be less impactful. Andrew Kreshik suggested giving some weight to the applicant's priority ranking in the scoring process. Steve Feeney stated that the project scores are really only to get the discussion moving, and that project priorities are already considered in the selection process. Sandy added that there may be competing priorities even within municipalities (between the DPW, planners, elected officials, etc.), and that it is up to the municipality's Planning Committee representative to balance these priorities.

On the topic of Planning Committee involvement in project selection: Sandy stated that other MPOs have a TIP subcommittee that handles this, but CDTC prefers to use the Planning Committee so that everyone has a seat at the table. The drawback to this approach is the time commitment needed from the Planning Committee, as they must meet multiple times.

Discussion moved to funding availability. In the TIP update, only a portion of TIP applications could be funded. Greg Wichser stated that federal funding availability has fluctuated in recent decades and is still low compared to historical levels when purchasing power is considered. Sandy stated that the benefit of getting all the local applications is that it documents the amount of unmet local needs from unfunded projects. Greg Wichser stated that other states, such as South Carolina, fund more PEL (Planning-Environmental Linkage) projects, but this approach has drawbacks as it puts regulatory agencies 'on the clock'.

2) TIP Update Debrief & Feedback

i. Project Application

Jacob asked for online TIP application feedback, both pros and cons. He stated that some of the known positives are that it streamlines the process due to the spreadsheet output of project data. One of the cons is that applicants had issues when attempting to work on multiple applications at the same time. This is due to Jotform overwriting in-progress applications when a new application is started. Andrew Kreshik stated that the online process is good, and that the word limit is helpful to keep applications focused. Mike Valentine concurred but added that small communities may find the online application challenging. Villages in particular may lack the capacity to apply/manage a federal aid project. Randy Milano and others agreed that the online process is relatively simple compared to others, such as grants.gov.

Steve Feeney suggested that smaller communities may have fewer federal-aid eligible roadways, and therefore less need for the MPO process. Villages don't come to the County for help all that often. Federal funding should be reserved for projects of a certain magnitude. As such, Steve suggested that there may be little unmet need for federal funding in Villages. Sandy stated that the BRIDGE NY solicitation is an opportunity to test to see if smaller communities will participate, and to see what their challenges are if they do not. Greg Wichser stated that the changes made to the BRIDGE NY solicitation were made at the request of the New York State County Highway Superintendents Association, so it will be interesting to see if the revamped process will increase participation.

Lisa Ramundo stated that consultants often offer to work pro-bono to prepare grant applications on the condition that, if the application is successful, they can administer the project. This is one way that smaller communities with staffing challenges may be able to participate.

Andrew Kreshik stated that larger municipalities face challenges as well – the City of Troy currently has no City Engineer, for example.

Jacob concluded the meeting by stating the remaining categories for discussion from the agenda (Informational & Review Materials, and CDTC Project Categories) will be discussed at the next meeting.

3) Meeting Adjourned

The meeting was adjourned at 2:35

The next meeting will be scheduled for February 2023.