

CDTC TIP Task Force: Meeting #2

Meeting Minutes

Date: February 15, 2023

Time: 1:00 - 2:30 pm

Attendees:

Name	Organization
Sandra Misiewicz	CDTC
Jacob Beeman	CDTC
Andrew Tracy	CDTC
Susan Barden	City of Saratoga Springs
Greg Wichser	NYS DOT Region 1
Kelley Kircher	NYS DOT Region 1
Kim Lambert	Saratoga County
Chris Wallin	City of Schenectady
Megan Quirk	CDTA
Mike Valentine	Saratoga County
John Scavo (Online)	Town of Clifton Park
Andrew Kreshik (Online)	City of Troy
Ross Farrell (Online)	CDTA
Lisa Ramundo (Online)	Albany County

1) Welcome and Introduction

Jacob Beeman began the meeting with a discussion of the meeting agenda and reviewed the objective of the TIP Task Force:

Objective: 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.

Caveat: Policies related to the updated regional transportation plan may require an amendment of the TIP Policy Document.

Jacob reviewed the anticipated TIP Task Force timeline. Meeting #3 will occur in April and will focus on summarizing feedback from Meetings 1 and 2. Meeting #3 will also feature discussion of TIP amendment guidelines and online access to TIP information. Meeting #4 will be used to present the draft TIP Policy Document to the task force for discussion.

2) Meeting #1 Summary

Jacob summarized the common themes of feedback from Meeting #1: that projects should be evaluated against similar project types; the short application timeline makes it difficult to prepare quality applications (especially for smaller municipalities), that the application process should be more inclusive of smaller municipalities, and that the process should focus more on local needs and project impact. Mike V. asked if CDTC staff have discussed the common themes yet. Jacob responded that the feedback gathering will continue with Meeting #2, and that recommendations for changes to the process would begin with Meeting #3. Sandy added that DOT may be moving towards including complete streets treatments in more federal-aid projects, which may influence TIP updates moving forward.

3) TIP Update Debrief & Feedback Continued

i. Project Fact Sheets & Summary Tables

Jacob presented the TIP Fact Sheets and Summary Tables for feedback. These documents were prepared for Planning Committee members to assist with project selection. Mike V. stated that different sponsors may find different uses from these materials – in Saratoga County, applications prepared by his colleagues may be derived from paving schedules and planned bridge repairs, and Mike learns about these applications through the Fact Sheets. The information on the Fact Sheets helps Mike better advocate for the County's projects.

The discussion then shifted to sponsor project prioritization. Chris W. stated that, in some cases, sponsor priorities reported on the applications did not align with the sponsor's true priorities. Greg W. responded that DOT had a high number of applications, and when an additional project came up at the end of the process, they had to rank it #27 simply because their existing applications had already been ranked 1 through 26. Greg continued by adding that DOT tries to right-size their funding request so that as many other sponsors can be reached as possible. When a local sponsor prepares only one application, this indicates that the project is a priority to them, and an effort should be made to fund it. Mike V. added that design funds can help get challenging projects, such as the Wilton roundabout which has been initiated recently using TIP design funds. Chris W. asked how meaningful the rankings are if funding is largely based on sponsor priority rather than ranking. In some cases, lower-ranked projects were funded in lieu of higher-ranked projects, if the lower-ranked project was indicated to be a higher priority by the sponsor. To the public, it would look unusual that a low-ranked project was still funded. Greg stated that DOT will make an effort to properly prioritize projects before coming to the table.

Andrew K. added that larger municipalities have the ability to submit more project applications. A city may submit three projects hoping to get one funded. If one of the three projects ranks highly, then he has the understanding that 'horse-trading' could occur, and the high-ranked project could be swapped out for one of the others if the city wishes. Andrew K. suggested that the sponsor could prepare additional supporting information relating to the merit of their own projects. Sandy replied that CDTC used to ask for priority ranks in the sponsor cover letter signed by the elected official. Sandy continued that when a smaller community submits only one application, it is clear that it is their highest priority. Sandy also added that when sponsors prepare multiple applications and not all are funded, it helps to demonstrate that transportation needs outweigh available funding. On the topic of the subjectivity of merit evaluation, Andrew Tracy. added that in the next TIP update, CDTC would like merit scores to have as little subjectivity as possible so that ideally, two evaluators would assign the same scores to the same projects. Andrew K. concurred that doing so would be an improvement.

Greg W. asked how the task force felt about the Bridge NY funding process, as this process was simplified. Sandy stated that the Bridge NY process worked and suggested that having a different scoring process for each asset type may be worthwhile. Sandy added that she dislikes the county-based funding targets used by Bridge NY as she feels it lessens MPO decision-making.

John S. stated that he likes that the current process which allows sponsors to swap high-ranked projects out in favor of higher-priority projects which may have scored lower. On the merit score sheets, John suggests using terms such as 'good/satisfactory/poor' or 'meets expectations/does not meet expectations' in lieu of numerical scores for greater clarity. The numerical scores could remain in the background for the purpose of computing a numerical score for each project, but the merit sheet would instead display the qualitative category ('good/satisfactory/poor', for example). Although this may not lessen the subjectivity of the merit scoring, it may improve public review clarity.

In general, everyone likes the fact sheets and summary tables, and further discussion on sponsor prioritization is needed.

ii. CDTC Project Categories

Regarding TIP project categories: the current process uses six categories (pavement, bridge, bike/ped, transit, intersection & safety, and others). Pavement and bridge are further divided into preservation and beyond preservation. Chris W. stated that categories could be weighted by importance, such as by giving safety projects or bridge projects a higher weight than recreational trail projects. Sandy suggested tabling this topic for now, as these projects may be derived from the long-range plan.

iii. Benefit Cost & Merit Evaluation Process

Andrew T. provided an overview of the evaluation process used in the TIP Update. Each project is scored out of 100 points, with half being the quantitative benefit-cost score, and the other half derived from the merit scores. The benefit-cost score has four components: safety, mobility, user cost savings, and facility life. Andrew T. suggested that user cost savings be dropped in future TIP updates as it accounts for less than 1% of the total benefit of each project. The qualitative merit score is calculated by summing 23 individual merit scores derived from the New Visions plan. Andrew T. went on to state that staff conducted a correlation analysis and noted that many merit scores strongly correlate with one another, so there may be opportunity to combine related merit scores to simplify the process. Observations from the correlation analysis were presented; for example, projects that scored well for the Preservation & Renewal merit score were likely to score poorly in other merit categories. Also, many merit scores cluster together, such as the eight merit scores that relate to complete streets, which all correlate strongly with one another. Andrew T. also noted that CDTC is in the process of preparing a Congestion Management Process update, and that ITS or congestion-related projects score poorly in the current process. Andrew T. asked the group if 'specialized' projects with narrow scope, such as ITS projects, should be more competitive.

Greg W. suggested that aligning the merit scores with the federal MAP-21 performance measures may be an avenue for improvement. Sandy concurred that everything needs to be better connected to the federal performance measures (performance-based planning). Chris W. asked if city vs. non-city projects were compared in the analysis; Andrew T. stated that it did not. Chris W. continued that certain facilities have greater opportunity to score merit points due to their context. Kelley K. asked if all projects are scored with the same merit process regardless of type; Andrew T. responded that they are. Sandy suggested that, for example, interstate highway projects would not need to receive the full merit scoring. Andrew T. stated that, for the Bridge NY evaluation, CDTC selected only five merit categories that were relevant for bridges, and we could do

something similar for other asset types for the next TIP update. Chris W. states that he prepares projects that he knows can 'check all the boxes' for merit scores, with other communities or other project types may not be able to do. Jacob suggested making the merit score process specific to each project type.

Andrew K. asked if another review process could be used for 'unicorn' projects, or projects that are not directly comparable to other projects. Jacob added that it may not only be unique projects that are affected by this, but common roadway projects as well. Andrew K. suggested revisiting the preservation focus as well. Greg W. responded that the preservation category is really only for DOT and not for locals. Chris W. stated that he prefers to use CHIPS funding for preservation projects and federal funding for beyond preservation projects, as he expects simple paving preservation projects will not score well under the CDTC process.

4) Next Steps

Jacob discussed next steps. Meeting #3 will occur in April, probably after the Planning Committee meeting. Meeting #3 will focus on presenting the summary of feedback from meetings 1 and 2 and discussing recommendations. Meeting #4 will occur in June and will focus on the Draft TIP Policy Document. Future task force discussions would also involve TIP amendment guidelines, TIP fiscal constraint, and how to display TIP information on our website.

5) Meeting Adjourned

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40

The next meeting will be scheduled for April 2023.