CDTC TIP Task Force
DRAFT Policy Document

May 2023

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TIP Task Force Background

The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) TIP Task Force was initiated with the purpose of engaging CDTC Planning Committee members in discussions on how the CDTC Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) update process and TIP management procedures can be improved. The primary goal of the Task Force was to develop a TIP Policy Document that recommends improvements to how the TIP is developed and managed. The approved policy document will empower CDTC staff to prepare updates to the TIP application, evaluation, and programming processes in accordance with recommendations established by the TIP Task Force. This document will be brought to the Planning Committee for review and approval to be implemented in subsequent updates of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and TIP.

The Task Force met four times from December 2022 through June 2023 to debrief on the 2022 – 2027 TIP process and review existing TIP management practices. The following CDTC members and CDTC staff participated in the TIP Task Force.

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

Chair, CDTC Planning Committee

Existing Conditions Feedback

The following sections document the feedback given by the Task Force on the CDTC TIP Update process.

Project Applications

Prior to solicitation for new projects, candidate project applications are prepared by CDTC staff. Applications ask sponsors for detailed information on the candidate project so they can be evaluated through CDTC's benefit cost and merit evaluation process. Each project category has a unique application that asks for specific data needed

to evaluate that project type (i.e., Pavement, Bridge, Bicycle, Pedestrian, etc.). The 2022 – 2027 TIP update used six (6) different applications based on project types. For the 2022 – 2027 TIP update, the applications were moved to an online platform (Jotform) to help streamline the application process for sponsors and CDTC staff.

The TIP Task Force had the following feedback on the CDTC TIP application process.

- Online TIP application through Jotform streamlines the process for CDTC staff, creating a spreadsheet output of all applications.
- Jotform makes it difficult to work on multiple applications at one time which created problems and caused some sponsors to have to repeat the application process.
- The short timeline between project solicitation release and application submittal makes it difficult to submit quality applications and hard to know if local budgets will align with requested projects.
- Small communities are often short on staff and resources, a simpler more streamlined application could make it easier for smaller communities to apply for TIP funding.
- Overall feedback was that the online process was relatively simple and effective, especially compared to other federal grant applications (i.e., grants.gov)

Project Fact Sheets and Summary Tables

Project fact sheets and summary tables are prepared by CDTC staff to assist Planning Committee members with project selection. A two-page project fact sheet is provided for each candidate project and includes project details such as, project name, sponsor, priority, functional class, fund source eligibility, AADT, total cost, and others. One summary table is provided for each project type (seven total) and includes high level project data such as name, sponsor, location, priority, total cost, total project score and others. Projects are listed in ranked order for each project type, making it easier for members to evaluate candidate projects against each other.

The TIP Task Force had the following feedback on the TIP Project Fact Sheets and Summary Tables:

- Fact sheets and summary tables are generally helpful to sponsors.
- Information provided in these formats helps sponsors advocate for their projects both at the CDTC table and externally to the public and other local representatives.
- Overall feedback on the project fact sheets and summary tables was positive.

CDTC Project Categories

The current TIP project evaluation process uses six project categories (pavement, bridge, bike/ped, transit, intersection & safety, and Other). Pavement and bridge are further divided into preservation and beyond preservation to distinguish between projects meant to simply repair already existing infrastructure and projects meant to fully reconstruct existing infrastructure and / or make additional improvements like the addition of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure within the project limits. Once scored, projects are ranked by category and compete for funding against other projects within the same category.

The TIP Task Force had the following feedback on the TIP Project Categories:

- Different geographic areas have different transportation needs which is not factored into the project categories (i.e., urban vs rural)
- Preservation projects, by definition, do not make additional changes to the roadway, however, get evaluated using the same criteria (also noted that the Preservation category is almost exclusively a NYSDOT category).
- Categories could be given weight by funding priority / regional significance assigned by the CDTC Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

Benefit Cost and Merit Evaluations

The CDTC TIP update process uses a comprehensive quantitative (benefit cost) and qualitative (merit) approach to score and rank all new TIP candidate projects. 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. The qualitative merit score is calculated by summing 23 individual merit scores derived from CDTC's current Metropolitan Transportation Plan (New Visions 2050). CDTC staff recently 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.

The TIP Task Force had the following feedback on the TIP Benefit Cost and Merit Evaluations:

- Concern about the merit score favoring urban areas.
- Certain types of facilities have more opportunities to score merit points due to their context.
- Could the evaluations better account for municipal need / priority?
- Support for the current process that allows sponsors to swap higher ranked projects for higher local priority projects.
- Decrease subjectivity in the merit evaluation process.
- Having a different scoring process for each project type could be a worthwhile option.
  - An example of this is the 2023 Bridge NY process which used a subset of B/C and merit evaluation criteria.
- Swapping the merit scoring from numbers to terms like good / satisfactory / poor could improve clarity from public's perspective.
- Aligning merit scores with federally required performance measures focus areas could be an improvement.
- Separate scoring process for "unique project types" that do not fit into other CDTC project categories.

General

The TIP Task Force had the following general feedback on the TIP Process:

- TIP funding availability
  - Federal funding has fluctuated over the years, however, it is still low compared to historical levels when purchasing power is considered.
  - Receiving local applications for all federally eligible projects helps us fully document the needs of transportation infrastructure in the region.

- Improving access to TIP funding for smaller communities
    - Small communities are often short on staff and resources, a simpler more streamlined application could make it easier for smaller communities to apply for TIP funding.
    - Smaller communities may have fewer federal aid eligible roadways and therefore less need for the MPO process.
    - Federal aid projects require administrative resources that often make it counterproductive to use federal aid on smaller scale projects.

Recommendations

The following sections document the recommendations made by the Task Force on the CDTC TIP Update process.

Project Applications

- Research general improvements or alternatives to the online application platform.
- Reduce application length, where able, for ease of completion by communities with limited staff resources
- Consider beginning the project solicitation process earlier to allow more time for project development.

Project Fact Sheets & Summary tables

- Continue to provide members with project summary tables and fact sheets to assist with project selection.
- Consider not showing sponsor priority in project fact sheets and summary tables, as it does not impact benefit cost or merit evaluations.
- Revise data fields included in tables based on revised evaluation process.

Project Categories

- Re-align project categories to be consistent with Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) goals and / or federally required performance measures focus areas.
- Consider removing the Preservation vs Beyond Preservation label and instead, use CDTC complete streets policy to divide roadway projects into a purely pavement category or a complete street context category.
    - CDTC complete streets policy is currently being developed in coordination with the CDTC Regional Operations and Safety Advisory Committee (ROSAC).

Benefit Cost and Merit Evaluations

- Revise merit evaluation process to ensure only context-appropriate scores are being evaluated for each project category.
    - Each category would include a small number of high-impact scores that would be evaluated for each project (like recent BRIDGE-NY solicitation)
- Consider re-evaluating the ratio between the quantitative and qualitative parts of the review.
- Consider incorporating locally funded design into the Project Delivery merit category criteria.

- Remove user cost component of Benefit / Cost analysis.
- Continue to allow for sponsors to swap funded projects based on internal priority.

General

- Continue to encourage local members to submit applications for all federally eligible projects helps us fully document the needs of transportation infrastructure in the region.
- Streamlining the application process will reduce the burden on staff in smaller communities.
- Continue the discussion on developing criteria for adding federally funded "Design Only" projects to the TIP.
- Develop a TIP Process Guidance document before the next TIP update.