

Proposed Update to TIP Project Merit Evaluation Criteria

BACKGROUND

An analysis was undertaken of the Merit Evaluation and Screening processes which are used by CDTC to aid in project programming. The initial impetus for reviewing CDTC's procedures was the fact that the project evaluation process was designed long ago and a sense that possibly it was in need of substantial revision or update. Several of the New Visions Committees and Task Forces confirmed this need by recommending modifications or updates to capital project evaluation and programming in the draft White Papers.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

In order to assess the Merit Evaluation and Screening processes, the following steps were taken: 1) personal or small group interviews of all CDTC staff; 2) examination of numerous precedents from MPO's and other regional governing bodies nationwide to identify best practices; and 3) other information gathering and analysis, including of CDTC's New Visions Goals, the current and prior TIP documents, Fact Sheets, and historical Screening and Merit results.

The national precedents examined included the scoring or other evaluation processes represented in the TIP, RTP, or other documents of the following MPO's or governing bodies:

- Nashville Area MPO
- Boston Region MPO
- Puget Sound Regional Council
- North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority
- Metropolitan Council (Minneapolis-St. Paul)
- Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission
- Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization
- Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Committee
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Metro Portland MPO
- Mid America Regional Council (Kansas City)
- Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (Columbus)
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

FINDINGS

Interviews

While many positive aspects of the current system were highlighted, including the strengths of the current B/C ratio methodology, there was found to be strong support for inclusion of additional dimensions of projects which the B/C ratio may tend to undervalue or omit. Under the current system, the B/C ratio value may tend to be disproportionately emphasized in comparison to the project Screening values and other information found on the project Fact Sheets.

The use of priority networks, such as freight, transit, and bike/ped, to help guide decision making and steer appropriate investment was affirmed and validated by staff but it was felt that projects which substantively contribute to a network ought to be rewarded rather than projects which are merely located on a network. Additionally, beneficial off-network projects must receive appropriate value.

Aspects not accounted for by networks or by elements within the B/C ratio, such as environmental justice, environmental impact, greenhouse gas reduction, alternative fuels use, economic impact, and certain

dimensions of safety, need to be established as categories of value in order for these dimensions of a project to be properly weighed. Infrastructure which preserves existing, which is inclusive of multimodalism, and which features complete streets components should be encouraged.

Precedent Analysis

Approximately half of the national precedents examined feature a numeric point system for ranking or evaluating projects. Among the most useful precedents overall are Nashville, Boston, Seattle, and Syracuse, which serve as partial models. Each has several questions/definitions which clearly guide the breakdown of each major category of scoring and how points are awarded. Nashville features the greatest clarity of presentation and simplicity of scoring. Boston Region MPO is strong on Economic Benefit, Environment, Environmental Justice, and Safety/Security, and features careful attention to weighting criteria and connecting to larger goals. Seattle is very ambitious and broad in approach and sensible in categorization. Several precedents, including Portland, Mid America, Mid-Ohio, and Hampton Roads, make a clear distinction of criteria for different project types and/or funding sources. Portland includes a 3-round system with some conceptual similarity to CDTC's. At least one example, Syracuse, makes a direct attempt at uniting long range RTP goals (including more qualitative aspects) with a quantitative benefit calculation. One additional notable finding is that no system studied uses negative scores for disbenefits, meaning that CDTC would establish a new and innovative precedent in this regard.

New Visions Goals Analysis

Because an optimal system of TIP programming would ensure that capital project evaluation and selection for programming are closely tied to the goals of the long range Regional Transportation Plan, the New Visions Goals were analyzed with respect to their relationship to Merit Evaluation. The analysis found several gaps and disconnects and proposes that a better connection between New Visions and TIP programming might be established by: 1) creating new merit categories or subcategories closely associated with the principles on Economic Development, Regional Equity, Complete Streets, Infrastructure, Safety & Security, Traffic Reliability, Environment, Technology, and several dimensions of Quality Region; and 2) enhancing the scoring on Priority Networks related to Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation, Transit, and Freight. Also consistent with New Visions, the proposed new Merit Evaluation process will better prepare CDTC and the region for performance measures and targets under MAP-21 or other Federal legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations consist primarily of establishing a new total point system of Merit Evaluation to be applied to candidate projects which: 1) addresses the perceived weaknesses or gaps in the current system of evaluation, especially by incorporating a broader range of factors; 2) is informed by nationwide models and best practices; and 3) better implements New Visions goals and performance measures. The recommended system will maintain the current B/C ratio but incorporate it into a larger system which also accounts for other factors, some of which are quantitative and some of which either do not readily submit to quantitative analysis or are more qualitative in nature.

The proposed point system includes the following categories (see attached graphic for additional detail):

- Regional Benefit
- Community Quality of Life
 - Includes Land Use, Smart Growth, Environmental Justice, and Accessibility/ADA/Human Services
- Appropriate Infrastructure
 - Includes Preservation and Complete Streets
- Multi-Modalism
 - Includes Transit, Pedestrian, and Bicycle
- Environment and Health
 - Includes Sensitive Areas Preservation, Greenhouse Gas Reduction, and Alternative Fuels

- Economic Development
- Safety & Security
- Technology & Operations
- Freight
- Innovation

Additional recommendations to be implemented relate to improving and simplifying communications, and to eliminating the current Project Screening process. Many elements of the Screening Criteria and Fact Sheets are now incorporated in the proposed new Merit Evaluation process. Some remaining Screening Criteria may be addressed within an upcoming revised Project Justification Package.

NEXT STEPS

- Incorporate comments from Planning and Policy Committees.
- Develop definitions (and measures, where applicable) for award of each point in every category, along with representative example projects that fulfill certain point values.
- Test past TIP projects under new proposed Merit Evaluation system for validation or revision.
- Revisit finalized White Papers to ensure alignment of Strategies and Actions with new Merit Evaluation process.
- Develop revised Project Justification Package (PJP).
- Publish and communicate final procedures, possibly in a workshop or other outreach effort.
- Utilize new Merit Evaluation procedure in forthcoming TIP Update.