

The Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program for 2015-16

Introduction

The Community and Transportation Linkage Planning Program (Linkage Program) was initiated in the year 2000 by the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Capital Region (www.cdtecmopo.org). The Program is designed to fulfill the adopted principles and strategies in *New Visions 2035*, the long range regional transportation plan, by providing integrated land use and transportation planning assistance to local communities. CDTC's adopted policies reflect a strong regional consensus indicating that the region's quality of life, mobility and economic vitality are dependent upon improved local land use planning and on better integration of land use development and the transportation system.

Since the program was initiated, CDTC has funded 79 planning studies in 40 Capital Region communities ranging from the largest city to some of the smallest towns and villages. Although there are many successes regarding the implementation of these studies, there is still more work to be done.

Linkage Program Strategies

The Linkage Program emphasizes seven broad planning strategies that are consistent with the *New Visions 2035* principles. New Visions principles follow four themes: to preserve and manage the existing investment in the region's transportation system, to develop the region's potential to grow into a uniquely attractive, vibrant and diverse metropolitan area, to link transportation and land use planning to meet the Plan's goals for urban reinvestment, concentrated development patterns and smart economic growth, and to plan and build for all modes of transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle, public transit, cars and trucks.

Submissions will be screened as part of the evaluation process for consistency with the Linkage Program strategies. The seven strategies are to:

- Support urban revitalization and redevelopment of existing commercial/residential areas;
- Improve street connectivity and reduce driveway conflicts through access management;
- Enhance and develop activity centers and town centers;
- Enhance and develop transit corridors and transit supportive built environments;
- Encourage a greater mix and intensity of land uses in municipal centers;
- Develop bicycle and pedestrian-friendly site design standards;
- Create an integrated multi-modal transportation network.

Eligible Initiatives for 2015-2016

For the 2015-2016 Linkage Program, the program will be focused on implementation activities related to completed Linkage Program plans or other completed local planning work (i.e. Comprehensive Plans, Waterfront Revitalization Plans, etc.). New for this solicitation, CDTC will be prioritizing the programming of Linkage Studies following three tiers of eligibility as described below. Note that for all three tiers the following will apply:

The proposed initiative must:

- Be directly related to a recommendation of a Linkage study or other local plan.
- Have a clear and direct connection to transportation issues.
- Be consistent with the Linkage Program and *New Visions 2035* principles and strategies.

Inter-municipal initiatives are encouraged. Engineering related work is not eligible and municipal wide initiatives are limited. Large scale comprehensive updates of zoning codes or site design standards are not eligible unless local sponsors pool financial or other resources to undertake larger initiatives. Federal funds for Linkage Program implementation activities will be capped (see page five on cost estimates).

Tier 1: Feasibility studies in corridors that have a funding commitment for a federal, state or local corridor pavement project or other multi-modal transportation project in the next two to three years. The funding commitment to the pavement or other project type must be demonstrated through the provision of State Transportation Improvement Program listings, resolutions, project award letters, local bonds, links to local websites with approved capital program project lists, etc. Feasibility studies will be undertaken to determine the feasibility of the proposed transportation concept including such projects as road diets, complete streets, trails/sidewalks on new alignments, etc.

Evaluating the feasibility of a transportation concept identified in a Linkage study or other local plan at the time a facility is entering the design process, even for a simple repaving project, can lead to better coordination between the facility owner and the community. This is likely to result in projects that better fit the context of the community. Given the emphasis on pavement preservation projects statewide, implementation actions may be as low cost as restriping a facility to create a more multi-modal corridor.

Disclaimer: NYSDOT will do its best to share its state funded paving program with CDTC and project sponsors at the time of Linkage project programming. However, the state paving program changes quickly and a comprehensive schedule of paving projects in the next two to three years may not be available.

Tier 2: Any of the following four project types that do not have a funding commitment for a federal, state or local corridor pavement project or other multi-modal transportation project in the next two to three years:

- Feasibility studies to determine the feasibility of linkage or other local planning study transportation concepts such as road diets, complete streets, trails/sidewalks on new alignments, etc.
- Strategic zoning code changes/zoning code overlays
- Site design standards or guidelines
- Official mapping

Tier 3: Other types of planning work. Planning efforts that do not fit into either Tier 1 or Tier 2 will only be considered after all worthy candidate projects have been funded. Examples may include conceptual land use/transportation planning efforts in communities that have never participated in the Linkage Program before, implementation efforts that are not specifically listed in Tier 2 above, etc. For questions regarding the eligibility regarding a potential Tier 3 project, please contact Sandy Misiewicz, AICP of the CDTC at (518) 458-2161 or email cdtclinkage@cdtcmpo.org.

Ineligible Initiatives

Linkage Program planning initiatives are conceptual in nature and *funding is for planning assistance only*. Linkage Program funds are not available to cover the cost of municipal employees. The following are not eligible for Linkage Program funds.

- Right-of-way acquisition
- Detailed engineering
- Surveying
- Storm water/sewer system design
- Construction of transportation system facilities
- Capital oriented implementation actions

Examples of Previously Funded Implementation Planning Work:

- **City of Albany Bike Share and Signage Strategy (\$70,000 consultant effort):** This study explored the feasibility of a bike share program and developed a bike share and bicycle-oriented signage strategy and implementation plan. Considerations included the identification of bike share station locations, station types, bicycle types and operational models. The related bike signage system would easily integrate with bicycle route maps and address features such as route confirmation, route intersections, advance route signing, destinations, directions, distances (or time) and amenities. This effort implemented a recommendation from the Albany Bicycle Master Plan.
- **Town of East Greenbush Site Design Standards (\$40,000 consultant effort):** This study will assist the town of East Greenbush with the development and adoption of multi-modal, higher-density, pedestrian-friendly site design standards that will be enforceable

in the Town's Comprehensive Zoning Law. The site design standards will be developed for the US 4 and the US 9 & 20 corridors, implementing recommendations from two previously completed Linkage studies and the town's Comprehensive Zoning Law.

- **Town of Malta Downtown Master Plan Implementation (\$90,000 consultant effort):** This initiative assisted the town of Malta with the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan in a manner that is consistent with previous Linkage Program studies in the area. This initiative led to the development and adoption by the town of a form based zoning code with an official map and a complete street plan including streetscape and site design standards for the area centered on the US 9/NY 67 intersection at Exit 12 of I-87.
- **City of Schenectady Gateway Plaza Implementation Plan (\$70,000 consultant effort):** This initiative assisted the city with the development of a conceptual re-design and expansion plan for Liberty Park and the area immediately surrounding it, including traffic configuration and landscaping plans. The project further advances key recommendations of the Route 5 Transit Gateway Linkage Study and considered pedestrian, bicycle, transit access, quality of life and safety issues.

For a complete list of past Linkage Program studies and summaries of those studies, visit www.cdtempo.org/linkage.htm

Eligible Applicants

Applicants must be entities within CDTC's planning area of Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady and Saratoga County (with the exception of the town of Moreau). Preferred eligible applicants are units of local government (town, city, village) and counties. Non-governmental entities such as not-for-profits and public authorities are also eligible if the submission includes a letter of support from the municipality or municipalities in which the study is focused.

Requested Assistance

Assistance can be provided in one of three ways:

- Through consultant work done under contract to CDTC.
- Through consultant work done under contract to a municipality or other unit of government (only considered for large scale studies with budgets totaling more than \$100,000 that combine funds from other sources).
- Through CDTC staff technical assistance (limited to no more than \$10,000 of staff time)

Proposals may specify which method appears most appropriate to the applicant or request that CDTC suggest the most appropriate method. If the submission is favorably evaluated by CDTC, the determination of the most appropriate method will be made by CDTC with sponsor consent.

Funding and Timing

CDTC is proposing to reserve up to \$100,000 in staff time and up to \$150,000 in consultant budget authority from federal planning funds to support the Linkage Program from April 2015 through March 2016 in its 2014-16 Unified Planning Work Program. That means funds for the 2015-16 Linkage Program will not be available for use until after April 1, 2015. **New for the 2015-2016 solicitation: if the project sponsor does not execute the Memorandum of Understanding with CDTC by March 31, 2016, Linkage funds will be forfeited.** It should be noted that due to uncertainty regarding the availability of federal planning funds in 2015, CDTC will reserve the right to cancel a Linkage Program project funded through this solicitation at any time prior to contracting with a consultant for that project. Should CDTC need to cancel a funded project prior to its initiation, said study will be given the first opportunity to compete for funds in the next funding year.

Match Requirement

Funding for consultant support is available on a reimbursement basis with a minimum 25% local cash match. A letter of intent will be required to document the availability of the local cash match. Additional consideration will be given to submissions with a commitment of local in-kind staff services or that intend to provide an overmatch of local funds. However, in-kind service cannot be used to meet the minimum 25% local cash match requirement. For example, if an \$80,000 consultant study is intended, the applicant must provide \$20,000 in cash to match \$60,000 in federal funds. *CDTC may waive the local match requirement for small-scale CDTC staff (not consultant) assistance or in special circumstances.*

Cost Estimates

Sponsors are asked to provide a cost estimate for the planning activity in their submissions. The cost estimate is to be broken down by federal funds requested and the local cash match contribution (a minimum of 25% of the total study cost). Federal funds are capped.

- There is no set minimum size for requests.
- The maximum total study cost for consultant efforts is \$90,000 (\$67,500 in federal funds matched with \$22,500 in local cash match). Total study costs may exceed \$90,000 IF the sponsor provides an overmatch of local funds or pools Linkage funds with funds from other grant sources. Such local sources should be identified in the study submission. If a large consultant effort is intended (\$100,000 or above using CDTC and other fund sources), the municipality may be required to select the consultant and administer the contract directly. If additional CDTC staff assistance is requested along with the consultant effort, the estimated dollar value of that assistance should be documented in the submission and is capped at \$10,000.
- The maximum request for CDTC staff assistance is \$10,000 for small scale, non-consultant efforts.

CDTC reserves the right to confirm or modify all cost estimates based on past experience with Linkage Program studies. For 2015-16, this action will be undertaken as step one of the evaluation process (see the project selection procedure on page nine for complete details).

Local Action on Study Findings

A formal resolution from the legislative body adopting the study findings is preferred by CDTC (see SEQR). Such action indicates the sponsors' willingness to continue to work through important planning processes, such as zoning code updates, to implement the findings of the plan (processes which are likely subject to SEQR). Sponsors may also consider formally endorsing or accepting the findings of the planning effort. Endorsing or accepting the findings of a plan does not carry the same weight with operational entities such as NYSDOT as adoption does for project implementation.

State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR)

SEQR procedures are the responsibility of the local municipality. If formal action is desired or required under SEQR by the municipality for the initiative, it should be expressed in the project submission (see item four under submission instructions on page seven). Submissions should note who will be responsible for preparing the required documentation (meaning the consultant as part of the Linkage Program project or the municipal staff as an in-kind contribution to the effort). This is critical for implementation activities. Changes in land use such as changes to a zoning code must consider SEQR requirements.

Although Linkage Program studies are not municipal wide comprehensive plans, they are considered comprehensive in nature and are subject to SEQR if the municipality is considering formal action. Methods of formal action include a resolution, adoption of the study as a strategic plan, as an amendment to a municipal comprehensive plan and through other means as appropriate.

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

Linking Planning with NEPA: Linkage Program study sponsors often advance transportation projects that were recommended through the Linkage Program planning process. Sponsors should be aware that projects proposed as a result of Linkage study concepts will be subject to NEPA if the project will be utilizing federal transportation funds for its design and construction. For Linkage Program planning efforts, consideration should be given to following Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance on linking the transportation planning process (Linkage Program plans) with NEPA. For details on the program visit www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/edc.asp and for a NEPA/planning linkages checklist visit www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/integ/pel_quest.asp

FHWA guidance encourages the planning process to inform the purpose and need statement, scoping and alternatives identification, evaluation and/or elimination of alternatives, and indirect and cumulative impacts assessment of a transportation project. Engaging specific stakeholders (i.e. Federal, Tribal, State, and local environmental, regulatory, resource agencies and the public)

and documenting planning decisions in a format that can easily be appended to the NEPA document or incorporated by reference are essential for linking planning with NEPA. To have standing in the NEPA process and its additional analyses, transportation planning information, analyses, documents, and decisions must be well documented and provided for examination during project scoping.

NEPA Categorical Exclusions: According to NYSDOT's Environmental Procedures Manual, certain types of federal aid projects are considered categorical exclusions under NEPA (visit the NYSDOT website at <https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/engineering/environmental-analysis/manuals-and-guidance/epm/chapter-2> for more information). Automatic categorical exclusions include planning and technical studies which do not involve or lead directly to the construction of a project. CDTC's Linkage Program studies generally fall into this category. However it is important for Linkage studies to adequately screen the study area and document potential environmental issues per CDTC's environmental mitigation procedures, document the assumptions and data inputs used, document any technical analysis performed (including methodology and results) and document the public outreach process as potential projects investigated as part of a Linkage study may be subject to NEPA.

Linkage planning studies may not be categorically exempted when there are "unusual circumstances" as defined by law (23 CFR 771.117(b)). Such unusual circumstances include significant environmental impacts; substantial controversy on environmental grounds; significant impact on properties protected by Section 4(f) of the USDOT Act (23 CFR 771.135) or Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; or inconsistencies with any Federal, State or local law, requirement or administrative determination relating to the environmental aspects of the action.

There are instances when a project sponsor may desire to generate a project directly from a Linkage Study. Therefore, sponsors should be aware that capital projects proposed to implement a Linkage study concept will be subject to NEPA if the project will be utilizing federal transportation funds for its design and construction. NYSDOT's Instructions for NEPA Checklist explains the procedure for processing Categorical Exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for projects that are funded or permitted by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

<https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/engineering/environmental-analysis/manuals-and-guidance/epm/repository/catex.pdf>

Submission Instructions

The submission (excluding the letter of intent, maps and supporting documents) should be no more than three pages in length. **Deadline for receipt of completed submissions is the close of business (5 PM EST), Friday, December 19, 2014. One original hard copy plus one electronic copy via email to cdtclinkage@cdtcmo.org or on CD/flash drive are required by the due date and time.** Submissions should be sent to the Capital District Transportation Committee, Attn: Sandy Misiewicz, AICP, One Park Place, Albany, NY 12205. Incomplete submissions will not be considered for funding. The following eight items must be included in all submissions:

1. A letter of intent which documents the availability of the local cash match and commits the community/sponsor(s) to the project. For proposals from non-governmental entities, a letter of support from the municipality in which the study is focused is required.
2. Name, title, street address, email address and phone number of the contact person for the effort
3. Study area map.
4. Project title and a description including what local planning study recommendation(s) are to be explored for implementation, the need for the project at this time, if there is a funding commitment for a related construction project, how the project is to be implemented (is SEQR documentation required, for example?) and how the project is connected to transportation issues.
5. An outline of tasks for the scope of work including a description of desired deliverables.
6. A description of the relationship between the implementation effort and CDTC's Linkage Program strategies and *New Visions 2035* principles.
7. The sponsor's judgment on the method of assistance that appears most appropriate: CDTC administration of a consultant; sponsor administration of a consultant (only considered for large scale studies – generally those over \$100,000) or CDTC staff assistance (limited to no more than \$10,000 of staff time). A combination of staff and consultant assistance may be requested.
8. Estimated cost of the study following the guidelines on page five and using the following format (example):

Total consultant budget:	\$80,000
Linkage funds requested:	\$60,000
Local cash match (25% minimum):	\$20,000
Additional cash match (if applicable):	\$0
CDTC staff technical assistance (if applicable):	\$5,000 (in addition to consultant budget)

Also document any additional grant resources (beyond cash match) to be pooled with Linkage funds for a larger effort and any in-kind staff contributions. In-kind staff contributions may not be used toward the local cash match requirement.

The applicant can include supporting material (excerpts from comprehensive plans, previous Linkage planning work, etc.) as an appendix to the submission to help CDTC understand the status of, context of and local commitment to the proposed project.

Project Selection

The Linkage Program is competitive and will involve a three step project selection process:

Step 1: Submissions will be screened to ensure they are complete and meet all program requirements as listed in this program summary. Incomplete submissions and those that do not meet the program requirements will not be considered for funding. Each project will also receive an initial prioritization by Tier as described below:

- Tier 1: Feasibility studies in corridors that have a funding commitment for a federal, state or local corridor pavement project or other multi-modal transportation project in the next two to three years.
- Tier 2: Any of the following four project types that do not have a funding commitment for a federal, state or local corridor pavement project or other multi-modal transportation project in the next two to three years:
 - Feasibility studies to determine the feasibility of linkage or other local planning study transportation concepts such as road diets, complete streets, trails/sidewalks on new alignments, etc.
 - Strategic zoning code changes/zoning code overlays
 - Site design standards or guidelines
 - Official mapping
- Tier 3: Other types of planning work.

Step 2: CDTC staff will review the scope of work tasks proposed for each project and the estimated budget. If the budget is not adequate for the desired scope of work, CDTC staff will develop an appropriate budget for the project and will reach out to the study sponsor with two choices: 1) increase the local match in proportion to the revised study cost to complete the desired scope of work or 2) reduce the desired scope of work to fit the study budget originally proposed. Project budgets will be confirmed based on CDTC's extensive experience with Linkage studies and consultant work. Once study budgets and scopes have been confirmed for all projects, the submissions will be forwarded on to a review committee for full evaluation.

Step 3: CDTC, CDRPC (Capital District Regional Planning Commission), CDTA (Capital District Transportation Authority) and NYSDOT staff will then evaluate the submissions. CDTC's Planning Committee will be provided with the evaluation results and funding options at its February 2015 meeting. Once approved by the Planning Committee, CDTC's Policy Board will take action on the recommended package of studies in March for incorporation into the 2014-16 Unified Planning Work Program. The likelihood of a study receiving funds will not be known until submissions have been received and evaluated. The evaluation criteria presented below are not presented in order of importance however an indication of their relative importance is noted for each criterion.

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Is the initiative in Tier 1, 2 or 3 as described on page 2? What is the need for the project? Is there a sense of urgency? (mandatory and improves priority):
2. Is the effort consistent with CDTC's Linkage Program strategies (see page 2) and *New Visions 2035* (www.cdtempo.org/rtp2035/2035.htm) regional planning principles? (mandatory)
3. What is the sponsors' plan for implementation? Is the intent to adopt, endorse or accept the plan? Does the proposal indicate a path for success? (improves priority)
4. Will the project have a positive impact on the transportation system when implemented? Is the project located on one or more of CDTC's Priority Networks (www.cdtempo.org/maps.htm, scroll to priority networks)? (improves priority)
5. Is the proposal an inter-municipal initiative? (improves priority)
6. Is the submission supported locally through complementary activities and/or funding commitments beyond the minimum match requirements? (improves priority)
7. For past sponsors of Linkage studies: Was the sponsor's performance adequate and appropriate as determined by CDTC staff? (improves priority)

All efforts are required to meet the first two criteria with the first criterion serving as an initial priority rating. Addressing the remaining five criteria will help improve the priority of the submission. Submissions that best meet all seven evaluation criteria will be considered first for funding. If there are more worthy submissions than available funding, funding options will also consider geographic balance and project type.

Notification of Award

Following approval by CDTC's Planning Committee in February 2015, all project sponsors will be notified in writing as to the status of their submissions by March 1, 2015. In March 2015, following Policy Board approval, activities awarded funding will receive CDTC's *Guide to Linkage Study Administration* and will be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU must be signed before Linkage funds may be accessed. Linkage funds become available for use after April 1, 2015. The MOU is between CDTC and the study sponsor(s) and articulates the roles and responsibilities of all parties throughout the study process. The MOU will be tied to the chosen method of assistance. **New for the 2015-2016 solicitation: if the project sponsor does not execute the MOU with CDTC by March 31, 2016, Linkage funds will be forfeited.** Please note that the ability of these studies to move forward after April 1, 2015 (when the federal funds become available) will be dependent on the progress of current studies and the availability of CDTC staff.

Consultant Activity Guidelines

To satisfy federal and state requirements, use of an appropriate means of consultant solicitation and selection will be required prior to designation of a consultant. CDTC uses an abbreviated approach to consultant selection. Sponsors should be aware that if consultant assistance is used in the preparation of a Linkage Program submission or in the development of the scope of work for the study, that consultant will not be eligible for the contract. In addition, a consultant on retainer to a municipality is not guaranteed a Linkage study contract. The consultant selection process is required to be competitive.

CDTC may be able to administer small-scale consultant studies to minimize the administrative burden on the municipality. However, if a large consultant effort is intended (\$100,000 or above using CDTC and other fund sources), the municipality may be required to select the consultant and administer the contract directly. In this case, the municipality will be required to execute necessary agreements with the New York State Department of Transportation in order to be reimbursed for the study costs.

CDTC reserves the right to modify the program without prior notice.

For questions regarding the Linkage Program, contact Sandy Misiewicz, AICP of the CDTC staff at (518) 458-2161 or email cdtclinkage@cdtcmpo.org.