

 Metro | Memo

Date: November 30, 2015
To: Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT) and Interested Parties
From: Grace Cho, Associate Transportation Planner
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Subject: 2018-2021 MTIP Coordination Policy & 2019-2021 RFFA Policy – Public Comment Discussion

Purpose

To give JPACT an overview of the public comment policy questions for the draft 2018-2021 Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP) coordination policy and the 2019-2021 Regional Flexible Fund Allocation (RFFA) policy options.

Request

JPACT is asked to review the draft 2018-2021 MTIP & 2019-2021 RFFA policy report which outlines the different policy considerations Metro staff seeks feedback. Staff requests JPACT to “green light” the release of the policy considerations for public comment.

Introduction

The MTIP is a federally required schedule of transportation investments administered by Metro, ODOT, TriMet and SMART, and monitors implementation of federal policies for the Portland metropolitan region during a four-year cycle. The current effective MTIP addresses the transportation investment programmed for fiscal years 2015 through 2018.

Setting the policy direction is the first step in developing the MTIP for fiscal years 2018 through 2021. The policy direction defines the expectations of partners in coordinating the different funding allocations approved in the MTIP.

The policy direction also defines the policy objectives for the prioritization of the RFFA for the years 2019 through 2021. The RFFA process identifies projects to receive federal transportation funding that is designated for metropolitan areas through metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), of which Metro is the MPO for the Portland metropolitan region.

Development of the MTIP Coordination Policy Proposal

For the MTIP policy update, the focus has been to look at how the funding allocation processes which make up the MTIP can better implement RTP policies and demonstrate compliance with federal mandates through greater coordination.

Throughout the spring of 2015, Metro staff has held workshops, presented at coordinating committee meetings and the City of Portland’s interdepartmental meeting, held discussions community-based organizations, advocacy organizations, and with the Metro Council to gather input from interested stakeholders, local staff and elected officials. Feedback included a number of

different coordination activities, which led to the development of a draft proposed coordination policy for the MTIP organized by theme.

Appendix A provides an overview of the existing MTIP coordination policies, which were shared as part of the Spring 2015 policy workshops. All the existing MTIP coordination policies are being proposed to continue.

Appendix B outlines the refinement of existing and new coordination activities, which were developed through input and feedback from the Spring 2015 policy workshops. These coordination activities are being proposed for implementation with the MTIP.

Development of the 2019-2021 RFFA Policy Proposal

Regional discussion to date regarding potential updates to the RFFA policy has focused on three main policy themes:

1. Incorporation of policies adopted since the last MTIP/RFFA policy update, namely the Regional Active Transportation Plan and Climate Smart Strategies
2. Consideration of Safe Routes to School as a funding focus area
3. Consideration of whether or not to retain a funding split in the Community Investment Projects Focus Area (Step 2)

From these themes, two RFFA policy questions have been derived for resolution by JPACT and Metro Council in March/April of 2016:

1. *“Do we want to consider new investments through Step 1 programs?”*
2. *“Should Step 2 be redefined to evaluate all projects within a single set of criteria and measures and/or with less specific direction on funding targets for project types?”*

Examples of new investments in Step 1 programs could include:

- Increasing the High Capacity Transit bond commitment to leverage FTA funds for Powell-Division bus rapid transit and Southwest Corridor investments
- Increasing the bond commitment to leverage FTA funds as well as providing an initial investment in preparation for a request for new regional or state transportation funds
- Increasing Regional Travel Options (RTO) region-wide program commitment to invest in outcomes related to Climate Smart Strategies list of short-term actions, and/or to invest in Safe Routes to School (SRTS) educational and promotional efforts
- Increasing Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO) region-wide program commitment to invest in outcomes related to Climate Smart Strategies list of short-term actions

Bonding a larger portion of the flexible funds enables the region to continue development of the Powell-Division and Southwest corridors on schedule, as well as positioning the region to leverage federal funding to complete these transit investments. A bond increase could also be used in conjunction with a multi-modal funding request to make needed investments in other parts of the transportation system.

Investing more in the RTO and TSMO programs would increase the programs’ ability to fund smaller-scale projects that improve how the system is used and managed and are an important

component in achieving multiple RTP targets, investing in Climate Smart Actions, and providing SRTS programs at schools around the region.

The question regarding Step 2 is intended to consider additional ways of how investments can be made in regional policy outcomes addressing active transportation (AT) and freight reliability.

The Regional Transportation Plan infrastructure target calls for a 50 percent increase in the miles of sidewalks, bikeways and trails throughout the region by 2040, compared to 2010. Directing 75 percent of the flexible funds identified for infrastructure projects towards AT investments has been one way the region has demonstrated its commitment to achieving this target. Funding for active transportation projects is historically a small part of overall transportation system investments, and certain funding sources are prohibited or limited in their use for this purpose. As such, use of flexible funds on AT projects represents a significant portion of the total overall revenue spent on AT.

The RTP Freight Reliability target is to reduce vehicle hours of delay per truck trip by 10 percent by 2040, compared to 2010. The 25 percent of flexible funds directed towards this target is intended to make spot improvements, such as adding a turn lane, improving turning radii at intersections, improving signal timing or other ITS solutions, and similar lower cost investments that improve access to industrial areas onto/from the regional freight network. Freight-related project development has also been a purpose of this funding. Investments in freight have been intended to ensure that the region is supporting and building the infrastructure necessary for a healthy economy.

Stakeholder feedback received through the process to date has raised the question of whether the region should consider other ways to invest in these two policy areas through projects that are broader in scope, and achieve multiple policy outcomes.

There are both benefits and tradeoffs to consider between maintaining separate project focus areas with funding targets for those focus areas, versus creating a single focus area that attempts to combine elements of both active transportation and freight projects.

- Feedback received through the policy workshop process and TPAC discussions illustrated the limitations of the Step 2 75/25 split. The split creates somewhat arbitrary funding silos that may not accurately reflect the regional system needs. Nor does it provide enough flexibility to fund projects that may have multiple benefits to the regional system. TPAC felt it would be beneficial to not lose the ability to fund AT or Freight-specific projects, but to increase the flexibility to select projects that can achieve multiple outcomes in support of those performance target areas.
- The Step 2 target areas and funding splits were created in order to ensure investments were being made at specific levels in the AT and Freight project categories. Removing the funding split may have the outcome of reducing the degree to which performance targets for AT and Freight are achieved, in favor of funding more broadly focused projects.

The challenge in creating a single evaluation category for Step 2 will be developing project evaluation and scoring criteria that allow a singularly focused project (such as a trail, or improved truck access to an industrial area) to compete with a more broadly focused project. TPAC indicated that a preferred evaluation system should allow singularly focused projects to compete but creative projects that meet multiple objectives should be recognized. Additionally, they recommended that it is the overall package of projects that should aim to achieve multiple outcomes, so that some

projects that perform well on limited outcomes can be recognized as part of a package of investments achieving meaningful multiple outcomes.

Funding forecast considerations

There is a forecast amount of \$125.74 million in the 2019-21 RFFA. While this is a decrease from the \$142.58 million available in the 2016-18 RFFA round, it is possible to continue investing at existing levels (adjusted for inflation) in both Steps 1 and 2, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1
Comparison of 2016-18 and 2019-21 RFFA funding levels**

Funding categories		2019-21	2016-18*
Step 1	Transit bond payments (\$16M/yr to 2027)	\$ 48.00 M	\$ 48.00 M
	Region-wide investments	\$ 28.06 M	\$ 26.01 M
	• Transit Oriented Development	\$ 9.89 M	\$ 9.19 M
	• Regional Travel Options	\$ 7.55 M	\$ 7.01 M
	• TSMO/ITS	\$ 5.00 M	\$ 4.64 M
	• MPO Planning	\$ 3.96 M	\$ 3.63 M
	• Corridor/Systems Planning	\$ 1.66 M	\$ 1.54 M
Step 2	Infrastructure projects	\$ 38.00 M	\$ 34.77 M
	• Freight Initiatives/Green Econ. (25%)	\$ 9.50 M	\$ 8.69 M
	• Active Trans./Complete Streets (75%)	\$ 28.50 M	\$ 26.08 M
Additional funding capacity for consideration – Step 1 and/or Step 2 increases		\$ 11.68 M	

(*The 2016-18 RFFA also contained an additional \$34.00 million in one-time funds, above what is shown in this table. These funds were allocated through a third funding step, known as the Regional Economic Opportunity Fund.)

If JPACT and Metro Council wish to continue investing in Steps 1 and 2 at existing levels, it would leave \$11.68 million that could be put towards further investments in either Step 1 or 2, or both.

Public comment preparation

Input received at the November TPAC meeting recommended that staff create a public comment question only around the Step 2 options under consideration.

TPAC believed the recent public engagement and policy direction from the Climate Smart Communities and Regional Transportation Plan update processes provided adequate comment and direction related to a policy of considering increases in funding (not an allocation decision) to Step 1 programs and investment in regional HCT. Additionally, given that there are multiple issues raised for consideration, and that time was needed for a complete discussion, they felt that JPACT should begin considering Step 1 options in January.

Description of the public comment process

Timeframe and focus: Project staff is on track to initiate a 30-day public comment period from mid-January to mid-February. The main driver for the comment period timeline is the development of the RFFA policy update. In addition, Metro will also have available and ask for feedback on the Draft Strategy to Advance Equity, and the Equitable Housing Initiative report and memo to Metro Council.

Audiences: Prior regional efforts have indicated that we are able to engage, broadly speaking, two types of audiences with our online tools:

1. residents that are casually interested in local government processes and decisions – though not necessarily fully engaged throughout the lifecycle of those processes and decisions – and willing to respond at a fairly high level and respond to the questions being asked in a 5 to 15 minute questionnaire format (estimated 1500-2000 respondents)
2. jurisdictional partners, advocates and other highly interested stakeholders with the capacity, experience and interest to read nuanced policy documents and provide specific and more intensive feedback (typically 10-30 participants).

Setting public expectations: This comment period will be framed as helping inform policymakers about the framework for spending regional flexible funds. Since participants are self-selecting based on specific spheres of notification, the results will not be a scientific representation of the region’s residents. The information gathered is to help policymakers in their deliberation by expressing an overall tenor of the region and potentially revealing dissenting concerns or unidentified consequences.

Format: To meet the needs of these two broad audiences, Metro has had success with a two-pronged approach to its online engagement:

1. provide a high-level questionnaire that focuses on broad values questions or offer easy-to-conceptualize tradeoff questions
2. encourage interested stakeholders to read the policy documents and offer comment via letter, email or conversation with staff.

For the more general (casually interested but not necessarily fully engaged) public, the tone will be “You don’t need to bring anything but your experience and your opinion” to the questionnaire. Each question will offer only a sentence or two of context and then ask a values/tradeoff/experience/level of interest/general direction-type question. We expect that our tool will also offer the same function offered in last fall’s Climate Smart questionnaire, where participants could open a box to get more information (limited to 2-3 short paragraphs) if they want more context before answering.

Opportunities for informing related projects and programs: The comment period and high-level questionnaire offers the opportunity to ask about 10 or so questions of the more general public. This allows for 1-3 questions around the following topics to inform the plans and work programs (presuming that some questions inform multiple programs):

- RFFA/MTIP policies
- Strategy to Advance Equity
- Equitable Housing Initiative
- Regional Transportation Plan (trends and challenges)
- Regional Transit Strategy (priorities)

- Transportation Equity Assessment (especially as it overlaps with RTP, RTS and Equity Strategy)

Prior engagement results to help inform policymakers: In addition to the information from this January-February comment period, Metro staff will compile information from prior engagement efforts that may help inform policymakers, including:

- Spring 2014 | Regional Transportation Plan, Active Transportation Plan, Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program and Climate Smart Communities Scenarios Project integrated comment period, asking questions on regional quality of life, transportation challenges, and priorities for investments in communities and in the transportation system
- Fall 2014 | Climate Smart Strategy comment period, asking for feedback on implementing the seven priority areas
- Summer 2014 | Community Summit discussion groups with historically underrepresented focusing on regional equity issues, including issues on transportation
- Summer 2014 | Regional Transportation Plan quick poll, asking about transportation issues most affecting respondents

Proposed questions for high-level questionnaire for regional flexible funds policy: For the more general public, Metro engagement staff has drafted the following context and questions:

(context)

Metro and its partners are figuring out how best to spend about \$38 million of federal funds from specific federal programs that allow for spending on things like sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes and trails or projects to improve freight movement to help the regional economy. Project ideas will compete next year based on the structure being decided soon. A couple of options have been raised:

Set aside some money for walking and biking improvements and some for freight improvements, letting the projects compete within these two categories. This has the advantage of targeting the best projects in each category.

-or-

Combine all project funds for potential walking, biking and freight projects and evaluate the project benefits among all competing projects. This has the advantage of allowing projects that are both good for walking and biking goals, and good for freight goals (though not necessarily "the best" in those as separate categories) be eligible for funding.

["click to find out more":]

The Portland metropolitan region (the tri-county area from Forest Grove to Oregon City, from Wilsonville to Troutdale) should expect to receive about \$X in federal and state aid for transportation projects over 3 years targeting road maintenance and expansion (and walking and biking facilities related to those road projects). We also expect to receive about \$126 million over 3 years from specific federal programs that offer more flexibility in how the dollars are spent. Due to the flexibility in the potential uses of the funds, previous investments have included roadway improvements, transit projects, sidewalks and other pedestrian improvements, freight movement improvements and bicycle facilities. The region also uses the

funds for region-wide programs to improve the management and flow of the transportation system, to educate residents about available travel options and to pay down bonds on high capacity transit (e.g., light rail) and related investments in priority transportation corridors.

About \$38 million to as much as \$49.7 million of these funds in this funding cycle will go specifically to things like sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes and trails or projects to improve freight movement to help the regional economy.

The needs for the region's transportation system range from building sidewalks where they don't exist, to maintaining roadways, to providing more transit service. Transportation funding from the federal, state, and local governments all help address the needs. But the long list of needs continues to grow and the amount of funding available continues to shrink. These regional flexible funds represent just a small piece of this shrinking pie, but can still achieve a lot if used wisely.

(Add examples of what you can get for \$38 million?)

(question)

Do you think we should:

- a) set aside some money for walking and biking improvements and some for freight improvements, letting the projects compete within these two categories?
- b) put all of the funds toward an overall group of projects that could collectively demonstrate benefits to both walking or biking and freight movement?

Issues open for interested stakeholder comment: For the RFFA policy, the documentation of the policy issues will be available for interested stakeholders to review and react to.

In addition, the updated MTIP policy proposal (see appendices A and B) will be open for interested stakeholder feedback. Stakeholders will be encouraged to offer additional considerations, refinements or activities for Metro, ODOT, TriMet, and SMART to consider in developing the MTIP. This strategy of not developing a "general public question" was chosen because, unlike with the RFFA policy, stakeholder input throughout spring 2015 and advisory committee conversations have not identified competing choices for the MTIP coordination policy.

Next steps

If JPACT determines the draft MTIP/RFFA policy question is ready for release for public comment, the public comment period will begin in early 2016. After the public comment period, feedback gathered will be summarized and presented at TPAC and JPACT in Spring 2016 with opportunities to discuss how to incorporate the feedback into final policy. The final 2018-2021 MTIP/RFFA policy is tentatively scheduled for adoption in March or April 2016.