



PLAN-FOCUSED PROGRAM APPROACH FOR THE CMAQ PROGRAM

HISTORY

Since its inception, the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) in northeastern Illinois has focused on the two federally-mandated program goals – reducing congestion without the creation of additional highway capacity, and eliminating transportation-generated air pollution, especially ozone and particulates. Now, with the launch of the GO TO 2040 Regional Comprehensive Plan, the region can guide the investment of CMAQ funds to implement GO TO 2040 in addition to meeting federal program goals.

The traditional approach to programming CMAQ funds has been to issue a call for projects, allowing all eligible government bodies in the region, the “implementers”, to propose transportation projects that met the federal guidelines for the CMAQ program. These proposals were technically evaluated for their air-quality benefits; the proposals with the best cost/benefit ratio in each category were typically recommended for funding. Additional considerations of project readiness, project mix, “mode mix” and sub-regional equity were also taken into account when developing a program. The first upcoming year was typically fully programmed and the next couple only partially programmed.

This approach has several desirable features: air-quality and congestion relief benefits are maximized; many different communities have been encouraged to improve their transportation infrastructure, and the program has been predictable. However, the program’s overall impact, when viewed from a regional basis, has been diffuse because there was no overarching effort to coordinate the overall program.

PROPOSAL

Developing a five-year CMAQ program of proposed improvements which helps implement GO TO 2040, improves air quality, and mitigates congestion is proposed. Program development would draw on on-going local, sub-regional, regional, and state programs and plans, benefiting both those agencies and the region as a whole. Program focus groups: two ad hoc CMAP committees (one for diesel emission reductions and one for transit), the Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force and the Regional Transportation Operations Coalition would set goals for specific project types and play an active role in identifying such projects and plans. The various phases involved in a project will have to be programmed individually or in combination. Many of the regional indicators for transportation may be moved in a “good” direction through

programming. These include air quality, average number of vehicles per household, energy use, highway congested hours, number of destinations served by mode and distance, percent of work trips by mode, pedestrian environment factors, pedestrian level of service, bike level of service, transit passenger mile per vehicle revenue hour, travel time index, unlinked passenger trips per capita, and vehicle minutes of delay for at-grade rail-highway crossings.

There are two options for developing sets of projects for this concept.

- Option A - Issue a “broadcast” call for projects.
 - This is similar to the current approach in that a public announcement would be made, and the pool of potential projects would be those submitted by governments and agencies. The application materials would place the responsibility on the sponsor to identify the plan or program containing the proposed project, and indicate how the project would implement GO TO 2040.
- Option B - Direct Programming
 - Develop a package of projects through the program focus groups. They would identify regionally significant projects and local projects that support GO TO 2040 based on current plans and programs. The sponsors would be asked to confirm their commitment to these projects.

The program focus groups would establish goals aligned with GO TO 2040 (ultimately reviewed by the CMAP Transportation Committee) to guide their thinking about what projects or groups of projects to prioritize.

The CMAQ Project Selection Committee would consider those that have commitment and also have good air quality and congestion mitigation benefits based on quantitative analysis for CMAQ funding. Projects not eligible for CMAQ funding should be kept as priorities and considered for implementation with other funding. In addition, to implement GO TO 2040, the region has made a commitment to assist local and sub-regional planning efforts. It is anticipated that these local and sub-regional planning efforts will yield future proposals for CMAQ and other funding programs, as such planning efforts have done in the past.

IMPLEMENTATION

Regardless of the way a package of projects is developed, the goal of the CMAQ Project Selection Committee is to improve air quality and reduce congestion. The committees and other groups should set goals for specific project types in light of priorities set out in GO TO 2040. These goals would provide a tool to the CMAQ Project Selection Committee to allocate the anticipated CMAQ funding to various categories, and set out the expected outcomes to be achieved – example are miles of new bicycle path, tons of particulates eliminated, and so on.

The responsibility for setting goals and prioritizing projects for the current project categories would be roughly assigned as follows, with some candidate project sources identified:

- Bottlenecks – Regional Transportation Operations Coalition (RTOC), using information from the CREATE program, sub-regional capital programs, freight studies
- Intersection improvements – RTOC, using county and local plans and capital programs
- Signal Interconnect/Traffic Management Centers/Transit Signal Priority (ITS) – RTOC and the RTA and service boards, using county and local plans and capital programs, northeastern Illinois ITS architecture and RTA and service board plans
- Bicycle – Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force, using the trails element of the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan and connections to said trail elements (identifying projects that support transportation and are not primarily recreation), sub-regional, council-level and local bicycle plans
- Pedestrian – Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force supplemented by the service boards, using sub-regional and local capital programs, school travel plans and Pace, CTA and Metra needs for transit stop access
- Transit (facility, equipment, service, parking) – RTA, service boards and CDOT, using their capital plans, community plans developed through RTA
- Diesel Reduction – An ad hoc committee of US EPA, IEPA, RTA, railroads, sub-regional and local environmental departments, using a discussion among railroads for locomotives, county and local plans (if any), IEPA and service board applications

There have been concerns raised that using existing plans and programs may result in simply substituting CMAQ funds for other funds already identified. Many plans are not fully funded, or are based on anticipated but not committed funds. In addition, utilizing CMAQ funds for projects in current plans and programs may provide implementing agencies with the opportunity to redirect funds currently identified for bringing their systems closer to a state of good repair, also a key priority identified in GO TO 2040. Programming CMAQ projects, and phases thereof, for 5 years out will enable implementers to better schedule the budgeting of the necessary matching funds and taking other implementation steps

Implementation would depend on project readiness. It is unlikely that all projects selected for the program in any one of the project categories could be implemented in the same year; they would be spread out over the five years by project phases. All projects would be included in the CMAQ A list and brought into the TIP when ready as per the CMAQ programming policies.

All years would be fully programmed. After the initial call for projects to develop a five year program, an annual or biennial call will occur to fill in the last years of funding. Having multiple years fully programmed will assist in spending down the unobligated balance. Inherently, some projects are able to obligate quicker than others and having five fully funded years will allow projects that are moving forward to be obligated. First ready, first funded should be implemented to assist in motivating project sponsors to accomplish their project as quickly as possible so the air quality and congestion mitigation benefits are realized as soon as possible.

The CMAQ A list and MYB list will still be used. They have led to increased project accomplishment and realized air quality benefits and congestion mitigation. The CMAQ A list

was established when SAFETEA-LU expired and an \$83 million rescission affected the CMAQ program. The MPO Policy Committee voted to move all projects that have not had any obligations to the MYB of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Once the project has accomplished reasonable movement and is ready for federal obligation the sponsor is to request to move the project back into the TIP. The rescission was eventually rescinded however the CMAQ A list remained in affect due to the flexibility it provides for moving projects forward. An additional benefit is that the CMAQ A list draws attention to the regional process for project movement.

The MYB list consists of projects that were not included in the FFY 10/11 CMAQ approved program but had reasonable benefits and were added to the MYB list. Projects on the MYB list have the opportunity for funding if the sponsor moves forward with pre-construction activities. This creates competition with the CMAQ funded projects to move forward on their projects.