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MEMORANDUM

To: CMAQ Project Selection Committee

From: CMAP Staff

Date: March 29, 2012

Re: CMAQ GO TO 2040 Focused Programming Lessons Learned

As the program development process for the FY2012-2016 CMAQ Improvement Program came to a close, the CMAQ Project Selection Committee (PSC) agreed that a review of the new programming approach should occur. Ways to improve the process will be discussed as we prepare for the next call for proposals. Some historical context has been provided below with a summary of the GO TO 2040 Focused Programming approach. Staff solicited comments on the new approach and on program development in general.

History

The traditional approach to programming CMAQ funds has been to issue an annual call for proposals, allowing all eligible government bodies in the region to propose transportation projects that meet the federal guidelines for the CMAQ program. Non-governmental bodies also have had an opportunity to participate in the CMAQ program by partnering with eligible government bodies. These proposals were evaluated for their air-quality and congestion reduction benefits and the proposals were ranked showing which proposals provided the best cost/benefit ratio in each program category. The proposal rankings were the primary criterion used in recommending proposals for funding. Five rankings are developed:

- Cost per Ton of VOC Eliminated
- Cost per Ton of NO_x Eliminated
- Cost per Ton of PM Eliminated (only for diesel emissions reduction projects)
- Cost per 1000 VMT Eliminated
- Cost per 1000 SOV Trips Eliminated

Additional considerations of project readiness, highway facilities on which transit routes run, project mix, mode mix, prior CMAQ funding history and geographic equity were also taken into account when developing a program. Prior to the 2007 program year, funding was programmed for only one program year at a time. With the 2007 program, multi-year funding was implemented. The first year was fully programmed; out years were partially programmed with phases that could not be completed in the first year.

GO TO 2040 Focused Programming

In January, 2011 CMAP adopted a new, focused programming approach which called for development of a five-year program of proposed improvements to help implement GO TO 2040. The focus groups were charged with developing cohesive “packages of projects” which would have more impact than the former approach. The overall goals of the CMAQ program, to improve air quality and reduce congestion, did not change. GO TO 2040 calls for the use of CMAQ funding to help implement the vision set out in the plan. Staff, with the help of our regional partners, identified four objectives of the program that could be directly linked with GO TO 2040.

- Localized Congestion Relief
- Operational Improvements
- Mode Shift
- Direct Emissions Reduction

Four focus groups were used, one for each of the objectives. Each focus group identified GO TO 2040 actions areas with which to evaluate and prioritize the proposals submitted. In addition to the proposals submitted by sponsors, the focus groups could also identify projects from existing state, regional, subregional, and local plans and programs for consideration. The focused programming approach did not replace the technical air quality and congestion benefits analysis but complemented it to ensure a program that provides continued air quality and congestion benefits and helps advance the region towards the vision set out in GO TO 2040. The focus groups were not asked to consider whether or not any proposals were a good fit for CMAQ funding. They were asked to identify projects that help implement GO TO 2040. Each focus group presented its recommendations to the PSC which used the recommendations along with the air quality and congestion benefits and the other factors cited above to develop a proposed program.

Summary of Comments Received

The following is a summary of the comments received to date.

Focused Programming Approach:

- Better define the role of the focus groups so as to increase focus groups’ understanding of their role.
- More time is needed to modify/develop proposals for the process.
- The time in which to conduct the proposal evaluation and prioritization was too short.
- Too extensive a time commitment was required from CMAP staff and program focus group participants.
- Municipal proposals suffered in the recommendations due to their lack of understanding of the focused programming approach on their part.
- More outreach to municipalities is needed for them to understand the process.
- More direction is needed from the PSC on how the focus groups should review projects and structure their recommendations.

- The corridor approach used by RTOC should be refined and its use expanded to other groups.
- The corridor approach should be refined to include a diversity of projects that may include modernization and/or expansion project types. It should be more multi-modal in approach.
- Presentations to the focus groups by proposal sponsors added value to the process.
- Staff should provide a first cut evaluation of bicycle/pedestrian proposals before focus group evaluation begins.
- It is critical to the success of the focused programming approach that the focus groups work on developing non-CMAQ eligible proposals in addition to CMAQ eligible proposals.
- Some focus group members were reluctant to provide input on proposals being reviewed by other focus groups.
- When evaluating transit proposals for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) benefits, a question arose as to whether priority should be given to proposals that support existing TOD over a planned TOD or vice versa.

Development of Proposed Program

- Use the work of the focus groups to help modify the methods used for the emissions and congestion reduction analysis to reflect GO TO 2040 more closely.
- Each sponsor's overall unobligated balance should be considered when programming new funds. Sponsors with large unobligated balances should have their funding restricted.
- A pre-application process would help develop more cohesive proposals that could foster the corridor approach.
- Don't fund phase I engineering; require the sponsors to prepare phase I with their own funds so they can develop realistic phasing schedules and costs for proposals.
- Clarify other project selection factors and how they relate with the other ranking criteria.
 - Regional Equity
 - Project Readiness
 - Sponsor Prioritization
 - Program Focus Group recommendations
- Encourage more public comment throughout the programming cycle.
- Clarify project information booklet to include further explanations:
 - Roles of staff, Task Force, Project Selection Committee, Policy Committee
 - How their input is weighted.
 - Explain the relationship and weight between emissions reduction, GO TO 2040 goals, Task Force priorities, project readiness.
 - Further explain the MYB list.
- Lack of objective ranking makes it difficult to apply for projects.

- Sub-regional councils and other sponsor groups should be given the opportunity to identify project proposals that are a particular priority within their sub-region.

Staff Recommendations

Overall, CMAP staff sees the GO TO 2040 focused programming approach as a successful addition to the programming of CMAQ funding for northeastern Illinois. The focus groups' work added value to the selection process. While many of the comments received offer suggestions on how to improve the focused programming approach, none of them indicate that it should be discarded.

Several comments and suggestions submitted did not lend themselves to staff recommendations. These included comments on the different approaches that the focus groups used and specific changes to the groups' evaluations. Each focus group is unique in composition and with the types of proposals that they are reviewing and evaluating. Setting a standard method would unnecessarily limit their flexibility. Proposed changes in the methods of the focus groups should be considered by each individual focus group. Comments made through this process will be passed along to the individual groups.

Comments were also received on programming projects of sponsors whose current projects have significant unobligated balances. The PSC has recommended changes to the active program management strategies that will directly address the issue of unobligated funds.

One comment expressed a concern for the lack of an objective ranking of each project. All projects are ranked by a cost per ton for VOCs, NO_x, trips, and vehicle miles traveled eliminated. These objective rankings play a prominent role in determining the proposed program. There is not a composite ranking taking into consideration emission benefits, consistency with GO TO 2040 and other factors. The CMAQ Committee considered this approach a number of years ago and rejected the idea.

A few comments were received about the recommendations of the focus groups and how they were used by the PSC in developing the proposed program. At no point was the role of the focus groups to make recommendations that the PSC would simply incorporate into a recommended program. The focus groups were asked to evaluate and prioritize proposals with respect to the goals, objectives and action areas from GO TO 2040.

The staff recommendations are:

1. Follow the previous program development schedule. Under this schedule the call for proposals begins in early December and concludes at the end of January. In comparison the call for the 2012-2016 CMAQ program was held during the months of February and March.
2. The focus programming groups should begin meeting prior to the call so that they may develop a schedule for themselves that will allow for the potential development of new proposals and increased coordination between project proposals. This should also reduce the time crunch that occurred last year and allow for proposals to be evaluated by multiple focus groups if warranted.

3. Staff should work with the PSC to improve the project instruction booklet and related materials to improve sponsors' understanding of what is expected. This includes working with the Council of Mayors and their staff (the planning liaisons) to help the region's municipalities develop project proposals that are more regional in scope and more directly support the implementation of GO TO 2040. Schedules and timelines will be expanded and clarified so that there is a better understanding of when decisions are made and when input can be provided. The application instructions will make clear that sponsors with multiple proposals, or Councils may identify proposals that are a particular sub-regional priority.
4. The focus groups should continue to improve their examination and evaluation of projects that advance the region toward the vision of GO TO 2040 without regard to the most appropriate fund source. Using the work done over the prior year will provide a base that can be advanced.