



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

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MEMORANDUM

To: Working Committees

From: Bob Dean, Deputy Executive Director for Local Planning

Date: May 2014

Re: LTA Program Evaluation

Since its initiation in spring 2011, the LTA program has provided planning assistance to communities across the Chicago metropolitan area. To date, over 60 plans have been completed, 50 more are underway, and 30 more are committed but have not yet begun. While the program has been quite popular and is considered a success, improvements can always be made. The large number of projects that have been completed provides an opportunity to evaluate the program and suggest changes for future years.

Staff intends to prepare this evaluation over the next several months. Implementation will be a key consideration, and staff will attempt to evaluate the level of success in implementing completed LTA plans. This is of great importance to CMAP; it does little good to produce plans that are not implemented. Since implementation of a plan can be difficult to assess in the short term, though, this will not be the only consideration – other factors, like the quality of deliverables, community satisfaction with the result, adherence to schedule and budget, and effectiveness of public engagement will also be evaluated.

The evaluation will inform the future direction of the LTA program in a number of ways. It will help determine the types of projects that are most successful, the characteristics of communities that sponsor successful projects, and the most effective use of CMAP staff and consultants. It may identify topical or geographic gaps in the program that need to be addressed. Ultimately, the evaluation of the LTA program will be used to focus future resources most effectively.

Staff intends to engage the working committees in discussions about the LTA program evaluation over the next several months. This will be an item on working committee agendas for several consecutive meetings, as it is a large topic and deserves significant discussion. To keep the committee discussions focused and productive, the evaluation process will be broken into several elements, a few of which will be presented and discussed at each committee meeting. Likely elements include:

- The “vital statistics” of the LTA program. This will include the number of completed and committed projects, project sorted by type and geography, average project size and duration, public engagement results and media coverage, and similar metrics.
- Results of external evaluations. Following project completion, CMAP requests feedback from sponsors using a simple survey. The overall results of survey responses to date will be presented and discussed.
- Implementation progress. The implementation of LTA recommendations is being tracked, and a report on implementation progress is being prepared. Drafts of the report will be reviewed with committees.
- Results of internal evaluations. Staff will be assessing the quality, timeliness, adherence to budget, quality of public engagement, and other factors for each project. The overall conclusions of this assessment will be discussed.

Discussion of LTA program evaluation will naturally lead to broader discussion of its future. Likely topics for discussion that are related to program evaluation include:

- Results of municipal survey. CMAP is conducting a new municipal survey during spring and summer 2014, and it contains questions to help gauge municipal interest in different types of potential LTA projects.
- Needs of municipalities and other applicants. The LTA program should provide assistance that meets the needs of local project sponsors, who are most frequently suburban municipalities, but also include counties, the City of Chicago, multijurisdictional groups, and nonprofit organizations. Committee feedback on the most useful types of projects will be sought.
- Funding opportunities and constraints. Many, but not all, types of locally-desired projects can be pursued using federal transportation funds. To support work on topics that are not related to transportation, CMAP has sought external funding to support the LTA program. Staff will discuss the overall strategy and current status of program funding.
- Challenges related to community capacity. Often, the applicants that most need CMAP’s assistance have the least ability or willingness to pursue implementation activities. This creates a continual tension in the LTA program between prioritizing projects that are likely to be implemented, as opposed to projects that provide assistance to communities in most need.
- Review of new applications. New project applications will be due on June 26, and committees will be asked to provide feedback in July and August, as in past years. It should be especially helpful to have project review happen as part of the overall evaluation of the LTA program.

Committee presentations and discussions on these topics are expected to begin in June.

ACTION REQUESTED: Discussion.