



GO TO 2040 Focused Programming 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 single occupant vehicle highway capacity, and eliminating transportation-generated air pollution - ozone and particulates in northeastern Illinois. Now, with the launch of the GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan, our region can also guide the investment of CMAQ funds to help implement GO TO 2040. Meeting federal CMAQ program goals will retain its primacy.

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 meet 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 program 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 of years only partially programmed with phases that could not be completed in the first year.

This approach has several desirable features: air-quality and congestion relief benefits are maximized from among the projects submitted; many different communities have been encouraged to improve their transportation infrastructure, and implementers have incorporated consideration of CMAQ funds in their program development process. However, the program's overall impact, when viewed from a regional basis, has been diffuse because there was no overarching effort to coordinate the chosen projects.

PROPOSAL

Developing a five-year CMAQ program of proposed improvements which improves air quality, mitigates congestion and helps implement GO TO 2040 (reflected in applicable improved Regional Indicator values), is proposed.¹

¹ The Regional Indicators Project is a work in progress. Information on the Regional Indicators Project is available at www.metropulsechicago.org.

GOALS

The overall goals of the CMAQ Program are to improve air quality and reduce congestion, as established in the Federal authorizing legislation.

OBJECTIVES

To carry out these goals, four objectives have been identified:

- **Localized Congestion Relief** – this will include projects aimed at reducing congestion through relieving both rail and roadway bottlenecks.
- **Operational Improvements** – this will include projects that reduce congestion by improving roadway, intersection, rail and transit operations.
- **Mode Shift** – this will include projects geared towards shifting travel from single-occupant vehicle travel to transit, non-motorized, and multiple-occupant modes.
- **Direct Emissions Reduction** – this will include projects geared directly towards reducing emissions through improving the efficiency of vehicles or switching to alternate fuels (e.g., diesel retrofits, GenSet technology, electric vehicles and support facilities for same).

ACTION AREAS

GO TO 2040 contains recommendations and identifies action areas that implement these objectives. For example, GO TO 2040 recommendations include:

- Many elements of livability can be supported through planning for land use and housing, including: support for transportation options including walking, bicycling, and transit; and
- A limited number of major capital expansions on the expressway and transit systems should be pursued.

Note: While CMAQ funds have helped implement major capital projects in the past, and have funded portions of CREATE projects and large traveler information projects, it is anticipated that these projects will use CMAQ funding only in targeted circumstances – portions of the overall project that have significant air quality impacts, for example. (Portions of these projects are not eligible for CMAQ funding, so in most cases, relying solely on the CMAQ program is not feasible, even aside from their large funding needs.)

Action Areas that implement the above-mentioned objectives are found in a number of plan sections. The following Implementation Action Areas are particularly relevant to CMAQ programming:

- Adopt best practices in new technologies
- Widely implement traveler information systems
- Establish seamless coordination between modes
- Include transit components as part of major highway capital projects

- Focus investment on maintenance and modernization (note that projects consisting solely of maintenance are not eligible for CMAQ funding)
- Prioritize and implement the CREATE Program
- Implement high-priority transit projects

CHANGED PROGRAMMING PROCESS: FOCUSED PROGRAMMING

Two alternative options for developing sets of projects have been discussed by the CMAQ Project Selection Committee (PSC): a “broadcast” call for projects, similar to the approach used in prior CMAQ programming cycles, and “direct programming,” in which projects would come from existing state, regional, subregional, and local plans and programs. The Committee has recommended a hybrid of the two, deeming a modified call for projects to be an essential process that should be supplemented by “direct identification” of projects by groups of experts in various aspects of transportation. The directly identified projects would be considered along with the proposals submitted in response to the modified call.

The modified call for projects will be made directly to the major implementers and to the council of mayors planning liaisons (PLs) for distribution to implementers within their council area. During the call for projects, application materials will be made available that place the responsibility on willing sponsors to identify the plan or program containing the proposed project, and to indicate how the project will help implement GO TO 2040 by advancing the goals and objectives and action areas identified above.

Projects which come in for consideration through the direct identification process would come from existing plans and programs as noted, and would have particular significance in advancing the goals, objectives and action areas identified above. Sponsors would need to be found and be asked to confirm their commitment to these regionally proposed projects and to submit an application.

It is anticipated that the direct identification process will occur within the planning process of groups with a broad array of regional program goals, for example: addressing gaps and/or barriers, managing the system to achieve reliable and efficient performance, and improving the safety and security of all users.

The region has made a commitment to assist local and sub-regional planning efforts and 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

ACTION BY THE PROGRAM FOCUS GROUPS

Using the goals, objectives and action areas described above, four program focus groups – two ad hoc CMAP committees (one for direct emissions reductions and one for transit), the Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force and the Regional Transportation Operations Coalition – will prioritize projects, whether submitted through the modified call or direct identification, with

respect to goals, objectives and action areas appropriate for the CMAQ Project Selection Committee to consider for CMAQ funding. The technical air quality and congestion benefits of the prioritized projects will not be evaluated at this stage of the focused programming process, rather, in their deliberations, the program focus groups can consider the extent to which the regional indicators ([MetroPulse](#)) are improved by the projects. The recommended projects will need to provide a coherent, identifiable achievement over the five-year time frame, i.e. a focused program. Projects may only be recommended to the PSC which have a committed implementer.

The responsibility for initial review of responses to the call for projects, identifying significant projects in existing plans and programs that may further advance implementation of GO TO 2040, prioritizing projects, ascertaining sponsor commitment and providing project information will be roughly assigned as follows to the focus groups for the current CMAQ PSC project categories:

- Arterial and intersection improvements – Regional Transportation Operations Coalition (RTOC)
- Bicycle and pedestrian - Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force
- Bottleneck relief – RTOC
- Diesel reduction – Ad hoc committee of USEPA, IEPA, RTA, railroads, subregional and local environmental departments, and other agencies as appropriate
- Intelligent Transportation System improvements (ITS) including signal interconnects/traffic management centers/transit signal priority systems – RTOC
- Transit (facility, equipment, service, parking) - RTA, service boards, CDOT, Counties and other agencies as appropriate
- Other and Demonstration – these will be considered by the most appropriate program focus group. A few proposals may not fit with any focus group; these will be considered directly by the CMAQ Project Selection Committee.

GO TO 2040 encourages a multi-modal approach and the program focus groups will be encouraged to consider projects that advance multiple modes. Implementers will be encouraged to participate in groups outside of their traditional modal focus. For example, transit agencies are encouraged to take advantage of their participation on RTOC to provide their perspective on projects that would benefit both transit operations and highway users.

Some projects recommended by the program focus groups may not in the final analysis end up being good CMAQ projects, or there may be insufficient funds to program all good CMAQ candidate projects. Projects not selected for CMAQ funding will be kept as priorities by the program focus groups and could be considered for implementation with other funding. The four program focus groups will be assisted by CMAP staff and will have only a reasonable amount of time, as set by the PSC, to send priority recommendations to the CMAQ Project Selection Committee.

ACTION BY THE CMAQ PROJECT SELECTION COMMITTEE

The CMAQ PSC has the responsibility to evaluate, discuss and develop the 5-year CMAQ program which will be recommended to the MPO Policy Committee. CMAP staff will provide the PSC with the technical evaluation of the air-quality benefits of proposed projects.

Considerations used for developing the CMAQ program by the PSC will include the air quality cost/benefit ratio in each program category and other technical evaluations, with appropriate consideration given to project readiness, project mix, mode mix, sub-regional equity, and achieving a focused program. All proposed projects in the recommended program will have to be eligible under the federal authorizing legislation.

All five years will be fully programmed. After the initial five year program, an annual or biennial update will occur to fill in the last years of funding given funding availability. 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 continued 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 CMAQ B List processes will still be in place. They have led to increased project accomplishment and accelerated the realization of air quality benefits and congestion mitigation. The CMAQ A List consists of all CMAQ projects programmed by the CMAP MPO Policy Committee that have not had any obligations. In the metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), these projects are moved from "illustrative" status into the approved TIP when they are ready for federal authorization.

The CMAQ B List consists of projects that were not included in the CMAQ approved program but have reasonable benefits. Sponsors of projects on the CMAQ B List who have moved forward with pre-construction activities may request the PSC to add their project to the CMAQ program if funds are available. This creates healthy competition among implementers of CMAQ-funded projects to move forward on their projects.

Programming CMAQ projects' individual phases for 5 years out will enable implementers to better budget the necessary matching funds and taking other implementation steps.

CONCLUSION

The current approach to programming CMAQ funds in northeastern Illinois should be modified to help implement the recommendations of GO TO 2040. While maintaining the core goals of improved air quality and reduced congestion, the proposed approach will provide a coherent program of projects that can be implemented in a five-year time frame and that address specific goals, objectives and action areas in GO TO 2040. Four program focus groups will be organized and staffed by CMAP to review submissions and identify significant projects

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which could provide a focus to the CMAQ program. This information will be considered by the CMAQ Project Selection Committee as it develops the proposed CMAQ Program.

This focused programming approach will combine with current CMAQ program management policies to ensure a CMAQ program that provides continued air quality and congestion relief benefits, encourages prompt implementation of projects and helps advance the region toward the vision set out in GO TO 2040.

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