

CMAQ Program Description in NE Illinois

The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program is a federally-funded program of surface transportation improvements designed to improve air quality and mitigate congestion.

The CMAQ Program was created in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). Continuation of the program was authorized by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in June 1998, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in August 2005, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) in July 2012 and the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act in December 2015. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number for the CMAQ program is 20.205.

In northeastern Illinois the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is the programmer of the funds through the MPO Policy Committee. The program development and review is overseen by the CMAQ Project Selection Committee. CMAP staff performs technical analyses of all projects and oversees the implementation of the program. The Illinois Department of Transportation administers the program funding.

Northeastern Illinois is a non-attainment area for the 8-hour ozone standard. Therefore, federal guidance and the CMAQ Project Selection Committee give priority to projects that reduce emissions that contribute to ground level ozone.

The CMAQ program can be an important vehicle to implement aspects of the region's adopted comprehensive plan, ON TO 2050 and the CMAQ Project Selection Committee will also give consideration in the selection process to projects that have a strong link to ON TO 2050 and aligned regional and local plans and programs.

The overall goals of the CMAQ Program are to improve air quality and reduce congestion, as established in the Federal authorizing legislation. To carry out these goals, four objectives have been identified:

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



Eligible Project Types

Many projects are eligible for CMAQ funding; specific project types are described below.

Transit Improvements

Transit Facility Projects

Enhance the existing transit system through adding or improving facilities such as stations.

Transit Service and Equipment

Enhance the existing transit system through improvements such as increasing the frequency or operating speed of service on bus routes or rail lines.

Access to Transit Projects

Increase the ability to assess transit service through different modes. Pedestrian and bicycle accommodations along with transit transfers facilities and commuter parking facilities.

Traffic Flow Improvements

Bottleneck Eliminations

Remove existing bottlenecks to traffic flow. Under current guidelines, a bottleneck is defined as a point along a roadway that restricts traffic flow. Road segments, even if relatively short, are not eligible.

Intersection Improvements

Ease the flow of traffic through existing intersections with the addition of turn lanes or traffic signal installations.

Signal Interconnects

Reduce delays through a series of intersections by coordinating the signal phases.

Bicycle Facility Projects

Bicycle facilities that reduce automobile travel.

Direct Emissions Reduction Projects

These projects reduce emissions through a variety of measures, including idle reduction, purchase of fuels that produce less emissions (beyond fuels required by law or regulation), retrofitting existing diesel engines with catalysts or filters, repowering vehicles with cleaner engines, or vehicle replacements with alternative fuel vehicles. For vehicle replacements only vehicles types that provide a dominant transportation function are eligible for up to 80 percent funding. These types include transit buses, paratransit, freeway courtesy vans/tow trucks, incident management patrol vehicles and others. For general purpose public fleet vehicles only the incremental cost difference between standard and alternative fuel vehicle is eligible for up to 80 percent funding.

Other Projects

These projects do not fit into the above categories, but result in emissions reductions and are otherwise eligible for CMAQ funds. Examples have included public information campaigns, rideshare incentive programs, interoperable emergency communications equipment, projects to reduce motor vehicle cold start, various ITS projects and bicycle parking and encouragement.



Ineligible Projects

Several types of projects are not eligible under federal guidelines for CMAQ funding.

Expansion of SOV Capacity

Projects that add new capacity for Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOV) are ineligible for CMAQ funding unless construction is limited to high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. HOV lane eligibility includes the full range of HOV facility uses, such as high-occupancy toll (HOT) and low-emission vehicles.

Transit Operations (other than the first three years)

Transit operating expenses may be eligible for CMAQ funding for the first three years of operation. However, CMAQ funds may not replace existing funding sources for transit operations or increase the general subsidy of existing operations.

Routine Maintenance

CMAQ funds cannot be used on projects which are considered routine maintenance, including retiming existing signals, reconstruction of roads, bridges and stations, and replacement-in-kind of track or other equipment.

Mandated Private Sector Demand Management Activities

CMAQ funds cannot be used on activities that are the mandated responsibility of the private sector under the Clean Air Act.

Light-duty Vehicle Scrappage Programs

CMAQ funds cannot be used on programs that scrap light-duty vehicles.

Stand-alone Fuel Purchase Programs

Projects for the purchase of fuel are not eligible.

Projects Phases Already Underway

Project phases for which funds have already been expended are not eligible for CMAQ funding. Phase-funded contracts are eligible for CMAQ funding. These are contracts in which there is an obligation limit based on funds in hand and further obligation authority requires formal notification by the sponsor.

If one project phase has been completed, other phases are still eligible for CMAQ funding as long as those phases will not be obligated before the funds are programmed in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

