



MEMORANDUM

To: Local Coordinating Committee

From: CMAP Staff

Date: October 5, 2016

Re: Local Technical Assistance (LTA) Project Implementation: Current Status and Next Steps

As of October 2016, nearly 140 projects have been completed through CMAP's Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program, with 40 more underway. However, the purpose of the LTA program is not simply to produce good plans, but to achieve positive results in the communities that they cover, making implementation an important follow up activity.

Interest in implementation of LTA projects is not a new concept. As part of an [evaluation of the LTA program](#) in 2014, several changes were made to support implementation of completed projects. These have been helpful, but have raised additional questions about CMAP's role in implementation.

The purpose of this memo is to begin a discussion with CMAP's stakeholders to develop answers to these questions. This memo summarizes the results of the 2014 program evaluation that relate to implementation; describes how implementation is currently supported; and poses several questions about future implementation directions.

The Local Coordinating Committee is the first group to discuss this memo. It will be brought to the working committees over the next several months (as part of a larger discussion about the LTA program) and conclusions will be reported to the CMAP Board in January.

Conclusions from 2014 LTA evaluation

In summer and fall 2014, CMAP staff conducted an evaluation of the LTA program, resulting in a series of memos and discussions with committees concerning strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. The primary conclusion was that the program had been successful, and should be continued, with adjustments also recommended in some areas. The most significant program change was the local match requirement, which went into effect in

2015. Other changes included prioritization of certain topics (specifically, stormwater and freight) or project types (planning priorities reports), as well as adjustments to the application process to better ensure local commitment.

The LTA evaluation also made a number of conclusions and recommendations concerning implementation, summarized below:

- First, CMAP should have a role in implementation of completed LTA plans. While the primary purpose of the LTA program is, and should remain, the production of local plans, the agency should also try to advance the implementation of completed projects.

Accomplishments: Staff resources began to be devoted to implementation, as described further below.

- Simply following up with project sponsors is valuable. CMAP conducts quarterly check-ins with project sponsors to discuss implementation progress, and offers general advice and review; communities report that they find these regular check-ins helpful.

Accomplishments: Implementation updates on projects completed recently (within two years) are prepared quarterly, and updates on all completed projects are prepared each July.

- Leadership on implementation needs to be locally driven. It is evident that local commitment – defined as a combination of responsiveness, energy, leadership, and willingness to use plan recommendations for day-to-day prioritization and decision-making – is the primary driver of implementation. The evaluation memo recommended a number of ways that local commitment could be demonstrated before projects are initiated.

Accomplishments: A local match was put in place to ensure local commitment, and a more intensive screening of commitment was added to the project evaluation process.

- Commonly, the CMAP role in implementation has involved aligning community needs with available resources from other external partners. External partners often have resources and responsibilities that position them as implementers. The evaluation recommended more systematic involvement of common implementers – like state and county agencies, transportation agencies, civic organizations, or groups of private developers – in relevant projects, both while they are underway and after they are completed.

Accomplishments: Partner involvement in each project is tracked and updated regularly, with new partners added as implementation priorities are identified. As project completion approaches, partner involvement in implementation is discussed, and potential implementers who have not been involved are invited to participate.

Also, CMAP staff conduct regular discussions on the LTA program with common implementers, like IDOT, transit agencies, and nonprofit partners.

- Even if time per project is fairly limited, the number of completed projects (nearly 140) means that even modest commitments per project add up to a large total. Devoting resources to implementation will inevitably reduce the new projects that can be taken on through the LTA program – but is preferable to producing large volumes of new plans that are not implemented. The evaluation recommended balancing implementation of completed projects with continued production of new plans.

Accomplishments: See the description of current practice below, which explains implementation staffing.

- Finally, the evaluation focused only on staff-led projects and commitment of staff time. This was a good place to start, but now further thought is needed about involvement of consultants and commitment of financial resources.

Accomplishments: This has not been addressed. See the final section of this memo for discussion of this issue.

Current practice

Regular reporting on implementation progress is a basic implementation activity. The October LTA update includes implementation reports on selected projects; the July update included a wider set of reports. To prepare these reports, staff follows up with sponsors of each completed project, though turnover (both at CMAP and the local sponsor) and in some cases sponsor unresponsiveness mean that these reports are not comprehensive.

For a smaller subset of projects, staff takes a more active approach. Due to the volume of completed projects, prioritization is necessary; attempting to actively engage with the sponsors of all 140 completed projects would be futile. Therefore, as projects near completion, a small team of staff reviews the potential for CMAP to have an active role in their implementation. Several factors are discussed, including: whether the community is interested and responsive; whether there are clear recommendations that CMAP can help to advance; and whether the local sponsor actually needs CMAP assistance in follow-through. For projects that meet these factors, a short list of potential implementation activities is developed and confirmed with the local sponsor. This process is conducted for newly completed projects, and older projects are also periodically reviewed.

Implementation activities taken on by CMAP have included the following:

- Linking communities with other public agencies. Many communities need assistance making the right contacts at state or regional agencies. CMAP has played an intermediary role in these cases, in terms of identifying the best points of contact,

setting up and facilitating meetings, and ensuring follow-up afterwards. This is often as simple as connecting community representatives with the right contact at a large agency, like IDOT or CDOT, to bring the community's priorities to their attention.

- Linking communities with nonprofits that can provide assistance. For example, CMAP is currently working with the Active Transportation Alliance on a pedestrian safety workshop in Hanover Park as a follow-up to a project completed several years ago.
- Linking communities with developers. While this is still in the planning phase, CMAP is working with the Urban Land Institute to host information sessions with interested developers for plans that recommended real estate development.
- Assisting with applications to funders. CMAP has helped several communities submit applications to philanthropic, federal, or state funding sources, often with success. For example, CMAP helped a nonprofit in Chinatown to secure funding from the Chicago Community Trust for staff support to implement their community plan, and publicized the Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP), administered by IDOT, to LTA project sponsors. CMAP does not help communities submit applications to transportation funding sources that are administered by CMAP, but does provide advice on eligibility for these sources.
- Training. Through an arrangement with the Illinois chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-IL), CMAP has sponsored plan commissioner trainings in multiple communities following completion.
- Research. In some cases, communities have follow-up questions sparked by a planning process that CMAP can help to answer. For example, CMAP developed a how-to guide on façade enhancement programs for New Lenox, which not only helps that specific community but also adds to the agency's base of knowledge.
- Other types of assistance have also been provided in a few cases. CMAP has assisted with proposal review and consultant selection, and frequently serves on steering committees for follow-up projects.

These are small-scale activities, and can be accomplished by a small team of staff. CMAP has one staff person who leads the implementation team, and several others who participate. Far more resources are devoted to new projects; the amount of time spent on these implementation activities is about 5% of overall time spent on the program.

Other implementation activities are larger in size, and require the community to submit a separate follow-up LTA application. A common example is a zoning project that follows a

comprehensive plan. CMAP is currently doing this in several communities, including Bensenville, Chicago Heights, and Harvard. Projects of this magnitude fall outside of the small-scale implementation assistance that CMAP regularly provides.

Questions about future involvement

CMAP staff believes that the current level of staff resources devoted to implementation is appropriate. Staff has been able to push progress in small ways, without excessive time expenditure. However, questions remain concerning the expenditure of resources other than staff time – namely, funding – on project implementation. To date, all implementation activities have been achieved by staff, or by partner organizations with no cost to CMAP. Commitment of financial resources should be discussed in two contexts:

- Some LTA projects (about one-third) are contracted to consulting firms rather than conducted by staff. For projects led by consultants, the consulting firm is the primary project manager and contact for the community, and is better positioned to identify, prioritize, and assist with implementation activities. It may sometimes make sense for consulting firms to continue their involvement with a community through implementation. (In anticipation of this, CMAP began to build an implementation option into its RFPs over a year ago, but has not yet exercised this option.)
- In other cases, recommended actions are beyond CMAP staff capacity, and instead require commitment of funding to accomplish. For example, CMAP worked on several projects for municipalities in northeastern Lake County that recommended coordination on economic development activities. In response, a multijurisdictional group of Lake County communities have taken steps to do just this, including jointly contracting with a consulting firm for marketing and new business attraction, and have requested that CMAP contribute a portion of the funding for this effort. In this case, commitment of CMAP staff time would not be helpful, and financial resources are necessary.

From one perspective, there is an argument for CMAP to commit resources of all types to project implementation, just as it does for the LTA program overall. Sometimes plan implementation is best accomplished through commitment of staff time, but sometimes other resources are necessary. Staff may lack necessary expertise or time availability, or may have less knowledge of the community and its needs than a consulting firm.

On the other hand, commitment of funding for implementation to consulting firms, or directly to the community, opens the agency to difficult decisions. There will be great interest in receiving financial implementation assistance, particularly if it can be used to support existing contracts. (There may also be community interest in CMAP funding local staff time; CMAP does not recommend even considering this idea.) Implementation activities are typically

shorter-term and more opportunistic than a full plan, so a regular, competitive selection process would miss opportunities for short-term action. Unless there is a clear way of determining what activities to fund in what communities, concerns about fairness will emerge.

Committee feedback on a number of issues is requested:

- Does addressing implementation in the LTA program still make sense? Are there any overall flaws or problems in the agency's approach to date?
- Is there value in committing financial resources to implementation beyond staff time – i.e. contracts with consulting firms, or direct grants to communities?
- If so, what kinds of standards might be used to make funding decisions? Options include: consistency with the adopted plan and with GO TO 2040; demonstrated local commitment; community need; eligibility of the proposed activity within the restrictions of CMAP's funding sources; size of funding request; and others.

CMAP staff does not have a proposal yet for how to answer these questions. Committee discussion is requested on the initial ideas presented in this memo, which will inform a later staff proposal.

ACTION REQUESTED: Discussion.

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