



# 2019 Minnesota Summer MPO Workshop

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# MnDOT Response to FHWA Findings Process

# Backdrop

- MnDOT was made aware by FHWA last spring that the new “Findings” process will be a part of the STIP review and approval process.
- The Findings process will include looking at the project coordination efforts between the MPOs and MnDOT.
- As you know, MnDOT has been working on some process issues regarding proper STIP and TIP project coordination with a few of its programs.
- Some of these issues will most likely be highlighted in the FHWA Finding for this year.

# Current Process Issues

Here are some of the known programs where MnDOT has had some MPO coordination issues in past that needed improvement;

- Public transit capital purchases
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) projects
- Rail Crossing Safety Program projects
- District C – Small Programs projects (examples: Rest Areas, Historical Properties, weigh stations, and et)
- Approval date of the final STIP (this year is the first time for this issue).

# Past Improvement Efforts

## Transit Capital Purchases -

- Transit Office did not understand the difficulty they were placing on MPOs by not providing a list of transit capital projects for the new STIP and TIPs until March or April. OTSM has since walked them through a better timeline.
- Transit Office falsely assumed the public transit systems were sharing their capital projects list for the STIP with MPOs. They have since changed the process so that both MPO and transit system are copied on the list.
- Personnel changes within Transit has resulted in a loss of some key knowledge that OTSM is trying to help rebuild.

# Past Improvement Efforts

## Highway Safety Improvement Program Projects -

- A MnDOT District Planner has been added to the statewide project selection team for local HSIP projects.
- Districts are responsible for state HSIP candidate projects and should be coordinating with MPOs. The level of that MPO coordination has varied from district-to-district and is still a work in progress.
- Brian Gage at OTSM, who is a registered traffic engineer himself, has been meeting with MnDOT's safety office to go over some of these issues and work towards a better process in the future.

# Past Improvement Efforts

## Rail Crossing Safety Program Projects –

- This program has a relatively new Program Manager that has had limited exposure to the STIP & TIP programming process. OTSM has been working with her to expand her understanding.
- Confusion and transfers between federal funds and state funds are causing some of the issues. OTSM has a new District C SRC Coordinator (just like each district), which should help improve the constant need for STIP & TIP changes in the future.

# Past Improvement Efforts

## District C Small Programs Projects –

- OTSM has installed a new District C SRC Coordinator to help manage multiple District C programs.
- OTSM now requires all of its specialty offices to attend a special STIP Guidance Training, so they are aware of MPO coordination requirements.
- OTSM is pushing all District C Programs that use federal funds to have their projects selected by no later than Year 3 of the STIP.



# Moving Forward



# Improvement Steps for the 2021-2024 STIP Process

1. MnDOT will review any Findings by FHWA regarding MPO coordination and develop an action plan to address them.
  - A. MnDOT will internally discuss any specific Findings with the appropriate MnDOT Office and seek ideas from that Office on how they intend to correct the situation.
  - B. MnDOT will meet jointly with the MPO executive directors to discuss the Findings and get their input/support for proposed ideas to correct the situation.
  - C. An action plan will then be developed and reviewed with FHWA.

# Improvement Steps for the 2021-2024 STIP Process

2. All MnDOT offices that select projects to be programmed with federal funds will be required to attend a MnDOT STIP Guidance meeting in December.
  - A. District offices will continue to attend the meeting that they have always attended.
  - B. All MnDOT specialty offices will attend a special guidance meeting just for them.
  - C. Two of the focus points for those guidance meetings will be ways to improve the “Findings” areas highlighted by FHWA and improve overall coordination of project selection with the MPOs.

# Improvement Steps for the 2021-2024 STIP Process

3. OTSM will work more closely with the following offices to specifically improve MPO coordination.
  - A. Transit Office
  - B. Safety Office
  - C. Rail Office



# Improvement Steps for the 2021-2024 STIP Process

4. Many of MnDOT's District C small programs do not impact MPOs. However, OTSM will be reviewing them over the next year to see if it is appropriate for any of the offices in charge of those programs to come to a future MPO Directors meeting to discuss their program.

# Improvement Steps for the 2021-2024 STIP Process

5. OTSM will try to determine if the activities which slowed down the STIP approval this year, will continue into next year. If so, OTSM will seek to adjust the STIP schedule to avoid these delays for the 2021-2024 STIP if at all possible.

# Longer Range Issues Needing Further Discussion

- TIP and STIP Development Start Date
- Lead STIP versus a Lag STIP

# TIP and STIP Development Start Date

- A few of the MPO's begin their new 4-year TIP updates much earlier than the November kick-off of the STIP.
- Some of the districts have asked if the STIP update process could begin before November, to better accommodate their MPOs.
- MnDOT does not begin the next STIP update cycle before November, because we need the official fiscal forecast released in November as a starting point to determine the funding targets.
- Moving ahead of November would require significant discussions with other agencies and officials.



# Lead STIP Versus Lag STIP

- Currently MnDOT's STIP is considered a "Lag" STIP, because the new STIP is not adopted and approved until after the start of the first fiscal year of the STIP. (example: 2020-2023 STIP will be adopted in September).
- This lag causes some issues for MnDOT;
  - We are constantly having to amend the existing STIP with projects that are in the first year of the pending STIP in order to get them authorized.
  - These various amendments can cause issues for the local TIPs as well.
  - Our CHIMES database and the printed STIP are always in conflict during the overlap period.

# Lead STIP Versus Lag STIP

- One way to solve this problem is to switch the timing schedule for the STIP to a “Lead” STIP.
- In a Lead STIP environment, the pending new STIP would be approved by FHWA/FTA before the start of the state fiscal year on July 1.
- All of the STIP timelines would have to be cranked ahead in order to be completed by July 1.
- The timing of all the MPOs TIPs would also be significantly impacted by any type of change like this.
- More discussions on this topic will be forth coming to see if it is even a possible outcome.

# Questions?

Any additional questions or concerns about MnDOT's response to FHWA's Findings Process?





# STIP/TIP – Defining Regional Significance

# Regionally Significant Projects

- MPOs can identify transportation projects they feel are regionally significant to them and put them into their Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), regardless of whether they are using federal funding or not.
- If an identified regionally significant project is on a MnDOT state highway, then the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) must also include the listed project, even if it is not using any federal funds

# Regionally Significant Projects

- Ensuring that regionally significant projects funded with only state funds are listed in the STIP has not been a problem in Minnesota, since MnDOT currently lists its entire program within the STIP.



# TIP Development

- To develop their TIPs, several of the MPOs simply take their MnDOT district's draft list of projects for the STIP and incorporate that list within their own TIP.
- This has been a good approach because it ensures that all federally funded projects are listed in both the STIP & TIP, per the Federal requirements for STIP & TIP consistency.
- This approach also provides an opportunity for the MPO TIP to serve as a coordination vehicle for the region because it will show almost all the upcoming state projects occurring in the region and not just those federally funded or the very large regionally significant ones.



# Emerging Issue

- Incorporating nearly all of MnDOT's state funded only projects in the local MPO TIP has resulted in the rise of an issue for MnDOT.
- On its state funded only projects, MnDOT often wants to make very late cost, scope, or timing changes in order to manage its program funding the best it can.
- If a MnDOT project that is 100% state funded has been listed in an MPO TIP, there is currently no way for FHWA to differentiate a project the MPO considers regionally significant from one they do not.



# Emerging Issue

- As you know, there are certain levels of changes that require formal amendments or modifications to federally funded and regionally significant projects in both the STIP and TIP.
- For formal amendments, the time it takes to go through the process for both a TIP and STIP formal amendment can be considerable.
- Because FHWA has no way to distinguish which state only funded projects are “regionally significant” in the TIP & STIP, they are requiring all state only funded projects which meet the threshold for a TIP & STIP amendment or modification do so.

# Emerging Issue

- MnDOT agrees that some of the state funded projects qualify as regionally significant and need to go through the TIP & STIP amendment/modification process.
- However, some of the state only funded projects are simple asset preservation projects.
- These types of project would normally not meet the “regionally significant” criteria for the MPO TIP, but have been listed for communication, coordination, and simplicity reasons.

# Emerging Issue

- MnDOT is thus having to work through TIP & STIP amendments it would normally not have to.
- The end result has been project delays and cost increases to the agency, that are not necessary.



# New Approach for 2021-2024 STIP

To address this Issue in the future, MnDOT is looking to make the following process changes during the 2021-2024 STIP cycle;

- Each MnDOT district will ask their MPOs to identify which state funded only projects they consider to be regionally significant.
- For each project an MPO identifies as regionally significant, MnDOT will add those words to the project's description in the STIP.
- MnDOT requests that MPO's take the same approach to their own TIPs and identify those state funded only projects as "regionally significant" in their own TIP descriptions, unless the MPO chooses to only list regionally significant projects in their TIP.

# Learning Curve

Implementing this new process might expose the need for more communication and understanding between MnDOT and the MPOs.

- For MnDOT's part, this new approach may require our district staffs to engage more with the MPO staff as to why a project is being considered regionally significant to the MPO, when MnDOT does not believe it should be.
- For the MPO's part, this new approach may expose the MPO to some of the program management difficulties experienced by their MnDOT districts with trying to manage the delivery of the overall program in a year.
- Together, hopefully the district and MPO can find a balance between too high and too low of a bar for projects being regionally significant.

# Questions?

