



**NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
(NEPA MPO)**

**2021-2024 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT
PROGRAM (TIP)**

PROJECT SELECTION SUMMARY

Northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Summary of Project Selection Process for 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program

INTRODUCTION

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA), in conjunction with the Northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization (NEPA MPO) Technical Planning Committee and Policy Board, has developed its 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP identifies the region's highest priority transportation projects, develops a multi-year program of implementation and identifies available federal and non-federal funding for the programmed project phases. The TIP shows the estimated cost of each project and a projected schedule for completion of the project. The TIP covers a four-year period of investment, must be fiscally constrained, and is updated every two years through a cooperative effort of local, state and federal agencies, including participation by the general public.

BACKGROUND

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA), as a Local Development District (LDD), encompasses all of Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill, and Wayne counties. NEPA is also designated as a Metropolitan Planning Organization serving as the coordinating agency for transportation planning and programming in Carbon, Monroe, Pike, and Schuylkill counties. Since 1991, the Alliance has contracted an annual work program with PennDOT. This work program requires that NEPA convene a transportation planning committee on a regular basis.

Following the 2010 Census, an urbanized area was identified in the Stroudsburg area of Monroe County requiring NEPA's transition from a rural planning organization to a metropolitan planning organization. In 2013, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization (NEPA MPO) was established, consisting of Carbon, Monroe, Pike and Schuylkill Counties. Two committees were created to guide the NEPA MPO – The NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee and NEPA MPO Policy Board.

The NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee is comprised of sixteen (16) voting members that include two (2) representatives from each of the four MPO counties, three (3) transit representatives, a representative from the Urbanized Area, the planning and programming engineer from PennDOT Districts 4-0 and 5-0, a PennDOT Central Office representative, and a representative from NEPA. The NEPA MPO Policy Board is comprised of 5 voting members that include one representative from each of the four MPO counties, appointed by the NEPA Alliance Board of Directors and a transportation professional from PennDOT Central Office. The NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee and NEPA MPO Policy Board are guided by Operational Procedures, which were adopted in October 2013.

With the establishment of the NEPA MPO, the development of a long range transportation plan (LRTP) was required. The NEPA MPO adopted its first LRTP in March 2016 and recently updated its Long Range Transportation Plan as it is required to be updated every four years. The LRTP identifies the major transportation projects, programs and policies needed for the next twenty-five years and establishes the vision and goals that guide future decisions affecting transportation facilities, infrastructure and services in the region. As part of its recent update, extensive outreach was conducted to identify projects for inclusion in the LRTP, including solicitation of projects from municipalities, transportation stakeholders and the general public. Following a public comment period, the 2045 LRTP was adopted by the NEPA MPO on April 21, 2020.

2021-2024 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) DEVELOPMENT

Financial Guidance

One of the first crucial steps in the development of Pennsylvania's Twelve Year Program (TYP), the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and each regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the development of Financial Guidance which establishes the framework for funding projects throughout the Commonwealth. Financial Guidance describes the available revenues and funding distribution strategies that form the foundation in developing the TIP and TYP. Financial Guidance is developed by a collaboration of representatives from Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Rural Planning Organizations (RPOs), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and PennDOT, collectively known as the Financial Guidance Work Group.

The Financial Guidance Work Group reviewed funding streams and formula allocations from various federal and state sources and developed a basis for project funding on the 2021-2024 TIP. Funding formulas for the first and second year of the 2021 Transportation Program remain unchanged for most funding categories; however, a shift in funding will occur in 2023 and 2024 and going forward. Several factors converged to influence the shift in the funding formulas. First, funding formulas were modified to reflect Transportation Performance Management (TPM) requirements and an asset management philosophy based upon Lowest Life Cycle Costs (LLCC). In addition, due to the imminent expiration of the FAST Act and uncertainty with the viability of the Highway Trust Fund, anticipated available federal highway, bridge and transit funds reflect a zero percent revenue growth from anticipated 2020 apportionment levels for the entire twelve years of the Program. At the same time, anticipated funding will be shifted to increase funding for the Interstate Highway System in order to meet federal performance requirements.

As a result of the Financial Guidance formula changes, funding for regional TIPs has been significantly decreased. Funding available for the NEPA MPO regional TIP will decrease by approximately 25% beginning in 2023. As a result, difficult decisions were required effecting current TIP projects and the MPO's ability to meet the transportation needs of the region, under the stress of maintaining fiscal constraint within the region's TIP and TYP.

Bridge and Highway TIP Development Meetings

Extensive collaboration between representatives of NEPA, the PennDOT Districts and the four counties was necessary to develop the 2021-2024 Bridge and Highway TIP. This collaboration

was essential to determine regional priorities while still maintaining critical infrastructure and meeting federal and state mandated performance measures. To meet this task, key MPO committee members representing the MPO counties, PennDOT, FHWA and NEPA deliberated through a series of TIP development meetings. Progress and developments were regularly reported back to the full Technical Planning Committee and Policy Board throughout the process.

The first TIP development meeting was held on September 27, 2019 at District 5-0. The meeting included district planning and engineering staff, as well as representatives from PennDOT Central Office, FHWA, NEPA Alliance and Carbon, Monroe and Schuylkill county planning staff. The goal of the initial meeting was to review the status of 2019 TIP projects and potential carryover projects into the 2021 TIP. In addition, projects that were on the NEPA MPO LRTP's Decade of Investment list were discussed for further positioning on the investment program. District bridge engineers also identified bridge projects that may be eligible for more intensive preservation maintenance activities rather than replacement.

A second meeting with District 5-0 was held on October 29, 2019. An overview of the funding amounts for each funding category were provided. A review of projects eligible for NHPP funding was also discussed. NHPP funding is particularly limited due to shifts in this funding to the Interstate TIP. After a review of the NHPP projects, shifts in other funding types were made and where possible, some projects were pushed out into the later years of the TIP. The use of Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funding was discussed and its application to current eligible project funding needs in Carbon County. It was decided that District 5-0 staff would continue their efforts to shift available funding into the proposed projects and determine where there are shortfalls.

A third TIP development meeting was held at District 5-0 on December 13, 2019. District staff provided an overview of the projects proposed for inclusion in the 2021 TIP and their funding sources. Due to fiscal constraints, some projects were reduced in scope from betterment projects to resurfacing projects. In addition, district staff indicated that they were seeking additional funding from Central Office to complete several large projects on the current 2019 TIP and thereby provide relief to the financial stress upon the 2021 TIP. This strategy would allow for other projects to advance on the 2021 TIP in term and scope. District staff also discussed STU funding from other regions and eligible projects to utilize those funds.

The first TIP development meeting with District 4-0 was held on November 4, 2019 to discuss projects in Pike County. The meeting was attended by District 4-0 planning and engineering staff and representatives of PennDOT Central Office, NEPA Alliance and the Pike County Planning Office. The district bridge engineer provided an overview of the bridge status and needs within Pike County.

A second meeting with District 4-0 was held on December 11, 2019. The meeting was also attended by NEPA Alliance staff and Pike County planning staff. District 4-0 discussed carryover projects from the 2019 TIP and proposed projects for the 2021 TIP. The proposed 2021 TIP projects placed an emphasis on beginning preliminary engineering on bridges in poor condition in order to position them for project delivery if additional funding becomes available. Following

this meeting, Pike County planning staff raised concerns that a high priority project to reconstruct the remaining section of SR 2001 was not carried over to the 2021 TIP.

A subsequent meeting with District 4-0 to discuss the SR 2001 project was held on February 6, 2020. In addition to the regular attendees, the meeting was attended by State Senator Lisa Baker, State Representative Rosemary Brown and the Pike County Commissioners. At this meeting, PennDOT 4-0 staff indicated that preliminary engineering for the SR 2001 Reconstruction Project is to be included in Year 9 of the TYP. District 4-0 staff also stated that efforts to advance the project earlier in the TYP will be made if funding opportunities become possible.

Transit TIP Development

The NEPA MPO region has three fixed route transit providers – Carbon County Community Transit (managed by Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority), Monroe County Transportation Authority and Schuylkill Transit System. Each transit provider works with PennDOT Central Office to develop its transit TIP. Projects included in the transit TIPs reflect priorities established in the NEPA MPO Coordinated Transit-Human Services Coordination Plan and capital priorities and needs expressed by the transit providers.

Draft TIP Review

A conference call was conducted with representatives of NEPA, PennDOT Central Office, PennDOT District 4-0 and 5-0, on January 13, 2020. During the conference call, the draft Bridge and Highway TIP and TYP were discussed and reviewed. The draft TIP and TYP documents were then shared with the NEPA MPO Technical Committee at a business meeting on January 21, 2020. The Interstate Management TIP and TYP were also shared with the NEPA MPO Technical Committee at a business meeting on March 24, 2020.

On April 21, 2020, the NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee completed a final review of the draft 2019-2022 Transportation Improvement Program. The NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee subsequently approved the release of the TIP for public comment period dates and Public Involvement Plan (PIP) outreach activities.

PENNDOT CONNECTS

In December 2016, PennDOT implemented a new policy, PennDOT Connects, to improve our transportation systems and our communities through collaborative planning. Collaboration provides the opportunity for details unique to communities to be identified and discussed for each transportation project during the planning phase, prior to developing project scopes and cost estimates. As part of the PennDOT Connect process, outreach to local governments was conducted for each new project on the 2019-2022 TIP and within LRTP fiscal constraint. This outreach resulted in phone calls, emails, meetings and field views with municipal officials to discuss specific areas of impacts, including safety issues, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, transit and multimodal considerations, stormwater management, utility issues, freight, traffic congestion and other local concerns. PennDOT Connects collaboration with local governments will continue as these projects are designed and advanced for construction.

2021-2024 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN OUTREACH

The NEPA MPO followed the procedures outlined in the Public Involvement Plan and related documents for the public comment period for the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Plan. The NEPA MPO held a 30-day public comment period on the draft TIP beginning on May 11, 2020 and ending on June 12, 2020. Notice of the Public Comment Period was placed in six newspapers within the region and was announced through various social media platforms, electronic newsletters and email communiques.

The 2021 TIP and TYP documents were placed on the NEPA website. Typically, copies of the plan documents are available at 10 locations in the region, however, many of these public facilities were closed due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The remaining locations were open to review the documents by appointment only. These locations are listed below.

Monroe County Planning Commission
Monroe County Transportation Authority
Pike County Administration Building

A virtual public hearing was held on Tuesday, May 19, 2020 by phone and videoconference only due to physical meeting restrictions in place at the time. A press release announcing the opening of the public comment period and virtual public meeting was shared with media outlets. Notification of the availability of the draft 2021-2024 TIP for review and public comment period was sent to various Native American Tribes and Nations that have or may have interest in our MPO region. All outreach activities included instructions to the public of the opportunity and means to submit written or verbal comments.

As part of these public notification efforts, information was also included concerning the June 16, 2020 virtual joint business meeting of the NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee and Policy Board, at which 2021-2024 TIP adoption actions are scheduled to be considered.