

# **Northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Summary of Project Selection Process for 2019-2022 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 draft 2019-2022 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 had 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, development of a long range transportation plan (LRTP) was required. The development of the LRTP began in late 2014 to identify the major transportation projects, programs and policies needed for the next twenty-five years and establish the vision and goals that guide future decisions affecting transportation facilities, infrastructure and services in the region. Over the following 18 months, 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 LRTP was adopted by the NEPA MPO on March 15, 2016.

### **2019-2022 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) DEVELOPMENT**

In order to be included on the TIP, programs and projects must be included on the NEPA MPO's adopted Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) or addressed through reserve line items included on the LRTP.

As part of the development of the NEPA MPO LRTP, an exhaustive solicitation process was conducted which identified numerous candidate projects and needs to be further evaluated for possible inclusion in the LRTP and TIP Update. This evaluation entailed several successive steps that ultimately led to the selection of a specific collection of projects and programmatic recommendations.

This process included:

- ***Candidate Project Identification:*** initial project needs and concerns were compiled directly from existing plans, an extensive background document review and the overall stakeholder outreach and public engagement processes.
- ***Candidate Project Pre-Screening:*** initial candidate projects were pre-screened in cooperation with the NEPA MPO and categorized into appropriate line-items, funding categories, candidate projects, etc.
- ***Candidate Project Prioritization:*** non-system preservation candidates from the initial list were evaluated by the NEPA MPO LRTP Steering Committee using customized project evaluation criteria and weighting factors through a software tool known as Decision Lens.
- ***Financial Constraint:*** rough order-of-magnitude costs were assigned to each candidate project and passed through a financial screening process versus available revenues to identify priority projects to include in the LRTP.

Following a review of the projects identified in the Twelve Year Program and the LRTP, PennDOT Central Office and PennDOT Districts 4-0 and 5-0 staff worked to identify projects for inclusion in the 2019-2022 TIP. PennDOT staff identified projects that were included in the 2017-2020 TIP that required carryover onto the 2019-2022 TIP. In addition, new projects were identified from the Twelve Year Program and LRTP for inclusion on the 2019-2022 TIP. In identifying new projects for the 2019-2022, guidelines from PennDOT's Statewide Transportation Investment Plan were followed to ensure that projects identified in the NEPA MPO TIP are consistent with improving the performance of the transportation system in the region.

A review of the carryover projects from the 2017-2020 TIP and proposed new projects for inclusion on the 2019-2022 TIP was held with the county planners at District 5-0 in Allentown on November 28, 2017 and District 4-0 in Dunmore on December 6, 2017. A review of the draft TIP was held with the NEPA MPO Technical Committee at the meeting on December 19, 2017. On May 16, 2018, the NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee completed a final review of the draft 2019-2022 Transportation Improvement Program and related documents including the Air Quality Conformity Report, TIP Administrative Actions and Amendments Summary and Public Involvement Summary. The NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee subsequently approved the TIP public comment period dates and outreach plan.

### **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 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. This outreach resulted in phone calls, emails, meetings and field views with municipal officials to discuss specific areas including safety issues, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, transit and multimodal considerations, stormwater management and utility issues. Collaboration with local governments will continue as these projects are designed and constructed.

### **2019-2022 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 2019-2022 Transportation Improvement Plan. The NEPA MPO held a 30-day public comment period on the draft TIP beginning on June 15, 2018 and ending on July 17, 2018. Notice of the Public Comment Period was placed in six newspapers. Copies of the plans were available at 10 locations and on the NEPA website.

A public hearing was held on Tuesday, July 17, 2018 at 9:30 AM at the Monroe County Transportation Authority, 134 MCTA Drive, Swiftwater, PA 18370. Additional meeting locations that had remote access to the public meeting are listed below.

- Carbon County Courthouse Annex, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 2 Hazard Square, Jim Thorpe, PA
- Pike County Administration Building, 506 Broad St., Milford, PA
- Schuylkill Transportation System, Union Station, 1 Progress Circle, Pottsville, PA

A press release announcing the opening of the public comment period and public meeting was shared with media outlets. Notification of the public comment period was sent to various Native American Tribes and Nations that have or may have interest in our MPO region.