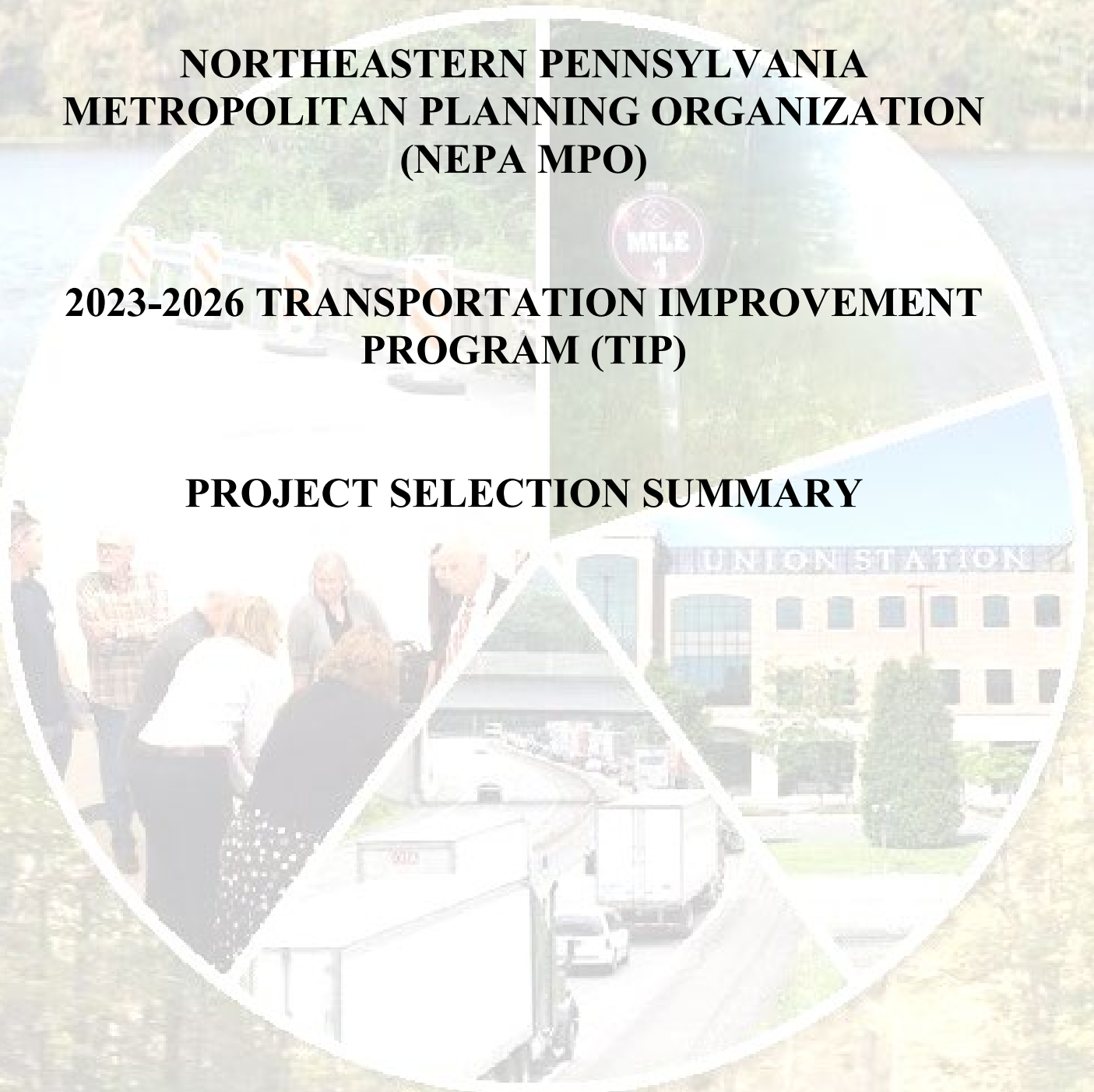


**NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA  
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION  
(NEPA MPO)**

**2023-2026 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT  
PROGRAM (TIP)**

**PROJECT SELECTION SUMMARY**



# **Northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Summary of Project Selection Process for 2023-2026 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 2023-2026 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, NEPA 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 updated it in April 2020, 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.

## **2023-2026 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 2023-2026 TIP. During development of the 2021-2024 TIP, changes to the funding formulas were applied for FFY 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 uncertainty with the federal transportation reauthorization legislation and the viability of the Highway Trust Fund, allocations for highway, bridge and transit funds reflected flat funding. At the same time, funding was shifted to increase funding for the Interstate Highway System to meet federal performance requirements.

As a result of the Financial Guidance formula changes, funding for regional TIPs were significantly decreased. Funding available for the NEPA MPO regional TIP decreased by approximately 25% beginning in 2023. As a result, at the beginning of the 2023-2026 TIP development process, difficult decisions were considered, affecting current TIP projects and the MPO's ability to meet the transportation needs of the region. Many bridge and highway projects were pushed into later years of the TIP/TYP to maintain fiscal constraint.

Fortunately, during the 2023 TIP Update development process, Congress passed the Improving Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA), which later became known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (BIL). The legislation invests \$110 billion of new funds for roads, bridges, and major projects, and reauthorizes the surface transportation program for the next five years. Pennsylvania's share of the bridge and highway funding is estimated at \$11 billion for highways and \$1.6 billion for

bridges. The additional funding was distributed to the MPO/RPO regions through the existing financial guidance formulas. As a result of the additional funding, many projects that had been pushed to later years of the TIP/TYP were able to be advanced. In addition to the formula funds, the BIL established many new discretionary programs. NEPA will monitor the implementation of the new programs to identify opportunities to capture additional funding for the region.

#### Bridge and Highway TIP Development Meetings

Extensive collaboration between representatives of NEPA, the PennDOT Districts and the four counties was necessary to develop the 2023-2026 Bridge and Highway TIP. This collaboration was essential to determine regional priorities while still maintaining critical infrastructure in accordance with 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.

TIP development meetings with District 5-0 were held on October 5<sup>th</sup>, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, December 7<sup>th</sup> and December 16<sup>th</sup>. TIP development meetings were held with District 4-0 on October 13<sup>th</sup> and December 16<sup>th</sup>. Summaries of each development meeting are attached.

#### 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 are consistent with 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 18, 2022. 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 by email on February 15, 2022. The Interstate Management TIP and TYP were also shared with the NEPA MPO Technical Committee by email on February 15, 2022 .

On April 17, 2022, the NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee completed a final review of the draft 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program. The NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee subsequently approved the release of the full draft TIP for public comment period scheduled 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 2023-2026 TIP. 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.

### **2023-2026 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM OUTREACH**

The NEPA MPO followed the procedures outlined in the Public Involvement Plan and related documents for the public comment period for the 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program. The NEPA MPO held a 30-day public comment period on the draft TIP beginning on May 2, 2022 and ending on May 31, 2022. 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 2023 TIP and TYP documents were placed on the NEPA website. Copies of the plan documents were available at 10 locations in the region. These locations are listed below.

Carbon Co. Office of Planning & Development	410 Center Avenue	Jim Thorpe, PA
Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority	1060 Lehigh Street	Allentown, PA
Monroe County Planning Commission	701 Main Street, Suite 405	Stroudsburg, PA
Monroe County Transportation Authority	134 MCTA Drive	Swiftwater, PA
Pike County Community Planning Office	837 US 6, Unit 3	Shohola, PA
Schuylkill County Planning Commission	401 N. Second Street (Courthouse)	Pottsville, PA
Schuylkill Transportation System	1 Progress Circle	Pottsville, PA
PennDOT District 4-0	55 Keystone Industrial Park	Dunmore, PA
PennDOT District 5-0	1002 W. Hamilton Street	Allentown, PA
NEPA Alliance	1151 Oak Street	Pittston, PA

A public hearing was held on May 17, 2022 at locations in each of the MPO counties:

Monroe County Transportation Authority, 134 MCTA Drive, Swiftwater, PA  
Carbon County Building, 44 Susquehanna Ave., Jim Thorpe, PA  
Pike County Community Planning Office, 837 US 6, Unit 3, Shohola, PA  
Schuylkill Economic Development Corporation, Union Station, 1 Progress Circle, Pottsville, PA

The public hearing was also held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

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 2023-2026 TIP for review and public comment period was sent to the Native American Tribes and Nations that have or may have interest in our MPO region listed below.

Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma  
Cayuga Nation

Delaware Nation  
Delaware Tribe  
Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma  
Oneida Indian Nation  
Oneida Nation of Wisconsin  
Onondaga Nation  
Seneca Nation of Indians  
Seneca-Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma  
Shawnee Tribe  
St. Regis Mohawk Tribe  
Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican Nation of Wisconsin  
Tonawanda Band of Seneca  
Tuscarora Nation

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 21, 2022 joint business meeting of the NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee and Policy Board, at which 2023-2026 TIP adoption actions are scheduled to be considered.