

Summary of Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment (OIP) Staff Recommended Changes to the SMART SCALE Program as presented to the Commonwealth Transportation Board through July 19, 2023

Disclaimer: This list was developed by CA-MPO staff as a summary of proposed changes for the purposes of organizing feedback. Full discussions informing the development of each of these recommendations can be found by viewing the discussions at the CTB meetings.

1. The Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering reducing the application cap for all entities eligible to submit applications. For Tier 1 entities, which is all of the submitting entities in the CA-MPO and TJPDC region, the application cap would be reduced from 4 applications to 2 applications.

Comments Received:

- How have we been performing as a region? If our applications have been complete and prepared, more projects submissions is beneficial. (Policy Board)

2. To facilitate application readiness at time of submission, the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering processes that will require final applications to be complete prior to submission. This would mean that all resolutions, approvals, reports, detailed project schedules, cost estimates, and other required attachments would need to be completed prior to the submission of the final application and could not be added later. The CTB is also considering changing the terminology for the pre-screening conditional review from "conditional screen in" if a pre-application indicates deficiencies in application readiness at the time the pre-application is submitted to "conditional screen out."

Comments Received:

- This seems to make sense to ensure applications are complete. (Policy Board)

3. To address project cost overruns and scheduling delays for locally administered projects that have received funding through SMART SCALE, the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering tying consensus funding decisions to entity performance in project delivery.

Comments Received:

- This seems to make sense to ensure performance in project delivery. (Policy Board)
- Challenges with project delivery doesn't negate that there are needed improvements. There needs to be more clarity on what options are available if the locality has had past issues with project delivery, and an understanding of what steps a locality would need to take to address those concerns. (MPO Tech)

4. To better capture the future impacts of project implementation on congestion impacts, the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering using 10-year future growth to determine congestion benefit scores instead of current congestion conditions.

Comments Received:

- It would make sense to consider both existing and 10-year growth congestion scores. (Policy Board)

5. MPOs, PDCs, and transit agencies are only eligible to submit applications through the High Priority Program (HPP). Localities are eligible to submit applications through both the District Grant Program and the HPP. To address concerns that the High Priority Program (HPP) is being used to implement small projects (projects with cost estimates < \$10 million) that don't have meaningful impacts on the improvement of Corridors of Statewide Significance or Regional Networks, the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering limiting projects that are eligible to receive funding through the HPP to the following types:
- New Capacity Highway
 - Managed Lanes
 - New or Improved Interchanges
 - New or Improved Passenger Rail Stations or Service
 - Freight Rail Improvements
 - Fixed Guideway Transit

Comments Received:

- I think bike/ped projects should also be considered – it seems like they could figure out a way to include them in the process. (Policy Board)
- This would exclude all non-motorized travel modes (ped and bike, e-scooters, etc.) and traditional transit service (buses, bus rapid transit) from the high priority project funding pot. In conjunction with Bullet 1 (where each jurisdiction can only submit 2 projects), it seems SMARTSCALE projects will be driven towards larger projects for motorized modes only (automobiles, rail, fixed guideway transit). This leaves some smaller regions that don't have light rail and rail service to only be able to apply automobile-centric projects for the HPP. (CTAC)

6. To address the concern about small projects (projects with a cost-estimate of < \$10 million) being funded through the High Priority Program (HPP), the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering adjustments to how HPP funding is allocated. The current funding steps are as follows:
- Step 1 allocates each VDOT construction district's grant program funding on a district-wide basis.
 - Step 2 allocates HPP funding on a district-wide basis for projects that would've been funded through each district's grant program if they had been eligible to be submitted through that program.
 - Step 3 allocates HPP funding on a statewide basis.

The proposed change would eliminate the current Step 2 and would move straight from Step 1 to Step 3 shown above.

Comments Received:

- This would help streamline the process. (Policy Board)

7. SMART SCALE includes "land use coordination" as a scoring criteria in the evaluation of applications. The goal of the land use coordination measure, as stated in the SMART SCALE Technical Guide, is to "improve the consistency of the connection between local comprehensive plan goals for transportation-efficient land use and transportation infrastructure design, multi-modal accommodation, and system operations." Concerns raised about the current use of the land use score is that it accounts for where a project is located, not expected project

outcomes. There is also concern that the land use score has disproportionately driven the types of projects that are selected for funding.

To address these concerns, the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering a change to eliminate land use as a standalone score. Instead, the Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering an adjustment to use the land use scoring factor as a multiplier - the calculated land use benefit would be converted to a multiplier and would be multiplied against the other calculated project benefits to enhance overall project benefits determined by the other scoring factors.

Comments Received:

- This seems to make sense, but only if property weighted. It is hard to assess the impacts of this. (Policy Board)
- The land use score often acts like a proxy for latent demand or other benefits that aren't captured in the other scoring factors. The Avon Street Multi-Modal Improvements project, for example, didn't demonstrate a safety benefit based on how SMART SCALE scores that factor. However, improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure throughout the region will have safety benefits. (MPO Tech)

8. To account for the elimination of land use as a standalone score, the weights for the other SMART SCALE scoring factors would need to be adjusted. The Commonwealth Transportation Board is considering the following revisions to the factor weighting:

Current Weighting						
Factor	Safety	Congestion	Accessibility	Land Use	Economic Development	Environment
Type A	5%	45%	15%	20%	5%	10%
Type B	20%	15%	20%	15%	20%	Up to -5 Points 10%
Type C	25%	15%	15%	10%	25%	10%
Type D	30%	10%	10%	10%	30%	10%

Staff Recommended Weighting						
Factor	Safety	Congestion	Accessibility	Land Use	Economic Development	Environment
Type A	20% (+15%)	50% (+5%)	15%		5%	10%
Type B	25% (+5%)	25% (+10%)	20%	Up to 100% Added	20%	Up to -5 Points 10%
Type C	30% (+5%)	20% (+5%)	15%		25%	10%
Type D	40% (+10%)	10% (+0%)	10%		30%	10%

The impacts to Round 5 SMART SCALE project selection if all changes were in effect for the past round are summarized below (the CA-MPO region is area type B, the rest of the PDC is area type C):

All Solutions Scenario

Funding Scenario

HPP
EligibilityDGP
Eligibility

Steps

Consensus

Factor
Weighting

Typology

Methods

Scoring



- Considers modifications to Land Use and Congestion, HPP-Eligible Project Types, and Elimination of Step 2
- Total number of projects funded in urban is 49% versus 51% in rural

The average total cost of funded projects raised from \$15.1M to \$21.8M

The average total request of funded projects raised from \$10.1M to \$13.9M (removes 39 projects)

For Principal Improvement Type

- Bike & Ped - 51 to 13
- Highway - 98 to 99
- Bus Transit – 3 to 1

For Area Type

- A - 39 to 29
- B - 34 to 26
- C - 23 to 14
- D - 56 to 44

General Comments Received:

- Observation that the highway category stays the same while bike/ped and transit projects take a larger impact. (Policy Board)
- The proposed changes appear to move in the opposite direction of the community feedback we have received so far [through our LRTP public engagement]. At first read, it also seems like these changes will make many of our local communities' comprehensive initiatives more difficult - particularly those related to land-use planning, affordable and equitable access to transportation, accessibility, among others. Without knowing specifics about the projects being referenced, I think many in our community would prefer 3 times as many transit projects (3 instead of 1) and 4 times as many bike/ped projects (51 instead of 13!) in return for a 1% decrease in highway projects (98 instead of 99). (CTAC)