

# INTRODUCTION: REGIONAL SOLICITATION FOR TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

The Regional Solicitation is a project selection process to award federal and regional transportation funding to projects that meet regional transportation needs. The solicitation is part of the Metropolitan Council's federally required continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning process for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The funding program and related rules and requirements are established by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and administered locally through collaboration with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

The online application can be accessed at: <https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/Planning-2/Transportation-Funding/Regional-Solicitation.aspx>

## Federal Program Overview

As authorized by the most recent federal surface transportation funding act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), projects will be selected for funding as part of four federal programs: Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP), the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program, Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program, and the Carbon Reduction Program (CRP). It is assumed that federal funding will continue to be available in 2030 and 2031, but these funding years are outside of the expiration of IIJA. Funding levels, programs, and eligibility may change with a new federal surface transportation program, and the Regional Solicitation will need to adjust accordingly.

## Active Transportation Regional Sales Tax Overview

In 2023, the Minnesota Legislature approved a new regional sales tax for the seven-county region to support various transportation improvements. A portion of this new sales tax was established to provide a dedicated funding source to be distributed by the TAB for active transportation investments in the region. This new source of funding is expected to provide \$20 million to \$24 million annually for active transportation initiatives. A working group of TAB and technical members was established to provide policy recommendations for the 2026 Solicitation. The legislation includes the following criteria and prioritization of projects that are required to be considered and included in the solicitation:

1. The project's inclusion in a municipal or regional nonmotorized transportation system plan.
2. The extent to which policies or practices of the political subdivision encourage and promote complete streets planning, design and construction;
3. The extent to which the project supports connections between communities and to key destinations within a community;
4. Identified barriers or deficiencies in the nonmotorized transportation system;
5. Identified safety or health benefits;
6. Geographic equity in project benefits, with an emphasis on communities that are historically and currently underrepresented in local or regional planning; and
7. The ability of a grantee to maintain the active transportation infrastructure following project completion.

## Changes for the 2026 Funding Cycle

The Regional Solicitation process was redesigned following the 2024 funding cycle as part of a two-year effort called the Regional Solicitation Evaluation. The evaluation examined every aspect of the Solicitation to closely align funding decisions to the policy direction in Imagine 2050 and the 2050

Transportation Policy Plan (TPP). The evaluation included 25 listening sessions across the region, public outreach and surveys, policy and technical work groups, including over 100 technical stakeholders as part of seven special issue working groups. For the 2026 cycle, this process resulted in new funding categories, as well as in the integration of categories to award Regional Active Transportation Sales Tax funding to eligible projects.

## **Regional Solicitation Structure**

The Regional Solicitation is structured around Imagine 2050 goals, funding categories, and other project selection processes that are connected to regional policy in the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan. This structure creates a basis for establishing funding availability by goals and funding categories, funding targets, and minimum and maximum project awards by category.

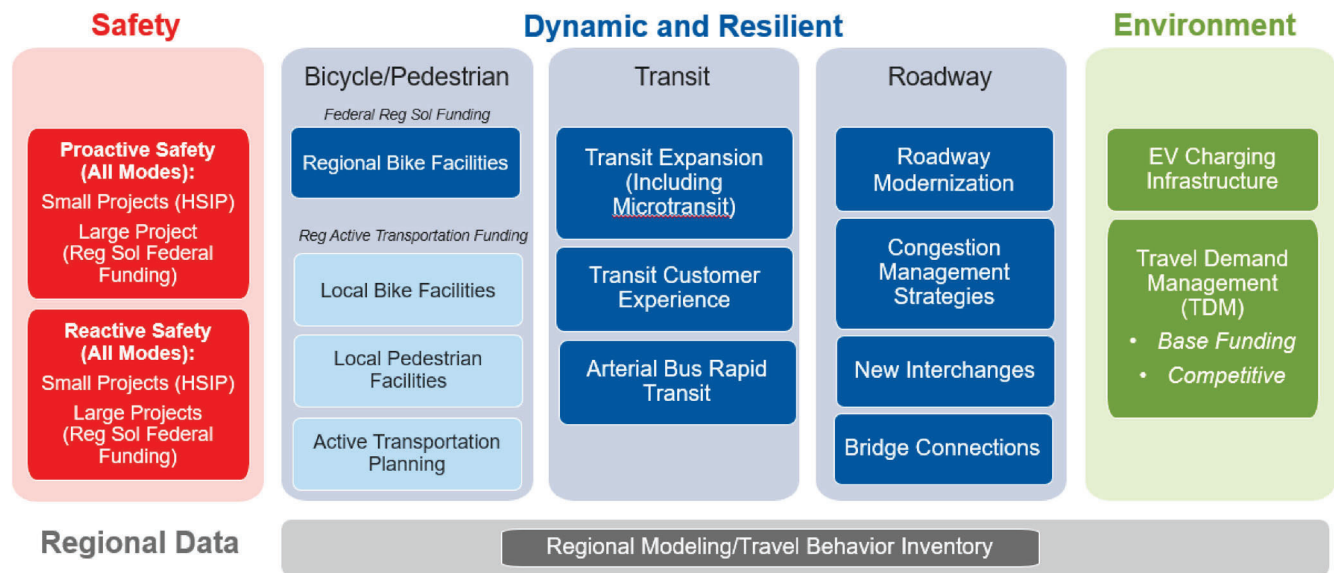
### ***Funding Categories***

As depicted in Figure 1, the funding categories are grouped into three of the five regional goals outlined in Imagine 2050:

1. Our communities are healthy and safe
2. Our region is dynamic and resilient
3. We lead on addressing climate change

Each of these regional goals includes separate funding categories as shown in Figure 1. Applicants for the Regional Solicitation will select the appropriate funding category for their proposed projects based on the guidance for each funding category. For instance, a roadway reconstruction project that includes a new sidewalk would apply under the Roadway Modernization funding category because that category is intended to fund roadway projects that include multimodal elements. While sidewalks are eligible under the Local Pedestrian Facilities category, that category is not intended to fund general improvements to the roadway. If the project sponsor wants to only submit the sidewalk portion of the project, then Local Pedestrian Facilities would be the appropriate funding category. The same project elements can only be submitted and scored in one funding category. If an applicant submits a project in the incorrect funding category, the application may be disqualified. It is advised that applicants contact Metropolitan Council staff prior to submission if there are any questions about which funding category is the most appropriate for their project.

Figure 1: Funding Categories



The goal area, Our Region is Equitable and Inclusive, is being proposed as a scoring measure called Community Considerations.

### Connection to the Regional Policy

One of the main updates to the 2026 Regional Solicitation process is the development of new funding categories and evaluation criteria to align with the 2050 TPP. The TPP is the region's long-range transportation plan, which was developed to meet federal requirements, reflect regional goals, and implement the transportation objectives and policies established in Imagine 2050, the regional development guide. It is useful to understand the intent behind both Imagine 2050 and the 2050 TPP to ensure that all projects funded through the Regional Solicitation meet these regional goals. These funds are intended to implement the region's transportation plan.

Table 1 illustrates the primary goals, objectives, and policies that link each Regional Solicitation funding category to regional policy. Each category may address additional goals, objectives and policies through the inclusion of additional evaluation criteria. There were two goal areas out of the five in Imagine 2050 that area not reflected as funding categories in Table 1. The goal of "Our region is equitable and inclusive" is not reflected as a standalone project category but instead is incorporated as scoring criteria for every funding category. The goal "We protect and restore natural systems" is also reflected as a scoring criterion (only in the Roadway Modernization, Congestion Management Strategies, New Interchanges, and Bridge Connections applications) and is not a funding category. These approaches may be revisited in the 2028 funding cycle pending any federal eligibility and program changes with a new federal surface transportation bill.

Projects funded through the Regional Solicitation do not need to be specifically named in the TPP because they must prove consistency with regional goals and policies when they pass the qualifying review step of the Regional Solicitation process. In addition, the scoring measures directly connect to the 2050 TPP so projects are more likely to be funded if they advance the 2050 TPP. Regionally significant projects (e.g., arterial bus rapid transit or new interchanges) may be amended into the TPP after selection if they are not already listed in the document.

**Table 1: Regional Solicitation Connection to Regional Policy**

Funding Categories	Imagine 2050 Primary Goal	Primary TPP Objectives or Policies
<b>Proactive Safety</b>  <b>Reactive Safety</b>	Our communities are healthy and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries from traffic crashes and incidents on the transportation system by 2050 using the <a href="#">Safe System Approach</a>.</li> <li>• Emphasize and prioritize the safety of people outside of vehicles in the transportation right-of-way.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Bicycle Facilities</b>  <b>Local Bicycle Facilities,</b>  <b>Local Pedestrian Facilities</b>  <b>Active Transportation Planning</b>	Our region is dynamic and resilient.  Our communities are healthy and safe;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People have better travel options beyond driving alone to meet their daily needs, with a focus on improving travel times, reliability, directness, and affordability.</li> <li>• People do not die or face life-changing injuries when using any form of transportation.</li> <li>• People can increase physical activity with more opportunities to walk, roll, or bike.</li> </ul>
<b>Transit Expansion</b>  <b>Transit Customer Experience</b>	Our region is dynamic and resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People have better travel options beyond driving alone to meet their daily needs, with a focus on improving travel times, reliability, directness, and affordability.</li> <li>• People have more predictable travel times when traveling on highways, with a focus on reducing excessive delays.</li> </ul>
<b>Roadway Modernization</b>	Our region is dynamic and resilient  Our communities are healthy and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People do not die or face life-changing injuries when using any form of transportation.</li> <li>• People have better travel options beyond driving alone to meet their daily needs, with a focus on improving travel times, reliability, directness, and affordability.</li> <li>• People and businesses can rely on predictable and cost-effective movement of freight and goods.</li> <li>• The region's transportation system protects, restores, and enhances natural systems (air, water, vegetation, and habitat quality).</li> </ul>

Funding Categories	Imagine 2050 Primary Goal	Primary TPP Objectives or Policies
<b>Congestion Management Strategies</b>  <b>New Interchanges</b>	Our region is dynamic and resilient  Our communities are healthy and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People do not die or face life-changing injuries when using any form of transportation.</li> <li>• People have more predictable travel times when traveling on highways, with a focus on reducing excessive delays.</li> <li>• People and businesses can rely on predictable and cost-effective movement of freight and goods.</li> <li>• The region's transportation system protects, restores, and enhances natural systems (air, water, vegetation, and habitat quality).</li> </ul>
<b>Bridge Connections</b>	Our region is dynamic and resilient  Our communities are healthy and safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People and businesses trust that transportation infrastructure and services will withstand and recover quickly from natural and human-caused disruptions.</li> <li>• People have better travel options beyond driving alone to meet their daily needs, with a focus on improving travel times, reliability, directness, and affordability.</li> <li>• People do not die or face life-changing injuries when using any form of transportation.</li> <li>• People and businesses can rely on predictable and cost-effective movement of freight and goods.</li> <li>• The region's transportation system protects, restores, and enhances natural systems (air, water, vegetation, and habitat quality).</li> </ul>
<b>EV Charging Infrastructure</b>	We lead on addressing climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The region's transportation system minimizes its greenhouse gas emissions.</li> <li>• People have more reliable access to zero emissions vehicle infrastructure.</li> </ul>
<b>Travel Demand Management (TDM)</b>	We lead on addressing climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The region's transportation system minimizes its greenhouse gas emissions.</li> <li>• By 2050, the region reduces vehicle miles traveled by 20 percent per capita below 2019 levels.</li> <li>• Use travel demand management (TDM) to plan, fund, and promote multimodal travel options and alternatives to driving alone.</li> </ul>

## *Other Project Selection Processes*

There are several project types that are selected with these funds in processes different than using an application to score and rank projects. Information may still be collected on these categories to contribute to evaluation results and there may still be rules applied to these categories, such as minimum and maximum awards.

- **Arterial bus rapid transit** projects are selected for funding by TAB based on regional planning processes that evaluate and prioritize similar projects from a single applicant, Metro Transit. Metro Transit regularly updates their evaluation of arterial bus rapid transit priorities (approximately every 5 years) and presents the priorities to TAB for review and comment. These priorities are also formalized in the TPP through an amendment. The evaluation process includes robust community engagement and stakeholder input and coordination. Metro Transit will provide a recommended arterial bus rapid transit line to TAB for consideration and final selection that will also include requested performance metrics such as new anticipated transit ridership.
- **Travel demand management (TDM) base funding** is a funding amount established to sustain a base-level of funding for ongoing TDM activities delivered by a set of regional TDM partners that include Commuter Programs and transportation management organizations (TMOs). These partners have a long history of providing valuable TDM services in key regional markets and sustaining the program is an important foundational component of being able to expand to new markets through the TDM funding category. The TDM base funding will be evaluated by Council staff and TDM stakeholders with every Regional Solicitation. Commuter Programs and the TMOs will submit a workplan for each two-year funding cycle that will be vetted by the Regional TDM Program Manager through the regional TDM advisory process. A recommendation will then be provided to TAB for their consideration and final selection.
- **Regional Model and Travel Behavior Inventory (TBI)** is funding in order to support the data needs of project implementation for local and regional projects. This funding ties directly to the TPP's overarching policy to "maintain a robust and current set of data, maps, plans, processes, and applications to support regional transportation planning." The program is evaluated every 10 years to establish a funding program recommendation from TAB in partnership with commitments from MnDOT and Met Council to provide transportation planning funds. The Council will submit a workplan and funding request for each two-year funding cycle that will be vetted by the Regional Travel Forecasting Committee. A recommendation will then be provided to TAB prior for their consideration and final selection.
- **Community Considerations Funding Priority:** Projects receiving a high score on each of the three measures, if any, will be considered for funding priority. Up to one (1) project from each solicitation round that was not otherwise selected for funding will be recommended for full funding in either the Roadway, Bike/Ped, Transit, or Environment categories.

These project selection processes can be reviewed and changed to accommodate new approaches every two years with adoption of the Regional Solicitation, at the discretion of TAB and the Met Council.

## *Funding Availability and Targets and Minimum and Maximum Project Awards*

A total of approximately \$250 million in federal funds is anticipated to be available in this solicitation for program years 2030 and 2031. As shown in Table 2, funding targets have been approved by TAB to give applicants an understanding of the general funding levels based on historic funding levels. TAB reserves the right to adjust these funding levels depending on the amount and quality of projects submitted, especially as this is the first Regional Solicitation under a new structure. It is expected that funding options will be discussed by TAB that are both above and below the target funding levels.

**Table 2: Federal Funding Targets**

Categories	Funding Target	Percent of Total
<b>Safety (two funding categories)</b>	\$30 million	12%
<b>Bicycle/Pedestrian (one funding category)</b>	\$35 million	14%
<b>Transit (two funding categories)</b>	\$60 million	24%
<b>Roadway (four funding categories)</b>	\$110 million	44%
<b>Environment (two funding categories)</b>	\$15 million	6%
<b>Total Federal</b>	<b>\$250 million</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Amounts shown assume that some level of over programming will occur beyond \$250M, but TAB will determine the exact amount as part of project selection. Included in this overprogramming will be the approximately \$1.5 million for regional modeling and the travel behavior inventory. In addition, project selection for the EV Charging funding category (under Environment) will not occur until the 2028 funding cycle, closer to project implementation.*

In addition, TAB approved a target of \$50 million in Regional Active Transportation Sales Tax funding to be awarded to projects in the Local Bicycle Facilities, Local Pedestrian Facilities and Active Transportation categories. Two million of this \$50 million will be the target for Active Transportation Planning.

**Table 3: Active Transportation Funding Targets**

Categories	Funding Target	Percent of Total
<b>Local Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects (two funding categories)</b>	\$48 million	96%
<b>Active Transportation Planning (one funding category)</b>	\$2 million	4%
<b>Total Active Transportation</b>	<b>\$50 million</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 shows the minimum and maximum awards by funding category.

**Table 4: Regional Solicitation Funding Category Minimums and Maximums**

Funding Category	Minimum Funding Award	Maximum Funding Award
<b>Safety</b>		
Proactive/Reactive Safety	\$2,000,000	\$7,000,000
<b>Roadway</b>		
Congestion Management Strategies – At-Grade Projects	\$1,000,000	\$10,000,000
New Interchanges	\$1,000,000	\$20,000,000
Roadway Modernization	\$1,000,000	\$10,000,000
Bridge Connections	\$1,000,000	\$7,000,000
<b>Transit</b>		
Transit Expansion	\$500,000	\$10,000,000
Transit Customer Experience	\$500,000	\$10,000,000
<b>Bicycle/Pedestrian</b>		
Regional Bike Facilities	\$1,000,000	\$5,500,000
Local Bike Facilities (Local Funding)	\$150,000	\$3,500,000
Local Pedestrian Facilities (Local Funding)	\$150,000	\$2,500,000
Active Transportation Planning (Local Funding)	N/A	\$200,000

Environment		
EV Charging Infrastructure (project selection in 2028)	\$500,000	\$2,000,000
TDM (Competitive)	\$100,000	\$750,000

**Table 5: Additional Funding Category Funding Amounts**

Funding Category	Expected Funding Amount
Arterial BRT	\$30,000,000 minimum
TDM Base Funding	\$5,800,000
Regional Travel Behavior Inventory	\$1,500,000

Definitions, examples, and scoring overviews of each of the funding categories are included at the end of this document.

## General Process and Rules

### *Application Process*

1. Projects may apply for Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funding in addition to the Regional Solicitation/Active Transportation Solicitations. However, applicants may not submit the same project for multiple categories within the Regional Solicitation/Active Transportation Solicitations. Instead, applicants should select the application category that best aligns with the primary objectives of the project. Each project submitted should be unique and not have overlapping project elements with another project submitted by the same agency. Projects can only be awarded funds from one of the three programs (i.e., HSIP, Regional Solicitation, and Active Transportation) for the same or overlapping project elements.
2. The applicant must complete the qualifying requirements questionnaire to show that the project meets all of the qualifying requirements of the appropriate funding category to be eligible to be scored and ranked against other projects.
3. The applicant must respond directly to each scoring measure in order for its application to be scored and receive points. Projects are scored based on how well the response meets the requirements of the measures and, in some cases, how well the responses compare to those of other qualified applications in the same project funding category.
4. Project applicants may “bundle” two or more projects together, but they must either be:
  - Projects located along the same corridor or travelshed (e.g., filling multiple trail gaps along a trail corridor or projects at stops/stations along a transit route)
  - Similar improvements within a defined neighborhood or downtown area (e.g., adding benches along the sidewalks in a downtown area, improving curb ramps across a corridor/small area)

The bundling of independent projects that are not related to one another as described above is not allowed. For eligible bundled projects, when scoring in multiple locations, an average will be used for geographically based measures. Applicants are encouraged to contact Joe Barbeau at [Joseph.barbeau@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:Joseph.barbeau@metc.state.mn.us) if they have questions regarding project bundling.

## *Scoring and Project Selection*

1. Metropolitan Scoring committees made up of members of the TAC F&P Committee or other technical staff will evaluate the applications and prepare a ranked list of projects for each funding category based on a total score of all the measures. The Committee will forward the ranked list of projects with funding options to TAC and TAB. TAB may develop its own funding options as well. TAB will then approve a list of projects, and the Metropolitan Council will concur on the Regional Solicitation projects. TAB later recommends the Regional Solicitation projects as part of the region's draft TIP and the Metropolitan Council approves it.
2. Scoring committees should use a tiebreaker to sort the ranking of two or more projects with the same score (all scores in each measure will be rounded to the nearest whole integer). For the 2026 Regional Solicitation, ties will be broken within funding categories by favoring the higher-scoring project in the highest-weighted criterion. If that score is tied, the tiebreaker will move down to the next-highest-weighted criterion until there is no tie. In any instance in which a tied score is between two projects with the same sponsor in the same funding category, that sponsor can select which project is ranked higher.
3. Scoring committees have the option to recommend a deviation from the approved scoring guidance if a rationale for the deviation is provided to the TAC Funding and Programming Committee for its consideration.
4. Applicants will have an opportunity to appeal scores on their submittals only at a TAC Funding and Programming Committee meeting. Scoring appeals are limited to quantitative errors or mistakes. The scores given on qualitative responses cannot be appealed.
5. TAB will not fund more than one project in the same funding category that is immediately adjacent to another submitted project on the same corridor (only applies to two separate applications selected in the same solicitation). For example, an applicant cannot break up the project into two separate applications to increase its funding award in the same solicitation cycle.
6. A map of the selected projects will be distributed to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) so that project sponsors will have ample time to coordinate on projects that potentially impact culturally sensitive land. Additional coordination between the MPO and Tribal Nations is occurring in other areas of the MPO's work.
7. At least one project will be funded from each of the five eligible functional classifications: Minor arterial augmenters, connectors, expanders, and relievers, as well as other principal arterials (i.e., non-freeway facilities).
8. Within the Transit modal category, there is an Arterial Bus Rapid Transit Project category, which will be funded for a minimum of \$30 million. TAB may choose to allocate more than the minimum for that category, in which case the additional funding will come from other Transit funding categories. There is also a New Market guarantee to ensure that at least one Transit Expansion or Modernization project is funded that serves areas outside of Transit Market Area 1 and 2 from the Transportation Policy Plan for at least one end of the project.

## *Funding Schedule*

1. Most projects selected to receive federal funding through this solicitation will be programmed in the regional TIP in program years 2030 and 2031. There may be a small amount of federal funding in earlier years that will also become available. The Active Transportation funds do not need to be programmed into the TIP, as these projects do not receive federal funding. Active Transportation projects may be initiated in years 2027, 2028, and 2029.

**A project will be removed from the program if it does not meet its program year.** The program year aligns with the state fiscal year. For example, if the project is programmed for 2030 in the TIP, the project program year begins July 1, 2029, and ends June 30, 2030. Most projects selected from this solicitation will be programmed in FY 2030 and 2031. The [Regional Program Year Policy](#) outlines the process to request a one-time program year extension.

## *Cost and Funding*

1. The fundable amount of a project is based on the original submittal. TAB must approve any significant change in the scope or cost of an approved project as described in TAB's [Scope Change Policy](#).

For all projects, sponsors must incur the cost of the project prior to repayment. Costs become eligible for reimbursement only after a project has been approved by MnDOT State-Aid and the appropriate USDOT modal agency. For Active Transportation regional sales tax funded projects, project costs are eligible for reimbursement only after the project has been approved by Met Council grants staff.

## *Roadway Lane Expansion or New Interchange Requirements*

1. Projects on the Minnesota trunk highway system that have a total cost (including design and engineering and right-of-way costs) greater than \$15 million and are either new interchange projects or add 2,500 feet of lane miles or more are required to perform a transportation greenhouse gas emissions impact assessment per MN Statutes 161.1781. This law requires a greenhouse gas impact assessment of the project and development of an offset plan before inclusion in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The assessment and offset plan will need to be reviewed by the Metropolitan Council and Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emissions Impact Assessment Technical Advisory Committee. The Minnesota Commissioner of Transportation will approve the project to be included in the TIP.
2. Prior to Regional Solicitation application submittal, project proposers will need to determine project emissions impacts and identify vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and emissions offsets. Then, the TAB will add in offsets generated from other selected Regional Solicitation and Active Transportation projects. The combined local and regional offsets will form the basis of the total offset plan to be reviewed by the Metropolitan Council and certified by MnDOT and its Technical Advisory Committee at least 90 days prior to the project entering the draft TIP. Project sponsors are encouraged to contact Met Council and MnDOT staff several months before the Regional Solicitation application deadline.
3. Roadway lane expansion projects on any system (city, county, or MnDOT) of greater than one mile are required to follow the Congestion Management Process (CMP) Handbook process for identifying potential congestion solutions and submit materials to Metropolitan Council staff prior to the application deadline. For the 2026 Solicitation, the Metropolitan Council has an on-call consultant who can assist applicants with going through the CMP Handbook.

## Transit Projects

1. Applicants for transit projects should be aware of the schedule and associated time lag for receiving federal funds for transit vehicle and transit operating projects. Applicants are encouraged to contact Heather Giesel at the Metropolitan Council [Heather.giesel@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:Heather.giesel@metc.state.mn.us) for more details on selecting a preferred program year as part of the application given this time lag.
2. Transit projects will be given an opportunity to have their ridership projections reviewed by Metropolitan Council staff prior to submittal to determine whether the scoring methodology is sound. Any applicant wanting to have an optional review should submit draft ridership information to the TAB Coordinator two weeks prior to the application deadline.

## Project Schedule **DRAFT**

Council approves release of Regional Solicitation	Spring 2026
Online Applications available	Spring 2026
Virtual Workshop – overview of 2026 Regional Solicitation	Spring 2026
Virtual Software/Mapping Application Training	Spring 2026
Application Deadline	Spring 2026
Scoring Committees Meet	Summer 2026
Scoring Appeals Deadline	Late Summer 2026
TAB Selection of Projects	Late 2026

## Technical Assistance Contacts

Table 6 provides contacts for technical assistance in providing necessary data in order to address various prioritizing criteria. Before contacting any technical expert below, please use existing local sources. Local experts in many cases are the appropriate contact for much of the data needed to respond to measures. In some instances, it may take five or more workdays to provide the requested data. Please request data as soon as possible.

To request special accommodation for submitting Regional Solicitation applications, please email [webteam@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:webteam@metc.state.mn.us).