



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Region 5
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October 28th, 2015

Mr. Charles Zelle
Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Transportation
395 John Ireland Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55155

Subject: Approval of Minnesota FY 2016 – 2019 STIP and FHWA/FTA Statewide Planning Finding

Dear Commissioner Zelle:

The following is in response to MnDOT's transmittal of the Minnesota Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 – 2019 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) requesting approval.

In order to approve the subject STIP document, including the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPS) contained therein, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must make a determination that the STIP is based on a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. Additionally, in accordance with 23 United States Code (U.S.C.) 135(g)(8) and Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450.218(b):

The FHWA and the FTA shall review the STIP or amend the STIP, and make a joint finding on the extent to which the STIP is based on a statewide transportation planning process that meets or substantially meets the requirements of 23 U.S.C. 135 and 135, 49 U.S.C. 5303 and 5304, and subparts A, B, and C of this part.

As a result, FHWA and FTA have jointly undertaken a review of the statewide planning process of the Minnesota State Department of Transportation (MnDOT). In accordance with these requirements, the following findings are provided.

The following strengths of the statewide and metropolitan planning process have been identified as noteworthy:

- ***MnSHIP*** – This 20-year Highway Investment Plan details a series of investment scenarios under differing priorities, providing an analytical underpinning to MnDOT's selected approach of balancing asset management with investment in local priorities and mobility. It should be applauded for providing MnDOT with an informed and risk-based investment process to guide the next 20 years.
- ***Functional Classification Review*** – MnDOT completed a systematic analysis and extensive inter-governmental coordination to categorize urban and rural road hierarchy. The functional classification review was a collaborative and effective process, and it is commended.
- ***Asset Management Plan*** – MnDOT's extensive efforts to develop an asset management plan have resulted in a number of improvements to how MnDOT manages its assets. Proactively serving as a pilot state for Asset Management Plan development, MnDOT's Asset Management Plan is now an example to advance the practice nationally.

The following areas of the statewide and metropolitan planning process have been identified as areas for enhancement:

- ***Corridor Planning*** – Corridor Planning is an opportunity to coordinate multiple performance needs and local and state projects within a systematic analysis of a corridor. These studies can be utilized to identify needs and phase implementation effectively to save costs and impacts to the travelling public.
- ***MPO Performance Targets*** – Performance-based planning is an MPO requirement of MAP-21. As the final Planning rule is still in development, we recommend the MPO's begin to identify the appropriate performance targets for their respective planning organizations. While FHWA and FTA will provide more guidance as it becomes available, a proactive approach to performance-based planning will ease the MPO's upcoming transition.
- ***STIP Public Presentation*** – While the fundamentals of 23 CFR 450.210 are met, the STIP can be presented in a format that is more conducive to public use. We recommend updating the website to call out/highlight amendments, change the project descriptions to public-friendly language, and include a visual representation of the project locations in a mapping tool.
- ***Performance Illustration in the STIP*** – MnDOT has been proactive in the development performance measures/targets in anticipation of MAP-21 and the STIP provides a yearly

opportunity to illustrate these performance outcomes. We recommend the current and projected performance outcomes are illustrated in the STIP to improve the accountability of investment decisions.

Accordingly, based on the State DOT and MPO self-certifications of their statewide and metropolitan planning processes, in addition to our involvement in the State and MPO transportation planning processes, the FHWA and FTA hereby find that the 2016-2019 STIP is based on a transportation planning process that substantially meets the requirements of 23 U.S.C. Sections 134 and 135, U.S.C. Sections 5303-5304, 23 CFR 450 (Subparts B and C), and 49 CFR Part 613 (Subparts B and C). Minnesota's 2016 – 2019 STIP is therefore approved.

This approval also includes the corresponding individual MPO Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) that comprise the STIP, as well approval of a joint FHWA/FTA air quality conformity determination for the Metropolitan Council's TIP pursuant to 40 CFR 93 (transportation conformity regulations).

It should be noted that approval of the 2016 – 2019 STIP is not to be construed as a Federal-aid eligibility determination. Each project must satisfy the specific requirements of the program from which Federal funds are requested, as well as other Federal requirements as appropriate before Federal funds are authorized.

Thank you for your continued effort to improve the STIP process and ensure a cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive transportation process. We recognize the complexity of assembling the STIP and appreciate the hard work and effort expended by staff involved. We look forward to working together to advance the projects and programs in the STIP, and to continuing to provide the traveling public with a transportation system of the highest caliber.

Should you have any questions regarding this STIP approval and Planning Finding, please contact Mr. Kris Riesenber, FHWA Technical Services Team Leader at (651) 291-6114, or Mr. Bill Wheeler, FTA Community Planner at (312) 353-2639.

Sincerely,



for
Arlene Kocher
Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration



Marisol R. Simón
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration

Cc: Trang Chu
Brian Gage
Mark Nelson
Roberta Retzlaff