



## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration  
Minnesota Division  
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Region 5  
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Chicago, IL 60606

October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016

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

Subject: Approval of 2017 – 2020 Minnesota State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and Planning Finding

Dear Commissioner Zelle:

This letter is in response to your September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 transmittal requesting approval of the 2017 – 2020 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), a federally-required document itemizing planned investment allocation of \$7.2 billion in federal, state, and local transportation funds over four years in Minnesota.

In order to approve the STIP, including the MPO Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) 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. Approval of the STIP by the FHWA and the FTA, in its entirety or in part, will be based upon the results of this finding.*

As a result, FHWA and FTA have jointly undertaken a review of MnDOT's statewide planning process. In accordance with these requirements, the findings below are provided.

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

- ***Every Place Counts Design Challenge*** – In July of 2016, MnDOT was selected by the U.S. DOT to participate in the Ladders of Opportunity Every Place Counts Design Challenge. This two-day charrette examined the Twin Cities' Rondo neighborhood, which is a historically African American community bifurcated by I-94's construction in the 1960's. During the challenge, participants sought to raise awareness, spark innovation, and encourage inclusive design solutions to bridge the infrastructure divide and reconnect people to opportunity. MnDOT is commended for being selected and working diligently to host, facilitate and successfully complete the design challenge on very short notice.
- ***Freight Plan, Statewide Bicycle Plan, Minnesota Walks, ADA Transition Plan*** – MnDOT's extensive effort to complete these four plans resulted in systematic and purposeful improvement of Minnesota's statewide planning process. The plans underwent an extensive and collaborative development process, and MnDOT is commended for completing these highly-involved (and often innovative) undertakings this past year.
- ***CHIMES Development*** – MnDOT is currently developing the Capital Highway Information Management Enterprise System, or CHIMES. Upon completion, the program will reduce extensive spreadsheet creation and digitally track funding details for the MnDOT Capital Highway program and other projects. The system will also assist handling program and project funding sources, report total project costs and estimates, and generate an online STIP with a geo-spatial element to visually assist public awareness of project locations. Researching the potential project with a peer exchange to Nevada earlier this year, MnDOT is praised for their aggressive pursuit of data management to support the planning process.

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

- ***UPWP/TIP Draft Review Time*** – FHWA and FTA request MnDOT and the MPOs ensure UPWPs/TIPs are passed to us during the comment period moving forward. FHWA/FTA is currently receiving the UPWPs/TIPs late in the process and in nearly final form. By allowing for early federal review during the public comment period, FHWA/FTA observations could be heeded and corrections made without the underlying threat or complications of an approval delay.
- ***PEL Process*** – The FAST Act urges greater inclusion of information and products developed during the planning phase into the NEPA review process. Earlier partner collaboration via the PEL (Planning and Environmental Linkages) process would help streamline decision-making and achieve transportation and environmental stewardship goals through improved programs, planning and projects. Systematic use of PEL on corridor and subarea studies could help MnDOT and/or the MPO's minimize redundancy, thereby improving process efficiency.
- ***Local ADA Transition Plans*** – Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), public entities with greater than 50 employees are required to develop an ADA Transition Plan. MnDOT, having recently completed the statewide ADA Transition Plan, is perfectly situated to work alongside MPOs as a technical and informational resource for local agencies that may need assistance completing plans.
- ***Functional Classification Consistency*** – Last year, MnDOT completed a systematic analysis and extensive inter-governmental coordination effort to categorize urban and rural roads. While the process was successful in greater Minnesota, the Twin Cities metro area was not included. In order to achieve

statewide consistency, FHWA recommends MnDOT coordinate with the Met Council in a data-driven approach to classify metropolitan roads in a collaborative process.

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 2017-2020 STIP, which includes the metropolitan TIPs, 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 2017 – 2020 STIP, which includes the metropolitan TIPs, is therefore approved. FHWA and FTA have also determined that the STIP and TIPs therein, as applicable, conform to the air quality requirements pursuant to 40 CFR 93.

It should be noted that approval of the 2017 – 2020 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 funds are authorized.

FHWA and FTA recognize the complex and multi-faceted work of assembling a STIP, and applaud the energy and effort exhibited by MnDOT staff. We look forward to working together to advance the projects and programs contained therein, and to continuing to provide the traveling public with a transportation system of the highest caliber.

If you have any questions regarding our joint action and the 2017 – 2020 STIP approval, please contact Mr. Kris Riesenberg, FHWA Technical Services Team Leader at (651) 291-6114, or Mr. Reggie Arkell, FTA Community Planner, at (312) 886-3704.

Sincerely,

For

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Arlene Kocher  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration

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Marisol R. Simón  
Regional Administrator  
Federal Transit Administration

Cc: Trang Chu (MnDOT)  
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