



## COLORADO Department of Transportation

Division of Transportation Development  
Multimodal Planning Branch  
4201 E. Arkansas Ave, Shumate Bldg.  
Denver, CO 80222

**DATE:** January 18, 2017  
**TO:** Transportation Commission  
**FROM:** Debra Perkins-Smith, Director, Division of Transportation Development  
**SUBJECT:** National Highway Freight Program Project Selection

### Purpose

To provide an update on project selection for the initial years of the National Highway Freight Program, and discuss different program scenarios.

### Action

None. Transportation Commission input on program scenarios.

### Background

The National Highway Freight Program is a new formula freight program created under the FAST Act. The National Highway Freight Program provides approximately \$15 million annually to Colorado, beginning in FY 15-16. Staff provided an overview of the National Highway Freight Program and discussed project selection approach and criteria with the Transportation Commission in October and November.

Staff is currently conducting a project selection process to identify recommended projects for, at a minimum, the first two years of funding (FY 15-16 and FY 16-17). Beginning in December 2017, projects must be identified in a State Freight Plan in order to be eligible for funding. The Multimodal Freight Plan and State Freight and Passenger Rail Plan, both currently in development, will identify a long-term freight investment strategy and project priorities for subsequent years of funding.

### Details

The Transportation Commission provided input on the project selection approach and criteria for the National Highway Freight Program at workshops in October and November. This included the following eligibility criteria:

- Is on the National Highway Freight Network or is a freight intermodal or freight rail project (federal requirement)
- Is identified in a State Highway Freight Plan (federal requirement, beginning December 2017)
- Is an eligible activity under the National Highway Freight Program (federal requirement)
- Is on a Colorado Freight Corridor or other facility with evidence of significance to freight
- Is identified in the 10-Year Development Program (if a scale of project typically included, i.e. "major" investment need within respective Region)
- Is "ready-to-go" by September 30, 2018

Evaluation criteria were also identified and discussed, and include the following criteria based on the Statewide Plan and Policy Directive (PD 14.0) goal areas:

- Safety
- Maintaining the System
- Mobility
- Economic Vitality
- Other Considerations (i.e. resiliency, redundancy, builds on other funding or phases)

In November and December staff from the Regions and DTD used the eligibility and evaluation criteria to identify and evaluate candidate projects. 37 projects totaling nearly \$275 million have been identified for consideration, with roughly \$35 million available (for FY 15-16 and FY 16-17). Region and DTD staff are currently developing several different program scenarios based on the results of evaluation. In developing program scenarios, staff is also considering a range of input on project selection provided in recent months through discussions with the Transportation Commission, Statewide Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC), Freight Advisory Council (FAC), and the Regions. Highlights from these discussions include:

- Freight focus. The FAC has advocated strongly that projects should have a clear freight focus or benefit and that funds not be used simply to top off existing projects. The FAC has expressed strong support for truck parking projects and freight safety projects. The FAC has also expressed support for smaller, more programmatic investments that target specific freight issues.
- Need for visible wins for freight. The FAC has discussed the need to identify some visible, quick to move forward projects to demonstrate what can be done with dedicated freight funding.
- Need to prepare for other funding opportunities. The RAMP program cleared out many of the “shelf” projects ready for construction in each Region. This limits our ability to respond to new funding opportunities, including discretionary grant programs such as TIGER or FASTLANE. The Regions have expressed a strong need for investment in preconstruction activities to advance projects, and the Transportation Commission in recent meetings has indicated the importance of being “ready” with high priority projects, should additional funding become available (see Preconstruction Pool memo).
- Geographic equity. Recent discussions of the Transportation Commission and the STAC have included recognition of the need to strongly consider geographic equity in project selection processes.

The following program scenarios are being developed, reflecting the results of evaluation and the guidance provided through recent discussions and highlighted above:

- Quick to Construction - A focus on ready-to-go or soon to be ready-to-go construction projects with a strong freight focus and/or direct freight benefit. Provides visible, “quick wins.”
  - Example projects include:
    - I-25 North 88<sup>th</sup> Ave. Bridge Reconstruction: Reconstruction of low vertical clearance bridge that is frequently hit by trucks.
    - US 85: Safety, intersection, and interchange improvements on important freight corridor recently submitted as a FASTLANE grant.
    - Region 5 Mountain Pass Critical Safety Improvements: Safety improvements to chain up stations including lengthening and widening chain up stations, buffer separating, and installation of LED lighting.
- Advance Projects to Prepare for Other Funding Opportunities - A focus on construction and pre-construction activities for projects with a strong freight focus and/or direct freight benefit, with the intention of advancing projects or making projects more competitive for discretionary grant funding such as FASTLANE, or other additional funding opportunities. Can be developed in tandem with Preconstruction Pool and advance key freight projects in order to make them ready/competitive for construction funding, when available.
  - Example projects include:
    - I-25 Valley Highway Bridges: Completion of design for two frequently hit, low vertical clearance bridges on I-25 in central Denver.
    - I-70 West Vail Pass Auxiliary Lanes: Completion of preconstruction for auxiliary/climbing lanes with significant mobility and safety benefit to freight.
    - SH 71 Super 2: Completion of design for construction of “Super 2” configuration on important freight alternative to I-25, including wider travel lanes and shoulders, and safety improvements.
- Statewide Programs - A focus on statewide, programmatic projects including smaller, more targeted freight projects or programs such as truck parking, truck signal prioritization, or safety projects such as commercial vehicle hot spots, and truck ramp restoration. Provides for very targeted investment in projects that directly benefit freight.
  - Example projects include:
    - Truck Parking: Truck parking improvements including development of new truck parking facilities, improvements to existing facilities, and deployment of technology such as Truck Parking Information Management Systems (TPIMs)
    - Truck Ramps: Improvements, restoration to truck ramps, including deployment of new truck ramp technologies such as truck arrestors and speed warning systems.
    - Signal Prioritization: Signal prioritization systems on key freight corridors. Signal prioritization systems can detect the movement of commercial vehicles and extend green lights to prevent a rapid deceleration or the vehicle moving through a red light.
- Hybrid - A mix of pre-construction, construction, and statewide programs with a strong freight focus and/or direct freight benefits.

Staff anticipates reviewing scenarios and projects with the FAC and STAC at their January meetings. Based on direction from the Transportation Commission, and input from the FAC and STAC, staff will return to the

Transportation Commission in February with refined program scenarios, including a recommended scenario with proposed projects.

#### *Questions*

Staff requests Transportation Commission input on next steps in the National Highway Freight Program project selection process. Questions to consider include:

1. What input does the Transportation Commission have on the proposed program scenarios?
2. Should any additional scenarios be considered?
3. Which of the scenarios, if any, are preferred?
4. Does the Transportation Commission have any additional input or direction for staff to consider in developing funding scenarios?

#### **Advisory Committee Input**

STAC last met in early December, off-cycle due to the holidays. STAC reviewed and provided input on the National Highway Freight Program eligibility and evaluation criteria in October. In December, discussion focused more generally on overall project selection and the use of the 10-Year Development and criteria in selecting projects. Additional discussion on scenarios and projects is planned for the January 27 STAC meeting.

The last meeting of the full FAC was in early October. No concerns were expressed regarding the proposed criteria for the National Highway Freight Program. The smaller FAC Steering Committee met on December 13 and provided input on some preliminary project information. The Steering Committee noted that projects with a direct benefit to commercial vehicle movement will have better industry reception, and noted that general safety, mobility, or asset management improvements are important but perhaps better suited to other sources of funding. Additional discussion on scenarios and projects is planned for the January 17 FAC meeting.

#### **Next Steps**

- Development of funding scenarios and FAC and STAC review
- Refinement of scenarios based on FAC and STAC
- Transportation Commission approval of funding for preconstruction pool in February or March.



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**DATE:** January 18, 2017  
**TO:** Transportation Commission  
**FROM:** Debra Perkins-Smith, Director, Division of Transportation Development  
Josh Laipply, Chief Engineer  
**SUBJECT:** Preconstruction Pool

**Purpose**

To review a proposal for the creation and funding of a new preconstruction pool.

**Action**

None. Transportation Commission input on proposal.

**Background**

At recent Transportation Commission meetings, staff discussed with the Commission the importance of being “ready” with high priority projects, should additional funding become available. Additional funding could take the form of discretionary grants such as TIGER or FASTLANE, additional transfers of revenue under Senate Bill (SB) 09-228, or a new federal infrastructure package. Staff is proposing the creation and funding of a one-time preconstruction pool in order to 1) ensure we have high priority projects ready for construction should we receive an influx of additional funding, and 2) ensure we have high priority projects sufficiently advanced to be competitive in discretionary grant programs.

**Details**

With the RAMP program, one of the requirements for the partnership and operations program was that projects be completed by December 2017, this resulted in clearing out most of the “shelf” or projects ready for construction. The creation of a preconstruction pool will provide a source of funds for each Region to advance some high priority projects through preconstruction phases such as NEPA, design, ROW, utilities, etc. With limited funding available, many high priority projects remain in a state of limited readiness, awaiting the identification of additional funding of some sort in order to advance additional preconstruction phases. While it often makes sense to limit preconstruction investment where funding for implementation is uncertain, this also limits our ability to respond to new funding opportunities. As an example, projects that are “ready to go” to construction are more competitive under discretionary grant programs than projects requesting preconstruction funding. In submitting discretionary grants we often have limited choices for construction ready projects.

Staff is recommending the proposed one-time Preconstruction Pool be initially funded in the amount of \$20 million, an amount that will likely allow the achievement of some significant preconstruction milestones on a couple of high priority projects in each Region. The Regions are currently reviewing the status and preconstruction needs of projects included in the 10-Year Development Program and developing recommendations for projects and preconstruction activities to be funded. This is occurring in tandem with project selection for the initial years of the new formula freight program, the National Highway Freight Program (see National Highway Freight Program memo). Projects being considered for formula freight funding include some preconstruction activities for significant freight-related projects. By looking at the preconstruction pool in tandem with the formula freight program, there is an opportunity to consider both sources of funding for appropriate projects.

Based on the 10-Year Development Program that has been developed in consultation with our transportation planning partners, the RTDs are identifying the highest priority projects in their Regions. As a group, the RTDs and HQ staff are discussing these projects and working together to develop a statewide comprehensive package that would be the most competitive for the federal discretionary program funds or other funding opportunities.

Staff anticipates returning to the Transportation Commission in February with additional information on the proposed use of funds, including specific projects and preconstruction activities.

### *Questions*

Staff requests Transportation Commission input on the proposed preconstruction pool. Questions to consider today and next month include:

1. Does the Transportation Commission support the concept of establishing a one-time dedicated pool of funds for advancing a limited number of high priority projects to leverage discretionary funding opportunities and/or be ready for a potential influx of funds?
2. Is \$20 million an appropriate amount with which to initially fund a preconstruction pool? Is it an appropriate amount given other statewide needs?

### Next Steps

- Identification of recommended projects, preconstruction activities, and estimated budgets for review by the Transportation Commission in February.
- Transportation Commission approval of funding for preconstruction pool in February or March.