

INTRODUCTION

A. THE MPO ROLE IN CAPITAL PROGRAMMING

Under federal law, transportation planning for urbanized areas is carried out through Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which coordinate planning activities of participating agencies. They also provide a forum for cooperative decision-making among state and local agencies, public and private transit operators, and the public. In meeting federal requirements, MPOs maintain the eligibility of their member agencies for federal transportation funds for planning, capital improvements, and operations. Among the MPOs' foremost responsibilities is the adoption of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

The TIP is a list of projects and programs scheduled to be implemented over a period of at least four years. Transportation projects must be included in the TIP to receive most types of federal funding. The TIP allows for a broad-based review of the region's capital programming and represents a consensus among major transportation interests in the region as to what improvements should have priority for available funds.

Federal actions in the 1990s significantly expanded and strengthened MPO responsibilities. Among these actions were the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, and the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990. Under ISTEA, MPOs were entrusted with an expanded role in transportation planning and capital programming. They became partners with state government in making decisions about how transportation tax dollars were spent, thus bringing decisions closer to those served. Accompanying this new authority, however, were new detailed standards, including requirements for conformity with the CAAA and increased emphasis on public involvement. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), enacted in 1998, basically reaffirmed and retained the structure of the planning process under ISTEA. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), signed on August 10, 2005, builds on the initiatives of the previous two transportation Acts, and emphasizes the importance of safety, long a top SJTPO priority.

B. SJTPO AS MPO

Effective July 1, 1993, the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) was designated the MPO for the southern New Jersey Counties of Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem. SJTPO replaced three small, existing MPOs and incorporated areas not previously served. The formation of SJTPO allowed for a stronger regional approach to solving transportation problems and brought new opportunities to southern New Jersey, in accordance with the intent of ISTEA.

SJTPO is governed by the Policy Board consisting of eleven voting members:

Eight elected officials: One from each of the counties - Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Salem (4)
Mayors of the City of Vineland and the City of Atlantic City (2)
One from a municipality in Cape May County and Salem County (2)

Three representatives: New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) (1)
New Jersey Transit (NJTRANSIT) (1)
South Jersey Transportation Authority (SJTA) (1)

A thirteen member Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) provides input to the Policy Board. It consists of staff of each Policy Board member, as well as representatives of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, and the Delaware River and Bay Authority.

C. THE FY 2008 - 2011 SJTPO TIP

This TIP includes the State and local highway projects, regional highway programs, NJDOT Statewide programs, and NJ Transit programs. Over \$763 million of Federal and State funding for fiscal years (FY) 2008-2011 is identified for transportation improvements within the four Counties. A section showing major authority projects is also included.

A revised TIP is produced each year. Of particular note in the TIP is the \$36.1 million allocated to SJTPO over the four years for projects using federal Surface Transportation Program funds (labeled "STP-SJ" in the project listings). SJTPO's member agencies became entitled to these funds by their agreement to work together through the formation of SJTPO.

A summary of TIP projects and programs is listed in Table 1. It also serves as an index to the individual description pages in Sections II, III, IV, and V, which provide more detailed information for each project and program. Table 1 is followed by a map of project locations and charts illustrating funding and program categories.

D. THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

The TIP links the transportation planning process to implementation. Central to this process is the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which provides a framework for guiding investment decisions over a 20-year period. It includes both long- and short-range strategies and actions leading to the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods.

Under federal regulation, all projects in the TIP must be consistent with the RTP. In addition, projects that are regionally significant under the federal Air Quality Conformity Rule must be drawn from the RTP. SJTPO's most recent 2025 Regional Transportation Plan was adopted in June 2001, amended in July 2002, and amended again in July 2003. A major update was adopted in May 2004 by the SJTPO Policy Board.

As mentioned under sub-section A, SAFETEA-LU sets forth eight planning factors which each MPO RTP must recognize. These factors build on the seven issue areas contained in TEA-21, which carried over from the sixteen planning factors specified by ISTEA. These eight provisions listed in SAFETEA-LU are:

- 1) Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
- 2) Increase the safety of the transportation system for all motorized and non-motorized users;
- 3) Increase the ability of the transportation system to support homeland security and to safeguard the personal security of all motorized and non-motorized users;
- 4) Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight;

- 5) Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
- 6) Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
- 7) Promote efficient system management and operation; and
- 8) Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

E. MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Supporting the transportation planning process are the management systems, particularly the Congestion Management System (CMS). ISTEA required larger MPOs with ozone air quality non-attainment areas, like SJTPO, to develop and maintain a CMS for their region. A CMS provides information on transportation system performance and alternative strategies for alleviating congestion and enhancing mobility. Federal funds may not be programmed for major capacity-adding projects in the ozone non-attainment area unless they result from a fully operational CMS.

SJTPO adopted its Fully Operational CMS Plan in November 1997 and amendments in March 1998. Specific procedures were adopted in January 1999. All projects in this TIP result from the CMS and its procedures.

In order to maintain this process into the new legislation, SAFETEA-LU requires operations and management strategies that improve the performance of existing facilities while relieving vehicular congestion and improving safety for people and freight.

F. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & PREPARATION

Project development for implementation is a continuous and usually complex process. A major milestone in this process is when a project obtains a position in the TIP. Projects often must undergo an initial study and development process before they can be considered for inclusion in the TIP. Exceptions are those cases where a project is very simple (a *Programmatic Categorical Exclusion*) or listed only to draw on federal funds to support preliminary project development activities.

The study and development process is a central component of the *project pipeline*. It is intended to take initial unstructured proposals and transform them -- if they can meet a series of tests for merit -- into fully-defined projects that can be included on the TIP and ultimately put out for bid. This procedure is necessary because federal law requires a "fiscally constrained" TIP in which component projects do not exceed anticipated revenues.

Study & Development yields a feasible and appropriate project (or other solution) to address a transportation problem. It includes developing a preferred alternative, securing community support, obtaining approval of environmental agencies, and developing a specific scope of work for the project.

Highway projects normally start as problem statements that clearly identify specific problems, needs, or opportunities. Problem statements come from various sources, including elected officials, county and local planning agencies, NJDOT staff, users of the State's transportation system, SJTPO-funded studies, NJDOT's Capital Investment Strategy, corridor strategies developed through the planning process, and the Regional Transportation Plan.

Only a few of the many problem statements received can be worked on, so they are evaluated by both SJTPO and NJDOT. NJDOT's evaluation considers technical priority, planned intake levels for different kinds of projects, engineering judgment, and commitments to external stakeholders. Also, implementation of statewide policies, anticipated feasibility of a solution, anticipated environmental impact, and anticipated community support. SJTPO identifies regional priorities through a similar evaluation, with emphasis on consultation with its members.

NJDOT and SJTPO then negotiate which problem statements should undergo further development. Those selected for further work are assigned to the Study & Development Program. Because NJDOT typically accepts one new Study and Development entry every one or two years, opportunities for new projects on the State system are limited. Study and Development has three specific phases: concept development, feasibility assessment, and final scope development. The last two phases are collectively known as "scoping". The specific phases of work are further described in the Glossary in Section VIII. Projects that have substantially completed study and development become part of the project pool from which TIP projects are selected each year. The selection process is described in Section G.

G. TIP DEVELOPMENT

The TIP is the product of nearly a year's work, with staff work by SJTPO, NJDOT, and NJ Transit. Initially, projects are tested for ability to be advanced for implementation within the year proposed and to verify scope and cost. All projects that pass the screening are placed in the project pool for further review and evaluation. The project pool is then analyzed by SJTPO, NJDOT, and NJ Transit to identify priorities.

SJTPO has a Project Selection Process and Ranking System that is used when needed to evaluate projects from a regional perspective. It sets criteria for scoring projects against seven major goals:

1. Support the regional economy.
2. Improve safety.
3. Reduce congestion and promote mobility.
4. Protect and improve the environment.
5. Preserve and maintain the existing transportation system.
6. Favor projects for more important facilities, services, and programs.
7. Favor cost-effective projects.

The project ranking system assigns a numeric point value to each potential project based on the degree to which it satisfies the various criteria. For example, under "Support the regional economy" goal, the criteria are: access to tourism destinations and/or recreational facilities; transportation and circulation important to the agricultural economy; serving an existing or planned employment center or industrial park; significant impact on economic growth and development, will help broaden the economy, or is important in maintaining current economic activity; importance to the movement of freight or commodities; and scope of economic activity supported.

A separate document is available on SJTPO's website www.sjtpo.org describing the entire Project Selection Process and Ranking System.

The resulting priorities become the basis for negotiating the TIP project portion to use available funds. However, other factors are also important, including geographic equity, staff resources, special purposes of funds, legal mandates, relationship between projects, and the need to coordinate the phasing of projects. To complete the TIP, Regional and Statewide highway programs are added, as well as transit programs and major authority projects.

H. FUNDING SOURCES

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are the major federal funding sources for projects in the TIP. In addition, the State of New Jersey provides funds through appropriations and through the Transportation Trust Fund that have been used to match federal aid dollars and to fund selected projects in total. Counties, municipalities, private developers, toll road authorities, and transit operators are also potential sources of project funding.

I. FINANCIAL PLAN

Federal planning regulations require that the TIP contain a financial plan that demonstrates how the TIP will be implemented. It must indicate the resources from public and private sources that are reasonably expected to be made available and any recommendations for innovative financing techniques to fund needed projects and programs. In accordance with the requirements in the federal legislation, federal expenditures in the first four years of the TIP are strictly constrained to expect funding. In other words, *planned expenditures* do not exceed *projected revenues*.

The four-year SJTPO TIP represents a joint commitment between NJDOT, NJ Transit, and SJTPO to provide funding for specifically identified projects and programs within the region, in addition to participation in the statewide programs. To comply with federal guidelines, it is based on an explicit set of statewide financial assumptions, which are set out in this section.

NJDOT develops an estimate of available state and federal revenues to support the state's transportation budget during the four fiscal years from FY 2008 through FY 2011. (For planning purposes, state revenues are estimated on the basis of state fiscal years, which begin July 1, and federal revenues are estimated on the basis of federal fiscal years, which begin October 1.) This amount constitutes the funding expected to be available to support the whole FY 2007-2010 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. With two notable exceptions, federal and state funds are not "allocated" to - that is, required to be spent within the boundaries of - the state's three MPOs. The first exception is STP funds, some of which are required under a formula in TEA-21 to be allocated to MPOs. The second exception is Trust Fund state aid funds, which are allocated on a county-by-county basis under statutory and regulatory formulae.

The actual budgeting of federal and state funds for projects within the MPO areas is a product of the development of the three regional TIPs, the Statewide TIP, and the annual capital program. On a statewide basis, the cost of projects programmed for a particular fiscal year must equal the planned resources for that year. Each project must also be assigned to a funding category that is appropriate for the project and within which adequate funding is available. From year to year there may be significant variations in the amount of funds actually programmed within an MPO area, as needs and specific project implementation schedules dictate. These programming decisions are made on a cooperative basis with the participation of NJDOT, NJ Transit, local government representatives, and other agencies (all of whom are members of the MPOs), the State Legislature, citizens' groups, and the general public.

J. FINANCING TRANSITION PROJECTS

Transition projects are projects which are programmed for implementation in the previous TIP that are not actually available for implementation until after October 1, 2007 when this FY 2008-2011 TIP takes effect. This could be for either scheduling or obligation authority limitation reasons.

To provide a smooth transition between one TIP period and the next, New Jersey's MPOs and appropriate state and federal agencies have agreed that the first 60 days after approval of the FY 2008-2011 State TIP will be considered a transition period, in which projects included in the FY 2008-2011 State TIP will be considered eligible for federal funding actions, even though they are not included in the FY 2008-2011 State TIP. The list of potential transition projects for SJTPO appears in Section VII.

K. AIR QUALITY CONFORMITY

Once a proposed TIP has been compiled, it is reviewed for its effect on air quality. Under the regulations implementing the CAAA, areas with a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that conforms with the CAAA may base a finding of conformity for a TIP on the consistency of the TIP with the RTP, rather than on a new emissions analysis. The conformity finding for this TIP is summarized in Appendix A.

L. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

After it has successfully met the air quality tests, the TIP and its accompanying air quality conformity finding enter final formal public involvement procedures. In keeping with federal mandates, SJTPO seeks to actively promote public participation in the planning process. Because of the vital importance of the TIP to transportation in the region, SJTPO has instituted special procedures within its official Public Involvement Policy to ensure that citizens, affected agencies, employees, private providers of transportation and other interested parties have an opportunity to comment on the proposed program.

Specifically, SJTPO takes the following steps: placing public notice in area newspapers; sending copies of the proposed TIP and conformity finding to libraries in each county and to key participating agencies within the region; posting it on SJTPO's website; sending copies to all Technical Advisory Committee members; providing notice directly to SJTPO's mailing list; holding a public meeting; and providing a 30-day public comment period. Public comments are considered and a written summary and report on the disposition of significant comments is provided as a part of the final document.

M. THE APPROVED TIP

After the TIP and its air quality conformity finding are adopted by the SJTPO Policy Board and the TIP is formally approved by the State, the conformity finding is subject to review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The TIP is then incorporated without modification into the final State Transportation Improvement Program. Finally, both Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations must concur with the conformity finding and approve the TIP and the State TIP as to process.

When a project is in the approved TIP it is scheduled for funding, however, it is not assured of implementation. TIP projects may be subject to additional study and analysis or public hearings. Any of these steps may reveal that an improvement does not warrant advancement or may require further study to justify implementation.

N. AMENDMENTS AND MODIFICATIONS

The FY 2008 element of the TIP represents an estimate of the projects that are planned for advancement during the program year. Nevertheless, project revisions may be needed during the course of the year that requires SJTPO, NJDOT, or NJ Transit to take action in modifying or amending the TIP. Such revisions must maintain fiscal constraint, the project selection process, air quality conformity, and appropriate public involvement.

SJTPO, NJDOT, and NJ Transit have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding, which specifies the procedures for modifications and amendments under the federal planning regulations. One goal of the agreement was to simplify the process as much as possible. Accordingly, the involved State agency is authorized to make certain changes, such as small cost increases, without any action by SJTPO. More significant changes, such as larger cost increases or moving a project from the second or third year to the current year, are reviewed by SJTPO administratively. Even larger revisions, such as adding or deleting a project, require action by the SJTPO Policy Board, which includes opportunity for public involvement.

O. MAJOR PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED FROM THE FY 2007-2010 TIP

The federal planning regulations require that the TIP list major projects from the previous TIP that were implemented and identify any significant delays in the planned implementation of major projects. A list of major FY 2007 projects implemented to date can be found below. Since time remains in the fiscal year, others may be implemented before the year ends.

DBNUM	County	Project	Status
98356	Cumberland, Salem	Route 56, Maurice River Bridge Replacement	Completed
05400	Cumberland, Salem	Route 55, S of Leonard Cake Road to S of Black Water Brook	Completed

P. ADVANCE CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

Advance Construction (AC) is a procedure to advance federally funded projects into the current fiscal year and implement them with other than federal funds. Then, in a later year, federal funds are used to reimburse the initial funding source. Use of AC is subject to the availability of other than federal funds (e.g., state funds) in the year in which the project is to be implemented, and the availability of federal funds in the year in which the AC project is to be converted to a regular federal aid project.

AC projects are to be listed individually in the TIP, and in the combined State TIP, in both the year the project is to be implemented and the year in which the conversion is to take place. This notification is provided so it is clearly understood that the "other funds" are available and that future federal funds may be committed to the AC projects. Fiscal constraint must be maintained throughout this process for both the implementing and conversion years.

When AC is used in the development, amendment, or modification of the TIP and State TIP, SJTPO and the State will explain the procedure following SJTPO's adopted Public Involvement Policy. SJTPO and the State agree that the inclusion of an AC project in the TIP and the State TIP in the year the project is to be implemented signifies that the project can be converted to federal funding when federal funds become available and that the decision to convert has been made.