



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Federal Highway  
Administration**

**Federal Transit Administration**

October 30, 2018

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Charles A. Zelle  
Commissioner of Transportation  
Minnesota Department of Transportation  
MS 100, Transportation Building  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Subject: Approval of Minnesota's FY 2019 – 2022 STIP and FHWA/FTA Statewide Planning Finding

Dear Commissioner Zelle:

The following is in response to the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) transmittal of the Minnesota Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 – 2022 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) requesting approval.

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 determine 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.*

Accordingly, FHWA and FTA have jointly undertaken a review of the statewide planning process of the MnDOT. In accordance with these requirements, the following strengths of the statewide and metropolitan planning process have been identified as noteworthy:

- **Public Engagement Outreach Plan for Long-term Equity (PEOPLE)** – Aiming to strengthen public engagement on a more granular level, FHWA has been advocating for district specific engagement plans. MnDOT District 3 answered this call with PEOPLE, a document that highlights a transparent decision-making process with meaningful and intentional public interaction. PEOPLE provides demographic data and analysis specific to District 3 while identifying engagement methods that function best within that region. Given that PEOPLE should heighten District 3 engagement quality, coupled with its potential use as a statewide template, this effort is recognized as noteworthy.

- **Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan Assistance** – Over two years, FHWA and MnDOT State Aid for Local Transportation (SALT) led an effort to reach the 87 counties and 148 cities across Minnesota to raise awareness for ADA Transition Plan completion. During this outreach period, FHWA relied heavily on the MPOs for local agency awareness and coordination, technical assistance, and progress monitoring. Their substantial assistance toward achieving ADA Transition Plan compliance statewide is therefore recognized by FHWA.
- **Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Pilot Study** – FHWA has been encouraging the use of PEL to seamlessly integrate the planning process into the environmental phase. If done properly, this would implement corridor needs more efficiently and cost effectively. Harnessing this opportunity, MnDOT Trunk Highway (TH) 65 through Blaine has been chosen to serve as a pilot project for PEL. Project outcomes will include documentation of lessons learned, development of a PEL checklist, quantification of financial and time savings, updated guidance for future PELs, and recommendations for next steps. Given that PEL is an emerging tool with many process unknowns, the pilot project is noteworthy for beginning a framework that should realize time and cost benefits later.

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

- **Encouraging Community Connections** – Performance-based planning leads toward investments in maintaining infrastructure and enhancements to mobility and safety. Transportation infrastructure can contribute to the quality of life in Minnesota, and it is important to fit infrastructure into the communities it serves. In a fiscally constrained environment, MnDOT is challenged to find a balanced approach to satisfy community and environmental needs while continuing to maintain the safety and mobility of the public. Starting with MnSHIP, the planning and project development processes need to deliberately solicit, consider, and accommodate community and environmental needs that are not easily measured to deliver an equitable transportation system – especially for traditionally underserved populations.
- **MPO Performance Management Integration** – Since the passage of MAP-21, performance management has become a transportation focus. Integrating performance management into all aspects an MPO planning process can ensure scarce resources are used effectively and transparently. Opportunities exist for Minnesota MPOs to further integrate performance management into their processes, with long-range transportation plans serving as the catalyst. MnDOT District coordination, buy-in and assistance can also help achieve this goal. Transparent, data-driven planning decisions that factor in risk and establish a regular practice of before/after analysis would serve as the best use of planning dollars in the state.
- **Linking (Transportation Asset Management Plan) TAMP strategies to investments/implementation** – MnDOT’s draft TAMP identifies optimization strategies. Effective

implementation of these strategies will cost effectively manage the infrastructure condition. MnDOT has an opportunity to expand the timely use of preventative maintenance strategies to reduce the life cycle cost and achieve performance targets. Deliberately funding and tracking implementation of infrastructure treatments per the optimal life cycle can help ensure the implementation of the TAMP and the right mix of fixes.

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 2019 – 2022 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).

This approval includes the corresponding individual MPO 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).

Approval of the 2019 – 2022 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 Andrew Emanuele, FHWA Community Planner at (651) 291-6124, or Bill Wheeler, FTA Community Planner at (312) 353-2639.

Sincerely,

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Arlene Kocher  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration



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Kelley Brookins  
Regional Administrator  
Federal Transit Administration

cc: Trang Chu  
Brian Gage  
Roberta Retzlaff  
Kris Riesenber