



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

Federal Transit Administration

October 29, 2021

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Margaret Anderson Kelliher
Commissioner of Transportation
Minnesota Department of Transportation
MS 100, Transportation Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Subject: Approval of Minnesota's FY 2022 – 2025 STIP and FHWA/FTA Federal Planning Finding

Dear Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher:

The following letter is in response to the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) transmittal of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 – 2025 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. This is achieved by examining the STIP and associated TIP documents, statewide and metropolitan planning self-certification statements (23 CFR 450.220; 23 CFR 450.336), related supporting documentation, and regular ongoing involvement with MnDOT and the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

In addition, under 23 CFR 450.220(b), the FHWA and FTA are required to document and issue a Federal Planning Finding (FPF) in conjunction with the STIP approval. The FPF verifies, at a minimum, that the development of the STIP is consistent with the provisions of both the statewide and metropolitan transportation planning requirements of 23 U.S.C. 234, 135; 49 U.S.C. 5303-5305; 23 CFR parts 450 and 500, and 49 CFR part 613.

Attachment 1 contains the complete FY 2022 – 2025 FPF. The Findings are summarized below:

Commendations

- Statewide Pedestrian System Plan

Recommendations

- STIP public involvement process
- Ensure consistency in how state and locally funded projects are listed in MPO TIPs and the STIP

Corrective Actions

- There are no Corrective Actions included with the 2022-2025 FPF

Accordingly, we find that the FY 2022 – 2025 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 as 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 FY 2022 – 2025 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 value MnDOT's sustained efforts to ensure a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive planning process. We recognize the complexity of assembling a STIP and the effort expended by MnDOT staff.

We look forward to working with MnDOT to advance the projects and programs in the STIP and to provide the traveling public with an efficient, high-quality transportation system.

Should you have any questions regarding this STIP approval and Federal Planning Finding, please contact Bobbi Retzlaff, FHWA Community Planner at (651) 291-6125, or Bill Wheeler, FTA Community Planner at (312) 353-2639.

Sincerely yours,



Wendall L. Meyer
Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration

Kelley Brookins
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration

Attachment

cc: Trang Chu (MnDOT)
Brian Gage (MnDOT)
Ed Idzorek (MnDOT)
Anna Pierce (MnDOT)
Kris Riesenberg (FHWA)

Attachment 1

Minnesota Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Finding for the FY 2022 – 2025 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

Overview

The Federal Planning Finding (FPF) is the key oversight mechanism through which the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) ensure that the transportation planning processes in Minnesota meet federal requirements. 23 CFR 450.220(b) requires FHWA and FTA to document and issue a Federal Planning Finding (FPF) in conjunction with approval of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The FPF verifies that, at a minimum, the development of the STIP is consistent with the provisions of both the Statewide and Metropolitan transportation planning requirements of 23 U.S.C. 134, 135; 49 U.S.C. 5303-5305; 23 CFR parts 450 and 500, and 49 CFR part 613.

Background

FHWA and FTA conducted the FPF in a risk-based capacity; the highest priority was placed in matters with the greatest potential to impede compliance with the federal planning requirements. FHWA and FTA determined the Findings through an in-depth desk review, risk tracking, assessment of previous Findings, day-to-day interactions with MnDOT and the MPOs, and feedback from MnDOT.

Findings fall into one of three categories: Commendations, Recommendations, or Corrective Actions. Each category is defined as follows:

Commendations: Planning activities that demonstrate innovative, highly effective and well-thought-out procedures for implementing the planning requirements or represent a national model for implementation and can be cited as an example for others.

Recommendations: Items that meet the statutory and regulatory requirements, but may contain opportunities to improve the transportation planning process.

Corrective Actions: Items that do not meet statutory and regulatory requirements. Corrective Actions require a work plan detailing how the issue will be resolved and by when.

2021-2024 STIP Findings

The 2021-2024 STIP FPF identified two commendations and two recommendations. The status of these findings is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: 2021-2024 STIP Federal Planning Findings and Status

Finding Type	Finding	Status
Commendation	Programming Update Workgroup (PUW)	Ongoing
Commendation	2020-2024 Strategic Highway Safety Plan	Ongoing
Recommendation	STIP public involvement process	Due to the pandemic and staffing shortages, MnDOT requested this recommendation be carried forward to the 2022-2025 STIP FPF.
Recommendation	MnDOT/MPO project coordination follow-up	MnDOT and the MPOs continue to improve project coordination.

2022-2025 STIP Findings

Commendations

Commendation #1: Statewide Pedestrian System Plan

Observation: MnDOT released its first statewide pedestrian system plan. The plan provides direction and strategies to help ensure that the concerns and needs of those who walk along and across the state highway system are addressed during statewide and project planning. The plan identified 50 action items grouped into four categories: investment planning, cost participation, maintenance, and project scoping and needs identification. The plan also developed the Priority Areas for Walking Study (PAWS). While PAWS does not identify specific pedestrian-related treatments or standards, it does serve as a tool to ensure walking is considered during the decision-making process. While the plan is focused on the state highway network, MnDOT included information on how other agencies and organizations can use the plan to increase levels of walking across the state.

Finding: MnDOT is commended on developing its first statewide pedestrian plan. The action items provide steps MnDOT – and its partners – can undertake to increase walking levels and improve access to destinations. The PAWS tool helps identify the highest priority areas for walking along state highways.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: STIP Public Involvement Process

Observation: The 2021-2024 STIP FPF included a recommendation to document the STIP public involvement process. Due to the pandemic and staffing shortages, MnDOT requested that FHWA defer the recommendation for one year.

Finding: As discussed in the 2021-2024 STIP FPF, MnDOT should document that the state’s STIP public involvement process is consistent with the requirements identified in 23 CFR 450.210(a)

and provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points. A documented process shows how MnDOT engages the public and stakeholders, including traditionally underserved populations, throughout the development of the STIP and describes how MnDOT will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of its outreach efforts.

Recommendation #2: Ensure consistency in how state and locally funded projects are listed in MPO TIPs and the STIP.

Observation: As part of the 2022-2025 STIP review, FHWA staff compared a sample of 2022 projects identified in the TIP and STIP to ensure consistency between the documents. Federal regulations require STIPs and TIPs to include all projects funded under Title 23 United States Code (USC) or Title 49 USC Chapter 53, all projects requiring action by either FHWA or FTA, or all regionally significant projects regardless of funding source (23 CFR 450.218(g)-(h) and 23 CFR 450.326(e)-(f)). MPOs are encouraged to define what projects are considered regionally significant. Federal regulations neither require nor discourage the listing of locally funded non-regionally significant projects. The decision to list locally funded non-regionally significant projects is at the discretion of the MPO and state. If the projects are listed, the TIP and STIP must be consistent as per 23 CFR 450.218(b).

Finding: In reviewing the sampled projects, FHWA staff identified inconsistencies between the locally funded projects listed in a TIP and the projects listed in the STIP. MnDOT and the MPO must coordinate to ensure the TIP and STIP are consistent.

Corrective Actions

There are no Corrective Actions included in the 2022-2025 STIP FPF.

Finalization and Transmittal

Following submittal to MnDOT, this FPF will be uploaded into FHWA's INPUT Response Tracker which documents the completion of the FPF and archives the results. INPUT also serves as the tracking system when following up with the State DOT and MPOs on their progress toward resolving identified risks. Since this FPF issued no Corrective Actions, it will be uploaded without a Work Plan or assigned task completion dates. We look forward to working with MnDOT to address the recommendations addressed in this document.