

**Blair Metropolitan Planning Organization
Project Selection Process Documentation
for the 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program**

Overview

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act legislation and the Statewide and Metropolitan Transportation Planning Final Rule (Title 23 U.S.C. Section 34 and Title 49 U.S.C. Section 1607) require that local and state officials in areas with a population of 50,000 to prepare plans and programs through a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3 C) planning process that certifies the area as eligible to receive federal transportation funds. The designated group that conducts the planning process is the Blair Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

During the planning process to update the transportation improvement program (TIP), the Blair MPO works with PennDOT, transit providers, the Blair County Planning Commission, elected officials, the public and other stakeholders to identify transportation priorities as candidate projects for the TIP and the long range plan.

The MPO prioritizes the projects in the TIP from the federal and state capital funds that are available as shown in the Department's financial guidance. Candidate TIP projects are either consistent with or included in the Long Range Transportation Plan. After the MPO approves the TIP, the State Transportation Commission adopts it as the First Four Years of the Twelve Year Program.

The Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990 require planning activities for areas if the air quality is not in attainment. Although Blair County is an "attainment area" for all current air quality standards, transportation conformity analysis on certain projects is required due to its 1997 violation of the 8-hour Ozone Standard and the February 16, 2018, D.C. Circuit decision in South Coast Air Quality Management District v. EPA (case no. 15-1115) and the subsequent guidance issued by EPA (EPA-420-B-18-050).

The Secretary of Transportation works to involve the public in preparing the TIP and long range plan by encouraging citizens to participate in the State Transportation Commission's 30 day public involvement period and meeting at the beginning of the two year update cycle. On behalf of the MPO, Blair Planning conducts the 30 day public review period for the draft TIP and the air quality and environmental justice analysis by advertising the draft TIP and the required documents in the newspaper, placing the documents on the Blair Planning website, and holding a public meeting at least two weeks before adoption by the MPO.

Project Selection

Projects in the TIP address a variety of transportation modes including improvements to roadways, bridges, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, rail freight facilities and sometimes airports. In recent years, system maintenance has required a growing share of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's resources. As a result, the TIP places high priority on projects that rehabilitate and reconstruct existing and aging transportation infrastructure.

The projects selected for inclusion on the 2023-2026 TIP, were either carryover projects from the previous TIP and long range plan or are consistent with PennDOT's "Business Plan" and "Transportation Asset Management Plan". The purpose of the plans is to evaluate the data associated with the

transportation decision-making process by ensuring that each dollar invested enhances the overall “performance” of the Commonwealth’s transportation system. The priority areas are as follows:

- Bridges on the National Highway System (NHS)
- Roadway conditions on the NHS
- Bridges on the remainder of the state and local roadway system
- Roadways on the remainder of the state roadway system.

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century and FAST Acts have performance-based planning and programming requirements, Transportation Performance Management, and the Transportation Asset Management Plan requirements that are incorporated in PennDOT’s General and Procedural Guidance. Information from the Asset Management Steering Committee, the Asset Management Division, Bridge Asset Management System (BAMS), and Pavement Asset Management System (PAMS) are included in the guidance document prepared for the 2023 TIP update to provide enhanced support for project programming to achieve Lowest Life Cycle Cost (LLCC). The Program Center will work with the Asset Management Division to provide the MPO with a list of recommended projects by work type based on LLCC projections derived from PennDOT’s pavement and bridge asset management systems based on funding allocations from the Financial Guidance document. The document has been updated to include an Asset Management Factor, which allows for adjusted funding in areas that demonstrate greater need. More details can be found in the “Pennsylvania 2019 Transportation Asset Management Plan”.

In addition, criteria in the following documents is used to help recommend projects:

- Regional Long Range Transportation Plan
- Regional Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan
- Safety needs identified through statewide Intersection Safety Implementation and Roadway Departure Implementation Plans, regional safety plans, and regional operation plans.

In preparing a draft list of projects for the TIP and the long range plan, PennDOT District 9-0 asks the county planning commission for candidate projects including safety projects and local bridges. The draft TIP and long range plan include projects in the following categories:

- carryover projects (projects that have begun on a prior TIP and need completed)
- Transportation Asset Management Plan for the National Highway System (major arterial roadways)
- Performance Measures and Targets
- Strategic Highway Safety Plan
- Long Range Transportation Plan
- County and local bridge priorities (the planning commission surveys the County and the municipalities for potential safety projects and local bridge priorities that could become candidate projects)
- Plans and studies that occur in collaboration with the County, local governments, PennDOT, other stakeholders, and the public

PennDOT District 9-0 conducts PennDOT Connects project interviews with the municipalities in which candidate TIP state highway and bridge projects are located. Blair Planning asks municipalities to complete the project initiation forms for their candidate local bridge projects and meets with the District to review the local bridges included in its Local Bridge Risk Assessment.

After the PennDOT District reviews project information and candidate project requests, it establishes a proposed list project priorities and prepares a fiscally balanced draft TIP of highway and bridge projects. Altoona Metro Transit prepares the draft TIP of public transit projects.

The MPO Technical and Coordinating committees then review and approve the draft TIP and forward it to the PennDOT Program Center for further review.

The planning commission conducts a Core Elements Environmental Justice Analysis and sends copies of the draft TIPs to organizations that represent people in low-income groups and minority groups and to Native American Nations for their review and comment as required.

Blair Planning advertises the draft TIP and the required documents in the newspaper and places the documents on the Blair Planning website for a 30 day public comment period and holds a public meeting at least two weeks before adoption by the MPO.

Roadway Projects

The department updates its roadway inventories annually in the Roadway Management System (RMS). This information is included in the Roadway “5-Year Plan”, where roadway needs are assessed using cycles that follow PennDOT’s Pavement Policy Manual. Projects selected from the 5-Year Plan may include factors like Decade of Investment (DOI) plan projects; fulfillment of and maintaining acceptable levels on the scorecard of influence; hierarchy of the roadway; current roadway conditions; and the next needed pavement treatment cycle.

Bridge Projects

The physical condition of a bridge’s superstructure is compared to its original as-built condition. A number is assigned by state-certified bridge inspectors during each inspection of the bridge, which occurs at least every two years on bridges 20 feet or > in length. Bridge condition ratings range from nine to zero. A rating of four or below indicates poor conditions that result in a “Poor” classification.

A. Replacements:

1. Bridges with condition five or less are evaluated
2. Prioritization by Business Plan Network: Interstate top priority and non-NHS with less than 2,000 ADT lowest priority
3. Consider roadway projects for combination with bridge replacements
4. Evaluate if Department Forces can complete the work.

B. Rehabilitations:

Same logic as Replacements, but mostly look for bridges that we can raise the condition ratings to a six or greater for all three major bridge components (substructures, superstructures

and deck).

C. Preservation:

1. Rely on evaluations and where appropriate cycles for each preservation treatment:
 - a. 10 to 20-year cycle for deck overlays (depends on type of overlay and traffic volumes)
 - b. 10-year replacement cycle for expansion dam strip seal glands
 - c. 15-year replacement cycle for tooth dam expansion troughs
 - d. 50 to 75-year cycle to replace entire expansion dams
 - e. 30 to 40-year cycle for painting steel girder bridges
 - f. 15 to 20-year cycle for painting steel trusses and steel through plate girders.
2. If appropriate, the deck and joint preservations are included with roadway projects on Business Plan Networks 1 to 3.
3. Standalone group bridge preservation projects are established for:
 - a. Painting projects
 - b. To get bridges on cycle when no roadway projects are planned
 - c. To address Business Plan Network 4 when Department Forces cannot complete the work
 - d. Scour or substructure repairs.
4. Prioritize by Business Plan Network and by the highest cost assets (major river crossings).

The TIP and long range plan may also include funds for projects that received funding from programs allocated on a statewide basis, including the following:

- Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside
- Appalachian Regional Commission Local Access Road Program
- Automated Red Light Enforcement and Green-Light-Go Programs
- Multimodal Transportation Fund
- Congested Corridor Improvement Program
- Rapid Bridge Replacement Program (P3)
- Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Program (RRX)
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) Statewide Set-aside.

In addition to the above process, please refer to the *“Pennsylvania Transportation Performance Management Performance-based Planning and Programming Procedures”* that describes the cooperative efforts between the planning partners, the Federal Highway Administration, and PennDOT to address those required procedures. PennDOT District 9-0 also has a *“2023 TIP Development Timeline”* of its activities.

2023 TIP Development Timeline for the Blair Metropolitan Planning Organization

March – July 2020 – The Blair County Planning Commission/Blair Planning surveyed the County and municipalities for local bridge priorities.

September 2020 - PennDOT District 9-0 updated its Local Bridge Risk Assessment and met with Blair Planning to review municipal bridge priorities and suggestions from the risk assessment that would help prioritize projects to be included in the draft 2023 TIP.

October 2020 – Blair Planning submitted an initial draft list of municipal bridge projects to PennDOT District 9-0.

March-April 2021 – Blair Planning reviewed the public comments for Blair County projects received during the State Transportation Commission’s Online Public Forum and public comment period for the 12-Year Program Update.

Spring and Summer 2021 – Blair Planning asked four municipalities and the County to complete PennDOT Connects project initiation forms for the recommended local bridges.

June 29, 2021 - Blair Planning attended a Summer Planning Partners Meeting focused on the 2023 TIP update.

July 29, 2021 – Blair Planning reviewed and submitted its final list of municipal bridge and safety projects to PennDOT District 9-0.

Fall 2021 – The PennDOT District 9-0 updated the project scopes and estimated costs/schedules for active projects on the current TIP.

Fall 2021 Blair Planning attended Planning Partners Meeting that provided information about the 2023 TIP update.

December 2021 – The District provided Blair Planning with a Draft 2023-2026 TIP that it distributed to the MPO Coordinating and Technical Committees.

December 13, 2021 – The Blair MPO approved the draft list of 2023 TIP projects.

December 2021 The Draft 2023 TIP project list was submitted to the Program Center, Federal Highway and Transit Administrations for review.

January 19, 2022 – The Program Center will hold a staff coordination conference call to review candidate projects, to agree on projects for inclusion in the Draft 2023 TIP, and to resolve any issues.

January - May 2022 – Blair Planning will perform an Environmental Justice Analysis by using populations of minorities and low income groups and maps to evaluate the benefits and burdens for draft 2023 TIP projects.

February through May 31, 2022 – Blair Planning will participate with PennDOT District 9-0’s completion of PennDOT Connects forms and interviews for new draft 2023 TIP projects.

February- April 2022 – The PennDOT Program Center will forward the Draft 2023 TIP to FHWA for eligibility review.

March – April 2022 – PennDOT will conduct air quality conformity analysis on Draft 2023 TIP.

May 2022 – Blair Planning will email copies of the Draft TIPs to groups that represent Environmental Justice communities and to individual Indian Nations as required.

May 20, 2022 – Blair Planning will advertise the Draft 2023 TIP for public comment and post it and the other required documents on its website for 30 days.

May 20 – June 20, 2022 – Blair Planning will accept public comments on the draft TIP and documents and conduct a public meeting to review the TIP and required documents in the week of June 6 or 13th.

June 27, 2022 – The MPO is scheduled to approve the air quality conformity analysis, the Environmental Justice Analysis and the other TIP documents and resolutions and then approve the 2023-2026 TIP.

By July 15, 2022 – Blair Planning will submit the approved 2023 TIP and related documents as a package to the PennDOT Program Center for delivery to the State Transportation Commission for adoption and then to the US DOT for approval.

For details on PennDOT Engineering District 9-0’s 2023 TIP activities, please see the “District 9 2023 Program Development Timeline”. For details on the PennDOT Central Office’s 2023 TIP activities, please see the “2023 Program Development Schedule”.