Corridors of Commerce Readiness Advancement Activities Program Guidance

Overview

Up to ten percent of Corridors of Commerce funds available in each fiscal year may be allocated for the following readiness advancement activities: planning, scoping, predesign, preliminary engineering, and environmental analysis. Any share of funds not allocated to readiness advancement activities must be distributed back to the program. Funds are for project development sufficient to meet the eligibility and scoring criteria of the program.

Project Classification

Candidate projects are classified as either Capacity Development projects or Freight Improvement projects.

- **Capacity Development** projects are on a segment of trunk highway where the segment:
  - is not a divided highway, and that highway is an expressway or freeway beyond the project limits;
  - contains a highway terminus that lacks an intersection or interchange with another trunk highway;
  - contains fewer lanes of travel compared to that highway beyond the project limits; or
  - contains a location that is proposed as a new interchange or to be reconstructed from an intersection to an interchange.
- **Freight Improvement** projects are for an asset preservation or replacement project that can result in:
  - removing or reducing barriers to commerce;
  - easing or preserving freight movement;
  - support emerging industries; or
  - providing connections between the trunk highway system and other transportation modes for the movement of freight.

Beginning February 1, 2025, Minnesota Statutes 161.178 now requires capacity expansion projects to complete a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) impact assessment and conform with the State's GHG and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction targets prior to inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) or a metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). What this means for

Corridors of Commerce, specifically readiness advancement activities, is that an initial impact assessment must be completed as part of awards made under this program.

Project Eligibility

The Corridors of Commerce law specifically laid out program eligibility guidelines. The eligibility requirements for readiness advancement activities that can be funded under the program are:

- The future project is consistent with MnDOT's Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP);
- The location of the future project is on the Trunk Highway system within the Metro District or on the National Highway System (NHS) within a Greater Minnesota District;
- Placement into at least one project classification category; and
- The future project may be, but is not required to be, identified in the 20-year state highway investment plan.

Regional Balance

To ensure regional balance throughout the state, Minnesota Statutes 161.088 requires that all available program funds be distributed according to the following regional allocations:

- **Metro Projects**: at least 25% and no more than 27.5% of the funds are for projects that are located within, on, or directly adjacent to an area bounded by marked Interstate Highways 494 and 694.
- **Metro Connector Projects**: at least 35% and no more than 37.5% of the funds are for projects that are located wholly or primarily within a greater metropolitan county and outside of the Metro Project boundary identified above.
- **Regional Center Projects**: at least 35% and no more than 40% of the funds are for projects that are outside of the two boundaries identified above.

Project Selection Process

The process for identifying, evaluating and selecting readiness advancement activity nominations under the program is done in phases.

Phase I: Project Solicitation

MnDOT will use an online nomination process that allows for an interested party, including an individual, business, local unit of government, corridor group, or interest group, to submit a future project needing to complete readiness advancement activities for consideration. The following information needs to be provided through the online system to be considered nominated:

- Name and contact information of nominator;
- Name of the organization the nominator represents;
- Future project location;

- A detailed description of the readiness advancement activity to be funded through this program;
- The total activity cost and the amount of funding being requested from this program;
- The source and dollar amount of any other funding commitments for this nomination; and
- Name and contact information for those other funding commitments.

Phase 2: Local Screening & Recommendations

MnDOT will distribute nominations received during the open solicitation to local screening entities. Screening entities identified within the statute:

- Metropolitan Council in consultation with the Transportation Advisory Board
- Greater Minnesota Area Transportation Partnerships
- Each of the following greater metropolitan counties: Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott, Sherburne, Washington and Wright.

Screening entities must consider all of the submitted nominations for its area. Consideration shall include soliciting input from members of the legislature who represent the area for review, comment, and nonbinding approval or disapproval. Additionally, MnDOT district offices will review submitted budgets for accuracy. Any budgets needing revision can be recommended for scoring with a stipulation of receiving a revised budget.

Each screening entity may select up to two nominations to recommend for readiness advancement funding. Each recommendation must identify the comments and approvals or disapprovals provided by a member of the legislature.

Phase 3: Project Scoring

Scoring Overview

All nominations recommended by a Local Screening Entity, that have been determined to be eligible for the program, will be scored. Up to 100 Points will be awarded for each of the eight criteria. The maximum possible score is 800 points.

Scoring Criteria

Once recommendations have been received from local screening entities, MnDOT will complete a scoring assessment. Recommended nominations must be scored using all of the following criteria, as required by law.

Return on Investment (ROI)

Future projects should demonstrate a return on investment. This criterion will compare the cost of the readiness advancement activity in relation to the roadway's current utilization.

Cost of the activity divided by the sum of the Average Annual Daily Traffic plus the Heavy Commercial Average Annual Daily Traffic will determine the cost per vehicle. The nomination with the lowest cost

per vehicle receives 100 points and the nomination with the highest cost per vehicle receives 0 points. All nominations between receive points proportionally scaled from the lowest cost per vehicle.

Economic Competitiveness

Future projects should support commerce and economic competitiveness.

The 5-year job growth rate for the county in which the future project is located will be used to assign half of the points for this category. If a future project crosses county lines, the average job growth rate of the two counties will be used. The nomination with the highest growth rate will receive 50 points and the nomination with the lowest growth rate will receive 0 points. All nominations between receive points proportionally scaled from the highest rate.

Economic development activity along the corridor will account for the other half of points in this category. Nomination descriptions shall include information on economic development activities along the roadway. Using the table below nominations will receive points based on the scoring committee's assessment of the economic activities.

Level of Economic Development Activity	Points
All New Development/Redevelopment	50
Mostly New Development/Redevelopment	40
Some New Development/Redevelopment	30
Little New Development/Redevelopment	20
No New Development/Redevelopment	10
No development along corridor	0

Freight Efficiency

Travel Time Reliability will be used to evaluate the roadway's travel time. Both the percentage and degree of travel time reliability will be utilized to develop an index that can be compared to all the other nominations. The nomination with the lowest percentage of reliability will receive 50 points and all others will be assigned points proportionally from the lowest percentage.

Heavy Commercial Average Annual Daily Traffic (HCAADT) will be used to assign the remaining 50 points in this category. HCADDT will be taken from MnDOT's traffic count volumes maps and used directly as this output. MnDOT will determine the closest HCAADT measurement to the future project or use a weighted HCAADT figure if more than one volume is available along the project area. The

nomination with the highest HCAADT count will receive 50 points. All other nominations will be assigned points proportionally from the highest count.

Safety

Ensuring safety is top priority for MnDOT, so projects will be evaluated on their crash history.

The 5-year average number of Fatal and Type A injury crashes will be used to determine up to 75 points for this criterion. The nomination with the highest average number of fatal and type A injury crashes will receive 75 points and no points will be given to a nomination if the average number is 0. All other nominations will be assigned points proportionally from the highest average.

The 5-year average number of all crashes will be used to determine up to 25 points. The nomination with the highest average number of all crashes will receive 25 points and no points will be given to a nomination if the average number is 0. All other nominations will be assigned points proportionally from the highest average.

Regional Connections

Connections within the transportation system facilitate statewide mobility.

Nominations will be scored based upon the connection issue the future project is trying to address using the following table. If a future project is seeking to address multiple issues, MnDOT will apply the highest scoring issue from the table to calculate the points.

Connection Issue	Interstates	Principal Arterials	Other
Lane gaps within a larger corridor	100	75	50
Isolated signalized intersection to interchange	NA	75	50
Need multiple interchanges/accesses	NA	50	25
Need additional lanes	75	50	25
Need to expand existing intersection/interchange	75	50	25
Connection to multimodal/intermodal facility	75	50	25
Unsignalized intersection to interchange	NA	50	25
Missing interchange ramps/movements	50	25	5

Connection Issue	Interstates	Principal Arterials	Other
Need passing lanes	NA	25	5
Does not meet one of the above	0	0	0

Policy Objectives

Future projects should address transportation system policy objectives and principals. MnDOT uses the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP) as the basis for assigning points for this criterion. Each nomination narrative shall provide insight as to how the future project achieves SMTP objectives.

Four of the six policy objectives from the 2022 SMTP will be considered, with each accounting for up to 25 points of the total 100 points possible in this category. The table below lists examples of elements that will be considered when assigning scores for each objective. Additional elements can be found in Chapter 5 of the 2022 SMTP.

SMTP Objective	Criteria (examples)	Points
System Stewardship	• Coordination with partners on management of assets connected to the transportation system (communications, utilities, etc.) • Provide transportation infrastructure and facilities that reflect the surrounding context (support existing/planned land use)	Up to 25
Climate Action	• Considerations for transitioning the transportation sector away from fossil-based fuels (EV charging) • Transportation and land use decisions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mixed land uses, non-emitting transportation modes, etc.) • Mitigate risk of extreme weather and increase resiliency (vulnerability assessments, stormwater management, etc.)	Up to 25
Healthy Equitable Communities	• Coordinate planning among partners, stakeholders and public (collaboration, engagement, etc.) • Reduce transportation burdens and inequities (remove barriers, address issues from the past, reduce transportation costs) • Leverage transportation to improve health (active transportation, access to food/services/parks, etc)	Up to 25

SMTP Objective	Criteria (examples)	Points
Open Decision Making	• Opportunities to have a role in transportation decision making (working with communities, engagement plans, inclusion of those impacted, etc.) • Build relationships to engage people, especially underserved communities (regular communication, connect with leaders, education, etc.) • Use research and data to drive decision making (easily accessible data, data visualization tools, qualitive data, etc.)	Up to 25

Community Consensus

Support and consensus from the surrounding community is needed for the future project to succeed.

To help ensure that nominations meet the spirit of this criteria, MnDOT has made each section of the table below all or nothing points. In the first section, all the municipalities and counties touched by the future project need to provide a letter of support in order to receive the 45 points. For the second section all regional planning agencies for the area in which the future project is located need to provide a letter of support in or to receive the 45 points. The third section requests a single letter of support from any chamber of commerce with relation to the future project for an additional 10 points.

The letters of support are not needed for the nominations until 60-days after the closing of the online process. MnDOT will contact all the municipalities and counties impacted by a nomination to request they consider providing a letter of support. MnDOT will note that if the local government does not provide a letter of support, it will impact the nomination's score within the Corridors of Commerce program. MnDOT will likewise notify the regional planning agencies of nominations that will need letters of support from them. The nominator is responsible for contacting a local chamber of commerce to have them send a letter of support. All letters should be sent electronically to Nicole Westadt.

What is Needed	Who	Points
Letter(s) of Support from each municipality and county that is touched by the project.	Mayor/County Board Chair	45 – All jurisdictions 0 – Missing any jurisdiction
Letter(s) of Support from the Metropolitan Planning Organization, Regional Development Commission and/or Regional Planning Agency.	Chair/Executive Director	45 – All planning organizations 0 – Missing any planning organization

What is Needed	Who	Points
Letter of Support from a Chamber of Commerce with purview over the future project area.	Chair/Executive Director	10 – At least one letter 0 – No letter

Project Deliverability

This criterion is designed to award points for those nominations further along in the project development process and thus have a higher likelihood to be delivered within the funding timeframe for the program. Using the table below, MnDOT will assign points based on the readiness advancement activity for which funding is being requested. If a project is seeking funding for multiple activities, MnDOT will apply the lowest scoring activity from the table to calculate the points.

Readiness Advancement Activity	Points
Environmental Analysis	100
Engineering/Design	75
Scoping	50
Planning	25

Phase 4: Project Ranking Selection

Upon completion of nomination scoring, MnDOT will develop ranked lists based on the total score for each of the regional project categories.

Phase 5: Public Information

MnDOT will publish information regarding the selection process on the department's website. The information will include:

- lists of all readiness advancement activity nominations submitted for consideration and all nominations recommended by the screening entities;
- the scores and ranking for each nomination; and
- an overview of each selected nomination amounts and sources of funding.

Additional Program Guidance

MnDOT will not award funding to a nomination that does not meet all the applicable state and federal laws, even if it scores the highest in the program.

Information will be shared with selected nominations for future projects anticipated needing to complete an initial GHG impact assessment as part of the readiness advancement activity.

Program Schedule

Metro Connector and Regional Center

Key Activity	Start	End
Phase 1: Project Solicitation	March 24	April 25
Phase 2: Local Screening & Recommendations	April 28	July 11
Phase 3: Project Scoring	July 14	August 15
Phase 4: Project Ranking Selection	October 13	October 31
Phase 5: Public Information & Award Announcement	November 3	NA

Metro

Key Activity	Start	End
Phase 1: Project Solicitation	June 16	July 18
Phase 2: Local Screening & Recommendations	July 21	September 19
Phase 3: Project Scoring	September 22	October 10
Phase 4: Project Ranking Selection	October 13	October 31
Phase 5: Public Information & Award Announcement	November 3	NA

Program Contacts

If you have additional questions about the Corridors of Commerce Program, please contact Nicole Westadt, Capital Planning Director.