# REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

June 2026



METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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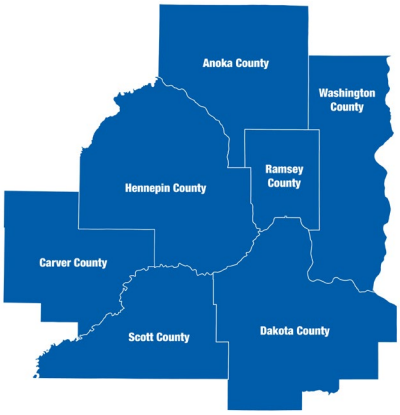


The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Met Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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# Executive Summary

The Regional Solicitation is one of the Metropolitan Council's most important tools for advancing regional transportation goals by strategically awarding federal funds to surface transportation projects. Between 2014 and 2024, the program awarded $1.5 billion in federal funds to 419 projects, leveraging another $1.6 billion in matching funds for a total of $3.1 billion in regional transportation investments. The Regional Solicitation Evaluation is the Council's once-per-decade effort to review, restructure, and modernize the entire program to ensure that future funding decisions closely align with regional policy established in *Imagine 2050* and the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP), both adopted in 2025.

The Evaluation also responds directly to feedback from applicants and partners who identified the need for a simpler, more accessible process, and incorporates new federal and local funding sources, including the regional active transportation sales tax.

The effort involved extensive technical analysis, peer Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) reviews, before-and-after project performance assessments, and a robust stakeholder engagement process with over 120 events. These events including 25 stakeholder listening sessions, the Policymaker Working Group, Technical Steering Committee, eight Special Issue Working Groups, two phases of public engagement, and a formal public comment period. Taken together, this effort represents the most comprehensive update to the Solicitation since 2014.

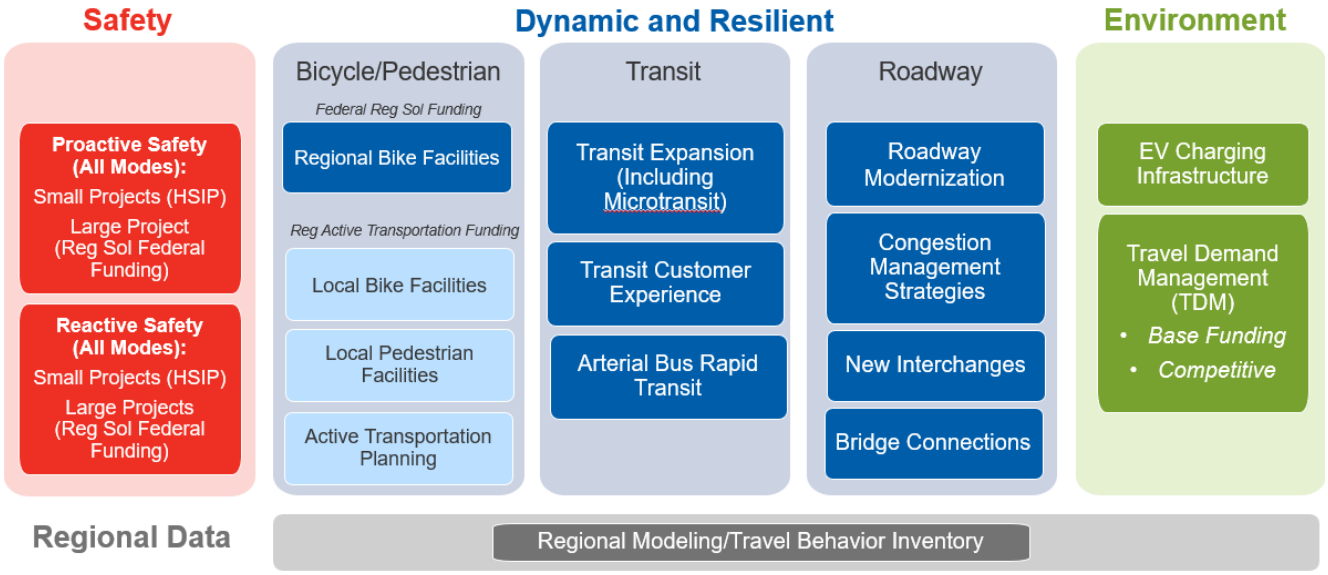
## Key Changes for the 2026 Solicitation Cycle

### New Goal-Based Structure

The 2026 funding cycle uses a goal-based structure that preserves modal investment areas from the past 10 years, while adding new safety and environment investment areas that tie back to regional goals. These investment areas are grouped under three of the five TPP goals (safety, dynamic and resilient, and environment as shown in Figure 1). The remaining goals (natural systems and equitable and inclusive region) are included as scoring criteria and/or scoring measures:

- Healthy and Safe
  - Safety
- Dynamic and Resilient
  - Bicycle/Pedestrian
  - Transit
  - Roadway
- Environment (Climate)
  - EV Charging Infrastructure and Travel Demand Management)

**Figure 1: 2026 Regional Solicitation Goal-Based Structure**




## New and Reorganized Application Categories

The 2026 redesign introduces new categories to advance regional goals and respond to emerging priorities:

- **Safety (Proactive and Reactive):**
  A new investment area that dedicates funding to projects aimed at reducing fatal and serious injury crashes, supporting the region's commitment to zero deaths and advancing the priorities of the Regional Safety Action Plan. The Proactive Safety category targets locations at high risk (i.e., without severe crash histories), while the Reactive Safety category focuses on sites with documented severe crash histories.
- **Active Transportation:**
  The Minnesota Legislature's 2023 approval of a seven-county sales tax provided $20 million to $24 million per year for active transportation initiatives. To integrate this funding, the 2026 redesign includes three new application categories: Local Bicycle Facilities, Local Pedestrian Facilities, and Active Transportation Planning. These categories directly align with seven legislative requirements for the funds.
- **Environment:**
  The Environment category includes projects specifically aimed at reducing negative environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions. This grouping includes Travel Demand Management (TDM) projects (previously included in the Transit category) and EV Charging infrastructure, which will be included in the 2028 solicitation funding cycle for the first time.

### Community Considerations: A New Cross-Cutting Scoring Criterion

Community Considerations is a new scoring criterion applied across all application categories. This criterion embeds the equitable and inclusive goal into the project selection process. Rather than relying on Census thresholds or location-based bonus points, as in past cycles, the new qualitative approach evaluates how well the applicant understands community data and context, community needs and future engagement, and then benefits of the project on the local community. The last goal area, natural systems, is a scoring measure in the four roadway applications under the dynamic and resilient goal area.

### A Simplified Application Process

One of the most significant changes for 2026 is a simplification of application requirements. The 2026 redesign streamlines criteria, eliminates redundancies, and narrows the focus of each application category to one or two key policy outcomes instead of requiring responses across all nine prior criteria. For example, the Roadway Modernization application now includes nine questions across five criteria, compared to 16 questions across nine criteria in 2024. Complicated modeling, crash analysis, and layout requirements were also modified to simplify the amount of time and effort for applicants to complete applications.

## Conclusion

The 2026 Regional Solicitation cycle represents an extensive modernization of one of the region's most impactful funding programs. It strengthens alignment with the Council's adopted 2050 regional goals, expands access to funding for active transportation projects, and simplifies the application process. Together, these changes position the Metropolitan Council and its partners to make more strategic investments that support investment in safety, travel options, and system resiliency.

# REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

## Introduction

The Regional Solicitation process has been an essential Metropolitan Council funding program since 1993. Its main objective is to help advance regional policies and priorities through the allocation of federal surface transportation funds to a variety of locally initiated projects. Every two years, the Regional Solicitation process awards federal transportation funds to projects that are selected in an objective, data-driven, transparent, and performance-based manner.

Between 2014 and 2024, $1.5 billion in federal funding was distributed to 419 projects. This Regional Solicitation funding leveraged another $1.6 billion from other sources, bringing the total regional investment to $3.1 billion, for roadways, transit, bikeways, pedestrian facilities, and travel demand management projects.

Every ten years, the Council conducts a Regional Solicitation Evaluation, aimed at evaluating and redesigning the entire Regional Solicitation program and process. The previous Regional Solicitation Evaluation Study was completed in 2014, resulting in changes implemented in the 2014 funding cycle. Most notably, application categories were switched from program-based to modal-based funding. Under this structure applicants selected the appropriate evaluation sub-category for their proposed project based on the mode requiring the largest percentage of cost. In 2014, the application was also made web-based and significantly shortened.

In addition to the 10-year formal Evaluation, considerable time and effort is put into evaluating and revising the Regional Solicitation application package between each funding cycle. These changes are based on feedback from applicants, committee members, the public, and scorers, as well as changes to regional transportation policy.

### 2024 Regional Solicitation Evaluation Goals

This Evaluation, which was started following the 2024 solicitation cycle, identified changes to be implemented as part of the 2026 solicitation cycle. The purpose of the Regional Solicitation Evaluation is to align federally funded project selection closely to the goals, objectives, and policies of Imagine 2050 and the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP), which were both formally adopted in 2025.

The 2050 TPP Goals include:

- Our Region is Equitable and Inclusive
- Our Communities are Healthy and Safe
- Our Region is Dynamic and Resilient
- We Lead on Addressing Climate Change
- We Protect and Restore Natural Systems

Other major goals of the Evaluation include simplifying the application process and reducing barriers to applying. These goals respond to regional stakeholder feedback, which identified the application process as lengthy, complicated, and sometimes costly for local agencies that required consultant support.

In addition, the Evaluation identified ways to incorporate new funding sources and legislative requirements. These included both federal funding sources such as

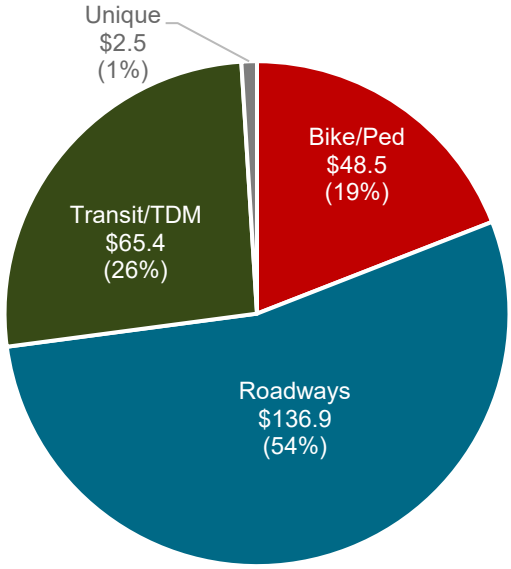
PROTECT and Carbon Reduction funding, and local funding sources such as the regional active transportation sales tax.

## Federal Funding Overview

While the total amount varies based on federal funding fluctuations, the Regional Solicitation typically distributes about $250 million in transportation funding in each two-year period. Over the years the funding awarded to each transportation mode has fluctuated based on local and federal priorities, but, on average, just over one-half of the funding has gone toward roadway projects (which may include multimodal elements) as shown in Figure 2.

This breakdown is anticipated to evolve for the 2026 Regional Solicitation and beyond, since the program has re-organized the funding categories. In addition, current funding levels are based on programs included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which expires in 2026. Funding levels and programs may change depending on the contents of a new federal surface transportation funding reauthorization. The scope of those changes is unknown and could amount to minor adjustments to existing programs or sweeping changes and new/deleted programs.

**Figure 2: Average Federal Funding by mode for each solicitation cycle, 2014-2024 (millions)**




Currently, the Metropolitan Council has approximately $125 million per year to allocate from IIJA funding, from the following programs:

- **The Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program**: $68 million/year regionally, which funds a broad range of transportation projects.
- **Transportation Alternatives (TA):** $14 million/year set aside within the STBG dedicated to smaller-scale projects including, but not limited to, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, recreational trails, and Safe Routes to School.
- **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)**: Approximately $33.5 million/year regionally for projects that reduce congestion and air pollution.
- **Carbon Reduction Program:** $7 million/year for projects designed to reduce transportation emissions, defined as carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from on-road highway sources.
- Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program: $3.5 million/year to improve resiliency to natural hazards.

# Regional Solicitation Evaluation Process

The Regional Solicitation Evaluation included extensive technical analysis to understand best practices from other national MPOs, the impact and history of previous solicitation cycles, and the evaluation of benefits from transportation projects funded through the solicitation. See the appendix for more detailed information on any of the documents summarized below.

## MPO Peer Review

The peer review examined how Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) across the United States structure and implement their processes for distributing federal transportation funds. Conducted through both a desktop analysis and an interview phase, the review sought to understand how different regions balance quantitative scoring with deliberative decision-making, manage regional versus sub-regional funding allocations, and incorporate emerging priorities such as equity, sustainability, and land-use coordination. The review highlighted diverse funding models such as centralized, decentralized, and hybrid structures, as well as practices like targeted set-asides and multi-step evaluation processes, offering a broad understanding of the strategic approaches MPOs use to align project selection with regional goals.

Following the desktop review, peer interviews were conducted with six MPOs each representing a range of organizational structures and decision-making approaches. These MPOs included:

- Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)
- Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission in Columbus (MORPC)
- Mid-American Regional Council in Kansas City (MARC)
- Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)
- Puget Sound Regional Council in Seattle (PSRC)
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission in San Francisco (MTC)

Across interviews, several key policy considerations consistently emerged:

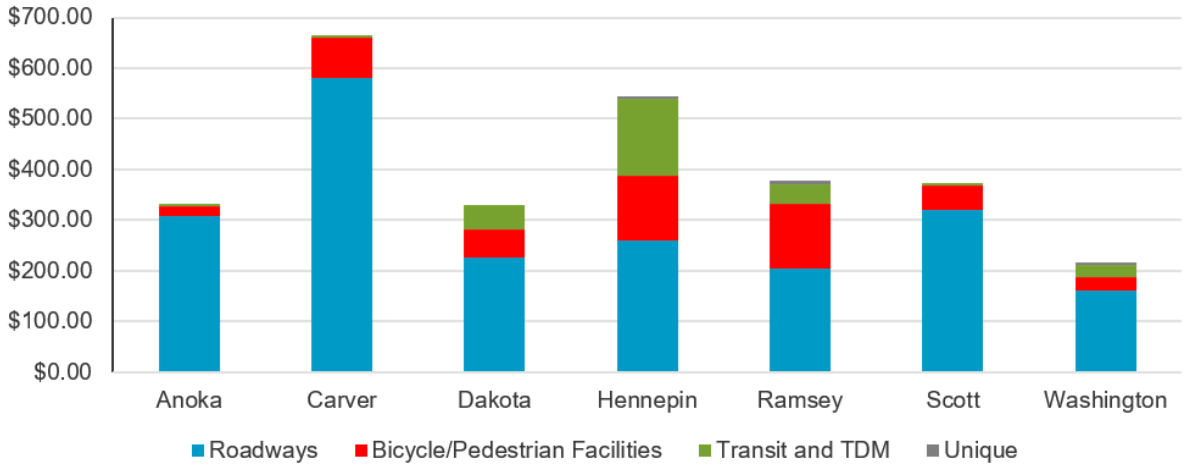
- The need for clearly defined and transparent evaluation criteria.
- The importance of balancing regional policy direction with local implementation flexibility.
- The value of incorporating qualitative narrative alongside technical scoring methodologies.
- The use of set-asides and policy-based funding filters to prioritize investment in high-need areas.

These findings help illuminate the tradeoffs between transparency, regional consistency, stakeholder ownership, and alignment with long-term regional plans, and were key elements of consideration in developing the final application structure and evaluation criteria. The peer review provided support for elements such as specific investment “set-asides” for elements like safety and arterial bus rapid transit (ABRT), as well as the inclusion of qualitative narrative opportunities in most criteria to allow applicants to “make their case.”

## 2014-2024 Investment Summary

From 2014 to 2024, the Regional Solicitation program awarded $1.5 billion in federal funds to 419 transportation projects. Overall, 50 percent of the submitted applications were funded (419 of 834). Roadway projects received the largest share, 54 percent of all federal dollars, supporting major corridor reconstructions, modernization projects, interchange upgrades, and safety improvements, including major investments along Highway 10 in Anoka County, Highway 169 in Scott County, and key urban minor arterials in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Transit and Travel Demand Management projects accounted for 26 percent of total funding, directing over $160 million toward transit expansion (such as the Green Line Extension and multiple Arterial Bus Rapid Transit lines) and more than $120 million toward modernization of stations, bus facilities, and system improvements. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities represented 19 percent of federal awards, enabling over 100 new miles of regional trails and sidewalks and supporting critical connections like the Bruce Vento Trail, Capital City Bikeway, and Safe Routes to School improvements across 29 schools.

**Figure 3: Regional Solicitation Federal Funding Per Capita by Category and County (2014-2024)**




Geographically, funding remained relatively balanced across the seven counties when viewed on a per-capita basis, as shown in Figure 3. Carver and Scott counties saw notably high per-capita investment, ranging from approximately $320 to $525 per resident, driven by large highway and trail projects. Meanwhile, Dakota, Anoka, Ramsey, and Washington counties saw steady investment across all modes, including roadway modernizations, new trail segments, and transit improvements. Overall, the distribution of funding indicates that TAB's current practices to balance investment geographically has resulted in measurable multimodal improvements across the entire metropolitan area.

## Before-and-After Study

As part of the process, a Before-and-After Study was completed for transportation projects funded in the 2014 solicitation cycle through both the Regional Solicitation program and the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). The Study examined projects constructed from 2017 to 2019. These projects were analyzed using three years of "before" and "after" data to evaluate each project's impact on safety and pedestrian/bicycle usage.

Overall, the Study shows that while all project types generated some safety benefits, safety-focused investments (i.e., HSIP projects) produced substantially higher monetized safety returns, with benefit-cost ratios averaging 2.16, compared to 0.23 for Regional Solicitation roadway projects. These HSIP projects also showed the most consistent reductions in both total and severe crash rates, underscoring the value of directing more federal resources toward strategies with a demonstrated safety payoff—including targeted lighting, conflict-point reduction, and signal improvements.

The Study also evaluated the effectiveness of pedestrian and bicycle investments in generating additional active transportation usage. While the findings show that pedestrian-focused projects and Safe Routes to School investments may generate the highest usage, a lack of existing data and many confounding variables makes a true before-and-after comparison difficult at this time. Future evaluations may seek to conduct counts prior to project construction to provide a better analysis baseline.

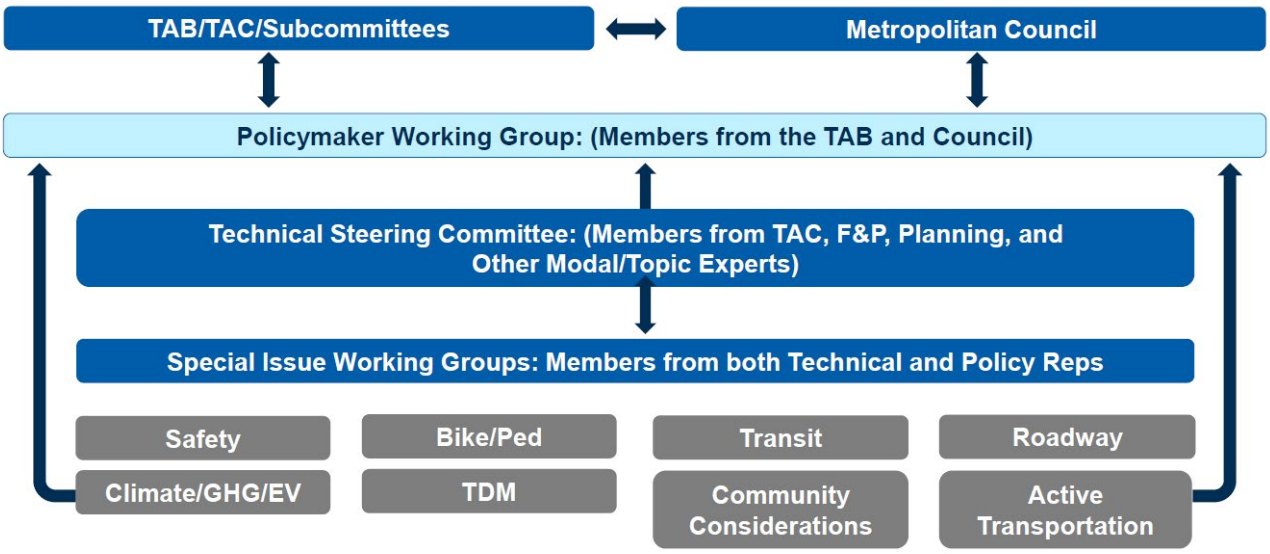
Taken together, the results emphasize several actionable takeaways for enhancing the productivity of federal funding:

- **Prioritize safety-focused projects** with proven performance.
- **Require or incentivize stronger safety components within roadway modernization and expansion (now congestion management strategies) projects**, given mixed results in severe crash outcomes.
- **Encourage increased collection of bicycle and pedestrian counts** to better identify project characteristics that are most effective at supporting regional goals around health, equity, and mode shift.

# Public, Policymaker and Stakeholder Involvement

Throughout the process, a wide variety of stakeholders were consulted in various capacities to inform the Regional Solicitation Evaluation, as shown in Figure 4. A summary of the role and involvement of each group is included below.

**Figure 4: Regional Solicitation Stakeholder Engagement Structure**




## Decision-making Groups

### Policymaker Working Group

Comprised of members from both the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) and the Metropolitan Council, this group was formed to receive input from the technical stakeholders, provide key policy direction to the project staff, and develop recommendations for the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB). The Policymaker Working Group weighed in primarily on questions related to the overall application structure, funding, scoring priorities, and qualifying requirements, focusing on ensuring the Solicitation outcome is consistent with established TAB and Metropolitan Council policies and priorities. The Policymaker Working Group met 15 times between April 2024 and March 2026.

### Transportation Advisory Board

The TAB, TAB Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), TAC Funding and Programming Committee, and TAC Planning Committee and other modal committees were involved at key decision-making stages of the process. In addition to regular updates on the progress of the Evaluation, TAB and its various committees took formal action on the Regional Solicitation redesign. These actions were informed by recommendations from the Policymaker Working Group and included approving application categories, funding targets, and funding minimum and maximum awards, approving all final details of the updated applications through multiple rounds of approvals, soliciting public comment on the applications, and approving the final applications for release with Council approval. The TAB will ultimately approve a list of projects for Regional Solicitation funding.

### Metropolitan Council

The Metropolitan Council serves as the final regional decision-maker on the application materials. It reviews recommendations coming from committees and working groups, ensures alignment with regional policy and federal requirements. After TAB recommended approval of the final application materials in March 2026, the Council approved the release of the application materials in April 2026, opening the solicitation period thereafter.

## Technical Advisory Groups

### Technical Steering Committee

The Technical Steering Committee was comprised of technical agency staff from cities, counties, state agencies, and transit agencies. The group met regularly to provide technical direction to the project team throughout the Evaluation, and to provide technical input and recommendations to the Policymaker Working Group. This group met 10 times between early 2024 and the end of 2025 and reviewed key questions from project staff and policymakers.

### Special Issue Working Groups

These topic-specific groups include both technical and policy representatives. Eight focus groups (Safety, Bike/Pedestrian, Transit, Roadway, Climate, TDM, Community Considerations, and Active Transportation) each focused on developing a specific category of applications, except for the Community Considerations group, which focused on developing the Community Considerations criterion included in all applications. Each of these groups met at least twice in 2025 to discuss relevant qualifying requirements, scoring criteria, measures, and policy questions. Some groups met more than twice to resolve complex topics.



*April Special Issue Working Group workshop, including over 100 participants from across the region*

### Active Transportation Working Group

In 2023, the Minnesota State Legislature approved a new regional sales tax for the seven-county region to support a variety of transportation improvements and operations. Part of this new funding is being dedicated to active transportation purposes in the region to be distributed by the TAB and administered by the Metropolitan Council. The new funding was authorized in the 2023 legislative session which included key requirements that must be incorporated into any project selection process that the TAB designed.

In order to fulfill the requirements for this new funding source, TAB established a working group to make decisions for the first solicitation and provide guidance for other

decisions as part of the Regional Solicitation Evaluation. The working group established two main objectives: 1) make decisions on immediate funding for regional projects, and 2) establish solicitation details for a formal 2026 solicitation.

The group was formed from both policymakers on the TAB and technical personnel on the various TAB subcommittees to ensure technical feedback was given during policy decisions. The working group members represented various counties, cities and representatives of non-motorized users in the region.

The working group met 16 times through 2024 and 2025 with an additional final meeting in February 2026. During this time, the working group made several key recommendations to establish grant administration requirements for the program and establish parameters and details for the 2026 solicitation of projects. These details included recommendations on project categories, required local funding match, funding targets, minimum and maximum funding awards, funding eligibility, and geographic balance.

Overall, more than 100 participants took part in these eight groups, including policymakers, staff from city, county, state, transit agencies staff, and others.

## Listening Sessions

In addition to the formal advisory groups, the project team also hosted 25 listening sessions between February and April 2024 with city and county staff, elected officials, and staff from organizations who take part in transportation projects. In total, the project team heard from 228 staff and elected officials who represented 54 organizations.

As a general takeaway, many value the Regional Solicitation’s open and transparent nature, which fosters trust and understanding among participants. Most stakeholders also expressed general support for maintaining some level of modal balance, ensuring that various transportation modes receive funding.

However, stakeholders also identified common concerns, such as the complexity of the application process, with many suggesting that simplifying it would encourage broader participation. Some also believed the current structure did not adequately consider the nuanced contexts of different local governments, potentially overlooking important factors unique to each community. Finally, there was a call to create more opportunities and reduce barriers for local governments to participate, ensuring a diverse range of voices and needs are represented in the solicitation process.

## Public Engagement

### Phase One Engagement

For public engagement on the Regional Solicitation Evaluation, the Metropolitan Council gathered feedback from residents in two distinct engagement phases. The first phase, conducted in late 2024 and early 2025, focused on which types of transportation projects residents would like to see in their community in the future and how they would like to provide feedback on those projects to local government agencies. Engagement reached residents from all seven counties, with a particular focus on hearing from historically underserved and underrepresented communities such as Indigenous people, people of color, people with lower incomes, people living with disabilities, and people living in suburban edge and rural cities and townships.



*A Nowthen Seniors Group member chooses Complete Streets as the project type she would prioritize if she had money to spend on roadways.*

Across communities, participants consistently expressed interest in more transit options and roadways that separate different transportation modes. Safety was a universal concern, with residents prioritizing improvements such as better lighting, snow removal, and road maintenance. Throughout our public engagement, we heard that people desire transportation spaces with good lighting, cleanliness, and visual elements like murals. For those walking or biking, safe intersections and dedicated infrastructure were identified as critical needs.

### Phase Two Engagement

Similar to the first phase, the second phase of engagement reached residents from all seven counties, with a particular focus on hearing from historically underserved and underrepresented communities. Due to unprecedented immigration enforcement presence in the metro region in early 2026, event attendance and survey responses were lower compared to the previous Regional Solicitation survey completed back in 2024, especially among immigrant communities.

Survey responses and conversations at events indicated that many residents would like to see the Regional Solicitation prioritize transit expansion projects. Category types that addressed urgent safety and maintenance needs were also popular amongst engagement participants. Participants were less eager to fund projects that focused on other investments such as electric vehicle charging infrastructure and new interchanges.

### Public Comment Period

A formal public comment period was held from January 23rd through February 17th, 2026, including a virtual public meeting. In total, 22 comments were received through the online form or via email and letter submission. Comments on the Regional Solicitation application packages primarily focused on four key topics: Travel Demand Management & Shared Mobility; Community Considerations; Data Availability; and Other Considerations.

In response to the comments, the Council recommended changes to two active transportation scoring measures to align with recommendations from the Active Transportation Working Group and Policymaker Working Group and commits to a full evaluation of several aspects of the solicitation after the 2026 cycle to make potential updates prior to 2028.

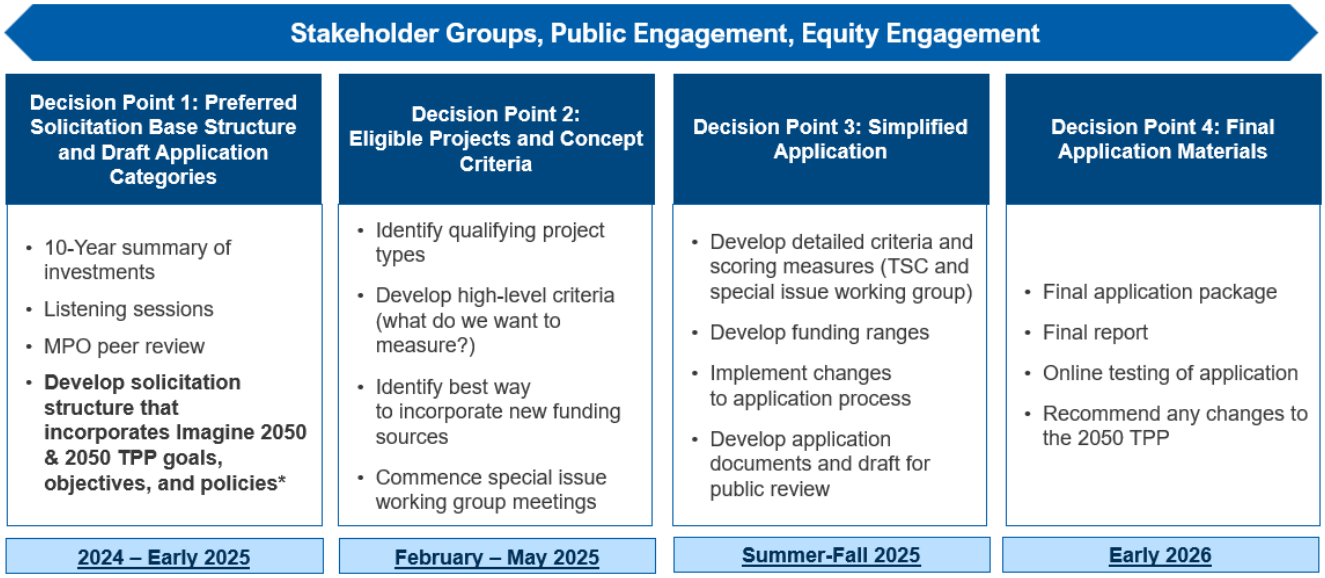
## Building the Solicitation

Building the updated Solicitation was an systematic process that involved technical analysis, stakeholder engagement, and collaboration among many groups. The process was divided into four distinct decision points (see Figure 5), each of which was critical to building consensus and ensuring the final application package reflected the Evaluation's goals and advanced regional goals, objectives, and policies.

Initial technical analysis and stakeholder engagement was focused on identifying the base solicitation structure, with the goal of developing a structure that successfully advances the goals, objectives, and policies of the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan. Once the structure was identified, policymakers and technical stakeholders collaborated to identify eligible project types, priorities to advance through scoring criteria, and identify ways to incorporate new funding sources, such as the regional active transportation sales tax.

The third decision point was focused on developing all details of the draft application package, with a focus on simplifying and streamlining the application process. This involved extensive engagement with policymakers and technical stakeholders to identify both detailed scoring criteria and guidance, set funding ranges, and ultimately develop a full package of application materials that were released for public review. Following the public review, final adjustments were made to the application materials based on public comments before being approved by the Council. The 2026 Regional Solicitation application package also included launching of a new online application portal.

**Figure 5: Overall Regional Solicitation Evaluation Decision Timeline**




## Solicitation Structure

Identifying the base "structure" of the solicitation process was the first major decision point in updating the application. Developing the structure involved first evaluating whether there should be a shift from the existing centralized regional selection process to a dual regional/subregional selection process (see Table 1).

### Regional vs. Subregional Structures

The current centralized regional selection approach places responsibility for project evaluation and funding decisions primarily with the TAB and its subcommittees. In this model, all applicants compete within a single regional process that applies consistent criteria and reflects regionwide priorities. The advantages of this approach include a high level of transparency, strong alignment with regional policy goals, and a unified, data-driven framework for comparing projects across jurisdictions. However, because the competition is regionwide, it can be less responsive to local differences in project types, capacity, or community context. Also, some jurisdictions, particularly suburban or rural areas, may feel disadvantaged when competing in categories against the urban core.

A dual regional/subregional approach, utilized by some MPOs around the country, divides funding recommendations between a regional process and subregional committees or forums, allowing local governments to prioritize and recommend projects within their own areas that are ultimately approved by the MPO Board. This approach can improve geographic balance, strengthen local participation, and elevate context-specific priorities, producing a more balanced distribution of funds. It also creates space for capacity-building among communities that may struggle in a fully regional competition. At the same time, the model introduces disadvantages: it adds administrative complexity, increases process burden for both the MPO and applicants, can dilute funds available to individual projects, and risks reducing the emphasis on regional goals if subregional interests dominate. Additionally, once implemented, the structure is difficult to reverse.

**Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Regional or Subregional Structures**

| Model | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| **Centralized Regional Process** | • Provides a transparent and consistent regionwide competition.<br>• Ensures strong alignment with regional policy goals and MPO priorities.<br>• Applies uniform scoring criteria, supporting comparability across project types and geographies. | • May be less sensitive to contextual differences among local governments.<br>• Suburban and rural areas may have difficulty competing in certain categories (e.g., bike/pedestrian). |
| **Dual Regional/Sub-Regional Process** | • Requires participation from all local governments, increasing engagement.<br>• Creates a more transparent geographic distribution of funds.<br>• Allows subregions to reflect localized needs and priorities.<br>• Can strengthen relationships and build capacity among local partners. | • Adds layers of committees, creating administrative and time burdens.<br>• Multiple calls for projects can limit funding available to any single project.<br>• Risk of uneven influence by certain agencies within subregions.<br>• May reduce focus on regionwide goals and harder to reverse once implemented. |

After reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of each, the Policymaker Working Group decided to continue with the existing centralized application and selection process.

## Modal vs. Goal Focused Structures

Following the decision to maintain a centralized application process, the next major structure decision was focused on the structure of the application categories.

A modal-focused structure, like the 2024 Regional Solicitation structure, organizes applications by mode and evaluates projects within these defined buckets. This approach makes it easier to compare similar projects, creates clarity for applicants familiar with longstanding modal categories, and preserves predictable funding ranges tied to each mode. It also ensures each project addresses a wide array of criteria, including usage and cost effectiveness. However, a modal structure can make outcomes harder to track, limits flexibility for multimodal or emerging project types (e.g., electric vehicle infrastructure, shared mobility), and often requires detailed policymaker involvement in complex scoring systems. Stakeholder feedback noted that the structure can also disadvantage projects that do not fit neatly into traditional modes (e.g., mobility hubs, planning studies) and contributes to a more complicated application process.

A goal-focused structure, in contrast, organizes applications around the region's long-term policy goals as defined in the 2050 TPP. Organizing in this way may create specific application categories for each goal (e.g., healthy and safe). This creates clear alignment between funding decisions and the 2050 TPP and allows application

categories to be directly shaped by policy priorities rather than modes. It simplifies applications by focusing on a smaller set of outcome-driven criteria and allows more flexibility for multimodal, crosscutting, or innovative projects. However, a goal-focused model may be less intuitive for applicants who are accustomed to modal categories, introduces uncertainty in setting funding targets without historical precedent, and may complicate categorization when projects touch multiple goals. Policymakers noted that while this approach can expand possibilities, it raises questions about how to evaluate very different project types within the same goal-based category and how to maintain clarity for applicants. See Table 2 for a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each type of structure.

**Table 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Modal-focused or Goal-focused Structures**

| Structure Type | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| **Modal-Focused Structure** | • Enables "apples-to-apples" comparison within established project types (e.g., roadways, transit, bike/ped).<br>• Familiar to applicants with long history using these categories.<br>• Ensures each project addresses a wide set of criteria, supporting consistency across modes.<br>• Past solicitation cycles provide predictable data for setting funding ranges. | • More complex and detailed application structure requiring evaluation against many policy goals. Many stakeholders felt previous applications should be simplified.<br>• Makes outcomes harder to track because categories aren't tied directly to desired regional goals.<br>• Limits ability to encourage multimodal, emerging, or unique project types (e.g., EV charging, shared mobility).<br>• Requires detailed policymaker involvement in technical scoring to incorporate TPP policy intent. |
| **Goal-Focused Structure** | • Strong alignment with 2050 Transportation Policy Plan goals, objectives, and policies.<br>• Simplifies applications by focusing on outcomes rather than requiring every project to address every criterion.<br>• Supports innovative and cross-modal projects that do not fit neatly into traditional modal buckets.<br>• Follows planning best practices by structuring investments around desired outcomes. | • May be less intuitive for applicants; requires new communication on how to categorize projects.<br>• Potentially difficult to establish funding ranges at first because no historical precedent exists.<br>• Projects often relate to multiple goals, raising challenges about fit and evaluation consistency.<br>• Risk that focusing narrowly on one goal could underemphasize co-benefits across other goals. |

Ultimately, the Policymaker Working Group recommended a “hybrid” structure that leads with the 2050 TPP goals but maintains some elements of the modal applications.

## Key Changes for 2026

The 2026 Regional Solicitation structure includes several large changes from the previous structure. At the same time, the updated structure also includes many smaller changes to qualifying requirements, scoring, and project selection processes. The major changes for applicants and agencies to be aware of include the following:

### Simplified applications

One of the major goals of the Evaluation process was to simplify the application process. Technical stakeholders from across the region noted that filling out previous applications was time-consuming, confusing, and often expensive as many agencies utilized consultants. This created many barriers to accessing transportation funding as smaller agencies often lacked the resources necessary to develop competitive applications.

In addition, previous application categories often required each project to provide information related to all regional goals and objectives, including equity and affordable housing, risk assessment, and cost effectiveness. As part of this process, technical stakeholders and policymakers worked to identify criteria that could be streamlined or removed from new applications, and to develop criteria that addressed one or two main policy objectives for each category, rather than scoring each application based on a broad range of objectives.

As a result, the 2026 Roadway Modernization application now includes nine questions for applicants to address across five criteria, compared to 16 questions across nine criteria in the 2024 Roadway Reconstruction and Modernization category (the most similar category). The new Safety categories are even more streamlined and focused, with seven questions to address across five criteria, four of which directly address safety concerns and improvements associated with the project.

### New Application Categories

Two new application categories were added in 2026 to more fully address regional priorities articulated in the 2050 TPP.

The Safety investment area with two application categories includes dedicated funding for projects that are intended to reduce fatal and serious injury crashes in pursuit of the region’s goal of achieving zero traffic fatalities. The Proactive Safety application category seeks to fund projects that reduce fatalities and serious injuries by focusing on locations with a high severe crash risk that may not have a documented severe crash history. By contrast, Reactive Safety projects seek to reduce fatalities and serious injuries at locations with a documented severe crash history. Both

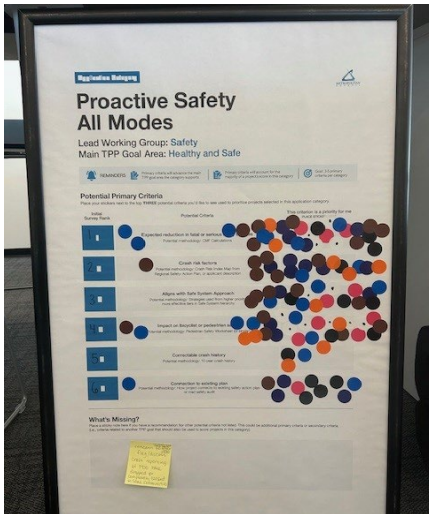



**Figure 6: An activity used to identify priorities for a new safety application category.**

categories are heavily tied to both local and regional safety planning efforts, as well as technical research to promote approaches demonstrated to improve roadway safety.

The Environment investment area includes the EV Charging Infrastructure category, which will be included for the first time in the 2028 Solicitation. This category aims to provide funding to help build out a regional EV charging network, advancing goals from the TPP as well as the Metropolitan Council's Public Charging Needs Analysis. The 2026 Evaluation developed the framework for this application category, but implementation will be delayed until the next solicitation cycle, closer to project implementation.

## New Funding Sources

The 2026 solicitation was designed to be flexible and dynamic to take advantage of changing funding sources. Currently, these sources include the federal Carbon Reduction Program and PROTECT funding, but the funding sources are not tied to a specific project category allowing for adaptation in future years as funding sources change.



**Figure 7: Stakeholders meeting to discuss how to incorporate EV funding into the solicitation structure.**

In addition to federal funding sources, the solicitation includes a method to disburse a new regional funding source. In 2023, the Minnesota Legislature approved a new regional sales tax for the seven-county Twin Cities region to support various transportation improvements. A portion of this funding is dedicated to active transportation projects and will be distributed by the TAB, with grants being administered by the Metropolitan Council.

This new funding source is expected to provides between $20 million and $24 million annually for active transportation initiatives. The funding was distributed for the first time in 2024 through a pilot process that utilized the ongoing 2024 Regional Solicitation project selection process in order to distribute funds for projects unfunded by federal sources. The pilot was also intended to aid the Council in learning to administer these new funds.

The 2026 Evaluation worked with multiple stakeholder groups to identify a method of incorporating this new funding sources into the project selection process. As the TAB wanted to be sure to not mix federal and local funds, three new funding categories were developed to provide funding for local active transportation projects: Local Bicycle Facilities, Local Pedestrian Facilities, and Active Transportation Planning. Qualifying requirements, selection criteria and scoring guidance were developed to align with the seven requirements outlined in the 2023 legislation and with TAB policy decisions.

This structure allows the Active Transportation Solicitation to take place concurrently with the Regional Solicitation and to utilize the same process and infrastructure. However, the Active Transportation Solicitation in 2026 was designed to be able to be conducted independently in the future, if wanted. Beginning in 2027, the Active Transportation Solicitation may move to occur on off years from the Regional

Solicitation (2027, 2029, etc.). The application and selection process are likely to be similar, but this will allow local agencies and the Council to better focus on each individual process rather than allocating resources to both solicitations in a single year. It would also give projects of active transportation projects a funding opportunity each calendar year with federal funds being one year and regional sales tax funds being available the next year.

### Community Considerations

The Community Considerations criterion is designed to embed the Metropolitan Council's regional goals directly into every application category, ensuring that projects are evaluated for how well they respond to the needs, priorities, and lived experiences of the communities who live nearby and adjacent to transportation projects and are most affected by transportation decisions. The criterion is grounded in the region's long-term vision, including the 2050 TPP equity and inclusion goal and reflects more than a decade of work to refine how equity is defined and measured in the Regional Solicitation process. It consists of three measures:

- **Community Data & Context**, which assesses whether applicants understand the specific communities adjacent to or impacted by the project.
- **Community Needs & Future Engagement**, which evaluates how well the project need was identified through community involvement and what structures exist to ensure meaningful, ongoing engagement.
- **Community Benefits**, which examines whether the project delivers tangible, meaningful benefits to adjacent communities.

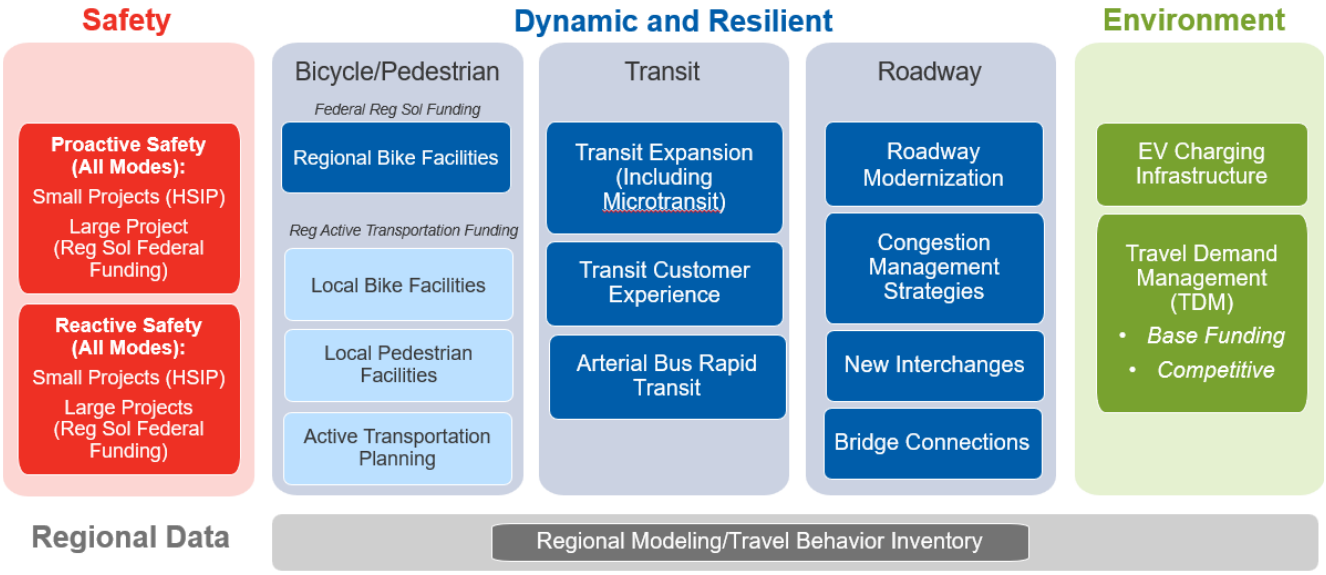
By allocating 15 to 20 percent of scoring to Community Considerations in every application category, the Council ensures that transportation funding decisions consistently prioritize people and that the benefits of investments reinforce a broader focus on community needs and improving quality of life for all regional residents. The emphasis on detailed community understanding, proactive engagement, and community benefits incentivizes agencies to adopt organizational practices that strengthen long-term capacity for equitable planning.

As a key shift from previous applications, the scoring does not prioritize projects that serve particular demographic groups. Instead, all scoring is qualitative in nature and based on the applicant's demonstration that they understand local community needs, and that the project is based on providing benefits that meaningfully address those identified needs.

## Final Solicitation Structure

This hybrid goal-based structure groups application categories by TPP goal areas of safety, dynamic and resilient, and environment, as shown in Figure 6. The structure also preserves the modal application categories included in the 2024 solicitation (under the dynamic and resilient goal area) while incorporating new regional sales tax funding in the Bicycle/Pedestrian categories

**Figure 8: 2026 Regional Solicitation Category Structure**




## 2026 Funding Details

Since federal funding allocation is a major way the Council advances regional goals and priorities, funding targets for each application grouping were established through collaboration with stakeholders and policymakers. These funding targets provide a general framework for distributing approximately $250 million in funding for each solicitation cycle by weighing factors such as typical project costs and the likely number of projects within each category.

Funding targets for 2026 are shown in Table 3. It is important to note that these "targets" are intended as guidelines for applicants to understand where funding may be allocated based on past investment decisions. Actual funding levels may be adjusted based on the number of applications in each category, quality of applications, or as various funding options are requested by TAB. These funding targets were approved by TAB in November 2025.

**Table 3: 2026 Proposed Funding Targets**

| Category | Federal Funding Target |
|---|---|
| **Safety** | $30 million (12% of total funding) |
| **Bicycle/Pedestrian (Regional Bicycle Facilities only)** | $35 million (14% of total funding) |
| **Transit** | $60 million (24% of total funding) |
| **Roadway** | $110 million (44% of total funding) |
| **Environment** | $15 million (6% of total funding) |

Funding in the Environment categories includes $7 million for EV Charging, $5.8 million for Transportation Management Organization base funding, and $2.2 million for competitive TDM projects. Funding will be set aside in 2026 for project selection in 2028.

In addition, TAB approved a funding target of **$50 million for Regional Active Transportation Sales Tax funded projects**, with a sub-target of $2 million set-aside for Active Transportation Planning projects.

Each category also includes a minimum and maximum award which limits the amount of funding provided to each individual project. For categories that were included in 2024, many maximums have been increased to account for rising construction costs, while others were held steady based on input from technical stakeholders. Funding minimums and maximums for 2026 are show in Table 4.

**Table 4: Regional Solicitation Funding Category Minimums and Maximums**

| Funding Category | Minimum Funding Award | Maximum Funding Award |
|---|---|---|
| **Safety** | | |
| Proactive/Reactive Safety | $2,000,000 | $7,000,000 |
| **Bicycle/Pedestrian** | | |
| Regional Bicycle Facilities | $1,000,000 | $5,500,000 |
| Local Bicycle Facilities (Regional Funding) | $150,000 | $3,500,000 |
| Local Pedestrian Facilities (Regional Funding) | $150,000 | $2,500,000 |
| Active Transportation Planning (Regional Funding) | N/A | $200,000 |
| **Transit** | | |
| Transit Expansion | $500,000 | $10,000,000 |
| Transit Customer Experience | $500,000 | $10,000,000 |
| **Roadway** | | |
| Roadway Modernization | $1,000,000 | $10,000,000 |
| Congestion Management Strategies | $1,000,000 | $10,000,000 |
| New Interchanges | $1,000,000 | $20,000,000 |
| Bridge Connections | $1,000,000 | $7,000,000 |
| **Environment** | | |
| EV Charging Infrastructure (project selection in 2028) | $500,000 | $2,000,000 |
| TDM (Competitive) | $100,000 | $750,000 |

**Table 5: Additional Funding Category Funding Amounts**

| Funding Category | Expected Funding Amount |
|---|---|
| Arterial Bus Rapid Transit | $30,000,000 minimum* |
| TDM Base Funding | $5,800,000 |
| Regional Travel Behavior Inventory | $1,500,000 |

**Additional funding may be awarded by TAB depending on the quantity and quality of other transit projects submitted. Any additional funding awarded will come out of the transit funding target.*

## Advancing TPP goals

The updated Solicitation structure incorporates all five major regional goals from the 2050 TPP in various ways. Three goals are directly addressed as investment areas. These include healthy and safe (addressed through the safety investment area as well as scoring criteria in other categories), dynamic and resilient (addressed through the bicycle/pedestrian, transit and roadway application categories), and environment/climate (addressed by TDM and EV Charging Infrastructure application categories).

Two regional goals are addressed through project scoring criteria and/or measures. The Equitable and Inclusive goal is addressed through the inclusion of the Community Considerations criteria (discussed above), and the Natural Systems goal is addressed through a scoring measure on the four roadway application categories.

# Next Steps

Draft 2026 Regional Solicitation application materials were released for public comment in January 2026, after which some minor changes were proposed by the public. The TAC and TAB then reviewed proposed changes and recommended approval of the applications to the Metropolitan Council, which approved the applications for release in April 2026. Applicants will submit projects for scoring in May/June 2026, and applications will then be evaluated by scoring committees in the summer and fall.

Following project scoring, the TAB will then review the scoring results, as well as several potential funding options developed at the board's request. These funding options might include providing additional funding to specific categories, or to projects that accomplish certain goals. Funding options are also reviewed for geographic distribution to ensure all areas of the region are receiving transportation funding.

In 2027, at the direction of the Metropolitan Council Chair, Council staff will lead a stakeholder effort to review the results of the 2026 Solicitation cycle and recommend any necessary changes or adjustments that may be incorporated into the 2028 Solicitation cycle.

## Appendices

a. First Phase Engagement Summary
b. Second Phase Engagement Summary
c. Public Comment Report
d. Policymaker Working Workshop Summary
e. Peer Review Summary
f. Investment Summary
g. Before-and-After Study
h. Links to Meeting Summaries and Agendas
i. Links to 2026 Application Materials

# REGIONAL SOLICITATION EVALUATION

390 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55101-1805

651-602-1000
TTY 651-291-0904
public.info@metc.state.mn.us
metrocouncil.org

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