

Item #5

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 9, 2009

To: TPB Technical Committee

From: Ronald F. Kirby
Director of Transportation Planning

Re: Response to TPB Request at December 17, 2008
Meeting Regarding Criteria and Process for Prioritizing
Stimulus-Related Transportation Projects

At its December 17, 2008 meeting, the TPB approved the following motion:

Number 1, that the chairman of the TPB be directed to send a letter to the Congressional Delegation and state leadership that, quote, “the transportation stimulus package must reflect fair and equitable distribution to metropolitan areas. At a minimum, the distribution should reflect the STP percentage allocated to metropolitan areas of 35 percent, recognizing the great economic contribution of metropolitan areas in the U.S.”

Number 2, that the Steering Committee be directed to report back to the TPB on January 28 proposed criteria for prioritizing stimulus-related transportation projects, and the best structure and process for the TPB to exert the maximum influence in stimulus-related transportation funding.

Number 3, that the Scenario Task Force be directed to report back to the TPB on January 28 with a proposed prioritized list of new major regional transportation projects to be considered, circumstances permitting.

In discussing this motion before voting on it, Board members clarified that the statement under point Number 1 was intended to be mode-neutral, and that the letter from the Chairman should make that clear. It was also clarified that the statement under point Number 2 was focused on future stimulus-related funding.

In response to point Number 1, a letter from TPB Chairman Mendelson has been sent to the Congressional delegation and state transportation leadership. Copies of that letter and the attachment will be distributed separately. At today's Technical Committee meeting, I would like to discuss proposed responses to points Number 2 and Number 3 of the TPB resolution.

Response to Point Number 2

As noted in the letter from TPB Chairman Mendelson responding to point Number 1, the importance of directing stimulus funding to projects that can be implemented quickly means that stimulus-related transportation projects will almost certainly be funded through the existing programs of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration. Chairman Mendelson's letter is aimed at ensuring that the allocation of funds across the various categories of the FHWA and FTA programs results in a "fair and equitable share of the funding" for major metropolitan areas by requiring that at least 35 percent be distributed through categories that direct funds to metropolitan areas by formula.

With regard to the specific projects that will be selected for stimulus funding, the existing TIP and STIP processes will almost certainly be used to govern the project selection process. That is, projects selected for stimulus funding will have to be drawn from approved TIPs/STIPs, or added into those TIPs/STIPs by amendment. It seems likely that the vast majority of projects proposed by state transportation agencies and transit authorities for the first stimulus package will be drawn from approved TIPs/STIPs and that they will be heavily focused on maintenance and rehabilitation activities that can be activated quickly. It is my understanding that detailed discussions are already underway between FHWA/FTA representatives concerning project selection for the first stimulus package.

Depending on how quickly Congress moves forward with the stimulus package over the next few weeks, the TPB may or may not be able to provide additional input on the package at its January 28 meeting. At a minimum it seems reasonable to request that the state transportation agencies and transit agencies provide a status report on the project selection process to the TPB at the January 28 meeting.

In response to point number 2 of the TPB's December 17 resolution, "the best structure and process for TPB to exert the maximum influence in stimulus-related funding" is surely to focus on the existing TIP and CLRP process. The TPB approved the FY2009-2014 TIP at its November 19, 2008 meeting, and is just beginning the process of developing the FY2010-2015 TIP. The strong indications that funding from the first stimulus package will be directed primarily to projects in already approved TIP/STIPs emphasizes the importance of the TIP process; when any new

funding appears unexpectedly and must be committed quickly, the existing TIP/STIP process will normally be used to govern project selection.

It is clear, of course, that state transportation agencies and transit agencies have some discretion in choosing projects from within the approved TIP/STIPs for stimulus funding. In addition to stressing the issue of “fair and equitable distribution to metropolitan areas”, the TPB might want to propose additional criteria for prioritizing stimulus-related transportation projects. Given the current backlog of maintenance and rehabilitation needs for both highway and transit systems, “maintenance and rehabilitation of existing systems” should probably be the top priority. Other potential criteria might include:

- Safety programs, particularly pedestrian and bicycle safety
- Efficient operation of the existing system, including traffic operations and incident management
- Effective demand management, emphasizing alternatives to private automobile use during congested periods such as ride-sharing, transit, and telecommuting

Given that the December 18, 2008 TPB resolution was referring under point Number 2 to future stimulus-related funding, it is important to draw attention to the TPB’s Policy Principles for the 2009 Authorization of Federal Surface Transportation Programs, approved September 18, 2009, as has been done in Chairman Mendelson’s letter responding to point Number 1. It is entirely possible that there will not be any future stimulus-related packages after this first one, in which case future transportation funding and prioritization will depend upon the 2009 Authorization.

Response to Point Number 3

The TPB Scenario Task Force is currently working on two future transportation and land use scenarios for the Washington region: the “CLRP Aspirations” and “What Would It Take?” Scenarios. These scenarios are currently being defined and analyzed, with results expected around July of 2009. The timeline for this work is aimed at providing inputs to the 2010 CLRP update process, which will begin in the fall of 2009. The TPB Scenario Task force is not in a position to provide a prioritized list of projects based on its ongoing work at the January 28 meeting.

One response that could be made to the TPB on January 28 from the Scenario Task Force would be to emphasize that the scenarios it is developing on future land use, BRT, and greenhouse gas measures rely on the implementation of baseline projects and programs specified in the 2008 CLRP, including sufficient capacity on the region’s transit system to accommodate projected demand. Current revenue projections at the state and local level suggest that delivering this baseline system may be a major challenge, even with the much-anticipated stimulus package. Focusing on

prioritizing current and potential new funding on ensuring that these 2008 baseline projects and programs can be delivered would be a good first step in laying the groundwork for developing new projects under the TPB Scenario Study for the 2010 CLRP update.