



February 10, 2009

Mr. Don Voelker
Strategic Planning Office of Transportation
North Carolina Department of Transportation
1501 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1501

Subject: Strategic Planning Office of Transportation Prioritization Tool

Dear Don:

We would like to thank you and your staff for the presentation you provided at the January 29th meeting of the NCAMPO and NCARPO meeting. Your presentation was very informative on the goals, objectives and direction of the SPOT program. Additionally, we applaud your efforts and believe SPOT's objects can help to improve transportation and mobility in the future. However, during our discussions our association members outlined several comments and concerns regarding the prioritization tool.

Enclosed please find a list of comments that were developed during the NCAMPO and NCARPO meetings. Please review this information and feel free to contact either of us for more information.

Sincerely,

Mike Kozlosky
NCAMPO, President
Executive Director, Wilmington MPO

Hanna Cockburn, AICP
President, NCARPO
Piedmont Triad RPO

cc: NCAMPO members
NCARPO members

Comments & Suggestions on “SPOT” Prioritization Tool

Comments

- SPOT is a good idea, but it appears to be a work in progress and is early in the development process.

Questions

- **Does SPOT want it fast or does SPOT want it right?**
SPOT intends to develop a prioritization process and model which meets a set of “guiding principles” and to complete it in time to develop a draft STIP by September 2010. SPOT’s early, aggressive timetable (introduced in late January) has been revised to provide more time for priority project deliberation during the summer of 2009 and project submittals in the fall of 2009.
- **How much time will the data entry take? The MPOs/RPOs feel that the timeframe for data entry is unrealistic.**
Since January, the NCDOT has implemented a new Reform Transportation Program which allows more time until the next draft STIP is needed. The existing TIP projects which need to be ranked by the MPOs/RPOs will be pre-populated in the project database which is scheduled to open Sept. 1, 2009. Therefore, only new projects will need to be entered in the project database, using the web-based template. The answers to the qualitative questions will be used as guidance for the Divisions. MPOs and RPOs should continue to use their respective prioritization methodologies.
- **Who will input statewide projects? The MPOs feel that NCDOT should input any existing and statewide TIP projects.**
NCDOT will input the existing STIP projects into the template. Projects will be listed by segment.
- **How do we handle multiple TIP projects that are prioritized together?**
Each project will need to be ranked separately.
- **How do we evaluate multi-modal transportation projects?**
The template is now set up for projects to be submitted by goal, tier and mode. Currently highway projects need to be ranked. A prioritization model will be used to evaluate highway projects. Non-highway project rankings will be determined by NCDOT Modal Divisions with significant local input. Use the “other pertinent information” box and check the multimodal benefits question when submitting projects with multimodal components. This will help “flag” the project during NCDOT review.

Remember each project submittal is driven by the primary benefit to the mode that the project is improving. For example a highway resurfacing project that includes wide outside shoulders for bicycles should be submitted as a highway (not bicycle project)

- **How do we address projects that are on new location?**
Data for these projects will be obtained from the nearby parallel route(s) from which the new location project is relieving. An MPO/RPO can also submit other supporting information regarding new location projects in the “Other Pertinent Information” box and/or in the Attachment tab.
- **Please clarify what projects go into the Prioritization Tool? The model is presently going to evaluate highway projects.**
 - **What is everything?**
Prioritization tool will be used to capture STIP projects (I, R, U, & W).
 - **Collect data on “Funded” and “Unfunded” projects?**
The database will be pre-populated with existing STIP projects beyond the delivery TIP projects. MPOs/RPOs submit a top 20 list of projects which is a combination of existing STIP and new projects.
- **How to address feasibility studies?**
 - TBD
- **Who develops and who verifies the costs estimates?**
Everyone needs to be using the same cost estimation assumptions. NCDOT will provide a cost estimation spreadsheet to MPOs and RPOs for determining costs of new candidate projects.
- **How do we list the projects in the prioritization tool?**
By Goal, Tier, and Mode. See also accompanying powerpoint (slide 16).
- **How do we address project segmentation issues?**
Project segments already in the delivery STIP do not need to be ranked. Project segments yet to be built will need to be ranked.
- **What are SPOT’s prioritization criteria?**
See the attached powerpoint (see slides 12-14). The criteria are a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and include NCDOT priority ranking and local (MPO/RPO) priority ranking. This model is to identify needs and funding eligibility is not expected to become a consideration until after the needs are identified.
 - **What is the weight factor?** See above.
 - **Weight of funding eligibility?** See above
 - **Weight of local priority?** See above
- **What elaboration would be critical to include?**
Any other pertinent project information that supports why the project is a priority.

- **How will this impact Air Quality Conformity?**
Air Quality is a consideration after needs are identified. If there is a project that must be constructed due to air quality considerations, there is a question on the template for an MPO or RPO to identify the project and thus it will be “flagged” as a special project consideration.

CMAQ candidate projects will NOT be evaluated under the Prioritization Model but WILL need to be submitted in the template (along with the electronic version of the CMAQ application). **No need for a hard copy transmittal.**
 - SPOT will flag CMAQ project submittals and route them to TPB
 - TPB is the LEAD business unit in making eligibility calls for CMAQ project candidates
- **How does public involvement get included in the design?**
Public involvement on priorities should be lead by MPOs/RPOS through normal process of gathering local input.
- **Where is the internal communication at TPB (SPOT to TPB)?**
A Working Group (made up of Transportation Planning Branch, MPO, RPO, and Division Engineers) was created in February to help SPOT develop this new prioritization process.
- **What are the ramifications for not participating?**
If projects are not ranked, they will receive lower scores and thus one would expect lower rankings.
- **What happens if individual jurisdictions submit projects?**
Only MPOs/RPOs, NCDOT Divisions and NCDOT lead business units have NCIDs required to enter the web based template. Only their submittals will be considered. SPOT presumes the MPOs/RPOs will reach out to local gov’t entities within their respective areas regarding prioritization.

Recommendations

- **Need to develop an instruction manual for the SPOT program. These instructions need to be distributed immediately.**
Instructional Guide is currently being prepared. The target date for release is August 3.
- **Should rank in 10-year brackets—need to match with existing work product.**
See the attached powerpoint and model for “how to rank”.
- **Need batch method of input (GIS).**
NCDOT will provide existing STIP project information in the template. Template is not currently designed to accept GIS info from external sources.

- **Need to determine if possible to dump GIS data or existing data.**
See previous answer.
- **Need to better capture multi-modal benefits.**
Agree this is a limitation due to the compartmentalized manner in which priority projects will be submitted in the template. However as stated in previous questions please use the space devoted to “Other Pertinent Information” and the Attachment Tab to provide any multimodal benefits which your respective priority project provides. The Instructional Guide will also provide examples of how to submit a project with multimodal benefits.
- **Need to prioritize based on Highway Division, particularly in organizations with multiple Highway Divisions.**
We will have ranked priorities from every Division, thus there will be prioritization based on Highway Division.
- **NCDOT needs to recognize the political ramifications of what is submitted (How? And When?).**
This is recognized and will be addressed in the final rankings.
- **Need stronger communication.**
There have been multiple meetings and presentations to MPO and RPO association meetings in the past few months.
 - 1st 2 weeks of March -- four working sessions on the web-based templates with Working Group.
 - April 17 -- presentation on progress to quarterly MPO Assoc meeting
 - April 29 – held webinar with Working Group representatives. We will continue to improve our communication and are expecting the Working Group representatives to assist with communication to their peers which is why they were chosen to represent their respective associations.
- **Need to report back of all projects to all MPOs/RPOs.**
Future release of the SPAN (Strategic Plans and Needs Report) will address this issue.
- **Need opportunity to redesign/reexamine local priority process and to respond to SPOT’s request.**
Local priorities should be re-examined, if necessary, this summer so they can be used as input to the template which will open Sept. 3.
- **The MPOs and RPOs would recommend that NCDOT consider SPOT a pilot rather than roll out.**
NCDOT is committed to a new way of doing business, including the development of 5-10 year Transportation Work Programs. Prioritization and SPOT’s responsibilities are key input into these Work Programs. All of these new efforts will result in a reformed Draft STIP and improved ability to utilize limited resources on the most critical priority projects, programs, and services.