

Metropolitan Mobility Program

Background

Congressman James Oberstar, Chairman of the US House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, has published draft legislation outlining his priorities for the next Surface Transportation Authorization. Contained within the draft legislation is a new “Metropolitan Mobility and Access (MMA) Program” that could greatly change the way metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) operate in the future.

The program is designed to:

“provide multi-modal transportation funding and financing authority directly to metropolitan planning organizations, thereby allowing MPOs broad multi-modal flexibility in planning and **implementing programs** of surface transportation projects to reduce vehicular congestion, to maximize mobility and access of people and goods, and to improve safety, environmental sustainability, and livability in large urbanized areas.”
(emphasis added)

The MMA Program, as currently written, would only apply to regions with populations in excess of 500,000 persons. Of note is that the new revenue would reach the MPOs through a competitive discretionary grant and be directly allocated to MPOs instead of going through the state departments of transportation as is the current practice. According to interest groups, the initial discussions in Washington indicated that MPOs over the 500,000 population threshold would receive 10 percent of an unidentified sub-allocated amount of potential cap and trade revenues. The latest estimation of revenue has reduced that percentage to five percent.

The regional MMA Programs, and their attendant greenhouse gas emissions reductions plans, will be evaluated by the newly created Office of Intermodalism. The criteria proposed to be used for evaluation are: levels of congestion, the likelihood of the plan to reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, potential to generate economic benefits to the region, and the plan’s long-term ability to improve environmental sustainability.

Potential points of discussion for the TPC include:

- Include language in the draft legislation to give MPOs the option to complete the environmental document for projects;
- Include clarifying language that requires metropolitan mobility projects be developed and executed in coordination with appropriate State and local governmental agencies;
- Include language that changes the current funding mechanism from a discretionary grant program to a formula-based program that would use congestion levels, air quality status, and population as key components of the funding formula;

TPC Agenda Item 12

Mailout - 10/16/09

- Include clarifying language that protects the current designated recipient status of agencies like METRO for FTA 5307 funds;
- Include clarifying language that states that an MPO will see no reduction in their current Federal program funds (e.g., STP, CMAQ, Safety, etc) as a result of receiving additional funds through the MMA Program;
- Potentially creating a new federal agency to administer the MMA Program. The agency would have the ability to approve environmental documents and obligate federal funds; Granting direct allocations through formula grants to the MPOs rather than discretionary grants.

Current Status

This proposal is included in Chairman Oberstar's draft legislation, which has yet to be introduced in the US House of Representatives.

Action Requested

Discussion only for October TPC. Adopt a resolution expressing support for the concept at the November TPC meeting.