

Metropolitan Transportation Commission

March 23, 2022

Agenda Item 14c - 22-0422

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Regional Grant Strategy

Subject:

Bay Area focused advocacy strategy to maximize Bay Area federal discretionary grants, including list of priority projects and programmatic categories for regional endorsement; the project list targets a limited set of 13 U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT))-administered Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) grant programs.

Background:

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funding Opportunities to Advance Plan Bay Area 2050

In February, staff received direction from the MTC and ABAG Joint Legislation Committee to proceed with developing a federal grant strategy to empower the Bay Area to meaningfully advance Plan Bay Area 2050's ambitious goals to combat the climate crisis; deliver a well-connected, safe and multimodal transportation network; and improve access to opportunity for all Bay Area residents. The strategy aims to maximize the Bay Area's share of the more than \$100 billion in federal discretionary funds authorized under the five-year Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) for which Bay Area projects can compete. Grants are expected to be highly competitive, and awards will likely range from the single digit millions to \$500 million or more. The core elements of the strategy include:

1. MTC, in coordination with Bay Area transportation partners, will develop a short list of priority projects for regional endorsement targeted at a limited set of USDOT-administered BIL grants.
2. Proceed with focused advocacy for the region's most competitive projects seeking grant funding from those larger-scale, regionally and nationally significant project-focused programs. Support Bay Area project competitiveness through informing grant development, as necessary, and with focused advocacy for grant awards.
3. MTC regional coordination should be limited to where it is most value-add, leaving plenty of opportunity for agencies to pursue local priorities from grant programs outside the regional target list.

Throughout February and March, MTC—in partnership with our Bay Area transportation agency partners—developed a short list of regionally significant priority projects or program areas that target a limited set of larger-scale USDOT-administered grants for funding. Staff also worked with partners to refine the focused advocacy strategy as follows:

- Regional grant targets shall be limited to 13 BIL grant programs; the remaining BIL grant programs (nearly 20) shall be reserved for local prioritization;
- MTC’s role will be that of a partner with regard to the local prioritization grants; Upon request, MTC will provide letters of support for Bay Area grant applications for projects consistent with Plan Bay Area 2050; and
- MTC and Bay Area partners will consult and coordinate with the California State Transportation Agency and other state agencies on our advocacy strategy, in particular as it relates to rail programs and projects;

This strategy, including a proposed BIL project list, was presented at the March Joint Legislation Committee. The proposed project list—including as Attachment A—recommended priorities for nearly all 13 programs targeted for regional endorsement. However, there were two areas where staff identified that more work was needed to identify specific projects:

1. Grade separations

Staff to identify approximately 5 – 10 Bay Area grade separation projects to share with the state by the March Commission meeting for incorporation into the overall BIL grant strategy. The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements and Railroad Crossing Elimination Program are proposed grant targets.

2. National Infrastructure Project Assistance (MEGA) “small” project candidates

Recommend Bay Area prioritize 1 – 2 projects in this category for regional endorsement. Many project sponsors requested projects be considered for this “small” MEGA project category (projects totaling between \$100 million and \$500 million). Staff to continue assessing project eligibility and alignment with BIL guiding principles and aim to bring recommendations to March Commission meeting.

The Committee provided some project-specific feedback, including requests for projects to be added to the INFRA project list and requests related to grade separation projects and candidates

for the “small” MEGA category, where further staff analysis and refinement of the list is ongoing.

Staff further received feedback related to the Bridge Program and a request to clarify that the seismic retrofit of the Golden Gate Bridge is the region’s priority with respect to the Bridge Program. Staff agrees this makes sense strategically and will include clarifying language in the final list document indicating that pursuit of funding for rehabilitation of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge will occur secondarily to seeking funds for the Golden Gate Bridge. Additionally, staff received a request related to refining terminology in the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail program recommendation for the Downtown Rail Extension and staff committed to work with the project sponsors on that item.

After robust discussion the Committee unanimously voted in favor of staff’s recommendation to advance the proposed project list to the Commission for approval, with direction to staff to further refine those two outstanding items and to continue to work with project sponsors.

As of the writing of this memo, that refinement is underway. Staff has coordinated with the Bay Area’s nine county transportation agencies to compile potential grade separation project candidates and will evaluate projects for prioritization based on project readiness and project benefits including benefits related to safety, mobility (including goods movement, passenger rail/transit and bicycle/pedestrian access), California High-Speed Rail, and equity. Staff is additionally continuing to assess project candidates for the National Infrastructure Project Assistance “small” category. A refined recommended project list for your consideration and approval will be included as a handout prior to your Commission meeting.

Recommendation: Support/MTC Commission Approval

Attachments:

- March MTC and ABAG Joint Legislation Committee Materials



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