SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

STBG/CMAQ

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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STBG/CMAQ PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program (CMAQ) and Surface Transportation Block Grant program (STBG) Program Guidelines, scheduled for adoption by the SCAG Regional Council (RC) on June 1, 2023, establishes the framework for project selection and investing of CMAQ and STBG funds within the SCAG region in accordance with 23 CFR § 450.332(c) et al. While the program guidelines focus on CMAQ and STBG project selection for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 through FY 2028, the guidelines are effective June 30, 2023, and any new project or new project phase to be programmed in the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) with CMAQ and/or STBG funds after this date will be subject to the SCAG selection process. These guidelines address joint Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) compliance findings focused on the delegation of project selection authority for the CMAQ program and the suballocation and administration of the STBG program.

BACKGROUND

Planning and programming actions for federal formula funded projects and programs are guided by the SCAG RC-approved Regional Transportation Plan / Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) – known as Connect SoCal 2020 and Connect SoCal 2024 (expected to be adopted by the SCAG RC in April 2024), the 2023 FTIP, the 2025 FTIP (expected to adopted by the SCAG RC in September 2024), and Federal Performance-Based Planning and Programming and Transportation Performance Management requirements.

The RTP/SCS provides the long-term vision and goals for how the SCAG region will build and support transformative transportation projects and initiatives. SCAG's RTP/SCS demonstrates how transportation projects and programs in the six-county SCAG region conform to the State of California and federal air quality mandates for funding eligibility. It identifies strategies to reduce regional greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and criteria air pollutant (CAP) emissions.

The FTIP is the document prepared by a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) that lists projects to be funded with federal, state, and local funds for the next four-year period. The FTIP is a key component in the process by which the RTP/SCS is implemented. It does so by providing an orderly allocation of federal, state, and local funds for use in planning and building specific projects. The FTIP is required to advance the RTP/SCS by programming the projects contained in the RTP/SCS, in accordance with federal and state requirements. These include specific requirements for scheduling of projects, funding, and the timely implementation of transportation control measures to help reduce air pollution.

Federal Transportation Performance Management Targets, adopted by the SCAG RC, provide near and mid-term anticipated outcomes for the transportation network. These inform and are informed, by planning and programming actions.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY

Prior to initiating a call for project nominations, SCAG will evaluate the availability of STBG and CMAQ funding. SCAG reserves the right to set aside up to 2.5 percent of the annual obligational authority for CMAQ and STBG funds apportioned to the SCAG region to support regional planning priorities that are led by SCAG and/or in partnership with the County Transportation Commissions (CTCs) (i.e., eligible planning activities that advance implementation of the RTP/SCS and performance-based planning and

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programming in the SCAG region). Use of the funds included in the set aside will be documented in the annual SCAG Overall Work Program and FTIP, as appropriate. The balance of CMAQ and STBG funding is available to projects through a competitive call for project nominations process that is administered and selected by SCAG in coordination with the SCAG region's six CTCs. SCAG is responsible for the development of the call for project nominations process, oversight, and final project selection. As outlined in the STBG/CMAQ Compliance Action Plan, SCAG has established performance-based nomination targets to guide the nomination submittals from each county within the SCAG region. The targets do not represent a guaranteed funding level, a nomination floor, or a nomination ceiling.

County	CMAQ Target Percentage	STBG Target Percentage
Imperial	0.6%	1.2%
Los Angeles	54.8%	53.3%
Orange	17.3%	17.1%
Riverside	12.7%	11.8%
San Bernardino	11.3%	12.2%
Ventura	3.3%	4.3%

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

In general, SCAG cities, counties, transit agencies, federally recognized Tribal governments, and CTCs are eligible to apply for CMAQ and STBG funds. Each CTC is responsible for coordination and submission of project nominations to SCAG from eligible entities from their respective counties. SCAG encourages CTCs to coordinate with SCAG and other affected CTCs on project nominations for multi-county projects and to support multi-county agency projects such the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency, and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink).

PUBLIC OUTREACH & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is essential in all SCAG programs. SCAG requires each CTC to engage relevant stakeholders from their respective county to maximize project impact and further collaborative policy goals.

CTCs are required to demonstrate countywide outreach and engagement with stakeholders and the public to solicit project ideas. CTCs should make every effort to follow current best practices related to virtual and in-person public participation, outreach, and engagement. SCAG strongly encourages each CTC to outreach and engage with historically disadvantaged communities (Priority Equity Communities) within their respective counties.

CTCs must document their public outreach and stakeholder engagement process and demonstrate how it meets the program guidelines. This can include a CTC conducting a call for project nominations.

PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

SCAG will conduct a call for project nominations, provide guidance, identify available funding, perform project evaluations, develop a list of prioritized projects, and conduct the SCAG board review and approval process.

CTCs will solicit and submit project nomination applications including conducting and documenting their outreach processes, screening applicants and projects for program eligibility, and conducting initial evaluation and prioritization of projects from their respective county. CTCs will develop individual project nomination application materials for submission to SCAG and establish processes for their county's project nominations, consistent with the overall program guidelines and subject to consultation and concurrence by SCAG staff.

After completing the initial project screening and evaluations, the CTCs will submit prioritized project nominations and required documentation to SCAG by the deadline established by SCAG. Prioritized nomination lists must be approved by the CTC's CEO (and/or governing board) prior to submission to SCAG.

CTC INITIAL SCREENING

At minimum, CTCs must incorporate the following regional criteria into their project nomination evaluations:

1. Eligibility: CTCs will screen potential implementing agencies and projects for eligibility with federal and regional requirements. Projects must be eligible for STBG and/or CMAQ funds, as detailed in 23 USC Sec. 133, 149, et al.

2. Alignment: CTCs should evaluate projects for alignment with relevant federal and regional plans and policies. CTCs should prioritize projects that:

   - Implement SCAG's adopted RTP/SCS, including future adopted Plan policies and strategies;

   - Advance Connect SoCal Performance Measures including Federal Transportation Performance Management Goals for safety, asset management, environmental sustainability and system performance, as detailed in 23 USC Sec. 105(b) and 49 USC Sec. 5301(b)(3);

   - Demonstrate direct and/or indirect benefits that positively impact Priority Equity Communities. (CTCs should aim to ensure that at least 40 percent of funding requested by projects countywide positively impact Priority Equity Communities).

3. Community/Stakeholder Engagement: CTCs should prioritize project nomination applications with demonstrated community support from Priority Equity Communities. Community support may be determined through a variety of means, including (but not limited to):

   - Responses to public outreach, including comments received at public meetings or hearings, feedback from community workshops, survey responses, etc.; and/or

   - Endorsement by a Community-Based Organization (CBO) representing Priority Equity Communities.

4. Deliverability and Readiness: CTCs should evaluate potential implementing agencies and projects for deliverability issues. CTCs should consider if potential implementing agencies have sufficient capacity and technical expertise to meet deadlines. CTCs should encourage projects with demonstrated readiness within the programming period.

SCAG encourages CTCs to work with SCAG staff on the development of the CTC project evaluation criteria. CTC project evaluation criteria must receive concurrence from SCAG staff and approval by the CTC CEO (and/or governing board) prior to issuing the call for nominations activities (or documented equivalent process) in their respective county. CTCs may develop separate evaluation frameworks by project type, but each such framework must meet the requirements of this section.

PROJECT NOMINATIONS

After completing initial project screening and evaluations, CTCs shall submit project nominations and associated documentation to SCAG for regional evaluation and project selection. Nomination lists must be approved by the CTC CEO (and/or governing board) prior to submission to SCAG. Project nomination packets must include the following elements, including project applications identifying the requested source(s) of funding:

1. Nomination List: list of eligible candidate projects for STBG and/or CMAQ funds prioritized according to the evaluation criteria developed by the CTC and approved by SCAG staff.

2. CEO Approval: letter from the CTC's CEO approving the project nomination list.

3. Outreach Documentation: materials verifying CTC compliance with outreach requirements.

4. Compliance Checklists: completed checklists and supporting documentation affirming compliance with requirements for both the CTC and each potential implementing agency with a project on the nomination list, including emissions benefit analysis for candidate CMAQ projects. Checklists should be completed by the CTC and must be signed by a signatory authority for the agency concerned.

REGIONAL PROJECT EVALUATION

SCAG staff will form a review committee composed of a multidisciplinary group of staff members. The review committee will conduct the regional project evaluation process to review the nomination packets provided by the CTCs and develop a recommended list of projects for adoption by the SCAG RC. This process will consist of the following steps:

1. Confirm Eligibility: SCAG staff will review submitted documentation to ensure CTC, potential implementing agency, and project compliance with applicable federal and regional policies. Screening will include a review to ensure consistency with adopted RTP/SCS. Any issues identified will be communicated to CTC staff, and projects with unresolved issues will be excluded from further consideration.

2. Scoring Criteria: Eligible projects can achieve up to 110 points for projects submitted for potential CMAQ funding and up to 100 points for projects submitted for STBG funding. The review committee will score projects using the following rubric:

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SCORING CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS
CTC Prioritization: Relative CTC project prioritization	50 Points
Regional Priorities: Project implements SCAG's adopted RTP/SCS, including future adopted Plan policies and strategies	20 Points
Performance Measures: Project demonstrates support for Connect SoCal Performance Measures (including but not limited to Federal Transportation Performance Management Goals): • Location Efficiency, • Mobility and Accessibility, • Safety and Public Health, • Environmental Quality, • Economic Opportunity, • Investment Effectiveness, • Transportation System Sustainability, and • Environmental Justice	20 Points
Equity: Project demonstrates direct and/or indirect benefit that positively impact Priority Equity Communities	10 Points
Air Quality Improvements: For CMAQ-eligible projects, expected criteria air pollutant (CAP) emissions reductions and relative cost effectiveness of projects in reducing CAP emissions in the SCAG region Air Basins	10 Points

The review committee will score each project using the following criteria:

CTC Prioritization:

• Prioritized in the CTC list as Highly Recommended	50 points
• Prioritized in the CTC list as Recommended	40 points
• Prioritized in the CTC Contingency List	20 points

Regional Priorities

• Aligns with 3 or more Regional Priorities	20 points
• Aligns with 1 to 2 Regional Priorities	10 points
• Does not align a Regional Priority	0 points

Performance Measures

• Supports 6 or more Performance Measures	20 points
• Supports 4 to 5 Performance Measure	10 points
• Supports 2 to 3 Performance Measures	5 points
• Supports less than 2 Performance Measures	0 points

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Equity

- Demonstrates direct positive benefit to Priority Equity Communities   10 points
- Demonstrated indirect positive benefits to Priority Equity Communities   5 points
- Does not demonstrate positive benefits to Priority Equity Communities   0 points

Air Quality Improvements

- Demonstrates cost effectiveness in reducing CAP emissions   10 points
- Estimates CAP emission reduction benefits   5 points
- Does not address CAP emission reduction benefits   0 points

3. **Project Ranking Process**: Candidate projects will be ranked according to their average review committee score. To ensure that high performing air quality improvement projects are prioritized for CMAQ funding, SCAG staff will first develop a recommended list of eligible projects for CMAQ funding using the comprehensive rubric rankings as well as projects identified as seeking CMAQ funding. (All eligible projects scored with a maximum possible score of 110 points and ranked from highest to lowest score.) In developing this list, SCAG will consider if project elements may not be eligible for CMAQ funds and should be considered for STBG funding.

   All remaining projects, including CMAQ-eligible projects not recommended for funding using this first method, will then be ranked with the air quality improvement portion of the rubric score excluded. (All remaining projects scored with a maximum possible score of 100 points and ranked from highest to lowest score). The latter rankings will be used by SCAG staff to develop a recommended list of projects for STBG funding.

   Once the lists are developed, they will be shared with the Air Quality Districts to obtain input on the projects selected for potential CMAQ funding. This will fulfill SCAG's requirement to involve the local air quality districts. SCAG may also consult with Caltrans and others as applicable.

4. **Program Balancing**: Candidate projects will be initially prioritized according to their ranking as described above. However, to achieve programmatic investment thresholds, and ensure a balanced program of projects, SCAG staff may adjust project prioritization based on the following factors:

   - Ensuring that at least 40 percent of funding positively benefit Priority Equity Communities,
   - County targets (as detailed in the SCAG RC-approved STBG/CMAQ Compliance Action Plan),
   - Relative STBG and/or CMAQ availability, and
   - Overall program balancing for a variety of project types, equitable investments, and regional diversity.

   Project scores will be converted into recommendation categories (i.e., Highly Recommended, Recommended, Contingency List, and Not Recommended) prior to publishing the recommended program of projects. To achieve an overall Highly Recommended determination, projects must

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achieve a score of at least 90 points. To achieve an overall Recommended determination, projects must achieve a score of at least 75 and less than 90 points. To be considered for the Contingency List, projects must achieve a score of at least 70 points. Depending on availability of CMAQ and STBG funds, projects may move between the Recommended list and the Contingency List. Using this process, SCAG staff will develop a draft program of recommended (Highly Recommended and Recommended) and Contingency List projects for SCAG RC adoption. Projects that achieve a score of less than 70 will be determined to be Not Recommended.

5. Program Approval: The SCAG RC will consider the recommended CMAQ and STBG projects. Projects approved by the SCAG RC for funding will be eligible for programming into the FTIP.

   If high scoring projects (Highly Recommended and Recommended) are not selected due to funding constraints, they will be prioritized for future funding opportunities as additional programming capacity becomes available for CMAQ and/or STBG programs prior to the next scheduled call for project nominations process. Contingency List projects will be considered after high scoring projects for future funding opportunities if additional programming capacity becomes available for CMAQ and/or STBG programs prior to the next scheduled call for project nominations process.

APPROVED PROJECTS, FEDERAL PROGRAMMING, MONITORING, AND FTIP MANAGEMENT

Projects approved by the SCAG RC for funding will be programmed in the FTIP consistent with adopted FTIP Guidelines. Approved projects that meet eligibility for transfer to the FTA should consult the FTIP Guidelines. To ensure the timely use of federal funds, SCAG will collaborate with Caltrans, CTCs, local jurisdictions, and transit operators to enhance FTIP Guideline policies and procedures to ensure federal funding requirements and deadlines are met and funds are not lost to the region. Additionally, SCAG will prepare and submit annual obligation plans to Caltrans, monitor federal fund obligations, overall federal funding levels, and apportionment and Obligation Authority (OA) balances.

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