

FEDERAL
TRANSPORTATION
INVESTMENT
in the
Bloomington-Normal
Urbanized Area
and
McLean County, Illinois

September 2015

At the end of each state fiscal year in June, the McLean County Regional Planning Commission publishes the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the Bloomington – Normal urbanized area for the following year. This document provides a window on planned transportation improvements in the Twin Cities, including street and road improvements, enhancements to transit service, extensions of our network of bicycle facilities, and repairs to major infrastructure such as interstate highways and bridges. The TIP covers a five-year time span, and covers projects planned by both Bloomington and Normal, projects planned by McLean County within the urban area, and projects planned by the Illinois Department of Transportation.

Under Federal law, the TIP must be “financially constrained.” This means that each project must have sources for the required funding identified. The TIP outlines how much each planned project is expected to cost, and for each government contributing to the project, the source of the funding to be applied. This can include any of a variety of funding sources, some of which can be applied to any project as deemed suitable by local, state or federal government, and some of which are designed to be used for specific purposes, such as highway safety, bridge construction and maintenance, improvements to rail crossings, the purchase of paratransit vehicles, and other enhancements to our transportation system.

In addition, and beginning with the FY 2016 – 2020, the TIP now includes “illustrative projects” for the City of Bloomington. These projects are not fiscally constrained, not having allocated funds attached to ensure their completion. They are included in the City’s Capital Improvement Program, and their inclusion in the TIP is intended to align the two documents. If at some point a project may receive funding that enables its continuance, an amendment will be made. This type of project listing is also

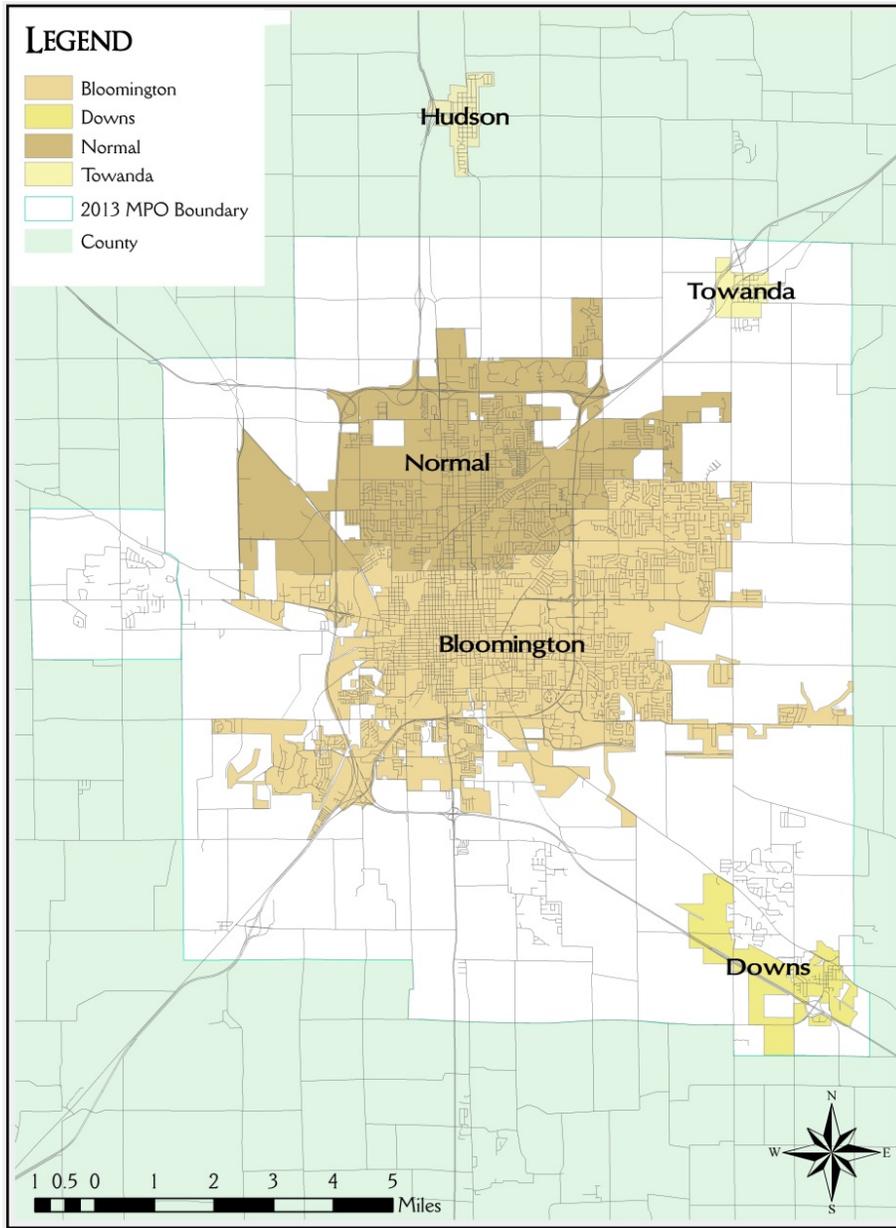
available to the Town of Normal and McLean County should they wish to pursue it.

The TIP lists for each project the intended schedule and the estimated costs for each phase of the project. Project schedules often change for various reasons. Thus, the TIP does not always yield an accurate picture of actual project expenditures. To ensure that the public has an accurate understanding of how federal funds are actually being spent on transportation projects, Congress included the following requirement in the Federal SAFETEA-LU transportation legislation enacted in 2005:

“an Annual Listing of projects, including investments in pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, for which Federal funds have been obligated in the preceding year shall be published or otherwise made available by the cooperative effort of the State, transit operator, and metropolitan planning organization for public review. The listing shall be consistent with the funding categories identified in each metropolitan transportation improvement program (TIP).”

This requirement is continued in the MAP-21 legislation as currently defined. The fiscal year under analysis for the purposes of this document is the state fiscal year from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015.

In each program year, some projects are eligible for funding from a number of Federal transportation programs. On an annual basis, we identify those projects which in the last fiscal year have benefited from the allocation and obligation of Federal transportation funding into our area, and report their status to the public through this report, *Federal Transportation Investment in the*



Bloomington – Normal Urbanized Area. These projects may include the reconstruction of intersections to improve safety and ease traffic congestion, streetscape engineering to make the community more attractive for all users of our streets, data collection and processing to improve our understanding of the transportation system, and engineering studies to consider the needs of the Bloomington – Normal of the future.

In accordance with federal law (23 CFR 450), the McLean County Transportation Study was established in 1967 by the Governor of Illinois, as a result of the population of the Bloomington-Normal urbanized area exceeding 50,000 for the first time. This population level triggered a federal mandate to create a formal transportation planning program for the area. The Transportation Study never functioned as a separate entity, and at the recommendation of the Federal Highway Administration was folded into the McLean County Regional Planning Commission planning process in 2012.

With the assistance of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the City of Bloomington, the Town of Normal, and portions of McLean County were organized into a Metropolitan Planning Organization (M.P.O.) and given the responsibility for transportation planning for the defined metropolitan planning area.

The physical boundaries of the planning area have changed as the community has grown over the more than forty years since the designation of the M.P.O. In the map at left, the current Bloomington – Normal metropolitan planning area is shown outlined in yellow. As a result of population increases and concentrations identified in the 2010 Census, the boundaries of the metropolitan planning area were revised in 2013.

Transportation projects within the expanded boundary are eligible for funding from Federal sources targeted for urban areas.

What are “project obligations”?

You might think of this as setting up a checking account for a specific purpose and then making an initial deposit. In order to begin work on any phase of a federally funded transportation project, the federal funds must first be obligated. This means that the money is set aside for that particular piece of work. Project expenses such as preliminary engineering, design, right-of-way acquisition or construction that are first paid for by the project sponsor can then be reimbursed from the obligated funds for the project.

Do project obligations mean the work is underway?

Prior to work getting underway, the federal funds must be obligated. However, the obligation of funds does not necessarily mean that work will begin immediately. Many times, funds are obligated only for initial phases of a project (preliminary engineering, right-of-way acquisition, etc.), and it may take time to select and hire a consultant to do the work. Similarly, the annual program of planned projects included in the Transportation Improvement Program includes projects for which Federal funds have been obligated, but which may not be undertaken as originally scheduled due to altered priorities, diversion of non-Federal funds needed to match the Federal investment, or ancillary project elements such as land acquisition not proceeding as anticipated. Generally, projects which could not be carried out as originally programmed are continued in the

What are “project phases”?

Transportation Improvement Program until such time as they can be completed.

Any transportation project, large or small, begins with an idea or plan and ends with construction. Here are the steps:

- **SCOPING:** Meetings are held with project developers and designers, local government representatives, and other involved parties. Decisions are made about the specific elements that will be included in the project and the range of design alternatives that will be investigated.
- **PRELIMINARY DESIGN:** This phase includes basic engineering work on each alternative, traffic studies, environmental analyses, and other work specific to the project. Public outreach is used to gain community input into project design. This phase ends with the selection and approval of a project alternative. This may take place in the context of a Phase 1 engineering study, which follows a standardized program of steps to evaluate project alternatives, impacts and design issues.
- **FINAL DESIGN:** In this phase, the actual plans and specifications that the construction contractor will work from are created.
- **RIGHT OF WAY INCIDENTALS:** Preparation work done prior to the acquisition of the right-of-way.

- **RIGHT OF WAY ACQUISITION:** In this phase, right-of-way necessary for the completion of the project is acquired either through purchase or easements.
- **CONSTRUCTION:** This encompasses all of the work to build the project, whether it is done by a contractor or an agency's own staff.
- **CONSTRUCTION INSPECTION:** In order to make sure that the work is being done properly and conforms to specifications, there is ongoing inspection. Sometimes this work is performed by local or state agency staff, but it may be contracted out.
- **OTHER:** This phase is associated with transit projects, and corresponds to the construction phase of the highway improvements, in that it represents that phase of the project wherein the proposed improvement is actually implemented. For transit projects, this usually involves the actual operation of transit service, and the resultant costs that are incurred, or the purchase and acquisition of equipment or facilities.

Advance Construction Projects¹

Advance construction allows states to begin a project even in the absence of sufficient Federal-aid obligation authority to cover the Federal share of project costs. Advance construction eliminates the need to set aside full obligational authority before starting projects. Thus, the state can undertake a greater number of concurrent projects than would otherwise be possible. In addition, advance construction helps facilitate construction of large projects, while maintaining obligational authority for smaller ones. At a future date when the state does have sufficient

obligation authority, it may convert an advance-constructed project to a Federal-aid project by obligating the permissible share of its Federal-aid funds and receiving subsequent reimbursements. Advance construction allows a state to conserve obligation authority and maintain flexibility in its transportation funding program.

There is no obligation or guarantee on either side. If Federal funds are not available, the state will not be able to convert the project to a Federal-aid project. In some cases, the state may choose not to convert the project, if state funds are sufficient.

Advance Construction (AC) is a cash flow tool (not additional funding) used by IDOT that allows them to preserve a project's federal eligibility and quickly obligate federal obligation limitation ceiling as additional ceiling becomes available. Projects that are so managed (or ACed) are all eligible for federal reimbursement (after being converted) and are authorized by FHWA in the same manner as all federally funded projects. (Note – Just as in regular federally funded projects, no work may begin before FHWA authorizes the AC action on a project.) When a project is ACed, IDOT essentially provides funds up front and does not seek federal reimbursement until a later date (after conversion). If a locally sponsored project is ACed, the project sponsor does not notice any difference from a regular federally funded project. Projects are ACed for a number of reasons:

- **Insufficient Obligation Limitation.** At the time project authorization is being sought from FHWA, there are more projects eligible for federal funding than the amount of obligation limitation IDOT has available;
- **Insufficient Apportionment.** At the time project authorization is being sought from FHWA, there are more projects eligible for a given federal fund type (NHPP, STP,

¹ http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/finance/tools_programs/federal_aid/ac_pcac/

etc.) than the amount of unobligated apportionments for that fund type;

- Discretionary Funds Allocation. On rare occasions a project is put on AC status when an allocation of funds from a discretionary program has not occurred, but it is certain will occur. In this case, the project remains in AC status only until the allocation occurs, generally a short amount of time.

Ordinarily, the first two events tend to happen closer to the end of the federal fiscal year. Essentially, individual projects are ACed because of timing issues.

Taking a project off AC status is commonly known as an AC Conversion. This requires a combination of obligation limitation, apportionment balances, and FHWA approval action to change the status of the project to regular federal funds. The request to convert funds can occur for a number of reasons:

- August Redistribution. Every year, the FHWA reallocates obligation limitation from those States that cannot use all of their ceiling to those that can demonstrate (a) that they can use additional ceiling and (b) that additional ceiling can be obligated before the end of the federal fiscal year. Having an inventory of projects on AC status allows the State to meet both conditions and capture additional federal funds.
- Road Fund Cash Flow. By law, all federal reimbursements to IDOT for spending are deposited into the Road Fund. If the available balance in the Road Fund fell to levels that would jeopardize the its ability to pay all of IDOT's bills on time, it would be possible—provided there is sufficient unobligated

ceiling and program apportionments—to convert one or more projects from AC status, thereby capturing all of the federal reimbursement associated with spending to date on that project/those projects and placing that money in the Road Fund in a very short time frame. The key to making this work is to have projects on AC status.

- Subsequent Allocation of Discretionary Funds. As noted above, on rare occasions an allocation of funds from a discretionary program do not occur prior to the need to implement the project and the project is put on AC status by IDOT. In those cases, once the allocation has occurred, the project is converted to Current Funded status.

The project funding in the following list reflects Federal allocations during the period from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014. In some instances, as noted above, funds may have been applied to projects during portions of the state fiscal year immediately before or after the time period encompassing the Federal fiscal year. Project listings include references to the Transportation Improvement Program, where relevant. The location of each project is shown on project maps, with the exception of projects consisting of data management. In some instances, additional funding from state or local sources may be identified in the FY 2013 – 2017 TIP. Some projects may also carry over into the FY 2014 – 2018 TIP or the current FY 2015 – 2019 TIP, with revisions to funding identified. Further information may be obtained from the TIP documents and associated amendments posted at www.mcplan.org.

Transit Investment

Federal investment is a critical element in supporting transit services in Bloomington – Normal. The principal transit provider in the Twin Cities is Connect Transit (aka Bloomington-Normal Public Transit System), which operates eleven fixed transit routes, provides paratransit special services, late-night demand response service, and provides additional transit services to Illinois State University through the operation of the RedBird Express. Transit budgets and programs are reported in the annual TIP.

Connect Transit anticipated Federal operating assistance, and state and local sources provide the remainder of operating funds for the transit system. Federal funds are also used to purchase vehicles and other equipment for the transit system as needed.

Federal grants allocated are shown below.

| PROJECT NO. | PROJECT DESCRIPTION | FUNDING FISCAL YEAR | OBLIGATION AMOUNT | OBLIGATION DATE | RECIPIENT ID |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| IL-90-X716 | FY2013 Operating Funds | 2012 | \$296,328 | 7/20/2013 | 1181 |
| IL-90-X716 | Mobile Fare Collection Equipment | 2013 | \$1,200,000 | 7/20/2013 | 1181 |
| IL-90-X716 | FY2013 Operating Funds | 2013 | \$1,515,675 | 7/20/2013 | 1181 |
| OBLIGATION TOTAL | | | \$3,012,003 | | |

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Using the Maps and Data

Following is an overview map of McLean County illustrating the projects identified by the Federal Highway Administration as having funds obligated between July 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013. Clicking a project symbol on the overview map will link to a project area map and data regarding the specific funding obligation for that project, as well as a citation to the project identification in the Transportation Improvement Program. Some projects located outside the urbanized area have been included in the report, but have not been referenced in the Transportation Improvement Program, which is focused on transportation facilities and projects within the metropolitan planning area illustrated on page 2. It is the practice of the McLean County Regional Planning Commission to include in the Transportation Improvement Program all projects which in some part are within the metropolitan planning area, even if the substantial portion of a project is outside the planning area.

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