



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

Federal Transit Administration

FHWA, Minnesota Division
180 East Fifth St, Ste 930
St. Paul, MN 55101-4802

FTA, Region V
200 West Adams St, Ste 320
Chicago, IL 60606-5253

Nancy Daubenberger
Commissioner of Transportation
Minnesota Department of Transportation
MS 100, Transportation Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Subject: Approval of Minnesota's FY 2023 – 2026 STIP and FHWA/FTA Federal Planning Finding

Dear Commissioner Nancy Daubenberger:

The following letter is in response to the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) transmittal of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 – 2026 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) requesting approval.

To approve the subject STIP document, including the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) contained therein, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must determine that the STIP is based on a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive planning process. This is achieved by examining the STIP and associated TIP documents, statewide and metropolitan planning self-certification statements (23 CFR 450.220; 23 CFR 450.336), related supporting documentation, and regular ongoing involvement with MnDOT and the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

In addition, under 23 CFR 450.220(b), the FHWA and FTA are required to document and issue a Federal Planning Finding (FPF) in conjunction with the STIP approval. The FPF verifies, at a minimum, that the development of the STIP is consistent with the provisions of both the statewide and metropolitan transportation planning requirements of 23 U.S.C. 234, 135; 49 U.S.C. 5303-5305; 23 CFR parts 450 and 500, and 49 CFR part 613.

Attachment 1 contains the complete FY 2023 – 2026 FPF. The findings are summarized below:

Commendations

- MnDOT Equity Work Group

Recommendations

- STIP public involvement process

Corrective Actions

- There are no Corrective Actions included with the 2023-2026 FPF

Accordingly, we find that the FY 2023 – 2026 STIP is based on a transportation planning process that substantially meets the requirements of 23 U.S.C. Sections 134 and 135, U.S.C. Sections 5303-5304, 23 CFR 450 (Subparts B and C), and 49 CFR Part 613 (Subparts B and C).

This approval includes the corresponding individual MPO TIPs that comprise the STIP and the La Crosse Area Planning Committee's project list. The La Crosse Area Planning Committee's TIP is approved once MnDOT approves and transmits the TIP to FHWA and FTA. The transmittal letter must state that MnDOT has confirmed that the projects identified in the TIP exactly match the projects listed in the STIP.

Approval of the FY 2023 – 2026 STIP is not to be construed as a federal-aid eligibility determination. Each project must satisfy the specific requirements of the program from which federal funds are requested, as well as other federal requirements as appropriate before funds are authorized.

FHWA and FTA value MnDOT's sustained efforts to ensure a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive planning process. We recognize the complexity of assembling a STIP and the effort expended by MnDOT staff.

We look forward to working with MnDOT to advance the projects and programs in the STIP and to provide the traveling public with an efficient, high-quality transportation system.

Should you have any questions regarding this STIP approval and Federal Planning Finding, please contact Bobbi Retzlaff, FHWA Community Planner at (651) 291-6125, or Bill Wheeler, FTA Community Planner at (312) 353-2639.

Sincerely yours,

Wendall L. Meyer
Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration

Kelley Brookins
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration

Attachment

cc: Trang Chu (MnDOT)
Brian Gage (MnDOT)
Ed Idzorek (MnDOT)
Anna Pierce (MnDOT)
Kris Riesenber (FHWA)

Attachment 1

Minnesota Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Finding for the FY 2023 – 2026 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

Overview

The Federal Planning Finding (FPF) is the key oversight mechanism through which the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) ensure that the transportation planning processes in Minnesota meet federal requirements. 23 CFR 450.220(b) requires FHWA and FTA to document and issue a Federal Planning Finding (FPF) in conjunction with approval of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The FPF verifies that, at a minimum, the development of the STIP is consistent with the provisions of both the Statewide and Metropolitan transportation planning requirements of 23 U.S.C. 134, 135; 49 U.S.C. 5303-5305; 23 CFR parts 450 and 500, and 49 CFR part 613.

Background

FHWA and FTA conducted the FPF in a risk-based capacity; the highest priority was placed in matters with the greatest potential to impede compliance with the federal planning requirements. FHWA and FTA determined the Findings through an in-depth desk review, risk tracking, assessment of previous Findings, day-to-day interactions with MnDOT and the MPOs, and feedback from MnDOT.

Findings fall into one of three categories: Commendations, Recommendations, or Corrective Actions. Each category is defined as follows:

Commendations: Planning activities that demonstrate innovative, highly effective and well-thought-out procedures for implementing the planning requirements or represent a national model for implementation and can be cited as an example for others.

Recommendations: Items that meet the statutory and regulatory requirements, but may contain opportunities to improve the transportation planning process.

Corrective Actions: Items that do not meet statutory and regulatory requirements. Corrective Actions require a work plan detailing how the issue will be resolved and by when.

2022-2025 STIP Findings

The 2022-2025 STIP FPF identified one commendation and two recommendations. The status of these findings is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: 2022-2025 STIP Federal Planning Findings and Status

Finding Type	Finding	Status
Commendation	Statewide Pedestrian System Plan	Ongoing
Recommendation	STIP public involvement process	MnDOT continues to clarify the public involvement process.
Recommendation	Ensure consistency in how state and locally funded projects are listed in MPO TIPs and the STIP	MnDOT and the MPOs continue to improve project coordination.

2023-2026 STIP Findings

Commendations

Commendation #1: MnDOT Equity Work Group

Observation: The Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP) identified equity as one of six focus areas. To address the equity focus area, MnDOT established an Equity Work Group that included internal and external stakeholders. In addition to providing policy guidance to the SMTP, the group also assisted MnDOT in other ways such as defining what transportation equity means, reviewing equity impacts of 20-year highway investment plan scenarios, identifying an accountability plan for implementing transportation equity once the SMTP is adopted.

Finding: MnDOT is commended on its continued commitment to transportation equity. The Work Group provided a solid foundation on which MnDOT can continue its work to create an equitable transportation system.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: STIP Public Involvement Process

Observation: The 2021-2024 STIP FPF included a recommendation to document the STIP public involvement process. Due to the pandemic and staffing shortages, FHWA and FTA deferred the recommendation to the 2022-2025 FPF. Throughout 2022, MnDOT's Office of Transportation System Management worked with its District staff to begin documenting the public involvement process. MnDOT has identified actions in 2023 that will continue to move the agency forward in documenting the STIP public involvement process.

Finding: As discussed in the 2021-2024 STIP FPF, MnDOT should document that the state's STIP public involvement process is consistent with the requirements identified in 23 CFR 450.210(a) and provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points. A documented process shows how MnDOT engages the public and stakeholders, including traditionally underserved populations, throughout the development of the STIP and describes how MnDOT will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of its outreach efforts. FHWA and FTA recognize the efforts MnDOT has made to date and its commitment moving forward.

Corrective Actions

There are no Corrective Actions included in the 2023-2026 STIP FPF.

Finalization and Transmittal

Following submittal to MnDOT, this FPF will be uploaded into FHWA's INPUT Response Tracker which documents the completion of the FPF and archives the results. INPUT also serves as the tracking system when following up with the State DOT and MPOs on their progress toward resolving identified risks. Since this FPF issued no Corrective Actions, it will be uploaded without a Work Plan or assigned task completion dates. We look forward to working with MnDOT to address the recommendations listed in this document.