

# Criteria for Project Prioritization

## RSMo 21.795.3(2)

### Introduction

The information in this section is in accordance with the highlighted portion in the following section of the reporting statute. *"(2) A detailed explanation of the methods or criteria employed to select construction projects, including a listing of any new or reprioritized projects not mentioned in a previous report, and an explanation as to how the new or reprioritized projects meet the selection methods or criteria; ..."* Section 21.795.3(2), RSMo Supp. 2002 (L. 2003 TAFP HB 668) (emphasis added).

The Five-Year Highway and Bridge Construction Schedule establishes work for 2007-2011. As each year of the plan is completed, a new year is added. Except for improvements specified in Sections 2B and 2C, schedules for 2007-2011 are the same as in last year's report.

The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission endorsed the Planning Framework in March of 2004. The framework is an open and transparent process for project selection and prioritization that includes public participation. The public involvement in planning, project development and programming activities is a key element in gaining public acceptance critical to the success of any transportation improvement program. In Missouri, the approach is to primarily seek involvement from four groups. These groups are: (1) metropolitan planning organizations, (2) regional planning commissions, (3) local officials, and (4) the general public. Through public involvement, Missourians have a say in how transportation dollars are spent.

Metropolitan planning organizations represent urbanized areas with populations over 50,000. They are responsible for planning, including transportation planning, within their regions. Regional planning commissions represent multi-county rural regions and are charged with coordinating functions of local governments, including transportation planning. The public is involved in the planning process in two ways: 1) through electing the local officials who comprise the regional planning commission and metropolitan planning organization boards of directors; and 2) through direct contact with MoDOT, metropolitan planning organizations, regional planning commissions or local officials.

Public involvement for development of transportation improvements begins several years before the projects actually appear in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

Transportation planning consists of a series of decisions that direct the use of current and future available resources to accomplish Missouri's transportation goals. The current transportation planning process can be summarized in the following steps:

1. Develop state's transportation vision and a plan to accomplish it

2. Identify and prioritize needs
3. Develop solutions and design projects
4. Prioritize and select projects for construction

Each process is detailed on the following pages.

### **Develop State's Transportation Vision and a Plan to Accomplish It**

MoDOT's long-range transportation planning initiative called *Missouri Advanced Planning* or *MAP* is almost complete and will identify the state's transportation vision. *MAP* will also help identify what the public expects of the state transportation system and goals for taking care of it. It will identify the values that guide needs and project prioritization for the next several years.

The vision will be Missouri's ideal transportation system as identified by Missourians. However, it's unlikely that Missouri can afford all the components of the ideal system, so *MAP* will also include policies and goals, and a fiscally constrained strategy for achieving the highest-priority components of the transportation vision within an agreed upon timeframe. This requires working with planning partners and citizens to determine where Missouri's transportation dollars should be spent.

### **Identify and Prioritize Needs**

There are many transportation problems, often called needs, on Missouri's transportation system. Identifying these needs is a continuous process and crucial for successful planning. For example, one need might be redesigning a high-accident location, such as an intersection; another need might be a location improvement that helps a new business move products more efficiently. There are two levels of needs identification, regional and statewide, and they are classified in two groups, physical system condition needs, which target the state of repair of road and bridge components, and functional needs, which target how well the transportation system is operating.

Statewide needs are identified formally through the long-range transportation planning process, which includes public outreach. These needs typically cross several county lines and involve interstates and U.S. highways.

MoDOT districts work with planning partners to identify regional transportation needs. Specific methods and timeframes are discussed in the implementation section of MoDOT's planning framework for guiding transportation decisions and investments.

Prioritizing needs is the process of deciding which problems, from the list of identified needs, should be addressed first. This can be a difficult task given a wide variety of needs. Not only do needs have different subject matter – safety, maintenance or economic development – they have varying time horizons. A structurally deficient bridge might be a more immediate need than the concern for meeting air quality standards in metropolitan areas. However, simply being an immediate need does not imply higher priority. Perhaps the deficient bridge is no longer needed and can be closed, while not meeting air quality standards could have a significant fiscal impact on future transportation projects and serious

environmental consequences. These complicated decisions require a coordinated effort from many groups.

Needs prioritization is based on the goals in Missouri's long-range transportation plan. MoDOT districts will work with planning partners to prioritize regional needs annually. Statewide needs will be prioritized when MoDOT's long-range transportation plan is updated; however, emerging needs can be added to the needs priority list between updates. Both regional and statewide needs will be prioritized using the processes established in MoDOT's Planning Framework, which are based primarily on objective data. Using the results of the prioritization process as a starting point, MoDOT districts will work with planning partners to divide needs into three categories.

- High – Resources are focused on addressing these needs first. They are the first to be selected for preliminary engineering.
- Medium – These needs may be addressed as additional resources become available.
- Low – No work is in progress to address these needs at this time.

The high-priority needs list is fiscally constrained to about ten years of funding and is not a commitment to design or construct projects. Existing needs will be reevaluated each time needs are prioritized. Some high-priority needs may never be designed or constructed due to prohibitive costs, changing priorities or other reasons. Needs from the high-priority list will be selected for preliminary project design.

### **Develop Solutions and Design Projects**

When the high-priority needs have been identified, they are evaluated to find the best solution to the problem based on engineering expertise, public input and financial considerations. After a solution is agreed upon, design plans are started and a transportation need becomes a transportation project.

Determining the cause of a problem is often more complicated than might be expected. For instance, a high incidence of accidents at a given intersection might be due to poor sight distances, weather conditions, signal timing, roadway geometry or even reckless driving. Identifying the primary reason or combination of reasons for the problem is key to developing effective solutions.

Once a problem is identified, the natural tendency for any problem-solver is to immediately offer *the* solution. Effective planning requires developing many possible solutions to capture the most efficient and effective solutions. MoDOT engineers and planners are experts at generating good solutions to transportation problems. MoDOT staff is even more effective when working with local and regional officials to generate the solutions. This process reveals issues and concerns that may not have previously been evident.

The public's involvement in defining needs and determining the appropriate solutions will take several forms. The public may actually initiate the investigation of needs by contacting MoDOT or its planning partners. The public, through its local officials, has representation in determining the best solution for the transportation need. As MoDOT develops public

involvement plans for specific projects, the public will have further opportunity to review concepts and provide input.

### **Prioritize and Select Projects for Construction**

Deciding which projects to do and when to do them is a complicated and often controversial matter. Gathering and discerning public input is crucial to realizing the full benefit of available funds for Missouri's transportation system. MoDOT relies on local and regional planning agencies for this process.

The project prioritization processes are based primarily on data and serve as a starting place for determining the best candidates for funding. There are separate project prioritization processes for each category in MoDOT's funding distribution method.

MoDOT recognizes the need for a balance between taking care of the current transportation system and expanding the system to accommodate anticipated future demand. As a result, transportation funding is divided accordingly. The nature of this balance is adjusted through the level of funds in each category. The project prioritization processes include the following.

- Safety
- Taking care of the system
- Regional and emerging needs
- Major projects
- Interstates and Major Bridges

Projects are divided into three categories - high, medium and low, within each funding category. The high-priority project list is fiscally constrained to five years of funding and is not a commitment for construction. Each time projects are prioritized, existing projects not yet programmed for construction will be reevaluated.

Projects are prioritized against other projects in the same group. Larger projects of statewide significance are compared with one another. Smaller projects and those intended to take care of the existing system are compared with one another. MoDOT works with local and regional officials to determine the priority of the projects in each group.

However, each of Missouri's seven metropolitan planning organizations located in Columbia, Joplin, Kansas City, St. Joseph, St. Louis, Jefferson City and Springfield, prepare a transportation improvement program within its respective metropolitan planning areas. These transportation improvement plans are the accumulation of federally funded projects proposed by their local governments and MoDOT. MoDOT utilizes public input received throughout the year to develop its submittal for the metropolitan planning organizations transportation improvement plan.

Each metropolitan planning organization has approved public involvement plans for its respective areas that allow for review and feedback from individual citizens, organizations, agencies and local area governments. Using public input as one of its decision factors, the metropolitan planning organizations determines the projects in its area that will be

programmed for construction. These transportation improvement plans are integrated into the five-year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program without modification.

### **Public Review Period**

After a preliminary draft of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, based on public and engineering input is developed, a 45-day public review period begins. During this public review period, the program is distributed to MoDOT districts for public access. Citizens have the opportunity to provide written comments, verbal comments or telephone comments (by calling 1-888-ASK MODOT) to district representatives during this period. The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program is also available on MoDOT's website at <http://www.modot.org>.

Changes are made in response to comments before a final draft is developed and presented to the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission for approval. Input from this part of the process will be used to measure the effectiveness of the program to evaluate its production process and to begin making improvements on next year's program. The Statewide Transportation Improvement Program becomes effective when approved by the commission, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration.

### **Program Amendments**

Projects can be amended to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and to a metropolitan area transportation improvement plan. The public involvement process for Statewide Transportation Improvement Program amendments will occur prior to incorporating the project in the program. Public involvement on projects inside a metropolitan planning organization area will be done by the metropolitan planning organization according to its approved transportation improvement plan amendment process.

For amended projects outside metropolitan planning organizations boundaries considered to be major transportation corridor investments, a 30-day public review period will be provided. During this public review period, information defining each project will be distributed to the affected MoDOT districts. Citizens will have the opportunity to telephone or write comments to district representatives during this period. MoDOT's Transportation Planning Division and MoDOT's districts around the state are responsible for notification and education of this review process. Notification should begin a minimum of 15 days prior to the public-review period.

Comments for projects outside metropolitan planning organizations boundaries not considered major transportation investments are solicited from the affected governing bodies including counties and/or cities. After concurrence by all affected parties, the projects are amended quarterly into the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.