



BOSTON REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Phillip Eng, MPO Chair | Interim Secretary and CEO, Massachusetts Department of Transportation
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TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 4, 2025
TO: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
FROM: Adriana Jacobsen, Transportation Planner and Capital Programmer
Ethan Lapointe, Senior Transportation Planner and Transportation
Improvement Program (TIP) Manager
RE: Draft TIP Project Readiness Requirements

This memorandum discusses a set of proposed readiness requirements for projects programmed in the Regional Target Program of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The objectives are to consistently program projects in an accurate advertising year and to move at-risk projects to an appropriate year to mitigate impacts to the broader TIP program. The readiness requirements were developed in consultation with the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee, the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) board, and Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) staff, and through quantitative research on the timelines of recently advertised TIP projects.¹

1 CURRENT PROJECT READINESS PROTOCOL BASED ON 2021 TIP PROJECT COST POLICY

The policy described in the [Draft Programming Policies to Address TIP Project Cost Increases memorandum](#), hereby referred to as the TIP Project Cost Policy, was developed in 2021 by the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee. The policy included an intervention requiring that project proponents submit 25 percent design plans and obtain an updated cost estimate from MassDOT prior to their projects being selected for TIP funding. These strategies were adopted to address the frequent project cost increases that affected the MPO's ability to regularly deliver municipal priority projects and align with the vision set by the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

¹ This research is outlined in Table 1.

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2 THE NEED TO BUILD UPON THE 2021 TIP PROJECT COST POLICY

The TIP Project Cost Policy was not able to accomplish the MPO board's desired outcome. In addition, since the policy was developed in 2021, new issues have affected the TIP program.

Pre-25 Percent Design Projects Remain on the TIP

Due to low application volumes in FFYs 2022 through 2024, the MPO board chose to continue to program new projects without a 25 percent design submission rather than program no new projects. Furthermore, the MPO board allowed a grace period for legacy projects without a 25 percent submission that had already been programmed on the TIP before the policy was implemented. As many of these "grace period" projects have since been delayed several times, several pre-25 percent projects remain programmed on the TIP.

No Readiness Standards after Programming

Although the policy proposed establishing readiness standards for each year of the TIP program, this recommendation was not adopted. Projects may experience delays in the development of their designs even after a 25 percent design submission, and such standards would further improve the MPO's ability to regularly deliver municipal priority projects.

Project Issues are Exacerbated

Since the development of the TIP Project Cost Policy, the TIP program continued to face the same issues discussed in the policy as well as new concerns:

- A prominent issue is that of delays in the first two years of the TIP program, leading to significant surpluses that must quickly be filled, deficits in the middle years of the program, and insufficient funding for new projects in the later years.
- Project cost increases continue to be a challenge to the health of the program; from June 2023 to 2025, the Core Investment projects originally programmed in FFY 2025 have cumulatively increased in cost by 55 percent. Cost increases are not unusual for TIP projects and do not necessarily indicate flaws in the project itself. In fact, regularly updated cost estimates reflect continuous development of the project design and consistent communication between project proponents, consultants, and the MPO board and staff. Although the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee recognized this issue and recommended requiring an updated cost estimate at the time of programming, the committee made no requirement in the TIP Project Cost Policy for regular cost estimate updates throughout the project's life cycle on the TIP.

- Projects are taking longer to reach the 25 percent design stage. Projects with an advertisement date between FFY 2022 and 2024 took 1.5 years on average between MassDOT's Project Review Committee (PRC) approval and 25 percent design submission. Projects with an advertisement date between FFY 2025 and 2027 took 2.8 years on average.

There is a now a more urgent need to put these measures in place to ensure the integrity of the TIP program. In order to mitigate these risks, the MPO board must be equipped to monitor project progress against established milestone targets and take appropriate measures when they are off track.

3 RECOMMENDED POLICY UPDATE

To inform an update to the existing policy, MPO staff collected project design timeline data for a dozen Regional Target projects advertised in FFYs 2022–24. Based on the average time these projects took between each milestone, MPO staff developed a set of minimum readiness requirements for each TIP programming year.

3.1 Objective

The objective of these readiness requirements is to ensure Regional Target projects are programmed to advertise for construction in the most accurate year. If a project falls behind schedule and is no longer expected to advertise in its original programming year, it would be moved to the earliest appropriate subsequent year to prevent far-reaching effects on the TIP program.

3.2 Design Pace of Recently Advertised Projects

To develop readiness milestones, MPO staff analyzed design milestone data from 12 Regional Target projects advertised between FFYs 2022 and 2024, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Years between Milestones and Advertisement for 12 Recently Advertised
Regional Target Projects in the Boston Region

Project ID	PRC Approval	25% Submission	DPH	75% Submission	100% Submission
609054	6.05	4.79	3.84	3.36	1.44
607777	9.43	3.70	1.85	0.89	0.28
607244	10.92	4.33	2.17	1.90	0.67
608007	10.09	7.38	4.50	3.56	2.24
608887	4.57	3.96	2.96	2.25	1.29
606130	13.05	11.36	8.50	3.88	1.30
607899	8.85	7.88	2.18	1.05	0.64
609253	4.32	3.81	2.35	1.64	0.65
608707	6.87	6.55	3.73	1.96	0.47
608889	6.12	4.65	3.75	2.89	1.97
608348	7.58	5.53	3.14	1.87	0.54
608933	6.12	4.65	3.75	2.89	1.97
Median	7.2	4.7	3.4	2.1	1.0

DPH = Design Public Hearing. PRC = MassDOT Project Review Committee.
Source: Massachusetts Department of Transportation Project Information.

Both the average project paces and the full range of project paces were used to set the performance expectations for each programming year.

The following examples illustrate the timelines and programming impacts for hypothetical projects.

To illustrate this timeline, consider a hypothetical Project M moving at the median project pace (as detailed in Table 1). The relevant timeframe for this project spans five and a half years from TIP development in FFY 2026 to the September 30, FFY 2031 advertisement deadline. Table 1 indicates that the median project required over four and a half years to advertise after submitting its 25 percent design package. Therefore, if Project M's proponents submitted a 25 percent design package in March of 2026 (during scenario development of the FFYs 2027–31 TIP), Project M would be scheduled to advertise in February 2031. This makes FFY 2031 an appropriate programming year.

Although the progression of projects varies, the data from Table 1 provides a range of project paces useful for developing realistic readiness guidelines. Consider another project, Project X, with a 25 percent design package submitted on the same day as Project M in March of 2026, seeking programming in FFY 2029. The pace of Project X is unknown.

The required advertisement window for FFY 2029 is October 1, 2028, to September 30, 2029—between two and a half and three and a half years after TIP development season in the spring of 2026. Therefore, Project X would need to advance from 25 percent design to advertisement faster than any Regional Target project has in the last three years. As a result, FFY 2029 is not a feasible programming year.

Relationship to MassDOT's Readiness Requirements

During the annual TIP Readiness Days exercise in February, MassDOT uses similar data to predict which projects may not advertise in their current programming year. However, the average development pace for projects in the Statewide Highway Program is slightly different than the pace of projects in the Regional Target Program. For example, MassDOT's standards expect a project two years out from advertisement to have submitted a 25 percent design package. However, in the past few years of the Regional Target Program, projects have taken 4.7 years on average to advertise after the submission of a 25 percent design package. As a result, a stricter standard should be applied to Regional Target projects in conjunction with MassDOT's TIP Readiness Days recommendations.

3.3 Readiness Requirements

Table 2 presents the minimum project readiness and cost estimate standards for a project to be programmed in a given federal fiscal year for the FFYs 2027–31 TIP. Projects must meet these requirements by March 1 of the corresponding TIP development cycle—in this case, March 1, 2026.

Table 2
Five-Year Readiness Guidelines

	FFY 2027	FFY 2028	FFY 2029	FFY 2030	FFY 2031
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Minimum Requirement	100% submitted	75% approved or combined 75% / 100%	25% DPH held	25% design received with comments	Pre-25% submission
Next Stage	PS&E within 9 months	100% within 6 months	75% within 6 months	25% DPH scheduled	25% submission within 3 months
Cost Estimate	New cost estimate	Cost estimate < 1.5 years old	New cost estimate	Cost estimate < 1.5 years old	New cost estimate

DPH = Design Public Hearing. FFY = Federal Fiscal Year. PS&E = Plans, Specifications, and Estimates.

The Minimum Requirement reflects the minimum level of project development required for a project to remain in a given programming year. Projects that are not at the minimum milestone will be delayed in programming scenarios to the best-fit year. For example, a project that is programmed in FFY 2028 and is only at the 25 percent Design Received stage will be delayed to FFY 2030.

The Next Stage Requirement assesses the risk for projects to hold their advertising years in later TIPs. If a project's schedule does not align with this requirement, the project would be flagged as being of at least moderate risk but a delay would not be required unless it also fails to meet the Minimum Requirement.

The Cost Estimate Requirement would require revised cost estimates to be provided by project proponents no less than once every 1.5 years. These estimates should reflect costs based on the pre-25 percent submission, on approach to 75 percent design, and after the 100 percent design submission.

3.4 Benefits to the TIP Program

This new policy would establish clear and standard expectations for all project proponents applying for federal funding through the TIP. The new milestones would provide the MPO board with data-driven readiness standards for every programming year, enabling the board to objectively identify and delay high-risk projects without targeting specific proponents. Ultimately, these changes would mitigate risk to the TIP program by significantly reducing last-minute delays and providing a reliable funding pathway for projects that are genuinely ready to advance.

3.5 Policy Enforcement

If a project fails to meet the required readiness or cost estimate standards, it will be programmed into the earliest appropriate subsequent year based on its readiness and cost estimate status. In cases of insufficient funding in that year, the project will be delayed further into the first year in which there is sufficient funding and where the appropriate readiness and cost estimate standards are met. If multiple delayed projects are competing for funding in the same year, the MPO board would resolve the conflict by voting on a project scenario.

These new guidelines would revise and augment the existing policy by relaxing the minimum standard for new project applications to a pre-25 percent submission threshold. This change reflects the evolution of the 25 percent design process over the last four years while addressing the original intent: to ensure a stronger understanding of project scope and cost at the time of TIP

programming. The MPO board would retain the authority to enforce stronger design requirements for initial funding based on individual project risk.

3.6 Features of Readiness Guidelines

The newly proposed readiness guidelines have the following advantages.

Data-Driven

These guidelines are based on data derived from recently advertised Regional Target projects and reflect the timelines of successful projects.

Proactive

High risk projects are flagged and delayed to an appropriate programming year, minimizing the risk of creating budget issues in the early programming years.

Consistent

The policy relies on data to identify at-risk projects and does not require board members to single out specific projects. The expectations are clearly outlined and are standard for all project proponents.

Comprehensive

These guidelines would apply across all five years of TIP programming, recognizing that projects may experience readiness challenges even well past their 25 percent design submission stage.

Multifaceted

The policy integrates current design status, future design submissions, and recent cost estimates.

Refinable

The readiness guidelines can be adjusted over time if evidence suggests that any of the standards are too strict or too relaxed.

4 NEXT STEPS

Should the MPO board vote to implement this update to the TIP Project Cost Policies, a vote may be taken at the December 4, 2025, MPO meeting to endorse these recommendations.

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