

# SVATS MPO TIP Development/Project Selection Process

## 2021-2024 TIP

### Introduction

Federal law and regulations require that any urbanized areas with a population exceeding 50,000 form a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). This group provides a forum for local and state officials to work cooperatively to maintain a cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing transportation process. The Shenango Valley Area Transportation Study (SVATS) MPO, formed in 1981, is the MPO responsible for planning and programming transportation projects receiving federal funding within the 48 municipalities comprising Mercer County.

On a biennial basis, the MPO and PennDOT produce a local Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which contains the programmed transportation projects (covering a four-year period) throughout Mercer County. MPO and PennDOT staffs work closely to develop a TIP that takes into account the Long Range Transportation Plan's (LRTP's) priorities, Performance-Based Planning and Programming, Transportation Performance Management and asset management principles. As it is developed, all parties work to ensure that the TIP represents logical and beneficial projects for the county and the people living, working, and traveling within its borders.

Candidly, this has been the most challenging TIP development process from the MPO staff perspective. There are several reasons for this but, as usual, the growing gap between available funding and transportation needs within Mercer County was the primary reason. Several significant accompanying challenges presented themselves during TIP development: additional—and often competing—metrics on project prioritization, greatly-increased workload in developing the 2021 TIP, new priorities/initiatives from District 1-0's upper management, often over-burdened collaborative partners, changes to funding formulas which are sometimes disadvantageous to Mercer County, and the COVID-19 Emergency situation just as TIP development was in its most critical stages.

Despite the myriad difficulties in developing the 2021 TIP, MPO staff did all within their power to work toward maintaining and improving the 3C-compliant (cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing) transportation process in Mercer County.

### Process Overview

As illustrated on the accompanying *TIP Timeline* chart, development of Mercer County's 2021 TIP was a process that began in earnest about a year before final adoption. Draft guidance documents for the TIP were released by PennDOT's Center for Program Development and Management (CPDM) in July. This was discussed in-depth at a summer (July) Planning Partners meeting. Most impactful was the financial guidance for this TIP, which resulted in significant funding cuts for Mercer County and all other planning regions. Also noteworthy, although not at all unexpected, was procedural guidance mandating more thoughtful consideration of how TIPs are developed—particularly with regard to Transportation Performance Measures (TPMs) and Environmental Justice (EJ). The SVATS MPO and PennDOT District 1-0 staff members began high-level discussions in light of these changes. Final guidance documents were released shortly thereafter (in August), and the development of the TIP gained momentum.

The previous (2019) TIP involved a far-greater number of meetings and discussions than in past TIP-updates, demonstrating the MPO's commitment to improve the 3C-compliant (cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing) transportation process. The 2021 update continued along a similar track, and involved even more TIP development conversations and debates, mostly during fall 2019. These meetings involved discussion about validity and details of specific projects, weighing needs vs. the availability of total funding, and how various considerations could help justify projects (such as TPMs and general asset management goals, planning study recommendations, EJ, etc.). As noted in the introduction, this was a particularly difficult TIP update and there were significant challenges to reaching consensus. Misunderstandings of the role both organizations play in the development of the TIP sometimes tested the long-standing excellent partnership between the MPO and PennDOT District 1-0. Ultimately, over the course of several months, a general agreement on what the draft TIP might look like was reached and details were shared along the way with the MPO Coordinating Committee.

The fast-approaching December 31, 2019 deadline of districts (e.g. D 1-0) to submit TIPs to CPDM, coupled with the impasse over several projects, meant that a finalized draft highway project listing of the TIP was not able to be fully-shared by D 1-0 and explained with the MPO Coordinating Committee until January 14, 2020. Although this practice seems to be consistent with many other regions for the rushed and challenging 2021 update, the idea of a TIP project listing being "locked-in" at the statewide level prior to thoughtful consideration and input from MPO voting members was an unfortunate consequence of the circumstances, and against the spirit of the federally-defined roles of the MPO. Nevertheless, MPO members were kept apprised of these issues (collectively, and individually in many cases) and were given an "early draft" during the fall of 2020. More-detailed conversation took place during January 14, 2020 SVATS MPO Coordinating Committee meeting and approval of the Draft TIP project listings was approved during the April 14, 2020 meeting.

The process for the transit component of the TIP works a little differently and is a much more cut-and-dry process. Mercer County has two transit providers—the Shenango Valley Shuttle Service and Mercer County Community Transit—which are staffed through the Mercer County Regional Council of Governments (MCRCOG). All PA transit agencies are required to utilize Pennsylvania's transit Capital Planning Tool (CPT) as part of their capital planning process. The CPT is an asset management and capital planning application that works as the central repository for all Pennsylvania transit asset and performance management activities and really helps guide the development of the transit portion of the TIP. MCRCOG staff relies heavily on the CPT, and works closely with the PennDOT Bureau of Multimodal Transportation and in accordance with the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) guidelines. A draft TIP was shared with MPO and PennDOT CPDM staff members in early 2020. Shortly thereafter, this was shared with the MPO voting members and other stakeholders. As with past updates, most projects fund transit vehicles, facilities, equipment and other capital expenditures that allow the transit system to operate efficiently and safely. Operating assistance is also included within the TIP. Projects typically fall under similar categories year-to-year and older TIPs look rather similar to the 2021 TIP.

The TIP is much more than just a listing of projects and accompanying costs and narrative descriptions. Myriad other documents comprise the TIP—this narrative included—and most of these are developed later in the process (March-May 2020), even if the information leading to their development was decided early in the TIP-development process. These additional documents are listed in the chart on the following page.

## Additional TIP Documents (Beyond Project Listings and Public Narratives)

Submission	Description
Cover Letter	Document showing TIP approval date and organization name
TIP Development/Project Selection Process	(This Document)
TIP Development Timeline	Graphic showing various milestones during TIP development
Transportation Performance Measure (TPM) Documentation	Narrative documentation regarding how TIP projects contribute toward safety, condition, system efficiency and transit PMs
Transit Financial Capacity Analysis	Description of transit TIP's financial capacity to complete projects
Environmental Justice (EJ) Analysis	EJ narrative, maps, Benefits and Burdens analysis
Air Quality Conformity Determination Report	Report explaining Mercer County's AQ status and analysis of the TIP projects that are likely to affect overall AQ
Air Quality Resolution	Resolution stating that TIP contributes to the achievement of ambient AQ standards
Public Comment Period Advertisement	Legal ad notifying the public comment period and public hearing
Documentation of Public Comments Received	List, description, and results of any public comments received
MPO/RPO TIP Revision Procedures MOU	Memorandum of Understanding regarding processes for handling revisions to the TIP
Self Certification Resolution	Resolution affirming that MPO is operating in accordance with federal mandates regarding MPOs
List of Regionally Important and Significantly Delayed Projects from Previous TIP	Description and justification of 2019 TIP projects meeting these criteria
Financial Constraint Table	Table indicating that financial guidance amounts match the amounts programmed on the TIP and identifying additional sources of funding

In May of 2020, the TIP entered into a 30-day public comment period. A legal ad was placed in Mercer County's widely-circulated newspaper, while the TIP documents were posted on the MCRPC/MPO website, and various notifications were sent out to the transportation community, including native tribes, stating that the TIP was available for public comment. A Public Hearing was also scheduled during this 30-day public comment period (documentation of this process is included within this TIP submittal).

The final TIP is to be approved at the July 2020 Coordinating Committee meeting, and will then be processed by PennDOT. After their review, PennDOT will bundle together this and all other PA MPO/RPO TIPs, and submit as one Statewide TIP (STIP) to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for final approval. After final approval of the STIP by FHWA and FTA, the TIP takes effect at the beginning of the federal fiscal year on October 1, 2020.

### Project Selection Overview

A wide variety of information from numerous sources was considered in the development of the 2021 TIP. The **Highway TIP** includes all roadway and bridge projects along eligible routes. Road improvements can include pavement resurfacing or rehabilitation projects, intersection improvements, signal projects, bicycle/pedestrian access or safety improvements, road widenings or alignment changes, and even the construction of new roadways (although no new roadways are on the current TIP). Bridge improvements would include either the replacement or rehabilitation (or more-intensive maintenance activities) along state-owned bridges. Additionally, funding is also set aside for off-system (i.e. "local") bridges. The vast majority of off-system bridges in Mercer County are owned by the county rather than at the municipal level. The **Transit TIP** contains all eligible transit projects, from capital improvements to operational expenditures. Finally, the **Interstate Management (IM) and Statewide Program TIPs** contain all

significant improvements to the Interstate Highway network or for projects using competitive statewide funds. These TIPs are developed at a statewide level, though project listings, descriptions, and funding amounts are included within this TIP for the public’s benefit.

Prioritizing improvements to this vast network of transportation infrastructure is a complicated and often varying process, depending upon the type and size of the project. The following sections capture the methods utilized to analyze which projects become programmed on the TIP.

### Initial District 1-0 Staff Priorities

Even before the meetings between District 1-0 and the MPO begin, PennDOT’s Planning and Programming staff has already worked with several other departments within PennDOT District 1-0 to get an idea of what their highest priorities are. These include, but are not limited to, the departments within District 1-0 as listed on the table below:

D 1-0 Unit/Dept.	How Projects are Conceptualized and Prioritized
Traffic (Safety)	Consideration of safety hot-spots, based on crash data. This includes Mercer County’s “Top 25” crash locations, top Intersection safety (ISIP) and roadway-departure (RDIP) concerns. <u>(See also TPM Narrative’s PM-1 Section)</u>
Maintenance	Local (Mercer) maintenance staff contemplates their highest priorities, and which roadway projects would be better utilized with TIP dollars (as opposed to state maintenance funds) due to scope and size of project. Several quantitative measures are used to assess the current and projected future condition of an asset. Although in its infancy, Pennsylvania’s Transportation Asset Management Plan (TAMP) allows PennDOT staff to manage and plan for future asset management needs based on several quantitative measures of an asset’s overall performance (including cracking, roughness, rutting, concrete faulting, etc.). <u>(See also TPM Narrative’s PM-2 Section)</u> . Historical data (i.e. when the road was last resurfaced, and how it has held up historically) is considered along with less formal methods like observation and institutional-knowledge. This is all factored in with the traffic volume and use of the roadway, and considered alongside available funding to develop a prioritized list.
Highway Design	Some roadway projects cannot be completed with county maintenance funds due to their scope and size. Some of the largest and most-intensive projects involving extensive restoration and reconstruction work (sometimes including stormwater improvements, pedestrian facilities, and other less-simple project elements) are called <i>betterments</i> . The process for determining which roadway projects are placed on the TIP is similar to the process noted above in the “Maintenance” section. Engineers from District 1-0’s design unit make these final determinations, based on asset management data via the TAMP and the recommendations of the county maintenance engineers.
Bridge Design	The bridge design unit keeps a detailed list of bridge condition based on inspections, which occur at least every two years. The physical condition of the superstructure compared to its original as-built condition is reviewed. Overall bridge condition ratings are applied to determine which bridges not only need imminent attention (i.e. poor condition bridges), but as to what level of attention they need. Various methods are used to determine which bridges can be rehabilitated or preserved, vs. replaced. <u>(See also TPM Narrative’s PM-2 Section for more information on bridge evaluating processes)</u> .
Executive Team	District 1-0’s District Executive (DE), Asst. DEs, and other high level managers work to meet certain metrics. Internal initiatives and approaches are developed with the goal of meeting these metrics. One notable example (and a difference between current and past TIPs) is the decision to direct significantly-increased funding toward betterment projects in order to preserve pavement assets; this was non-negotiable from the district’s perspective.

District 1-0's Planning and Programming staff took this information into consideration, and also looked at carryover projects from the current TIP (e.g. projects partially funded but not yet fully complete during the current/2019 TIP cycle). These carryover projects typically constitute a very large portion of our total dollars available.

These departments' priorities were incorporated into an initial, "rough draft" TIP and this was presented to the MPO staff. This occurred in late September of 2019. Project-specific discussions between District 1-0 and MPO staffs took place several times over the next two months. When relevant, staff members from the aforementioned units/departments were brought into discussions regarding either specific projects, overall priorities, or to provide further details on how their priorities were developed.

## Initial MPO and Local Priorities

Prior to initial discussions with PennDOT District 1-0's staff—including deeper conversations about meeting performance measures and other more quantitative data collected through PennDOT—most of the project ideas on behalf of the MPO are borne out of previous planning efforts. These generally fall into two categories: (1.) Mercer County's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and (2.) other, locally-developed planning studies. A brief description of these processes and how they fit into TIP development are described in the following subsections.

### LRTP

The MPO's most recent LRTP\* was completed in November 2016 and, as federally-mandated, should be used as a primary tool in TIP development. Because past LRTPs were arguably somewhat vague and not exceptionally well-utilized, the MPO decided to put significant effort toward developing a meaningful plan. This most recent LRTP was highly successful for various reasons. First, it was developed collaboratively with direct input from municipal officials, the general public, various agency stakeholders, and PennDOT officials. Second, it provided a clear roadmap that could directly feed our TIP's development by laying out a detailed listing of prioritized projects. Because it was developed with regular input with PennDOT's District 1-0 staff, it allowed their planning and programming unit to have a thorough understanding of our region's priorities and needs, and enabled them to easily communicate this information to project managers and other staff within the agency.

*\* - The SVATS MPO is currently in the early stages of the 2021 LRTP update, which will build upon the foundations set up for the 2016 update, including meaningful development alongside PennDOT, incorporation of PA's Transportation Asset Management Plan, more thoughtful EJ analysis, and other components to further integrate the LRTP and TIP.*

Many of these improvements can be found under the "Highway Projects" section of the LRTP (see pages 66-69 of the 2016 LRTP). All of these were prioritized using DecisionLens software, where our MPO voting members decided on various criteria to rank projects (see Appendix A of LRTP on Page 89), and voted on how important each of these criteria were in comparison to others. Pre-determining how projects should be ranked and scored allowed for an objective ranking/prioritization of our projects. Projects were run through the DecisionLens model only after the ranking criteria were decided upon.

The list generated through Decision Lens provides a clear project ranking, but of course feasibility of constructing improvements and cost play a role as well. For example, if a top-ranked project is \$20m, it cannot be constructed nearly as quickly and easily as a \$1m project. Moreover, decisions about when to program certain improvements are affected by other projects within the vicinity.

Many projects identified on this LRTP were advanced through the 2017 and 2019 TIPs; Given changing staff and priorities at the district level, coupled with the stark realities of 2021 Financial Guidance, the momentum of advancing LRTP projects has understandably slowed to some degree.

### Local Planning Studies

Numerous planning studies fully or partially relating to transportation have been undertaken within Mercer County in recent years. These include corridor studies, comprehensive and strategic community plans, traffic impact studies, feasibility studies, access management studies, bicycle/pedestrian master plans, safety-related studies and various other studies. Often the MPO funds these studies, and has a primary role in their development. Many other studies are initiated and managed through D 1-0's office and funded through the TIP or other sources. In either scenario, a planning study almost always involves substantial input from both D 1-0 and the MPO.

All of these studies provide project recommendations resulting from a comprehensive planning process, and include cost estimates and an implementation and funding plan. The vast majority of the many recommendations from pre-2016 plans were cataloged and include in the 2016 LRTP. Likewise, the LRTP recommended many (11) studies based on identified issues, seven of which are in-process or complete.

Over the past decade, the MPO has worked increasingly-closely with the District to ensure that project scopes are feasible and that cost estimates are reasonable from their perspective. This has led to the development of more implementable, relevant, and realistic plans. A list of many of the planning studies either underway or completed within the past decade is listed in the table below:

Study Name	Year	Project Type	Lead Proj. Sponsor
US 19/SR 208 Corridor Study (Springfield)	Underway	Corridor Study	MPO/Twp.
I-80 Roadside Safety Audits (MM 0-15)	Underway	Safety Corridor Study	D 1-0
US 62 Bessemer RR Tunnel Study (Coolspring)	Underway	Feasibility Analysis	D 1-0
Mercer County Traffic Signal Improvement Study	2019-2020	Signal Inv./Analysis	MPO
US 62 Safety Study (Hermitage-Mercer)	2019	Safety Corridor Study	D 1-0
PA 58 Corridor Safety Study (Greenville-Mercer)	2019	Safety Corridor Study	D 1-0
Greenville Pedestrian Circulation Study (Greenville area)	2018-2019	Pedestrian Study	MPO/Town
SE Mercer Co. Bike/Ped Master Plan (G.City/Sprngfld./Pine)	2017-2018	Bicycle/Pedestrian Study	MPO/Twp.
CMP County Wide Summary Report	2018, 2013	Congestion Mgmt. Prcss.	MPO
Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Plan (County)	2016, 2008	Coordinated Plan	MCRCOG
SR 208 Access Management Study (Springfield)	2016	Access Mgmt. Plan	MPO/Twp.
Bridge Closure and Removal Study (Local County Bridges)	2014-2015	Bridge Redundancy Stdy.	MPO/Cnty.
SR 18 Traffic Signal Retiming Study (Hermitage)	2014-2015	Congestion/Signal Study	MPO
Williamson Rd. Traffic Impact & Planning Study (Hmpfld.)	2012-2013	Corridor Study	MPO
State Street/Irvine Ave. Corridor Study (Sharon, Hrmtge.)	2011-2012	Corridor Study	MPO
US 19 Corridor Study (Mercer, East Lackawannock)	2010-2011	Corridor Study	MPO
SR 18 Corridor Safety Study	2009-2010	Safety Corridor Study	D 1-0

In addition to the transportation-specific studies, several communities have comprehensive plans. These can be developed by a single municipality or can be multi-municipal in scope. Many of these plans have a dedicated transportation section. Most comprehensive plans developed prior to 2016 were reviewed as part of Mercer County’s LRTP, and applicable projects were scored within the LRTP.

**Other Agency Priorities**

Transit and local bridge projects are also a major component of the TIP. Because the decisions about these aspects of the overall program are made largely outside of the PennDOT District office and the MPO, these are noted separately. The processes for developing these projects are detailed in the table below:

Agency	How Projects are Conceptualized and Prioritized
Mercer County Bridge Department	Some bridge funding can be used on off-system, or “local” bridges. In Mercer County, the county itself owns the vast majority of non-state owned bridges. The County bridge engineer uses a similar process to what the PennDOT bridge unit uses to prioritize needs. These needs are communicated with the Mercer County Commissioners, District 1-0 bridge unit, planning and programming staff, and the MPO staff so that consensus is reached on which bridges are able to be programmed.
Shenango Valley Shuttle Service/Mercer County Community Transit	Mercer County has two transit providers—the Shenango Valley Shuttle Service and Mercer County Community Transit—which are staffed through the Mercer County Regional Council of Governments (MCRCOG). The transit portion of the TIP is developed separately the MCRCOG staff and their board, based on guidance from the PennDOT Bureau of Multimodal Transportation and in accordance with the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA’s) guidelines. The transit portion of the TIP is also developed with consideration to the adopted Coordinated Public Transit/Human Services Transportation Plan, MCRCOG’s Citizens Advisory Board, and PennDOT’s Capital Planning Tool (CPT). Once the transit portion of the TIP is developed, it is shared with MPO staff and PennDOT’s CPDM staff for review. (See page 2 for additional detail on the CPT).

**Next Steps—Refining Project Priorities Through TPM and EJ**

As noted in the previous three sections, numerous people housed within several agencies contributed to the public-ready version of the Draft TIP. As always, PennDOT D 1-0 Planning and Programming staff took the lead on developing the project listing and narrative documents. As explained in the process overview section on pages one through three, getting to this point requires several meetings and a spirit of compromise. There were some additional considerations worth noting that affected the TIP, which are summarized in the following sub-sections. While neither consideration was new, both warranted substantially increased attention/focus as part of the 2021 update, and are likely to be further refined and increasingly important on subsequent TIP updates.

**Transportation Performance Measures**

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) and the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act include performance management requirements. Performance-based planning will ensure that PennDOT and the MPOs collectively invest Federal transportation funds efficiently towards achieving national goals.

Transportation Performance Management (TPM) is strategic approach that uses data to make investment and policy decisions to achieve national performance goals. In essence, Mercer County is evaluated on how well PennDOT and the MPO were able to select a mix of projects that contribute toward a safer, more efficient and manageable transportation system. Four transportation performance measures addressing five topics were evaluated as part of the 2021 TIP development process as noted in the table below.

The previous (2019) TIP was the first one to directly consider TPMs, but only the PM-1 (Safety) PM was formally evaluated. As specific guidance and approaches have been refined, a more holistic look at the (additional) PMs has become part of the TIP development process.

Performance Measure Addressing...	Also Known As...
Safety	PM-1
Pavement Condition	PM-2
Bridge Condition	PM-2
System Performance	PM-3
Transit Asset Management	TAM

Additional detail regarding TPM considerations can be found in the *Transportation Performance Management/Performance Based Planning and Programming* document also included as part of the 2021-2024 SVATS MPO TIP.

### Environmental Justice

Environmental justice (EJ) is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Presidential Executive Order 12898 of 1994 requires Federal agencies to achieve Environmental Justice by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. In layman’s terms, it is essential for the MPO to evaluate the effects/impacts of all TIP projects on traditionally underserved minority and low-income populations and mitigate any inequities in the disbursement of funds or the process itself.

In April 2019, the FHWA PA Division, FTA Region III, PennDOT Central Office, PennDOT Engineering District 8-0, and six MPOs within District 8-0 Pennsylvania, jointly developed the *South Central Pennsylvania Environmental Justice Unified Process and Methodology Guide*. This was developed to help these agencies collaboratively analyze potential EJ impacts to minority and low-income populations in a straightforward manner. This “best practice” guidance was then shared with the remaining MPOs and RPOs for consideration of their future programs including their respective Transportation Improvement Programs (TIP) and the Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTP).

The Guide outlines several strategies for accomplishing the core elements of an EJ analysis acceptable to FHWA and FTA. It identifies specific core activities that MPOs in Pennsylvania should complete during an EJ analysis, and reiterates the need for EJ to be a meaningful component of TIP development.

SVATS MPO’s EJ Analysis for the 2021-2024 TIP can be found in the *Environmental Justice Documentation* section of the TIP.

## Consideration of Public and Stakeholder Input

There were several opportunities for our MPO voting members, transportation stakeholders, and the general public to provide public input before, during, and even toward the end of the TIP development process. These are noted on the *2021 TIP Development Timeline*, and some of these conversations were also summarized in the earlier *Process Overview* section of this document.

MPO voting members, and all others attending MPO meetings, were afforded several opportunities to question the inclusion (or exclusion) of particular projects, suggest changes to initial project listings, and ask general questions about overall approaches, financial guidance, etc. Most of these opportunities were during regularly-scheduled MPO Coordinating Committee meetings. However, as always, MPO staff had numerous conversations about the TIP (and often specific TIP projects) with individual community/agency representatives as necessary and during other regularly-occurring conversations.

Overall, most MPO Voting Members placed their trust in the primary developers of the TIP—namely PennDOT District 1-0 and MPO staffs—and rely on them to make the best decisions for Mercer County given the available funding. Historically and currently, this has been a good working partnership between MPO members, MPO staff and D 1-0 staff. Some questions were asked (mostly minor clarifications) and answers were provided, but there were not any substantial changes to the overall TIP project priorities based on these many opportunities.

Further opportunities to contribute to TIP project priorities take place during the 30-day Public Comment Period, which also includes a Public Hearing. The COVID-19 emergency situation has changed this process a bit (i.e. public meeting being held virtually), though opportunities and access for direct input was increased via additional methods due to technological advances.

## Conclusion and Future Directions

The 2021-2024 TIP Update, while certainly challenging, helped bring to light several issues that will hopefully improve future processes. Looking back over several past TIP updates, at least from an MPO staff perspective, the TIP development and project selection processes have continually become much more substantive and have (generally) improved.

The 2021 LRTP, described earlier in this document, is expected to further integrate the two federal documents by marrying the latest performance-based, asset-management approaches with all other necessary and important considerations. The LRTP will afford fresh opportunities for local input (which can be integrated into the PennDOT Connects process) and PennDOT-level understanding of local needs and expectations. Further refinements to LRTP project prioritization will also improve the planning process. If the LRTP process is successful, future TIP updates will contain fewer surprises and frustrations and improve partnerships between various agencies.

Ultimately, an “ideal” TIP development process relies on people. For it to work well, PennDOT CPDM and their federal partners must develop clear and reasonable expectations and guidance documents and communicate this information in a timely manner. MPO and PennDOT District 1-0 staffs must keep lines of communication open and recognize the important roles each organization plays in the process of advancing projects. These organizations must also work collaboratively to further-integrate TPM and EJ processes into the process. MPO staff must also seek continuously improving methods of communicating to MPO board members, other transportation stakeholders, and

affected/concerned/interested citizens. Every one of the aforementioned organizations has seen staff pulled in new and different directions. Consequently, our workdays become increasingly frenetic and bureaucratic, and simple collaboration too often takes a lower priority.

This is not a veiled criticism of the manner in which the aforementioned organizations are managed, and certainly not a disparagement of any individuals. In all honesty, each of the various planning partners who work to develop Mercer County's TIP are conscientious, diligent, and almost always work well together to achieve common goals. Instead, this (perhaps candid) assessment of the TIP development process demonstrates the importance of occasionally pausing to consider ways to optimize our partnerships in order to achieve a federally compliant, 3C (cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing) transportation process.

*Any questions or concerns regarding the 2021-2024 TIP development and project selection process may be directed to Matt Stewart of the SVATS MPO/MCRPC ([mstewart@mcrpc.com](mailto:mstewart@mcrpc.com); 724-981-2412, x3206).*