



# TIP Development/Project Selection Process

2027-2030 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 considers 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.

This was the first TIP update for several new SVATS MPO staff members. With assistance from PennDOT, FHWA, and FTA staff, the SVATS MPO overcame the challenges in developing the 2027-2030 TIP. The MPO staff worked toward maintaining and improving the 3C-compliant (cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing) transportation process in Mercer County along with each of their partners.

## Process Overview

As illustrated on the accompanying *TIP Timeline* chart, development of Mercer County's 2027 TIP was a process that began in earnest about a year before final adoption. The initial draft guidance documents for the TIP were released by PennDOT's Center for Program Development and Management (CPDM) in the Summer of 2025. This included financial guidance. The general/procedural guidance was similar to the previous TIP's guidance, which had several components dictating more thoughtful guidance on how TIPs were to be developed. Two noteworthy components had to do with how planning regions consider Transportation Performance Measures (TPMs) and Community Demographic Assessment (CDA). The SVATS MPO and PennDOT District 1-0 staff members conducted several meetings to discuss not only the inclusion of TPMs and CDA, but also on general project priorities and directions for the TIP. A general agreement on what the draft TIP might look like began to take shape, and details were shared with the MPO Coordinating Committee in June 2025.

During the development of the 2027-2030 TIP, SVATS MPO worked with PennDOT to review a TIP coordination worksheet, which focuses on great detail about TIP development and coordination. This worksheet helped frame and guide many of these early TIP discussions. This narrative can be thought of as a more public-facing output from the TIP Coordination Worksheet.

A finalized draft highway project listing of the TIP was fully shared by District 1-0 and explained with the MPO Coordinating Committee in September 2025. MPO members were kept apprised of these issues (collectively, and individually in many cases) and were given an “early draft” during the fall/winter of 2025. More-detailed conversation took place during December 2025 and March 2026 SVATS MPO Coordinating Committee meeting and approval of the TIP project listings took place on June 16, 2026.

After the New Year, MPO staff met with all PennDOT and federal partners to review the draft program review. MPO staff relayed their concerns about the Transit TIP. There was discussion of loss of funding from CMAQ and STU as a result of losing status as part of Transportation Management Area (TMA) following the 2020 census. Also discussed was project prioritization through an asset management approach and the use of Bridge and Pavement Asset Management Systems data for project validation. Several follow-up steps were established, most of which were addressed over the next couple of months.

The transit component of the TIP is developed differently from the highway portion, particularly due to the loss of urbanized status after Mercer County was no longer part of a TMA. Mercer County’s two transit providers—the Shenango Valley Shuttle Service and Mercer County Community Transit—are staffed through the Mercer County Regional Council of Governments (MCRCOG). MCRCOG uses Pennsylvania’s Capital Planning Tool (CPT) to manage transit assets and guide capital planning, working closely with PennDOT and following Federal Transit Administration (FTA) guidelines.

While the update was completed smoothly through strong collaboration with MCRCOG, the 2027–2030 TIP reflects ongoing adjustments to federal funding eligibility. Operating assistance is the primary item in this TIP and relies entirely on state and local funds. Capital projects such as vehicles, facilities, and equipment will require MCRCOG to apply for federal funding through the state. The loss of federal transit funding is expected to be an ongoing issue, and resources will need to be carefully managed to ensure the system continues to operate efficiently and safely.

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 some of these are developed later in the process, even if the information leading to their development was decided early in the TIP-development process. These additional documents are listed in the chart below.

### **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              | Explanation of how TIP is developed (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 |
| TIP Financial Constraint Chart                         | Summary/overview table demonstrating project funding lines up with available funding amounts and sources                  |
| Transit Financial Capacity Analysis                    | Description of Transit TIP’s financial capacity to complete projects  |
| Community Demographic Assessment                       | DA 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   |
| Title VI Policy Statement   | Document noting MPO’s commitment to nondiscrimination and providing information about how to file any complaints |
| 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 2025 TIP projects meeting these criteria  |

On April 1, 2026, the TIP entered into a 30-day public comment period. A legal ad was placed in Mercer County’s widely-circulated newspaper (The Herald), 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 June 16, 2026 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, 2026.

## Project Selection Overview

A wide variety of information from numerous sources was considered in the development of the 2027-2030 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

The first task in creating a new TIP is reviewing the current TIP to see which projects will carry over (termed “carryover projects”). A TIP is a four-year document that gets updated every two years, so there are many projects in years three and four that will continue onto the new TIP.

After carryover projects are determined—which often comprise a very large portion of the TIP—PennDOT’s Planning and Programming staff works with several other departments within PennDOT District 1-0 to get an idea of what their highest priorities are. The Planning and Programming staff invited MPO staff to listen in on various meetings. The table on the following page notes many of the departments within District 1-0 that weigh in on project prioritization.

These departments’ priorities, along with the carryover project considerations, were incorporated into an initial, “rough draft” TIP and this was presented to the MPO staff. Project-specific discussions between District 1-0 and MPO staffs took place several times over the fall of 2023 (see TIP timeline). When relevant, staff members from the aforementioned departments were brought into discussions regarding either specific projects, overall priorities, or to provide further details on how their priorities were developed.

| D 1-0 Unit/Dept. | How Projects are Conceptualized and Prioritized  |
|------------------|--|
| Traffic (Safety) | Consideration of safety hot-spots, based on various safety data. Analysis of possible projects that might qualify for highway safety funding. Also see the <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. 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.) and understand what the lowest life-cycle cost would be for the system <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. The Bridge Asset Management System (BAMS) helps understand lowest life-cycle cost treatments. <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. |
|----------------|--|

## 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 2021, and a new LRTP update has been developed in parallel with the 2027–2030 TIP, with adoption anticipated in September 2026. Developing the LRTP alongside the TIP has allowed MPO members to engage more fully in both planning processes and understand the importance of aligning long-range priorities with short-term programming decisions. The LRTP provides a roadmap for TIP development by identifying and prioritizing projects through a collaborative process involving municipal officials, the public, agency stakeholders, and PennDOT staff. Project prioritization is now guided by Assessment Management and District coordination, ensuring that projects reflect both local needs and broader regional considerations.

While this prioritization provides clear guidance, feasibility and cost remain key factors. Larger, high-cost projects take longer to implement than smaller ones, and project timing is coordinated with other improvements in the region to maximize efficiency and effective use of resources.

### Local Planning Studies

Numerous planning studies 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 other transportation-focused analyses. The MPO often funds these studies and plays a primary role in their development, while many others are initiated and managed by District 1-0 and funded through the TIP or other sources. In all cases, studies involve substantial input from both the MPO and District 1-0 staff.

These studies provide project recommendations based on comprehensive planning, including cost estimates and implementation strategies. Over the past decade, the MPO has worked closely with the District to ensure project scopes are feasible and cost estimates are realistic, resulting in more implementable and effective plans.

The last fully completed local planning study was the **US 19/SR 208 Corridor Study (Springfield) in 2019**, with other studies in progress supporting transportation planning priorities. In addition to transportation-specific studies, several communities have adopted comprehensive plans, either municipal or multi-municipal in scope, many including dedicated transportation sections. Plans developed prior to 2016 were reviewed and incorporated into the Mercer County LRTP, with applicable projects scored and prioritized accordingly.

| Study Name   | Year       | Project Type             | Lead Sponsor |
|--|------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| US 19/SR 208 Corridor Study (Springfield)                  | 2021-2022  | Corridor Study           | MPO/Twp.     |
| I-80 Roadside Safety Audits (MM 0-15)                      | 2021       | Safety Corridor Study    | D 1-0        |
| US 62 Bessemer RR Tunnel Study (Coolspring)                | 2019-2020  | 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, 2022 | Congestion Mgmt. Prcss.  | MPO          |
| Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Plan (County)    | 2016       | 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 Study  | 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          |

### 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. The County has also pursued bonds to ensure they remain proactive in replacing a large number of bridges nearing the end of their useful life.   |
| 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 DA

As noted in the previous three sections, numerous people housed within several agencies contributed to the public-ready version of the TIP. As always, PennDOT District 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 past two updates, and are likely to be further refined and increasingly important on subsequent TIP updates.

### Transportation Performance Measures

The past three federal funding bills have included 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 noted in the table below.

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 2027-2030 SVATS MPO TIP.

| 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              |
| Public Transit Safety             | Transit Safety   |

### Demographic Assessment (DA)

Demographic assessment is a critical component of the transportation planning process, providing insight into the composition, distribution, and trends of populations within the region. Understanding demographic characteristics—such as age, income, race, ethnicity, disability status, and vehicle availability—allows the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to better assess transportation needs and ensure that planning and programming decisions are responsive to all users of the transportation system.

The SVATS MPO utilizes demographic data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the American Community Survey to identify concentrations of populations that may have distinct transportation needs or face barriers to mobility. These may include low-income households, minority populations, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and households without access to a vehicle. Mapping and assessing these populations help ensure that transportation investments are planned and prioritized in a manner that promotes equitable access, system connectivity, and overall mobility.

At the state level, guidance such as the South Central Pennsylvania Environmental Justice Unified Process and Methodology Guide—developed collaboratively by FHWA, FTA, PennDOT, and regional MPO partners—continues to inform best practices for integrating demographic and equity considerations into

planning documents, including the 2027–2030 TIP and the LRTP update, with current data and assessments applied to ensure compliance and equitable project development.

The results of the demographic assessment for the 2027–2030 TIP are used to evaluate the distribution of benefits and burdens associated with planned transportation investments and to support a transparent, data-driven decision-making process.

## 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.

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 District 1-0 staff. Though there some minor comments or questions from stakeholders, 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.

## Conclusion and Future Directions

The 2027-2030 TIP Update process was influenced by the ongoing impacts of losing TMA status, along with CMAQ and STU funding. Loss of designation as an urbanized transit area also affected the development of the Transit TIP. In addition, due to rising construction costs, the 2027-2030 TIP includes a larger proportion of carryover projects than usual. This reduced the need for extensive prioritization of projects and allowed additional funding to be allocated more efficiently. Overall, TIP development and project selection processes have continued to become more substantive and, in many cases, more effective.

The success of future TIP updates will be measured, in part, by how well they align with the LRTP, how community priority projects advance (from the TYP to the TIP), and how project priority discussions are conducted. Much of the groundwork has already been established through the LRTP, so reliance on this document is expected to reduce surprises, streamline decision-making, and strengthen partnerships between various agencies.

Equally important, a successful TIP development process requires open and regular communication. While these communication channels generally exist and relationships remain positive, challenges persist due

to competing demands on staff time across organizations. Collaboration often competes with other daily responsibilities, making it a lower priority at times.

Nevertheless, despite these ongoing challenges, MPO staff and other stakeholders remain committed to exploring new approaches to maintain a federally compliant, 3C (cooperative, comprehensive, and continuing) transportation planning process.

Any questions or concerns regarding the 2027-2030 TIP development and project selection process may be directed to Jacob Matta of the SVATS MPO/MCRPC (mail@mcrpc.com; 724-981-2412).