# Section 1—Introduction

Introduction ..... 1

General Overview of the TIP..... 2

Program Summary ..... 5

Opportunity for Review and Public Comment..... 7

## Introduction

The Reading Area Transportation Study Coordinating Committee, the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation in Berks County, is pleased to present the FFY 2025 – 2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The Committee has worked with its member organizations to prepare a program that it feels responds to the transportation needs of Berks County and at the same time complies with federal and state policies.

The TIP for Berks County contains 112 projects totaling $365,803,185 for the phases to be advanced during the next four years. It includes 95 projects valued at $284,194,806 addressing the highway system and bridges and 17 projects valued at $81,608,379 addressing the transit system. Table 1 on page 7 presents a funding summary of the program for each of the four TIP years.

There is also a statewide Interstate Management Program that is separate from the regional TIP. This program is discussed more fully in Section 2. Two (2) projects located in Berks County with a value of $13,942,000 are included in that program. Table 2 on page 7 presents a funding summary for the Berks County portion of the Interstate Maintenance Program.

### The TIP and Federal Requirements

The TIP is a requirement of federal transportation legislation. The current federal surface transportation legislation, entitled the "Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act" (IIJA), was enacted in November 2021. This legislation is also known as the "Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). It builds on the prior legislation "Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act" (FAST ACT – 2015) and "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century" (MAP-21 -2012). MAP-21 prescribed transportation investment in a balanced approach through a guaranteed commitment to highways and bridges, public transit, intermodal projects and advanced technologies. The FAST Act retained most of the transit and highway program structure enacted with MAP-21 and added two new highway initiatives – the National Freight Program, an apportioned program to fund freight-related highway improvements and the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects program that will provide competitively-selected grants for large-scale highway, bridge, rail-grade crossings, intermodal and freight rail projects. The IIJA also introduces new programs - the Carbon Reduction Program and the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program as well as numerous other competitive programs.

The IIJA authorizes over $567 billion nationwide for transportation purposes over the five-year period FFY 2022 - 2026.

### What this Document Includes

The complete TIP document is divided into three sections. This first section includes:

1) A general overview of the TIP and the TIP development process, intending to familiarize you with what the TIP is and is not, how it was developed, and what can be expected for projects in the TIP;

2) A program summary; and

3) Guidance on preparing and submitting comments in response to the document.

The second and third sections, respectively, contain detailed project lists and maps relating to

the Highway and Bridge Program, the statewide Interstate Management Program and the Transit Program.

This document also contains the following appendices:

A) Procedures for TIP Development, Prioritization and Administrative Actions;

B) Financial Guidance;

C) Air Quality Conformity Documentation and Resolution;

D) MPO Organizational Structure and Self-Certification Resolution and;

E) Public Participation Policy and Environmental Justice Documentation.

F) Transmission, Approval, and Planning Findings Letters

## General Overview of the TIP

**The TIP is the agreed upon list of specific priority projects.** The TIP lists all projects that intend to use federal funds, along with non-federally funded projects that are regionally significant. The TIP represents the transportation improvement priorities of the region and is required by federal law; the most recent of which is the "Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act" (IIJA). The list is multi-modal. In addition to the more traditional highway and public transit projects, it also includes bicycle and pedestrian projects.

**The TIP shows estimated costs and schedule by project phase.** The TIP not only lists the specific projects, but also documents the anticipated schedule and cost for each project phase (study, preliminary engineering, final design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction). Inclusion of a project phase in the TIP means that there is serious intent to implement it during the TIP time period.

**The TIP covers a four-year period and is updated every other year.**

**The TIP may be changed after it is adopted.** Under the provisions of federal law and regulation, the approved TIP can be modified or amended in various ways in order to add new projects, delete projects, advance project phases and accommodate cost and phase of work changes or major scope changes to a project. The criteria and procedures for changing the TIP are outlined in an agreement included in Appendix A.

**The TIP is financially constrained.** The list of projects in the TIP must be financially constrained to the amount of funds that are expected to be available. In order to add projects to the TIP, others must be deferred or additional funding sources identified. As a result, the TIP is not a "wish list". Competition between projects for a spot on the TIP clearly exists. The financial guidance used to develop this program is included in Appendix B.

**The TIP is authorization to seek funding.** A project's presence in the TIP represents a critical step in the authorization of funding to a project. It does not, however, represent a commitment of funds, an obligation to fund, or a grant of funds.

**The TIP is not a final schedule of project implementation.** The time frame shown in the TIP is the "best estimate" at the time of TIP development, which is six to nine months prior to the beginning of the first fiscal year of the TIP period. Projects quite often cannot maintain that schedule and get reprogrammed to later years.

**The TIP is not a guarantee of project implementation.** Unforeseen problems may arise, such as engineering obstacles, environmental permit conflicts, changes in priorities, and additional financial constraints. These problems can slow a project, cause it to be postponed, or even dropped from further consideration.

### Regional Consensus

The production of the TIP is the culmination of the transportation planning process and represents a consensus among state and regional officials as to what near term improvements to pursue. Consensus is crucial because, before committing significant sums of money, the federal and state governments want assurances that all interested parties have participated in developing the priorities. A project's inclusion in the TIP signifies regional agreement on the priority of the project and establishes eligibility for federal funding.

### How does the TIP relate to the Long-Range Plan?

Regionally significant projects must be drawn from the region's long-range plan and all projects in the TIP must help to implement the goals of the plan. The long-range plan, also required by federal law, is the document that helps direct transportation and land use decisions over a minimum 20-year horizon. The TIP represents the translation of the current long-range transportation plan into a short-term program of improvements. The current Long Range Transportation Plan can be found at www.berkspa.gov/planning.

### How does the TIP relate to the Clean Air Act?

The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 require that all transportation plans, programs and projects conform to the purpose of State Implementation Plans (SIPs) to attain national air quality standards. A TIP is said to conform if it is drawn from a conforming plan as determined by an emissions analysis. The regionally significant projects in the FFY 2025-2028 TIP are a subset of the regionally significant projects contained in the long-range transportation plan.

The TIP and long range plan have been tested for conformity and found to meet all requirements, including the critical test that Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) and Oxides of Nitrogen (NOx) emissions are less than any budget established by the state for the budget year and any subsequent analysis year. Documentation of the TIP conformity finding is included as Appendix C.

### How is the TIP funded?

The major funding source for the projects in the TIP is the IIJA, administered through the US Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA). In addition, funds are made available by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to match federal funding in various ratios, and to provide 100 percent financing of selected projects. Pennsylvania took a significant step forward in funding transportation projects in 2013 with the passage of Act 89. This unprecedented comprehensive package brought much-needed additional investment to Pennsylvania's transportation systems. The County, municipalities and private developers or toll authorities, as well as transit operators, may also participate in providing matching funds for federal aid. New funding sources and innovative funding techniques are constantly being sought. Documentation of the funding can be found in Appendix B.

**Who are the players?**

Many organizations play a role in the TIP development process. They include state and federal agencies, operating agencies, and county and municipal government representation. Other groups and the general public become involved through the public participation process. The Reading MPO organizational structure is included in Appendix D.

**How does a project get on the TIP?**

Securing a spot on the TIP is not a simple task. Sometimes years of pre- implementation research and public input precedes a project's inclusion on the TIP. Although there are several ways in which a project can get on the TIP, the most typical course is described here. First, a particular transportation need is identified. In many cases, municipal planners and engineers generate lists of potential improvements based on their needs analyses and citizen complaints and inquiries. The local proposals are in turn reviewed at the county level in consultation with the local PENNDOT District. If the County agrees that a particular idea has merit, it may decide to act as the project sponsor and work towards refining the initial idea and developing clear project specifications. Project proposals are also generated at the County and State level in much the same way. Transit projects are generated by the operating agency - primarily the South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) providing services in Berks County as BARTA.

Once the County, State and operating agency have developed their own list of projects and priorities, they are brought to the MPO where the Reading Area Transportation Study Technical Committee reviews them. The Technical Committee seeks to ensure that the highest priorities of the region are being addressed within the limits of available resources. The Technical Committee makes recommendations to the MPO.

Finally, the MPO provides the forum through which the preliminary recommendations and public comments are reviewed prior to final program adoption.

**What happens to a project once it's on the TIP?**

Once a project is on the TIP, a considerable amount of work still remains to be done to bring it to completion. The designated lead agency is responsible for ensuring that the project moves forward. The lead agency in most cases is PENNDOT or the transit operator (SCTA) and in some cases is the County or a municipality.

Highway projects usually proceed in phases (preliminary engineering, final design, right- of-way acquisition, utilities and construction). Each phase is included in the TIP showing funding and anticipated schedule. Transit projects are programmed in the TIP according to the annual grant application cycle under which the funds will be sought. Ideally, a project will advance according to its programmed schedule. In reality, however, projects are often delayed due to unforeseen obstacles such as environmental issues and community concerns. Tracking each project's progress is important so that delays can be identified and remedied as soon as possible and so that resources can be reallocated as necessary.

Once federal funds have been made available for a project's final construction phase, it will no longer appear in future TIP documents (even though the project may not yet be constructed or completed).

**Why is municipal and interest group involvement important?**

The MPO believes that a collaborative process between all levels of government and the public and business communities will ensure that the best transportation program is produced. This type of process is one in which, state, county and local governments and transportation providers become partners in the planning and programming process and interest groups and community leaders have a voice.

**In what ways can the public participate?**

Public participation occurs during all stages of a project's development. Letters of concern to municipal and county officials and transit company managers are one of the most effective starting points. As local investigations begin, public input may be provided at formal meetings or informal sessions with local or county planning boards and staff. Citizens may also be asked to participate in special task forces to review transportation improvement concepts at the corridor or county level. Finally, once a project is on the TIP and it enters the preliminary engineering phase, the detailed environmental review process affords yet another opportunity for the public to offer input.

The primary vehicle for ongoing public participation in the Reading MPO's planning and programming activities is through attendance at the meetings of the Technical Committee. This is where the preliminary recommendations are developed for formal MPO consideration. To obtain a schedule of these meetings, please contact the Berks County Planning Commission or visit their website at: www.berkspa.gov/planning.

The public and other interest groups also had the opportunity to comment on the TIP before it was officially adopted by the MPO. The MPO conducts a minimum 30-day public comment period and holds a public meeting to receive public input. Specific information regarding the public comment process for the FFY 2025 – 2028 Transportation Improvement Program can be found on page 7. The Reading MPO's Public Participation Process and documentation of public participation efforts are included in Appendix E.

## Program Summary

The FFY 2025 – 2028 Transportation Improvement Program for Berks County contains 112 projects totaling $365,803,185 for the phases to be advanced during the next four years. It includes 95 projects valued at $284,194,806 addressing the highway system and bridges and 17 projects valued at $81,608,379 addressing the transit system.

Table 1 summarizes the Reading MPO TIP.

**Table 1**
**Cost Summary by Program, Reading MPO TIP**

| | FFY 2025 | FFY 2026 | FFY 2027 | FFY 2028 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highway Program | $62,797,000 | $63,748,000 | $79,010,500 | $78,639,306 | $284,194,806 |
| Transit Program (BARTA) | $19,815,113 | $19,840,978 | $20,430,634 | $21,521,648 | $81,608,379 |
| Grand Total Cost - 4 Year Highway and Transit Program: | | | | | $365,803,185 |

In addition to these, 2 projects valued at $13,942,000, representing the Berks County portion of the statewide Interstate Management Program are included for reference. Table 2 summarizes the Berks County portion of the Interstate Management Program.

**Table 2**
**Cost Summary , Interstate Management Program**

| | FFY 2025 | FFY 2026 | FFY 2027 | FFY 2028 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Berks County Portion Only | $13,942,000 | N/A | N/A | N/A | $13,942,000 |
| | | | | | |

## Opportunity for Review and Public Comment

The Reading MPO encouraged the public to review and pose questions about the TIP to state, county, transit and MPO staff through its ongoing public involvement process and, in particular, during a minimum 30-day public comment period on the TIP.

**Public Comment Period -** The public comment period began on **March 24, 2024** and ended at 5:00 P.M. on **April 23, 2024.**

**Copies of the TIP –** A copy of the TIP was available for review at the offices of the Berks County Planning Commission, 633 Court Street, 14th Floor, Reading, PA. The complete document was also available for review on-line at the Berks County Planning Commission's website using the following address: **www.berkspa.gov/planning.**

**Public Comment Meeting –**The required Public Meetings to review the FFY 2025- 2028 Transportation Improvement Program, Air Quality Conformity Analysis and Environmental Justice Summary were held using a hybrid platform and an in-person option. The first meeting was conducted using a hybrid platform on **Monday, April 8, 2024 beginning at 3:00 p.m.** in the Berks County Commissioners Board Room, Berks County Services Center 13th Floor, 633 Court Street, Reading, PA 19601 for in-person attendance with the virtual component using Microsoft Teams and YouTube. Instructions for connecting to this meeting were available at the Berks County Planning Commission's website using the following address: www.berkspa.gov/planning The second meeting was conducted in-person on **Thursday, April 11, 2024 beginning at 6:00 p.m.** at the Berks County Agricultural Center, 1238 County Welfare Road, Leesport, PA 19533. A link to the presentation materials was placed on our web page to be viewed and comments could be submitted at any time through the close of the Public Comment Period on April 23, 2024.

The Berks County Planning Commission offices are handicapped accessible. The Planning Commission offices are served by BARTA routes. Spanish language interpretation services will be provided with a minimum of ninety-six (96) hours prior notice. These documents will be made available in alternative languages or formats if requested. Persons requiring additional accommodations or those with questions should call 610-478-6300.

**Written Comments –** Written comments could be submitted at any time through the end of the public comment period (5:00 p.m. on **April 23, 2024**). They could be sent to:

TIP Comments
Berks County Planning Commission
633 Court Street, 14th Floor
Reading, PA 19601

Comments could also be faxed to 610-478-6316 or via e-mail at: **planning@berkspa.gov**

**Public Comment Guidance –** Comments were welcome on all aspects of the proposed TIP ranging from general concerns about the overall process to specific project concerns. As a reminder to those intending to recommend new projects for inclusion on the TIP - in order to earn a place on the TIP, projects must first progress through the screening and planning processes described earlier. As a result, requests for totally new projects are generally referred to the appropriate agency for further investigation through their respective pre-TIP study efforts. These efforts may lead to the project securing a place on the TIP in some future year.