



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Edward L. Roberge, PE, City Engineer

DATE: September 28, 2017

SUBJECT: Report recommending that the City Manager be authorized to apply for US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program funds.

Recommendation

Accept this report recommending that the City Manager be authorized to apply for US Department of Transportation (USDOT), Federal Highway Administration, 2017 Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program funds for CIP 543, Merrimack River Greenway Trail Project.

Background

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, appropriated \$500 million to be awarded by the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) for National Infrastructure Investments. This appropriation stems from the program funded and implemented pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act known as the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants. USDOT is soliciting applications for TIGER grant projects through a notice of funding availability (NOFA) published in the Federal Register on September 7, 2017 for grants in the FY2017 program.

Like the previous TIGER grant rounds, this year's program is for capital investments in surface transportation infrastructure and is to be awarded on a competitive basis for projects in both urban and rural areas. For projects located in rural areas, the FY2017 Appropriation Act does not require matching funds, although the statute does direct USDOT to give priority to rural projects that include an overall financing package that includes non-Federal sources of funds. The minimum grant size is \$1 million, and this year's program has set the maximum grant size of \$25 million. Based on review of projects awarded in previous TIGER grant rounds, as well as our own experience with the Downtown Complete Streets Improvement Project, successful projects in rural areas included a significant share of non-Federal funds.

Projects that are eligible for TIGER grant funds under the FY2017 program include capital projects which repair bridges or improve infrastructure to a state of good repair; projects that implement safety improvements to reduce fatalities and serious injuries, including improving grade crossings or providing shorter or more direct access to critical health services; projects that connect communities and people to jobs, services, and education; and, projects that anchor economic revitalization and job growth in communities. Evaluation and selection criteria have been well developed and published in the NOFA.

Applications are due by October 16, 2017. Successful applications require considerable effort and must demonstrate the ability to obligate the grant funds by September 30, 2020. Obligation occurs when a selected applicant and USDOT enters into an agreement and has completed all project administrative requirements, including transportation planning, design, completion of National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) review, and acquisition of right-of-way. All FY2017 TIGER funds must be expended (actually paid out) by September 30, 2025.

Discussion

Based upon initial review of the NOFA, staff concludes that several projects could be strong candidate projects for the grant program. Staff evaluated the following projects based upon their readiness, compatibility with the grant program objectives, opportunity for non-Federal source funds to support the project, and placement and priority in the City's capital improvement program.

CIP543 – Merrimack River Greenway Trail Project

The Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT) Project (CIP543) is envisioned as a continuous, off-street path, roughly following the Merrimack River through Concord. The trail project proposes to connect to the eventual terminus of the Northern Rail Trail to the north and the proposed Salem to Concord Bikeway in the south. The greenway trail project is intended to be a 4-season paved facility to serve pedestrians and bicycles as a transportation corridor connecting villages and town centers as well as provide access to other non-motorized users. The MRGT Feasibility Study was completed and presented to City Council in early 2011. Following acceptance of the project report, the project was placed in the outyear of the CIP program. Total estimated cost of the greenway trail project is \$13 million.

In March 2015, the City received a \$200,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant from the US Forest Service for construction of a portion of the first phase of the project (Terrill Park/Manchester Street to Loudon Road). Design is nearly complete and permitting is underway for this phase of this project which includes the construction of about 100 feet of boardwalk and 100' of multi-use path. \$100,000 in required matching funds was provided by the Friends of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail Project (FOMRGT) through fundraising. The project is programmed for construction in 2018. The remaining work in this first phase includes construction of an approximately one quarter mile long boardwalk linking the boardwalk at the northern end of Terrill Park to City land south of the Concord Post Office on Loudon Road (near the southern edge of the cornfields).

In terms of its readiness, updates of the project were presented to City Council on several occasions and placed in the CIP in FY2019, FY2022, and FY2025. Environmental review for the first phase of the project has been underway in detail for the past 6 months. Recent discontinuance of about 6.6 miles of the Pan Am rail line from Horseshoe Pond Lane north to the Boscawen Town Line creates a unique opportunity to acquire right-of-way for a rail-trail conversion. Prior to this development, right-of-way for the trail project would be difficult, if not impossible. Working closely with NHDOT who has similar interest in converting this corridor to a trail could make the challenge of rail corridor acquisition possible.

This project also ranks high with respect to compatibility with the grant program objectives including capital projects that offer transportation choice, safety, connection of communities and people to jobs, services, and education; and, projects that anchor economic revitalization and job growth in communities. Challenges include raising a significant percentage of non-Federal source funds to make this project competitive.

Other Projects Considered

Other major surface transportation projects considered and currently in the City's CIP include the Langley Parkway – Phase III project (CIP40), the Manchester Street Corridor Improvement Project (US Route 3 South) (CIP36), and the Pleasant Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP25).

Langley Parkway - Phase I and Phase II was constructed as part of a model public-private partnership with community leaders. The Langley Parkway - Phase I and Phase II improvements connected Clinton Street to Pleasant Street and partially through the regional medical complex campus. Langley Parkway - Phase III proposes to connect Pleasant Street to Penacook Street/Boutin Street and Interstate 393 enhancing the limited access to the regional medical facilities that exists today. While the project is a top ranking project on the CNHRPC - TIP and has been a top priority project of City Council, the project is currently planned in the Concord CIP in FY2019, FY2020, and FY2021. More discussion with City Council to determine its priority over other major initiatives is required.

While the Manchester Street Corridor Improvement Project (US Route 3 South) (CIP36) is a major surface transportation project that would rank well with some of the grant program objectives, based upon other priorities in the CIP this project was deferred following the completion of the US Route 3 Corridor (North) project and Langley Parkway. Given the participation by the State in previous portions of the corridor improvements including the intersection improvements at Manchester Street/Airport Road/Integra Drive, other funding sources for this project may be available in future phases of the project.

The Pleasant Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP25) is placed in the outyear of the CIP pending the completion of the Langley Parkway – Phase III connection. Staff feels it is premature to look at the Pleasant Street corridor prior to completing the Langley Parkway connection Clinton and Pleasant Street to Penacook and North State Street. Additionally, recent discussions related to zoning changes and development opportunities within the corridor will likely require further study to fully develop a transportation corridor for the future. Staff believes this project is also properly placed by priority in the CIP program.

Therefore it is recommended that City Council accept this report and authorize the City Manager to apply for US Department of Transportation (USDOT), Federal Highway Administration, 2017 Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program funds for CIP 543, Merrimack River Greenway Trail Project.

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