

## Prioritizing

Prioritization, the last step in project development, is when NOACA selects projects to be implemented in a given fiscal year.

Each December, NOACA develops a “lockdown” list of projects for the upcoming state fiscal year (running from July 1 through June 30). This list offers the best estimate of the projects that will be implemented during the next fiscal year. At this stage, a project’s design must be developed sufficiently to be able to prepare and file final plans and award a contract within 12 to 15 months of its selection (including the best available cost estimate). Project sponsors must also:

- agree to a final, not-to-be-exceeded federal funding amount; and
- agree the project will be bid out to contractors within a specific quarter of the fiscal year.

NOACA also develops an annual “reservoir list” of projects that supplement the lockdown projects. If a project on the lockdown list falls behind schedule, a project from the reservoir list may be moved up in its place.

When prioritizing projects, NOACA considers not only the readiness of a project and the sponsor’s commitment, but also county funding targets. These targets help direct NOACA-controlled federal aid to



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projects throughout the region in an equitable way so that NOACA can balance the maintenance of the entire region’s transportation system.

NOACA targets its funding to the five counties based on each county’s relative share of the region’s total population. Because project implementation is based on readiness, a county might not realize its funding percentage during a given year, but over a number of years, NOACA will meet its county funding targets.

## Ready to Go!

By following the steps above – planning, programming and prioritizing – you can help ensure that your project is well planned and will enhance your community.



*Good planning makes for good projects!*

## For More Information

For more information about the project planning and development process, visit [www.noaca.org](http://www.noaca.org), or call us at 216-214-2414.

## About NOACA

The Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) is an association of state, county, city, village, and township officials that works with other organizations to address Northeast Ohio’s transportation, air quality, and water quality needs. In its planning for the region consisting of Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina counties, NOACA considers all modes of transportation (vehicles, transit, bicycle, pedestrian, etc.), as well as the transportation system’s impact on the environment and land use. NOACA focuses on preserving existing transportation facilities, relieving congestion, enhancing the region’s economic development, offering greater choice in modes of transportation, and increasing mobility to the elderly, the physically disabled and those who are dependent on transit. As a public agency, NOACA seeks public involvement and comment about all of its planning efforts.

# Planning for Your Federal-Aid Project



You have a transportation project in mind that you know would benefit your community. You believe you're ready to go, and all you need are the funds to get started. If the project is eligible for federal aid, you plan to ask for funding from the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), which controls federal funds for transportation projects in Northeast Ohio. With funding secured, construction can begin, and you imagine your community reaping the rewards of the completed project.

But making your dream a reality isn't simple. The fact is, almost all transportation projects are more complicated than they first appear, and they may take longer to implement than anticipated. In Northeast Ohio, a typical project can take seven years or more from concept to finished state – and more complex projects can take as long as 30 years!

One way that project sponsors can identify potential problems – and minimize the risk that a project will be prolonged – is through early planning and coordination with NOACA. A well-planned transportation project can help make a community more vibrant economically and more enjoyable for residents and visitors alike. Good planning and coordination can help make that a reality.

In project development, NOACA advocates a three-stage process:

- [planning](#),
- [programming](#) and
- [prioritizing](#).

Following these steps can increase the likelihood that your eligible project will receive federal funds within a reasonable time.

## Planning

The foundation of a successful infrastructure project is good planning, and the best place to start is with a clear understanding of the purpose of the proposed project or the need you are trying to fulfill.

NOACA recommends that project sponsors complete and submit a Preliminary Project Information Form for Proposed Federal-aid Projects. This form, which you can find on NOACA's Web site, contains questions to help you think through your project. The information you provide will help NOACA determine whether your project is eligible for federal aid and is a useful starting point if you set up a meeting with NOACA staff to talk through your preliminary ideas.



*NOACA's Governing Board considers planning so important that it set aside \$1 million in planning grants through its Transportation for Livable Communities Initiative.*

If you are more certain that your project is eligible for federal funds, you may choose to complete the Application Packet for Proposed Federal-aid Projects, also found on NOACA's Web site. The application begins the actual planning process and is used to document your project's planning history and eligibility for federal aid. If your project passes the initial screening (that is, if it qualifies as a federal-aid project and there is sufficient information), NOACA staff will notify you of the next step in the planning process. If your project does not pass the initial screening, you will be given a written notification explaining the reason(s).

Experienced members of NOACA's staff are available to meet with you to discuss your project and explain the planning review process. NOACA's role is to help project sponsors identify the transportation need that the project will address and determine if the proposed project will offer the best, most cost-effective solution. NOACA staff can also help identify complexities and complications that can slow down project development.

After screening, your project goes through NOACA's quarterly Project Planning Review (PPR) process (see NOACA's Web site for the schedule). The PPR process includes the following steps:

### • Staff Review

NOACA staff reviews the project application for completeness and appropriate documentation and offers comments. The staff also assesses each project to determine how it will meet one

or more of the ten transportation goals of the regional Transportation Plan, *Connections 2030*.

### • Committee Review

Staff comments are summarized and distributed to NOACA committees for further review and comment, beginning as an information item to the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The project is presented again to the TAC the following month for its recommendation to NOACA's Governing Board.

### • Intergovernmental Review and Consultation (IGRC) and Public Involvement

Each project is made available for public involvement and intergovernmental review and consultation from the time it goes to the TAC until the Board makes a decision. Committee comments about each project, as well as those from the staff, public and governmental organizations, are posted on NOACA's Web site.

### • Governing Board Review/Consideration

After comments are gathered and the TAC

makes its recommendations, the Governing Board considers the project for approval. When approved, the Governing Board issues a resolution indicating that the project review has been successfully completed. This resolution allows the project to be amended to the Transportation Plan and become a candidate to be amended to, or included on, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

It is only after the planning is completed that the project can move forward and informed talk of funding can take place. Because the federal-aid program is not a grant program (where funds are delivered up front) and there are federal planning requirements that must be met, many problems result from the lack of advance planning and coordination rather than the lack of federal funds.

The important point to remember is, if you are seeking federal aid, the sooner you start the process and the more planning you do, the better your chances of a successful project.

## Programming

Congratulations! Your project has successfully made it through the Project Planning Review Process and has been added to the Transportation Plan. That means funding is imminent and you can begin work, right?

Not quite. Unfortunately, many project sponsors optimistically believe their project will be ready to implement much sooner than it actually is. There are a couple more steps involved.

Once a project has completed the planning stage of project development and NOACA has placed it on the Long-Range Transportation Plan, you will continue to work on the project, including preliminary engineering and environmental assessment. This is a critical stage when unforeseen problems may arise that can affect the scope and estimated cost of the project – and result in delays.

Before the project can be “programmed,” or amended to the four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), you may be asked to show how you have addressed any planning issues the NOACA Governing Board identified through the project's planning review. If the project's total construction cost is estimated to be more than \$5 million, you will also need to have a financial plan and a commitment to provide the 20-percent local match within the four-year life of the TIP.



*Most proposed projects are more complex than they appear at first glance. That's why NOACA encourages careful and continuous planning before the project is programmed.*

If the project scope changes significantly and/or the cost increases more than 20 percent, the project must go through the Project Planning Review Process again unless the project sponsor pays the additional costs. For this reason, NOACA encourages careful and continuous planning before the project is programmed. Ongoing coordination and communication with NOACA can help keep your project on track.

Placement on the TIP allows project sponsors to prepare for the implementation phase.