

# HOW FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION DOLLARS ARE SPENT IN TOMPKINS COUNTY ANNUAL LISTING OF PROJECT OBLIGATIONS

The Ithaca-Tompkins County transportation Council's *Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP) is a listing of transportation projects over a five-year period that will be paid for in part with money from the Federal Highway Administration or Federal Transit Administration. For each project, the TIP lists the intended schedule and the estimated cost. Project schedules often change as a result of personnel, contractor or consultant availability or due to changes in budget resource availability. Thus, the TIP does not yield an exact picture of actual project expenditures.

To ensure that the public has an accurate understanding of how federal funds are actually being spent on transportation projects, Congress, in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (1998) and continuing in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU, 2005), included a requirement that the organizations responsible for approving the Transportation Improvement Program, publish an annual listing of project **obligations**.

## What are "project obligations"?

You might think of this as setting up a checking account for a specific purpose and then making an initial deposit. In order to begin work on any phase of a transportation project, federal funds must be obligated. This means that the money is set aside for that particular piece of work which can then be used to pay bills. The project expenses may be bills from a design consultant, a construction contractor, or payroll costs for New York State DOT employees working on the project.

## Do project obligations mean the work is underway?

Not in all cases; project accounts are set up particularly for the initial phases of a project to enable the work to start. It may take a while, for example to select and hire a design consultant and have them actually begin work.

## What are "project phases"?

Any transportation project large or small begins with an idea or plan and ends with construction. Here are the Phases:

- **SCOPING**: Meetings are held with project developers and designers, local government representatives, and other involved parties. Decisions are made about the specific elements that will be included in the project, and the range of design alternatives that will be investigated.
- **PRELIMINARY DESIGN**: This phase includes basic engineering work on each alternative, traffic studies, environmental analyses, and other work specific to the project. Public outreach is used to gain community input into project design. This phase ends with the selection and approval of a project alternative.
- **FINAL DESIGN**: In this phase, the actual plans and specifications that the construction contractor will work from are created.
- **RIGHT OF WAY INCIDENTALS**: Preparation work done prior to the acquisition of the right-of-way.
- **RIGHT OF WAY ACQUISITION**: In this phase, right-of-way necessary for the completion of a project is acquired either through purchase or easements.
- **CONSTRUCTION**: This encompasses all of the work to build the project, whether it is done by a contractor or an agency's own staff.
- **CONSTRUCTION INSPECTION**: In order to make sure that the work is being done properly and conforms to specifications, there is ongoing inspection. Sometimes this work is done by NYSDOT or local sponsor employees, but it is often contracted out.
- **OTHER**: This phase is associated with transit projects, and corresponds to the construction phase of the highway improvements, in that it represents that phase of the project where in the proposed improvement is actually implemented. For transit projects, this usually involves the purchase and acquisition of rolling stock and associated equipment, though in some cases, such as for station, parking, and maintenance/storage facilities, the construction of fixed or permanent facilities is undertaken.

Transportation projects may contain several components that are related to the primary task; the work may include safety related components as well as bicycle and pedestrian improvements. The funding for these project components are incorporated into the overall scope of work. The actual dollars are drawn from a number of Federal fund categories and are used for the various components of each project.

**Project Listing**

The attached table lists all projects on the ITCTC TIP that had funds obligated during the current Federal Fiscal Year. It indicates which project phases were active.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

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