Community Connections Program Application

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# Part 1: How the Community Connections Program Works

## What is the Community Connections Program?

Community Connections (CC) is the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) funding program for first- and last-mile solutions, community transportation, and other small, nontraditional transportation projects such as updating transit technology and improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The goals of the CC Program are to

* create first- and last-mile connections between transit and other modes;
* incentivize collaboration between entities; and
* promote mode shift by filling gaps in the transportation system.

The CC Program is the first of many new funding programs presented in the MPO’s Long-Range Transportation Plan, *Destination 2040*. More details on the CC Program can be found at <https://www.bostonmpo.org/community-connections> and on *Destination 2040* at <https://www.bostonmpo.org/lrtp>.

## How does Community Connections funding work?

The MPO’s federal fiscal years (FFY) 2021–25 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) allocates $2 million per year for the CC Program, beginning in FFY 2021 (October 1, 2020–September 30, 2021). The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) typically provides the 20 percent local match for capital construction projects funded with federal dollars, while the project sponsors are expected to provide a local match for operating projects.

## Is my project eligible for Community Connections Program funding?

Municipalities and regional transit authorities (RTA) may apply for CC funding. Other entities, such as Transportation Management Associations and nonprofit organizations, may apply **in partnership with a municipality or RTA that has agreed to serve as a project proponent and fiscal manager.**

The CC Program is funded with federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds. As such, **all projects must demonstrate a benefit to the quality of the air in the Boston Region MPO’s area and meet other federal requirements. Projects that add capacity to the roadway network are ineligible.**

The following types of projects are eligible for CC Program funds:

* Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL)
* Bicycle-Supportive Infrastructure, including:
  + Bikeshare stations and vehicles
  + Bicycle parking and shelters
* Bus Lanes
* Education about transportation options
* E-Ink Signs for MBTA Bus Stops
* Parking Management
  + Parking leases
  + Payment systems
* Transit Operations (new bus or shuttle service)
* Transit Signal Priority (TSP)

For more detail on these types of projects see Appendix A to this document.

## How do I apply for Community Connections funds?

After you have reviewed this application form and believe your project may be eligible for the CC Program, contact Sandy Johnston at [sjohnston@ctps.org](mailto:sjohnston@ctps.org) or 857.702.3710. MPO staff will review the eligibility of the basic concept of the project and give you feedback.

If staff judge that your project is likely to meet eligibility requirements, you may complete Parts 2 and 3 of this document and the accompanying budget spreadsheet for your type of project. MPO staff will analyze the data provided in the application form to confirm eligibility.

All project materials should be submitted to Sandy Johnston at [sjohnston@ctps.org](mailto:sjohnston@ctps.org) in one digital folder via Google Drive, Dropbox, or a similar tool. Materials should be submitted in the following formats:

* The application form file should be submitted as a Microsoft Word document
* Accompanying location and geographic data should be submitted per the instructions below
* Budget sheets (found by project type on the Community Connections web page, <https://www.bostonmpo.org/community-connections>) should be submitted in Excel format. You should pay careful attention to the instructions in the sheet where relevant. You may add lines to the sheet if your project requires more components than the base sheet allows. Likewise, if your project requests funding across multiple years, you may add additional tabs to the spreadsheet in the same format as the base sheet.

## When is my application due?

Deadline for this year’s CC Program Applications is December 11, 2020.

## When will I hear if my project has been selected for funding?

We will present a scored project list to the MPO no later than February 2021. The MPO will select a list of projects to be funded under the CC Program during TIP scenario programming discussions in March 2021 or shortly thereafter. All projects selected for funding will be reviewed for eligibility by the Commonwealth’s CMAQ Consultation Committee in Spring 2021.

## When and how will my project be implemented if selected for funding?

CC projects are implemented with the help of several state-level agencies. Once the FFYs 2022–26 TIP has been endorsed, MPO staff will connect proponents of projects selected for funding with staff from the relevant agency to guide them through implementation. We expect a written guide for CC project implementation to be available for the FFY 2023 grant cycle. Provided all administrative measures are settled, funds will be available beginning October 1, 2021.

**Table 1  
CC Project Types and Implementation Paths**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Implementation Path** |
| AVL | MAPC/MassDOT OTP |
| Bicycle-Supportive Infrastructure | MAPC/MassDOT OTP |
| Bus Lanes | MBTA |
| Education | MassDOT OTP |
| E-Ink Signs | MBTA |
| Parking Management | MAPC/MassDOT OTP |
| Transit Operations | MassDOT |
| TSP | MBTA |

AVL = automatic vehicle location. MAPC = Metropolitan Area Planning Council. MassDOT OTP = Massachusetts Department of Transportation Office of Transportation Planning. MBTA = Metropolitan Bay Transportation Authority. TSP = transit signal priority.

# Part 2: Project Eligibility Verification

Candidate projects must pass a two-part test to confirm eligibility for funding. The first part consists of a basic analysis of air quality impacts to confirm that the project will not have a negative impact on air quality. The second verifies that the proponent possesses sufficient institutional capacity to manage the project.

## Data Required to Assess Air Quality Impacts

Table 2 lists the data required to calculate the air quality impacts of candidate projects. Please provide the data listed for your project type. If you are unsure of the appropriate category for your project or believe that it does not fit into any of these categories, or if your project requires completion of a sheet to be provided by MPO staff, please contact Sandy Johnston at [sjohnston@ctps.org](mailto:sjohnston@ctps.org).

**Table 2  
Required Inputs for Air Quality Calculations**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **CMAQ Input** |
| AVL | No additional inputs necessary; air quality benefits are presumed |
| Bicycle-Supportive Infrastructure | For bike share:   1. Number of bikes in the bike-share system 2. Average bike trip length 3. Average number of trips per bike per day 4. Bike share operating days per year   For bicycle parking:  Total number of parking spots |
| Bus Lanes | See sheet provided by MPO staff |
| Education | No additional inputs necessary; air quality benefits are presumed |
| E-Ink Signs | No additional inputs necessary; air quality benefits are presumed |
| Parking Management | No additional inputs necessary; air quality benefits are presumed |
| Transit Operations | 1. Daily one-way person-trips anticipated 2. Total route distance in miles 3. Number of round trips per day   Vehicle type (e.g., cutaway bus, 30-foot bus, or 40-foot bus) |
| TSP | See sheet provided by MPO staff |

AVL = automatic vehicle locator. CMAQ = Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality. MPO = Metropolitan Planning Organization. TSP = transit signal priority.

## Proponent’s Project Management Capacity

Describe the proponent’s readiness and institutional capacity to manage the project, including the following details:

* The name of the entity (or entities) primarily responsible for managing the project
* The institutional capacity of the lead sponsoring entity to manage the project, considering, for example, the availability of management’s time and staff’s ability to handle reporting activities or civil rights compliance activities
* A list of staff who will work on the project, including the following information:
  + The name and/or position of the anticipated project manager, if known
  + The number of hours each staff member will work on the project over the year(s) of its implementation
  + The relevant skills and experience of the project team

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# Part 3: Community Connections Program Application

## Contact Information

Please provide your contact information in the table below. Feel free to submit additional information (such as contact information for co-sponsors) in the “Other/additional” field.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name |  |
| Primary/lead applicant |  |
| Address |  |
| City/town |  |
| Zip code |  |
| Email address |  |
| Phone number |  |
| Other/additional |  |

## Project Description

### Project Purpose and Scope

Using the fillable boxes below, please describe the proposed project and its goals. In addition to the required elements captured in the bullet points, please feel free to provide any additional information you feel is relevant. There are three boxes in this section:

* A Project Overview box that **all** proponents must complete
* A box that **only proponents of Transit Operations projects must complete**
* A box that **all other project proponents must complete**

For more details on project types that may help you complete this section, please refer to the Appendix.

### Project Overview

* A concise description of the purpose of the project and how it meets the goals of the CC Program and the MPO (for more, see <https://www.bostonmpo.org/data/pdf/plans/LRTP/destination/Destination-2040-Vision-Goals-Objectives.pdf>)
* Who will be served (for example, the approximate demographic profile [income, race, gender, age] of potential users/riders or the market for the services if the project is targeted at the workforce of a particular company or office park)
* How this project fills a key unmet need for potential users

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### For Transit Operations projects

Transit Operations projects that request funding across multiple years must demonstrate an air quality benefit from each year as it passes to retain eligibility for funding. There are detailed reporting requirements for this type of project.

* Detail your proposed fare structure and describe its rationale.
* The CC Program can fund Transit Operations projects for a maximum of three years, and the MPO’s share of total costs is expected to decrease each year. Projects should demonstrate a capacity to continue after the MPO funding expires. Describe your plans for reaching financial sustainability after the three-year limit for subsidies under this funding program has been reached. In particular, indicate the steps to be taken towards sustainability and the milestones to be reached during the first two years of funding.
* Provide details on the planned frequency and routing of the service(s) you are proposing.
* Describe the types of vehicles your service would use and to whom they would belong.
* Describe who will administer the service. In particular, who will be responsible for monitoring the service provider and responding to customer concerns? Describe the administrator’s track record (if any) in monitoring this type of service.
* Describe your marketing plan, including considerations such as:
  + Plans informing potential customers about the new service and encouraging them to become regular users.
  + Branding of the new service.
  + How transit stops will be marked (with signage and schedule information, for example).
  + Types of printed or electronic schedule information that will be provided.
  + How potential customers will be able to find out more about the service.
* Describe how you plan to collect **and report** the following data, as required for CMAQ compliance:
  + Daily one-way person-trips (at a minimum; we welcome additional ridership data, such as demographics gathered through surveys)
  + Average one-way person-trip *length*

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### For all projects other than Transit Operations projects

* Right-of-way (ROW) considerations:
  + Will the work be conducted entirely within ROW controlled by a municipality or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts?
  + If ROW acquisition is required, who must it be acquired from, and what entity would make the acquisition?
* Sources and amount of financial support
* The financial situation of the project sponsor(s) and the ability of the sponsor(s) to fully fund the commitment to the project

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### Location(s) of the Project

Please provide a geographic file or files (in .kml, .kmz, or shapefile format) defining the project area. You may email this attachment to Sandy Johnston or provide it in a shared drive (such as Google Drive or Dropbox). You may use a geographic information system (GIS) program, such as Esri’s ArcMap or Google’s free My Maps service. A tutorial for My Maps is available here: <https://support.google.com/mymaps/answer/3433053?hl=en&ref_topic=3024924>.

Please contact Sandy Johnston at [sjohnston@ctps.org](mailto:sjohnston@ctps.org) or 857.702.3710 if you have any questions.

Table 3 provides examples of the geographic data you may submit.

**Table 3  
Geographic Definitions for Project Proposals**

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| **Category** | **Data Submission** |
| Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) | Polygon defining area where improved vehicles will operate |
| Bicycle-Supportive Infrastructure | Polygon defining area where improvements will be made OR points representing locations of new docks, bicycle parking, or shelters |
| Bus Lanes | Polygon or lines defining area where improvements will be made |
| Education | Written description that identifies the area or particular institutions or workplaces to which the project or program will be targeted |
| E-Ink Signs | Points representing stations where signs will be installed |
| Parking Management | For parking payment systems:  Polygon defining area where systems will be operative OR points representing locations of new meters  For parking leasing:  A point or polygon defining the lot(s) to be leased. |
| Transit Operations | Lines representing routes and points representing stops |
| Transit Signal Priority (TSP) | Points representing signals to be improved |

AVL = automatic vehicle locator. TSP = transit signal priority.

## Network or Connectivity Value

1. Describe any activity hubs, transit nodes, or other relevant elements that your project connects to and/or enhances and that you wish MPO staff to be aware of when evaluating your project. Please identify all known existing or connecting fixed-route and paratransit service within a one-quarter mile of the proposed service.
2. Additional instruction for Transit Operations projects—please describe how your proposed service will complement, rather than compete with, existing transit options.
3. Document the provision of parking within one-half mile of your project area (for transit projects, this distance should be measured from stops; for capital improvement projects, the distance should be measured from the location of the project). Include an estimate of the number of spaces available, the percentage of spaces used on an average day, and the prices charged. This information can be provided in the text box below and/or by emailing a spreadsheet, map, or chart to [sjohnston@ctps.org](mailto:sjohnston@ctps.org). *Proponents of projects in the following categories do not have to answer this question: Transit Signal Priority, E-Ink Signs, Bus Lanes, and Education.*

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## Coordination or Cooperation between Multiple Entities

In addition to the lead sponsor, identify the names of the other entities supporting this project. Explain their roles in the project, their financial commitments, and any in-kind support (such as staff time, data resources, or vehicles) they may be providing to the project. Explain how the project demonstrates cooperation between these entities to serve the goals of the CC Program and the MPO. If your project requires participation of a transit agency or other transit operating entity (for example, a TSP project), *you must coordinate with them and have them submit a letter of support*.

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## Inclusion in and Consistency with Local and Regional Plans

The Boston Region MPO values continuity and prioritization of projects from the planning phase through implementation. Please document if and how your project has been included in local and/or regional plans or analyses. Examples include local comprehensive plans, transit development plans, or plans produced by the MPO or Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

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## Equity

MPO staff will conduct an equity evaluation for each project application. For most projects, staff will identify the transportation equity (TE) populations within the project area based on the geographic file(s) provided in Part 1 and compare the percent of the population within the project area to the MPO’s regional average for that population group to come up with the score. TE populations are those listed below covered by the Civil Rights Act, the Environmental Justice Executive Order, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1973:

* Minority population
* Low-income population (defined as people whose family income is 200 percent or less of the poverty level for their family size as defined in the national poverty guidelines)
* People with limited English proficiency
* People with disabilities
* Elderly population (age 75 and older)
* Youth population (age 17 and younger)

Education or wayfinding projects or education-related bicycle and pedestrian projects should include a description of the TE population(s) that the project is expected to serve, as these projects are less geographically bounded. If you are not sure which category your project falls into, please contact MPO staff.

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## Generation of Modal Flexibility and Shift

Please describe how the project will accomplish the following:

1. Allow new trips that prior to this project would only have been possible by single-occupancy vehicle (SOV)
2. Shift existing trips from the SOV mode to other modes

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## Demand Projections

Provide an estimate of what the typical weekday and weekend (if applicable) usage of the new service or facility will be once it has been in operation or existence for six months.

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# Appendix—Details on Project Types

The Community Connections (CC) Program can fund a wide variety of project types, ranging from operating transit service to building some kinds of small infrastructure projects. All projects should have the primary goal of creating first- and last-mile connections or closing other gaps in the transportation system. Projects must demonstrate an air quality benefit, as defined in the application document.

## Automatic Vehicle Location

Automatic vehicle location (AVL) equipment tracks buses and other transit vehicles, allowing riders to plan their trips more effectively and reliably. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) offers AVL equipment for transit vehicles in partnership with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). You can see the variety of available options on MAPC’s website at <https://www.mapc.org/our-work/services-for-cities-towns/public-works-collective-purchasing-program/#AVL>.

## Bicycle-Supportive Infrastructure

Bicycle-supportive infrastructure projects help create a web of first- and last-mile connections by building publicly accessible bicycle facilities. They fall into two categories: bikeshare infrastructure and bicycle shelters and parking.

### Bikeshare

The CC Program can fund the purchase of bikeshare docks and bicycles. Please contact MPO staff for details about implementation.

### Bicycle Shelters and Parking

The MPO partners with MAPC to help project proponents purchase bicycle shelters and parking options that serve first- and last-mile connection purposes. You can see the variety of available options on MAPC’s website at <https://www.mapc.org/our-work/services-for-cities-towns/public-works-collective-purchasing-program/#bicycleparking>.

## Bus Lanes

The MPO has partnered with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to consider funding implementation of bus lanes in any MPO member municipality that has MBTA bus service.

## Education

Education projects provide information about transportation options. These types of projects can help solve first- and last-mile problems and shift trips from the single-occupancy vehicle mode to other modes by reaching potential riders and users who would not otherwise be aware of or fully able to make use of available options. Eligible projects may include the following:

* Travel instruction
* Training on new technologies
* Training for bringing bicycles on transit

## E-Ink Signs

Since 2017, the MBTA has been conducting a pilot to determine the feasibility and utility of using solar-powered E-Ink signs at transit stops. The MPO is proud to partner with the MBTA to bring these signs to bus stops throughout the MBTA bus service area. If approved, grants will provide capital funds for purchasing and constructing the signs. Each sign is expected to cost $20,000 for procurement and installation. There is also an annual operational and maintenance cost of approximately $2,000 attached to each sign, which is not eligible for Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding. The implementing municipality will likely be responsible for paying operational cost. There is a possibility that MBTA will cover operational and maintenance costs; MBTA staff plan to determine that by Summer 2021.

You can find more information about the MBTA’s E-Ink pilot here: <https://www.mbta.com/projects/solar-powered-e-ink-signs>

## Parking Management

Parking management projects encourage the adoption of innovative parking management strategies.

### Parking Payment Systems

Implementing flexible and accessible parking payment systems at and near transit stops and other key destinations can be a critical function for first- and last-mile trips. The MPO partners with MAPC to deliver payment systems. You can see the variety of available options on MAPC’s website at <https://www.mapc.org/our-work/services-for-cities-towns/public-works-collective-purchasing-program/#parkingpaymentsystems>.

### Parking Leasing

Several MPO municipalities have found success in leasing remote parking lots—such as those belonging to houses of worship—that are located near transit stations and underused during the week. The CC Program can pay for leasing or arranging for off-site parking spaces near transit stations to supplement existing parking.

## Transit Operations

Transit Operations projects are those that close gaps in the transit network, including those that provide first- and last-mile solutions and address mobility needs not covered by existing fixed-route transit or paratransit services. Operations funded through the CC Program must represent *new service.* If you have questions about the definition of new service, please contact MPO staff. Eligible project types include, but are not limited to, the following:

* Fixed-route transit service
* Shuttle operations
* Partnerships with transportation network companies—ride-hailing companies such as Uber and Lyft

The MPO can provide a maximum of three years of funding for Transit Operations projects. Projects are obligated to provide certain reporting metrics after each year, so that their continuing air quality benefit can be confirmed. A local match to federal funding is expected; typically, the federal share of funding for the project declines each year. Projects will be expected to demonstrate fiscal sustainability for the fourth year of operation and beyond.

## Transit Signal Priority

Transit Signal Priority (TSP) projects add TSP equipment to traffic signals at individual intersections or along a corridor to make transit vehicles faster and more reliable. Currently, these projects can be implemented by the MBTA in municipalities with MBTA bus or surface Green Line rail service, but if you wish to explore the possibility of a TSP project serving transit vehicles from another operator, please contact MPO staff to determine feasibility.

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) operates its programs, services, and activities in compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and related statutes and regulations. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives federal assistance. Related federal nondiscrimination laws administered by the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, or both, prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and disability. The Boston Region MPO considers these protected populations in its Title VI Programs, consistent with federal interpretation and administration. In addition, the Boston Region MPO provides meaningful access to its programs, services, and activities to individuals with limited English proficiency, in compliance with U.S. Department of Transportation policy and guidance on federal Executive Order 13166.

The Boston Region MPO also complies with the Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law, M.G.L. c 272 sections 92a, 98, 98a, which prohibits making any distinction, discrimination, or restriction in admission to, or treatment in a place of public accommodation based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or ancestry. Likewise, the Boston Region MPO complies with the Governor's Executive Order 526, section 4, which requires that all programs, activities, and services provided, performed, licensed, chartered, funded, regulated, or contracted for by the state shall be conducted without unlawful discrimination based on race, color, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, creed, ancestry, national origin, disability, veteran's status (including Vietnam-era veterans), or background.

A complaint form and additional information can be obtained by contacting the MPO or at <http://www.bostonmpo.org/mpo_non_discrimination>. To request this information in a different language or in an accessible format, please contact

Title VI Specialist  
Boston Region MPO  
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150  
Boston, MA 02116  
[civilrights@ctps.org](mailto:civilrights@ctps.org)  
857.702.3700 (voice)  
617.570.9193 (TTY)