

## HATS Project Development Process

Recent federal and state initiatives have generated the need for HATS to revisit its project development process. The focus is to better define projects at the onset of a project's development to produce more realistic scopes, costs, and schedules. Ultimately, this will prevent unexpected delays and unnecessary cost increases now often encountered during projects' engineering and environmental/permitting phase.

The additional effort placed in the planning phase of the project will produce efficiencies in project delivery. More information describing and defining necessary project details early will require time and attention from project sponsors, HATS planning staff, PennDOT, federal and state environmental review agencies. This enhanced project planning is now being incorporated into the HATS process and resources will be made available as needed to perform the necessary additional tasks (for instance, develop purpose and needs statements or identify potentially affected environmental resources).

The established HATS project suggestion form and ranking criteria remain part of the process, however the timing and application of these elements will adjust to meet the new process objective. These changes are intended to be consistent with PennDOT's right-sizing and smart transportation objectives, as well as Federal linking planning and NEPA requirements.

### Policy Objective

To better define projects before they are programmed on the TIP to generate more realistic scopes, costs, and schedules for project delivery.

### Pre-Application Conference

Because a significant change to HATS' project planning approach is being implemented, all potential project sponsors are required to participate in a pre-application conference with HATS planning staff. This conference will provide an orientation to the HATS process, address questions and expectations, and identify information and resources necessary to deliver a project using federal transportation funds. It may be concluded during this conference that HATS is not the appropriate funding source for a project, or other programs/approaches may produce more practical results. Therefore, **HATS PROJECT SUGGESTION FORMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT A SPONSOR'S PARTICIPATION IN A PRE-APPLICATION CONFERENCE.**

It is intended that the project suggestion form will be completed by the project sponsor after the pre-application conference. The pre-application conference will provide information necessary for the project sponsor to make an informed decision whether or not to pursue HATS funding and to properly prepare the project for federal funding consideration by providing complete information as requested on the project suggestion form. Project sponsors are strongly encouraged to make arrangements for a pre-application conference by contacting HATS planning staff

(717-234-2639) prior to filling out a project suggestion form. **PROJECT SUGGESTION FORMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AT THE PRE-APPLICATION CONFERENCE.**

### **Project Suggestion Forms**

Following the pre-application conference, a project can be proposed to HATS at any time through the submittal of a project suggestion form. This form represents the minimum information required regarding the proposed project to adequately prepare the project for HATS' consideration.

The form can be downloaded from the HATS website ([www.tcrpc-pa.org/HATS.htm](http://www.tcrpc-pa.org/HATS.htm)) and submitted as an attached email document (preferred) or through US Mail. (A web-based application will be developed in the future.) Changes to the HATS form have been coordinated with an ongoing statewide effort and will provide for a smoother transition to the state's future requirements when implemented.

Project forms will be initially screened for completeness and federal funding eligibility by HATS staff. If not eligible, the applicant will be notified and processing of the project through HATS will end at this point. HATS and appropriate County Planning Commissions will be notified of the ineligible project applications.

### **Required Project Information**

Project definition begins with a purpose and need statement. This statement must be included on the project suggestion form as this is necessary documentation and the beginning point for project scoping, environmental clearance, and federal funding. Guidance will be provided on what information should be included in a purpose and need statement. Briefly, the purpose describes the problem to be solved, and the need provides the data to establish that a problem exists. The complexity of the statement will vary depending on the complexity and anticipated level of environmental review for the project.

Most projects funded through HATS are categorical exclusions (CE), which have no significant effect on the environment and require the most basic level of environmental review. Therefore, most purpose and need statements will likely only be a few sentences long. At the other extreme, environmental impact statement (EIS) projects have significant environmental impacts, will require the most rigorous level of environmental review, and generate the most complex purpose and need statements. There are no EIS projects currently in the HATS region.

Alternative approaches considered in the solution of the defined problem, potential controversies, impacted environmental resources, and a cost estimate with any funding commitments should all be indicated on the form.

### **Project Review**

The project form will be forwarded to the appropriate County Planning Commission for more detailed discussion and evaluation. The Planning Commission should:

1. Clarify the purpose and need of the project – *Is the problem identified and data-driven?*
2. Discuss alternatives and impacts – *Is additional local planning needed?*
3. Determine the project’s priority amongst existing County projects on HATS record
4. Notify HATS of evaluation results

Based on the County’s evaluation results, HATS staff will determine if additional project scoping is necessary. The project sponsor, PennDOT, and environmental review agencies will be included in the project scoping discussion. At this point:

1. An understanding of project scope, requirements & process for project delivery, and revised costs are determined. *(The planning partners checklist could be applied at this point, if necessary.)*
2. An agreement to forward project to HATS Technical Committee for program consideration is reached, and/or alternatives suggested for the project sponsor to pursue.
3. HATS project ranking criteria is applied *(all projects must be ranked to be programmed for funding through HATS)*, and a determination is made as to whether or not the project is within HATS’ foreseeable fiscal capacity based on its priority ranking.
4. All project information is forwarded to the HATS Committees for program consideration.

The HATS Technical Committee will review and make a recommendation to add/not add the proposed project to the program. Formal action is then taken by the Coordinating Committee, directing the project to be added to the RTP (during the next update), added to the TIP immediately, or not to add the project to the program at all. Project sponsors are notified of HATS’ final action.

HATS staff will generate an updated project priority list on an ongoing basis, as project suggestion forms are processed to distribute and use as a guide in RTP and TIP updates.

The following chart summarizes the steps and information addressed in the HATS process.

S T E P S	<b>1 PROCESS REQUIREMENTS</b> Pre-Application Conference	<b>2 BASIC PROJECT INFORMATION</b> Screening / Review Form	<b>3 PLANNING BASIS</b> County Planning Commission review	<b>4 DETAILED PROJECT DATA</b> Project Scoping meeting	<b>5 FUNDING PRIORITY &amp; FEASIBILITY</b> Apply Project Ranking Criteria
I N F O R M A T I O N  A D D R E S S E D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What is the HATS process?</li> <li>✓ What can be expected?</li> <li>✓ What types of information will be needed?</li> <li>✓ Who/what other resources may be available?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the project eligible for federal funding?</li> <li>✓ Is the application complete?</li> <li>✓ What is the problem to be solved?</li> <li>✓ How is the problem identified or measured?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the problem identification clear and data driven?</li> <li>✓ Is additional local planning needed?</li> <li>✓ What are other ways to address the problem?</li> <li>✓ Are there environmental or other qualities/ concerns affected?</li> <li>✓ How does this compare with other County priorities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What is the extent of the project?</li> <li>✓ Are there other alternatives to consider?</li> <li>✓ Is more detailed environmental assessment needed?</li> <li>✓ What will it take to deliver (cost, schedule)?</li> <li>✓ Do the costs need to be refined?</li> <li>✓ Are there other funding sources?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How does the project rank compared with others on the HATS program?</li> <li>✓ Is the project within the fiscal limitation of the RTP?</li> <li>✓ Are there other funding sources?</li> </ul>
A C T I O N	Sponsor decides whether or not to pursue funding through HATS.	Sponsor, HATS & County informed of form status.	County evaluation forwarded to HATS.	Recommendation to add/not add to HATS program.	HATS amend or modify RTP/TIP, add to 'illustrative' list, or decline application -- advise sponsor.
L E A D	HATS staff Sponsor	HATS staff	County Planning staff Sponsor	HATS staff, PennDOT, FHWA/FTA, Environ Agencies, Sponsor	HATS staff HATS Committees