Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
MDOT Prioritization – Scoring Model & Application Process

Prioritization Process Context

Why did MDOT develop a new prioritization process for major transportation projects? How is it different from the previous process, Chapter 30?

The new prioritization process builds on lessons learned from Maryland's previous transportation prioritization process, Chapter 30. Identified opportunities for improvements have included greater transparency and a stronger connection between project scoring and selection.

The new approach responds to directives from MDOT Secretary Paul Wiedefeld to develop a prioritization process for surface transportation capacity enhancing projects requesting funding in the Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP). It is intended to deliver a transparent, objective scoring model to drive project selection. It aligns with the Moore-Miller Administration's vision for data-driven, heart-led efforts to make a safer, more affordable, more competitive Maryland that leaves no one behind.

Key updates relate to the criteria and measures used for project evaluation, select project and applicant eligibility parameters, and the frequency of project scoring and selection. More information about the new process can be found in the Project Prioritization Technical Guide, available via the MDOT website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83).

How much funding will be available for the prioritization process? How is this amount determined?

The amount of available funding will be announced prior to each round of prioritization. It will be determined by the MDOT Secretary.

Funds will be made available for surface transportation capacity enhancing projects after MDOT has funded other core needs such as maintenance and operations, debt service, and State of Good Repair (SGR) needs.

How frequently will MDOT conduct the project prioritization process? How does this schedule relate to the development of the Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP)?

MDOT will conduct the prioritization process and select new surface transportation capacity enhancing projects every other year. Previously, the Chapter 30 process was conducted annually. Moving to a biennial cadence will not change the overall amount of funding available, but it will increase the amount of funding available for award to projects in a given scoring round. This will allow

funding to be fully programmed in the CTP via the prioritization process, creating greater certainty for project sponsors and partners. In the off-years, when MDOT is not actively soliciting and scoring projects, staff will conduct a review of the prioritization process and make improvements based on the assessment results. The CTP will continue to be developed on an annual basis.

When will the new prioritization process be implemented?

The first round of the new prioritization process will be a pilot round with no funding in 2025. The application submission period will run from January 15 until February 18, 2025. The next round of the prioritization process will be determined based on availability of resources and is anticipated to take place in 2026 or 2027.

Why conduct a no-funding pilot?

The no-funding pilot will allow MDOT and applicants to test the new prioritization approach. Applicants will be able to explore the new system and understand its mechanics, provide feedback on the new process, and receive feedback on their project proposal. MDOT will be able to strengthen the prioritization approach based on the pilot round and feedback from applicants. When funding becomes available in the future, both the prioritization process and applicants will be better prepared.

Project Submission

What projects are required to submit an application to be considered for funding in the CTP?

With the exception of those identified below, all surface transportation capacity enhancing projects requesting between $5 million and $400 million in the CTP, including federal funding that MDOT controls, must be submitted for prioritization in order to be considered for inclusion in the CTP. This includes highway, transit, and non-motorized transportation projects.

Funding sources with existing legislatively designated processes for distribution are exempt from the prioritization process. Expansion projects with the following Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds do <u>not</u> need to be submitted: CMAQ, TAP, Carbon Reduction Program, PROTECT, HSIP, Highway-Railway Grade Crossing, and Statewide Planning. Expansion projects with the following Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds do <u>not</u> need to be submitted: 5307/5340 - Urbanized Area Formula; 5337 - State of Good Repair; 5304 - Statewide Planning; 5310 - Elderly and Disabled; 5311 - Rural Formula Program; 5329 - State Safety Oversight; and 5339 - Bus and Bus Facilities. All other expansion projects meeting the criteria described above must be submitted.

Who is eligible to submit projects for prioritization? How many projects can be proposed by each applicant?

The following types of entities may submit projects for prioritization:

- County government
- Municipal government
- State government agency
- Independent city
- Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
- Locally Operated Transit System (LOTS)

All proposing entities have a limited number of applications they may submit per round. Except in the case of state agencies, this limit is structured in tiers based on the population of the proposing entity and the project size (Table 1). For state agencies, the limit is structured in tiers based on project size only.

Table 1. Project Application Limits

Proposing Entity Population*	Projects with Costs** Over $20M	Projects with Costs** of $20M or Less	Total Projects
Under 50,000	1 application	3 applications	4 applications
50,000- 500,000	2 applications	4 applications	6 applications
Over 500,000	4 applications	6 applications	10 applications
N/A (State Agency)	6 applications	10 applications	16 applications

* For LOTS, population size is based on the population of the jurisdiction served.
** State funding request, including federal funding that MDOT controls, for both capacity enhancing and SGR components

What are the eligibility requirements for projects submitted for prioritization?

To be eligible for prioritization, projects must –

1) be a surface transportation capacity enhancing project for which the state funding request, including federal funding that MDOT controls, is at least $5 million and less than $400 million,
2) be located or operate on the state system or provide benefits to the state system, and
3) have progressed far enough in their design work to provide the information necessary to for scoring (see below).

Operational efforts are not eligible for the prioritization process. The following project types are eligible <u>only if they include capacity expansion components:</u> facilities upgrades, complete streets, road diet, and transportation demand management (TDM) projects.

To be scored, projects must have:

a) a draft feasibility study or equivalent document to be published for public comment;
b) a minimum level of design through the feasibility study or equivalent document;
c) an identified alternative for projects subject to an alternatives analysis; and
d) a reasonable and updated cost estimate.

MDOT will screen submissions for eligibility prior to scoring. Projects that do not meet the eligibility requirements by the application deadline are not eligible to be considered for funding via the prioritization process that fiscal year.

What types of non-motorized projects would be eligible for the prioritization process?

All non-motorized projects are subject to the eligibility requirements listed above (see 'What are the eligibility requirements for projects submitted for prioritization?'). Examples of potential non-motorized projects include the installation of a new sidewalk or bike lane, complete streets improvements that include capacity expansion components, and road diet efforts that include capacity expansion components. Additionally, bike and pedestrian improvements that are bundled as part of a coordinated network and, together, meet the eligibility criteria, including a funding request of at least $5 million, would be eligible. Applicants are encouraged to reach out to MDOT (prioritization@mdot.maryland.gov) to confirm the eligibility of specific projects or project types.

Complete street and road diet efforts may reduce auto capacity but add bike lanes and/or pedestrian infrastructure. How will these types of projects be addressed?

Complete street and road diet projects that include capacity expansion components would be eligible for the prioritization process. These projects would also be subject to the eligibility requirements listed above (see 'What are the eligibility requirements for projects submitted for prioritization?').

How will it be determined if a project provides benefits to the state system? Is there a specific criterion for this requirement?

MDOT is in the process of developing further guidance and will share more information when it is available.

Should projects previously submitted for scoring under the Ch. 30 model be resubmitted?

Project sponsors do not need to submit a full application under the new prioritization approach for projects previously scored under Chapter 30 and included in Appendix A of the Draft CTP. They are required, however, to inform MDOT that they want the project scored under Chapter 30 to be considered for the new prioritization program and provide any additional information required to score the project under the new approach.

Project sponsors should reach out to MDOT at prioritization@mdot.maryland.gov as soon as possible to request that a project previously scored via Chapter 30 be considered in the prioritization pilot. For the 2025 no-funding prioritization pilot, the deadline for these requests is Friday, January 31.

What additional project data will be required for projects previously scored under Chapter 30? Will they need a feasibility study or equivalent document?

After a project sponsor submits a request for a project previously scored under Chapter 30 to be considered via the new prioritization approach, MDOT will compare the data previously submitted for the project to the data needed to score the project under the new approach. MDOT will request the outstanding data items from the project sponsor. The list of outstanding data items may differ from project to project based on what information was previously submitted. Should a project's feasibility study be outdated or otherwise unavailable, the sponsor would be required to provide the information that would generally come from a feasibility study, as well as back-up documentation for the provided information.

How does an applicant submit a project for prioritization?

Proposing entities may submit project applications through the Maryland OneStop portal (onestop.md.gov/). In years when scoring is conducted, the application period will open in January and close in February. Proposing entities must submit separate applications for each project.

For the 2025 no-funding prioritization pilot, the application window will run from January 15 to February 18, 2025. Please consult the MDOT website for additional details (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83). A guide to registering a new account on Maryland OneStop will also be made available at the same link.

What information is needed for a project application?

For each submitted project, proposing entities must have a feasibility study or equivalent document that includes basic project information, such as the project

limits, a cost estimate, and a description of the proposed improvements and map of their locations.

Proposing entities should also be prepared to answer questions about additional attributes and benefits of their transportation projects, including safety improvements, included assets, and project scope.

Transit capacity project applications will require additional details including frequency/headway, travel time, and alignment.

More information about the information required for a project application can be found in the Project Prioritization Technical Guide, available via the MDOT website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83).

In the project application, should applicants provide the project cost for a specific phase or total, across all phases?

Applicants should provide the total project cost across phases.

Project Scoring & Selection

How will projects be evaluated?

MDOT will use the project application data to evaluate each project and calculate a score based on quantitative measures in the areas of Safety, Accessibility & Mobility, Climate Change & the Environment, Social Equity, Economic Competitiveness, and Sustainable Land Use/Demand Management. All eligible projects, regardless of location or type, will be evaluated with the same measures.

A project's total score will be divided by its state funding request, including federal funding that MDOT controls, to calculate a Score-Cost Ratio (SCR). Projects will be ranked based on SCR.

More information about the evaluation measures and process can be found in the Project Prioritization Technical Guide, available via the MDOT website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83).

What should be included in the signed resolution or letter required for the project application? Is the signed resolution or letter different from the priority letter?

The project application requires a signed resolution or letter from the applicant entity's leadership. This is different from a priority letter, which may be submitted via a separate OneStop form in May. The signed resolution or letter should consist of a brief statement (e.g., 1-2 sentences) affirming that the project application has the official support and endorsement of the applicant entity. The appropriate signatory may differ by entity type; for counties, for example, the letter may be signed by the county executive. A sample letter template is available via the MDOT website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83).

What role will County Priority Letters play in project selection? Will priority letters continue to be submitted on an annual basis?

County Priority Letters will continue to play a role in the development of the CTP. The letters will not influence the quantitative evaluation of projects but will be considered by the Secretary and MDOT during the CTP development process.

The timing of priority letter submission will remain unchanged, and they will continue to be submitted on an annual basis. There are two reasons for this approach: (1) Priority letters include a more expansive set of projects than are eligible for the prioritization process, and MDOT wants to continue to hear about local priorities across the broader spectrum of project types. (2) MDOT has established a process through which applicants can request MDOT funding for feasibility studies with their priority letters. These studies allow for the development of concepts into potential projects that can later be considered in the prioritization process. (See 'What support is available for entities with limited capacity to develop prioritization-ready projects?' below.) In an off year, when MDOT is not actively scoring projects, applicants may continue to advance project readiness.

Proposing entities may submit County Priority Letters via the OneStop portal (onestop.md.gov/) in May. Additional priority letter submission guidance will be made available via the MDOT website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83).

How do results from the prioritization process affect which projects are selected for funding in the CTP?

MDOT will use the new prioritization process' results to drive project selection. After projects are evaluated, the project rankings and the list of projects selected for the CTP will be published for public review and input during the CTP tour. The MDOT Secretary may then make changes to the list of selected projects, if desired, based on factors such as public input or geographic equity.

The Secretary will present a final list to a public commission at a public meeting for review and public discussion. Should there be a decision to deviate from the rankings, MDOT will provide a written rationale for that decision to support transparency in the decision-making process. Projects selected for funding and inclusion in the CTP will have their full project funding — through construction — reflected in the CTP.

Therefore, project proposals must include all remaining unfunded phases, rather than focusing exclusively on one, single phase.

<u>Coordination Across Jurisdictions</u>

The Chapter 30 scoring model allocated points for letters of support or collaboration among entities. Will those still be factors in the new prioritization process?

Some entities will encourage this type of collaboration by virtue of their composition. MPOs, for example, would likely coordinate with their constituent members to decide which projects to submit.

Factors like letters of support or collaboration among entities would be considered after scoring, during CTP development, when the MDOT Secretary may make changes to the list of selected projects, if desired, based on factors such as public input or geographic equity. (See 'How do results from the prioritization process affect which projects are selected for funding in the CTP?')

Will the priority letter form include a specific question about coordination across jurisdictional boundaries, or should applicants note any related items in the form's narrative section?

Information about coordination across jurisdictional boundaries would be included in the narrative section of the form.

What happens if a municipality and a county want to submit the same project?

There is no benefit to submitting two applications for the same project. One applicant could submit the project and note in the application that it has the support of both jurisdictions. Unlike the Chapter 30 scoring system, the new scoring approach does not include local priority points.

Could a municipality submit a smaller project that is different from the county's project(s)?

Yes.

Additional Information

What support is available for entities with limited capacity to develop prioritization-ready projects?

Under the new prioritization process, all applications are required to have a completed feasibility study or equivalent document. This requirement existed under the Chapter 30 process and is being retained under the new prioritization process.

MDOT recognizes that not all applicants have the same capabilities and resources, which can make it harder for some to complete the necessary feasibility study or equivalent document. To address this issue, MDOT has established a process through which applicants can request funding from MDOT through their

priority letters for feasibility studies to develop concepts into potential projects that can be considered in the prioritization process.

Priority letters will be submitted annually via a standalone OneStop form that includes a field for applicants to request MDOT support for project feasibility studies. This new feature provides structure to a previously informal process for determining feasibility study support.

As for the project evaluation itself, as with Chapter 30, entities will provide information about their proposed project, and MDOT will be responsible for conducting additional modeling and GIS analyses needed for project scoring. More information about data responsibilities can be found in the Project Prioritization Technical Guide, available via the MDOT website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83).

MDOT encourages entities to submit any questions about navigating the project readiness and application requirements to prioritization@mdot.maryland.gov.

Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) are included among the entities eligible to submit projects. Does this affect existing LOTS funding processes?

Existing LOTS funding processes will be unaffected by the prioritization process. LOTS funding is exempt from the prioritization process, as it is distributed via a state legislative process, and will continue to be distributed as it has been in the past. If there are expansion projects that LOTS agencies are unable to fund via existing processes, they may submit them for consideration under the prioritization process.

How would projects that (a) are in the CTP, (b) had funding at one point but received funding deferrals, and (c) were not previously scored via Ch. 30 be addressed?

This will depend on the project status. If the project is in Construction now, it will continue to move forward. If the project is not in Construction, it will depend on how far along it is. MDOT will share any further guidance for this second scenario as it becomes available.

Is MDOT going to evaluate projects using the Chapter 30 process in 2025?

No, MDOT does not plan to evaluate projects using the Chapter 30 process in 2025. Rather, it encourages applicants to submit projects for evaluation under the no-funding pilot of the new prioritization process.

Are the slides from previous info sessions available for review?

Yes. MDOT held two virtual info sessions for prospective applicants for the 2025 prioritization pilot, on December 3, 2024 and January 8, 2025. The slides and

recordings from these info sessions are available via the MDOT Prioritization Process Website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83).

I have additional questions about my project application and/or the prioritization process. Where can I learn more?

The following resources provide additional information on the prioritization process and are (or will be made) available via the MDOT Prioritization Process Website (www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=83):

- Project Prioritization Technical Guide
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- OneStop Portal New User Instructions
- OneStop Portal Project Application Link
- Updated Priority Letter Guidance
- Sample Completed Applications
- Endorsement Letter Template
- Sample Concept Plan

The project application will be available via the Maryland OneStop Portal (onestop.md.gov/).

Please reach out to MDOT with any further questions about project applications and/or the prioritization process at prioritization@mdot.maryland.gov. Proposing entities are encouraged to coordinate with MDOT prior to submitting applications to ensure all the necessary data and eligibility requirements are met.