

September 18, 2025

The Honorable Marcus J. Molinaro  
Administrator  
Federal Transit Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

**Subject: Request for Information Concerning the Capital Investment Grants Program (Docket No. FTA-2025-0069)**

Dear Administrator Molinaro,

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) represents a \$93 billion industry that directly employs more than 430,000 people and supports millions of private-sector jobs. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to FTA's recent Request for Information (RFI) on ideas to improve the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program published in the Federal Register on August 19, 2025. APTA supports the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) commitment to streamline and enhance the CIG Policy Guidance. APTA and FTA have a long history of successful partnership and collaboration, and we look forward to continuing this important work together.

The CIG program is a critical financial resource for communities across the United States to implement the high-capacity, high-quality transit investments that safely and efficiently connect families to jobs, schools, healthcare, and economic opportunity. Our responses reflect APTA's commitment to preserving the integrity of the program while finding opportunities to streamline and simplify its complex and overly burdensome requirements. We stand ready to work with FTA in implementing improvements to the CIG program. Our responses to the questions posed in the RFI are as follows:

**1. Should FTA consider under the Economic Development and/or Land Use criterion ways to further capture population growth?**

FTA's Economic Development and Land Use criteria feature multiple measures and sub-measures; in the spirit of program streamlining, we offer that adding additional factors to the project evaluation and rating process is unfavorable unless it is necessary to accomplish policy goals. We believe that population growth in candidate CIG project corridors is well captured in the Economic Development criterion in that the quality and strength of local transit-oriented development plans and policies to promote, attract, and accommodate residential (as well as employment and economic) growth constitute two-thirds of the criterion's rating.

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Paul P. Skoutelas

1300 I Street NW | Suite 1200 East | Washington, DC 20005

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In addition to the Economic Development criterion, FTA permits CIG project sponsors to factor in adopted Metropolitan Planning Organization population growth estimates in the travel forecasts that inform three other project justification criteria (i.e., Mobility Improvements, Congestion Relief, and Cost Effectiveness). Thus, four of FTA's six CIG project justification criteria may be informed by population growth. As the Land Use criterion addresses *existing* development in CIG project corridors and FTA has proposed that the Environmental Benefits measure reflect *current* air quality conditions, we do not see an opportunity to incorporate growth measures in those criteria.

**2. Should FTA consider under the Economic Development and/or Land Use criterion ways to further capture transit-oriented development?**

APTA agrees that FTA should increase the weight given to transit-oriented development (TOD). The ability of CIG projects to successfully transform their surrounding land uses and leverage private investment is an important aspect of these public transit investments. This could be accomplished by elevating the specific Performance of Transit Supportive Plans and Policies evaluation sub-factor (which is currently one of five sub-factors under the Economic Development criterion's Performance *and Impacts* measure) to equal the weight of the other three existing measures (i.e., establishing four measures weighted 25 percent each). This weighting demonstrates the willingness of the private sector to leverage proposed CIG projects, and the actual success—rather than the intended outcome—of the policies in achieving meaningful TOD which benefit all station area populations.

**3. Should FTA consider under the Economic Development and/or Land Use criterion ways to capture opportunity zones as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development?**

APTA recommends that FTA capture opportunity zones within the Economic Development criterion. We believe that this would significantly contribute to aligning public investment in transit with private investment in opportunity zones. States designate opportunity zones in undercapitalized areas to attract investors, who receive tax credits for their investment. Leveraging these credited developments with high-capacity transit investments is a win-win proposition for opportunity zone residents and families. Opportunity zones are an important development tool that should be acknowledged and emphasized within the Economic Development criterion's Tools to Implement Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies sub-measure within the Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies measure. Opportunity zone investments may also be captured in the Performance of Policies and Potential Impact evaluation sub-factor. By linking the potential for federal transit investment with opportunity zones, states might consider the location of planned transit corridor improvements when they redesignate opportunity zones in 2027.

**4. How should FTA streamline and/or simplify the CIG process, consistent with statutory requirements?**

APTA is most appreciative of the opportunity to provide our recommendations for streamlining and simplifying the CIG process. We propose the following recommendations and measures:

- **Eliminate the Essential Services Land Use Measure.** The Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data (HIFLD) set, which serves as the source of data for the Essential Services measure in the Land Use criterion, was recently discontinued. The elimination of the measure's data source, coupled with its bias against service-poor transit corridor investments which are intended to feed a regional rail network where many such services are located, should—in the spirit of streamlining—warrant consideration of its elimination.
- **Warrant the Streamlined Financial Plan or Expedited Project Delivery Pilot Program for qualifying New Start and Core Capacity Projects.** FTA's financial plan requirements for New Start and Core Capacity projects are a significant undertaking on the part of project sponsors, and the review of these plans is a laborious and costly exercise for FTA. For projects where the Federal Government is a "minority investor" in their overall funding and financing, and which demonstrate that operating and maintenance costs would add less than five percent to the overall operations and maintenance costs of the transit system, FTA should reduce this mutual burden. FTA already has two sets of streamlined financial requirements: 1) the streamlined financial evaluation for projects under \$400 million in cost, and 2) the financial plan requirements that currently apply to Expedited Project Delivery Pilot Program projects. The application of either set of requirements or FTA development of alternative simplified financial plan requirements would significantly streamline the CIG financial planning and evaluation processes and bring them into line with the financial plan expectations for other large capital projects funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation.
- **Provide Blanket Pre-Award Authority upon Completion of NEPA and Medium Rating.** The process for development of a project sponsor's request for, and FTA review of, a Letter of No Prejudice (LONP) can take several months. This duration can lead to schedule delays (and associated cost increases). However, the risk of advancing any work covered under an LONP is solely the sponsors' risk. In the spirit of streamlining, APTA strongly encourages FTA to consider providing blanket pre-award authority upon 1) a project sponsor's receipt of a Record of Decision (ROD), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), or Categorical Exclusion (CE), and 2) achievement of a rating of Medium or higher against the CIG criteria, to ensure its eligibility for a future Capital Investment Grant. Such authority would provide project sponsors with the discretion and flexibility to accelerate their projects at *their* risk, or to more conservatively await FTA funding decisions.
- **Implement the Expedited Technical Capacity Review Process.** FTA's oversight of major capital projects is an acknowledged necessity but, as currently administered, it can be burdensome to grantees and time and resource intensive to FTA. Section 5309(c)(3) provides for "applicants that have recently and successfully completed at least one" New Start or Core Capacity project to qualify for an Expedited Technical Capacity (ETC) review. However, FTA has never formally implemented the ETC process. APTA recommends that FTA engage the industry through a subsequent RFI (or other engagement vehicle) to develop a) potential eligibility measures for application of the ETC process and b) potential parameters/contents of the actual review. This feedback would inform the development of a proposed ETC review process for inclusion in the next CIG Policy Guidance proposal, subject to industry review and comment before final adoption of the process.

- **Other Streamlined Project Management Oversight Observations.** To the extent FTA continues to set its' level of commitment for New Start and Core Capacity projects at the point of Engineering approval, the most critical period of Project Management Oversight (PMO) will be the readiness reviews and risk assessment supporting the Engineering request. After this time, the project sponsor is entirely responsible for any cost increases and schedule delays, reducing FTA's oversight commitment. APTA encourages FTA to consider how it might limit some of its' oversight activities upon project entry into Engineering, including, for example, eliminating the need for a "risk refresh" prior to a Full Funding Grant Agreement if a sponsor and its contractor have agreed to a guaranteed maximum price to deliver the project. APTA reminds FTA that its PMO regulations authorize the agency to not provide oversight for CIG projects under certain circumstances and FTA should consider developing measures for when and how that authority would be activated.
  - **Clarify and Standardize the Sequence of Steps/Requirements ("Roadmap") to Enter into Engineering and Execute a Grant.** APTA encourages FTA to include in its next CIG Policy Guidance a detailed explanation of not just the requirements for advancing projects into Engineering or to execute a grant, but the specific sequence of sponsor deliverables and FTA reviews for determining both the ratings and readiness for projects to advance. This approach would lead to a clearer, standardized process approach for both project sponsors and their FTA CIG Team Leaders and contribute to a more mutually beneficial dialogue leading up to project approval.
5. **How could FTA work with potential project sponsors to improve the rightsizing of projects and accuracy of operating plans developed to prepare the ridership projections for CIG projects?**

To help achieve better operating plans that can produce more reliable forecasts, we propose the following suggested actions. These will: (a) improve the realism of project service plans, and (b) better represent the existing transit network for use in Simplified Trips on Project Software (STOPS) model forecasts:

- **Standardize Better Model and Reporting Documentation (i.e., Forecast Basis of Estimate (BoE)).** Like Cost BoEs, require a Forecast BoE that documents: background service changes, run-time/reliability assumptions (signal priority, lanes), access assumptions (walk shed, PNR/KNR supply & pricing), TOD factors, transfer rules, vehicle capacities, fare policy, and land-use inputs. Use an FTA checklist to ensure comparability across projects.
- **Publish an FTA "Empirical Priors" Library.** Release reference ranges from Before-and-After studies (e.g., typical BRT/LRT achieved commercial speeds, dwell per door, TSP effects, stop spacing, elasticity to headway and travel time (if possible), fixed-guideway premium). Sponsors must justify variances outside these priors or reflect them as risk.
- **Background Network Transparency/Better GTFS.** The standard "idealized" General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) that feeds STOPS reflects scheduled times, but does not account for schedule adherence, on-time performance, and workforce constraints (e.g., operator and driver

shortages). Using GTFS that does not represent a service provider's actual performance risks distorting forecasts. To capture these variables, project sponsors should be able to modify or adapt the background service plan GTFS using simple tools. For example, GTFSEd is a free menu driven software developed by FTA that allows users to create and edit GTFS files for use in STOPS. A modification to this software or a similar tool could be developed to allow GTFS adjustments that help to create conservative, and optimistic service level scenarios, ensuring that model forecasts are based on a range of defensible assumptions about how service is delivered.

- **STOPS/Region Cross-Checks.** In addition to project sponsor runs, we recommend FTA produce a standardized STOPS run with the Service Envelope and FTA priors to flag outlier sensitivities.

### **Conclusion**

APTA looks forward to FTA's updated CIG policy proposal. Recognizing that many projects in the CIG pipeline have been subject to *most* of the existing criteria measures for several years, we respectfully request that FTA consider grandfathering such projects from any new measures adopted in future guidance.

APTA appreciates the opportunity to comment on this RFI. If you have questions regarding this letter, please contact Arthur Guzzetti, Vice President Mobility Initiatives and Public Policy, at (202) 309-5695 or [aguzzetti@apta.com](mailto:aguzzetti@apta.com), or contact Taria Barron, General Counsel, at (202) 496-4808, or [tbarron@apta.com](mailto:tbarron@apta.com). Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to continuing to work with FTA as it develops and implements the criteria.

Sincerely,



Paul P. Skoutelas  
President and CEO