

Air Quality

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement
(CMAQ) Program

MAP-21 - Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century

Revised Interim Guidance on CMAQ Operating Assistance under MAP-21

July 2014

Section 125 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Public Law 113-76) (2014 Appropriations Act), modified 23 U.S.C. 149(m) to eliminate any time limitation on the use of CMAQ funds for operating assistance for certain activities. This Revised Interim Guidance updates and supersedes Interim Guidance on CMAQ Operating Assistance issued in June 2013.

There are several general conditions for operating assistance eligibility under the CMAQ program (see the November 2013 CMAQ Program Interim Guidance for a complete discussion on CMAQ project eligibility requirements):

- a. Operating assistance is limited to start up operating costs for new transportation services or the incremental costs of expanding such services, including transit, commuter and intercity passenger rail services, intermodal facilities, and travel demand management strategies, including traffic operation centers.
- b. In using CMAQ funds for operating assistance, the intent is to help start up viable new transportation services that can demonstrate air quality benefits and eventually cover costs as much as possible. Other funding sources should supplement and ultimately replace CMAQ funds for operating assistance, as these projects no longer represent additional, net air quality benefits but have become part of the baseline transportation network. The provisions in 23 U.S.C. 116 place responsibilities for maintenance of transportation facilities on the States. Since facility maintenance is akin to operations, a time-limited period of CMAQ assistance provides adequate incentive and flexibility while not creating a pattern of excessive or even perpetual support.
- c. Operating assistance includes all costs of providing new transportation services, including, but not limited to, labor, fuel, administrative costs, and maintenance.
- d. When CMAQ funds are used for operating assistance, non-Federal share requirements still apply.
- e. With the focus on start-up, and recognizing the importance of flexibility in the timing of financial assistance, the 3 years of operating assistance allowable under the CMAQ program may now be spread over a longer period, for a total of up to 5 sequential years of support. Grantees who propose to use CMAQ funding for operating support may spread the third year amount (an amount not to exceed the greater of year 1 or 2) across an additional 2 years (i.e. years 4 and 5). This approach will provide an incremental, taper-down approach, while other funding is used for a higher proportion of the operating costs as needed. See Table 3 for examples of possible funding allocations. At the conclusion of the 5-year period, operating costs would have to be maintained with non-CMAQ funding. It is anticipated that this approach may enable a transition to more independent system operation. The amounts which apply to years 1 and/or 2 are established at the discretion of the State or local sponsor.

Table 3 - Example Allocations of CMAQ Funds for Operating Assistance

Example	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
A	\$300	\$300	\$200	\$50	\$50	\$900
B	300	300	100	100	100	900
C	100	400	200	100	100	900

Except as noted in paragraph (f) below, activities that already have received 3 years of operating assistance under prior authorizations of the CMAQ program are not considered to be in a start-up phase and are not eligible for new CMAQ operating assistance or the expanded assistance period.

- f. Section 125 of the 2014 Appropriations Act included changes to the Operating Assistance Section of the CMAQ program (23 USC 149(m)). The changes added new language that specifically prohibits the imposition of a time limitation for operating assistance eligibility on a system "for which CMAQ funding was made available, obligated or expended in fiscal year 2012." The phrase "made available" applies to projects designated for CMAQ operating assistance in statute, or to any commitment by the party that by law selects projects for operating assistance funding so long as it occurred during FY2012. There must be official documentation demonstrating that there was a specific commitment in FY 2012 to provide CMAQ funding for operating assistance for a particular project or service. Such official documentation could include a TIP or STIP, or other State or MPO official records. The specific project or service for which the CMAQ funds are being sought for operating assistance without a time limitation must be clearly identified in this documentation. Transportation services expressly eligible for CMAQ funding under SAFETEA-LU sections 1808(g)-(k) and certain provisions in previous appropriations acts are eligible to use CMAQ funds for operating assistance without time limitations. Consistent with Section IX of the CMAQ Program Interim Guidance, States retain the discretion to decide whether or not to fund the operating assistance.
- g. Elements of operating assistance prohibited by statute or regulation are not eligible for CMAQ participation, regardless of their emissions or congestion reduction potential.