

The "TIP": What it is and why you should care

The Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) updates the regional transportation improvement program, or "TIP," annually and makes changes (amendments) to the TIP throughout the year. You may have seen notices of requests for comments on amendments or the annual update and wondered what it's all about. Below we explain the "what" and "why" of the TIP to help put these requests for your feedback into context.

- 1. What is the TIP?** The TIP is a seven-year budget of transportation projects in Ada and Canyon Counties that expect federal or state funds and/or are "regionally significant." Essentially, it is a list of transportation projects with information on each project's budget. (A "regionally significant" project has a specific definition, but basically it is what it sounds like...a project that is big enough that it is significant to the region.) The TIP is based on the federal fiscal year, which runs from October 1 - September 30.

While it is a seven-year budget, COMPASS updates it yearly to add one year to the end. For example, the TIP adopted in 2020 covered fiscal years 2021 - 2027; the TIP adopted in 2019 covered fiscal years 2020 - 2026. The entire TIP does not change each year. New projects are added (usually to the last year) and old projects are completed and removed, but most projects simply move from one year to the next as they work their way to completion.

- 2. Why does it matter?** Transportation projects are expensive, time consuming, and often take years to plan and execute. Just as you would not decide how to pay for your child's freshman year of college without looking beyond that to future years, transportation agencies need to plan ahead to budget and schedule their funding to ensure all their "ducks are in a row" when it comes time to actually build a project. And...it's required. Federal funds cannot be spent on transportation projects without them being budgeted in an approved TIP (and/or the statewide equivalent).

- 3. Why does COMPASS ask for public comment?**

- A. These projects are being paid for using your tax dollars.
- B. The projects have the potential to affect you, your commute, and your quality of life.

You have a right and a responsibility to review how your tax dollars are proposed to be spent and to ask questions and share your agreement, or disagreement, with the projects selected. COMPASS staff considers all public comments, passes them along to the relevant agencies, and provides them to the COMPASS Board of Directors for consideration before any final decisions are made.

What's the TIP, anyway?



Think of it like a detailed, multi-year budget for your child's college education, with you, your child, and multiple sources of financial aid all contributing.

You need to track how much each aspect of college will cost (tuition, housing, fees, books, etc.), what each type of financial aid can and cannot be used for, and who is paying for how much of each item each year.



4. **When the annual TIP update is open for public comment, what should I comment on?**

While you can comment on any aspect of the TIP, it is the proposed projects themselves — or changes to projects already in the TIP — that have the most impact on you as an individual. Look at projects near where you live or work, or projects along your commute. Do you agree with what is proposed? Are there other projects, that aren't listed, that you think are more important? Keep in mind that the TIP is a budget — it tells you what projects have been proposed and their costs and sources of funding, along with a brief description that includes the location and year(s) the project would be built or purchased.

COMPASS also requests public comment on certain changes (amendments) to the TIP throughout the year. In those instances, COMPASS is looking for feedback specifically on those proposed changes. Changes may include adding projects, removing projects, or changing the scope of a project.

5. **Why is the TIP so hard to understand?** The TIP is designed to provide a lot of information — much of which is complicated even on its own. While some details may seem unnecessary to you, those details are important to someone else. For example, you may only care about the project description, while someone else may only care about the cost of the project, and a third person may only care about who is paying for it. The TIP provides all those details in one place.

6. **Are there tricks (or “TIPS”) to finding projects I’m interested in?** There are two quick things you can do to help you find projects you may be interested in.

A. **Search.** If you are looking at the document online (in PDF format), push the “Ctrl” key then “F” at the same time, to activate the “find” function. You’ll see a box appear in the upper right corner of your screen. Use this to type in key words to search for projects you care about. For example, if you want to know what is planned for Ustick Road, type in “Ustick” and click “next.”

B. **Use the “Major Changes” list.** This list — available during the annual public comment period — highlights projects that are new or removed, projects where the construction phase is advanced or delayed, and projects where the scope has changed significantly as compared to the current TIP. Many projects remain in the TIP for the full seven years of the budget (or longer). The “major changes” list helps you focus on what is new or changed by weeding out projects that are simply continuing on their multi-year tracks.

Want more help? More information on how to read and understand the TIP is available online at www.compassidaho.org/prodserv/transimprovement.htm. Or, contact COMPASS staff for assistance by calling 208/475-2238 or info@compassidaho.org.