

# Tracking State Transportation Dollars



**Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
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## **Acknowledgements**

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*Cover Images (clockwise, top left to bottom left): A two lane road in Alabama (source: Federal Highway Administration), the Manhattan Bridge as seen from Brooklyn (source: TSTC), Georgia's Woodbine Riverwalk (source: East Coast Greenway), Select Bus Service along New York City's First Avenue (source: TSTC).*

## Introduction

How are states spending transportation construction dollars? Are states prioritizing creating new roads or maintaining their existing roadway network? Are states implementing bicycle and pedestrian improvements or building new transit lines? How do states' investments in transportation projects compare to each other? In many states, basic answers to these questions are surprisingly hard to find.

Tri-State Transportation Campaign's 50-state analysis, *Tracking State Transportation Dollars*, begins to answer these questions so the public can better understand transportation priorities in their state. To do this, TSTC analyzed each state's statewide transportation improvement program (STIP, more about this document below), categorizing each project listed in the document into one of nine<sup>1</sup> categories:

- new road capacity,
- bridge capacity expansion,
- road maintenance/minor widening,
- bridge maintenance/replacement,
- road or bridge project with bicycle/pedestrian components,
- bicycle/pedestrian,
- safety,
- transit and,
- other.

By categorizing the projects in each statewide transportation improvement program, TSTC was able to identify each state's priorities. TSTC's analysis also allows insight into transportation investment on a national level.

Billions of taxpayers dollars are spent every year on transportation in the United States. The national government provides significant resources for transportation projects, but the federalist system gives substantial decision making power about road, bridge, transit, bicycle and

## Key Findings

- Transportation reporting documents are not uniform, and in many states, these documents are inaccessible and not transparent to the public.
- State departments of transportation tend to do a poor job of clearly explaining how transportation dollars are spent.
- On average, states are spending 20 percent of their federal transportation dollars (leveraged by state and local sources) on transit, 2 percent on bicycle/pedestrian projects, 39 percent on projects that maintain roads and bridges, and 23 percent on projects that add capacity to roads and bridges.
- More transparency increases public support of transportation projects.

## Other Sources of Funds for Transportation Projects

While federal funding makes up about 40 percent of all dollars available for surface transportation investment nationwide,<sup>2</sup> it is important to note that the statewide transportation improvement programs do not account for all transportation spending within a state. Many states use additional financing tools such as public-private partnerships, infrastructure banks, and toll authorities to fund transportation infrastructure. The projects funded by these methods do not have to be reported in a state's statewide transportation improvement program, though some states may choose to show these projects. If the state's STIP does not include projects funded by these methods, these projects are not included in the analysis.

pedestrian projects to state departments of transportation, governors, and state legislatures. Collectively, these decisions impact our country's climate, our economy, what our neighborhoods look like, and what kind of world we leave for our children.

Making smart transportation choices that embrace values such as accessibility, equity and environmental sustainability will be even more important moving forward. The economic recession has ravaged government, forcing policy makers at all levels to do more with less. The "baby boomer" population is aging, and more and more people, young and old, are choosing to live in cities. Energy prices continue to fluctuate and concerns over global warming and greenhouses gas emissions remain.

By outlining every state's planned near-term transportation investments, the *Tracking State Transportation Dollars* report and website ([trackstatedollars.org](http://trackstatedollars.org)) bring to light transportation investment choices in each state. While some state level groups closely examine their state's statewide transportation improvement program, TSTC's fifty state analysis provides the first national picture of the spending outlined in these documents. We hope this report allows the public to better engage in transportation debates and decision making going forward.

## **What is the STIP?**

The statewide transportation improvement program is a transportation planning document developed by each state's department of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations in the state. This document is generally a four year financial plan that lists all projects expected to be funded with federal dollars over the same period. The statewide transportation improvement program typically shows other contributions (state, local and private) put towards these projects as well. While many states have developed their own transportation planning documents in addition to the statewide transportation improvement program, the statewide transportation improvement program is the only short-term transportation planning document each state must produce for the federal government. Because the document shows planned transportation investment in the near future, it is a good marker of each state's transportation infrastructure spending priorities.

## **What the STIP Shows – and What it Doesn't**

Statewide transportation improvement programs are required by the federal government, but documents vary greatly from state to state. Some states may choose to show a longer time frame of projects; New Jersey's STIP shows 10 years of transportation projects, for example. In addition, while many of these documents include projects that are state, local, or privately funded, there is no requirement that the states disclose this information to the federal government.

Certain other projects may not show up on the document as well. States have several tools they can use to finance transportation projects, such as infrastructure banks and public authorities like the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Projects funded by these methods are not required to be reported in the statewide transportation improvement program,

and states may choose whether or not to include them.

Nonetheless, as a means of understanding the kinds of projects each state is pursuing, the statewide transportation improvement program is the best transportation blueprint available. In fact, it is one of the only tools that provides basic information to transportation advocates, policy makers and the general public. Recommendations offered at the end of this report suggest how to make this document a more standardized and transparent tool, helping to further clarify each state's transportation investments and to provide a better platform for state-to-state comparisons and national trends.

## Project Background, Highlights, and Trends

### *Project Background*

TSTC classified projects into a variety of categories, all of which are displayed on the website, **trackstatedollars.org**, and on each state's fact sheet. This section highlights four of the metrics most scrutinized by state level groups and individuals: percentage of spending on transit projects, percentage of spending on bicycle/pedestrian projects, percentage of spending on road and bridge maintenance projects (a combination of the two maintenance categories) and percentage of spending on new road and bridge capacity projects (a combination of the two new capacity categories). For all categories, less than 1 percent spending is approximated as .5 percent.

### *Transit Spending*

On average, states are spending **19.78** percent on their federal transportation dollars (leveraged by state and local sources) on transit investments. However, spending varies across this category greatly, from 74 percent of the statewide transportation improvement program to 1 percent. States that are spending a higher percentage of their statewide transportation improvement program on transit may be investing in a certain project or projects (such as Hawaii and Colorado) or may have extensive transit

### Tracking State Transportation Spending Online

An interactive website, **trackstatedollars.org**, has been created for this project. The website provides a map of the entire U.S. as well as individual state pages. State fact sheets that outline each state's transportation spending are available as one page downloadable PDFs.



New light rail cars for Denver-Aurora and Boulder metropolitan areas' FasTracks system. *Image: RTD FasTracks.*



Green bike lane and bike box along San Francisco's Market Street. Image: L.A. Eco-Village Blog.



Henry County, Route N over Honey Creek, part of Missouri's Safe and Sound bridge improvement project. Image: Missouri Department of Transportation.

systems that require extensive maintenance (such as New York and Illinois).

#### *Bicycle/Pedestrian Spending*

Spending on bicycle/pedestrian projects ranged from 5 percent of the statewide transportation improvement programs to less than 1 percent, with a national average of **2.01** percent of the programs.

#### *Road and Bridge Maintenance*

Combining road maintenance/minor widening projects with bridge maintenance/replacement projects shows that the national average for road and bridge maintenance spending is **38.52** percent of the statewide transportation improvement programs.

#### *New Road Capacity and Bridge Capacity Expansion*

On average, states are spending **22.49** percent of their statewide transportation improvement programs on projects that increase road and bridge capacity. States tend to spend much less on increasing capacity on bridges than on their roads, with many states spending less than 1 percent of their statewide transportation improvement program on bridge capacity expansion.

## **Description of Project Types**

TSTC used nine categories to identify each project in the statewide transportation improvement program.<sup>3</sup> The project types are listed below with some descriptions. TSTC's full methodology can be found in the Appendix.

- *New Road Capacity*: Road projects that add capacity, as well as interchanges that cost more than \$2 million during the years addressed by the statewide transportation improvement program and road relocation projects.
- *Bridge Capacity Expansion*: Bridge projects that add lane capacity.
- *Road Maintenance/Minor Widening*: Maintenance or repair work done to roads, such as repaving, also, the addition of shoulders, turn lanes, and intersection improvements.
- *Bridge Maintenance/ Replacement*: Maintenance, repair, replacement or rehabilitation work done to bridges.
- *Bicycle/Pedestrian*: Bike paths, sidewalks, trails, greenways, bicycle facilities, streetscape improvements, as well as projects funded by the Transportation Enhancements program.
- *Road/Bridge Projects with Bicycle/Pedestrian Components*: Road and bridge maintenance

and new capacity projects that include bicycle/pedestrian elements such as sidewalks and bike lanes.

- **Safety:** Projects categorized by state departments of transportation as “safety,” as well as signals, signing, guard rails and projects funded by the Highway Safety Improvement Program.
- **Transit:** Items identified as transit, high-speed passenger rail projects, ferries, and park and rides. Also programs that educate/encourage alternative transportation including car pooling. Transit spending includes federal funding for capital, administration and operations, along with state and local match necessary for these funds.
- **Other:** Items that are not directly related to a specific road, bridge or transit project including general planning funds, general studies, set-asides, consulting fees and unspecified mitigation costs. Beautification projects (unless funded by Transportation Enhancements), rest areas, administrative costs and building renovations are also included in this category. In addition, this category includes projects that did not fall into one of the eight other categories.



Work on the final segment of the Tenn. 85 outer loop highway around Memphis, Tennessee. *Image: The Commercial Appeal.*

## Recommendations

Though the statewide transportation improvement programs are public documents meant to be accessible to all, in many cases, these documents are very difficult to understand. In reviewing each state’s program, TSTC found that there were few similarities across the states. Some states provided clear project narratives, describing each planned investment, but many others provided little else beside road name, mile markers, and estimated project cost. Increasing the transparency and uniformity in each state will go a long way in helping state transportation agencies be more accountable to the people who are affected each day by the agencies’ decisions – the public. But transparency and accountability need not be a one way street; giving the public a better grasp on the state’s transportation investments has been shown to increase support of the agency’s work.<sup>4</sup>

## STIP Models

Some states and metropolitan planning organizations are noteworthy for the levels of transparency and clarity in their STIPs and transportation improvement programs (TIPs).

- New Hampshire provides a downloadable Microsoft Excel version of its statewide transportation improvement program on its website.
- Maryland and Delaware have detailed project descriptions.
- Massachusetts has a searchable project database which provides project information.
- The Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization’s online database provides easy-to-understand project information for each item as well as the ability to download its TIP in various formats (PDF, XLSX, CSV).

The recommendations below strive to increase uniformity, transparency and accountability in statewide transportation improvement programs across the country.

*Increase accessibility of STIPs and create a state DOT contact for all STIP questions*

Departments of transportation can promote transparency and accountability with their statewide transportation improvement program by making the document readily accessible on the state department of transportation’s website and by providing a contact person who is responsible for answering the public’s questions about the document. In addition to providing a searchable PDF with all the metropolitan planning organizations’ transportation improvement programs included in the statewide document, agencies can make the document available in a database form – for example, provide it as a downloadable Microsoft Excel file. The relevant person, persons, or bureau within the department of transportation responsible for managing the statewide transportation improvement program could be clearly identified on the website and within the document. Having a contact (or contacts) clearly identified will help direct the public should they have questions about the statewide transportation improvement program or projects within it.

**... transparency and accountability need not be a one way street; giving the public a better grasp on the state’s transportation investments has been shown to increase support of the agency’s work.<sup>4</sup>**

*Require uniform information and project categories in all STIPs*

TSTC recommends that every statewide transportation improvement program provide a minimum amount of project information and make use of uniform, clear project categories that non-transportation engineers can comprehend. Changing the reporting in this way would help the public better understand the department of transportation’s investments. Currently, explanations about transportation investments vary widely from state to state. A project identified as “adding lanes” in one state may be called “congestion relief” in another, “safety and mobility improvements” in another or not described at all in another. Uniform descriptions, categories, and financial information would facilitate cross-state comparisons, benefiting the federal government, which provides an estimated 40 percent of all dollars spent on surface transportation projects nationwide,<sup>1</sup> as well as the public.

*Include descriptions and costs of project components in STIPs*

TSTC recommends that all states provide project narratives and project component costs in their statewide transportation improvement program. Currently there is no requirement for departments of transportation to provide this information in their improvement program. Some states include project narratives but many do not. Without uniform project categories and without project descriptions, it is nearly impossible for the general public to understand the projects or types of projects its department of transportation is undertaking. Project narratives need not be lengthy for the public to get a handle on the project type. One or two sentences should be sufficient.

In addition to a project narrative that clarifies the project components, transportation



agencies should include costs for each project component. For example, for a road reconstruction project that adds sidewalks, a project narrative should include a break down of the road reconstruction cost and the cost of adding sidewalks, not an aggregate total. Not only would this information assist the public and advocates in understanding their transportation agency's spending priorities, it may also benefit the agencies. Including this information in the STIP would enable the agency to acknowledge bicycle and pedestrian improvements that may otherwise be hidden within a road or bridge project. The Alliance for Biking and Walking notes this problem in their *2012 Benchmarking Report*. The organization points out, "It is likely that bicycle and pedestrian spending is underreported when a larger road project has a bicycle or pedestrian component. Often, the entire project is coded as a highway project and therefore the state is not credited with spending the funds on bicycling and walking. This is becoming more of an issue for tracking and comparing spending by states with the rise in complete streets policies. With more states including bicycling and walking in all projects, it is increasingly difficult to track if states do not code the bike/pedestrian portions of the project."<sup>5</sup>

*Develop performance metrics for STIP projects*

The federal transportation law adopted in July 2012 directs states to incorporate performance measurements into both their long-range planning and their short-term planning. TSTC believes that these are good steps forward and recommends including performance metrics for each project in the statewide transportation improvement program. This would further increase transparency in these documents and in transportation planning. Including performance metrics in decision making is popular with citizens. A June 2012 report from the Eno Center for Transportation notes that "more than half of Americans believe that government should no longer use the public's money without detailing how transportation funding is spent."<sup>6</sup>

In a December 2010 report, the Government Accountability Office examines performance measurement in transportation investments and finds that current U.S. Department of

**Tri-State Recommends**

- *Increase accessibility of STIPs and create a state DOT contact for all STIP questions;*
- *Require uniform information and project categories in all STIPs;*
- *Include descriptions and costs of project components in STIPs;*
- *Develop performance metrics for STIP projects.*



Guardrail on the Haleakala Highway improved with energy-absorbing crash attenuator. Image: Hawaii Department of Transportation.

Transportation oversight of the statewide transportation improvement programs solely focuses on whether the document was created in accordance with federal statutes and planning regulations. Unlike some federal grant programs, such as the popular Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (the TIGER Discretionary Grant program), there are no specific requirements or goals that need to be met for a project to receive federal funding and no uniform methods of evaluating the success of each project. Despite this, some states already use forms of performance measurement in developing their statewide transportation improvement programs.<sup>7</sup> TSTC recommends that measurements be required for each project receiving federal funds. For example, if the goal of a road reconstruction project is to increase vehicular and pedestrian safety, the statewide transportation improvement program could note this and set a reasonable crash reduction goal. Similarly, if a transit project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the state should explain how the project will do this, and by how

**“The public is likely to gain confidence in transportation leaders when those leaders are seen as applying a methodical and objective approach to selecting projects.”<sup>9</sup>**

much it expects the project to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Adding performance measurements to the statewide transportation improvement program is beneficial to agencies for two reasons. First, performance measurements allow agencies to “track their

progress toward goals” and these measurements “give managers important information on which to base their organizational and management decisions.”<sup>8</sup> Second, as the Eno Center for Transportation’s report makes clear, measurements can be used to increase the public’s and elected officials’ support for increased transportation infrastructure investments. The report states, “the results from some states’ economic impact analyses were so compelling that they helped transportation agencies convince the public to invest even more in transportation. The public is likely to gain confidence in transportation leaders when those leaders are seen as applying a methodical and objective approach to selecting projects.”<sup>9</sup>

## **Conclusion**

TSTC hopes that the information in this report and on [trackstatedollars.org](http://trackstatedollars.org) will be used by local advocates and policy makers throughout the country to promote sustainable and equitable transportation policies and more balanced transportation investments. The two-year federal transportation law adopted in July 2012 provides stable funding for transportation projects, but does not include reforms that would make the transportation system more accountable, such as providing meaningful performance metrics, nor does it direct investment toward more environmentally sustainable or economically significant projects. Without federal guidance, it is up to local advocates and elected officials to urge their state departments of transportation to pursue forward-looking transportation policies and investments.

While each state clearly has different transportation spending priorities and needs, TSTC’s close examination of all fifty states’ STIPs makes apparent that the majority of these documents lack uniformity and transparency. More uniform and accessible transportation planning documents will be beneficial to all: state departments of transportation, elected officials, the federal government, advocacy organizations, and — most importantly — the taxpaying public.

## Appendix

### *Methodology in Full*

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign conducted a line-by-line analysis of each state’s statewide transportation improvement program for the most recent years available at the time of the analysis. TSTC categorized each project listed in the statewide transportation improvement program in one of the following nine categories: new road capacity, bridge capacity expansion, road minor widening/maintenance, bridge maintenance/replacement, bicycle/pedestrian, safety, road/bridge projects with bicycle/pedestrian components, transit, and other.<sup>1</sup> Projects were assigned a project category by examining the project descriptions in the statewide transportation improvement programs and transportation improvement programs, reviewing the state department of transportation’s website for additional information about the project, conducting online research, and reaching out to the state department of transportation, staff at the metropolitan planning organization involved with the project, or local organizations. TSTC confined its analysis to spending proposed during the statewide transportation improvement program years. Table One shows elements not included and included in the analysis.

**Table One**

<b>Not Included in Analysis</b>	<b>Included in Analysis</b>
Debt service payments	GARVEE-funded projects
Indian Reservation Roads and Bridges	ARRA-funded projects
Federal Lands Highways	State and local spending on projects not receiving federal funds (if included in document)
Aviation	Advance Construction <sup>10</sup>
Ports	Advance Construction Conversion <sup>10</sup>

### *Category Descriptions*

TSTC categorized each item on the statewide transportation improvement program to one of the following categories.<sup>1</sup>

*New Road Capacity:* Any road project that adds capacity (either a new lane or a new road), as well as interchanges that cost more than \$2 million during the years addressed by the statewide transportation improvement program and road relocation projects. Costs associated with adding capacity, including mitigation and planning fees for new road capacity projects are also included.

*Bridge Capacity Expansion:* Any bridge project that increases capacity by adding new lanes. Costs associated with adding capacity, including mitigation and planning fees for specific projects, are also included.

*Road Maintenance/Minor Widening:* Any maintenance or repair work done to a road, such as repaving, as well as any minor addition of pavement including shoulders, turn lanes, intersection improvements, and any interchanges that cost less than \$2 million (within the years addressed by the statewide transportation improvement program).

*Bridge Maintenance/ Replacement:* Any maintenance, repair, replacement or rehabilitation work done to a bridge.

*Bicycle/Pedestrian:* Bike paths, sidewalks, trails, greenways, bicycle facilities, streetscape improvements, and all items funded by Transportation Enhancements.<sup>11</sup>

*Road/Bridge Projects with Bicycle/Pedestrian Components:* Road and bridge maintenance and capacity expansion projects that include bicycle/pedestrian elements such as sidewalks and bike lanes. If a project was noted as having a bicycle/pedestrian component the entire project was placed in this category. To identify projects with bicycle/pedestrian components, Tri-State primarily used project descriptions provided in the statewide transportation improvement program. In addition, any projects identified by on-the-ground advocates, department of transportation employees or metropolitan planning organization employees as having bicycle/pedestrian components and any projects that further research showed to have these components were included in this category.

*Safety:* All projects categorized by state departments of transportation as “safety,” as well as signals, signing, guard rails and projects funded by the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

*Transit:* All items identified as transit, high speed passenger rail projects, ferries, and park and rides. Also programs that educate/encourage alternative transportation including car pooling. Federal funds as well as state and local match for these funds for capital, administration, and operating assistance is included in the analysis. State and local transit operating assistance (other than state and local match for federal transit operating funds) was taken out from the analysis.

*Other:* Items that are not directly related to a specific road, bridge or transit project including general planning funds, general studies, mitigation costs, set-asides, consulting fees. Beautification projects (unless funded by Transportation Enhancements), rest areas, administrative costs and building renovations are also included in this category. In addition, this category includes projects that did not fall into one of the eight other categories.

## Endnotes

1 Tri-State used these nine categories for almost all the states. However, in three states, the analysis strayed from these categories. In some cases, road and bridge projects were bundled together in the STIP. In order to classify these projects, Tri-State contacted the state's department of transportation to get information on the costs associated with each part of the project. Using this information, Tri-State split the project by the costs associated with each part. However, when information on the cost of the components was not available, Tri-State used information from the STIP to re-classify the "bundled" project into either a road or bridge category. The exceptions to this approach are Alaska and Connecticut. Alaska's Department of Transportation lumps some of its road and bridge projects together due to geographic concerns. Tri-State has left these projects as bundled together. Tri-State's earlier analysis of Connecticut's STIP did not distinguish between road and bridge capacity expansion projects or between road and bridge maintenance/minor widening/ replacement projects. In addition, because Washington State's Alaskan Viaduct project could not be classified as a road new capacity or road maintenance/replacement project, Tri-State left this project in its own category.

2 Norboge, Nicolas. "Better Use of Public Dollars: Economic Impact Analysis in Transportation Decision Making." Eno Center for Transportation. June 2012. <<http://www.enotrans.org/wp-content/uploads/wpsc/downloadables/Public-Dollars.pdf>>. (16.)

3 As noted in Endnote One, there are three state exceptions to these nine categories.

4 Norboge, Nicolas, 14.

5 *2012 Benchmarking Report*. Alliance for Biking and Walking, 82-84.

6 Norboge, Nicolas, 18.

7 "Statewide Transportation Planning: Opportunities Exist to Transition to Performance-Based Planning and Federal Oversight." U.S. Government Accountability Office. December 2010. <<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-77>>. (pg. 38-40.)

8 Ibid, pg. 48.

9 Norboge, Nicolas, 14.

10 Advance construction projects allow a state to spend state, local or private funds on a project that may be eligible to receive federal funding. When federal funds become available, these funds can be used for the project. The use of federal funds for advance construction projects is advance construction conversion.

11 In the forthcoming federal transportation law, Transportation Enhancements were eliminated. The Transportation Alternatives program, which includes projects formerly eligible for TE and other similar programs like Safe Routes to School, was created in its place.

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