**Draft Proceedings**

**Getting the Most out of the Transportation Alternatives Program**

**Minneapolis**

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**Introduction**

The 2012 transportation act, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century, or MAP-21, makes substantial changes to the federal funding stream for pedestrian and bicycle projects around the country. Among the changes: The new Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) combines previously separate programs, sub-allocates some state funding to MPOs, requires a competitive system for picking projects, and changes the entities that can apply for funding.

*Getting the Most out of the Transportation Alternatives Program*, an SSTI workshop for staff from Metropolitan Planning Organizations and state Departments of Transportation,

focused on ways that DOTs and their local partners can use the program to select, design, deliver and operate facilities that best advance pedestrian and bicycle mobility and access.

This document summarizes the discussion. While there was general consensus on the goal of the program and on general strategies, states and regions have varying needs and capacities, so some practices described here may not apply to all. Because the conversation was not-for-attribution, we do not cite individual speakers; if readers would like more information about the material or its source, they are invited to contact SSTI at staff@SSTI.us.

**Data-driven decision making and performance measures**

Performance measures and data for nonmotorized modes are not as well developed as those for motor vehicle travel and facilities. Yet there is a need for these measures. Collecting this data and generating better decision criteria will aid in communicating multimodal investment needs, at the project and system level, to the public and within agencies. MAP-21 does not mandate performance measures for TAP, so states and MPOs must take the lead in developing performance measures for bicycle and pedestrian modes. SSTI has agreed to address this concern in forthcoming research.

Sources of information for assessing projects and systems include:

* Bicycle and pedestrian counts. Even where facilities are non-existent or inadequate, some level of biking and walking gives an idea of latent demand. A national model for prioritizing retrofits on existing roads is being developed as an NCRHP report, due in May 2014.
* Crash and fatality data involving pedestrians and cyclists. Such data may help leverage additional federal support for bike and pedestrian facilities from the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP).
* Bicycle and pedestrian level of service ratings for roadway corridors and segments. This is an emerging field, but some agencies have already begun mapping and tracking LOS levels. Resources include [NCHRP Report 616 (2008)](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_616.pdf) and the current [Highway Capacity Manual (2010)](http://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/164718.aspx).
* Resident surveys to determine where there are unmet needs and concerns about safety.
* Analyses of network gaps, including those where no street now exists, e.g. between a neighborhood and a school, due to a barrier such as a stream or a disconnected street network.

At the project level, it is often useful to establish a pre-construction baseline (walkers, riders, crashes, etc.) and then collect the same data after the project is delivered. With this information agencies can continuously learn to make better project decisions, and they can demonstrate successes to stakeholders.

**Project selection**

Just because a project can be delivered or has a constituency does not necessarily make it one that serves a transportation need. Scoring criteria in project selection should include connectivity, safety improvements, and compatibility with a community’s long range transportation needs and aspirations.

It may be wise to prioritize projects based on project merits first and funding second. Completing analyses of priority projects will provide a good view of system needs. A funding package, including state, local and private sources outside of TAP, may be able to be assembled once projects are prioritized.

**Scenario planning, and modeling and visualization tools**

MAP-21 embraces scenario planning, which can avoid a problem with traditional four-step modeling: that of using land uses as static inputs rather than as variables, and can also elicit community insights in ways that conventional modeling cannot. Analytic and visualization tools can provide important assistance in doing scenario planning. For bike and pedestrian projects, however, these tools have been scarce. Traditional four-step models, based on transportation analysis zones, are not granular enough to evaluate projects at the typical scale of a bike-ped facility. However, tools that can drill down to the tax parcel level do exist. DelDOT’s [Land Use and Transportation Scenario Analysis and Microsimulation (LUTSAM)](http://www.ssti.us/2012/06/lutsam/)  is one such tool. It allows an agency to quickly alter both transportation facilities and land uses in various scenarios, then provides an animated visualization of transportation impacts, as well as projections on travel demand, mode choice, emissions and more.

**Intrastate funding allocation**

While some states are allowing entities in metro areas with their own TAP sub-allocation to apply for state-held TAP funds, others are not. The rationale for doing so is that larger metro areas use bike and pedestrian facilities most heavily. Reasons for not allowing those metro areas access to state-held funds are that there are good projects in smaller localities, and that spreading funding around a state helps build goodwill for continuing or growing the program.

**Additional funding for projects and repurposing TAP funds**

MAP-21 provides lowered support for nonmotorized transportation, forcing DOTs and MPOs to look to other sources of revenue:

* Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds may be used for bike-pedestrian and complete streets infrastructure, as well as for adult education programs, which are no longer covered in TAP.
* Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds may be used for multimodal infrastructure projects.
* Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds can be used for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Crash data to support applications for improvements are critical.
* State and local sources often provide support above and beyond federally required matches. For example, Pennsylvania has offered several rounds of competitive grants for community projects, many of them for nonmotorized travel. The Tennessee DOT has launched a new effort to provide technical assistance on local land use and transportation decisions to communities, in an attempt to foster reduced travel demand and congestion on state facilities. Washington DOT is considering a fund for competitive grants across all modes, including nonmotorized ones. And as described below, the Denver area is setting aside toll revenues from new HOT lanes, in part for bike and pedestrian facilities.

Some bicycle and pedestrian advocates have feared that state DOTs would repurpose their TAP funding. At least one agency participating in the workshop is doing so, but with the intent of advancing multimodalism in a different way – supporting complete streets development by moving TAP funds into the Surface Transportation Program.

**Safe Routes to School (SRTS)**

In creating TAP, MAP-21 combined SRTS with the former Transportation Enhancements infrastructure program, and reduced the overall funds available. The requirement that SRTS, with its education element, compete against hard infrastructure projects for TAP funding has created questions about how to judge such different projects. The requirement for a 20 percent match could prevent lower-income school districts from participating in the program. And the program no longer supports education programs for students in grades 9 – 12 or adults.

In an effort to continue the SRTS program and even the adult education component, states and MPOs are adopting some creative approaches:

* States may set aside a portion of their TAP allocation for SRTS.
* States with money remaining from SAFETEA-LU can use this money for education programs that are not allowed with MAP-21.
* Some states, such as Washington and Massachusetts, are supplementing SRTS with state dollars. These state funds can cover the 20 percent match and support both infrastructure and non-infrastructure programs. .
* Where safety concerns are being addressed by SRTS, it may be appropriate to use HSIP funds.

**Communicating about TAP and nonmotorized transportation**

While nonmotorized transportation projects have strong advocates in many areas – including among agency decision-makers – TAP remains small compared with highway and transit programs. The title of the former Enhancements program suggested something that was nice to have but not essential; “Alternatives” may not be much better. A goal would be to have nonmotorized programs be viewed as “Transportation Essentials.”

As a step in that direction, agencies can:

* Stop describing their work as a “highway” program – unless they are describing work related specifically to highways – and instead talk in a mode-neutral way about “transportation.”
* Make clear to stakeholders how transportation choice helps make the system more efficient, e.g. by allowing a commuter to park once and visit multiple destinations by another mode.
* Highlight livability and property value benefits from walkable, bikeable development and associated infrastructure.

**Corridor management**

Some agencies are employing a corridor management approach to foster multimodalism. For example:

* The Denver Regional Council of Governments’ plan calls for new automobile lanes in the MPO region to be high-occupancy toll lanes. To reduce congestion and provide transportation alternatives, some toll revenue from an upcoming HOT-lane project will be devoted to transportation demand management, transit improvements and bike-pedestrian facilities, such as parallel bike paths.
* Minnesota DOT’s Corridor Investment Management Strategy provides funding for bike-pedestrian projects in trunk highway corridors, if they improve quality of life, environmental health or economic competitiveness. MnDOT has provided significant funding for bicycle, pedestrian, and transit projects through this program.

**Roadway classification**

MAP-21 expanded the National Highway System (NHS) to include principal arterials. Many of these roads have segments that serve as main streets or major local links that would be amenable to bike-pedestrian facilities, perhaps through narrowing motor vehicle lanes. The NHS classification, however, may limit a community’s ability to make context-sensitive infrastructure improvements that increase multimodalism, livability, and generate local economic benefits. In response to this, some agencies are considering changing the functional classifications of these streets to take them out of the NHS and allow for more local control.

Washington DOT is considering reclassifying 500 miles of main streets in the state, providing more flexibility for its own planners and engineers to address local transportation needs.

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