



Advocacy **Advance**

a partnership of

Alliance
for
Biking & Walking

THE LEAGUE
OF AMERICAN BICYCLISTS

Transportation Alternatives Program Competitive Grant Processes: Examples of Regional Applications



This report is
produced in
collaboration with

the Safe Routes to School National
Partnership as a guide for Metropolitan
Planning Organizations' staff



Advocacy Advance MPO Working Group

Through the Advocacy Advance partnership, the League of American Bicyclists and Alliance for Biking & Walking convened a working group of Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) professionals to identify priorities and best practices and collected examples of good Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) applications.

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This working group recommended a project selection that is transparent and public, clear and measureable, and emphasizes transportation, mobility and several other priority areas.

For more MPO best practices see [How Metropolitan Planning Organizations Plan for and Fund Bicycling and Walking Investments](#).

For assistance in creating a Transportation Alternatives Program Handbook, see the [Program Manual Development](#) guide from the Transportation Alternatives Clearinghouse.

Executive Summary

For the first time, regional agencies that coordinate transportation in and around urban areas are responsible for distributing a portion of federal funds for local bicycling and walking projects under the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).

To date, some Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) have complied with the new law by setting up competitive grant processes. Others, however, have not yet established their applications.

This report — released on the first anniversary of the law that created the new funding mechanism — is intended as a guide for MPO staff setting up competitive grant process applications. The report spotlights example MPO applications that will help regional transportation staff evaluate potential projects for federal TAP funding.

This report also includes details on how MPOs can address the need for Safe Routes to School infrastructure and programming. This information is presented in collaboration with the Safe Routes to School National Partnership.

Bicycling and walking projects are an important part of any regional transportation system. When MPO staffers prioritize projects that improve walkability and bikeability, the agency helps to boost mobility for the region's most vulnerable residents — the elderly, the poor, and youth — who often lack access to a car. Bicycle and pedestrian improvements also help enhance mobility by giving residents a fuller suite of transportation options and by easing transit and automobile congestion at peak times.

To address these issues, MPOs around the country are establishing competitive grant applications that consider mobility, safety, intermodal connections, livability, equity, “fix it first” ideals and Safe Routes to School principles.

Advocacy Advance is a partnership of the [Alliance for Biking & Walking](#) and the [League of American Bicyclists](#) and is leading the effort to assist state, regional, and agency staff and nonprofit organizations in implementing bicycling and walking policies under the new transportation law.

This report is presented in collaboration with the [Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#), which is advancing safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in daily life, to improve the health and well-being of America's children and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities.

Images in this report are courtesy of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and the Alliance for Biking & Walking photo library.

Introduction

In previous transportation authorizations, bicycling and walking projects were funded under the Transportation Enhancements, Recreational Trails Program, and Safe Routes to School programs, all of which were administered by state departments of transportation. In the past, in order to apply for federal funding under any of these programs, a local government or nonprofit organization would typically apply directly to the state agency.



This process changed with the passage of the 2012 federal transportation law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). MAP-21 created the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which replaced the three separate active transportation programs, reduced funding amounts by a third and established new funding application procedures.

Rather than routing all funding applications through the state, MAP-21 requires that MPOs in areas with population over 200,000 establish a competitive grant process to distribute TAP dollars for local projects. This new process, called sub-allocation, pushes funding decision-making power for small projects closer to the local level.

Projects that improve safety for bicycling and walking are essential elements of any 21st century transportation improvement program. Biking, walking, and Safe Routes to Schools projects are the most effective use of Transportation Alternatives Program funding.

This document is intended to help MPOs that want to improve their transportation system's accessibility to biking and walking applications. The Federal Highway Administration has [directed MPOs](#) to Advocacy Advance resources such as this report.

Applications vary significantly in format, length, and complexity based on the capacity and needs of the MPO. This document refers to a dozen best practice examples of how existing MPO TAP applications handle common priority areas. The examples show how regions rely on both policies (i.e. setting aside a portion of the funds for particular activities) and the application itself (i.e. targeted questions with weighted points) to make progress towards their priorities.

Full applications are often lengthy, so this report excerpts relevant individual questions. MPOs currently developing their applications can draw from these excerpts and refer to the full applications listed at the end for full context.

In applications, questions are generally accompanied by a potential point value. Because the questions are out of context in this document, the point values have been replaced with X, except when it was necessary to retain for comprehension. Each MPO would need to weight the points according to regional priorities.

Because every metropolitan region is different, MPO staff may need to adapt these examples to their region's needs.

Among the regions that have already developed robust competitive processes, several common themes emerge:

- **Transportation & Mobility**
- **Safety**
- **Intermodal connection**
- **Quality of life**
- **Equity**
- **Fix it First**
- **Safe Routes to School**

This report explains each of these priority areas and provides examples of how MPOs have incorporated these themes into complete TAP applications. This report also includes a special section produced with the Safe Routes to School National Partnership that explains how MPOs can best work on Safe Routes to School issues.

Transportation & Mobility

Metropolitan Planning Organizations work to implement regional transportation solutions that improve the existing transportation network, make it easier for residents to get around, and provide safe access to destinations.

When an MPO chooses to fund projects that improve walkability and bikeability, the agency helps to boost mobility for the region's most vulnerable residents — the elderly, the poor, and youth — who often lack access to a car. Bicycle and pedestrian improvements also help enhance regional transportation and mobility by giving residents a fuller suite of transportation options and by easing transit and automobile congestion at peak times.

In order to prioritize TAP projects that improve mobility and transportation, MPOs may institute policies that describe how the agency will prioritize bicycling and walking projects for TAP funds. MPOs can also include questions about transparency and mobility in the competitive application process. This section highlights examples of both.



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) Chicago, IL

MPOs have the option to limit eligibility for TAP funding to bicycling and walking projects only. Citing limited funds and time constraints, staff at Chicago's MPO requested permission from their board to focus project eligibility on biking and walking projects:¹

The rationale for limiting project eligibility to bicycle and pedestrian projects is as follows. Since a relatively small amount of funding is available, a focused approach will maximize the program's impact. The eligibility of streetscaping, a major use of the previous Transportation Enhancement funds, has been eliminated as a stand-

¹ CMAP Letter to Board and MPO Policy Committee, June 5, 2013 http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/20583/1338130/MemoToCMAP_Board_re_TAP.pdf/fa952fa4-45b5-4cd9-834c-b1f9248337d6

alone project category under MAP-21. Furthermore, in view of CMAP's commitment to performance-based programming, it is important to develop performance measures and evaluation methods for other project categories. Given the limited funding, the effort required to develop these methods and measures would not be well-spent. By contrast, CMAP's evaluation methods for bicycle and pedestrian projects are already fairly evolved, although they will be reviewed and strengthened for use in TAP. Finally, under MAP-21, TAP funds are only available for three years after the funds are authorized, raising the importance of moving quickly to program the funds.

Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) Denver, CO

Denver's MPO reserves 100 percent of TAP funds for bicycling and walking projects. They supplement TAP with Surface Transportation Program Metro (STP-M) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) funds for a total allocation of \$36 million for bicycling and walking projects in the last funding cycle, accounting for 14 percent of total funds from the three programs.²

There are two phases to the TIP selection process (1st and 2nd phase). Funding targets are set by funding category in the 1st phase and makes up 75% of the total funding. In this phase, 100% of STP-E (now TA) funds were reserved for b/p projects. The second phase is where the remaining 25% of funds are allocated to projects and this phase is more subjective. Not only is the score considered in this phase, but criteria such as financial equity among counties, strategic corridors, GHG reduction potential, etc.³

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) Northwestern Indiana

The Northwestern Indiana MPO categorizes TAP applications into three funding target areas: pedestrian & bicycle projects, Safe Routes to School, and environment & historic projects. In order to ensure that transportation and mobility are emphasized, the MPO will allocate TAP funds according to certain proportions.

² Denver MPO (DRCOG) http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/TIP_Application_DRCOG_2012_Call_for_Projects_-_FINAL.xls

³ Email from DRCOG personnel

NIRPC will fund TAP applications according to following targets:

<i>Activity type</i>	<i>Share of total TAP funds</i>
<i>Pedestrian & Bicycle Projects</i>	<i>80%</i>
<i>Safe Routes to School</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Environment & Historic Projects</i>	<i>10%</i>

The NIRPC application uses a set of questions to identify projects that will have the greatest impact on the mobility of the most people. It prioritizes projects that enhance the regional transportation network by counting the number of parks and projects that are likely to have the most users. Predicted use is gauged by counting the number of schools, post offices, libraries, municipal buildings, high-priority trail corridors, and businesses within a mile of a proposed trail segment. In particular, it asks for the number of large employment centers and residential density nearby.⁴

Count all the following traffic generators that are WHOLLY or PARTIALLY contained within the trail corridor. List each traffic generator ONCE and IN ONLY ONE CATEGORY BELOW:

Parks: _____

Schools: _____

Post Offices: _____

Public Libraries: _____

Other municipal buildings such as town/city hall and other buildings involved in public businesses: _____

Existing or funded Regional Priority Trail Corridors: _____

Are there 20 or more retail business within the trail band? No = 0 / Yes = 1

⁴ Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/2013_TAP_Pedestrian__Bicycle_Projects.pdf

CONTIGUOUS THREE-BLOCK AREA: *Is there a contiguous 3-block area partially or wholly within the band that contains a group of workplaces that collectively employ 250+ employees?*

- *Locate all workplaces within the chosen trail band (1 mile or 1/2 mile)*
- *Determine the number of employees at each workplace (best guess)*

Is the AVERAGE RESIDENTIAL DENSITY *within the band at least TWO dwelling units per acre?*

- *Determine the number of existing dwelling units within the chosen band.*
- *Determine the total area within the band-width and convert the area to acres.*
- *Divide them to determine the residential density in the band. Show all work.*

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Washington, DC

Describe how the project addresses the Transportation Planning Board's goal of broadening regional mobility choices and improving the accessibility of transportation facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-drivers.⁵

Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) Kansas City, MO and KS

Describe how the project is transportation related and how it relates to the inter-modal transportation system. Describe how this project enhances the transportation system — complements other work, provides linkages to other modes of transportation. Please indicate how the project meets the requirement for function, proximity, or impact.

Definitions: Function- has a functional relationship to the transportation system; Proximity- is adjacent to or is in close proximity to the transportation system; Impact — impacts the transportation system⁶

⁵ Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Washington, DC <http://www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/tlc/tap/pdf/TAP-TPB-Application.pdf>

⁶ Mid-America Regional Council, Kansas City region www.marc.org/transportation/enhancements/

Knoxville Regional Transportation Organization Knoxville, TN

Question #: *Improving active transportation choices (X points)*

*How well does the project/program improve people's ability to use active transportation (walking and bicycling) for everyday activities, such as traveling to work or school, shopping and socializing?*⁷

7 Knoxville Regional Transportation Organization

Safety

Improving the safety of our transportation network is a major priority of the U.S. Department of Transportation, state departments of transportation, and MPOs across the country. When assessing applications for TAP dollars, MPOs face a unique opportunity to improve traffic safety for the most vulnerable road users — residents traveling on foot and by bicycle.

MPOs can design the TAP application process to determine which projects would help make streets safer for everyone, regardless of whether they choose to walk, bike, drive, or take transit. Over the past 50 years, most roadways have been designed primarily for safer automobile and truck travel, which can make streets less safe for pedestrians and bicyclists. People who do not drive or have access to private vehicles are disproportionately represented in traffic fatalities. Improvements like bike lanes and paths, wide sidewalks, safe crosswalks, and multi-use paths can go a long way towards making streets safer for everybody.

TAP application questions can vary in form. Some agencies ask for general answer boxes, while others perform a more quantitative analysis.



Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Washington, DC

Describe how the project makes the region's transportation facilities safer and less intimidating for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-drivers.⁸

Memphis Urban Area MPO Memphis, TN

Safety and Security (X pts):

Please provide answers to the following questions regarding improvements to the safety and security of current and potential users of the project.

⁸ Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments <http://www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/tlc/tap/pdf/TAP-TPB-Application.pdf>

Please provide the number of accidents along the project corridor for all road users including automobile, pedestrian, and bicyclists. This data will be used to determine an accident rate, normalized by the length of the project. (Up to X points)

Does the project address a location with a history of accidents resulting in an incapacitating injury or fatality of a pedestrian or bicyclist? (X points) If yes, please list the date and location of the fatal accidents.

Does the project incorporate any of the following traffic calming and design improvements? (Up to X points) If yes, please describe the traffic calming and design improvements included in the project scope.

Please describe any traffic calming and design improvements included in the project scope.

*Does the project incorporate any security improvements? Describe.*⁹

⁹ Memphis Urban Area MPO <http://www.memphismpo.org/sites/default/files/public/070113%20TAP%20Application%20Saveable.pdf>

Intermodal connection

Metropolitan planners are increasingly aware of the importance of “first and last mile” connections to transit — the connections between transit facilities and infrastructure for bicycling and walking. An MPO that provides smooth connections between modes helps the whole transportation system become more integrated and efficient.

Providing safe and comfortable routes for people on foot and on bike near transit brings a larger pool of potential customers to transit agencies. TAP projects that improve accessibility and safety for walkers and bicyclists in and around transit areas can help make transit stations more inviting for riders and can ensure that transit stops are designed and constructed to provide safe access for all users.

Recognizing the benefits of multimodal travel, regions often include questions about intermodal connections in their TAP applications.



Atlanta Regional Commission Atlanta, GA

The Atlanta MPO’s application emphasizes transit and station area access projects *“that provide safe and convenient access to regional transit systems, including rail stations, express or local bus routes, and first-mile and last-mile connectivity to the regional transit network.”*¹⁰

Memphis Urban Area MPO Memphis, TN

Multimodal (X pts):

Please provide answers to the following questions regarding improvements to multimodal transportation options included in the scope of the project.

¹⁰ [http://documents.atlantaregional.com/tcc/tap/Letter%20of%20Interest%20Form%20Guidance%20\(May%202013\).pdf](http://documents.atlantaregional.com/tcc/tap/Letter%20of%20Interest%20Form%20Guidance%20(May%202013).pdf)

*Does the project incorporate any of the following bicycle-related improvements?
(Up to X points)*

- ☐ *Cycle Track or Shared-Use Path*
- ☐ *Signed and Painted Bike Lanes*
- ☐ *Shared Roadway or Paved Shoulder*
- ☐ *Wayfinding, Bike Racks, or other End of Trip Facilities*

*Does the project incorporate any of the following bicycle-related improvements?
(Up to X points)*

- ☐ *Sidewalks, Curb Ramps, or Shared-Use Path*
- ☐ *Pedestrian Signal Heads and Push Buttons*
- ☐ *Marked Crosswalks*
- ☐ *Wayfinding, Furniture or Other End of Trip Facilities*

*Does the project incorporate improvements to existing or proposed transit routes?
(X points) Describe.¹¹*

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Washington, DC

As a regional policy, the Transportation Policy Board seeks to promote the development of transportation alternatives in "Regional Activity Centers." Is any portion of the project located within a Regional Activity Center?

Is the project located within 3/4 miles of a Metrorail (existing or under construction) or commuter rail station?

Describe how the project creates links for users to transit and/or employment, and how the project fills a gap in existing non-automobile transportation infrastructure.¹²

¹¹ Memphis Urban Area MPO <http://www.memphismpo.org/sites/default/files/public/070113%20TAP%20Application%20Saveable.pdf>

¹² <http://www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/tlc/tap/pdf/TAP-TPB-Application.pdf>

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) Northwestern Indiana

Intermodal Connection. Points will be awarded in this category for projects that have certain characteristics that will either encourage intermodal connections to the trail or provide trail head parking. The points in this category are awarded based on the overall Regional Trail Corridor that the project is contained within or connects to.

Intermodal Connection (X Points Maximum + Bonus)

Choose **ONLY ONE** of the following statements:

A. The community has an existing transit, **FIXED ROUTE** system **AND** the trail project is either within 1/2 mile of a bus/rail stop that has secure bicycle storage facilities; **OR** it is on a transit route served by passenger vehicles w/bike storage and bike facilities. Attach documentation. _____ (X Points)

B. The community doesn't have a transit system **BUT** the project **creates** trail head parking **EXCLUSIVE** for the trail (minimum 5 paved parking bays). _____ (X Points)

BONUS: Every additional 5-car paved parking lot **EXCLUSIVE** for the trail - maximum two additional locations.

Number of locations _____ X 2 = _____ (X points max.)¹³

¹³ http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/2013_TAP_Pedestrian__Bicycle_Projects.pdf

Quality of Life & Land Use

Improving regional transportation with projects that help people travel from A to B in the most pleasant way can go a long way towards improving livability and quality of life. In designing application processes for TAP funds, MPOs are in a unique position to evaluate potential local projects based on their potential to boost livability.



Building well-connected street networks and facilities for bicycling and walking provides more transportation options and convenient access to daily activities, which can create more vibrant neighborhoods. People flock to walkable and bikeable neighborhoods: Homes in communities with compact development and active transportation choices tend to better retain value. Biking and walking projects can boost regional quality of life and livability.

MPO applications include a variety of questions to evaluate a potential project's ability to boost livability and quality of life.

Knoxville Regional Planning Organization Knoxville, TN

LAND USES WITHIN ¼ MILE OF FACILITY Below, check boxes to indicate if these land uses are present within ¼ mile of your proposed bike/ped project. ("Yes" "No" "Some")

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ☐ Public Park | ☐ Employment |
| ☐ School | ☐ Residential |
| ☐ Library | ☐ Retail |
| ☐ Transit Stop | ☐ Other: |

Check "Yes, No, or Some" to indicate if there will be a direct Bike/Ped connection between your proposed facility and these land uses. If "Some," please expand on the Notes page.¹⁴

¹⁴ Knoxville Regional Transportation Organization

Memphis Urban Area MPO Memphis, TN

<i>Is the project located within identified proximity of the listed land uses? Improvement</i>	Pedestrian Users (½ mile buffer)	Bicycle Users (3 mile buffer)
<i>Schools or Colleges</i>		
<i>Parks</i>		
<i>Retail Centers</i>		
<i>Employment Centers</i>		
<i>Transit Routes ¹</i>		

Model Grant Application: Transportation for America has crafted a model application to promote livability, quality of life, and equity. A sample Transportation Alternatives Program Competitive Grant Application, Project Scoring Criteria, and Project Scoring Sheet can be found at www.advocacyadvance.org/MAP21.¹⁵

¹⁵ Transportation for America, www.T4America.org

Equity

Access to affordable and reliable transportation options widens economic opportunities and can help address poverty, unemployment, and access to schools and health care services. By prioritizing projects that most benefit underserved communities, MPOs can make regional transportation systems more equitable.

Bicycling and walking are often the most available transportation options for metropolitan areas' most economically vulnerable populations. Ensuring safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle facilities can help increase low-income communities' access to economic opportunities, contributing to a region's overall economic health and equality.

In TAP applications, regional transportation agencies are making concerted efforts to support transportation options for disadvantaged communities.



Knoxville Regional Transportation Organization Knoxville, TN

The Knoxville MPO addresses equity issues by targeting resources to “communities of concern.”

Communities of Concern are those places with a high concentration of people meeting certain characteristics based on Census data, including: seniors, those living in households with no motor vehicles, people with disabilities, racial minorities, and people living in poverty. People living in these communities are more likely to have health problems and are more dependent on transit, walking and bicycling for transportation.

Serving Communities of Concern (X points)

Does the project/program serve residents of the Communities of Concern within the TPO urbanized area? (A map of the Communities of Concern can be accessed from the TPO's web page at www.knoxtrans.org.)¹⁶ (See definition above.)

¹⁶ Knoxville Regional Transportation Organization, www.knoxtrans.org

Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) Kansas City, MO and KS

Mid-America Regional Commission addresses equity through Environmental Justice areas. Environmental justice principles require transportation decisions “to avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.”

Does this project improve access for environmental justice tracts? ([View Map](#)) If so, indicate how.¹⁷

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission Northwestern Indiana

Enhances the Access of Environmental Justice (EJ) Areas (X Points Maximum)

Choose ONLY ONE of the following:

A. *50% or more of the project is within an EJ area: _____ (X Points)*

B. *The project touches an EJ area or up to 49% of the project is within an EJ area: _____ (X Points) ¹⁸*

¹⁷ Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), Kansas City, <http://www.marc.org/transportation/enhancements/>

¹⁸ http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/2013_TAP_Pedestrian__Bicycle_Projects.pdf

Safe Routes to School

The Safe Routes to School program emphasizes a comprehensive approach to improve safety and increase walking and bicycling to school, through infrastructure improvements (such as sidewalks, crosswalks, school zone signage and traffic calming) and non-infrastructure programming (such as teaching children traffic safety skills, ensuring that motorists are driving safely around schools, walking school buses and more). The availability of Safe Routes to School funding has galvanized a focus on prioritizing safety improvements around schools, resulting in improvements for traffic congestion, busing costs and physical activity. A recent [Pediatrics study](#) found that in areas with Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements, the rate of injuries for school-aged pedestrians during school travel hours decreased 44 percent, compared to no change in areas without Safe Routes to School improvements.¹⁹



Prioritization of Funding

MPOs are encouraged to prioritize Safe Routes to School projects in their TAP application process. As mentioned earlier in this document, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) has set aside 10 percent of their TAP funding for Safe Routes to School projects. The Atlanta Regional Commission defines Safe Routes to Schools as one of their priorities: “projects that provide safe and convenient access to elementary and middle school locations within the Atlanta region; projects that complement education, outreach, and planning efforts at school sites.”²⁰

Application Models

From 2005 to 2012, the federal Safe Routes to School program was operated by most states as a state DOT-run competitive award process. Most MPOs are familiar with the concepts of Safe Routes to School but in most states had little involvement in the application or selection processes. Because of this, there is a dearth of examples of how MPOs are handling Safe Routes to School in their TAP

19 DiMaggio, Charles and Li Guoha. “Effectiveness of a Safe Routes to School Program in Preventing School-Aged Pedestrian Injury.” *Pediatrics* 131(February 2013): 290-296.

20 [http://documents.atlantaregional.com/tcc/tap/Letter%20of%20Interest%20Form%20Guidance%20\(May%202013\).pdf](http://documents.atlantaregional.com/tcc/tap/Letter%20of%20Interest%20Form%20Guidance%20(May%202013).pdf)

applications. It is helpful instead to turn to state DOT Safe Routes to School applications for examples of concepts and information that MPOs can address and collect through their TAP applications.

There are two potential approaches for MPOs to incorporate Safe Routes to School projects into their applications. In one approach, the MPO could seek to weave Safe Routes to School concepts into application questions. For example, as cited earlier in the Quality of Life and Land Use section, the Memphis Urban Area MPO asks applicants to indicate whether their projects are in close proximity to schools. The examples cited in the Safety section from Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the Memphis Urban Area MPO are also clearly applicable to Safe Routes to School projects.

Another approach would be for the MPO to provide a checkbox to indicate whether a project is a Safe Routes to School project, and if so, to answer questions specific to Safe Routes to School. In Michigan, the states and MPOs have agreed to use a common application for TAP. Those interested in submitting Safe Routes to School projects are required to submit additional information specific to Safe Routes to School.

Scoring

Regardless of whether the MPO chooses to integrate Safe Routes to School into other questions or to create a specific section for Safe Routes to School, it is important to ensure that the scoring processes used by the MPO addresses the unique aspects of Safe Routes to School projects. In particular, this is the only type of TAP project in which non-infrastructure programming is eligible, which could be disadvantaged by a scoring system that is entirely tailored to infrastructure.

For example, the **state of Michigan** identifies a range of competitiveness factors²¹ for Safe Routes to School, including:

- ☐ Safe Routes to School activities that are reflective of an action plan and show a balanced approach between infrastructure and non-infrastructure
- ☐ Demonstrates a strong user base who will utilize the infrastructure

The **state of Ohio** has 12 separate factors and criteria²² on which they evaluate Safe Routes to School applications, including:

- ☐ Percentage of K-8 students attending the school who are expected to benefit

²¹ <http://saferoutesmichigan.org/applicationssubmit>

²² <http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Planning/SPPM/MajorPrograms/SafeRoutes/Documents/2013ApplicationGuidance.pdf>

from the countermeasure (Note that for Ohio, countermeasure means either infrastructure or a non-infrastructure program)

- ☐ Proximity of the proposed countermeasure to a bicycle or pedestrian crash that has occurred within the past 3 years
- ☐ Percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged
- ☐ Percentage of students attending the school who live within two miles of the school

It is also helpful to ensure that the TAP selection committee includes a representative familiar with Safe Routes to School.

Key Concepts and Information

Because states have been running Safe Routes to School competitive processes for many years, there are good models for the type of information that are helpful to collect to effectively evaluate and select Safe Routes to School projects. Below are key concepts along with examples of how related questions are worded on Safe Routes to School applications. Two of these states, Florida and Michigan, were selected because the MPOs have agreed to use the state application form to solicit Safe Routes to School projects. A third, Ohio, is highlighted because of the simplicity of the application form and the support the state provides to applicants.



Data Collection

Over the past several years, the National Center for Safe Routes to School has created [standardized data collection tools](#) to measure parent perceptions about walking and bicycling to school (parent survey) and an in-classroom tally to determine the current ways in which students get to school. Many state DOTs require applicants to submit the results from a parent survey and in-classroom tallies to serve as a baseline, before intervention, and to submit the results from surveys and tallies after the project is completed (or annually for longer projects) to demonstrate whether the project is having an impact.

- ☐ **Florida:** Requires applicants to submit travel in-classroom tally results and to commit to conduct the tally after the project is completed

- ☐ **Michigan:** Requires applicants to submit travel in-classroom tally results and a commitment to conduct evaluation after the project is completed
- ☐ **Ohio:** Requires applicants to submit a summary of the most recent standardized data collection for the target schools

Potential Benefit

Safe Routes to School projects can have different types of benefits, depending on the type of project. It can increase the number of children walking or bicycling to school, it can improve safety, and it can even reduce busing costs. But these potential benefits and effectiveness of a project can only be assessed during the project selection process if applicants are asked to supply pertinent information.

Florida:

- ☐ If the proposed project has been identified as a priority in a Bicycle/Pedestrian or other Plan or is a missing link in a pedestrian or bicycle system, please explain.
- ☐ Describe if this project is an opportunity to resolve a documented hazardous walking condition and eliminate the resultant school busing. Include a discussion of public support for the project if busing were eliminated.
- ☐ Explain the number of children living near the school and how this relates to the anticipated success of the project.
- ☐ Provide the number of students from the affected schools that live along the proposed route, the number of children currently walking or biking this route, and the number of children who could walk or bike along the proposed route after improvements.
- ☐ Provide 5 years of crash data for the project location. If not available or not included, please explain why not.

Michigan:

- ☐ Requires applicants to submit a map of the school enrollment area with student homes plotted to show potential number of students affected by the program or improvement (the state provides assistance for how to do this)

Ohio:

- ☐ Provide the percentage of K-8 students attending the school who are expected to benefit once the proposed countermeasure is implemented
- ☐ Is the proposed countermeasure near a bicycle or pedestrian crash that has

occurred within the past 3 years? (Note that the state provides an [online system](#) to search crashes to make this question easier to answer).

- ☐ For infrastructure projects, requires submission of a map showing the location of proposed project, overlaid on a map showing the 2-mile radius around the school. (Note that the state creates these [radius maps](#) for schools upon request.)

School and Neighborhood Engagement

As the applicants for Safe Routes to School projects are often the local government, it can be helpful to ensure that the affected school(s) is supportive of the project. It can also head off potential problems down the road with infrastructure projects to ensure that the neighborhood has been engaged.

Florida:

- ☐ Has a school-based SRTS committee (including school representation been formed)? Has at least one meeting of this committee been held?
- ☐ What neighborhood association or other neighborhood meetings have been held to inform neighbors directly affected by this proposed project and the reaction?
- ☐ What PTA/PTO/school meetings have been held to inform parents and school staff about this project and the reaction?
- ☐ Applicants are allowed to submit up to six unique support letters from groups or individuals

Michigan:

- ☐ Requires applicants to submit a support letter from the principal of the affected school

Ohio:

- ☐ Requires submission of a copy of an ordinance or resolution from the jurisdiction and school board to show support for the project
- ☐ Requires submission of the minutes and date of the last Safe Routes to School committee meeting

Equity

Lower-income schools often have higher rates of walking and bicycling to school out of necessity. Yet, those communities often have fewer sidewalks and crosswalks plus high-speed traffic,²³ which results in a higher risk of children from low-

23 Zhu, Xuemei and Chanam Lee. "Walkability and safety around elementary schools: Economic and ethnic disparities." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 34 (January 2008): 282-290.

er-income families being injured or killed when walking.²⁴ Prioritizing improvements in low-income areas can often result in safety benefits for a larger number of children.

Florida:

- ☐ How do the demographics of the school population relate to the anticipated success of the proposed SRTS project? For instance, is there a population of students near the school from a culture which traditionally walks a lot?
- ☐ Provide the percent of free or reduced lunch program students at the affected school.

Ohio:

- ☐ Provide the percent of students at the target school classified by the Ohio Department of Education school report card as economically disadvantaged.
- ☐ Is the percentage of students with disabilities at the school closed to the project above 15% (which is the state average)?

Community Connections

When creating safe routes between homes and schools, the infrastructure created is likely to be even more beneficial if it also provides connections to other destinations that children and families use, such as parks, pools, after-school facilities, libraries and more.

Florida:

- ☐ Discuss the project's proximity (within 2 miles) to other facilities which might also benefit from the project, such as other schools or colleges, parks, playgrounds, libraries or other pedestrian destinations.

Referenced applications:

[Florida Safe Routes to School Infrastructure Application](#)
[Florida Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Application](#)
[Michigan Safe Routes to School Application Instructions](#)
[Ohio Safe Routes to School Infrastructure Application](#)
[Ohio Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Application](#)

²⁴ Macpherson, Alison, Ian Roberts and Barry Pless. "Children's exposure to traffic and pedestrian injuries." *American Journal of Public Health* 88 (December 1998).

Conclusion

Good Transportation Alternatives Program projects, selected through a thoughtful approval process, bring many benefits to regions, especially when projects improve a region's active transportation network to build more complete, safe, equitable transportation environments.

The 2012 transportation law's Transportation Alternatives Program provides a new chance for Metropolitan Planning Organizations to shape regions' active transportation environments. In designing applications for their MPO's TAP competitive grant processes, regional planning staff have an opportunity to express the region's transportation priorities and diversify transportation networks at the local level.

From boosting mobility and providing intermodal connections to increasing safety and addressing equity, active transportation projects are effective ways for MPOs to enrich local and regional travel.



Cited TAP Application Examples

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC): http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/2013_TAP_Pedestrian__Bicycle_Projects.pdf

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP): http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/20583/1338130/MemoToCMAP_Board_re_TAP.pdf/fa952fa4-45b5-4cd9-834c-b1f9248337d6

Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), Kansas City, MO: <http://www.marc.org/transportation/enhancements/>

Washington, DC National Capitol Region: <http://www.mwcog.org/transportation/activities/tlc/tap/pdf/TAP-TPB-Application.pdf>

Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC): [http://documents.atlantaregional.com/tcc/tap/Letter%20of%20Interest%20Form%20Guidance%20\(May%202013\).pdf](http://documents.atlantaregional.com/tcc/tap/Letter%20of%20Interest%20Form%20Guidance%20(May%202013).pdf)

Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization: http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/Knoxville_TPO_TAP_application.pdf

Memphis Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): <http://www.memphismpo.org/sites/default/files/public/070113%20TAP%20Application%20Saveable.pdf>

Additional Resources and Models

How Metropolitan Planning Organizations Plan for and Fund Bicycling and Walking Investments (Advocacy Advance): http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/MPO_BikePed_Best_Practices_Final.pdf

Transportation Alternatives Program Q&A, Knoxville Regional TPO: http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/TAP_QA.pdf

Transportation for America Models:

[Sample Transportation Alternatives Program Competitive Grant Application](#)

[Project Scoring Criteria](#)

[Project Scoring Sheet](#)

National Transportation Alternatives Clearinghouse

[Transportation Alternatives Program Manual Development Guide](#)

http://wwwcf.fhwa.dot.gov/exit.cfm?link=http://www.ta-clearinghouse.info/action/document/download?document_id=30

Chicago Metropolitan Planning Agency: Call for Projects

<http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/transportation-alternatives>