



Safe Routes
to School
**National
Partnership**



American
Heart
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Voices for Healthy Kids
Action Center



Using the Transportation Alternatives Program to Improve Safety and Health in Your Local Community

Many local communities are eager to use transportation funding streams to create safe streets for people walking and bicycling and increase access to schools, parks, playgrounds, walking and biking paths, and other opportunities for physical activity.

However, because Congress has passed two federal transportation laws in the past four years that made changes in accessing funding to support healthy modes of getting around, it can be confusing to know where to start. This factsheet helps communities understand how to use the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) to support healthy community design and active transportation.

With more than 62 percent of adolescents not meeting the recommended daily level of physical activity¹ (60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day²), Safe Routes to School, bicycling, and walking initiatives can contribute significantly to nationwide efforts to reduce childhood obesity and improve the long-term health and overall well-being of children and their families. This is especially true in lower-income communities and predominantly Latino or African-American neighborhoods, where walking and bicycling infrastructure is less available and fewer resources exist for play and exercise.^{3, 4, 5} TAP provides a funding stream to support healthier communities around the country.

What is the Transportation Alternatives Program?

The Transportation Alternatives Program (now also known as the STP Set-Aside) is the major federal source of transportation funding for bicycling, walking and Safe Routes to School projects. TAP funds sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and trail infrastructure, as well as Safe Routes to School programming, around the nation.

TAP was created in June 2012, when Congress passed a reauthorization of federal transportation law called MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century). MAP-21 combined the former Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancements, and Recreational Trails programs into a new program called the Transportation Alternatives Program, or TAP. In December 2015, Congress made some additional modifications to TAP with the passage of the FAST Act (Fixing America's Surface Transportation).



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Why are there two names for this program?

From 2012 to 2015, this program was known as the Transportation Alternatives Program or TAP. In December 2015, Congress renamed it to “STP Setaside.” However, states and localities can continue to use the name TAP if they choose. Whichever name is used, the program operates the same. For this document, we will use the name TAP.

How much money does my state get for TAP?

Nationally, there is \$835 million available for TAP in 2016. The amount of the funding for TAP is different in each state, depending on population and other factors.

- An estimate of the 2016 TAP funding for each state is available [here](#).
- The Safe Routes to School National Partnership also tracks the [implementation of TAP funds for each state](#).

How is my state’s TAP funding allocated?

TAP funding is awarded by two primary entities.

State departments of transportation (DOTs) run the largest competition, which supports projects throughout the state as well as projects in small and mid-sized communities. In large urban areas, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs)—which are regional transportation authorities—run a competition just for projects within their region. The DOT and the MPO each decide their application timeline, criteria, and process for choosing projects.

However, both DOTs and MPOs have the flexibility to divert up to half of the TAP dollars they control to other kinds of transportation projects. It is important for stakeholders to encourage DOTs and MPOs to spend all available TAP funds on TAP projects.

How much of the project cost can TAP cover?

Most TAP projects require a 20 percent match from the local project sponsor, though in certain states, the local match is lower. In a few places, the state has identified other state resources to supply the matching dollars—an approach that is particularly valued by low-income communities, which may struggle to find local matching dollars.



What kind of projects are eligible for TAP funding?

- Safe Routes to School—both infrastructure improvements and non-infrastructure programming
- Facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation
- Safe routes for non-drivers
- Conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors for trails
- Community improvement activities
- Construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas
- Streetscape improvements
- Recreational trails

Who is eligible to apply for TAP funds?

- Local governments
- Regional transportation authorities
- Transit agencies
- Natural resource or public land agencies
- School districts and local education agencies
- Tribal governments
- Other local and governmental entities with oversight of transportation or recreational trails.
- Nonprofit organizations that oversee local transportation safety initiatives (*new starting in 2016)

State departments of transportation and MPOs are not eligible to apply for TAP funds.



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How to Begin in Your Local Community

Navigating federal transportation laws and funding streams can be complex, but there is tremendous opportunity with TAP to make sure that funds support key projects, especially in low income communities that have experienced long term underinvestment. You can begin with a few key steps:

1. **Find and connect** with local [bicycling and walking](#) or [Safe Routes to School](#) advocates.
2. **Work together to identify needs.** Does your community have a bicycle or pedestrian plan that already spells out needed infrastructure? Has your school performed a walking audit or developed a Safe Routes to School plan? Connect with advocates, local bicycle and pedestrian coordinators, equity groups, and other local government and regional transportation agency personnel to learn more about what is being done or planned in your community. And don't forget to broaden your coalition by engaging other community stakeholders such as faith-based organizations, public health agencies, community safety groups, PTAs, and more.
3. **Influence your local decision-makers.** Make the case for the key projects that your school or neighborhood needs to your local government or school system so they can prioritize the project for the next TAP competition. Create relationships with decision makers in which you explain why walking and biking is important to the lives of people in your community. Bring materials to explain how to access TAP funds and build the case for the value of active transportation.
4. **Understand your state and MPO TAP implementation.** Visit your state's [TAP](#) or [Safe Routes to School](#) website or contact your MPO to see if and when TAP competitions are happening and what kinds of projects are getting funded. This will help you understand how your community could compete for funding. If need be, band together with other advocates to influence the criteria and project selection process that your MPO or DOT uses to make sure that Safe Routes to School, bicycling, and walking projects are being funded in the communities most in need. (A wealth of resources, including state and MPO best practices, legislative history, and state implementation tracking is available from the [Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#).)

Endnotes

- 1 Litman, T. Transportation and Public Health. Annual Review of Public Health, 2013; 34: 22.1 – 22.17. Available online at: <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031912-114502>. In press.
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "How much physical activity do children need?" Last updated November 2011.
- 3 Powell, L. M., S. Slater, and F. J. Chaloupka. "The relationship between community physical activity settings and race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status." Evidenced Based Preventive Medicine. 135-44. 21 May 2009.
- 4 M. Maciag, Pedestrians Dying at Disproportionate Rates in America's Poorer Neighborhoods, Governing (August 2014), <http://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/gov-pedestriandeaths-analysis.html>.
- 5 Duncan DT, Kawachi I, White K, Williams DR. The geography of recreational open space: Influence of neighborhood racial composition and neighborhood poverty. J Urban Heal. 2013;90(4):618-631. doi:10.1007/s11524-012-9770-y.

