



# GENERATING AND PRIORITIZING FUNDING FOR ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION



Safe  
Routes  
PARTNERSHIP

# Boosting Active Transportation and Transit Through **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING**

Transportation plays a critical role in the health and economic development of a metropolitan area. When people have the ability to walk, bike, or take transit safely to a destination, the whole region benefits from healthier people, better air quality, and reduced traffic fatalities.



Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are transportation planning agencies that focus on urban areas. They develop plans that guide their region's land use and transportation systems, and also decide how to spend federal transportation funds. Given that more than 70 percent of people in the United States live in the jurisdiction of an MPO, active transportation advocates can have a broad impact by focusing their efforts on MPOs.

Regional policies have a profound impact on the safety, convenience, and ability of children to be able to walk and bicycle to schools and be more physically active in daily life. Over the past ten years, the Safe Routes Partnership has partnered with Kaiser Permanente to implement a Regional Network Project in targeted metropolitan areas. Through this project, we advocated for healthy transportation options at the regional level by influencing policy, plans, and funding for large populations.

In the course of the decade-long Regional Network Project, the Safe Routes Partnership has identified three primary avenues to build more biking and walking infrastructure. A series of three fact sheets will lay out success stories, best practices, and resources for more information on each of these three areas.



## **POLICY**

Establishing policies that encourage or require counties and cities across a region to implement active transportation projects.



## **PLANS**

Directing the spending of existing federal and regional transportation funds towards active transportation and transit projects through regional planning processes.



## **FUNDING**

Securing new funding sources either at the regional level or city/county level to benefit active transportation, Safe Routes to School, and transit.



## Increasing Investments in Active Transportation and Transit

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) allocate millions of dollars from the federal government for transportation for things like roads, bridges, biking and walking infrastructure, and air quality improvements. Depending on state law, MPOs can also work with state legislatures or local partners to develop regional funding packages through bonds or tax measures. Advocates can utilize this process to lock in new funding for active transportation and transit. A similar mechanism can also be used at the city or county level for a more focused investment.

Regional transit authorities are another regional transportation body that merit attention by advocates. These agencies determine how to use federal transit funding, fare revenue, and other funding to maintain and operate region-wide bus and rail systems as well as where to put in new transit lines. Combining safe biking and walking infrastructure with a strong transit system is a critical to providing safe, affordable transportation options. Advocates can sit on regional transit authority committees or run campaigns to influence the frequency and location of transit service, how transit funds are invested to best serve the communities that need transit most, and the agency's long-term transit improvement plans.



## Case Study: Los Angeles County

# Passing a Sales Tax Measure to Fund Active Transportation and Transit

In 2014, Metro, the transportation agency for Los Angeles County, began floating the idea of a sales tax measure to fund transportation in Los Angeles County in perpetuity. Over a two-year period, advocates, led by the nonprofit Investing in Place and including Safe Routes Partnership, rallied to prioritize active transportation, transit, and equity in the measure.

Through participation in Metro's Advisory Council meetings, testimony at City Council and Metro board meetings, and submission of coalition comment letters, advocates secured the inclusion of \$2 billion over 40 years for walking and biking in Measure M. Funding supports Safe Routes to School programs, sidewalk repair throughout the region, and many new walking and biking projects. The measure ultimately passed in November 2016, creating a new, permanent half-cent transportation sales tax. Advocates then turned their attention to implementation of Measure M to ensure that funding guidelines included Complete Streets requirements for all projects and priorities on equity, safety, and community input.



## Case Study: Salem, Oregon

# Shaping How a Regional Transit Agency Uses State Funds to Improve Transit

In 2017, the Oregon legislature passed a new transportation funding measure that included a state payroll tax to support transit. The revenue goes to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) which is then allocated to mass transit agencies throughout the state. Agencies must develop a four-year plan for how the funds will be used to serve low-income households, youth, and diverse populations.

In the Salem, OR region, the mass transit agency is Cherriots. Right after passage of the new transportation law, Safe Routes Partnership joined Cherriots' STIF Advisory Committee to shape how the agency used STIF funds. Together with advocates throughout the region, Safe Routes Partnership was able to secure reduced transit fares for youth (worth approximately \$2 million per year), increased service along routes serving low-income populations, and added transit service during evenings and weekends. Advocates are seeking to build on that initial win and are pushing for a free youth transit pass in future STIF allocations.



A review of our work on funding at the regional level reveals several best practices that can help with a funding campaign. Any funding campaign involving voter approval must be particularly diligent in listening to community members and incorporating their highest priorities into the measure and the messaging. The best practices listed below will help hone the measure's focus so it can win approval.

**1. Prioritize the highest-need communities.** Getting funding for active transportation and transit to low- and moderate-income communities will result in affordable transportation options for those most in need. These communities have often also endured underinvestment for decades and higher levels of traffic injuries and deaths. Engaging community members will help identify their highest priority needs such as more frequent evening and weekend service or more crosswalks near transit stops that should be incorporated into the campaign's ask. Focusing a significant portion of new funding on the highest-need areas can also create new advocates and partners in pushing for the bond or tax.

**2. Highlight youth voices.** Young people are often overlooked in transportation planning. Providing young people with transportation options like walking, biking, and transit can build lifelong habits and give them more independence getting to and from school, afterschool activities, and jobs. Young people can make powerful advocates as well, particularly in testifying at agency meetings and public forums. Including Safe Routes to School infrastructure and programming; safe access to key youth destinations like libraries, parks, and youth centers; and discounted or free transit passes will help draw youth voices into the campaign. Consider ways to give young people leadership roles within the campaign such as a youth advisory committee.

**3. Fund both infrastructure and programs.** Think just beyond sidewalks, trails, and rail lines to also include long-term funding for programs like free youth transit passes, regional Safe Routes to School programs, and improving transit options for people with disabilities beyond basic requirements. It takes more than infrastructure to change people's habits; they also need training on how to safely walk and bike, encouragement campaigns and support to help them consider a new way of getting around, and more. Research shows that consistent programs are more effective in increasing walking, biking, and transit use over time.

**4. Focus on a substantial and long-term ask.** Securing a new funding source takes a significant commitment by advocates, and the best return on that effort is to make a push for a multi-year – or even permanent – funding mechanism. A substantial ask is also more likely to be able to fund visionary projects and programs that truly will create affordable and safe transportation networks, rather than a piecemeal approach with smaller, disconnected projects. A bigger picture approach can also provide better messaging to help policymakers and voters understand how the initiative will substantially benefit them over time.

### Resources for More Information

- [Fact Sheet: The Basics of Active Transportation Financing](#)
- [Fact Sheet: How Local Governments Generate Active Transportation Funding](#)
- [Publication: Investing in Health – Robust Local Active Transportation Financing for Healthy Communities](#)
- [Publication: Securing Funding for Safe Routes to School, Bicycling and Walking: Coalitions, Connections and Creativity](#)
- [Fact Sheet: How Regional Transportation Plans Influence Health](#)
- [Publication: Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 101: The Nuts and Bolts of Regional Transportation Agencies](#)
- [Publication: Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 201: Best Practices & Promising Opportunities for Health](#)
- [Publication: Investing in Walking, Biking, and Safe Routes to School: A Win for the Bottom Line](#)

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