



Safe Routes to School: How States are Adapting to a New Legislative Framework

2014 Policy Report



Catalyzing support for safe,
active and healthy communities



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND BACKGROUND

This report was written by Matthew Colvin, federal policy manager for the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, with support from Margo Pedroso, deputy director, and Margaux Mennesson, communications manager.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life for kids and communities by promoting active, healthy lifestyles and safe infrastructure that supports bicycling and walking. We advance policy change; catalyze support for safe, active and healthy communities with a network of more than 700 partner organizations; and share our deep expertise at national, state and local levels with those who are helping to propel our mission forward. Founded in 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership's mission is to advance 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.

For more information visit www.saferoutespartnership.org.

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Safe Routes to School: A National Program Making an Impact

Over the past 50 years, America has seen significant declines in the number of children walking and bicycling to and from school each day. Those who do walk or bicycle, in many cases out of necessity, may face increased traffic, poor or missing sidewalks and the risk of violence along the way, all of which can leave many families feeling as though they have no choice other than to drive their children even short distances to school each day. At a time when the majority of American children are

not getting enough daily physical activity and struggle with high rates of obesity, the ability to walk or bicycle safely to and from school can prove critical to the health of our kids and communities — both in terms of reducing traffic injuries and deaths and improving health through physical activity.

Since 2005, federal transportation funds have been available for Safe Routes to School programs that make it safer for more children to walk and bicycle to and

from school. Two years ago, Congress made major modifications to the federal Safe Routes to School program. While those changes are still being rolled out by state departments of transportation, it is time to examine how different states have adapted to those changes and how the changes have impacted the availability of Safe Routes to School funds.

History of the Federal Safe Routes to School Program

In a sweeping effort to get more children safely walking and bicycling to and from school each day, Congress created the Safe Routes to School Program in 2005 as part of the federal transportation bill known as SAFETEA-LU. To date, about \$987 million has been awarded to nearly 6,000 Safe Routes to School projects in all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

From 2005 to 2012, federal Safe Routes to School funds were allotted to state departments of transportation, which in turn provided grants to state, local and regional governments, schools and nonprofits to implement Safe Routes to School projects. Eligible activities included both infrastructure projects and non-infrastructure activities that improved safety for children who walk and bicycle to and from school. Examples of funded projects included sidewalk construction and intersection improvements near schools, speed limit signage, walking school buses and crossing guard trainings. Like some other federally funded safety improvements, Safe Routes to School awards were 100 percent federally funded — meaning no state or local dollars had to be contributed to the project as matching funds, making it easier for small, rural and low-income communities with limited tax bases and financial resources to take advantage of the program.¹

In June 2012, Congress passed a new two-year transportation bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), which made significant changes to the federal Safe Routes to School program. Under the new law, the Safe Routes to School program is combined with the former Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails programs

From 2005 to 2012, federal Safe Routes to School funds were allotted to state departments of transportation, which in turn provided grants to state, local and regional governments, schools and nonprofits to implement Safe Routes to School projects.

(programs that fund bicycling and walking infrastructure along with several other types of projects) into a new program called the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). There is no longer a set, dedicated amount of funding for Safe Routes to School projects in each state; instead, there is a pool of money available for a range of eligible projects, including Safe Routes to School projects. Congress also added new eligible uses of funding, including environmental mitigation and boulevard construction, further diminishing the ability of local communities to secure Safe Routes to School funds.

The funding level for TAP is approximately \$800 million per year, which is an overall cut of more than 30 percent from the \$1.2 billion that was allocated to the three separate programs (Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails) in FY2011. States can redirect half of their TAP money to roads, bridges or other transportation projects. In addition, while all Safe Routes to School projects continue to be eligible to compete for funding, all TAP projects require a state or local match of 20 percent of the project's cost, limiting the federal share of project costs to no more than 80 percent. This creates a significant financial barrier for low-income communities in urban and rural settings.

MAP-21 contains additional changes to how the funds are allocated in each state. In the past, state departments of transportation were the sole decision-makers as to which projects received funding. Now, state departments of transportation award only some of the TAP funds. The rest of the funds are awarded by local transportation policy-making bodies known as metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) that get to select TAP projects in their regions. Finally, state departments of transportation are no longer required to have a Safe Routes to School coordinator to staff and run the program, though current coordinator positions can continue to be funded with remaining SAFETEA-LU or TAP dollars.

The amount of funding that will go to Safe Routes to School projects under this new construct and the degree to which underserved communities are able to access funds ultimately depends on the decision-making of state departments of transportation and MPOs, as well as on the work of advocates and public officials at the local level.

Investing in Healthy Communities

In 2012, more than 22,000 children ages 5 to 15 were injured and another 270 were killed by cars while they were walking or bicycling. This represents 28 percent of all children's traffic fatalities and 15 percent of all children's traffic injuries.² Additionally, the medical costs of hospitalization and treatment for children's bicycle and pedestrian fatalities and injuries totaled \$839 million that year — 4.5 times the budget for Safe Routes to School efforts in 2012.³

The existence of a sidewalk cuts in half the risk that a pedestrian will be struck by a car.⁴ To that end, research studies have proven the effectiveness and value of the original Safe Routes to School program, notwithstanding the changes made by Congress in 2012, in terms of improving pedestrian safety. A recent study in New York City found a 33 percent decline in overall pedestrian injury among school children (including a 44 percent decline during school travel times) in areas where federally funded Safe Routes to School projects were implemented. In locations without Safe Routes to School interventions, the injury number remained almost unchanged.⁵ A follow-up study in

These findings portend a significant impact on the health and well-being of our children as they grow into adulthood. Childhood obesity rates among children ages six to 11 have more than quadrupled from 4 percent in 1969 to 17.7 percent in 2012.⁹ Currently, 23 million children and teens — nearly one-third of all young people in the U.S. — are overweight or obese.¹⁰ The lifetime medical costs for treating an obese child relative to a normal weight child are estimated at \$19,000 per child — totaling up to approximately \$14 billion annually.¹¹

The effects of childhood obesity extend into the classroom as well. Overweight and obese children, on average, have lower GPAs, more school absences and more disciplinary referrals.¹² However, studies show that children who walk and bicycle to school are more physically active,¹³ have lower body mass index scores,¹⁴ lower obesity levels¹⁵ and are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines¹⁶ than students who are driven or bused to school.

In addition to improving safety for children, Safe Routes to School is also effective at increasing rates of walking and bicycling.



New York City examining the benefits of Safe Routes to School projects on injury reduction and the associated cost savings found that the projects were associated with an overall net societal benefit of \$230 million over a projected 50-year period.⁶

In addition to improving safety for children, Safe Routes to School is also effective at increasing rates of walking and bicycling. Overall, just 15 percent of children ages five to 14 walk and bicycle to and from school — a significant drop from 1969 when nearly 50 percent of children walked to school.⁷ Yet Safe Routes to School programs have demonstrated their value in helping to reverse this nationwide problem, showing a 37 percent increase in bicycling and walking where projects have been undertaken.⁸

Whether it's making our streets safer or increasing physical activity for our children, the federal Safe Routes to School program has demonstrated its value as a successful and cost-effective solution in thousands of communities across the country. Given the changes Congress made to the program in 2012, it is critical to examine the subsequent implementation decisions made by state departments of transportation to understand their impact on the availability of Safe Routes to School funding.



Safe Routes to School Becomes a Part of the Transportation Alternatives Program: State Implementation Profiles

State departments of transportation (DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) have adapted to the changes made to the federal Safe Routes to School program under the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) in different ways. For the purposes of this report, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership conducted interviews¹⁷ with 10 state DOT coordinators to gather information about their TAP implementation decisions that affect Safe Routes to School funding, including:

- Whether or not the state will retain a Safe Routes to School coordinator. Under MAP-21, dedicated funding for coordinators is no longer provided. Some states have chosen to retain coordinators, while a number of others have consolidated the position with other responsibilities. Staffing levels impact a state's capacity to run and evaluate the award competitions, assist disadvantaged communities with planning and applications and shepherd projects through the federal regulatory process.
- How much money a state will allocate to TAP and Safe Routes to School, including whether or not they will transfer funds away or increase available funds, and how the state will implement the competitive process for TAP. A key question is whether Safe Routes to School remains a "standalone program" in which funds are set aside exclusively for Safe Routes to School projects or whether these projects compete against all others eligible under TAP. These decisions affect how much money is available to support Safe Routes to School projects.
- How the needs of small, rural and low-income communities are being taken into account, whether through the state providing the required 20 percent matching funds or through special assistance or consideration in the application process. These choices can help prioritize low-income communities or help remove financial barriers to them applying for Safe Routes to School funding.
- To what degree states are coordinating with MPOs. As MPOs are newly engaged in awarding TAP projects, they have an important role to play in whether or not Safe Routes to School projects are selected for funding.

States profiled for this report were selected to represent diversity in geography, size and implementation decisions. However, an overall slow rollout of TAP proved limiting, as many states have not completed their first round of awards and thus could not be assessed for this report. This impact of this factor is addressed later in this report.

ALABAMA



STAFFING

Alabama retained its Safe Routes to School coordinator, but added other responsibilities to the position, including overseeing the administration of TAP and funding still available under SAFETEA-LU for Transportation Enhancements.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Alabama received \$16,797,235 for TAP, which is a 19.6 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. Alabama has not transferred funding out of TAP. The coordinator indicated that the former Transportation Enhancements program was popular and the state DOT administration wanted to continue making that funding available. The state is not supplementing TAP with funds from other programs.

PROJECT SELECTION

Alabama is not maintaining a standalone Safe Routes to School program. The combined TAP application does, however, allow applicants to specify if a project helps to connect children to a school, and a higher score is given to Safe Routes to School projects.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

When scoring projects, extra points are not given to small, rural or low-income communities. However, a higher score is awarded to regions that have received a fewer number of projects in past competitions. The coordinator believes this helps to distribute funding evenly across the state. Alabama does not provide matching funding for projects and requires a 20 percent cash match for the project.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$3.1 million of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. The Alabama DOT collaborated in the development of and approved MPO procedures for allocating funding at the outset of TAP. Six MPOs in Alabama have held competitions and are now in the process of holding their second round of applications. They grade, score and select projects following the same procedures as the state, and final project selection is approved by the state DOT. However, only one MPO, the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission, has funded a Safe Routes to School project, at a total amount of \$126,534.

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

In its first round of TAP applications, Alabama received approximately 80 applications, of which 49 were selected for approximately \$15.5 million in funding. Five of the 49 awarded projects, totaling \$1,293,976, were Safe Routes to School projects.¹⁸ According to the project coordinator, those projects are not in low-income or small communities. By comparison, in 2012, Alabama awarded \$2,850,045 for 18 Safe Routes to School projects under SAFETEA-LU. The coordinator believes that the decreased number of applicants and awards is due, in part, to the change in federal matching requirements under MAP-21.

ARIZONA



STAFFING

Arizona did not retain the Safe Routes to School coordinator position, instead adding some of its former responsibilities into a TAP coordinator position, including the administration of Safe Routes to School projects awarded under SAFETEA-LU as well as oversight of certain projects that MPOs have selected as a part of their TAP funds.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Arizona received \$16,855,672 for TAP, which is a 24.2 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. Arizona is transferring its state portion of TAP funding to other surface transportation projects to address funding shortfalls. Based on Arizona's five-year budget cycle, if there were to be a state-administered TAP competition, it would likely not begin until 2018.

PROJECT SELECTION AND PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

There is currently no state selection process for TAP funding since no competition is planned.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$5.7 million of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. Arizona's two MPOs representing populations over 200,000 have each held one round of funding. A total of \$1.1 million has been awarded in the Tucson area, all of which went to bicycle and pedestrian safety projects, and just over 50 percent went to projects that could be specifically considered Safe Routes to School. In 2013, the Maricopa Association of Governments, which represents the Phoenix metropolitan area, awarded \$12 million for 13 projects in FY 2015-2017, three of which were Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure awards totaling approximately \$400,000.¹⁹

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

Arizona transferred its state portion of TAP funds out of the program, and therefore did not hold competitions in fiscal years 2013 or 2014. By contrast, Arizona had awarded \$8,108,152 for a total of 54 Safe Routes to School projects in fiscal years 2011 and 2012. Even when considering MPO funds awarded to Safe Routes to School projects, this is a significant decline in funding for Safe Routes to School.



COLORADO



STAFFING

Colorado is retaining its Safe Routes to School coordinator.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Colorado received \$11,698,429 for TAP, which is a 31.6 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. Colorado has not transferred funding out of TAP. In 2013, Colorado chose not to fund Safe Routes to School projects with TAP dollars, instead allocating \$1.5 million from a general contingency fund for one year. For 2014, Colorado was able to identify savings from past SAFETEA-LU funded Safe Routes to School projects and awarded \$2.36 million in new projects. Additionally, Colorado passed HB14-1301, which authorizes the appropriation of \$700,000 in state funds to the Safe Routes to School program for FY 2015. The coordinator indicated that this is due to the work of statewide stakeholders including a SRTS network, health professionals, the DOT and others.

PROJECT SELECTION

While Safe Routes to School funds have not been set aside from TAP funds for the 2015 competition and beyond, potential grantees are encouraged to apply for infrastructure projects through the TAP process. For the 2013 and 2014 competitions, in addition to following federal requirements for fund distribution, Colorado has a state statute that identifies the project selection process for any federal funds being distributed for Safe Routes to School. It requires projects be scored and selected by a nine-person advisory committee representing parents, teachers, law enforcement and others. The statute also requires funds be distributed based on population of youth K-8.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Colorado has not provided special consideration for low-income schools in its project selection since the beginning of the program. The advisory committee that selects projects

bases its decision on the quality of application and project justification. However, 25 percent of project funding is specifically set aside for rural communities, which generally have fewer resources available to them. Colorado also awards funding to school districts which set their own criteria for school selection, which may include using free and reduced lunch eligibility as one of the criteria. In addition, the state intends to provide 100 percent funding with no match for Safe Routes to School projects in the 2015 call for projects.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$3.8 million of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. MPOs in Colorado have varying application processes and call for project periods. While some MPOs have already identified projects to be funded, others will be holding an application process for TAP projects.

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

In 2013, \$1.5 million was awarded to 14 Safe Routes to School projects out of 29 applicants using the state contingency funds. In 2014, \$6.38 million was awarded from remaining SAFETEA-LU funds to 17 out of 40 Safe Routes to School applicants. As a comparison, in 2012, Colorado spent \$2,536,513 on 26 Safe Routes to School projects out of 44 applicants. Since the state used contingency dollars for the 2013 round of applications, TAP funding has yet to be awarded in Colorado, so it remains unclear how much funding will ultimately be awarded to Safe Routes to School projects and how that will compare to SAFETEA-LU numbers.

FLORIDA



STAFFING

Florida has retained a Safe Routes to School coordinator through 2015 using SAFETEA-LU funding.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Florida received \$49,223,461 for TAP, which is a 21.6 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. Florida is retaining its entire TAP funding, maintaining a standalone Safe Routes to School Program and supplementing the program with funding from the federal Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). Currently, Florida has the third-highest rate of pedestrian and bicycle deaths in the nation, with bicyclists and pedestrians representing 23.4 percent of all road fatalities, and the coordinator believes that is a major contributor to the Secretary of Transportation prioritizing safety. Projects that qualify for infrastructure improvements are primarily funded by HSIP, while education programs continue to be funded out of TAP.

PROJECT SELECTION

Florida is maintaining the same application it used for Safe Routes to School under SAFETEA-LU. Its application asks for a range of information from applicants, including the number of children to be affected by the project, crash data, information about parent engagement and whether a hazardous bus route could be eliminated. In a change from SAFETEA-LU, all project applications are now first assessed by MPOs or Boards of County Commissioners, depending on location.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Florida is not specifically prioritizing low-income communities under TAP; however, it is providing 100 percent funding for projects by using state tolling revenue to cover the required match, which provides much-needed assistance for small and low-income communities. In addition, it has provided funding for engineers and crash data engineering assistance for communities that may not have the capacity to undertake those projects on their own.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$19.8 million of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. The state coordinator presents on Safe Routes to School at statewide MPO meetings, maintains a mailing list which goes out to all MPOs and communicates regularly with all government liaisons. MPOs began awarding projects in 2012 for FY 2013-FY 2018 and some are prioritizing Safe Routes to School projects in their application process. For example, the Miami-Dade MPO recently awarded \$5.7 million in TAP funding, \$605,000 of which went to Safe Routes to School projects. The Miami-Dade bicycle/pedestrian coordinator indicated that the next round of awards should include an even greater number of Safe Routes to School-specific funding.²⁰

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

Since passage of MAP-21, Florida has awarded a total of \$48,590,593 million for Safe Routes to School projects from 2012 through 2017. Of this total, \$16,339,169 comes from TAP funding. The remaining amount comes from a number of sources, including remaining SAFETEA-LU funds, HSIP, Surface Transportation Program and equity bonus funds.

KANSAS



STAFFING

Kansas consolidated the Safe Routes to School coordinator and the state bicycle and pedestrian coordinator positions into a single job.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Kansas received \$10,298,554 for TAP, which is a 24.2 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. In 2013, Kansas did a one-time transfer of 20 percent of TAP funds to the Recreational Trails program, but will not do so again in 2014. The coordinator believes high demand for pedestrian and bicycle funding has driven the state's support for the program. To that effect, the DOT had \$40 million worth of requests for just \$11 million available for two years of TAP funding. The state has also decided to keep a standalone Safe Routes to School program to make applying for funds as simple as possible for applicants.

PROJECT SELECTION

Kansas is retaining a separate Safe Routes to School application process, and will be using approximately \$800,000 in TAP funds each year for Safe Routes to School planning, implementation and non-infrastructure awards.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Low-income communities are not specifically prioritized in Kansas. Instead, applicants are asked to describe their current conditions, which are taken into account when selecting projects.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$2 million of 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. Wichita selects projects through its transportation planning process and three Safe Routes to School projects totaling \$645,000 were selected under that process. The Mid-American Regional Council, which serves Kansas City, has held its first TAP competition, under which Safe Routes to School projects were eligible, but has not yet selected its funded projects.

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

Kansas awarded funds for Safe Routes to School in two phases. Phase 1 used remaining SAFETEA-LU funding totaling \$280,000 to support nine Safe Routes to School planning grants plus one statewide walking school bus project. Phase 2 provided \$665,000 in TAP funds for four communities to implement their Safe Routes to School plans. In the future, approximately \$800,000 in TAP funds are expected to be available for Safe Routes to School projects each year. By comparison, in 2012 Kansas funded 11 projects at \$1,340,000.



KENTUCKY



STAFFING

Kentucky combined the state Safe Routes to School coordinator and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality coordinator positions into a single position.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Kentucky received \$12,882,145 for TAP, which is a 27.8 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. Kentucky has not transferred funding out of TAP and is not supplementing TAP with funds from other programs. For the 2013 TAP cycle, Kentucky included remaining funds from Safe Routes to School and Transportation Enhancements along with TAP funds.

PROJECT SELECTION

No TAP funding was specifically set aside for Safe Routes to School projects. However, the application does allow applicants to list schools that would be affected, the number of students within two miles of the school and the current number of students that are walking or bicycling to school.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

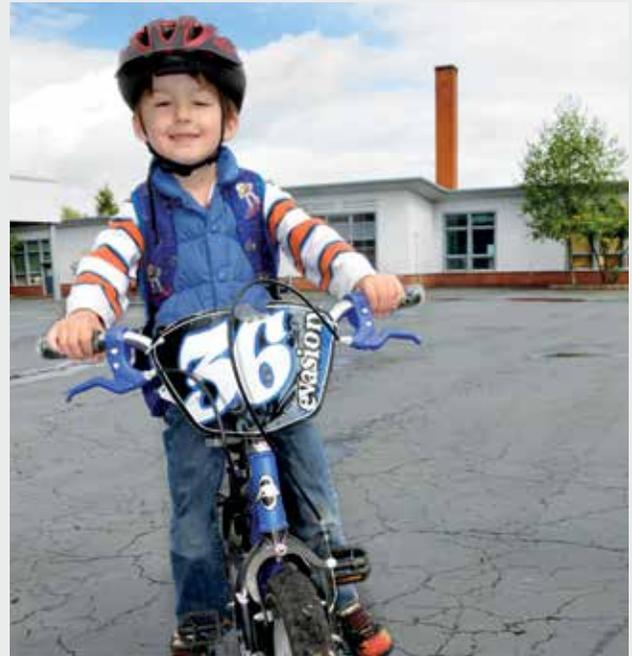
Kentucky allows applicants to indicate a project's proximity to low-income neighborhoods. It did not, however, use a point system to award funds when selecting projects, so this information is purely to guide its decision-making. The coordinator indicated that, in a state where a significant portion of the population is below the poverty line, most projects are ultimately helping underserved communities.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$2.1 million of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. Only one MPO (Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments) has awarded funding for projects, but the project list is not yet available. The Lexington Area MPO bicycle & pedestrian coordinator confirmed that it is waiting until it has multiple years' worth of money in hand before holding a competition.²¹

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

Kentucky has awarded \$2.7 million for the 2013 round of TAP funding. In addition, \$1,678,180 was awarded to nine Safe Routes to School projects, using remaining Safe Routes to School funds. In 2012, Kentucky funded 12 Safe Routes to School projects at \$2,552,199.



MAINE



STAFFING

Maine retained its Safe Routes to School coordinator, but has added other responsibilities, including oversight of bicycle and pedestrian priorities.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Maine received \$3,331,124 for TAP, which is a 46.6 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. While Maine is not transferring or supplementing TAP funding, the coordinator indicated that the state has been budgeting its entire TAP allotment on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects. In addition, it continues to use highway and other funding to support Complete Streets policies, which help create additional sidewalks and pathways for non-motorized road users. The coordinator indicated that Maine still values standalone projects that can be funded through TAP and will continue to make those a priority in the state. Additionally, the state has budgeted \$175,000 per year on non-infrastructure programs using HSIP funds, as the statewide education and outreach program is run through a nonprofit organization (that was selected through a consultant review process) and is therefore not eligible for TAP funding.

PROJECT SELECTION

Maine is transitioning to a revolving open-ended selection process that will allow projects to receive preliminary approval and to be placed into a queue for funding. The coordinator believes this will help project applicants spend more time focusing on eligible projects and securing matching funds and less time trying to get approvals for a project that may or may not be selected for funding. While there is no standalone Safe Routes to School application, the combined TAP application will allow applicants to specify the benefits related to improving safety to schools, and indicate who will benefit from the funding.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Maine is not prioritizing low-income communities in its application process. The coordinator believes that the matching funds requirement is proving prohibitive for some communities that would otherwise apply for funding.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$150,000 of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. The Portland Area MPO is the only MPO in Maine with a population greater than 200,000 people, but due to the limited dollars available, it agreed to allow the state DOT to award the funds in the MPO area, since the award size exceeds the MPO allocation.

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

To date, Maine has awarded \$5,690,881 in two cycles of TAP funding to 24 projects. While not all are specifically Safe Routes to School projects, each awarded project is expected to have an impact on local schools. Specific to Safe Routes to School, \$948,000 was awarded to eight projects, plus another \$450,000 has been awarded in HSIP funding for Safe Routes to School education programs. By comparison, in 2010 and 2011, Maine awarded \$1,516,768 to Safe Routes to School Projects.

MISSISSIPPI



STAFFING

Mississippi retained the Safe Routes to School coordinator position but added other responsibilities and is handing off oversight for certain activities to other agencies. For example, International Walk to School Day is now coordinated by the state department of health.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Mississippi received \$10,472,229 for TAP, which is a 30.1 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. Mississippi transferred 15 percent of TAP funds in 2013. This was indicated to be a one-time transfer to make whole the Appalachian Development Highway System Program, which had funding rescinded under MAP-21.

PROJECT SELECTION

When scoring TAP projects, Safe Routes to School TAP projects are graded on a high, medium and low priority scale. Projects with a high-priority designation are first in line for funding recommendations. The remaining applications are then prioritized by DOT staff and all recommendations are brought to the commissioners (which are representatives of the north, central and southern regions of Mississippi and make funding decisions) for final funding decisions. In its first two application cycles, Mississippi used remaining SAFETEA-LU funding for TAP projects, though it awarded projects using MAP-21 obligation limits. In future funding cycles, Mississippi will use TAP funding.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

When prioritizing projects, Mississippi takes into account the number of students in area schools that qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The coordinator indicated that schools with the least safe conditions will rise to the top of the list, so while the state does not have dedicated funding for low-income communities, it believes it is benefiting those communities through project selection. Approximately 80 percent of funded schools meet the definition of low-income with at least half of the student body receiving free or reduced price school meals.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$1.4 million of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. The coordinator indicated that the Gulf Regional Planning Commission used all of its funding for Safe Routes to School projects, though they were allocated only approximately \$300,000 in TAP funds. The Central Mississippi Planning & Development District did not fund any Safe Routes to School projects; however, the state allowed anyone in that MPO area to apply directly to the state DOT for Safe Routes to School funding. The Mississippi DOT has a seat on the selection committee of MPOs.

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

In 2013 and 2014, Mississippi funded 13 Safe Routes to School Projects at \$ 2,278,983. In comparison, in 2011, Mississippi awarded \$913,808 to five projects.

OHIO



STAFFING

Ohio combined its Safe Routes to School coordinator and bicycle and pedestrian coordinator into one position.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, Ohio received \$27,613,886 for TAP, which is a 26.4 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. Ohio is not transferring funding out of TAP, nor is it supplementing it with funding from other programs. However, along with Florida, it is providing 100 percent funding for projects and using state tolling revenue to cover the required match. In addition, it is maintaining a standalone Safe Routes to School program through 2015 at \$4 million per year.

PROJECT SELECTION

Safe Routes to School is being operated as a standalone program, with a specific application just for Safe Routes to School projects separate from the TAP application. Ohio requires communities to create school travel plans before applying for infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. Communities can apply for funding to assist with school travel plans, infrastructure projects or non-infrastructure projects.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Each school interested in applying for funding provides a list of addresses for students, and the state DOT plots them out in relation to the school, allowing the DOT to consider the percentage of students that will be affected by the project in the scoring process. Ohio provides extra points to projects in schools with higher numbers of economically disadvantaged students.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

Approximately \$9.1 million of the 2013 TAP funds is earmarked for large MPOs to award. In Ohio's first round of TAP funding, it engaged in a collaborative process with its MPOs. Communities with large school districts (more than 35 schools) interested in Safe Routes to School funds were asked to partner with their MPO to request funds to develop large-scale school travel plans, similar to community travel plans. The state agreed to fund half, while the MPO and the communities would each fund a portion. The coordinator believes collaboration between the DOT, MPOs and advocates has been strengthened as a result of this process.

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

Ohio awarded \$7.2 million in 2013 to 71 Safe Routes to School projects plus an undetermined amount of MPO funds are being used for the Safe Routes to School district travel plans. In 2014, Ohio awarded another \$3.8 million for 39 Safe Routes to School projects. By comparison, in 2012, Ohio funded 66 projects at \$15,804,111.

SOUTH DAKOTA



STAFFING

South Dakota is retaining an interim Safe Routes to School coordinator to assist in completing projects previously awarded using SAFETEA-LU funding. Once those projects are completed, the responsibilities will be folded into the Transportation Alternatives coordinator position.

STATE FUNDING DECISIONS

In 2013, South Dakota received \$5,253,074 for TAP, which is a 36.9 percent cut from the equivalent 2012 level for the three programs. South Dakota is transferring its state portion of funding into its Transportation Improvement Program, which includes both highway and more traditional Transportation Enhancement projects (e.g., sidewalk construction, curb ramps, bike parking), leaving about \$2.1 million for TAP.

PROJECT SELECTION

There is one competition for all types of TAP projects, including Safe Routes to School. Applicants select categories, such as a shared use path, Safe Routes to School project or safe roads for non-drivers when applying for funding.

PRIORITIZING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

South Dakota is not prioritizing low-income communities in its application process.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION PROCESS

There are no MPOs over 200,000 in population in South Dakota and thus no funds are earmarked for MPOs to award.

PROJECT AWARD STATISTICS

In the first two rounds of TAP competitions, South Dakota funded 20 projects at \$4,148,000, of which \$1,180,253 were Safe Routes to School projects. It is currently entering its third round. By comparison, South Dakota spent \$1,855,740 in 2011 and 2012 on Safe Routes to School projects.





Analysis and Recommendations

Program Implementation, Data Availability and Transparency

The original intent of this report was to draw conclusions about the impact of the Transportation Alternatives Program on Safe Routes to School and to identify clear recommendations for state implementation practices. However, the combination of slow program implementation by states and incomplete, inconsistent and often unavailable data has created a significant hurdle for arriving at conclusive recommendations at this stage.

The Transportation Alternatives Program is still in the early stage of implementation by states and MPOs. While MAP-21 was signed into law in July 2012, the U.S. Department of Transportation did not issue guidance until June 2013.²² This left states little time to make implementation decisions and, as a result, many have not yet held competitions

or selected award recipients. This makes it difficult to determine the ultimate effect that the TAP changes will have on the number of federally-funded Safe Routes to School projects undertaken in each state.

In addition, there are no requirements that states provide critical data on the types of TAP projects being funded and their funding levels. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has put forward a long-term surface transportation bill that would require states to report the number of TAP applicants received and selected, the cost and value of those projects, the cost share of the project sponsor and the type of project. However, Congress has yet to enact a new surface transportation law.

While the states interviewed were forthcoming with lists of projects awarded under the TAP program, data presentation is inconsistent and it is not always clear which types of projects were being funded with which funding source. In addition, only limited information was available about projects funded by MPOs. Having greater consistency and more timely reporting of projects will allow for ongoing and more comprehensive assessments of the true impact of the change from Safe Routes to School to TAP on the funds available for Safe Routes to School projects.

Even so, analyzing the states profiled in this report and the data available at this relatively early stage of implementation of the Transportation Alternatives Program does allow for some conclusions to be drawn.

Availability of Funds

Certainly, one of the most significant results of placing Safe Routes to School within the Transportation Alternatives Program is the funding cut, which will result in fewer Safe Routes to School projects. As the table on the next page documents, the ten states highlighted in this report collectively received \$30.9 million in Safe Routes to School funding in 2012, the last year of SAFETEA-LU. In 2013, these states received an average 29 percent cut in TAP funding, which would equate to an expected \$22.9 million for Safe Routes to School projects if the cut was applied proportionately. In actuality, these 10 states awarded \$21.3 million to Safe Routes to School in a one-year period. While Safe Routes to School projects are generally competing well for TAP funding, it is still a significant reduction from when Safe Routes to School was a standalone program.

It is evident is that the TAP funding cuts can either be ameliorated or exacerbated depending on state implementation decisions. All of the states that spent more on Safe Routes to School than would have been anticipated — with the exception of South Dakota and Kentucky, which had minimal increases — had at least one positive state implementation practice. For example, Maine added funding to TAP and also ensured that all TAP-funded projects had an impact on a school in some way, resulting in a significant increase in projects benefiting Safe Routes to School. Florida retained its coordinator, supplemented TAP funding, retained Safe Routes to School as a standalone program and provided matching funds. Colorado implemented a number of positive practices even with a small decline in Safe Routes to School awards, but that decline will likely be reversed in the next funding cycle.

While Safe Routes to School projects are generally competing well for TAP funding, it is still a significant reduction from when Safe Routes to School was a standalone program.



Kansas had a fairly significant decrease in Safe Routes to School spending as compared with projections, in spite of its decision to retain Safe Routes to School as a standalone program. In this case, that positive implementation decision was apparently not enough to offset the decline in available funds and the new matching requirements. The state with the

worst result was Arizona — the state has transferred all of the TAP funds it is legally allowed to do and has not moved forward on an application cycle. As a result, no funds for Safe Routes to School are available, which is a serious detriment to communities in need of these resources.

Assessment of State Implementation Decisions

IMPLEMENTATION DECISIONS

State	Staffing	TAP Funding	Structure of TAP Competition	Prioritization for Low-Income Projects
Alabama	Kept coordinator but with extra duties	Used available funds	Does one TAP application but has special consideration for Safe Routes to School	Does not provide matching funds, no prioritization for low-income projects
Arizona	Did not retain coordinator	Transferred half of TAP funds	Is not holding statewide competition	Does not provide matching funds, no prioritization for low-income projects
Colorado	Kept full-time coordinator	Added funding to TAP	Retained standalone Safe Routes to School competition	State provides 100% funding for Safe Routes to School projects
Florida	Kept full-time coordinator	Added funding to TAP	Retained standalone Safe Routes to School competition	State provides 100% funding for Safe Routes to School projects
Kansas	Kept coordinator but with extra duties	Used available funds	Retained standalone Safe Routes to School competition	Does not provide matching funds, no prioritization for low-income projects
Kentucky	Kept coordinator but with extra duties	Used available funds	Does one TAP application but has special consideration for Safe Routes to School	Does not provide matching funds, but does prioritize low-income projects
Maine	Kept coordinator but with extra duties	Added funding to TAP	Does one TAP application but has special consideration for Safe Routes to School	Does not provide matching funds, no prioritization for low-income projects
Mississippi	Kept coordinator but with extra duties	One-time, partial transfer of TAP funds	Does one TAP application but has special consideration for Safe Routes to School	Does not provide matching funds, but does prioritize low-income projects
Ohio	Kept coordinator but with extra duties	Used available funds	Retained standalone Safe Routes to School competition	State provides 100% funding for Safe Routes to School projects
South Dakota	Kept coordinator temporarily; then extra duties added	Transferred half of TAP funds	Does one TAP application but has special consideration for Safe Routes to School	Does not provide matching funds, no prioritization for low-income projects

* These states used one-time additional dollars to supplement a TAP competition to fund Safe Routes to School projects.

Key for Implementation Decisions:

- Beneficial practice
- Neutral practice
- Detrimental but temporary practice
- Detrimental practice

Key for Spending:

- Spent more than projected
- Spent slightly less than projected
- Spent somewhat less than projected
- Spent significantly less than projected

SPENDING ON SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Safe Routes to School Funds available in FY2012 under SAFETEA-LU	Size of cut under MAP-21 for TAP	Projected yearly amount for Safe Routes to School assuming proportional reduction	One-year average of DOT TAP spending on Safe Routes to School	Comparison of actual DOT TAP spending to projected spending
\$2,556,869	-19.6%	\$2,055,630	\$1,293,976	-37.1%
\$3,372,404	-24.2%	\$2,557,788	\$0	-100.0%
\$2,483,132	-31.6%	\$1,698,550	\$1,500,000*	-11.7%
\$9,079,278	-21.6%	\$7,119,251	\$8,098,432	+13.8%
\$1,537,243	-24.2%	\$1,164,766	\$800,000	-31.3%
\$2,199,689	-27.8%	\$1,589,102	\$1,678,180*	+5.6%
\$933,567	-46.6%	\$498,262	\$699,400	+40.4%
\$1,724,971	-30.6%	\$1,196,520	\$1,139,491	-4.8%
\$6,140,248	-26.4%	\$4,519,190	\$5,500,000	+21.7%
\$933,567	-36.9%	\$588,907	\$590,126	+0.2%

Federal Matching Requirements and Low-income and Small Communities

Of the ten states profiled in this report, Florida and Ohio are the only ones that provide the 20 percent matching requirement for Safe Routes to School projects. In both cases, this match is made available from in-state tolling revenue. Both state coordinators felt that the federal match has played a significant role in ensuring projects in small, low-income and rural schools were able to secure funding. Colorado also plans to provide matching funds starting with the 2014 TAP competition.

Other states interviewed, including Kansas, Kentucky, Maine and Mississippi, specifically indicated that the matching requirements have either discouraged potential applicants from applying for funds, or made applicants ineligible when they cannot identify matching funds. Maine has addressed this problem by moving to a rolling application process, in hopes that potential project sponsors can spend more

Despite some creative solutions by states, matching requirements may be the largest barrier to entry for TAP funding for many low-income and small communities.

time identifying matching funds. Despite some creative solutions by states, matching requirements may be the largest barrier to entry for TAP funding for many low-income and small communities.

With the exception of Maine, states did not provide data based on community size or whether the project was in a rural or urban community. As a result, our data is ultimately incomplete on whether states have successfully addressed the needs in these communities.

Regardless of the lack of data to demonstrate the impact, many coordinators expressed concern that low-income and small communities were put at a disadvantage when competing for state funding and some speculated that they received fewer applications due to the matching requirements. This is a critical issue to overcome, given that disadvantaged schools received nearly 70 percent of Safe Routes to School funding in the SAFETEA-LU program.²³



State Implementation

Ultimately, the needs of each state may require unique and creative solutions. However, several states can serve as examples others can look to when deciding how to ensure TAP best serves the needs of their population and maximizes funding for Safe Routes to School projects.

Standalone Programs and Supplemental Funding:

We encourage states to follow the examples of Colorado, Florida, Ohio and Kansas by maintaining dedicated Safe Routes to School programs and, where possible, supplementing funding from other sources of federal or state money. This will help ensure the competitiveness of Safe Routes to School projects and an easier application process for communities that became accustomed to applying under the old Safe Routes to School process.

In addition, some coordinators were concerned that Safe Routes to School projects had a more challenging time competing against all of the other eligibilities in a combined TAP program. If a standalone Safe Routes to School program cannot be maintained, it is helpful to ensure that TAP applications ask questions specific to Safe Routes to School and provide extra points or special consideration to these projects.

Safe Routes to School Coordinators:

Safe Routes to School coordinators in states that are no longer maintaining dedicated coordinators indicated that their positions under SAFETEA-LU were instrumental in building support for the program on the ground and within the state DOTs. Several of the coordinators expressed concern that without a dedicated program and coordinator, the “watershed

moment” in which both citizens and the state institutions recognized the value of the program will not be reached.

Of the states interviewed, only Colorado and Florida are retaining full-time Safe Routes to School state coordinators whose positions have not been merged with other duties or roles. In the case of Colorado, the coordinator indicated that her work within the DOT was instrumental in building support for a state 20 percent match for projects, representing how important these positions are in selling the program both internally and to the state.

One strong example of how states can provide support to communities is Ohio. Ohio, uniquely among those states interviewed for this report, maps student proximity to schools. Extra points are awarded to applications from low-income schools, and for rural schools, projects are ranked based on the percentage of students who would benefit from a project. While the state does not track projects by income or population, the state coordinator estimates that between 60 and 70 percent of Safe Routes to School funding goes to small towns and low-income communities.

We encourage states to prioritize low-income, rural and small communities, and to provide state assistance for matching funds.

Prioritizing Small, Rural and Low-income Communities:

We encourage states to prioritize low-income, rural and small communities, and to provide state assistance for matching funds. Many of the schools and communities with the greatest need for Safe Routes to School projects are those that have the hardest time complying with the federal matching requirements. And while many states are at least indirectly prioritizing these communities, we believe that proactively and directly prioritizing disadvantaged communities is necessary to maximize the effectiveness of federal TAP funds.

Maine’s rolling application cycle is another good example of how identifying creative solutions can help ease the burden on communities that stand to benefit most from Safe Routes to School projects. While the state does not provide matching funds to disadvantaged communities, the rolling application cycle allows communities to take the time necessary to identify matching funds before they apply for a grant.

Conclusion

Safe Routes to School has a proven effect on the long-term health and well-being of our children by encouraging more children to walk and bicycle to and from school under vastly improved safety conditions. We know the costs of inaction to children's safety and obesity levels, both in terms of dollars and health. And we know that these costs are particularly high in disadvantaged communities that have the greatest need for Safe Routes to School dollars.

Regrettably, the consolidation of Safe Routes to School into the Transportation Alternatives Program has already been detrimental to the implementation and funding of projects, as most states have not yet completed a first application cycle. With less money available, we see examples such as Alabama, where of 49 awarded TAP applicants, only five were Safe Routes to School projects, or Kansas,

We know the costs of inaction to children's safety and obesity levels, both in terms of dollars and health.

which received \$40 million worth of Safe Routes to School project requests but was only able to award \$11 million over two years. Unfortunately, in our interviews with state coordinators, stories like these represented the rule, rather than the exception.

While the current political and budget climate in Washington, D.C. makes it doubtful that Safe Routes to School will return to a standalone program with

fully restored funding, we believe that by moving forward as expeditiously as possible with TAP competitions and award cycles, as well as adhering to best practices such as providing the federal match to disadvantaged communities, states can have a significant impact on the overall competitiveness of Safe Routes to School projects under the Transportation Alternatives Program.





End Notes

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