

# Navigating MAP-21: The Safe Routes to School Edition

September 6, 2012 webinar

## Questions and Answers

### Transportation Alternatives Funding

- **What if our state doesn't have any urban areas with 200,000 or more population?**

As the flowchart on slide 5 of Margo's presentation shows, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) that represent areas with 200,000 people or more will receive a lump sum of Transportation Alternatives funds. Those MPOs must then hold a competition to award the funds.

If there are no MPOs representing areas of 200,000 or more, then all of the funding in the state's "population pot" of Transportation Alternatives will be available for a competition run by the state. When awarding projects in this "population pot", the state must ensure that they select projects that are split appropriately between areas with 5,000-200,000 in population, and areas with less than 5,000 population. So, for example, a state with many small towns that make up 40% of the state's population, the DOT must ensure that 40% of the "population pot" funds are awarded to projects in these small towns.

- **The part of Transportation Alternatives funding that can be transferred, is there a date or deadline when that must be done?**

On the flowchart on slide 5 of Margo's presentation, the "unrestricted pot" on the right side of the flowchart includes half of Transportation Alternatives funds. These funds can be transferred by state DOTs to other transportation programs. There is no deadline by which states need to make the determination to transfer funds. They can transfer all of these funds out right after they are provided on October 1, or a state could transfer smaller portions of funds multiple times throughout the year.

It can be very difficult to know whether states are transferring these funds, so we are going to have to keep our eye on this. States that do not have a strong history on bicycling and walking funding may transfer the money right away, so we need to work together to prevent this from happening. The real issue will be to put sunlight on state decisions and try to push state DOTs to get details and commitments not to transfer the funds. It is important that states publicly commit to their plans on Transportation Alternatives. Even if a state does the right thing in the next few years, staff can change and therefore policies could change. So it's important to get the state DOT on record.

- **The Transportation Alternatives program was cut by 30%. How does that compare to other program funding levels within MAP-21?**

Unfortunately, Transportation Alternatives took the brunt of the cuts in the transportation bill. Most other programs stayed pretty close to level funding. It is difficult to be definitive as many transportation programs were consolidated or moved to other programs and their funding didn't always move to the new category. The Highway Safety Improvement

Program did see a good increase in funding. It was a difficult environment in Congress with some influential leaders pushing to restrict funding to roads and bridges. We did the best we could – and states that value bicycling, walking and Safe Routes to School can use the transferability clause to add money back to Transportation Alternatives to restore the funding cuts.

### **DOT Advisory Committees**

- **When you talk about the Safe Routes to School advisory committee for the DOT, how are they set up and who do they report to?**

There may be advisory committees at various levels. At the state level, the advisory committee can be set up specific to Safe Routes to School, and work to the Safe Routes to School coordinator. Other advisory committees may report directly to the Governor or to the state’s transportation board. These can be powerful groups that influence project selection, and can also help ensure diverse viewpoints in the state’s Safe Routes to School implementation.

Advisory committees can also exist at the local level to help guide the community’s implementation of Safe Routes to School. They would report to the community’s lead representative for Safe Routes to School, such as the mayor, city council, or local engineering department.

- **What if your DOT has not set up an advisory committee and has elected to set up only an internal advisory group. Is there language that instructs DOTs to set up an external advisory group as a requirement?**

The state DOT has the decision-making power about whether to convene an advisory committee. Unless the state legislature has required an advisory committee, it is up to advocates to make the case to the DOT that a diverse advisory committee is important.

### **Bicycle/Pedestrian Education**

- **How can bike/ped education programs be funded?**

Bicycle and pedestrian education targeted at kids is eligible within Safe Routes to School. It is a little unclear how bike/ped education for adults will be funded. We believe there may be some possibilities within the Transportation Alternatives eligibility for “safe routes for non-drivers” and also within the Highway Safety Improvement Program. It is also eligible under the Surface Transportation Program as a safety program, which allows education, and also under the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program. We are seeking to clarify with USDOT the “safe routes for non-drivers” eligibility to see if it can include education.

- **If bike/ped education projects are not allowed under MAP-21, can we still apply for an education only SRTS project?**

This will depend on your state and how they choose to administer the Transportation Alternatives program. Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure uses are still eligible, but it is up to states how they choose to make those funds available. For example, a state may choose to require projects that include both infrastructure and non-infrastructure rather

than funding stand-alone education projects. This is something that states are able to do now, in the existing Safe Routes to School program. If your state is currently funding education-only programs, it is a possibility that they will continue to allow these eligibilities. But you will need to check with your state's Safe Routes to School coordinator for details—however, the coordinator may not yet know the answer as state DOTs consider how to implement Transportation Alternatives.

- **Will DOT be offering the Safe Routes to School Trainings that the National Center used to do?**

We are advocating that the US DOT retain the National Center for Safe Routes to School, so we hope they will be able to continue offering those trainings. If the worst case scenario happens and the National Center is not continued by USDOT, we will work with the Center to identify options for continuing the most important functions of the Center.

### **Spending Existing Safe Routes to School Funds**

- **If a state has leftover Safe Routes to School funds under SAFETEA-LU, can they decide to opt-out of spending and rescind these funds back to FHWA?**

Sometimes, Congress asks the state DOTs to return a portion of their transportation funds back to Washington. That process is called rescissions, and during rescissions, state DOTs select which of their funds to “rescind” – or to send back to the Federal Highway Administration.

Safe Routes to School is one of the few transportation programs in which the funds do not expire. And, up until this point, Safe Routes to School funds have been protected from rescissions because they are safety funds (meaning states could not rescind any Safe Routes to School funds).

With these protections, the Safe Routes to School funds will sit with the DOT until they spend it. However, it is possible that Congress will ask for new rescissions in the future (although none are planned at this point), and Safe Routes to School funds could be a target since it has been folded into Transportation Alternatives. This is why it is critical for states to get their Safe Routes to School funds awarded and obligated.

- **If a state has leftover SRTS funds, and decides to continue spending on SRTS projects, is the state then mandated that they keep the SRTS State Coordinator on staff (because of the tie to existing funds)?**

This is an issue that will have to be clarified by the USDOT when they issue guidance on the implementation of Transportation Alternatives. We would like to see Safe Routes to School coordinators continue to be required until a state has spent all of its Safe Routes to School funding, because there are still thousands of projects across the country “in the pipeline” working their way towards construction. At the very least, we want state DOTs to be able

to continue to pay for their Safe Routes to School coordinators out of the state's Safe Routes to School funds as long as projects remain to be completed.

- **If a state has funds remaining for Safe Routes to School, will that money be spent under MAP-21 rules? Or under SAFETEA-LU rules?**

The Federal Highway Administration has already provided a response on this question (at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/qa.cfm>). They have indicated that a state must spend the money under the rules that were in effect when the funds were received. So all funds that a state has received for Safe Routes to School through September 30, 2012 are to be expended per the Safe Routes to School law. Funds received starting October 1, 2012 are to be expended per the new Transportation Alternatives rules.

- **Where is the State of the States information located?**

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership produces the "State of the States" report each quarter to track how much of its available Safe Routes to School funds a state has awarded and obligated. The State of the States report can help you see whether your state has enough funds available to hold another Safe Routes to School competition. The report is available at <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/stateofstates>

- **Will Map-21 affect projects in the Florida DOT Work Program that have been programmed out into future years?**

Florida has programmed Safe Routes to School projects as far out as 2017, and has promised millions in funding more than what is available through their existing Safe Routes to School program. The Florida DOT could take funds from other funding categories, such as the Surface Transportation Program or the Highway Safety Improvement Program, to ensure that these projects—which have already been promised to communities throughout the state—can continue. It is unclear whether the Florida DOT could simply direct Transportation Alternatives funds to these already-programmed projects, given the requirements in the law to suballocate funds and hold competitions. This is an area that will require further input from the USDOT.

### **Implementation Challenges**

- **Does MAP-21 make paperwork for SRTS infrastructure easier, or harder?**

In essence, there are a lot of regulatory steps that you have to go through to get a Safe Routes to School project built. We were working to get that process simplified through legislation, but unfortunately, Congress actually applied the Safe Routes to School regulatory requirements to all of Transportation Alternatives. However, there are portions of MAP-21 that may be helpful. Congress placed a lot of focus in this bill on getting projects completed more quickly. There is language in MAP-21 that requires USDOT to identify best practices to get projects completed more quickly, and to work with states to speed implementation. This language specifically instructs USDOT to look at these provisions for projects in all transportation modes and of all sizes. We will be working with USDOT to provide our recommendations and experiences about the challenges we have had in Safe

Routes to School and adjustments they can make to improve project delivery. This will be something that could take a year.

### **Transportation Alternatives Application Processes and Priorities**

- **Massachusetts runs Safe Routes to School differently from pretty much every other state. In Massachusetts, all Safe Routes to School services are provided directly by the DOT or its contractors - there are no grants awarded directly to schools or communities. Effectively, the DOT keeps all the Safe Routes to School money in-house, and offers a menu of services to schools. Does MAP-21 mean that Massachusetts must shift to the more common grant-based model for Safe Routes to School?**

Specific to Massachusetts, the state has about \$11 million available in Safe Routes to School funding that has not yet been spent, so the state can continue its current model with existing Safe Routes to School funds. With Transportation Alternatives, this is an area in which we will need more guidance from the USDOT. But it is likely to be difficult for the state to continue to administer it without a grant competition. The legislation requires the state to hold a competition for the funds, and the state DOT is not eligible to compete for the funds. So it is likely that the state will need to hold a competition of some sort, but they may be able to find creative ways to administer it through the state DOT. States that are in this situation should check in with USDOT to get clarification on their specific situation.

- **What determines priorities when it comes to funding sidewalks?**

Every state and community handles it differently. Each state has a lot of leeway in how they judge Safe Routes to School applications, and can use different factors in deciding which projects to fund. Sidewalks are infrastructure projects, and priorities could include how many children will be affected by the addition of the sidewalks, the gravity of safety problems solved by the sidewalks, and more. You should contact your state's Safe Routes to School coordinator to find out its priorities in selecting infrastructure projects. At the local level, your community's engineers and planners understand your local codes on building sidewalks and can help you understand prioritization for use of local funds.

- **Is there any guidance from USDOT about criteria and ranking for Safe Routes to School applications?**

We don't know for sure what kind of guidance the USDOT will provide to states for the Transportation Alternatives programs. We have heard they are interested in providing some suggestions to the large Metropolitan Planning Organizations that will need to set up grant programs for their "lump sum" sub-allocated funds through Transportation Alternatives. Since most states are running competitions for Safe Routes to School under current law, most states already have some experience about how to rank these applications.

- **My community received a grant to connect our downtown. Why aren't connections to schools a priority?**

While we don't know the specifics of the grant you are referencing, it is likely provided through another program other than Safe Routes to School. There are a number of

different transportation programs, and each of them have different priorities for what types of projects they will fund. Safe Routes to School projects must take place within two miles of a school, which does prioritize connections to schools.

- **Is SRTS funding going to continue to serve grades k-8? Can it be expanded to k-12?**  
Under current law, Safe Routes to School can only serve grades K-8. So that same restriction applies for Safe Routes to School funds awarded through the new Transportation Alternatives program. However, there is an interesting possibility. In Transportation Alternatives, a new eligibility was added for projects and systems to create “safe routes for non-drivers.” This could potentially create an opportunity to do Safe Routes to School types of projects to serve high school students. Many states are implementing graduated drivers licenses in which teenagers don’t get full drivers licenses until 17 or 18. Bicycling can be a great solution for high school students, particularly given the longer distances many students have to get to high school. So this may be a possibility, but we will need more direction from USDOT in this area.

### **State Transportation Alternatives Campaigns**

- **Where do I find info about our state's "campaign" leader?**  
As discussed in Margo’s presentation, in partnership with Advocacy Advance, a lead person has been identified in nearly every state to lead the campaigns to urge state DOTs to fully fund, staff and implement Transportation Alternatives. Safe Routes to School advocates are urged to get in touch with their state’s lead and get involved in the campaign. A list of state leads is available at: <http://www.bit.ly/MAP21stateleads>.
- **Who is America Bikes?**  
America Bikes was mentioned in Margo’s presentation as an organization the Safe Routes to School National Partnership is working with on federal guidance. America Bikes is a coalition of several national bicycling and walking organizations to work together on federal policy and advocacy. More information is available at <http://www.americabikes.org>.

### **Highway Safety Improvement Program**

- **Who is the bike/ped rep on the Highway Safety Improvement Program?**  
As mentioned in Margo’s presentation, there is a new requirement that a state include a bicycle/pedestrian representative in the state’s safety planning committee. The legislation is not very specific, but it does say that it should be a “State” representative, implying that it is an employee of the state DOT. It is not definitive, however, so we are seeking clarification from the US DOT as we would like to see states be able to include advocates or other representatives that are not employed by the state DOT. This is an issue that may be addressed by USDOT guidance, and you may want to check in with your state’s Safe Routes to School coordinator to get their thoughts.

### **State Network Project**

- **What is the difference between the Safe Routes to School National Partnership’s state network staff and the DOT SRTS coordinators?**

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership has been running a network project since 2007; we currently run 7 state networks (CA, FL, MS, NC, NJ, OH and TN). We have full-time staffers, called state advocacy organizers, that are employees of our organization. They facilitate coalitions to address implementation of MAP-21, federal funding issues, complete streets policies and joint use of public facilities. The state's Safe Routes to School coordinator and sometimes the state's bike/ped coordinator participates in the coalition. These are ad hoc coalitions that do not report to the state DOT. More information on the network project is available at: <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/network>

- **What is the best way to facilitate working relationships between the Safe Routes to School National Partnership's network staff and the DOT?**

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership's network organizers work hard to develop strong working relationships with the state DOT and build trust, particularly with the Safe Routes to School coordinator. This involves including the SRTS coordinators in the network meetings, as appropriate, to share information and provide updates on the state's progress. Our goal is to retain the Safe Routes to School coordinators and the program, so our organizers and coalitions can be allies for the DOT.

- **Why is the network project only in 7 states?**

Our network is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and we are currently funded to work just in those seven states. We do also have a regional network project funded by Kaiser Permanente; more information is available on the regional network here: <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/local/rnp>.

### **Engaging Policymakers**

- **How do we register for the September 6 webinar on how to engage policymakers through Safe Routes to School events and site visits?**

The webinar will take place on Thursday, September 6 from 2-3pm ET / 11am-12pm PT. You can register at <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5053583384676796928>.