

# How Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) Plan and Fund Bicycling and Walking Investments

**Background:** The new transportation law, MAP-21, gives Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) more responsibility for distributing federal transportation funds. MPOs serving areas with populations over 200,000 are required to run a competitive grant program to distribute Transportation Alternative Program funds. As a result of these new rules, many transportation stakeholders – including MPO professionals, federal policy makers, and bicycling and walking advocates – are interested in learning from MPOs currently engaged in effective planning and funding methods for bicycling and walking.

**Goal:** Identify best practices to effectively integrate bicycling and walking needs into the MPO planning and funding process, in general and related to the competitive grant program, in particular.

## General Best Practices

In general, successful communities have three things:

1. Strong political leadership
2. Capable staff – supportive staff is even better
3. Regular funding stream(s)

## Planning Best Practices

- Integrate bicycling and walking projects and/or strategies in the region’s Long Range Plan
- Involve the community in identifying its needs and priorities: they lead to goals
  - Constituent survey – demonstrate public support for goals
  - Include health questions on Regional household Travel Survey
  - Frame transportation planning according to a way of life people identify with
- Collect data on bicycling and walking rates, including to school
  - MPO shares data back to localities
  - Safe Routes to School
    - Track communities with school level plans – go after what you can measure
    - International Walk to School Day data (see the National Center for Safe Routes to School: [www.saferoutesinfo.org/events-and-training/walk-to-school-day](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/events-and-training/walk-to-school-day))
- Integrate bicycling and walking projects into other planning documents
  - Regional Comprehensive plan points to greenways and trails plan (used in Chicago)
  - Recognized projects list
  - Sub-plans developed by groups
  - MPO funds county-level transportation plans and captures all needs including bike/ped (inner county vs. outer county; consulting firms)
- MPOs are good at supporting local planning. Focus on walking/cycling improvements at the local level by:
  - Fund local planning initiatives
  - Work with local officials to identify local priorities
  - Help them bundle small projects into regionally significant projects

- Integrate elements from regional plans (e.g. priority corridors & complete streets) into local plans. This shows a united commitment to biking and walking among regional and local levels.
- Create a database of bikeways (geo-coded)
  - Local, regional, & sub-regional plans
  - Builds support for funding when everybody's on board – it's on all the plans
  - Aligns the different levels of the plan

### Funding Best Practices

- Establish a transparent process
  - Selection criteria should be clear and measurable
  - Reduces “politics” and creates credibility
- Pass and implement a Complete Streets policy
  - Ensure all projects meet the needs of all relevant road users
- Establish an effective MPO Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee (see our Advocacy Advance report for tips: [www.advocacyadvance.org/site\\_images/content/bpac\\_best\\_practices\(web\).pdf](http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/bpac_best_practices(web).pdf))

### Suggested Funding Approaches

- Use performance measures to tie funds to regionally-embraced goals and objectives
  - Make sure you have data
- Percentage set-aside for bike/ped projects in the Surface Transportation Program (STP), Congestion, Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), and Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) (see our Advocacy Advance Fair Share For Safety report: [www.advocacyadvance.org/site\\_images/content/hsip\\_2012\\_updated.pdf](http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/hsip_2012_updated.pdf))
  - Set-asides needs to be high. They can limit spending if they're too low.
- Focus on health (used in Nashville)
  - Map unhealthy areas and give projects in those areas get extra points while scoring
- Focus on mode-shift goal (used in Chicago)
- Focus on bicycling/walking level of service

## **Best Practices for Transportation Alternatives Competitive Grant Program**

- Involve Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) members and bicycling stakeholders in establishing applications, selection criteria, and project selection decisions
- Project selection criteria should:
  - Be transparent and public
  - Be clear and measurable
  - Emphasize bicycling and walking
- Project selection criteria example (used in Kansas City)
  - Consideration for
    - Non-motorized transportation
    - Mobility and safety
    - Intermodal connections
    - Quality of life
    - Reducing Single Occupancy Use and improving air quality

- Equity and safety (additional suggestion)
      - Score and rank projects based on user counts, adjacent business
- Have a balanced composition on your project selection committee:
  - Bicycling advocates
  - Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) members
  - Transit representatives
  - Park representatives
  - Accessibility representatives
  - Some, but not predominantly, public works agency staff
  - Safe Routes to School advocates and/or school reps
  - Representatives from communities
- Communicate clearly and work with communities to develop high-quality bike/ped applications
  - Bike/ped outcome is only as good as the applications
- Field checks / site visits:
  - MPO staff – and committee members as relevant – go to proposed site(s)
  - Take photos for selection committee to refer to (e.g. herd path shows need for sidewalk)
  - Use visit to determine if cost estimates are in line
  - Note: field checks require staff time. Alternative: Google Street view. Some MPOs require photo as part of application.
- In first months of MAP-21, quickly get the process going .Delays can be politically damaging to bike/ped projects in the future
  - Fund good, fast, existing Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancements, and Rec. Trails projects as Transportation Alternatives
  - Spend down existing TE, SRTS, Rec. Trails funds (see our Navigating MAP-21 one-pager: [www.advocacyadvance.org/site\\_images/content/Fully\\_Spend\\_Existing\\_Funds.pdf](http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/Fully_Spend_Existing_Funds.pdf))
  - Fund incomplete projects (projects stalled due to lack of funding)
- Evaluate and revisit the process (application, criteria, committees) after each funding round to make improvements

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