

Case Study: Delaware Department of Transportation

DeIDOT Provides Hands-On Support for TAP's Local Project Sponsors

In Delaware, the types of projects funded under the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, typically have not been competitive in the allocation of general transportation funds. This is because Delaware is a small State with a large metropolitan planning organization (the Wilmington Area Planning Council) that covers more than one-third (New Castle County) of the State. TAP is a valued funding source for making projects possible. Key to the success of Delaware's TAP is the fact that the Delaware Department of Transportation (DeIDOT) manages project development and implementation on behalf of local project sponsors. DeIDOT can do this because of the small size of the State and because the agency does not have the additional layer of district offices that DOTs in larger States have.

TAP Implementation

Before enactment of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), DeIDOT's competitive process was to accept applications at any time, approve all eligible projects, and implement the projects as funding became available. In response to MAP-21's requirement for a competitive process, DeIDOT developed a process to prioritize projects as a statewide program.

As a small State, Delaware receives a relatively modest amount of Federal funding for transportation. Because most TAP-eligible projects tend to be small, it is harder for them to compete with traditional highway projects for funding. That is where the TAP comes in handy. The department primarily uses the program to support pedestrian and bicycle projects, spending about 80 percent of program funds on these types of projects. For now, DeIDOT officials are not using TAP funds for Safe Routes to School projects because the State still has funds for that program remaining from the previous transportation authorization. Further, Delaware schools have not expressed much interest to date in the Safe Routes to School program.

To get the most out of its TAP funds, DeIDOT takes advantage of supplemental funding sources. For example, when trail projects are submitted for consideration, staffers screen those projects for eligibility for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program. If a project is found eligible and funds are available, DeIDOT uses its CMAQ funds instead, freeing up TAP money for other types of eligible projects.

Another advantage of being in a small State is that DeIDOT is able to be very involved in the development of TAP projects. DeIDOT staff works directly with local project sponsors, serving as a consultant for projects and handling administrative and project management responsibilities for the sponsors. DeIDOT manages the entire process from conceptual planning and soliciting public input to cost analysis, final design, and construction management.

Transportation Alternatives Program

TAP provides funding for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, which include on- and off-road facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation and enhanced mobility, community improvement activities, and environmental mitigation. The program also covers recreational trail projects, safe routes to school, and projects for planning, designing, or constructing boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of former divided highways.

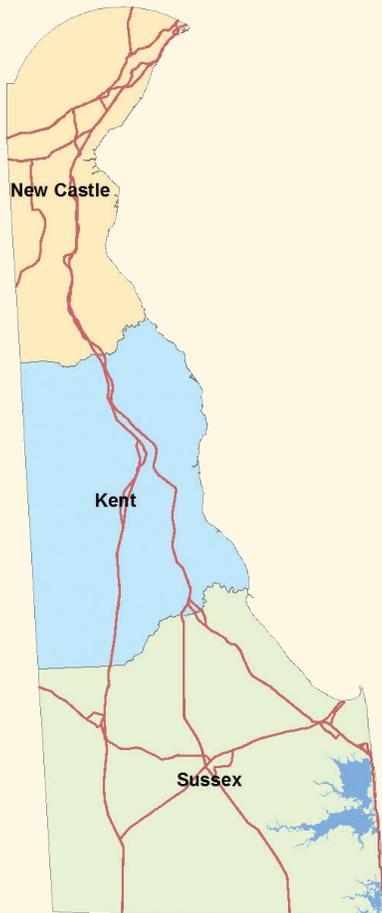
This series of case studies examines how DOTs and MPOs around the country have implemented TAP within their areas.

Note: The Recreational Trails Program was not reviewed as part of this case study series, because it is a set-aside from TAP and the States run it as a separate program.

Delaware Transportation Alternatives Program Funds, Fiscal Year 2014

TAP Category	FY 2014 Apportionment
Areas anywhere in the State	\$1,362,340
Areas with population > 200,000	\$730,718
Areas with population between 5,000 and 200,000	\$388,366
Areas with population < 5,000	\$243,255
Total	\$2,724,679

Areas with Population > 200,000	FY 2014 Apportionment
Philadelphia	\$730,718



In addition, because TAP staff is co-located in the DeIDOT headquarters building, the program has easy access to support staff from other offices needed to complete projects, such as finance, environmental review, and right-of-way. DeIDOT has formed a cross-functional team of staff from these supporting offices who work on TAP projects, which has enabled this team to develop expertise in these types of projects, improving their effectiveness and efficiency over time. For example, one DeIDOT real estate appraiser now is assigned to all TAP projects.

The hands-on approach that DeIDOT and the Federal Highway Administration reviewers used, combined with the consistent team of project supporters, has helped the program maintain a high success rate for project completion. In fact, the average project is completed within 2 to 2.5 years after funding is awarded. According to DeIDOT officials, the longer it takes to start a project, the more likely that turnover occurs at the local sponsor level. Therefore, the department strives to develop and complete TAP projects as soon as possible, while the local interest remains high.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Coordinate Across Projects to Extend Benefits. Despite its size, Delaware employs resourceful practices to maximize the reach of TAP funds. In addition to using CMAQ funds when possible, DeIDOT has identified opportunities to integrate TAP activities into some larger projects. For example, TAP staff reviews the DeIDOT Pavement Management Division's annual road inventory to determine if any future paving activities overlap with TAP projects and coordinates with the division on construction. This coordination helps to streamline projects and reduce costs.

Provide Administrative Support to Local Officials. Even before Congress enacted MAP-21, DeIDOT faced an ongoing challenge of generating local interest in the Safe Routes to School program. The department found that many eligible schools were reluctant to sponsor projects because they did not have the administrative capacity to manage Federal grants. To address this obstacle, DeIDOT now directly administers funding for these projects. This change has resulted in more projects being implemented around the State.

Critical Factors for Success

Support from within and outside DeIDOT is critical to the success of TAP. Within the department, TAP is viewed as a valuable program that helps bolster the agency's public image. Unlike highway projects, which are more likely to be controversial, TAP projects like trails and sidewalk connections typically garner a positive response from the public. Therefore, in addition to expanding transportation options, TAP generates good public relations for DeIDOT.

The department primarily relies on State legislative offices to promote the program to local communities. Constituents often contact their local legislative offices to inquire about funding opportunities for various projects, and the legislative staffers refer them to TAP and other State programs. Having buy-in from State officials helps gain access to other resources to support the program. A statewide Community Trust Fund also is available for the non-Federal match for TAP projects.

More Information

Visit DeIDOT's [Community Programs and Services](#).

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