

Case Study: Michigan Department of Transportation and Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

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.

Michigan Project Selection Overview

	Fiscal Year 2013*
Applications Submitted	116
Projects Selected	50
Total Requested	\$78.6 Million
Total Awarded	\$39.3 Million

*Included TAP and unused Transportation Enhancements funds.

Partnering with MPOs Helps Get More Projects off the Ground

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), enacted in July 2012, gave State departments of transportation (DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) just a few months to implement the new Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) before fiscal year 2013 funds became available. In the ensuing months, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) collaborated with the State's six large MPOs to implement their individual TAP initiatives. This collaboration, as demonstrated by MDOT's strong working relationship with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), is helping to ensure that the State's TAP funds are invested in projects that benefit local communities.

TAP Implementation

MDOT has a history of collaborating with MPOs on programs such as Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School. Every quarter, the agency would post an open call for applications and notify MPOs about the approved project lists from their jurisdictions. Then the local agencies would implement their Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School projects with MDOT's oversight. These earlier interactions made for an easy transition to TAP.

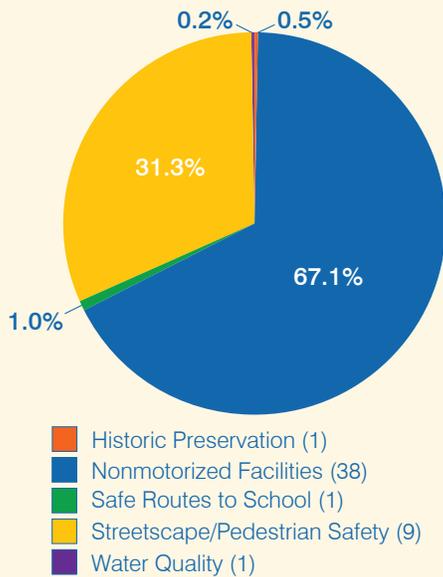
MDOT's director encouraged the department to collaborate with the MPOs on implementing TAP instead of having numerous, possibly different, programs within the State. Faced with the challenge of establishing the program in less than 3 months with limited staff resources dedicated to this program, SEMCOG and the other MPOs were eager to work with MDOT.

MDOT and the MPOs began meeting to coordinate their programs. As a first step, SEMCOG and the other five large MPOs adopted MDOT's grant management system. MDOT was in the process of developing a Web-based grant management system for the Transportation Enhancements program and had already invested a significant amount in the project. When MAP-21 became law, MDOT moved quickly to modify the application for TAP, adding a Safe Routes to School component and providing user access for MPO staff.

The new grant management system has functionalities for reviewing applications and project tracking, and both MDOT and MPO staff can see the data and generate reports. In addition, the new system provides an enhanced user experience for applicants. With one application, an applicant can submit a project for consideration to receive MPO and statewide funds, as well as the State's remaining Transportation Enhancement funds.

MDOT, SEMCOG, and the other MPOs cooperatively review the applications as well. For example, MDOT and SEMCOG conduct an initial review of applications jointly. MDOT's Selection Advisory Committee brings experience in technical review, including an engineering perspective, while SEMCOG provides analysis

Funds Awarded by Project Type for Transportation Enhancements and Transportation Alternatives Program in Michigan (2013)



Michigan Transportation Alternatives Program Funds, Fiscal Year 2014

TAP Category	FY 2014 Apportionment
Areas anywhere in the State	\$11,765,794
Areas with population > 200,000	\$6,611,959
Areas with population between 5,000 and 200,000	\$1,996,594
Areas with population < 5,000	\$3,157,240
Total	\$23,531,587

Areas with Population > 200,000	FY 2014 Apportionment
Ann Arbor*	\$364,298
Detroit*	\$4,445,177
Flint	\$424,053
Grand Rapids	\$678,468
Kalamazoo	\$249,637
Lansing	\$373,238
South Bend	\$43,207
Toledo*	\$33,881
Total	\$6,611,959

* Urbanized areas within SEMCOG

for regional connectivity and alignment of local place-based initiatives. Ultimately, funding decisions are made separately, but the DOT has jointly funded projects with all the MPOs. As with Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School, MDOT provides oversight for TAP projects.

The extent of the collaboration is not limited to selecting projects. The MDOT grant coordinators also work closely with the MPOs to raise awareness about the program at the local level and to generate stronger applications. The grant coordinators and MPO staffs conduct joint visits to potential project sites to determine eligibility. They meet with project consultants and engineers and provide feedback on how competitive a project might be. This cooperation helps to produce stronger project applications.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Use Technology to Support Collaboration and Efficiency. Sharing the same grant management system offers several advantages to MDOT and the MPOs. In addition to streamlining the application process, it facilitates easier communication about TAP projects, as all parties have access to the same data. The grant management system enables MPO and DOT staff to enter technical reviews into project records, which helps to keep everyone better informed. In addition, it makes statewide reporting on the use of TAP funds more efficient.

Focus on Implementation to Maintain a High Obligation Rate. In the early to mid-2000s, MDOT had a low obligation rate for Transportation Enhancement funds. Although the department was able to award funding, these projects lagged in implementation. At one point, the State had \$65 million in unobligated funds. The department now emphasizes the selection of strong projects and regular meetings with the MPOs to discuss progress on implementation. These measures have resulted in a higher obligation rate.

Critical Factors for Success

Around the time TAP was created, both the State of Michigan and SEMCOG launched place-based economic development initiatives that emphasized improving walkability, bikeability, and multimodal connections. Transportation is a key component of these economic development initiatives, and TAP is viewed as a critical resource for place-based projects that enhance transportation options.

Flexibility in the program better enables MDOT and SEMCOG to support these and other broader objectives, which builds additional interest in the program and helps maintain a high obligation rate. MDOT's open call for projects and quarterly reviews of applications make it easier to pair TAP-funded activities with larger road projects, such as adding bike lanes at the same time that a street is being restriped. Although SEMCOG has an annual call for projects, the MPO strongly encourages applicants to apply anytime, since MDOT reviews and selects projects quarterly.

More Information

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