

Case Study: North Central Texas 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.

A Texas MPO Ties Transportation Alternatives to Regional Plan

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) is a trailblazer in establishing its Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). The metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Dallas-Fort Worth area, NCTCOG was the first MPO to create such a program in Texas. Based on inspiration from around the country, NCTCOG tailored its program to support the region's long-term transportation goals of connectivity and equity.

TAP Implementation

When the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) became law in 2012, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) had a significant balance of unused Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds authorized under the previous Federal surface transportation authorization law. The department decided to hold a statewide call for projects to award the remaining TE funds. For the first time, TxDOT gave the MPOs for the State's most populous areas the responsibility for selecting the projects for their respective regions.

NCTCOG received approximately \$13 million in TE funds for the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Although that was the organization's first foray into directly awarding Federal funds for these types of transportation activities, the MPO had ample experience in managing and choosing projects for other Federal, State, and local grant programs. Based on this experience, NCTCOG officials felt confident in moving forward with implementing their TAP.

With the intention of holding the first call for projects in early 2014, NCTCOG worked to develop a program tailored for the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. The region's long-range transportation plan, **Mobility 2035: The Metropolitan Transportation Plan for the Dallas-Fort Worth Area**, emphasizes building multimodal connectivity. Bicycle and pedestrian improvements are critical to achieving that goal.

Accordingly, NCTCOG narrowed its eligibility criteria for TAP funding to focus on three broad categories of projects: active transportation facilities (e.g., sidewalks, trails, and bicycle infrastructure and facilities); safety and access to schools (e.g., safety improvements, and facilities and noninfrastructure activities to increase walking and biking to schools); and boulevards/urban thoroughfares (i.e., revitalization of urban roads, typically along former interstate system routes or other divided highways).

Another goal of Mobility 2035 is environmental justice, providing an equitable transportation system that improves mobility, access, air quality, and overall

Texas Transportation Alternatives Program Funds, Fiscal Year 2014

TAP Category	FY 2014 Apportionment
Areas anywhere in the State	\$37,463,082
Areas with population > 200,000	\$24,616,072
Areas with population between 5,000 and 200,000	\$6,474,921
Areas with population < 5,000	\$46,372,089
Total	\$74,926,164

Areas with Population > 200,000	FY 2014 Apportionment
Austin	\$2,029,794
Brownsville	\$324,169
Conroe—The Woodlands	\$357,471
Corpus Christi	\$476,854
Dallas—Fort Worth—Arlington*	\$7,630,844
Denton—Lewisville*	\$545,544
El Paso	\$1,150,720
Houston	\$7,366,307
Killeen	\$324,236
Laredo	\$351,202
Lubbock	\$353,625
McAllen	\$1,085,839
San Antonio	\$2,619,467
Total	\$24,616,072

*Urbanized areas within NCTCOG

quality of life for all communities within the region. To support attainment of that goal, NCTCOG included an equity criterion in its scoring system for TAP project applications. Applications receive more points if they would serve an area with an above-average proportion of minority and low-income households.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Use Available Resources and Learn From Others. As the first in Texas to implement a TAP, NCTCOG sought resources from across the country. A couple of the most useful resources included a seminar from the National Transportation Alternatives Clearinghouse and input from MPOs and States that had begun TAP implementation. Best practices from around the country helped to shape NCTCOG's TAP.

Employ Creative Financing to Incentivize Participation. To encourage local schools to participate in the Safety and Access to Schools category, NCTCOG borrowed an idea from the Ohio Department of Transportation and is using **transportation development credits** (also called toll credits) to provide the local matching requirement for these projects. State DOTs earn transportation development credits when capital investments are made in federally approved toll facilities. TxDOT allocates 75 percent of its credits to the MPO in whose region they were earned. The Dallas-Fort Worth area is home to more than 120 independent school districts, and NCTCOG views TAP as a way to engage these schools in the region's broader planning efforts.

Critical Factors for Success

To help ensure early program successes, the MPO has included in its project evaluation criteria a bonus category for projects in advanced stages of implementation. In addition, having right-of-way acquisition completed is a regional requirement intended to expedite projects.

More Information

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NCTCOG's [Transportation Alternatives Program](#)