



Transportation Act Reauthorization – 2009

Requested Congressional Action: Increase funding in the reauthorization of the Transportation Act for the Transportation Enhancements Program; bike and pedestrian trails; the Recreational Trails Program; the Boating Safety and Fishing Education Trust Fund; Safe Routes to School; and other transportation related programs that improve community health and livability, and transportation-related access to parks and recreation resources.

Current Need

In 2009, Congress will begin the process of reauthorizing and updating the nation's current Surface Transportation Act, known as SAFETEA-LU. In 1991, Congress passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act, ISTEA and since then, Congress has continued to pass a series of multi-year transportation authorizations.

Since ISTEA, Congress has intended that the nation's surface transportation program specifically include funding for more than just highway construction projects. Mindful of our nation's growing obesity epidemic and an increasingly significant need to mitigate congestion and pollution, Congress enabled the states to expand alternative transportation and promote increased physical activity while also protecting our environment. These programs included the Transportation Enhancements Program, the Recreational Trails Program, Safe Routes to School, the Boating Safety and Fishing Education Trust Fund (Wallops-Breaux Act) and other programs that promote livable communities, health, safety, and other transportation related benefits to user groups and communities nationwide. However, the Transportation Trust Fund, which is funded by an 18 ½ cent fuel excise tax that has not been raised since 1994, is widely expected to become depleted during the next reauthorization cycle. No consensus has yet emerged on how to fund the growing needs for both traditional and alternative transportation needs once these funds are depleted.

Background

SAFETEA-LU, the Safe, Accountable, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—a Legacy for Users, is the most recent bill that authorizes spending for the nation's surface transportation program. SAFETEA-LU was passed in fiscal years 2005 and runs through 2009. A new multi-year reauthorization is anticipated to be taken up by Congress in the summer of 2009.

As non-highway construction spending has grown in recent reauthorization cycles, this funding has become increasingly important to cities, counties, states and regions in creating alternative transportation networks, bike and pedestrian trails, and other transportation-related components that provide livable communities. The upcoming reauthorization of the Transportation Act will allow more people than ever access to public lands and to healthier lifestyles, and will provide transportation links to parks and recreation facilities by cyclists, hikers, transit users, school children, and highway users, thus reducing congestion and pollution.

The highlights of SAFETEA-LU authorizations for important park and recreation-related program categories include:

- **Transportation Enhancements (TE):** Roughly \$3.5 billion through FY09 (about \$625-\$685 million per year), a slight increase over the previous law, TEA-21. The TE program funds 12 categories of transportation-related community projects, but trails and pedestrian/bicycle facilities have historically accounted for about half of TE funding (\$300 million/year) since its establishment in 1991.
- **Recreational Trails Program (RTP):** A separate program in the bill, the Recreational Trails Program, has been funded at \$370 million through FY09, a 64% increase over TEA-21 levels. Funding began at \$60 million in FY05, and rose to \$85 million FY09. Many hiking, cycling, and off-road vehicle trails benefit from RTP funds. The funds are made available to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses.

- **Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS):** \$612 million over 5 Federal fiscal years (FY 2005–2009) to enable and encourage primary and secondary school children to walk and bicycle to school. Both infrastructure-related and behavioral projects are geared toward providing a safe, appealing environment for walking and biking that will improve the quality of children’s lives and support national health objectives by reducing traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.
- **Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program:** \$25 million per year through FY09 for four areas (Columbia, Missouri, Marin County, California, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, and Sheboygan County, Wisconsin) to help develop trails and other pedestrian/bicycle facilities. (See below for information on new initiatives)
- **Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program:** \$8.6 billion through FY09 to help communities with air quality problems invest in less-polluting alternative forms of transportation, including pedestrian/bicycling facilities and trails.
- **Boating Safety and Fishing Education Trust Fund (Wallops-Breaux Act; Aquatic Resources Trust Fund):** Funded at about \$350 million over five years, this fund utilizes the proceeds of the boat fuel excise tax to fund boating safety programs in the states, build marina pump out facilities, restore sport fishing resources, provide boating access from public parks, and fund other boating safety and boating law enforcement programs. In addition, the fund provides for wetland conservation and mitigation projects and youth education through fishing appreciation and other aquatic resources education programs.

Return on Investment: Case Studies

Alternative modes of transportation significantly contribute to the health, safety, environmental protection and economic vitality of communities throughout our country.

Congestion Mitigation: Marion County, California estimated that 21% of morning traffic was associated with parents driving their children to school. In 2000, the Safe Routes to Schools Program was implemented in Marion County. In the first year of the program, walking and biking to school increased by 57% and by 2004, 33 schools representing over 13,000 children were participating. This mitigated traffic congestion and increased physical activity of school aged children.

Environmental Protection: In Waterboro, Maine, rainwater runoff from Rt. 5 was being emptied into a nearby public swimming area, thereby polluting the water and endangering the public’s health. Through Transportation Enhancements funding, Waterboro has now installed a subsurface filtration system that cleans the water.

Increased Property Values: Indianapolis, Indiana has converted an abandoned railway to a trail for biking, walking, rollerblading and other outdoor recreation activities. The trail attracts 1.2 million visitors a year and studies show that the 9,000 homes that are located within ½ mile of the trail have a sales premium of more than \$13,000. This premium has resulted in a \$116 million increase in property values and increased tax revenue for the local community and the state.

For more information on parks and recreation related transportation programs and to see the NRPA report on transportation funding related to recreation, visit: www.nrpa.org/advocacy