

SUPPORTING THE TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

Background

Since 1991, the Transportation Alternatives (TA) program has been the nation's largest dedicated source of funding for bicycling, walking, and trails projects. Administered by the Federal Highway Administration, TA provides funding to states for alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles and for improvements to transportation assets. Specifically, TA funds bicycle and pedestrian projects, Safe Routes to School (SRTS) projects, and the Recreational Trails Program projects. Other TA project categories include: stormwater mitigation in rights-of-way; wildlife management; vegetation management in rights-of-way for safety, erosion control, and invasive species control; and scenic turnouts and overlooks.

The TA program is part of the comprehensive surface transportation law, which, unless Congress takes action, will expire on September 30, 2026. On May 22, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee passed a comprehensive surface transportation bill (H.R. 8870) that includes the TA program funded at \$1.66 billion and all project categories. However, no further House action has occurred, and the Senate has not taken any action on a bill.

The Issue

Communities want more cost-effective transportation options, like biking and walking. Rural communities are particularly seeking more investment in active transportation projects as they plan multiuse trails and other facilities that improve quality of life and economic development. Unfortunately, available funding does not meet the demand for increased bike/pedestrian and trails projects. Increased funding for the TA program can help meet these demands.

Landscape architects are uniquely educated and trained to be the lead design professionals of active transportation projects. The profession accesses TA to work with communities to plan and design bicycle, pedestrian, trails, vegetation and stormwater management, and other TA projects across the nation.

Transportation Alternatives Program and Community Benefits

TA projects provide a myriad of community benefits, such as offering safe transportation options, jumpstarting economic development, promoting healthy lifestyles, and obtaining environmental benefits. Bicycling and walking are increasingly becoming primary transportation options for individuals and families. Dedicated, safe infrastructure is needed to meet this demand. The SRTS program helps communities make infrastructure improvements like constructing sidewalks, bike lanes, pathways, safe crossings, and traffic signals, which has helped millions of children safely walk or bike to and from school. Active transportation projects also promote healthy lifestyles and can prevent many diseases. In addition, these projects emit less pollution, which can contribute to asthma and other health concerns.

Active transportation projects are also helping to jumpstart economic development in urban and rural communities across the country. The Urban Land Institute found that bike-friendly cities and towns enjoy increased tourism, including extended stays and return visits. A Rails to Trails Conservancy study found that active transportation infrastructure contributes more than \$34 billion annually to the U.S. economy—an amount that could grow to \$135 billion with improved connectivity. TA projects generate 10 to 23 jobs per \$1 million spent, whereas traditional road projects create roughly 8 jobs per \$1 million.

Request

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) urges Congress to help communities meet their active transportation needs by supporting a robust Transportation Alternatives program in the next surface transportation reauthorization measure. A strong TA program must include all current project categories and be funded at no less than \$1.66 billion annually. ASLA also asks legislators to support maintaining current law, which prevents states from transferring TA funds for other, unintended purposes.