

Greater Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Solicitation

Statewide Program Outcome Objectives

In 2013 MnDOT underwent a significant stakeholder engagement process to develop the Transportation Alternatives solicitation. Four key program goals related to outcomes were identified. They provide statewide objectives for TA project selection and serve as the basis for the reporting and evaluation associated with the program.

1. Promote Projects Identified through a Planning Process

MnDOT and partners continually undergo considerable efforts to identify projects that align with and advance statewide, regional and local goals. These projects should be considered priorities for the overall transportation system and/or for specific programs or modal systems. They are identified through comprehensive planning processes and documents (e.g. MnSHIP, Statewide Bicycle System Plan, MPO plans). It was noted that these planning efforts typically involve extensive outreach and project vetting in order to identify projects of greatest importance. Because of this, it is important that the projects identified through planning processes, when eligible, are able to be advanced through the TA solicitation.

While some plans are already in existence, additional plans may be added in future years. It is important that the TA solicitation is set up to address projects identified in both current as well as future plans as they are adopted.

2. Support Safe Routes to School

An interest in maintaining a certain level of investment in Safe Routes to School was heard consistently during outreach. While there were many different ideas expressed as to how this would be best accomplished, there was general support for the program. It was noted that this support has been demonstrated beyond the transportation community through the State Legislature appropriating State resources for SRTS as well as the Department of Health's involvement in SRTS through SHIP, among other examples. Interest in SRTS in Minnesota is growing. Continuing to invest TA dollars toward STRS projects would help all transportation partners develop partnerships and allow the SRTS community to leverage additional resources to continue to advance the program. Because of this, some degree of preference for SRTS projects should be incorporated in the TAP project selection process to ensure a minimum investment amount.

However, it was also noted that one longer-term goal for the SRTS program is to become more fully integrated into all related MnDOT processes. This would suggest that while a specific focus on SRTS may be justified in the near term, in order to promote the program and capitalize on other available resources and interest, the goal would be for the program to become more integrated into the general structure of TA over time.

3. Serve a Transportation Purpose

A major theme heard during outreach, also consistent with FHWA direction, is that the projects funded through TA should serve a transportation purpose as their primary function rather than a recreational purpose. For the

TA program, “transportation purpose” is defined as primarily serving a commuting purpose and/or connecting two destination points. A facility may serve both a transportation purpose and a recreational purpose. A facility that connects people to recreational destinations may be considered to have a transportation purpose. The TA solicitation process should be structured such that the projects selected meet this definition.

Examples of projects that do not serve a transportation purpose include a loop trail with overlapping start and end points, interpretive trails and other transportation infrastructure that does not connect destinations or make it easier for the traveling public to complete purpose-driven trips.

It was noted that there are recreation needs throughout the state. However, there is limited TA funding. It was also noted that there are other specific resources available to address recreational needs. These resources include the Recreational Trails Program – an optional component of TA which the State of Minnesota elects to participate in.

4. Ensure Project Delivery

In light of recent State legislation, the issue of TA projects slipping from one STIP year to another, or out of the program entirely needed to be addressed in some capacity by the overall structure for the program. When this issue was discussed during outreach, a number of reasons for these issues were identified. However, the most common cause noted was that projects were not adequately prepared at the time of application. Either they were not far enough along in the development process and/or the lead community was not sufficiently informed about the project requirements associated with federal funds. The overall structure for TA should include strategies that can mitigate these issues.