



MEMORANDUM

TO: TPB Technical Committee
FROM: John Swanson, Transportation Planner
SUBJECT: Projects recommended for funding in FY 2020 in Maryland under the Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program
DATE: July 12, 2019

SUMMARY

Under the federal Transportation Alternatives Set Aside (TA Set Aside) Program, the TPB is responsible for selecting projects using sub-allocated funding for Suburban Maryland, Northern Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The TA Set Aside, which is part of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, was previously known as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and that name is commonly still used.

For FY 2020, a selection panel has recommended that the following projects in Maryland be approved by the TPB at its meeting on July 24, 2019.

Project	Jurisdiction/Agency	Recommendation
Chamber Avenue Green Street/Complete Street Project	Town of Capitol Heights	\$250,000.00
University Park Elementary School Safe Routes to School Plan	Town of University Park	\$77,738.00
Takoma Park Safe Routes to School Improvements	City of Takoma Park	\$80,494.00
North Stonestreet Avenue: Street and Sidewalk Improvements	City of Rockville	\$280,000.00
Total		\$688,232.00

BACKGROUND

The Transportation Alternatives Set Aside (TA Set Aside) Program was established by federal law to fund a variety of smaller-scale transportation projects such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, trails, safe routes to school (SRTS) projects, community improvements, and environmental mitigation. MAP 21, the surface transportation legislation enacted in 2012, established the program as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). The FAST Act of 2015 renamed the program as the Transportation Alternatives Set Aside (TA Set Aside) Program, but the key features of the program largely remain the same. Information on the TA Set Aside is available from FHWA at: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/.

The program provides sub-allocated funding for large metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) like the TPB (classified as “Transportation Management Areas”) to fund local projects. In addition to these sub-allocated funds, a portion of the TA Set Aside funding is reserved for statewide project selection, which is conducted by the state departments of transportation.

For the National Capital Region, the program offers an opportunity to support and enhance regional planning activities. At the direction of the TPB, our region’s TA Set Aside is framed as a complementary component of the TPB’s Transportation/Land-Use Connections (TLC) Program, which provides technical assistance for small planning studies to TPB member jurisdictions.

The TA Set Aside offers the region the ability to fund projects that support regional priorities and goals. Applicants from the National Capital Region are asked to show how their projects will serve regional criteria when they seek TA Set Aside funds. The criteria, which are rooted in TPB policies and programs, include: focus on expanding transportation options; support for Regional Activity Centers; access to high-capacity transit; access in Equity Emphasis Areas; support for the National Capital Trail; and increased access for people with disabilities.

FY 2020 SOLICITATION FOR MARYLAND

Since the establishment of TAP in 2012, and the TA Set Aside in 2015, the TPB continues to combine its solicitations with the state departments of transportation in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. As part of the annual review process, TPB staff works with the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) to administer the TA Set Aside for Suburban Maryland.

For this current round of funding in Maryland, MDOT SHA launched the solicitation process on April 15, 2019. Applications were due to MDOTSHA on May 15, 2019. For applicants from the TPB’s Maryland jurisdictions, the MDOT SHA application included a supplementary form requesting information about how projects responded to the TPB’s regional priorities including promoting non-motorized circulation within Activity Centers, enhancing access to transit stations, and increasing multimodal transportation options.

Maryland follows a two-stage project selection process. In the first stage, large MPOs like the TPB (those designated as “Transportation Management Areas”) select projects using sub-allocated funds. In the second stage, a process is conducted by MDOT SHA at the state level to select projects using the statewide TAP funds.

For the TPB’s Maryland jurisdictions for FY 2020, MDOT SHA received seven eligible applications representing a total of \$3,690,174 in requested funding. The TPB was sub-allocated a maximum of \$1,217,150 for decision-making at the MPO level.

TPB staff met with MDOT SHA staff to review all the applications. TPB and MDOT SHA staff also conducted a site visit to review the application submitted by Capitol Heights.

PROJECT SELECTION

The TPB is responsible for completing the first step in the selection process described above. To develop draft recommendations, TPB staff invited representatives from the District of Columbia and Virginia departments of transportation, along with COG/TPB staff, to participate on the TPB's technical review panel. Christy Bernal from MDOT SHA, actively participated in the panel discussion and served as a technical resource for the meeting.

Panel participants included:

- Kelsey Bridges, District Department of Transportation
- Pam Liston, Virginia Department of Transportation
- Michael Farrell, COG/TPB
- John Swanson, COG/TPB

Panel members individually reviewed and scored applications for a maximum of 100 points. The total score is a composite based on each reviewer's professional assessment (50 points) and regional selection criteria (50 points). The professional assessment is based on each panel member's transportation planning expertise, knowledge of transportation planning in the region, evaluation of the project budget, and project management experience. The regional criteria are rooted in TPB policies and programs, with the understanding that some projects would not meet all criteria. Regional selection criteria included the following:

- ***Focus on expanding transportation options (10 points):*** Will the project significantly increase transportation options for pedestrians, bicyclists and other non-drivers? Will the transportation benefits of the project be more than just recreational?
- ***Support for Regional Activity Centers (10 points):*** Does the project enhance walkability and accessibility within or between Regional Activity Centers? (Information on which projects involve Regional Activity Centers is provided to the selection panel.)
- ***Access to high-capacity transit (10 points):*** Will the project improve ped/bike access to major transit facilities, such as Metrorail, VRE, or bus rapid transit?
- ***Access in Equity Emphasis Areas (10 points):*** Does the project promote accessibility for communities in Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs)? EEAs are locations that the TPB has identified as having high concentrations of low-income and/or minority populations.
- ***Safe routes to schools (5 points):*** Does the project enhance safe ped/bike access to schools?
- ***Increased access for people with disabilities (5 points):*** Does the project promote accessibility for people with disabilities?

The panel met via WebEx on July 8, 2019. To provide a basis for discussion, each member provided general rankings for each project application (high, medium, or low) based on the numerical score they gave each project. The group discussed each project individually and asked the MDOT SHA representative for additional information regarding the applications. The panel then agreed upon joint preliminary rankings of high, medium, or low for each project. As a final step, the group determined funding recommendations based on these rankings. The final recommendations are the result of consensus. The recommendations are jointly decided and do not simply reflect a quantitative sum of each panelist's individual scores.

The panel discussion was informed by new rules established by MDOT SHA which are designed to ensure projects that are awarded funding are achievable. These new rules establish the following conditions:

- Prohibit MPOs from funding projects on a partial basis.
- Require projects to complete key phases in their development before they qualify for a subsequent phase. Projects seeking construction funding are now required to have completed 30% design. Projects seeking design funding are now required to have completed a concept-level plan.

These new rules and the fact that there was only a limited amount of funding available contributed to a limited consideration of options for distribution of funding by the TPB selection panel. Large projects were difficult to include as the projects needed to be funded in their entirety, and those large projects did not provide a scalable option to award lesser funding. Other projects were subject to concerns about eligibility. After considerable deliberation, the panel decided it would not award \$528,918 of its allocation this year. These funds will be rolled into next year's sub-allocation or portions of this funding may be used to supplement projects that have been previously awarded by the TPB if needed.

At the end of the meeting on July 8, the review panel recommended four projects for funding, which are listed described below. Upon completion of the TPB's selection process, the unsuccessful applications will automatically be submitted to compete for the statewide TAP funds.

A table listing all the submitted applications and the selection panel's funding recommendations is attached to this memorandum.

FY 2020 PROJECTS

Based upon this review process, staff is recommending full funding for the three projects briefly described below. The projects will serve myriad policy priorities of the TPB, including promoting Regional Activity Centers, Equity Emphasis Areas, and access to transit.

- **Chamber Avenue Green Street/Complete Street Project**

Town of Capitol Heights

\$250,000.00

A pedestrian unfriendly road will be transformed by this project into a safe and inviting pathway to the Capitol Heights Metro Station. The project, which is a key step in fulfilling the town's Green Street/Complete Street Master Plan, will construct improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists along the Chambers Avenue-Capitol Heights Boulevard-Davey Street corridor. The scope includes a reduction of the width of vehicle travel lanes, new sidewalks (with appropriate signage), new street lighting, bike lane installation, improved pedestrian crossings, and new pedestrian lighting. The project, which will complete final design and construction, includes funding from a variety of sources in addition to the TA Set-Aside grant.

- **University Park Elementary School Safe Routes to School Plan**

Town of University Park

\$77,738.00

Responding to growing concerns about pedestrian safety and findings from a recent traffic analysis, the town of University Park is moving forward with plans to ensure its children can walk to school safely. This project entails the design of infrastructure work including sidewalk improvements, traffic calming and speed reduction improvements¹ and pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements to provide safe access to the University Park Elementary School. The project also includes funding for educational materials and programming.

- **Takoma Park Safe Routes to School Improvements**

City of Takoma Park

\$80,494.00

With this grant², Takoma Park will continue its highly regarded educational programming which introduces best safety practices for walking and biking to primary school students. The curriculum includes a Crosswalk Simulation Activity and Bike Rodeo. A new feature of the Takoma Park programming is the iCan Shine Camp, which will teach biking skills for students with disabilities. The iCan Shine camp will be open to Maryland residents with disabilities.

- **North Stonestreet Avenue: Street and Sidewalk Improvements**

City of Rockville

\$280,000.00

Focusing on improving pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Rockville Metro Station, this project will design street³ and sidewalk improvements along Park Road (between North Stonestreet Avenue and South Stonestreet Avenue) and N. Stonestreet Ave (between Park Road and Lincoln Avenue). Improvements will include wider sidewalks, a new intersection alignment⁴, and bike lanes. The project is based upon recommendation in the recently completed Stonestreet Corridor Study, which featured extensive public outreach.

NEXT STEPS

Following the TPB's action on the FY 2020 recommendations, which is scheduled for July 24, TPB staff will forward information regarding the approved projects to MDOT for inclusion in MDOT's Capital Improvement Program.

In addition, MDOT SHA will conduct its statewide project selection process, which will include consideration of whether to award funding, using the statewide TA Set Aside funds, to the Maryland applications that were not funded through the TPB's process. Once all selections are finalized, MDOT SHA staff will work with applicants to administer funding.

¹ The application included a funding request for a mobile electronic speed monitoring sign. This equipment was deemed ineligible for grant funding this item was deducted from the panel's recommendations for funding.

² The application included a funding request for four rectangular rapid flashing beacons. These devices were deemed ineligible for grant funding and these items were deducted from the panel's recommendation for funding.

³ MDOT SHA has indicated that the street design will be considered ineligible for TA grant funding if it is not specifically for bicycle lanes.

⁴ MDOT SHA has indicated that the design of a new intersection alignment will not be considered eligible for TA funding if it is not specifically for bicycle lanes.