

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NEW Federal Transportation Law

Trail/Bicycle/Pedestrian Provisions in SAFETEA-LU

After 12 extensions spanning two years, a new bill reauthorizing TEA-21, the federal surface transportation legislation, finally became law in August 2005. Titled SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users), the five-year legislation contains several pieces of exciting news for trail users. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy thanks its partners — Congresspeople, partner organizations and coalitions, RTC members, other funders and the public — for joining the effort which made these successes possible.



PROTECTING CURRENT PROGRAMS

Transportation Enhancements (TE)

\$3.5 billion

This popular, community-based program is the largest source of funding for trails, sidewalks, and other bicycle/pedestrian facilities. In 2003, an attack to zero-out TE in the appropriations process was turned back by a resounding, bipartisan 327–90 vote in the full House. That demonstration of support helped secure TE's place in the nation's transportation law. An attempt in the Senate to gut TE during TEA-21 reauthorization met a similar fate. RTC sought to retain TE as a 10% set-aside of the Surface Transportation Program, while preventing the addition of new eligible project categories which might have siphoned off funds. Both of these goals were achieved, with changes limited to minor clarifications.

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

\$370 million

This program funds trails by using a portion of federal gas taxes attributable to off-road recreation. In the past, RTP received only a small fraction of the revenues paid by trail users. SAFETEA-LU makes great strides toward righting this wrong by ramping-up funding over five years, amounting to a 64% increase in average annual funding compared to TEA-21.

Section 4(f)

Saved!

Prior to SAFETEA-LU passage, federal law required transportation plans to include measures to maintain or enhance the natural beauty of lands crossed by transportation facilities. The new law includes an exemption, but RTC and a small coalition worked hard to retain a requirement to do all possible planning to minimize harm to protected resources, while adding a requirement for public notice and comment prior to determination.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Safe Routes to School

\$612 million

This critical new program will help local communities make walking and bicycling to school a safe choice, reversing a trend that has alarmingly declined over the past generation. A new national program supporting infrastructure and education ramps-up funding over five years, while providing guidance and technical assistance through a clearinghouse, national task force and state coordinator positions.

Non-motorized Transportation Pilot Program

\$100 million

This new pilot program — an RTC initiative — will assist several cities to complete seamless transportation networks by connecting trails, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, mass transit and more, and demonstrating that communities will increasingly use alternative modes of transportation if available. Projects will take place in Columbia, Mo.; Marin County, Calif.; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minn.; and Sheboygan County, Wis.

High Priority Projects

\$1 billion

Congress sets aside funds for earmarked projects selected by each Member. Traditionally, these projects have overwhelmingly been roads and highways. RTC initiated a nationwide grassroots effort to recommend trail/bike/ped projects, and the results are astounding: 750 projects totaling \$1 billion! Perhaps more than any other provisions, this result demonstrates the rising appreciation for our projects in Congress.

September 2005



Trail/Bike/Ped Spending

A Comparison of TEA-21 and SAFETEA-LU

~ average annual authorization ~

