



Prioritizing A Safer, Connected America

A Surface Transportation Reauthorization Agenda to Build the Nation's Essential Walking and Biking Infrastructure

Decades of federal, state and local investment has established a foundation for the nation's active transportation system. Today, the country's 42,000+ miles of multiuse trails and hundreds of developing trail and active transportation networks reach every single state and generate more than \$34 billion in annual economic activity. It is now easier to walk, bike and be active in more places, but the nation continues to fall short of reaching the goal that people can safely and conveniently walk and bike to the places they want to go—having safe pedestrian and cyclist routes throughout and between communities. These connections represent essential infrastructure to improve safety, quality of life, economic development, and mobility for all Americans.

Reauthorization of the nation's surface transportation policy offers an opportunity to make further progress on these goals, creating access to this infrastructure for everyone. Federal programs dedicated to trails, walking and biking like Transportation Alternatives (TA), the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), and the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIIP) provide vital policies and investments that, combined with state and local efforts, have contributed significantly to flourishing regional economies and interstate commerce, putting walking and bicycling infrastructure to work generating opportunities for mobility and economic development.

Despite progress, existing infrastructure remains far short of what is needed to make it safe and convenient for American families to walk, bike and be active. Traffic fatalities and injuries among pedestrians and bicyclists remain unconscionably high absent broad investment in connected safe routes to the places people want to go. In 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) revitalized funding for trails and active transportation to better align with the robust demand from people across America's landscape, but there is far more work to be done to meet the nation's needs.

RTC is urging Congress to build on this progress by implementing the following recommendations in the next surface transportation reauthorization, establishing a policy framework that will deliver the active transportation infrastructure America needs.

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1. Strengthen and Grow TA and RTP

Congress should improve and strengthen TA, the nation's largest dedicated federal funding source for trails, walking and biking, by increasing funding commensurate with need and implementing specific policy changes: providing transparency around transfers of funds out of the program, reducing the local match, providing incentives to states to invest in larger projects and provide technical assistance, and collecting and reporting data about how the program is implemented.

In combination with its predecessor program, Transportation Enhancements (which originated in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991), TA has provided resources necessary to develop trail and active transportation infrastructure in rural, suburban and urban communities nationwide, feeding a growing demand to further develop this infrastructure because of its impact on the economy and quality of life.

TA is structured as a 10% set aside within the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) and should retain at least that share and grow along with STBGP. To maximize program effectiveness, it needs to be easier for applicants to meet matching fund requirements, harder to curb transfers of funds to unrelated purposes, and encourage larger, highly strategic grants that create safe, connected routes to daily destinations.

Congress should grow RTP funding to match fuel tax receipts from off-road trail users, currently calculated at \$281 million per year by the most recent fuel study and add these resources to the RTP set aside so that both it and TA grow.

RTP has been a vital complement to TA for more than 30 years. Since its inception, the program has drawn on the user-pay/user-benefit model, directing off-road vehicle gas taxes to pay for trails and has been responsible for building and maintaining more than 30,000 trail projects including innumerable nonmotorized trails. It can best be strengthened by increasing its funding level to match fuel taxes paid by off-road motorized recreational trail users and directing those taxes from the Highway Trust Fund to increase the STBG set-aside that supports TA and RTP. Over time a misalignment has occurred between tax receipts from trail users and funding for the program. An FHWA Fuel Study in 2021 found that those receipts total \$281 million annually. RTP is currently funded at \$84 million per year. That gap should be closed and recurring fuel use studies established to advise Congress on future funding decisions.

2. Secure Dedicated Funding for the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP)

Congress should commit highway trust fund contract authority of \$250 million to meet the overwhelming demand for this unique investment in connectivity that maximizes the return on investment possible by leveraging existing trail and active transportation infrastructure into safe, connected walking and biking routes.

Authorized in IIJA for \$200 million per year but without contract authority, ATIIP is designed to build upon the value of discreet projects funded through TA, RTP, and state and local resources. ATIIP is the only program dedicated to investing at sufficient scale in projects that connect active transportation networks and spines. It provides the large-scale grants necessary to address multiple gaps in safe walking and biking routes, including expensive but crucial infrastructure connections such as tunnels and bridges. This approach—providing larger grants for planning and construction to connect existing infrastructure within and between states and regions—will accelerate implementation of state, regional and local plans to create safe and convenient walking and biking routes to everyday destinations, which are being pursued in communities of every size and type in all 50 states.

With one round of appropriated funding, ATIIP was oversubscribed by applications at a ratio of 40 to 1, with 350 communities requesting \$1.8 billion. Congress now has an opportunity to sustain and grow this program to meet the needs of Americans to safely and conveniently get where they want to go on foot, by bike or wheelchair. It is time to provide communities with the certainty and scale of investment necessary to plan and invest in the connectivity of active transportation systems, just as we do for roads and rails.

3. Strategically Deploy Multi-Modal Federal Discretionary Grants

Congress should continue multi-modal discretionary grants and use these programs to inform and catalyze ongoing innovation in formula programs. The Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD), Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A), and the Reconnecting Communities Program (RCP) support critical projects that formula programs often fail to prioritize. By identifying innovative transportation solutions, these discretionary grants improve outcomes and illuminate how the formula programs can be improved to deliver for the American people.

IIJA made trails and other walking and biking infrastructure eligible for multiple discretionary programs, pushing forward progress on developing regional active transportation networks. Grant programs like BUILD, SS4A and RCP provided grants at the scale needed to make meaningful progress in creating safe and connected routes to walk and bike, advancing core federal goals, including reducing traffic fatalities and serious injuries and improving mobility and access to economic opportunity. By identifying and supporting new and more effective ways to make transportation safer and more efficient, these programs demonstrate how larger formula funding programs can improve outcomes.

4. Modernize Formula Programs to Deliver on Goals

Congress should articulate clear goals and provide for accountability in achieving them in order to deliver the transportation system that Americans deserve.

Formula funds distribute the largest share of federal surface transportation funding, yet too often do not deliver on goals set by Congress or the outcomes that Americans want. Such goals and accountability measures will ensure that taxpayer dollars are maximized and that some of the largest and most flexible programs, like surface transportation block grants, are aligned with America's unmet transportation needs.

Goals should include setting performance targets to further improve roadway safety, including for vulnerable road users, that are enforceable by withholding formula funding; aligning programs with 21st century needs, including maintenance, and increasing access to jobs and services; reducing the match for active transportation and communities of persistent poverty; and reforming the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) program and the Carbon Reduction Program to prioritize trails and active transportation.

5. Optimizing Programs to Increase Impact

Congress should continue to require USDOT to optimize the efficiency and accountability of programs, reducing barriers to investing in safe and connected active transportation infrastructure by modernizing outdated guidance and gaps in research that create challenges to improving safety for active transportation users and getting the most out of infrastructure investments.

Reauthorization presents opportunities to make further progress including modernizing the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, maintaining a National Roadway Safety Strategy that leverages the Safe System Approach, providing technical assistance in support of accessing grants and project implementation, and improved data to track progress towards goals.

About RTC

*Rails to Trails Conservancy is the nation's largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on social media. **Learn more about RTC's priorities for the reauthorizing surface transportation policy at www.railstotrails.org/reauthorization.***