

CONNECTIONS

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The High Street Cap: Bridging the Gap

TE funds repair a tear in the urban fabric of Columbus, Ohio

For the first time in more than forty years, there is a good reason to walk over Interstate 670 in downtown Columbus, Ohio. The reason is a one-of-a-kind bridge, the High Street Cap. Completed late last year, the Cap does what no other bridge has tried to do before: become a part of the main street.

Before the Cap was constructed, pedestrians walking along High Street, Columbus' historic main street, were confronted with a challenge when trying to cross I-670 where it cuts through downtown. The overpass, built in the 1960s, had only narrow sidewalks adjacent to vehicle lanes. Cars whizzed past and a steady roar issued from the highway below. The dangerous overpass discouraged pedestrians from continuing along High Street, and rifted two of the city's most pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods: the Short North neighborhood and the Arena District.

The vision for the Cap evolved from an Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) project to widen parts of I-670 and to reconstruct the High Street overpass. ODOT appointed a special task force to consider ways to mitigate the widening of the highway by integrating aesthetic and pedestrian improvements into their designs. The task force developed an unheard of design for the new overpass. They envisioned a bridge with space on either side for a covered pedestrian arcade and shops. The shops and walkway would function as a "cap" over I-670, blocking out the sights and sounds of cars passing below. Pedestrians on the new bridge would barely notice that they were crossing an eight-lane highway.

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"THIS DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT SHOULD BE A MODEL FOR OTHER CITIES SEARCHING TO RECONNECT THE URBAN FABRIC THAT WAS CUT BY THE CONSTRUCTION OF FREEWAYS."

— COLUMBUS MAYOR

MICHAEL COLEMAN



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In order to make the Cap into a reality, ODOT provided \$1 million in Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds. These were used in combination with \$300,000 from the city of Columbus to build the Cap's support structures on either side of the bridge, and to install decorative fencing, lighting, and landscaping.

The city of Columbus teamed up with a private firm, Continental Real Estate, to build out the top of the bridge. They used \$7.2 million in city funds to construct space for shops and restaurants and to build the arched, covered pedestrian arcades on either side of the roadway, designed in the style of the historic Union train station that once stood nearby. Three shops—Tropical Trends, Jeffery Thomas Men's Apparel, and Schokolad Chocolate Factory—have opened so far, and several more are scheduled to open this spring.

The newly finished High Street Cap serves a multitude of functions: it improves pedestrian safety on High Street; disguises the highway below; and creates new retail space. Best of all, the Cap creates an attractive pedestrian corridor and seamless main street feel between the Short North and the Arena District.

"This downtown development project should be a model for other cities searching to reconnect the urban fabric that was cut by the construction of freeways," wrote Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman. "The I-670 Cap bridges the canyon separating our great Short North Arts District and downtown, with a seamless streetscape of shops, restaurants, and a great historic design."

The Short North, once a dilapidated and crime-ridden section of town, has transformed over the past two decades into a thriving arts community. Galleries, eclectic shops, cafes, and beautifully refurbished Victorian-era homes line the streets. On the first Saturday of every month, people from all over Columbus descend on the Short North to take part in the "Gallery Hop," what the Short North Business Association calls "an unforgettable evening of gallery exhibit openings, artist receptions, street vendors, performers, fine dining, and the best people-watching Columbus has to offer!" With the Cap in place, the Gallery Hop crowd can easily spill over into downtown Columbus.

The Arena District, south of the Cap, is the nucleus of downtown Columbus, packed with bars, restaurants, and trendy apartments. The district boasts a major sports and performance arena, an outdoor concert pavilion, a three-level movie theater, and a convention center. In the past, conventioners would have avoided walking over the High Street overpass and missed out on visiting the Short North. The Cap now lures them over to explore one of Columbus' most fascinating neighborhoods. Mary Martineau, Executive Director of the Short North Business Association, wrote, "We [now] have uninterrupted connectivity between downtown Columbus, the Convention Center, and the Short North Arts District. We are thrilled with the Cap and the new business it is bringing to our community."



How is TEA-21 Reauthorization Affecting the TE Program?

Until recently, funding for the Transportation Enhancements (TE) program came through a major piece of legislation known as "TEA-21" — the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century. TEA-21 provided \$218 billion between 1998 and 2003 to fund the TE program and much more, including improvements to roads, bridges, and mass transit.

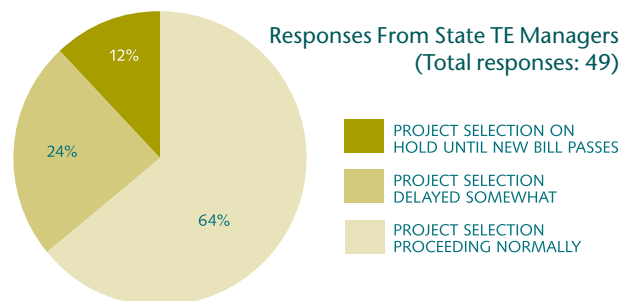
On September 30, 2003, TEA-21 expired and federal legislators began the process of "reauthorization," in which they create a new transportation bill to last another six years. In the meantime, stopgap bills, called "extensions," have kept federal programs running. These extensions provide funds for a few months at a time.

The interim period between two six-year bills is often a time of uncertainty for state department of transportation officials responsible for implementing federal transportation programs. State officials do not know exactly how much money, or which federal programs will be contained in the new six-year bill.

NTEC recently conducted a poll of TE managers at each state department of transportation to determine how they have been affected by the reauthorization process. A

majority (31 of 49 who responded) reported that they are continuing to select TE projects and award funds as they would normally, making the assumption that the TE program will receive similar funding levels in the new six-year bill as it has in the past. Some of these states noted, however, that they will not allow project sponsors to begin obligating TE funds until a new bill is passed.

Twelve states reported that the financial uncertainty surrounding reauthorization has caused them to temporarily delay project selection, or to reduce the amount of TE funds awarded to project sponsors. Six states are not selecting any TE projects, waiting until a new bill is passed.



Decatur, Alabama

Pedestrians are once again able to cross over the train tracks in Decatur, Alabama, now that a pedestrian bridge linking two neighborhoods is finished. Replacing the crumbling bridge removed several years ago, this new bridge provides an important passage from Railroad Street on the northeast side of the tracks to Church Street in the northwest neighborhood. The bridge crosses the tracks adjacent to the historic Dancy-Polk House, once a popular lodging spot for travelers on the Southern Railroad, and now a restored historic bed and breakfast. A Transportation Enhancements award of \$430,000 and an \$86,000 match from the city of Decatur provided funding for the project. [The Decatur Daily, 1/2/04]

Bedford, VA

Residents and visitors in Bedford, Virginia are enjoying views of the Peaks of Otter and the National D-Day Memorial through expansive glass windows in a new 10,700 square foot community and welcome center. Thanks to a 1.1 million dollar Transportation Enhancements award, it's not just the views that are exciting, but also the resources this elegant center brings to the community. Situated in the Blue Ridge mountains at the intersection of Burks Hill Road (SR 122) and Highway 460, the center provides informative guides and maps to popular historic destinations; meeting rooms and conference space for Bedford residents; an amphitheater for sports, concerts and movies; a walking trail; and permanent exhibits, including Bedford's prized 1927 Seagrave fire engine and an antique pull pumper. Sponsors for this project included the City and County of Bedford, Virginia; the Virginia Municipal League; the Virginia Association of Counties; and a number of other local organizations and businesses. [American City and County, 12/1/04]

Ackley, Iowa

The Illinois Central Combination Depot is now safer than ever! A Transportation Enhancements (TE) award of \$189,000 provided funding for the rehabilitation of the aging 1926 depot, which once served as a bustling station for passengers traveling through central Iowa. Now the depot, with its ticket window, restored wood trim and counters, is partially occupied by the Ackley Police Department, which is delighted to call this historic space home. The depot also includes space for community meetings and events, as well as permanent exhibits of railroad memorabilia and artwork. Town leaders hope the depot's central location in Ackley will anchor a larger market square revitalization plan. The town of Ackley and the Ackley Historic Preservation Commission supplied a \$72,800 sponsor match to the TE award. [Waterloo Courier, 10/27/04]

Muncie, Indiana

Residents of Muncie, Indiana are eagerly hitting the trail for exercise, peace of mind and transportation, as final touches are completed in a new section of the White River Greenway. A Transportation Enhancements award of \$860,000 helped finance the greenway, a paved walking and biking trail that runs along the White River and links McCulloch Park with the Minnetrista Natural and Cultural Heritage Center. The trail also connects to the celebrated Cardinal Greenway, Indiana's longest rail-trail project. [Star Press, 10/28/04]

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES introduced a new bill on February 8th, 2005 to begin the process of reauthorizing federal highway and transit programs. Entitled the *Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users*, this new House bill reflects much of the content in the bill passed by the House last year. This new bill sets obligation levels at \$283.9 billion, matching amounts found in the Bush Administration's recently released budget proposal. Floor action on the bill is likely to occur in early to mid-March 2005. Also announced in the beginning of February were new transportation leadership committee appointments for the 109th Congress. Below is a listing of new members:

New to House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I)

MAJORITY

- Kenny Marchant (TX)
- Michael E. Sodrel (IN)
- Charles W. Dent (PA)
- Ted Poe (TX)
- David G. Reichert (WA)
- Connie Mack (FL)
- John R. "Randy" Kuhl, Jr. (NY)
- Luis G. Fortuno (PR)
- Lynn A. Westmoreland (GA)
- Charles W. Boustany, Jr. (LA)

MINORITY

- Brian Higgins (NY)
- Russ Carnahan (MO)
- Allyson Y. Schwartz (PA)
- John T. Salazar (CO)

New to Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW)

MAJORITY

- John Thune (SD)
- Jim DeMint (SC)
- Johnny Isakson (GA)
- David Vitter (LA)

MINORITY

- Frank Lautenberg (NJ)
- Barack Obama (IL)

Find complete lists of T&I and EPW membership at www.house.gov/transportation and <http://epw.senate.gov/index.cfm>.



Hitting the Nail on the Head: Keeping Cost Estimates on the Mark

Imagine you're sponsoring a Transportation Enhancements (TE) project involving the construction of a steel trestle pedestrian and bicycle bridge. After months of planning, the bridge is almost ready for construction, and all of a sudden the price of steel rises precipitously. Project costs are now inflated, and funds are getting short. "No problem," you think, "I'll just request additional TE funds from my state department of transportation, right?"

Don't count on it. While some states set aside TE funds to help project sponsors in case of unanticipated expenses, or "cost overruns," many states will not provide additional funds to sponsors under any circumstances. Some states, such as Missouri and Tennessee, will not provide additional funds but will allow the sponsor to reduce the scope of the project (e.g. reduce the length of a trail or the number of benches) to decrease the overall project cost. States may also allow the sponsor to apply for additional TE funds in the next year's funding cycle. This doesn't guarantee additional funds for the project, however, and may result in significant project delays.

States that do cover cost overruns usually do so within limits. Nevada, for example, will fund cost overruns up to \$100,000. Like several other states, Nevada also requires sponsors to "overmatch" the supplemental funding award to demonstrate their continued commitment to the project.

The state of Indiana grants additional funds to the sponsor depending on the reason for the request. Unforeseen circumstances such as a rise in the price of raw materials are generally considered more legitimate justification for a cost increase than bureaucratic delays, sloppy initial estimates, or changes in the agreed-upon project plan.

Cost overruns are a serious problem whether or not they are covered by the state. They may cause delay in project implementation and, in the worst cases, project termination and rescission of federal funds. Cost overruns create problems for a state's TE program, because states may be forced to delay funding for new or existing TE projects in order to help a troubled project. With so much at stake for the project and the state TE program as a whole, it's crucial that project sponsors give accurate cost estimates from the start.

So what throws project sponsors off when they make

their estimates? Some costs can't be anticipated: rising prices in raw materials or labor, budget cuts, and nasty weather, to name a few. The cost estimate should reflect the best estimate of the factors shown in the box that may affect final project costs.

More commonly, cost overruns are the result of poor planning or inexperience. Some sponsors start off on the wrong foot by attempting to calculate project costs without the help of a certified professional in the appropriate field, such as an engineer or landscape architect. Some states, like Delaware for example, cope with this problem by offering to have experienced state staff develop the estimate for the local project sponsor.

The planning and engineering phases of project development are particularly problematic for inexperienced sponsors. They may be unaware of the rigor and expense required to complete the environmental review process, for example.

Even if sponsors correctly calculate the cost of the review

process, they may overlook the cost of its outcome. If contamination is discovered at a project site, the clean-up can be very expensive, depending on the intensity of contamination and the methods used to control it.

The process of acquiring property, or "right-of-way," for a project may also generate unexpected costs. Because property acquisition is regulated by the federal government, sponsors must follow a lengthy and formal process that may be complicated by any local opposition to the project. To control these unpredictable stages of the planning process, some states encourage or even require sponsors to complete the planning process before applying for TE funds.

Once planning is completed and construction starts, unexpected costs still may crop up.

Construction bids may come in higher than predicted. If the construction period takes longer than expected, contractors may charge overtime pay to meet the

target date for project completion. Delays during any stage of the project development process, from planning to construction, may increase project costs because of inflation.

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING AN ACCURATE COST ESTIMATE

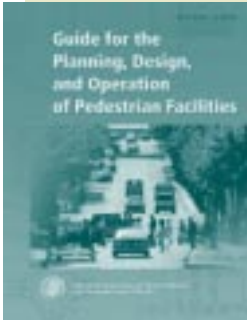
- Secure local funding commitments before submitting your application
- Get a certified professional in the appropriate field to develop the cost estimate
- Adjust cost estimates for inflation over the expected project timeline
- Develop realistic project completion dates to avoid paying overtime to contractors
- Quickly proceed to project development after being notified of your TE award
- Be aware of the time and expense required for environmental review
- Be prepared to finance DOT costs for administering the project
- Be aware of wage requirements associated with federal-aid construction projects
- If possible, secure the necessary rights-of-way before applying for funds

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American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)

recently published the *Guide for the Planning, Design, and Operation of Pedestrian Facilities* that focuses on identifying effective measures and methods for accommodating pedestrians on public rights-of-way. This manual serves state and local level planners, roadway designers, and transportation engineers, the majority of whom make daily decisions that affect pedestrians. This guide also recognizes the profound effect that land use planning and site design have on pedestrian mobility. Purchase the guide

online under “Design, Operation and Planning” at www.transportation.org/publications/bookstore.nsf.



The **Transportation Research Board (TRB)** recently released *TRB Special Report 282: Does the Built Environment Influence Physical Activity? Examining the Evidence*. The report reviews the broad trends affecting the relationships among physical activity, health, transportation, and land use; summarizes what is known about these relationships, including the strength and magnitude of any causal connections; examines implications for policy; and recommends priorities for future research. A summary of the report was published as *TRB Report Summary 24*. Background papers used by the committee to help develop the report are also available. Find the summary, background papers, and the full report at www.trb.org.



Last November, the **Environmental Protection Agency** announced the winners of the 2004 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement. This award recognizes outstanding achievement in smart growth by tribal, local, or regional governments in five categories: Overall Excellence, Built Projects, Policies and Regulation, Community Outreach and

Education, and Small Communities. To find out more about the winners, visit www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/awards.htm.

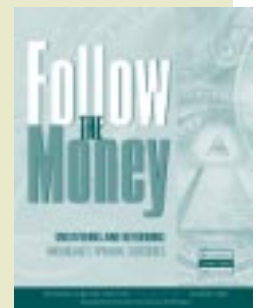
The **Preservation Institute** recently released *The Built Environment and Health: 11 Profiles of Neighborhood Transformation*. This report outlines examples of successful neighborhood-level initiatives to improve public health through changes in the built environment. Profiles include a description of the geographic area and the specific changes that were made; the process required to implement the changes, including leadership and organizational collaboration; any documented impacts (positive and negative); and lessons learned in the process. Find the report online at www.preventioninstitute.org/builtenv.html.

Active Living Leadership announced the publication of a new report entitled *Healthy Community Design: Success Stories from State and Local Leaders*,

which highlights significant strides made by elected and appointed leaders to support healthy community design. Active Living Leadership is a national project supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, developed to support government leaders as they create and promote policies, programs, and places that enable active living to improve the health, well-being and vitality of communities. Find the report online at www.activelivingleadership.org.



The **Michigan Land Use Institute and United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan** collaborated to produce *Follow the Money: Uncovering and Reforming Michigan's Sprawl Subsidies*, an in-depth look at how state spending can cause sprawl and its deleterious effects. The report examines public investment in roads, jobs, government offices, and business development in order to underscore the connection between state spending and runaway sprawl. In particular, the report discusses how current state spending influences urban decay, environmental degradation, poor public transportation services, and increased hardship for those with disabilities. To learn more about this topic and access the report, visit the Michigan Land Use Institute Web site: www.mlui.org.



Goodbye

NTEC BIDS A FOND FAREWELL to erstwhile director Hugh Morris. Hugh supervised the work of NTEC for five of his eight years on the staff of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. His diligent effort improved the productivity and efficiency of NTEC each year. As a result, he leaves— in his own words— “a smooth sailing ship” behind. Hugh goes on to a position at the National Association of Realtors, where he will be involved with smart growth outreach. In the interim, Franz Gimmler, a longtime employee of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, will assume the role of NTEC director.



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HEALTHY CITIES AND SMART GROWTH: PLANNING FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

April 21–22, 2005 • Berkeley, California
www.civicpartnerships.org

TRADITIONAL BUILDING EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE

April 27–30, 2005 • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
www.traditionalbuildingshow.com

MAY

BICYCLE EDUCATION LEADERS CONFERENCE

May 2–4, 2005 • New York, New York
www.bikeleague.org

2005 MAIN STREET CONFERENCE

May 8–11, 2005 • Baltimore, Maryland
<http://conference.mainstreet.org>

JUNE

CNU XIII—Congress for New Urbanism

June 9–12, 2005 • Pasadena, California
www.cnuxii.org

COMING THIS SUMMER

TRAILLINK 2005

July 27–30, 2005
Minneapolis/St. Paul,
Minnesota
www.railtrails.org

Hitting the Nail on the Head...

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With so many possible pitfalls, developing an accurate cost estimate may seem like predicting the future with a crystal ball. However, most TE project sponsors manage to develop an accurate cost estimate and complete projects on time and on budget. By keeping a few tips in mind, tomorrow's TE project sponsors will make cost overruns a thing of the past.

Connections is a quarterly publication of the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration. Submission of articles as well as letters and other comments are welcome.

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