

CONNECTIONS

The Newsletter of the NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS CLEARINGHOUSE

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

MAY 1997

A Message from Washington...

by Harold E. Peaks

By way of introduction, I am the Team Leader for the Community Impacts and Transportation Enhancement Team of the Office of Environment and Planning, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Our shop manages the Federal Transportation Enhancement Program.

Throughout 1995 and 1996, the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) conducted a number of focus groups all over the country to get a better understanding of the difficulties encountered with the Transportation Enhancement (TE) program, and benefits of TE projects. While many participants urged us to improve the program by streamlining TE implementation procedures, there was overwhelming support for maintaining the program because of its unique benefits to local communities.

Consequently, NEXTEA, the Administration's proposal for reauthorization of ISTEA, retains the TE program with a 35 percent increase in funding. The National Economic Crossroads Efficiency Act (or NEXTEA), was announced by President Clinton, Secretary Slater and others, on March 12, 1997; and introduced to Congress soon thereafter.

In addition to providing a funding increase for Enhancements, NEXTEA retains the current TE structure which makes Enhancements a 10 percent set-aside of the Surface Transportation Program, and recommends language requiring all TE projects to "have a direct link to surface transportation."

We at USDOT are convinced that the TE program provides a terrific boost to the Department's efforts to not only provide efficient transportation facilities, but improve the communities through which this movement of people and goods is taking place. We are hopeful that Congressional debate surrounding reauthorization of ISTEA produces a bill that will maintain the momentum the TE program has created.

(continued on page 2)

Clearinghouse Launches Newsletter in Second Year of Operation

This is the first of a bi-monthly newsletter the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse (NTEC) plans to issue in 1997, its second year of operation. The NTEC will publish *Connections* approximately every two months.

"This newsletter should fill a huge information gap for the Enhancements Program and the many partners involved in program administration and project implementation," said Harold Peaks, FHWA's Team Leader for Community Impacts and Transportation Enhancements.

Connections will focus on sharing best practices in Transportation Enhancement (TE) project implementation, elaborating on streamlining opportunities, announcing any new FHWA guidance, tracking reauthorization of ISTEA in Congress, and highlighting the successes of state TE Programs and local projects.

It will also promote new products and resources available from the NTEC, announce TE-oriented conferences or training events, and include other important news from within the "Enhancements World."

Those receiving the newsletter include State TE Program Managers, FHWA Regional and Division TE contacts, state TE Advisory Committee members, past NTEC customers, and others.

For readers unfamiliar with "transportation-speak," we have provided a guide to acronyms on page two.

Please call the NTEC if you are interested in adding a name to the mailing list. Also all recipients are welcome to make copies for wider distribution.

The Editors hope *Connections* will be a useful new forum for the exchange of news and ideas, and we welcome contributions from our readers.

Co-Editors — Robert Patten & Tim Lidiak

Streamlining Packet Sent to All States

In late March 1997, FHWA issued the first comprehensive guide to streamlining the TE project implementation process. It was distributed to FHWA Regional and Division staff, and State Transportation Enhancements Program managers.

“State Enhancement Program managers and project sponsors alike should find ‘red-tape’ relief in this comprehensive packet of guidance,” commented Harold Peaks, Team Leader for the FHWA Community Impacts and Transportation Enhancements Team.

“For example, it explains that procurement of TE projects not located within highway right-of-way do not need to follow federal competitive bidding procedures; and that Davis-Bacon wage rates do not necessarily apply to projects: a) located outside the highway right-of-way, and b) whose eligibility is based on function, such as bike paths and restoration of rail stations,” Peaks added.

These and other streamlining measures are detailed in the packet. Four of the guidance memos elaborate on changes made to the federal-aid process by the 1995 National Highway System Designation Act:

- NEPA requirements and categorical exclusions for TE projects;
- advance payment options;
- newly established eligibility for donated funds, materials & services as local match to federal funds;
- property acquisition rules (related to the Uniform Act) for non-profit organizations that are acquiring lands for conveyance to public ownership.

At this time, additional copies are not available, however, FHWA plans to reprint soon. The NTEC staff can brief callers about the applicability of any streamlining measure to the caller’s situation, and will copy any of the twelve individual guidance memos that the caller may need.

Message from Washington...

(continued from page 1)

Additionally, we know we can improve our track record if we learn from our TE project experiences and share them with other practitioners. This newsletter will be a great vehicle for keeping that ball rolling.

NTEC Issues Second Technical Brief on Financing Alternatives

The NTEC issued its second Technical Brief to a broad range of TE program stakeholders, in March 1997. It focuses on the financing of TE projects — specifically the *Alternative Share* guidance and new NHS provisions allowing donations of funds, materials and services as local match.

Research for the brief, conducted by NTEC Manager, Tim Lidiak, found that many states have used the *Alternative Share* guidance to stretch the federal portion of TE funds among as many projects as possible, and reduce the actual cash outlays required by project sponsors.

Under *Alternative Share*, the preliminary engineering (PE) activities can be more easily administered by the local sponsor. Georgia DOT does this on many projects, and credits the PE costs toward the sponsor’s required 20 percent match, with the result that projects are moving through the DOT project development pipeline much faster. Project sponsors can now start the PE, design and environmental work a year ahead of planned construction.

For more examples on how *Alternative Share* and NHS streamlining measures can improve your state’s TE program or speed your project to completion, call the NTEC and ask for Technical Brief #2: *Financing Transportation Enhancements Projects*.

A Guide to Abbreviations Used in Connections

NTEC	.....	National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse
ISTEA	.....	Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991
NHS	.....	National Highway System Designation Act of 1995
NEPA	.....	National Environmental Policy Act
DOT	.....	Department of Transportation
MPO	.....	Metropolitan Planning Organization
FHWA	.....	Federal Highway Administration
TE	.....	Transportation Enhancements
TEA	.....	Transportation Enhancement Activity
FY	.....	Fiscal Year

Garvey Challenges States to Raise Transportation Enhancements Obligation Rates to 75 Percent

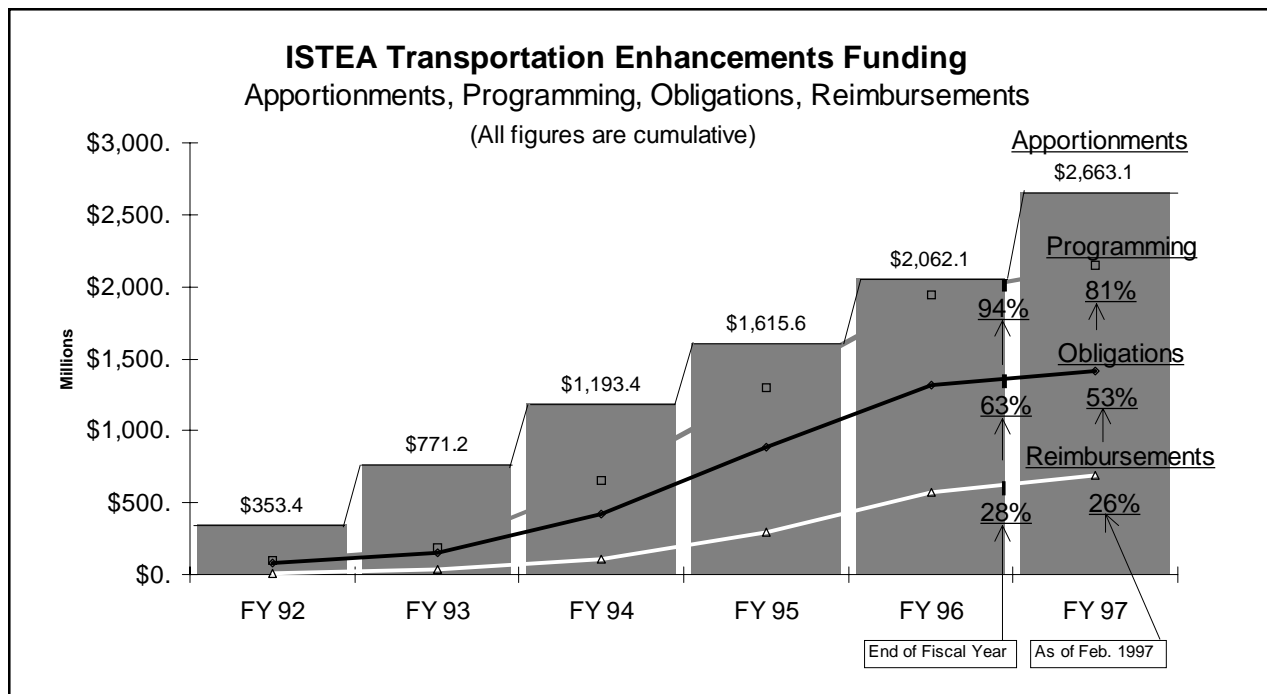
In March 1997, Acting FHWA Administrator Jane Garvey challenged states with a TE obligation rate under 75 percent to make improvements by year's end. As of February 1, 1997 only three states had rates over 75 percent: New York, New Mexico and the District of Columbia. Other states above 70 percent include FL, WY, CO, WA, MD, KY, CT, and PR.

The challenge was released to state DOTs through a formal FHWA Memorandum sent to all FHWA Regional and Division Administrators. Accompanying the challenge was a comprehensive guidance packet, including copies of twelve pieces of FHWA guidance on how to streamline the implementation of Enhance-

ments Projects (see *Streamlining...* page 2).

"The challenge to reach 75 percent may be a stretch for many states; however, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's research suggests that despite low obligation ceilings in fiscal years '93, '94, '95 and '97, states could obligate **90 percent** of available TE funds if they distributed these shortfalls equitably among all ISTEA programs," said Hal Hiemstra, Vice President for National Policy at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

As of February 1, 1997, FHWA data shows that fifteen states have TE obligation rates under 40 percent, including ID, VT, MS, OK, AZ, IN, VA, UT, DE, TX, HI, MA, WI, LA, and MO.



TE Programming Tops 80 Percent of Available Funds

In February, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) released the eleventh update of its report: *ISTEA Transportation Enhancements: Summary of Nationwide Spending*. The report identifies over 7,000 Transportation Enhancement (TE) projects programmed by state DOTs and MPOs totaling \$2.1 billion.

In late December, FHWA released the FY 1997 apportionments for the Surface Transportation Program, including a \$600 million apportionment for Enhancements. The cumulative TE apportionment under ISTEA (92-97) now totals \$2.663 billion.

RTC project award data shows that over 80

percent of these TE funds have been programmed for specific projects, as of February 1, 1997. However, RTC data is not current for some states including HI, NE, NC, SC, NV, WV and UT. Thus, RTC estimates that, to-date, over 90 percent of available TE funds have been programmed.

Factoring in the \$600 million added to the state TE accounts in FY 1997, obligation rates dropped to 53 percent as of February 1, 1997. This is down from 63 percent at the close of FY 1996 (September 30, 1996). "However, the obligation rate will rise as the
(continued on page 4)

National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse

1506 21st Street NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20036

Address Correction Requested

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
PRESORT
US POSTAGE PAID
BOWIE, MD
PERMIT NO. 4434

- Toll-free Tel: (888) 388-6832
- Fax: (202) 463-0875
- Email: ntec@transact.org
- Website: <http://www.transact.org/ntec.htm>

New Products from the NTEC

Visual Database of Transportation Enhancements—This multimedia database on compact disc (CD-ROM) describes and displays specific Transportation Enhancements projects through the use of text, photographs, architectural renderings, site plan/maps, digital voice, and digital video. This multimedia database includes project contacts, summary information, and project funding data.

The *Visual Database* includes a self-running tutorial, a national directory of State DOT Enhancements Program Managers, and comes with *Leaving a Place Better Than We Found It*. *Leaving...* is a 28-page booklet with pictures and stories describing 10 projects from the *Visual Database*—one for each of the ten Transportation Enhancement Activities.

TE Programming...

(continued from page 3)

year progresses, hopefully topping 75 percent by September 1997," reported Kevin Heanue, Director of the FHWA Office of Environment and Planning.

Contact the NTEC for a copy of *ISTEA Transportation Enhancements: Summary of Nationwide Spending*, February 1997 Update.

Contact RTC (202-331-9696) for a primer on: *Analyzing State Performance for ISTEA Transportation Enhancements*, February 1997.

In the Next Issue of Connections...

A Summary of ISTEA Reauthorization Proposals: from STEP-21 to STARS 2000, NEXTEA to ISTEA Works.

"Meet the Staff"

Tim Lidiak has served as the NTEC Manager since the Clearinghouse opened in March 1996. Tim's responsibilities include managing day-to-day operations, technical assistance, media services, client outreach and generating monthly reports to FHWA. Tim will also serve as co-editor of *Connections*.

Tom Maggio has recently joined the NTEC team, replacing Tim Gorman (who left NTEC for a position doing GIS work with an Alexandria, VA firm). Tom comes to the NTEC from Cleveland, Ohio where he worked at the MPO on bicycling and walking issues. As the NTEC Program Associate, Tom's responsibilities include providing technical assistance, product distribution, electronic communications and general office support. When calling the NTEC, Tom will most likely be your first point of contact.

Robert Patten serves as the NTEC Director (a part-time position), among his other duties as RTC's Senior Associate for Transportation Research and Policy. Bob oversees the general work plan of the NTEC, provides technical assistance and co-edits *Connections*. Bob can be reached at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) at 202-974-5116.