

# CONNECTIONS

The NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS CLEARINGHOUSE Newsletter

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## Youth Corps and Enhancements: A Natural Connection

Martin O'Brien, National Association of Service and Conservation Corps

The winding highway along majestic Lake Superior offers some of the best scenery around Ashland, WI. Yet for years the city used this lakefront area as nothing more than a dumping ground for snow from its city streets. A few years ago, a crew of young people from Ashland — and around Wisconsin — built a boardwalk along the highway and the lake. Now walkers and cyclists from the Ashland community enjoy the splendor of the great lake, while the young people who built that boardwalk have developed their work skills, their education and their self-esteem.

Who built the Ashland boardwalk? Members of the Wisconsin Conservation Corps (WCC), using transportation enhancement funds. And these Wisconsin corpsmembers are not unique — members of youth conservation and service corps all around the country began working to meet the transportation and environmental needs of their communities as part of the Transportation Enhancements provision established under ISTEA.

"It is really something for our crew to be proud of," said Bridget Bonneville, a WCC corpsmember who worked on the project. "For many years we will see our huge boardwalk in the middle of Ashland, and be reminded of what the WCC and dedicated young adults can do to enhance their community."

Some members of Congress have long been impressed by the substantial benefits brought to communities by the youth corps. Those same members used a 1993 legislative vehicle — the Urban Youth Corps provisions of the National and Community Service Trust Act — to encourage corps involvement in infrastructure projects. In turn, FHWA encouraged states to work with youth corps; many states responded through the Transportation Enhancements and Recreational Trails programs.

When it came time to draft a successor to ISTEA, Congress moved to formalize that link between corps and enhancements, to get more young people

*(continued on page 2)*



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Washington Conservation Corps members performing routine trail construction

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California Conservation Corps members constructing stairs in Yosemite National Park

## What are Youth Corps?

Youth corps are state or local programs that organize crews for labor-intensive conservation and community service projects. The corps provide a proven strategy for giving young men and women a chance to better their communities and their own lives. Corps engage disadvantaged young people, ages 16-25, in paid community service projects and provide education, job training and supportive services. Youth corps that are active members of the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) subscribe to a set of principles and practices that ensures high quality organization, supervision and accountability.

in more states involved in projects similar to the Ashland boardwalk. As a result, TEA-21 includes language in Section 1108 that encourages the States to partner with youth corps in carrying out enhancements and recreational trails projects.

## Corps' Experience with Enhancements

Youth corps and corpsmembers have experience as a labor force in nearly every category of enhancements projects with the exception of land acquisition and archaeological planning and research. A few examples of corps enhancements projects include:

- California Conservation Corps members planted acorns of various native oak species in the highway ROW of 23 counties.
- Los Angeles Conservation Corps member stenciled storm drains and distributed informational door hangers to educate the public about the environmental dangers of roadway runoff.
- Vermont Youth Conservation Corps members cleared brush, cleaned ditches, built small bridges, rebuilt trails and were educated on environment and conservation issues.

## Working with a Corps

Corps continually seek new partners for work project opportunities that enrich the lives of corpsmembers and communities. Youth corps staff, usually the Executive Director or Projects Coordinator, work with project sponsors and partners to fashion a contract or cooperative agreement to carry out all or part of an enhancements project. In some cases, corps have applied for TE funds to build their own projects. Citizen groups and states or municipalities have enlisted corps as a labor force for part or all of other projects.

## Ability and Skill Level of the Corps

Corpsmembers have undertaken simple enhancements projects such as scenic beautification. They have also constructed picnic shelters, signs and other transportation-related facilities. Some corps have tackled complex projects like the restoration and renovation of historic structures. Most corps will take on any achievable and measurable project that requires sweat, muscle and teamwork. Corps are particularly useful for adding intensive bursts of labor to projects that also utilize volunteers.

## Possible Roadblocks and Incentives to Working with Corps

States, FHWA divisions and community partners are still learning about and experimenting with the best ways to engage youth corps. Advocates have hit understandable roadblocks caused by the lack of prior models for cooperative agreements or other mechanisms that would set the terms of a mutually beneficial partnership. However, corps now have enough experience with enhancements, and the legislative language is sufficiently unambiguous, to get beyond roadblocks.

Specifically, the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) is recommending to the FHWA that it put meat on the bones of the "encouragement of use of youth conservation or service corps" language in Section 1108 of TEA 21. The FHWA could provide examples of the ways that states have utilized corps, as well as examples of potential future partnerships. States could offer "extra credit" to TE project applications that involve corps. In the future, NASCC expects to work closely with NTEC to disseminate good examples of states, corps and community groups working together.

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**Find the Youth Corps Nearest You** NASCC is the membership association for more than 100 conservation and service corps programs around the country. Visit the NASCC web site at [www.nascc.org](http://www.nascc.org) or call Marty O'Brien at 202-737-6272, ext. 106 to find a corps program in your area.

# TE Project Links World-Famous Park and Historic Neighborhood

Lane Addonizio, Cityscape Institute of New York City

The Cityscape Institute of New York City, a private non-profit organization, is working with the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) and the Harlem Community Development Corporation (HCDC) to implement a Transportation Enhancement project along 110<sup>th</sup> Street. The “Harlem Gateway Corridor” project includes the northern boundary of Central Park and the gateway to the Harlem Community. TE funds are enabling a strategic partnership between community groups, public agencies, non-profit organizations and designers to help people reclaim their city streets as public space.

Streets comprise more than a third of all land in modern American cities, yet they are rarely thought of as an open space asset. The Harlem Corridor Gateway Transportation Enhancements project is a strategic community effort to change this situation in New York City. It is an excellent example of enhancements funds used to demonstrate a design methodology that can be applied to streets anywhere.

## Project Background

With a grant from the US DOT’s Livable Cities program, the Central Park Conservancy partnered with the Harlem community through “Help Design Frederick Douglass Circle.” This event was a community workshop to develop a vision for a commemorative public space at the northwest corner of the park. The intersection at the northeast corner of the park was at the same time being redesigned by the city in commemoration of Duke Ellington.

The TE application for the Harlem Gateway Corridor project — a collaboration between Cityscape, ESDC and HCDC as co-sponsors and the Central Park Conservancy — was a direct outgrowth of the Livable Cities workshop. It built upon the community process developed for the Circle and extended the scope to include a vision of 110<sup>th</sup> street as the Gateway to Harlem, with a commitment by the New York City Department of Transportation for a portion of the local funding.

## The Design Process

The surrounding community was involved in the design process for 110<sup>th</sup> Street from the very beginning. In the spring of 1997, the Cityscape Institute surveyed neighborhood residents and business owners to assess the community’s concerns and ideas about the street. The most common responses identified a desire for:

- More, higher quality sidewalk lighting.
- A “greener” street.
- A cleaner street.
- Repaired and restored sidewalk paving.

- Awnings above the deeply recessed building entrances typical of this corridor.
- A better, more consistent street image.

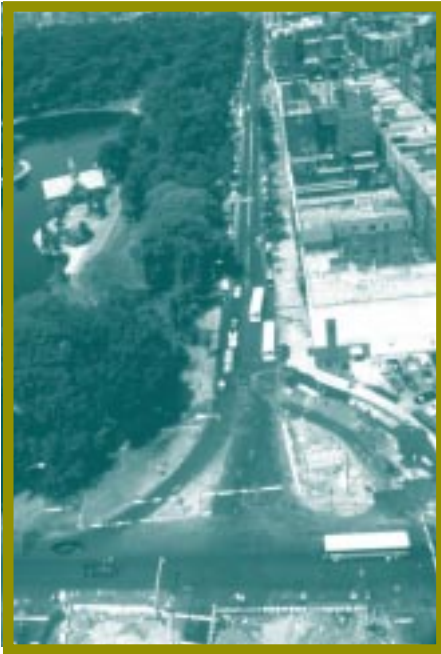
A locally appointed community board had formed the notion of this street as a “walk of heroes.” This became a key design priority. People envisioned this streetscape project as a unique opportunity to celebrate the juxtaposition of a park and a neighborhood that share worldwide historic and cultural importance.

To shape these objectives into a coherent vision for 110<sup>th</sup> Street, Cityscape assembled an interdisciplinary team of architects, lighting designers, landscape architects and environmental graphic designers. They analyzed existing conditions of the street including a photometric analysis showing existing and proposed patterns of illumination. The design team then developed a streetscape concept in which each design aspect was conceived in relation to everything else. They worked closely with city agencies to ensure that every design responds to the city’s own maintenance standards, so that the design would not require management by a private entity. The resulting plan for the Harlem Gateway Corridor includes:

- Articulation of distinct zones in the wide right-of-way through differentiated landscaping and paving patterns.
- Tighter spacing of street trees and the restoration of planting beds along the building edge.
- Coordinated street furniture.
- Reduced signage; improved appearance of graphics and hardware.
- Roadway and pedestrian light fixtures combined to achieve



Community Design Workshop, Frederick Douglass Circle



Harlem Gateway Corridor site. On left is Central Park, Duke Ellington Circle is in the foreground.

optimum lighting patterns for vehicles **and** pedestrians.

- Light fixtures with ornamental bases that incorporate “Heritage Corridor” portrait and text panels.

### Heritage Corridor Concept

The Harlem Gateway Corridor is the result of a design approach that treats streets like public spaces for people — not just transportation arteries. This project will be New York City’s first Heritage Corridor, serving the Harlem community as a potent reminder of the people and events that have come before. It is Cityscape’s plan to install panels depicting faces and text from Harlem’s past into the base of the streetlight fixtures. This evolved out of the idea that new streetscape elements should be incorporated into an existing system, rather than cluttering the street with new objects. “Faces in the bases” combines the traditions of large, ornamental bases found on historic fixtures and of faces depicted in architectural details.

The fixtures on 110<sup>th</sup> Street will contain the faces and words of such legendary figures from Harlem’s past as Duke Ellington, Langston Hughes

and Bessie Smith. These will stand alongside those of lesser-known Harlemites like Lincoln Brewer, one of the first black subway conductors in New York. Images and biographical research on artists, writers, political and religious leaders, educators and unsung Harlem heroes were compiled for consideration and selection by the Harlem community.

### TE Funds Catalyze Community

Transportation Enhancements funds have made it possible for strategic partners to direct the energies and resources of a community. In the case of the Harlem Gateway Corridor, it has helped to:

- Build upon long-standing relationships with community groups to help develop a vision, create a sense of “ownership,” and ensure successful management.
- Establish an interdisciplinary team of designers to interpret the vision as a coherent design.
- Coordinate with public agencies so that maintenance by the city is viable, and the project can influence city design standards.
- Partner with other initiatives in the area to combine resources and develop a comprehensive vision and strategy.

For more information, contact Lane Addonizio at 212-925-6675, or visit the Cityscape Institute website at [www.cityscapeinstitute.com](http://www.cityscapeinstitute.com).



110<sup>th</sup> Street design by Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer, Associates

## Call for TE PROJECT NOMINATIONS

### Deadline February 21, 1999

The time is ripe for a guide to TE written in plain English about success stories and lessons learned from projects like yours. We seek TE project nominations for *a Citizens’ Guide to Transportation Enhancements*.

#### Ideal projects should:

- Be nominated by a local government.
- Include community sponsorship or participation.
- Be under construction or complete.
- Be implemented with an FHWA streamlining measure.
- Illustrate problem-solving in design, development or participation.

#### Successful applications should:

- Make a strong visual statement with slides and schematics.
- Summarize the project plan with lessons learned about state program or project development.
- Include funding and cost breakdowns, as well as project contacts.

Direct nominations or questions to:

Katherine Shriver  
c/o Rails-to-Trails Conservancy  
1100 17th Street, NW, 10th Floor  
Washington, DC 20036

202-974-5144  
[rtckatherine@transact.org](mailto:rtckatherine@transact.org)

# Tips for a Successful TE Project Application & Development

The most common causes of a Transportation Enhancements project downfall are the lack of a thorough project scope and plan, and faulty construction cost estimates. Project sponsors can avoid these pitfalls with careful planning, and by using professionals familiar with their state DOT's procedures. This is especially true with regards to prevailing wages, service and material procurement as well as preparing a contract for bid.

## Sweat the Details

Many projects sound good on their merits, but a detailed scope, timeline and budget are necessary to determine the needs and requirements of a project. An application may simply state that sidewalks are desired and needed in a community. What is missing are the critical details. Where will the sidewalks go? Will their widths, slope, cross slope and curb ramps conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? Does property have to be purchased or an easement negotiated?

Crafting a clear project scope can help the sponsor streamline project implementation. One common streamlining measure is the Categorical Exclusion (CE). In federal regulations the FHWA has listed projects that are "categorically excluded" from NEPA review because they do not have significant environmental impacts. Several TEAs such as bike and pedestrian facilities, landscaping and scenic easement acquisition fit within these existing CEs.

Federal regulations also allow each state to approve other CE classifications on a project-by-project basis or programmatically. The FHWA streamlining guidance encourages the programmatic approach, which allows state DOTs and FHWA to agree in advance on what projects qualify for a CE classification.

Project sponsors should ask their state TE manager whether their state DOT and the FHWA have adopted a programmatic approach to CE classification. If not, sponsors should work with the TE manager to determine whether resources will be significantly altered.

## Get the Price Right

Good construction cost estimates are derived from a detailed and narrowly focused project scope and, just as important, an experienced staff person or consultant who can accurately determine project costs. Most DOT's have wage-rate books and some have a cost-per-mile average for items. These should be used only as a guide since each project is unique.

Some states require local sponsors to use professional consultants or local government engineers to assist in the development of the cost estimates while others have a dedicated source of funds to cover cost overruns. As a precaution, some states review cost estimates rigorously during the project selection process.

## What Your State DOT Can Do

TE managers have been working to smooth out the institutional wrinkles of the TE program. Consider these approaches for more effective program implementation.

- **Hold workshops before the call for projects and after awards.** This educates hopefuls about the program and makes certain that they know important facts.
- **Schedule calls for projects** with sufficient time for potential sponsors to develop sound plans, good cost estimates and garner local support.
- **Provide information on the Internet** such as applications, project examples, guidelines and rules.

- **Make reimbursements a priority.** Quick repayment to project sponsors helps reduce costs to sponsors who otherwise may have to borrow money to complete a project.
- **Arrange for Advance Payment.** States may elect to establish a process with the FHWA to secure payment in advance for a TE project rather than waiting to reimburse local sponsors.
- **Cut redundant steps to speed up the process.** Tennessee sends paperwork to two state agencies for simultaneous review, saving up to six months.
- **Establish Programmatic Agreements for CE** and adopt the Nationwide Programmatic Agreement between FHWA and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers.
- **Suballocate funds to district offices** — Florida allows its seven DOT districts to run their own programs.
- **Implement a Certification Acceptance process** that allows local agencies and governments to administer TE project development and construction.
- **Use toll funds for the local match** — New Jersey and Florida use toll funding as the local match for TE projects. This allows project sponsors to spend their local match on preliminary engineering and design, which enables these states to bypass contract bid requirements.
- **Use DOT staff or hire technical consultants** to work with local sponsors on proposed development and other project reviews.
- **Use advisory committees** to guarantee broad representation, select projects and ensure a forum for monitoring implementation issues.

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## Transportation Enhancements Outreach and Beyond

Harold Peaks, Federal Highway Administration

**D**uring the fall of 1998, the FHWA sponsored four information exchange sessions to gain input on the subject of TEA-21 and transportation enhancements. More specifically, the sessions were to address the question of "What do our partners and customers think about the provisions for the Transportation Enhancements program and its related activities as provided in TEA-21?" Our objective was to get feedback on the TE legislative provisions which lend themselves to interpretations.

The four information exchange sessions were held in Kansas City, MO, Oakland, CA, Washington, D.C. and Savannah, GA. Each day-long session was attended by 25 to 45 participants. The participants represented a wide spectrum of interests, and discussed their concerns. The interests repre-

sented at the sessions included the historic preservation community, non-motorized transportation advocates, the tourist and trade industry, departments of transportation, museum representatives, railroad officials, environmental protection specialists, public interest organizations and citizen representatives.

A number of comments and submittals from the participants in a USDOT-sponsored listening session will also be assessed for comments that pertain to transportation enhancements activities.

Why is this important? The FHWA is now reviewing and evaluating the information it received via these various means of public and agency involvement. We will be using this information to assist in developing guidance for the implementation of the

provisions of the TE program in TEA-21. Most of the guidance may be drafted by the end of January, 1999. While many of the policies that are presently in place will continue to be appropriate, a number of them must be reevaluated and new ones may be needed.

Yes, we recognize that some states have already developed state guidance to move forward with their programs. We also recognize that many states have had a call for projects and found it necessary to provide their own TEA-21 interpretations. However, the FHWA and the DOT felt it important to hear from our partners and customers before we developed guidance. We expect that most of the TE guidance will be consistent with the state efforts. Where it is not, we will work out potential conflicts. The FHWA will assist in maintaining the integrity of the program while maximizing the flexibility available to the states under the law. We look forward to a great partnership in the life of Transportation Enhancements under TEA-21.

**P.S.** Keep June 22-23, 1999 open for a national coordinators meeting in Pittsburgh in conjunction with the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Trails & Greenways Conference.

**Connections** is a quarterly publication of the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse. Submission of articles as well as letters and other comments are welcome.

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