

CONNECTIONS

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TEAchallenge Salutes State Excellence

By Kate Valentine, TransManagement

In December 2000, nine state Departments of Transportation were honored at the American Association of Highway and State Transportation Officials (AASHTO) conference in Indianapolis, IN for excellence in implementation of state Transportation Enhancements (TE) programs or TE projects. The TEAchallenge competition, the first of its kind, was sponsored by six interest groups – representative of the 12 TE activities – and AASHTO. The other sponsors were Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Scenic America, the Great American Station Foundation, the Surface Transportation Policy Project, and the International Downtown Association.

Thirty states accepted the challenge to nominate their state program for a TEAward, and eighteen of those states also nominated an individual project for consideration. The four winning programs and five winning projects represent the best of a top-flight applicant pool. Kansas, Nebraska, Vermont, and New Jersey won a TEAward for overall program excellence, and Alaska, California, Georgia, Kentucky, and West Virginia won a TEAward for excellence with a specific project.

While each of the four winning programs has distinct features, they are all characterized by strong and sustained outreach, well-designed technical assistance, and an open process. They employ a variety of financial support techniques to ensure that all communities can participate and encourage broad-based partnerships with public and private organizations. These states also have a high level of obligation of TE funds and completed projects; two exceed obligations of 100 percent most years. The five winning projects are characterized by their economic benefit, their impact on the quality of life of their communities, their emphasis on preserving the best of the past, and their sensitivity to the environment.

This first TEAchallenge competition produced invaluable information on the design, promotion, administration, and implementation of TE programs and projects.



Thomas R. Warne, CAO of Utah DOT (far left) and AASHTO Executive Director John Horsley (far right) present a TEAward to Vermont AOT TE Manager Lani Ravin and Vermont AOT Secretary of Transportation Brian Searles. (Photo:AASHTO)

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T HIS FIRST TEACHALLENGE COMPETITION PRODUCED INVALUABLE INFORMATION ON THE DESIGN, PROMOTION, ADMINISTRATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TE PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS. BY SHOWCASING THESE EFFORTS, THE COMPETITION SPONSORS HOPE TO RAISE THE BAR AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO FURTHER IMPROVE AND EXPAND THEIR PROGRAMS.

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By showcasing these efforts, the competition sponsors hope to raise the bar and encourage others to further improve and expand their programs. Additional details on these programs and projects, as well as lessons learned from other applicants, will be highlighted in a forthcoming AASHTO report. Below are detailed descriptions of the TEAward program and project recipients.

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE WINNERS: Program

The following four states are being recognized for the overall excellence of their TE programs.

KANSAS

Extensive and consistent efforts to get the word out on the Kansas Transportation Enhancements Program were among the reasons the program is a top-rated service in the Kansas Department of Transportation's annual external customer survey. The program also is a model for project development streamlining to help minimize applicant problems, especially for small communities and non-profits, which the DOT encourages to participate. Sustained technical assistance, such as easy-to-read guides, educational workshops, and feedback for unsuccessful applicants also help reduce the "fear factor" sometimes experienced by applicants to the program. The DOT also encourages feedback from project sponsors, which has resulted in revisions to other aspects of the program in the past several years. For more information, contact Julie Lesslie, TE Program Coordinator, (785) 296-0284 or JulieL@ksdot.org.

NEBRASKA

From the standpoint of both process and outcome, the Nebraska TE program is a clear winner. An easy two-stage application process minimizes the time commitment of the project sponsors and avoids wasted time for non-eligible projects. Full-time staff and trained consultants in all the necessary disciplines support potentially eligible applicants in developing proposals. Technical assis-

tance is then provided to all successful applicants throughout the lives of their projects. Over the past nine years, the Nebraska Department of Roads has obligated all available Enhancements dollars for this broadly popular program and produced over 400 projects in 11 of the 12 categories. From the Department's perspective, the reward is an improved quality of life in one out of every four Nebraska communities. For more information, contact Jim Pearson, TE Program Manager, (402) 479-3771 or Jpearson@dor.state.ne.us.

NEW JERSEY

As one of the states that supported Transportation Enhancements during the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) debate, the New Jersey Department of Transportation has taken a comprehensive approach to implementation from the beginning. New Jersey's Enhancements program has served as a useful model to other states in terms of supporting applicants and streamlining the project development process. New Jersey is one of several states that fund projects at 100 percent, but encourage applicants to make contributions, whether in cash or in-kind. According to the DOT, the success of the program has inspired the DOT to introduce several new state-funded programs that support goals similar to the Federal TE program, including two new programs at the local level for pedestrian and bicycle safety initiatives. For more information, contact Robert Goslin, TE Program Manager, (609) 530-3640 or robertgoslin@dot.state.nj.us.

VERMONT

Similar to Nebraska, Vermont has obligated more than 100 percent of available funds for the Enhancements program. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VAOT) uses all available methods to streamline project development, and finds that many of the techniques reduce project costs as well as time. Another hallmark of the Vermont program is the significant

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Transportation Enhancements: Essential Ingredients for Smarter Growth

By Don Chen, Smart Growth America, Karen Nozik, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and Megan Betts Russell, NTEC

The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Highway Administration.

For several years now, “smart growth” has become a driving force in public policy, largely responding to increasing public demands for solutions to haphazard sprawl and traffic congestion. Within the transportation sector, efforts to promote more sensible development have caused planners, engineers, and other professionals to recalibrate their approach to doing business. Associations like the Institute of Traffic Engineers, the American Planning Association and the National Association of Regional Councils have sought to provide their members with the tools necessary to reduce the harmful impacts of sprawl. Fortunately, one particularly effective set of tools—Transportation Enhancements—is already at their disposal.

To examine the smart growth benefits of Transportation Enhancements (TE), let’s first consider what constitutes smarter growth. According to Smart Growth America, a nationwide coalition, these efforts are defined by intended outcomes, including neighborhood livability, better access and less traffic, thriving cities, suburbs and towns, lower costs and lower taxes, and keeping open space open.

To achieve these outcomes, communities across America have found the following to be among the useful approaches available:

- Fostering “walkable,” close-knit neighborhoods;
- Promoting attractive communities with a strong sense of place, including the rehabilitation and use of historic buildings;
- Preserving open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas;
- Strengthening and encouraging growth in existing communities;
- Providing a variety of transportation choices; and,
- Encouraging citizen and stakeholder participation in development decisions.

Some would argue that TE offers the best fiscal tool available for these approaches and outcomes. Certainly, TE is unparalleled in the amount of money for states and cities to parlay their desire for livable communities into projects on the ground. Since the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was implemented in 1991, over \$4.4 billion in TE funds have been made available to the states. Enhancements projects contribute to growing smart because they provide transportation choice, historic preservation, open space preservation, aesthetics and livability, and economic development to communities.

For example, by providing funding for multi-purpose trails and other bicycle and pedestrian facilities, TE actively increases the number of transportation choices in towns and cities. When the Bear Creek Greenway Trail in Jackson County, OR is completed, this TE-funded greenway between Ashland and Central Point (a distance of 19 miles) will allow users to work or shop anywhere along that trail by using something other than a car.

Moreover, historic preservation TE projects have resurrected numerous train stations and commercial districts, contributing to sense of place, mass transit choice, and infill development. The Union Station project in Meridian, MS used TE funds to turn a historic train depot into a multi-modal hub that connects residents to buses, trains, and trolleys. This project facilitates use of mass transit and preserved a historic building, as well as spurred economic development in Meridian’s existing downtown area.

TE can also be used for aesthetic improvements, which recognize the human need for beautiful surroundings and can even contribute to economic development. Preserving open space or adding scenic improvements make the rejuvenation of neighborhoods possible, and help to balance the built and natural environment. The city of Douglas, GA used TE funds to add brick sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, crosswalks, and trash receptacles to its downtown area. Douglas has since seen a dramatic improvement in the downtown atmosphere and economy. California recently used TE funds for a scenic acquisition project that will protect a 649-acre mountain lion habitat from new housing and commercial development. This project preserves rare open space for animals *and* humans, and prevents possible sprawl-like development.

States are doing their part to use TE to contribute to smarter growth. Consider Vermont’s “Downtown Program,” which was enacted in 1998 to promote downtown redevelopment. While it is a separate program from TE, Vermont’s TE Advisory Committee gives a 10% scoring advantage to potential Enhancements projects that are located within a “designated downtown.” This places those projects higher on the TE funding list. Enhancing Vermont’s town centers with TE projects allows the state to protect its character (which translates into tourism dollars), plus support one of its best features for its citizens: livability.

Transportation Enhancements funds are thus one tool for communities and states who seek to protect and promote transportation choice, historic preservation, aesthetics and livability, and social and economic development—all of which contribute to growing smarter. To learn more about smart growth in general and other available monetary tools, check out Smart Growth America’s Web site at www.smartgrowthamerica.com.

TEAchallenge

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involvement and support received from the state legislature, allowing legislators to serve on a broad-based selection committee. Such strong legislative interest has resulted in increased funding over the 10 percent set-aside. Since 1997, VAOT has obligated an average of 148 percent of Enhancements funds. For more information, contact Lani Ravin, TE Program Coordinator, (802) 828-3885 or lani.ravin@state.vt.us.

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE WINNERS: Projects

The following five projects are being recognized for their outstanding quality in the implementation of TE objectives.

ALASKA: CHILKAT BALD EAGLE PRESERVE WAYSIDE AND TRAIL

The Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve Wayside and Trail provides wayside, trail, and interpretive facilities for visitors to this 48,000-acre habitat. The project is notable in the approach taken to address the design challenges posed by the site. Great care was taken throughout the project to construct facilities that would blend in with the area's striking natural beauty.

Created to protect and perpetuate the world's largest concentration of bald eagles, the preserve attracts a significant number of visitors each year. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities was increasingly challenged by the environmental impact of cars pulling off the highway onto surrounding vegetation and the safety problems posed by drivers stopping abruptly to view the eagles or walk along the highway. The Department took the initiative to create an environmentally sensitive interpretive viewing site that consists of two pavilions, small parking lots "tucked in" to the habitat, a two-mile walking trail, and a boardwalk facility that incorporates interpretive displays and spotting scopes to view the eagles.

The benefits of the project are numerous. Visitors now have a designated site where they can learn about and observe the eagles. The community has gained a new venue for both educational and social functions and is benefiting from increased tourism. Also important is that the environmental impacts of visitors pulling off the highway, compacting surrounding vegetation and damaging the bird habitat has been mitigated. For more information, contact Judy



Alaska's Chilkat Project. (Photo: TRAAK)



California's Union Station. (Photo: CalTrans)

which can be closed off for cultural events and festivals. The East Portal Pavilion, a grand terminal building on the east side of the station, is also decorated with artwork and provides pedestrians with an aesthetically pleasing environment in which to access various modes of travel. Graced by attractive etched glass skylights, this contemporary half-domed structure is reminiscent in scale and design of the grand train stations.

The Gateway Center was a large-scale project that included the provision of an intermodal center, a public park-and-ride garage, and a series of roadways and ramps to provide convenient access to the station. The total cost of the project was approximately \$125 million, \$19.6 million of which was provided by TE funds. For more information, contact Howard Reynolds, CalTrans, (916) 654-2477 or Howard_Reynolds@dot.ca.gov.

GEORGIA: SAPELO ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE

The beacon at the historic Sapelo Island Lighthouse is shining once again thanks in part to TE funding. Dark since



Georgia's restored Sapelo lighthouse. (Photo: Georgia DOT)

1905, the lighthouse was officially reopened and relit in 1998. It now functions as an important aid to an island that can only be approached by waterways.

Extensive reconstruction of the lighthouse included the replacement of windows, the interior staircase, and the cupola, as well as installation of an operable light. TE funds accelerated the preservation of the monumental structure. Over \$300,000 in funds to improve the surrounding complex were later provided by the General Assembly and private donations to the Sapelo Island Restoration Foundation. This project is exemplary in the success of its partners to leverage the initial TE dollars to attract substantial funding in order to preserve the crumbling structure.

The work on the lighthouse marks the beginning of a concerted effort to rehabilitate the historic elements of the island and to aggressively promote tourism. For more information, contact Marta Rosen, Georgia DOT, (404) 657-5226 or Marta.Rosen@dot.state.ga.us

KENTUCKY: RENAISSANCE KENTUCKY

Created by Governor Paul E. Patton, Renaissance Kentucky is an innovative initiative designed to assist communities with their downtown revitalization efforts. To accomplish its goals, an alliance of state and federal agencies and a private entity was formed. Renaissance Kentucky is designed to enhance and coordinate existing revitalization efforts. Communities are encouraged to utilize planning and expertise created through prior, current, or future participation



Renaissance KY project in Shelbyville. (Photo: KYTC)



Mon River Trail opening celebration. (Photo: WVDOT)

in the Kentucky Heritage Council Main Street Program and the Kentucky Certified Community Partnership Program.

In 1998, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet announced its plan to make TE funding available to support the communities designated by the Renaissance Kentucky program. The Cabinet partnered with the Kentucky Heritage Council, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Kentucky Alliance to develop design guidelines for historic commercial districts to assist communities as they plan public and private improvements to their historic downtowns. These guidelines have shaped the plans for the projects selected for funding. The agencies have also collaborated to offer training sessions on the application process and guidelines.

Over the past two years, \$10 million in TE funds have been earmarked for streetscape improvements and for community-sensitive streetscape design guidelines in Renaissance Kentucky designate cities. In addition, \$4 million in state funds has been allocated for streetscape projects in Renaissance Kentucky cities. The result: streetscape improvements that preserve the unique characteristics of each downtown and enhance the community benefits of preservation in twenty-four Kentucky cities. For more information, contact Michael Hill, Director, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, (502) 564-7686 or Mhill@mail.kytc.state.ky.us.

WEST VIRGINIA: MON RIVER/CAPTERTON/ DECKERS CREEK TRAIL SYSTEM

Mon River/Capterton/Deckers Creek Trail System is a rail-trail approximately 50 miles in length that traverses three counties. The trail system provides a transportation facility, aesthetic appeal, and commerce. Response to the trail has been overwhelmingly positive since its creation.

Enthusiastic about the positive benefits of the trail for their employees, businesses bordering the trail have built stairways and decks to provide easy access to the area. Residents had already started to traverse the trail prior to its opening, and some along the rural sections of the trail have now “adopted” lengths of the trail to plant flowers and perform other landscaping activities. A new sense of community has sprung up because of these actions, making the trail the link to a tri-countywide extended neighborhood.

To date, over \$2 million in TE funds have been invested in the creation of the trail. These funds have been further augmented by business and community donations. Thanks

to a broad-based partnership, sustained financial support, and a clear vision of the final goal, this project has provided numerous positive benefits to the surrounding communities. For more information, contact Bill Robinson, WV DOT, (304)558-3165 or wrobinson@dot.state.wv.us.

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New Resources and TE News

NEW RESOURCES

TRAILS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, Second Edition, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's comprehensive manual on the planning, design, and management of multi-use trails, will be published in March. It is available for \$29.95 from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. To order, call Darren Smith at 202-974-5148 or email rtcdarren@transact.org.

GRANT OPPORTUNITY

The Great American Station Foundation is now accepting applications for its 2001 grants for train station revitalization projects. These grants are intended to help jump-start a community's effort to restore its rail station as an active inter-modal transportation facility. For more information and application package, visit www.stationfoundation.org or call Eric Strebe at 505-426-8055. Application deadline is April 13, 2001.

TE NEWS

FORT KENT AND ST. FRANCIS, ME – The St. John Valley Heritage Trail, a 16.6 mile rail-trail that has been in the works since 1994, will help connect two towns thanks to \$1.2 million in TE funds. A key link in the trail is a railroad trestle across the Fish River, which is to be rehabilitated and renovated as part of

the project. Once complete, the trail will be used by bicyclists, pedestrians, equestrians, and others to travel from Fort Kent to St. Francis. [*Bangor Daily News*]

STATEWIDE, NC – The North Carolina DOT recently approved \$145,256 in TE funding to manufacture and install river basin highway signs across North Carolina. The signs will inform visitors of the river basin in which they are travelling, with the goal to increase public awareness about natural systems and how people impact those systems. The signs are part of a public awareness campaign, "Discover Your Ecological Address", and are cosponsored by the state's Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Office of Environmental Education. [*News & Record*]

ORANGE COUNTY, CA – Orange County mountain lions still have Coal Canyon, 649-acres of wilderness open space, as their home in part due to \$15 million in TE funds for a scenic acquisition. CalTrans funded this project over three rounds. The site was privately owned and was nearly sold to developers, but after talking to wildlife agencies, the owner decided to reduce the asking price and sell it to preservationists. Coal Canyon is one of the last remaining links between the Cleveland National Forest and the Chino hills, and its preservation will help maintain an ecological balance among the wildlife in the area. [*The Orange County Register*]

KNOXVILLE, TN – Greenways got a boost in Knoxville this past fall when three TE projects were selected for funding by TDOT. The city will use TE funds for a 1.5-mile loop around a quarry for the Fort Dickerson/Mary Vestal Greenway, and to build a 0.7-mile trail that connects a middle school with a field. The third project is a 2.1 mile trail called the James White/Old City Greenway, which will provide connections among existing greenways and parks. [*Knoxville News Sentinel*]

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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