

# CONNECTIONS

THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS CLEARINGHOUSE NEWSLETTER  
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SUMMER 2003

## Nationwide TE Obligations on the Rise

The National Transportation Clearinghouse (NTEC) announces the release of its annual report of Transportation Enhancements (TE) spending, *Transportation Enhancements: Summary of Nationwide Spending as of FY 2002*. This report provides information on State-level use of allotted TE funds since the beginning of the TE program. It includes cumulative figures from fiscal years (FY) 1992 through 2002 for each State.

This year's report shows that State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) obligated \$648 million in TE funds in FY 2002, the highest amount obligated in a single year since the inception of the program. Obligations have continued to increase since 1998. The addition of the 2002 obligations brings the cumulative (FY 1992 through FY 2002) national obligation rate up to 72.2 percent from the FY 2001 obligation rate of 69.8 percent. If the obligation figures continue to rise at a similar rate during the current fiscal year, the obligation rate should be very close to the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) stated goal of 75 percent by the close of FY 2003.

### Spending Benchmarks

NTEC reports on four distinct spending benchmarks for TE funds: Apportioned, Programmed, Obligated, and Reimbursed. Apportionments are funds allocated to each State DOT for TE activities minus transfers. Programmed amounts are those awarded by States at project selection. Obligated funds are those that the Federal government has committed to spend at the time the project is ready to proceed. Reimbursed funds are those that have been paid to the sponsor at the completion of a project. NTEC also reports on funds transferred from TE to other qualifying program accounts. All of these reported figures are cumulative from FY 1992 through FY 2002.

NTEC calculates Apportioned, Obligated, Reimbursed, and Transferred fund amounts from data derived from FHWA's Fiscal Management Information System (FMIS). NTEC relies on State DOTs to provide Programming figures. Participation was outstanding; 42 States and the District of Columbia provided updated data to NTEC for FY 2002. As a result of the states' efforts, NTEC's database of programmed projects now has 16,699 projects dated through 2002 and an additional 1,221 projects programmed for future years. The report analyzes only programmed projects dated 1992 through 2002.

During the 11 years of the TE program, \$5.97 billion in Federal funds have been apportioned to the States for TE projects. State DOTs have programmed at least 94 percent of available funds. State DOTs have cumulatively obligated \$4.31 billion or 72.2 percent of available funds. The cumulative amount reimbursed was \$3.01 billion or 50.6 percent of the total available. This reimbursement figure has

*(continued on page 2)*



**S** TATE DEPARTMENTS OF  
TRANSPORTATION (DOTs)  
OBLIGATED \$648 MILLION IN  
TE FUNDS IN FY 2002, THE  
HIGHEST AMOUNT OBLIGATED  
IN A SINGLE YEAR SINCE THE  
INCEPTION OF THE PROGRAM.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE 1: TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS FINANCIAL SUMMARY .....	2
FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL FUNDS BY TEA, FY 1992-FY 2002 ..	2
TABLE 2: STATE TE PROGRAM BENCHMARKS FOR FY1992 THROUGH FY 2002 .....	3
ON THE HILL .....	4
FHWA ANNOUNCES 2003 ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS .....	5
RESOURCES .....	5
SAVE THE DATE .....	6

**TABLE 1: TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

Cumulative Apportionments, Programming, Obligations, Reimbursements, and Transfers (Current through FY 2002)		
		Amount % of Apportionment
<b>Apportioned</b> in ISTEA and TEA-21: <i>Source: FHWA. This figure does not consider Congressionally-imposed obligation limitations.</i>	<b>\$5.97 Billion</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Programmed</b> in ISTEA and TEA-21: <i>Source: 16,699 projects dated 1992-2002 in NTEC's TE project database.</i>	<b>\$5.62 Billion</b>	<b>94.2%</b>
<b>Obligated</b> in ISTEA and TEA-21: <i>Source: FHWA.</i>	<b>\$4.31 Billion</b>	<b>72.2%</b>
<b>Reimbursed</b> in ISTEA and TEA-21: <i>Source: FHWA.</i>	<b>\$3.01 Billion</b>	<b>50.6%</b>
<b>Transfers</b> from TE to other Federal-aid Highway funds: <i>Source: FHWA.</i>	<b>\$31.7 Million</b>	<b>0.53%</b>

increased by 3 percentage points from the FY 2001 figure. Transfers of TE funds to other Federal-aid highway programs totaled \$31.7 million, up from \$15.45 million in FY 2001. All of these figures are summarized in Table 1.

**Obligation Rates**

Obligation rates are used to track the spending status of TE funds. The national obligation rate is determined by individual State activity. State obligation rates varied widely from 99.6 percent in Wyoming to 36.4 percent in Massachusetts as illustrated in Table 2. These differences result from the varying TE programs in each State, and are not, in and of themselves, the best indication of the success of a State's TE program. They do testify to the differences in approaches, problems, priorities, and solutions in using TE funds. Obligation rates provide a perspective on the system that each state has in place to move projects from vision to reality.

There are as many explanations for varying rates as there are State programs. Some State DOTs have been dedicated to TE since its inception and have consistently had high obligation rates. Other States were slower to embrace Enhancements, but have in recent years been making great strides in obligating projects. Readers are encouraged to contact their state DOTs directly if they have questions regarding their State's TE program.

**Distribution of TE Funds**

The spending report also analyzes the distribution of Federal funds across the 12 eligible TE activities (TEAs). In 2002 there

were some minor adjustments to the general trends established in previous years as illustrated in Figure 1. As in the past, almost half (45 percent) of the Federal programmed funds are for bicycle and pedestrian facilities (TEA 1). Landscaping and scenic beautification (TEA 5) received 17 percent, a slight increase from 2001. Historic preservation categories (TEAs 6 and 7) received 17 percent, a slight decrease from 2001. Rail-trails (TEA 8) accounted for a lower percentage than in the past with 9 percent.

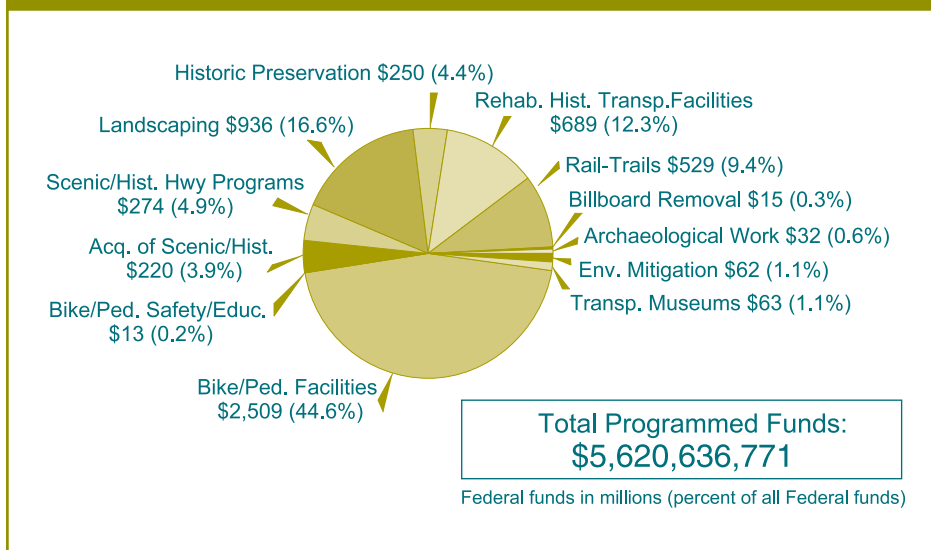
**Conclusions**

TE funds are in high demand. There are many fine examples of TE projects in all States across the nation and many more are in the planning phases. Despite the uncertainties of reauthorization of the Federal surface transportation program, States have continued to select projects at a high rate.

There has been an overall trend of increasing obligation rates; however, obligations and reimbursements of TE funds are low compared to other Federal-aid Highway programs. There are several contributing factors to low obligation rates including the flexibility of States to prioritize and distribute obligation authority among the various programs.

The full spending report is available on NTEC's Web site at [www.enhancements.org](http://www.enhancements.org) or by contacting NTEC at 888-388-NTEC or [NTEC@transact.org](mailto:NTEC@transact.org). Contact information for state DOT and FHWA TE staff is also available from any of these sources.

**FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL FUNDS BY TEA FY 1992-FY 2002**



**TABLE 2: STATE PROGRAM BENCHMARKS FOR FY 1992 THROUGH FY 2002**

State	APPORTIONED	PROGRAMMED		OBLIGATED			REIMBURSED		
	FY92-02	Total FY92-02	Rate	FY92-02	Rate	Rank	FY92-02	Rate	Rank
Alabama	\$121,187,230	\$108,962,457	89.9%	\$90,751,584	74.89%	28	\$61,315,809	50.60%	30
Alaska	\$102,360,438	\$73,319,807	71.6%	\$100,914,844	98.59%	3	\$88,603,066	86.56%	3
Arizona	\$99,647,910	\$108,111,629	108.5%	\$55,880,710	56.08%	46	\$42,747,234	42.90%	42
Arkansas	\$79,892,490	\$83,413,930	104.4%	\$64,281,778	80.46%	21	\$47,484,855	59.44%	17
California	\$512,191,156	\$701,203,000	136.9%	\$394,351,577	76.99%	23	\$229,479,334	44.80%	39
Colorado	\$84,373,950	\$62,914,088	74.6%	\$62,489,489	74.06%	29	\$51,098,917	60.56%	15
Connecticut	\$98,229,482	\$96,884,217	98.6%	\$82,485,366	83.97%	12	\$67,653,790	68.87%	8
Delaware	\$32,760,317	\$27,296,607	83.3%	\$25,126,075	76.70%	24	\$20,347,273	62.11%	13
Dist. of Columbia	\$26,517,453	\$23,492,888	88.6%	\$23,289,361	87.83%	7	\$16,082,038	60.65%	14
Florida	\$306,758,892	\$263,871,360	86.0%	\$267,716,690	87.27%	8	\$216,856,024	70.69%	6
Georgia	\$211,237,602	\$220,441,436	104.4%	\$159,323,192	75.42%	27	\$100,698,634	47.67%	34
Hawaii	\$54,858,024	\$35,186,841	64.1%	\$37,696,220	68.72%	34	\$29,660,881	54.07%	23
Idaho	\$48,992,693	\$28,800,431	58.8%	\$31,112,029	63.50%	44	\$21,001,086	42.87%	43
Illinois	\$234,970,210	\$254,367,383	108.3%	\$152,644,674	64.96%	40	\$130,265,538	55.44%	21
Indiana	\$155,927,863	\$132,907,158	85.2%	\$118,381,572	75.92%	26	\$94,373,245	60.52%	16
Iowa	\$82,852,431	\$79,074,569	95.4%	\$54,084,041	65.28%	38	\$39,167,389	47.27%	35
Kansas	\$78,771,750	\$55,943,478	71.0%	\$73,392,215	93.17%	5	\$49,669,761	63.06%	12
Kentucky	\$102,653,247	\$92,423,632	90.0%	\$86,657,057	84.42%	11	\$51,610,128	50.28%	31
Louisiana	\$88,971,147	\$82,830,289	93.1%	\$42,102,691	47.32%	50	\$27,199,515	30.57%	51
Maine	\$34,360,835	\$28,905,123	84.1%	\$23,035,634	67.04%	36	\$16,160,227	47.03%	36
Maryland	\$89,557,318	\$101,696,057	113.6%	\$73,525,999	82.10%	15	\$45,445,688	50.74%	29
Massachusetts	\$109,101,544	\$61,294,084	56.2%	\$39,738,964	36.42%	52	\$21,420,096	19.63%	52
Michigan	\$185,213,445	\$157,761,477	85.2%	\$118,929,856	64.21%	42	\$78,070,116	42.15%	45
Minnesota*	\$113,744,177	\$83,177,447	73.1%	\$111,605,215	98.12%	4	\$93,383,555	82.10%	4
Mississippi	\$76,398,635	\$69,807,963	91.4%	\$53,960,493	70.63%	33	\$36,791,359	48.16%	33
Missouri	\$120,607,794	\$126,726,357	105.1%	\$78,371,787	64.98%	39	\$49,812,263	41.30%	46
Montana	\$57,328,723	\$46,651,737	81.4%	\$46,105,318	80.42%	22	\$33,492,557	58.42%	18
Nebraska	\$58,797,672	\$45,159,403	76.8%	\$41,599,334	70.75%	32	\$27,255,409	46.35%	37
Nevada	\$47,459,172	\$49,370,223	104.0%	\$31,693,091	66.78%	37	\$26,176,609	55.16%	22
New Hampshire	\$34,148,619	\$33,370,458	97.7%	\$28,463,967	83.35%	14	\$19,473,264	57.03%	20
New Jersey	\$124,791,723	\$112,967,167	90.5%	\$95,203,648	76.29%	25	\$67,467,776	54.06%	24
New Mexico	\$68,019,590	\$74,017,800	108.8%	\$55,261,190	81.24%	19	\$44,265,364	65.08%	11
New York	\$243,762,783	\$230,652,602	94.6%	\$198,256,000	81.33%	18	\$107,998,134	44.30%	40
North Carolina	\$173,985,691	\$160,274,110	92.1%	\$142,519,980	81.91%	17	\$91,529,155	52.61%	27
North Dakota	\$45,861,917	\$36,685,953	80.0%	\$37,605,289	82.00%	16	\$32,530,829	70.93%	5
Ohio	\$200,830,733	\$114,098,413	56.8%	\$135,468,887	67.45%	35	\$116,506,321	58.01%	19
Oklahoma	\$101,085,689	\$74,914,219	74.1%	\$85,578,770	84.66%	10	\$53,263,941	52.69%	26
Oregon	\$71,331,872	\$39,835,194	55.8%	\$42,722,904	59.89%	45	\$35,054,295	49.14%	32
Pennsylvania	\$163,363,311	\$177,975,000	108.9%	\$87,917,289	53.82%	48	\$50,217,811	30.74%	50
Puerto Rico	\$15,520,839	\$15,507,118	99.9%	\$15,520,839	100.00%	1	\$13,643,298	87.90%	1
Rhode Island	\$30,797,136	\$21,752,648	70.6%	\$19,898,799	64.61%	41	\$13,923,826	45.21%	38
South Carolina	\$102,560,390	\$45,707,845	44.6%	\$74,090,913	72.24%	31	\$43,921,872	42.83%	44
South Dakota	\$48,788,355	\$28,319,140	58.0%	\$26,892,223	55.12%	47	\$25,500,511	52.27%	28
Tennessee	\$125,977,970	\$145,949,619	115.9%	\$80,069,187	63.56%	43	\$54,235,325	43.05%	41
Texas	\$471,888,086	\$475,463,581	100.8%	\$247,646,183	52.48%	49	\$164,162,389	34.79%	48
Utah	\$45,558,157	\$31,029,054	68.1%	\$33,689,759	73.95%	30	\$29,941,626	65.72%	9
Vermont	\$30,222,389	\$34,401,913	113.8%	\$27,029,357	89.43%	6	\$19,823,132	65.59%	10
Virginia	\$128,913,103	\$141,352,985	109.6%	\$104,243,498	80.86%	20	\$51,420,051	39.89%	47
Washington*	\$96,388,666	\$114,609,232	118.9%	\$82,170,246	85.25%	9	\$66,536,897	69.03%	7
West Virginia	\$47,429,397	\$47,874,994	100.9%	\$39,742,902	83.79%	13	\$25,494,060	53.75%	25
Wisconsin	\$143,455,055	\$125,912,488	87.8%	\$67,050,703	46.74%	51	\$46,308,501	32.28%	49
Wyoming	\$37,511,164	\$35,970,167	95.9%	\$37,367,457	99.62%	2	\$32,639,653	87.01%	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,967,916,235</b>	<b>\$5,620,636,771</b>	<b>94.2%</b>	<b>\$4,305,656,850</b>	<b>72.2%</b>		<b>\$3,019,180,424</b>	<b>50.6%</b>	

\*Minnesota and Washington figures have been adjusted for STP pilot. All figures represent cumulative totals FY92-FY02

The September 30, 2003 expiration date for the TEA-21 legislation is rapidly approaching, and the buzz around Washington continues to intensify.

U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Norman Y. Mineta, unveiled the Bush Administration's surface transportation reauthorization proposal on May 14, 2003. The Administration's Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA) proposes a six-year \$247 billion legislative act, the largest surface and public transportation investment in U.S. history.

Secretary Mineta said that SAFETEA serves as a framework for investments needed to maintain and grow the nation's vital transportation infrastructure and emphasized SAFETEA's doubling of funding for highway safety. The proposal creates a new core funding category within the Federal-aid Highway program dedicated to safety, the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

SAFETEA maintains the link of highway funding to transportation excise taxes. It also proposes to modify the Revenue Aligned Budget Authority (RABA) mechanism to avoid the wide annual swings in funding.

The legislation proposes a new pilot program in which States could manage core program funds as a block grant; however, the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) and Transportation Enhancements are specifically excluded.

SAFETEA proposes measures to enhance project delivery and streamline the environmental review process by establishing time frames for resource agency review and permitting decisions.

Revisions to the CMAQ program are proposed along with the establishment of a new Transportation, Energy, and Environment Program for multi-modal energy and climate change research.

SAFETEA does not have a section on Transportation Enhancements because no changes are proposed to funding or eligible activities as currently codified in Title 23 United States Code. Therefore, TE retains the 10 percent set aside of Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds, and the list of 12 eligible activities remains unchanged.

Section 1815 of SAFETEA proposes changes in the assumption of responsibility for Transportation Enhancements, Recreational Trails Program, and Transportation, Community, and System Preservation Program (TCSP) projects. The proposed legislation allows the Secretary of Transportation to assign to a State agency some or all of the Department of Transportation's responsibilities under Federal law. The State agency would assume full responsibility for complying with the laws and full liability for failure to comply.

Section 1815 requires a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Secretary of Transportation

and the State, outlining terms and conditions of assignment and assumption of responsibility. This MOU must be renegotiated every three years, and the Secretary must conduct annual compliance reviews for the first three years and periodically thereafter.

The full text of the Administration's proposed SAFETEA is posted at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reauthorization/safetea>.

What happens now? Some speculate that the Congress will begin authorization efforts in earnest this summer while others believe that it will wait until the fall. In the meantime, Congressional Committees have continued hearings and have taken requests for priority projects.

In an effort to keep you abreast of the fast-paced discussion surrounding the reauthorization of TEA-21 and SAFETEA, several Internet links for government and non-governmental Web sites are provided which provide frequent updates on the proposals and progress being made toward reauthorization.

► U.S. DOT FHWA:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reauthorization>

This site provides the Administration's proposals and other pertinent information.

► U.S. SENATE: <http://epw.senate.gov>

The Environment and Public Works Committee of the U.S. Senate will handle the Senate-side discussion and debate of the reauthorization process. Proposals from Senators will be made through this Committee.

► U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

<http://www.house.gov/transportation>

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives will handle the House-side discussion and debate of the reauthorization process. Proposals from House members will be made through this Committee, and particularly the Highways, Transit, and Pipelines Subcommittee.

► SURFACE TRANSPORTATION POLICY PROJECT:

<http://www.tea3.org>

The Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) acts as the primary coordinating body for many of the transportation-related non-governmental organizations. STPP has developed this Web site to keep interested parties apprised of both governmental and non-governmental actions related to reauthorization.

► AMERICA BIKES: <http://www.americabikes.org>

Of particular interest to those concerned with Transportation Enhancements, America Bikes was formed by eight non-governmental organizations specifically to advocate for bicycling provisions in the next transportation bill.

# FHWA Announces 2003 Environmental Excellence Awards

In celebration of Earth Day on April 22, 2003, Federal Highway Administrator Mary E. Peters announced 12 winners of FHWA's 2003 Environmental Excellence Awards. Peters described the biennial awards as a way of "recognizing and showcasing the transportation projects and the stewards who provide a balance between environmental protection and mobility." Specifically, the awards recognize innovative projects that use FHWA funding sources to meet and exceed environmental compliance goals. Several of the 2003 winning projects from Vermont, Kentucky, Florida, and Iowa have used TE funds or are key components of the TE program.

Vermont's Programmatic Agreement and Manual on Section 106 was recognized and represents a formal understanding between the State Historic Preservation Officer and historic preservation professionals within the Vermont Agency of Transportation to exempt various types of activity from Section 106 review, streamlining the review process and decreasing the time to implement projects, including many historic preservation related TE projects. The Vermont



Top: Iowa's Living Roadways  
Bottom: Broward County, Florida

Section 106 programmatic agreement has been determined a success, inspiring 30 other States to see if a similar agreement can be arranged in their States.

The Paris Pike project in Kentucky was an award recipient and entailed the innovative redesign of a 12-mile stretch of highway between the city of Lexington and the rural community of Paris. Public concerns for the protection of the culturally and historically rich region encouraged highway engineers to blend the redesign of the roadway with the natural landscape. TE funds contributed to this context-sensitive design solution assisting with the preservation and relocation of historic dry-laid stone fences along the roadway leading to a landscape and roadway that is attractive, visually interesting, and safe to drive.

The Broward County, Florida, Long-Range Transportation Plan was honored for its plan to ensure that the needs, especially the nonmotorized transportation needs, of county residents are identified and addressed through interagency coordination, public participation, and consensus-building

*(continue on page 6)*

## RESOURCES

**Environmental Justice and Transportation: A Citizen's Handbook** is a new publication from the Institute of Transport Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. The citizen's handbook is designed to help those who are new to the transportation decision-making processes influence how environmental justice is incorporated into decisions about transportation policy and projects, allowing safe, reliable transportation options for everyone. The handbook is available at <http://www.its.berkeley.edu/publications/publications.html>.

**Keeping It Simple: Easy Ways to Help Wildlife Along Roads** is a new Federal Highway Administration Web site highlighting over 100 wildlife preservation success stories from all 50 States. All projects represent "easy" ways transportation agencies are working to protect and maintain the environment at little to no cost. Many projects are eligible for TE funding including "Living Snow Fences," scenic land acquisition, and signage warning motorists of wildlife crossings. To learn more, visit [www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/wildlifeprotection/index.cfm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/wildlifeprotection/index.cfm).

**Second Nature: Improving Transportation Without Putting Nature Second** is a new report by the Defenders of Wildlife and the Surface Transportation Policy Project. The report examines the relationships between transportation planning and biological diversity, highlighting innovative State programs that seek to improve transportation infrastructure while protecting wildlife and the natural environment. The report can be downloaded from [www.defenders.org/habitat/highways/secondnature.html](http://www.defenders.org/habitat/highways/secondnature.html) or [www.transact.org](http://www.transact.org).

**Fueling Transportation Finance: A Primer on the Gas Tax** is part of The Brookings Institution's new series of discussion papers and policy briefs on the reauthorization of Federal surface transportation law. This survey paper discusses the use of Federal and State gas tax revenue in the States, and suggests that some use restrictions adversely affect mass transit, congestion and air quality improvement projects, and transportation projects in cities and urban areas. Fueling Transportation Finance and other Transportation Reform Series papers are available at [www.brookings.edu/urban](http://www.brookings.edu/urban).

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**SAVE THE DATE!**  
CONFERENCE CALENDAR

### **JUNE 2003**

TRAILLINK 2003:  
DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE  
June 26 – 29, 2003 • Providence, RI  
Web site: [www.railtrails.org/traillink2003](http://www.railtrails.org/traillink2003)

### **AUGUST 2003**

9TH CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL SCENIC AND HISTORIC  
TRAILS  
August 22 – 25, 2003 • Bow, WA  
E-mail: [natrails@aol.com](mailto:natrails@aol.com)  
  
THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ECOLOGY  
AND TRANSPORTATION  
August 24 – 29, 2003 • Lake Placid, NY  
Web site: [www.itre.ncsu.edu/cte/icoet/icoet2003.html](http://www.itre.ncsu.edu/cte/icoet/icoet2003.html)

### **SEPTEMBER 2003**

RAIL~VOLUTION: BUILDING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES  
WITH TRANSIT  
September 10 – 14, 2003 • Atlanta, GA  
Web site: [www.railvolution.com](http://www.railvolution.com)

NATIONAL PRESERVATION CONFERENCE 2003:  
NEW FRONTIERS IN PRESERVATION  
September 30 – October 5, 2003 • Denver, CO  
Web site: [www.nthpconference.org](http://www.nthpconference.org)

### **OCTOBER 2003**

LAND TRUST ALLIANCE RALLY 2003  
October 16 – 19, 2003 • Sacramento, CA  
Web site: [www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org)  
  
NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION CONGRESS  
AND EXPOSITION  
October 22 – 25, 2003 • St. Louis, MO  
E-mail: [congress@nrpa.org](mailto:congress@nrpa.org) Web site: [www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org)

## **FHWA Environmental Awards...**

*(continued from page 5)*

within the community. To help meet these needs, Broward County has programmed more than \$19 million in TE funds to enhance bicycle and pedestrian systems, add landscaping, and restore a historic train depot thus contributing towards a sustainable future for Broward County.

Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program and Living Roadways Project was recognized as an environmental transportation program that promotes livable communities. The program helps smaller communities think more creatively when making roadside landscape improvements. Once the visioning process is complete, TE funds are awarded for landscape projects using native trees, grasses, and wildflowers to beautify entranceways, roadsides, recreational trails, and other highly visible areas. Since 1996, at least \$2 million in TE funds has been distributed to 184 projects in 138 communities.

In congratulating the award winners Peters suggests, "Let us take their examples and build upon them. These winning efforts show us how to be better stewards of our environment and we need to share their accomplishments to promote, protect, and enhance our environment and our way of life."

**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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