

Take Action for Bicycling, Walking and Safe Routes to School on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

Posted February 18, 2009

Created by America Bikes and the Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Advocates have an important role to play in ensuring that each state's available transportation funds are used in part for bicycle and pedestrian projects. While each state must use 3% of their highway funds for Transportation Enhancements, bicycle and pedestrian projects are only one of the eligible purposes for the funding. In addition, the remaining 97% of the highway funding presents an opportunity to create complete streets.

In the months leading up to passage of the economic stimulus bill, many state Departments of Transportation released their lists of proposed projects. Unfortunately, bicycle and pedestrian projects were under-represented on many state lists. In fact, an [analysis done by the US Public Interest Research Group](#) found that just 0.3% of the state lists of projects were for bike/ped infrastructure, when bicyclists and pedestrians represent nearly 10% of all trips.

Since states have just 120 days to obligate half of their available funding and one year to obligate the remainder of funds, it is essential that advocates work quickly to familiarize states with ready-to-go bicycle and pedestrian projects and to ask questions about the designs for the roadway projects being implemented to ensure that as many of these projects as possible can become complete streets. In some states, formulas are being used to divide up this funding, so action needs to happen at the state, regional (MPO) and local (city/county) levels. It is important that advocates take action quickly as states and communities are moving quickly to select projects for funding.

In addition, urbanized areas also have a role to play in the decision-making for approximately 30% of a state's funding, meaning that advocates can also work at the local level to ensure that local lists of ready-to-go projects include bicycle and pedestrian priorities.

We suggest that local advocates take the following actions:

1. Write a letter to your state's governor about the transportation stimulus funding and your local bicycle/pedestrian project(s). (see sample letter below)
 2. Call your local mayor to discuss local priorities for transportation stimulus funding and the potential for including bicycle and pedestrian projects. (see draft talking points below)
-

Sample Letter to the Governor:

Please use the text below as a template for a letter to [your state's Governor](#). Any items in [brackets] must be personalized before sending.

[Date]

[Address Information]

Re: Please fund bicycle and pedestrian projects with stimulus funds

[Salutation]

[NAME OF ORGANIZATION or I is/am] writing to discuss our state's plans for spending the transportation funding that Congress provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The law directs each state to spend 3% of its highway allocation on the Transportation Enhancements program.

Given the quick turnaround time for obligation of transportation funding, I want to ensure that you are aware of the ready-to-go bicycle and pedestrian projects in our state. Nationally, there are over \$3.7 billion in ready-to-go bicycle, pedestrian, and Safe Routes to School projects that can start creating construction jobs quickly. Specifically, in our state, I encourage you to fund the *[insert a sentence or two about a ready-to-go bike/ped/SRTS/complete streets project in your local community, including cost, location and brief description.]*

I request that [NAME OF STATE] prioritize our Transportation Enhancements funds for bicycle and pedestrian projects. Building sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use paths net more jobs per dollars spent than highway projects, because they use fewer materials and are more labor intensive. These projects are also generally smaller and quicker to build—ensuring that our state can get funding out the door rapidly and in a way that benefits local engineering and construction firms, as well as communities.

In addition, I request that [NAME OF STATE] give priority to highway and road projects that create “complete streets,” which ensure that all users—whether walking, bicycling, taking public transportation, or driving—are accommodated.

Bicycle, pedestrian, and complete streets projects turn streets and downtowns into destinations for shopping and entertainment, which help local businesses and the “Main Street” economy. Families that can walk and bicycle to school, work, shopping, and transit also have an easier time meeting their bottom-line transportation costs. These projects also lay an important foundation to address some of our state's major crises—including physical inactivity and obesity, energy and oil dependence, and greenhouse gas emissions.

I look forward to hearing back from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Name

Organization (if representing an organization)

Address

Phone

Email

Talking Points for Local Leaders:

These talking points are for use with your mayor or other local leaders. Items in brackets should be personalized for your local situation.

Introduce the Subject

- I am calling to talk to you about our community's plans for the transportation funding that Congress provided through the economic recovery bill.
- Since 30% of the state's funding is to be used in urbanized areas, I want to ensure that our local priorities for transportation projects include bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- In addition, our state has great latitude on how it will spend its Transportation Enhancements funding, and I'd like to work with you to ensure that NAME OF COMMUNITY gets our fair share for bicycle and pedestrian projects.

Ask for Support of Local Projects

- There are over \$2 billion worth of "ready-to-go" bicycle and pedestrian projects across the U.S. that can create jobs right now.
- In [NAME OF COMMUNITY], it has been a priority for years to build [NAME OF PROJECT]. It needs [\$X] to be constructed, and should be included in our community's transportation priorities.
- This project is important to our community because...*[refer to the Other Rationale section below and select the arguments that apply to your project]*.
- How can we work together to ensure that this project is included in our community's list of priorities for stimulus transportation funding?
- I'd also like to ask what roadway projects [NAME OF COMMUNITY] plans to fund with the stimulus dollars, as each roadway project provides the opportunity to include the needs of auto users, bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users. Creating complete streets will be important with this funding.
- Thank you for your time today. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Other Rationale

- Bicycle, pedestrian and Safe Routes to School projects are quick. Because they are smaller, states and cities can spend the money quickly – and the projects are more likely to benefit local engineering and construction firms, as well as the local "Main Street" economy.
- Building bicycling and walking infrastructure creates jobs now. Bike and pedestrian infrastructure is more labor intensive and less material intensive than building roads, thus netting more jobs for dollars spent.
- Sidewalks, pathways, and bike lanes make streets and downtowns into destinations for shopping and entertainment. Investing in walking and bicycling facilities helps local business and is an investment in the local economy.
- 24% of all trips in the US are less than a mile, 40% are less than two miles. Walking and bicycling facilities, including those that connect to transit, help Americans with their bottom-line transportation costs. When families can walk and bicycle to school, work, shopping, and transit, it eases the burden of automobile expenses. And it lays an important foundation to address some of our nation's major crises, such as climate, energy, and health.
- Investing stimulus funding in roads but not in improving bicycling, walking, and Safe Routes to School denies the current trends in transportation and the safety needs of the American public. Bicycling has increased rapidly in the US—in some cities it has increased more than 35% in the last two years.
- Bicycling and pedestrian improvements also help wean us for foreign oil and support a healthy and sustainable future for America.