



BOOSTING ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION THROUGH REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANS



Safe
Routes
PARTNERSHIP

Boosting Active Transportation Through **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANS**

Transportation plays a critical role in the health and economic development of a metropolitan area. When people have the ability to walk, bike, or take transit safely to a destination, the whole region benefits from healthier people, better air quality, and reduced traffic fatalities.



Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are transportation planning agencies that focus on urban areas. They develop plans that guide their region's land use and transportation systems, and also decide how to spend federal transportation funds. Given that more than 70 percent of people in the United States live in the jurisdiction of an MPO, active transportation advocates can have a broad impact by focusing their efforts on MPOs.

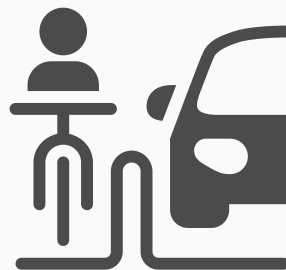
Regional policies have a profound impact on the safety, convenience, and ability of children to be able to walk and bicycle to schools and be more physically active in daily life. Over the past ten years, the Safe Routes Partnership has partnered with Kaiser Permanente to implement a Regional Network Project in targeted metropolitan areas. Through this project, we advocated for healthy transportation options at the regional level by influencing policy, plans, and funding for large populations.

In the course of the decade-long Regional Network Project, the Safe Routes Partnership has identified three primary avenues to build more biking and walking infrastructure. A series of three fact sheets will lay out success stories, best practices, and resources for more information on each of these three areas.



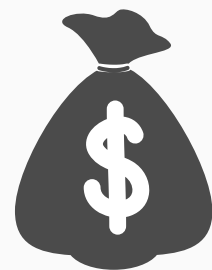
POLICY

Establishing policies that encourage or require counties and cities across a region to implement active transportation projects.



PLANS

Directing the spending of existing federal and regional transportation funds towards active transportation and transit projects through regional planning processes.



FUNDING

Securing new funding sources either at the regional level or city/county level to benefit active transportation, Safe Routes to School, and transit.



Regional Planning Sets the Foundation for Transportation Options

Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are charged with planning the transportation vision and investments in a region – both in the short-term and the long-term. Two key types of plans provide opportunities for advocates to influence a region’s commitment to active transportation and transit, and to actually ensure that funding goes to specific biking, walking, and transit projects.

Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs) are blueprints to guide transportation investments within a region over a 20- to 25-year period. These plans include a policy section outlining the vision, goals and targets for the transportation network and a project list allocating anticipated funding for current and future transportation projects. Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) generally revisit their RTPs every four to five years, providing an opportunity for active transportation advocates to influence how much funding goes to biking, walking, and transit projects, and which projects are prioritized.

Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) are the lists of projects that will be funded and built during the subsequent four years. TIPs must be consistent with the RTP – so advocates are best advised to focus first on the RTP and then to ensure that each new TIP actually includes the active transportation and transit projects as promised in the RTP.



Case Study

Regional Sustainability Planning in Fresno, CA

The Fresno Council of Governments (COG) serves as the MPO for Fresno County, which is in the Central Valley area of California. The Central Valley is in central California and is more rural and agricultural in nature, even while the city of Fresno has a population of more than 500,000 people. As a more rural area, a focus on roads dominates transportation planning and funds for transit and active transportation are limited. Through the development of the 2014 RTP, the Safe Routes Partnership worked closely with advocates around the county to push for new planning funds to be made available to local jurisdictions focused on sustainability and equity. The thought was that local communities were often interested in adding biking and walking elements, but lacked the resources or planning staff to develop strong plans that could compete for state and federal dollars.

Ultimately, Fresno COG agreed to include a new planning grant program in the 2014 RTP, but lacked the funding to implement it. In 2017, the state of California passed a law directing new transportation funding throughout the state, and Fresno COG used a portion of those resources, \$150,000 per year, to fund the grant program starting in 2018. Three cycles of the Regional Sustainable Infrastructure Planning Grant Program (SIPGP) have been held thus far, supporting multimodal transportation and land use planning that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and addresses the needs of disadvantaged communities. With a focus on health, equity, and sustainability, the planning grants are a first step towards creating a more multimodal approach in Fresno County.



Case Study

Winning \$770 Million for Active Transportation in Portland, OR

The 2018 RTP update by Metro, the Portland area MPO, was the target of Safe Routes Partnership and area transportation and environmental justice advocates. By participating on the equity and safety RTP working groups, the Safe Routes Partnership was able to push for the RTP to include strong measures prioritizing equity and safety. Through regional Leadership Forums, community leaders spoke about the impact of unsafe streets and air pollution on their daily lives. Metro incorporated guiding principles in their RTP that highlighted safety, transit, biking and walking, and reducing disparities for historically marginalized communities.

However, that was only an initial victory. When local transportation agencies submitted their desired projects for funding, it was clear they would not advance equity, safety, climate and congestion goals for the region, and that many of the transit and active transportation projects were proposed for the end of the plan's timeframe. The Safe Routes Partnership joined with other community leaders and nonprofits to advocate that Metro require jurisdictions to resubmit their projects, ensuring alignment with the RTP priorities and goals. In the end, the 2018 RTP designated \$770 million for active transportation projects in the first ten years, an increase of \$95 million over the first draft, and 90 percent of the projects were now located in an equity focus area. As a result, the greater Portland region will see dozens more biking and walking projects in the next decade, providing safe, healthy, affordable mobility options.

BEST PRACTICES

Influencing regional planning requires allies and time, as MPOs often spend months (more than a year for larger MPOs) developing their plans. Based on our experiences, we have identified several best practices that will help advocates work towards victories for active transportation and transit in plans.

1. Build a thoughtful coalition. Because the plan must cover an entire region, make sure allies cover the geographic spread of the region. Focusing only on the major county or city within the region will likely result in not enough support within MPO leadership for the coalition's goals. Many organizations may not normally work on transportation planning issues, so be prepared to make the case for why this will matter to the day-to-day priorities of their constituents. Offer to serve as the transportation expert who can translate detailed and complex transportation language into more approachable outcomes. Make sure to reach out to equity and environmental justice organizations, health-focused nonprofits and agencies, youth-focused organizations, and more. Work together with coalition members to determine a list of priorities or principles.

2. Draw upon the power of stories. MPOs often only hear from transportation planners and engineers, some of whom can have a more academic approach to transportation needs and projects. Bringing community members to planning forums or hearings adds a powerful voice to the process, emphasizing how the sometimes dry project lists and language can have real impacts on people's lives. Work with your coalition to identify stories of transportation needs and wishes, and prep potential speakers with a little background on transportation planning and how to tell their story to the MPO.

3. Think beyond day-to-day transportation impacts. While measuring things like access to transit and miles of sidewalks is important, don't forget to take a step back. Shifting MPO planning to include health measures and impacts can be a powerful way to impact spending priorities. Securing inclusion of goals and performance measures on physical activity levels, air quality, and safety will then help ensure that the projects selected for funding will have a positive impact on health, which usually means more active transportation and transit investments and less highway and road investments.

4. Put in the time. The process of developing an RTP takes many months – often more than a year. MPOs will have many discussions and input points into the RTP, through standing MPO committees, community forums, hearings, surveys, and social media. Regularly attend the standing MPO committee meetings to build relationships with MPO staff and demonstrate that the coalition will be a consistent presence. Make sure to turn out coalition members for each engagement opportunity so that the coalition’s points are made at every turn. Ensure your coalition members stick to consistent messaging when responding to surveys, testifying, or providing input.

5. Run the numbers and do the analysis. An RTP can have a vision supportive of biking, walking, and transit, with principles and performance measures to match. However, the list of projects is where the tangible difference will be made in people’s lives. While the list is likely to be extensive, review it to be sure that it matches the vision and principles. What percentage of funding is being allocated to active transportation and transit projects? Are the selected projects the “right” ones and are they located in the neighborhoods that need them most (i.e. neighborhoods that are the most underserved and marginalized)? For example, if most of the biking and walking projects are tourism-focused trails, they won’t have the intended positive impact on residents’ safety and access to jobs, schools, and daily life. Look at the intended timeline for transit and active transportation improvements and make sure they aren’t all programmed towards the end of the plan’s period, which could mean the funding is no longer available by then. Be prepared to push back either on specific projects or on the project list as a whole if they will not meet the region’s transportation needs, or advocate to move key active transportation and transit projects to the first five or ten years of the plan.

Resources for More Information

- [Fact Sheet: How Regional Transportation Plans Influence Health](#)
- [Publication: Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 101: The Nuts and Bolts of Regional Transportation Agencies](#)
- [Publication: Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Health 201: Best Practices & Promising Opportunities for Health](#)
- [Publication: Investing in Walking, Biking, and Safe Routes to School: A Win for the Bottom Line](#)

This publication made possible through funding from Kaiser Permanente.
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