

California

# Rural Counties Task Force



[www.ruralcountiestaskforce.org](http://www.ruralcountiestaskforce.org)

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Mr. James C. Ghielmetti, Chair  
California Transportation Commission  
1120 N Street, Room 2221 (MS-52)  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Ghielmetti:

On behalf of the 26 agencies that form the Rural Counties Task Force, I want to thank you and your staff, for your leadership in conducting the Active Transportation Program (ATP) workgroup meetings and for inviting our participation and input on the ATP guidelines.

In response to your invitation, I am writing to offer our specific suggestions and recommendations. These recommendations based on the following objectives:

- Make the process as simple as possible for project applicants and advocates. Allow a single application to qualify a project for consideration of funding from any of the various ATP "pots" of funding for which the project may qualify. One of the purposes of SB 99's consolidation of programs was to avoid the need to choose from or make multiple applications for programs with overlapping goals and eligibility.
- Make the evaluation and programming process as simple as possible, minimizing the evaluation workload while allowing for consideration of project funding from multiple sources.
- Take geographic distribution into account, providing the 10% share only to rural and small urban areas in the state.
- Honor regional priorities, consistent with program goals. Projects should be selected that are consistent with an agency's Regional Transportation Plan goals and policies, and where applicable, the Sustainable Communities Strategy. This approach would also support the CTC's STIP Guidelines and ensure equivalent public involvement.
- Assure program compliance with all funding mandates and constraints.
- Assure the full and most effective use of program funds.
- Define the mandate for serving disadvantaged communities in a way that is consistent with the intent of statute, is simple to measure and report in terms of readily available data, and allows for application throughout the state.

We start from the assumption that the CTC may break down the overall ATP into at least the following 13 distinct shares:

- Nine shares, one for each of the nine large MPOs. Together these make up 40% of the program. Projects for each of these shares are to be selected by the MPO in consultation with Caltrans and the CTC.
- One share, 10% of the program, for the rural and small urban areas of the state outside the nine large MPOs. Projects are to be competitively awarded to projects in those areas by the CTC.

- One share, at \$24 million per year, for Safe Routes to Schools. Projects are to be competitively awarded to qualifying projects by the CTC.
- One share, at about \$2.3 million per year, for Recreational Trails projects. Projects are to be selected by the CTC in collaboration with the state Department of Parks and Recreation.
- The remaining share, about 29% of the total program, be competitively awarded by the CTC for projects in the state – this includes projects in large urban, small urban and rural areas, as well as projects that serve schools and recreational trails.

Safety. Highlight the importance of performance criteria aligned with the Strategic Highway Safety Plan to select ATP projects that improve safety.

Disadvantaged Communities. We support the concept articulated in the workgroup meetings that the 25% mandate for serving disadvantaged communities should be applied to each of the program shares, including Safe Routes to Schools. We do believe an exception may need to be made for the Recreational Trails share, given its small size and the nature of that subprogram.

For the purposes of the program mandate, the definition of disadvantaged communities should be specific and as simple as possible to identify and report. We suggest that a project be counted toward meeting the mandate if it serves at least one of the following:

- A school where at least 75% of students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program. Eligibility data for individual schools are available from the website of the California Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesasp.asp>.
- An area identified as among the most disadvantaged 10% in the state according to the CalEnviroScreen 1.1 scores. These scores are listed and individually mapped on the website of the state Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), <http://oehha.ca.gov/ej/ces11.html>.
- An area with a Median Household Income (MHI) that is less than 80% of the statewide MHI (currently, 80% of \$61,632=\$49,305). The MHI data should come from the latest American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year data. Excel files of these data by zip code, county, city, and census designated place are available through the website of the state census data center: [http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/state\\_census\\_data\\_center/american\\_community\\_survey/#ACS2011x5](http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/state_census_data_center/american_community_survey/#ACS2011x5). Updated data are released each December.
- No existing active transportation facilities, or other modes, precluding the community access to employment, health and educational services.

Criteria and Evaluations. The program guidelines should establish and define general evaluation criteria and perhaps special criteria for subprograms or shares. However, we strongly urge that the guidelines not attempt to dictate the precise evaluation methodology to be used, as by assigning specific points and weights to individual criteria. Instead, the guidelines should focus on ordinal priority setting by multiple evaluation teams for the various shares. Mandated point and weighting systems can be easily manipulated. Even without conscious manipulation, evaluations made by different evaluation teams using a given point and weight system will produce different results and not necessarily be consistent.

We support allowing each evaluation team to develop its own precise methodology using the general criteria specified in statute and the guidelines. In the case of Safe Routes to Schools and Recreational Trails, this may allow for a process that is more familiar from past evaluations. In the case of MPOs, this would be consistent with the provision of statute that allows for an MPO to establish its own evaluation criteria, subject to approval by the CTC.

Staged Evaluation. We recommend a staged evaluation process that would be a variation on the sequential selection process discussed in the workgroup meetings. The intent would be to (1) maximize project selection opportunities for project applicants and advocates, (2) provide full opportunity for consideration of regional priorities, and (3) keep the evaluation timeline and workload manageable.

Under this proposal, there would be an initial evaluation stage with 12 separate concurrent evaluations resulting in 12 different project lists, one for each of the nine large MPOs, and one each for the areas outside the large MPOs, for Safe Routes to Schools, and for Recreational Trails. Each of the 12 evaluations would be conducted by a different evaluation team. There would need to be some initial screening to identify projects eligible for consideration for Safe Routes to Schools and Recreational Trails. This could come from self-identification by the applicant but in any case should be verified by the CTC or Caltrans. Once so identified, a project application could be placed into consideration for two different project evaluations at the same time. For example, a Safe Routes to Schools project might be considered for evaluation and selection from both the Safe Routes to Schools list and from either the MPO or the 10% list.

We propose that each of the 12 concurrent evaluations result in a priority list of up to 150-200% of the identified funding share for that area or subprogram. Each list would designate projects to be funded at a 100% funding level and priorities for additional funding above that level.

These 12 priority lists would then be forwarded to the CTC, and the CTC would develop a comprehensive program from the projects in the initial priority lists. The CTC staff would present to the Commission a proposed program of projects that includes all eligible projects proposed through the initial evaluations at the 100% of share level plus an additional selection of projects. The recommended program would take into consideration the priorities identified in the initial evaluations, a statewide evaluation of priorities across areas and subprograms, project scheduling and deliverability, availability of funding by year, and compliance with all program and funding mandates and constraints.

Selection Committee(s) Membership. We propose rural participation in the selection committee(s). Members of the committee(s) would not evaluate projects from their jurisdiction.

Project Deliverability. There is one potentially critical criterion that seems to be missing so far from the discussion of evaluation criteria and that is project readiness, or the ability of an applicant to deliver the proposed project. The program guidelines should recognize this in some way. There is no point in programming funds for a project, no matter how well it meets other criteria, if the project applicant is not able, for whatever reason, to deliver it within the programming timeframe.

State Only Funding. Establish a dollar threshold for smaller projects to be programmed with state funds. Focus use of federal funds on larger projects that will most likely already be federalized.

Geographic Distribution. For the 10% share to rural and small urban areas in the state, other than the nine large MPOs, we recommend that geographic distribution be added as a criterion for evaluation. We do not advocate that this be defined in any more specific terms, as by a formula or maximum. We do believe, however, that the evaluation for this share should be permitted to take geographic distribution into account.

Supplanting of Other Funds. We note that there has been some discussion of a guideline that would preclude the supplanting of other funds for a project. We understand that there is reason to preclude the supplanting of funds committed to a project already under award or contract. However, we do not see the need to preclude the use of ATP funds for a future project that may have been scheduled for

local funding. We suggest, that for the first round, agencies that have projects selected that supplant funds, use an equivalent amount of supplanted funds for projects in their region that meet Active Transportation Program criteria.

Process Timeline. For the initial two-year cycle, the timeline might look like this:

- March 20, 2014. CTC adopts the initial ATP guidelines and the ATP fund estimate for the initial cycle.
- June 1, 2014. All applications due, with copies to the CTC, Caltrans, and the MPO or regional agency. CTC or Caltrans would identify potential eligibility for Safe Routes to Schools and Recreational Trails.
- August 1, 2014. All initial evaluations and priority lists to be completed and submitted to the CTC. These initial evaluations and lists would be prepared by the MPOs and by separate evaluation teams nominated by the CTC for the 10% share, for Safe Routes to Schools, and Recreational Trails. The Recreational Trails evaluation and list would be prepared by or in conjunction with the Department of Parks and Recreation. CTC staff to publish its recommendation for the full program.
- September 19, 2014. CTC adoption of the program.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and suggestions. We had a very productive meeting with Mitch Weiss last week, and we look forward to exploring these and other ATP questions together at greater length.

Sincerely,



Sharon Scherzinger, Chair

Cc:

California Transportation Commissioners

Mr. Brian Kelly, Secretary, California Transportation Agency

Ms. Arwen Chenery, Office of Senate Pro Tempore

Mr. Christian Griffith, Assembly Budget Committee

Ms. Erica Martinez, Assembly Speaker's Office

Ms. Erin Riches, Senate Transportation and Housing Committee

Mr. Ted Link-Oberstar, Senate Office of Research

Mr. Malcolm Dougherty, Director, California Department of Transportation

Mr. Andre Boutros, Executive Director, California Transportation Commission