

Improve walking and biking with these state funding sources

Communities across Illinois can take advantage two major grant sources to make walking and biking safer and more inviting for residents



With more people traveling on foot and biking, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated community interest in funding walking and bicycling projects.

For decades, walking and biking projects have proven to make our streets safer for all users while boosting community health, equity, and sustainability. Yet, finding funding can be surprising difficult, especially for low-income, rural, and Black and Brown communities.

Fortunately, new funding opportunities have recently emerged thanks to advocacy from Active Trans and our partners across the state. Two of the state's most important transportation grant programs now provide major opportunities for cities and towns across the state to upgrade their walking and biking networks: Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) and Surface Transportation Program (STP) Shared Fund.

Here is a more detailed look at each program as well as resources available to help communities apply. We encourage you to identify project needs in your community and speak to your municipal staff and elected officials about applying for new walking and biking funding. Questions? Contact maggie@activetrans.org.

Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP)

Background

For the first time ever, the Illinois 2019 capital plan included dedicated funding for walking and biking projects: \$50M per year. This came about through a lot of hard work and community support. Leading up to the bill's passage, Active Trans led a statewide campaign for the new funding and supporters like you generated more than 3,400 phone calls, emails, and tweets to legislators about the bill.

This state funding is now being distributed through ITEP, which was previously solely federally funded. The 2020 ITEP funding cycle offered \$105 million for projects across the state, after only about \$30 million was offered in previous cycles. To advance transportation equity, the bill designates that at least 25 percent of total ITEP funds are directed towards projects in high-need areas, with a sliding-scale local match based on need.

What can be funded through ITEP?

Projects eligible for ITEP funding include new sidewalks, the replacement of existing sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, bike lanes, side paths, and trails that provide a transportation option for people walking or biking. A 20 percent local match will be required for most communities,



but in some cases, depending on need, the local match will be reduced to 10 or even 0 percent.

ITEP is able to provide up to \$2 million in partial to full funding for anything from preliminary engineering and land acquisition to utility relocation and construction costs. Of note is that phase 1 engineering is eligible for funding, making ITEP one of the few grants that can help cover these expenses.

Past projects funded by ITEP in the Chicagoland region have included sidewalk improvements in Berwyn, protected bike lanes in Algonquin, a multi-use path extension in Aurora, and the 43rd Street bicycle pedestrian bridge in Chicago.

Support for communities

We know many Illinois communities often lack the capacity and expertise to develop competitive grant proposals to secure state and federal funding. To help address this, the Active Transportation Alliance teamed up with the Illinois Public Health Institute to utilize funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the summer and fall of 2020, Active Trans hosted a 3-part webinar series designed to help applicants across the state develop successful ITEP proposals.

The webinars walked attendees through project scoring and each step of the application process. They also included live Q&A with staff from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) who are the administrators of the grant.

In addition to the webinars, we formed an ITEP Learning Collaborative with 15 low-to-moderate income communities. The Collaborative provided in-depth technical

assistance and a virtual peer-learning space to address any challenges these communities faced in developing their proposals.

ITEP awards are expected to be announced in the spring of 2021 and we are hoping to see many more high-need communities benefiting from the changes made to the program.

While the next round of funding begins in 2022, it doesn't hurt to begin thinking early about applying. Recordings from the webinars and responses to frequently asked questions can be found at activetrans.org/ITEP.

Surface Transportation Program (STP) Shared Fund

Background

Managed by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), the **STP Shared Fund** was originally established in 2018 to fund transportation projects with available federal funds that are of "regional significance." Unfortunately, walking and biking projects were specifically excluded because regional leaders saw more value in car-centric roadway and bridge projects.

Active Trans, Metropolitan Planning Council, and others immediately objected to this policy. We spoke directly to CMAP staff and provided public comment at multiple committee meetings. After two years of conversations and comments, in 2020 CMAP reached out to partner organizations, including Active Trans, for input on how to improve the program and include funding for all modes of transportation.

In response to our input and feedback from others, CMAP made stand-alone pedestrian and bicycle projects eligible for STP funding and increased points available for projects with walking and biking elements. These changes take effect for the 2021 funding cycle.

What does STP fund?

The STP Shared Fund is broad in scope. Eligible project types include pedestrian/bicycle barrier elimination, bridge or road reconstruction, bus speed improvements and transit station improvements, among others.

Stand-alone pedestrian and bicycle projects that are now eligible for funding must eliminate a barrier such as a waterway, highway or railroad that prevent travel by foot or bike. Examples include a bicycle/pedestrian overpass

or underpass or a new multi-use trail. Transit station improvements can also address gaps in pedestrian and bicycle access. Examples include completing the sidewalk or bicycle network that connects to the station or installing bike parking or bike share at a station.

When projects are scored, additional points are awarded to communities that have adopted a Complete Streets Policy. Points are also awarded to projects that have Complete Streets elements including sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, refuge islands, bump-outs, and crosswalks.

STP typically funds phase 2 engineering, land acquisition and construction for projects that have a total cost of \$5 million or more. High-need communities facing hardship may be eligible for funding phase 1 engineering and in some cases may be exempt from the program's 20 percent local match requirement.



Support for Communities

For the 2021 call for proposals, CMAP will be hosting **two informational webinars** about the upcoming STP funding cycle and other upcoming federal funding programs in January 2021, with recordings available on their website.

CMAP Planning Liaisons are available to review applications between now and February 19 and applications are due March 5, 2021. This funding opportunity is typically available in the winter of every odd year.

Other upcoming funding opportunities for walking and biking:

- CMAQ ([Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality](#)): \$115 million available for projects to reduce transportation related emissions. Applications are typically open on odd years between January and March.
- TAP ([Transportation Alternatives Program](#)): \$9 million available for bicycle projects in the Chicagoland region. Applications are typically open on odd years between January and March.
- [RTA's Access to Transit Grant](#): Funding available to help improve access to rail and bus stations. This grant typically opens every other year in January.
- [Invest in Cook](#) (for Cook County only): \$8.5 million available for transportation projects every year. This annual grant typically opens every January.
- [People for Bikes Community Grant](#) (for city/county agencies or non-profits): Grants of up to \$10,000 awarded, can be helpful for meeting local match requirements for other grants. This grant typically opens every winter and summer.
- [Openlands ComEd Green Region Program](#): Grants of up to \$10,000 to support open space projects, including trails. This annual grant typically opens every January.



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