

Planning and Funding Accessible Pedestrian Facilities

Prepared by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) with assistance from the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Bicycle and Pedestrian Office

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

The combined funding of federal, state and local government on surface transportation is one of this county's largest domestic spending programs. The funding for pedestrian issues has increased dramatically since 1991. This increase was spurred by transportation legislation, grassroots support and accessibility policies. Pedestrian projects and programs are eligible for funding in almost every major federal-aid surface transportation category. Transportation legislation, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) of 1998, call for mainstreaming pedestrian (and bicycle) projects into planning, design and operation of our nation's transportation system. Transportation facilities must include features that will allow people of all abilities to use them.

The federal-aid highway program can work hand in hand with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which requires all pedestrian facilities be accessible for people with disabilities. Accessibility is not an exclusive or separate issue. Rather, accessibility design is fundamental to the walking environment, because all pedestrians with or without disabilities benefit from accessibility design. Accessibility is an intrinsic part of planning, retrofitting and constructing pedestrian facilities, along with safe accommodation and good design. Accessibility is a safety issue, because if a facility is not accessible, then it is not safe for more than 54 million people in this country who have some form of disability.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's policy on accessibility states, "Accessibility is a civil right. The key function of transportation, at its most fundamental level, is to provide basic mobility to society. It is our responsibility to strive to ensure that transportation systems are not only safe and efficient, but also usable by all, including persons with disabilities." The U.S. Department of Transportation's Accessibility Policy Statement can be viewed on-line at www.dot.gov/accessibility/polfin.htm.

Accessibility requirements are not new, and these obligations have been around long before the ADA in 1990. States and localities were first required to place curb ramps at street crossings in 1973 by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Also, the Department of Justice has ruled that resurfacing a roadway (beyond filling pot holes) is an alteration, thus triggering the requirement to place curb ramps at roadway intersections.

FUNDING SOURCES FOR PEDESTRIAN PROJECTS

Pedestrian projects are broadly eligible for funding from almost all the major Federal-aid highway, transit, safety and other programs.

Federal-Aid Highway Programs

National Highway System (NHS) funds can be used to construct pedestrian facilities on land adjacent to any highway on the NHS, including Interstate highways.

Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds can be used for either the construction of pedestrian walkways or non-construction projects related to safety (e.g. maps, brochures and public service announcements). TEA-21 adds "the modification of public sidewalks to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act" as an activity that is specifically eligible for the use of these funds.

Ten percent of each state's annual STP funds is set-aside for the **Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP)**. There is a specific list of eligible activities under the TEP, including the "provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles", "the provision of safety and educational activities for pedestrians and bicyclists", and "the preservation of abandoned railway corridors (including the conversion and use thereof for pedestrian and bicycle trails)."

Another 10 percent of each State's STP funds is set aside for the **Hazard Elimination and Railway-Highway Crossing programs**, which can be used to address pedestrian safety issues. Each state is required to implement a Hazard Elimination Program to identify and correct locations that may constitute a danger to motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. Possible activities include a survey of hazardous locations and for projects on any publicly owned, shared-use path, pedestrian walkway or trail, or any safety-related traffic calming measure.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) funds may be used for either the construction of pedestrian walkways, or non-construction projects (e.g. maps, brochures, public service announcements).

Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds may be used for all kinds of trail projects. Of the funds apportioned to a state, 30 percent must be used for motorized trail uses, 30 percent for non-motorized trail uses and 40 percent for diverse trail uses (any combination).

Provisions for pedestrians are eligible under the various categories of the **Federal Lands Highway Program** in conjunction with roads, highways and parkways. Priority for funding projects is determined by the appropriate Federal Land Agency.

National Scenic Byways Program funds may be used for "construction along a scenic byway of a facility for pedestrians."

High-Priority Projects and Designated Transportation Enhancement Activities identified by federal legislators within the TEA-21 legislation did include numerous pedestrian, trail and traffic calming projects in communities throughout the country. Similar opportunities to earmark projects under the new federal transportation legislation (to be passed in 2003) may be available.

Federal Transit Program

Title 49 U.S.C. (as amended by TEA-21) allows the **Urbanized-Area Formula Grants, Capital Investment Grants and Loans, and Formula Program for Other Than Urbanized Area** transit funds to be used for improving pedestrian access to transit facilities and vehicles. Eligible activities include investments in "pedestrian and bicycle access to a

mass transportation facility” that establishes or enhances coordination between mass transportation and other transportation.

TEA-21 also created a **Transit Enhancement Activity** program with a one percent set-aside of Urbanized-Area Formula Grant funds designated for, among other things, pedestrian access and walkways.

Highway Safety Programs

Pedestrian and bicyclist safety remain priority areas for **State and Community Highway Safety Grants** funded by the Section 402 formula grant program. A state is eligible for these grants by submitting a performance plan and a highway safety plan. Research, development, demonstration projects, and training to improve highway safety (including pedestrian safety) are carried out under the Highway Safety Research and Development (Section 403) program.

DESIGNING FOR ALL THE INTENDED USERS

Roadways are not designed for one type of vehicle, and a one size fits all approach to pedestrian design does not work either. Pedestrians have varying abilities. One in every five people in this country has a disability, and one third of our population does not drive. These numbers alone reveal the diversity we have in this country and the need for a variety of transportation choices. A large segment of the disabled population cannot leave home and travel to their destination independently. Many people with disabilities have low vision or are blind. Accessibility is a paramount safety issue to individuals with vision disabilities. Roadway designs have changed over the past 30 and 40 years, and many of these changes have made the simple task of crossing the street much more difficult, for example:

- Larger corner radii create longer crossing distances
- Pedestrian signals may be difficult to read from longer distances
- Curb ramps built at low grades can be difficult to detect for a person who is blind

At one time, it was easier for people with visual disabilities to determine where the sidewalk ends and the street begins, because the curb provided the necessary cue for that boundary. Curb ramps are vital for people who use wheelchairs, but have removed that defined boundary cue for people with visual disabilities. Installing detectable warnings at the bottom of a curb ramp can reinstate the sidewalk-to-street boundary for people with visual disabilities, and can prevent serious consequences. Other safety considerations are adequate crossing time during walk phases and the application of accessible pedestrian signals. People with visual disabilities, older pedestrians and children can be more cautious about starting to cross, and may need more crossing time than is usually allotted. Various safety considerations for nonmotorized transportation are specifically mentioned in TEA-21 legislation. Among them Section 1202 (a) states, “shall include the installation, where appropriate, and maintenance of audible traffic signals and audible signs at street crossings.” If a pedestrian push button is needed to actuate the walk phase, it may be necessary to install an accessible pedestrian signal (APS) for the intersection to be safe and usable by all pedestrians. Publications on accessible pedestrian signals (APS) and detectable warnings are available on the U.S. Access Board’s Web site, www.access-board.gov (click on Publications, and go to Public Rights-of-Way). These documents include lists of manufactures and materials.

AWARENESS

Most federal-aid highway projects require a 20 percent match from states or localities. This match may include donations of funds, materials, services, or right-of-way. Federal transportation policy calls for an integrated, intermodal transportation system which provides travelers with a real choice of transportation modes. This more balanced approach to transportation choices has been responsible for the tremendous increase in non-motorized facilities. Awareness has been raised on accessible pedestrian design, and the needs of all users to be included in the pedestrian system. This awareness has brought an understanding that accessible facilities are generally safer and more user-friendly for all pedestrian travelers. Funding is available in various federal-aid categories for accessible signals, new and retrofitted crosswalks and sidewalks, curb cuts and ramps, training and intersection improvements. The *U.S. DOT Policy on Integrating Bicycling and Walking into the Transportation Infrastructure* states that walking (and bicycling) facilities will be incorporated into all transportation projects unless exceptional circumstances exist.

See this web site -- www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm -- for the following publications and more details on funding opportunities and the planning process:

- *Bicycle and Pedestrian Provisions Summary*

U.S. DOT Policy on Integrating Bicycling and Walking into the Transportation Infrastructure FHWA Guidance (1999)

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Early and continuing public involvement is a planning requirement, and can ensure that facilities will provide the accessibility needs of a community. Disabled stakeholders can work with transportation providers throughout the stages of planning, project development and construction design. This input can give transportation providers information on how the pedestrian system should function and perform.

THE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

To receive funding, projects and programs must be included into the state and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) planning documents: the Long-Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Once in the plans, a project or program will need to be approved by the state or MPO (regional planning agencies in urbanized areas of 50,000 people or more) in order to be funded. Awareness on planning and livability issues is on the rise in communities.

Even with the advancement of these issues and availability of funding, there is still a need to educate decision makers, transportation professionals and communities on the benefits of accessibility issues. Making sure that accessibility is included from the start is the best way of making funds stretch farther. It costs little to make a new project accessible. Altering facilities often takes skill and care, and may cost more. The cost of removing the barriers in the pedestrian environment can be countered with the great social costs of not removing them. Information on accessible design and the needs of people with disabilities is available in the FHWA reports, *Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Part I* and *Part II* (*Part II* will be available in Spring 2001). For a hard copy fax a request to 301-577-1421, and it is available on the Web at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped.

The U.S. Access Board has two publications, *Accessible Public Rights-of-Way* and *Public Rights-of-Way Access*

Advisory Committee Report to the Access Board, and an informative video tape on sidewalk and crosswalk design considerations for people with visual and mobility disabilities, phone: 202-272-5434, fax: 202-272-5449, or visit the Web site at www.access-board.gov.

CONCLUSION

Designing for accessibility utilizes common sense on the part of the designer or engineer, once there is awareness and understanding. It means understanding the capabilities of users (children, elderly, people with cognitive, visual and mobility disabilities), and knowing how a facility should perform for all pedestrians. Some of the questions to ask are:

- Does an actuated pedestrian traffic signal have a locator tone for people who are blind?
- Is the actuated traffic signal button too high or out of the reach of a wheelchair user or child?
- Is there an alternate route for pedestrians at construction sites? Are there cues at the site giving a person using a white cane the information that is needed to know there is a sidewalk closure or open pit? Does the information give cues on how to navigate safely around the site and not into the construction? Is there a wheelchair ramp at the site for users to navigate to the alternate route?
- Can pedestrians (especially a person with low vision) see the pedestrian signal across the street?
- Is the curb ramp placed so that person using a wheelchair or walker can navigate up the ramp with enough room to turn onto the sidewalk without risk of falling?
- Are there intersections with right turns on red or right slip lanes that are creating a safety hazard for pedestrians?
- Are pedestrian signs easy to understand and interpret?
- Are the sidewalks passable by people using wheelchairs, walkers and strollers?
- Are there actuated pedestrian signals with locator tones at roundabouts for people who are blind to use the facility?

These and other pedestrian-related issues can be funded through the numerous funding categories available for pedestrian projects and programs of the federal-aid highway program.