



# Transportation Alternatives, HR 5231

## What it is »

The original TA program was predicated on the idea that local governments should have decision-making power over a small amount of federal transportation funding for local transportation priorities, such as bikeways and sidewalks. HR: 5231, introduced by Reps. Espailat and Larsen, makes small changes to restore flexibility to the state, while increasing local control to communities.

### *Ensure fair increases in and fair distribution of TA funds*

- » **The Problem:** Under the FAST Act, TA funding is limited to a dollar amount and does not increase as other transportation programs increase. Under the FAST Act, 50% of TA funds go to a state run grant program, and 50% are distributed to communities based on population. In small communities and rural areas, funding may be too small for more than one project.
- » **The Fix:** Change TA funding to a percentage, and change the formula so that two-thirds of the funding is distributed by population for a fairer distribution among communities of all sizes.

### *Increase local control*

- » **The Problem:** Under the FAST Act, large Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) with a population over 200,000 can select projects, but can't obligate funds to start implementation of the projects. Small MPOs, those with populations under 200,000 are barred from applying for funds due to a drafting error in MAP-21.
- » **The Fix:** Give large MPOs obligation authority to improve project deliver, and fix the drafting error so that small MPOs are eligible to apply for funds.

### *Improve project applications*

- » **The Problem:** Small and mid-size cities don't always have the technical capacity to put together strong applications and navigate the implementation process.
- » **The Fix:** Give States access to 5% of TA funds to staff the program, and to offer technical and engineering assistance to local governments to help them produce strong applications, and manage the implementation process.

### *Give States flexibility*

- » **The Problem:** Several states would prefer to suballocate all TA funding to local governments, but under the FAST act, all projects must go through a competitive process.
- » **The Fix:** Allow states to sub-allocate 100% of their TA if the Federal Highways Administration approves of the plan, and that plan includes a mechanism to tracking projects funded by it.

### *Ensure local governments can access funds before they are transferred*

- » **The Problem:** Under the FAST Act States can transfer up to 50% of TA regardless of whether local governments have applied for the funding. This violates the purpose of the program to distribute funds to local governments for local priorities.
- » **The Fix:** Require states to run a competitive process, offer technical assistance, and to demonstrate that there were not suitable applications before transferring funds.

**Please co-sponsor HR 5231 to make the Transportation Alternatives program more efficient and effective.**

### **To Cosponsor contact:**

- » **Todd Sloves (Espailat)-** [Todd.sloves@mail.house.gov](mailto:Todd.sloves@mail.house.gov)
- » **Alexandra Menardy (Larsen)-** [Alexandra.Menardy@mail.house.gov](mailto:Alexandra.Menardy@mail.house.gov)



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## Large Unmet Needs for the Program »

In the FAST Act, Congress required states to provide data on the number and cost of projects considered for Transportation Alternatives funding.

States have consistently reported that they are unable to fund most projects at current TA funding levels.

Even as states report large and increasing unmet needs, many states and localities struggle to implement projects due to red tape in the funding process.

The proposed changes are intended to fix some of those implementation issues.

## How the Program Currently Works (and how it could change) »

Under current law, 50% of TA funding goes to the state DOT and 50% is distributed by the state to local agencies.

- » Change to 40% State DOT and 60% local agency.
- » States could elect to make the funding go entirely to local agencies

Local agencies, including large MPOs, are limited in their ability to fund projects.

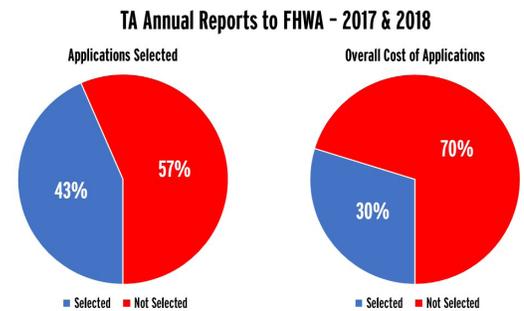
- » Could increase local authority for projects and allow more localities to apply for funding

Competitive processes are required by law, but no funding exists to provide technical assistance or other guidance on how to participate in those processes. This makes it difficult for smaller communities and lower resource communities to access TA funds.

- » Could allow TA funding to go to technical assistance

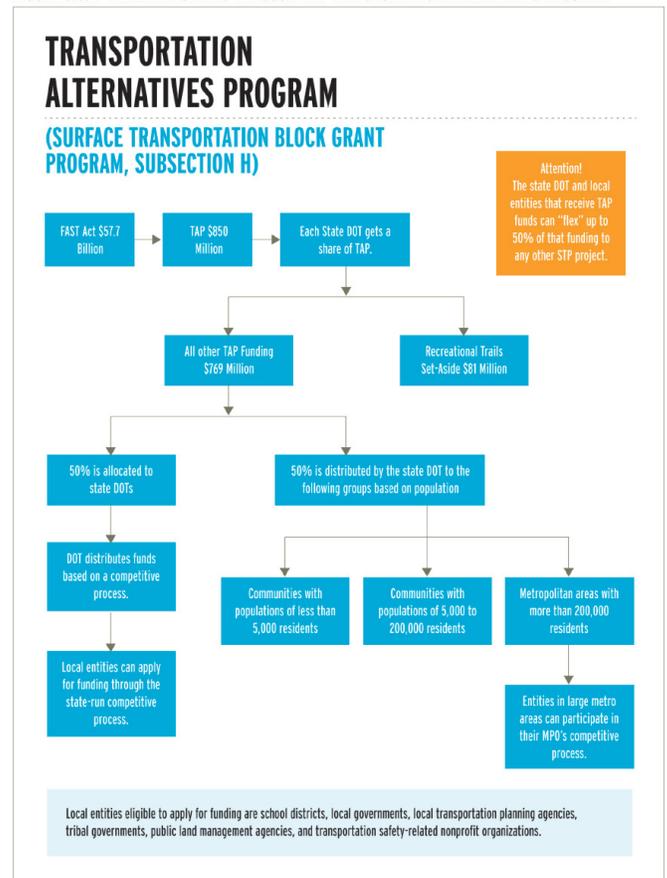
State DOTs can transfer funds regardless of local applications for funding

- » Could require distribution of funds based on applications, or documentation that applications were not suitable



Nearly \$3.9 Billion left unfunded, a 13% increase from last year

FIGURE 3.6.2 - FEDERAL FUNDING THROUGH THE TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM



# Transportation Alternatives



The original Transportation Alternatives program was predicated on the idea that local governments should have decision-making power over a small amount of federal transportation funding for local transportation priorities, such as bikeways and sidewalks. The changes listed below will make the program easier for local governments to access, and for states to implement.

## Ensure fair increases of TA funds

<i>The Problem</i>	<i>The Fix</i>
Under the FAST Act, TA funding is limited to a dollar amount and does not increase even as other transportation programs increase.	Increase TA funding and change it to 10% of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program.

## Improve project applications

<i>The Problem</i>	<i>The Fix</i>
Small and mid-size cities don't always have the technical capacity to put together strong applications and navigate the implementation process.	Give States access to 5% of TA funds for technical and engineering assistance to local governments to help them produce strong applications, and to fund program staff to manage the implementation process.

## Gives States flexibility

<i>The Problem</i>	<i>The Fix</i>
Several states would prefer to suballocate all of their TA funding to local governments, but under the FAST Act, all projects must go through a competitive process.	Allow states to sub-allocate 100% of their TA if the Federal Highways Administration approves of the plan, and that plan includes a mechanism to tracking projects funded by it.

## Increases local control

<i>The Problem</i>	<i>The Fix</i>
Under the FAST Act, large Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) with a population over 200,000 can select projects, but can't obligate funds to start implementation of the projects. They already have the authority to obligate other surface transportation funds. Small MPOs, those with populations under 200,000 are barred from applying for funds due to a drafting error in MAP-21.	Give large MPOs obligation authority to improve project deliver, and makes small MPOs eligible to apply.

**Will you make improving your constituents' access to the Transportation Alternatives Program one of your transportation priorities?**