

A photograph of a paved path with utility poles and trees under a blue sky. The path is on the left, leading towards the background. Utility poles with power lines are on the right. There are several trees and a red fire hydrant in the foreground. A white car is visible in the distance. The sky is clear and blue.

Region 10 Regional Planning Affiliation

Updated November 2023

Transportation Funding Guidance

INTRODUCTION

The Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program and a set-aside program known as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) were authorized as part of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) federal transportation act. These programs continued when MAP-21 was replaced with the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act in 2016 and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021. Each fiscal year, the Region 10 Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA 10) is designated by Iowa Department of Transportation to receive a portion of the STBG and TAP funds available to the State. As noted in the map below, RPA 10 includes the counties of Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington Counties

but excludes metropolitan Cedar Rapids and metropolitan Iowa City.

Programming of these funds is the responsibility of RPA 10's Policy Committee. The Policy Committee has directed the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC) to develop and implement a process through which candidate projects for STBG funding are submitted and evaluated in a manner that is inclusive of all eligible applicants and transparent to the public. Similarly, they have directed the Regional Trails Advisory Committee (RTAC) to

develop and implement a process for candidate projects for regional TAP funding. The advisory committees' resulting recommended priorities assists the Policy Committee in determining which projects should be selected to receive STBG and TAP funding in a given application cycle. The Policy Committee reserves the right to select projects to receive STBG and TAP funding as deemed necessary for the transportation system at any time. There may be circumstances where the outlined STBG and TAP processes may not apply.



STBG FUNDING

STBG funds improvements to any roadway or bridge on the federal-aid system, transit capital projects, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, enhancement projects, environmental restoration, and the establishment of native species. Due to limited funding, RPA 10 will not fund TAP-eligible projects (described in later paragraphs) with regional STBG funds. Regional STBG funds are provided by Iowa DOT and are programmed by the Policy Committee.

Iowa Federal-Aid Swap

In 2017, the State of Iowa gave Iowa DOT the ability to exchange federal STBG funds for state funding from motor vehicle fees and fuel taxes. The exchange is considered dollar for dollar and must be noted as swapped funds in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). In 2021 the policy was revised to limit swap funding to City-sponsored projects. Swap funds are subject to all the requirements under this State policy.

Eligible Applicants and Project Sponsors

All public agencies and local governments with jurisdiction over public rights-of-way for transportation, public transit responsibilities, or transportation planning responsibilities within the RPA 10 boundary, excluding metropolitan Cedar Rapids and metropolitan Iowa City, are eligible to apply for STBG funds.

Non-eligible project sponsors may partner with an eligible sponsor in applying for funds if the eligible sponsor is the lead on the project.

Project Eligibility

STBG Applications submitted to RPA 10 must meet the following requirements:

- For construction projects, a minimum total project cost of \$100,000 (\$80,000 federal) with a minimum 20 percent match.
- Eligible activities include:
 - Major new construction, reconstruction, or resurfacing of roadways or bridges
 - Regional planning and planning studies
 - Transit capital purchases
 - ADA-compliant ramp reconstruction in conjunction with an adjacent road reconstruction or resurfacing project
 - Minor utility adjustments and incidental utility work necessary to complete a roadway project
- Ineligible activities include: - Design engineering and construction related services - Sidewalk maintenance
- Roadway projects must be on federally classified routes that are Minor Collectors or above, or a Farm-to-Market route.

- Applicants must attend a regional Preapplication Workshop, submit a short preapplication, and complete a regional STBG Application. Incomplete applications will not be considered for funding.
- Project sponsors will participate in the Iowa DOT’s federal-aid swap for all eligible road and bridge projects.

In addition, all projects are subject to all applicable federal requirements and FHWA approval. To be eligible for TAP funds, the following qualifications must be met:

- Project sponsors must assure they will operate and maintain the property and facility for the useful life (minimum of twenty years) of the improvement and not change the use of any right-of-way acquired without prior approval from the Iowa Department of Transportation.
- Project sponsors must assure ability to let or have the project under construction within two years of when programmed.
- All project bids will be let by the Iowa Department of Transportation.
- Projects must demonstrate a direct relationship to existing or planned surface transportation facilities.
- STBG funding may not be used for engineering or architectural related services during design or project construction.

Geographic Equity

Since 1995, the counties of Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington having been working together as RPA 10 to address regional transportation issues. RPA 10 is intent on ensuring funding equity between the participating jurisdictions.

Targets

In the early years of RPA 10, as relationships were forming, the region chose to identify STBG (formerly known as STP) funding “targets” to remove perceived competition that strained the formation of new and necessary governmental relationships. RPA 10 provided targets to the seven counties and three cities with a population greater than 5,000, based upon previous federal funding allocation formulas. Over time, the basis for the targets has been adjusted, but jurisdictional partners have maintained their intent for the targets to be geographically equitable, as the equity in programming has enable a level of trust that has resulted in number of regional transportation planning success stories, including the completion of a regional trails plan, the construction of at least five multi-jurisdictional road projects,

the formation of a regional multi-disciplinary safety team, and the recent implementation of a regional vanpool program. The current basis for these targets is as followings:

- Targets for cities with a population > 5,000: population based, if the city has 5% of the regional population, their annual target is 5% of the available regional STBG funds.
- Targets for counties: their annual target is based on the same formula used to distribute Road Use Tax Funds (RUTF) to the counties. The RUTF formula considers changes in population, mileage, lineal feet of bridges, and traffic levels as they occur over time. The formula was developed by a committee comprised of county engineers, county supervisors, and DOT representatives, and approved by the legislature.

Clarification of Targets

These targets are intended to be stable, recognize that transportation needs are distributed throughout the region, and be sensitive to the diverse nature of the participating counties and cities. In the past, RPA 10 has referred to these targets as suballocations, but has come to realize that the term is not appropriate for a variety of reasons:

- The county targets are not allocated solely for county projects; they are targets for projects from throughout the county, including those from cities within the respective county.
- All applications received from throughout the region are reviewed and considered.
- Programming is based on readiness and need, and it is possible for applicants to “borrow ahead” for these needed projects.

Borrowing Ahead on Target Amounts

Cities or counties with significant regional projects that exceed their four-year funding target may borrow ahead, provided a balance of regional STBG funds is available. The city or county may borrow no more than 3 times their annual target, resulting in a target deficit. The city or county may not borrow ahead again until target deficit is eliminated.

Application Requirements

A pre-application must be submitted to determine that a project is eligible for RPA 10 funding. If the pre-application is approved, applicants will complete the full application. The regional STBG application form must be used.

Application Review Process

Each year, new applications are submitted to ECICOG. ECICOG has the responsibility to review each application to ensure that:

- The application submitted is for new construction or reconstruction.

- The work proposed is federal aid eligible.
- The funds requested are within RPA 10's funding limitations.

On behalf of RPA 10, ECICOG forwards **all** applications from within each county to their respective county board of supervisors (BOS). The boards of supervisors (BOS) are asked to prioritize all applications received from within their county. While the BOS can establish their own criteria, RPA 10 provides the following criteria for consideration, based on the goals and objectives outlined in the RPA 10 Long Range Transportation Plan 2022-2050: enhanced connectivity for users, improved safety for all, maximization of financial resources, preservation and maintenance of the existing system, and improvements that contribute to the movement of goods and services.

County priorities are then forwarded to the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC) for consideration. The TTAC will prepare a recommendation for funding to the Policy Committee based on the above noted criteria and county priorities (although, the TTAC's recommendation may vary from the identified county priorities). All applications are shared, reviewed, and discussed by these committees. The Policy Committee will have final approval. The Policy Committee has the discretion to determine the share of federal funding for each recommended project. Their determinations will consider the TTAC's recommendation and funding constraints. Projects approved by the Policy Committee will be included in RPA 10's Transportation Improvement Program that is submitted to Iowa DOT by July 15. Final approval is complete when projects are included in the State's Transportation Improvement Program that's submitted to the Federal Highway Administration each Fall.

TAP FUNDING

TAP program is a set-aside from the STBG program to fund enhancement activities that have a direct relationship to surface transportation facilities, including facilities for bicycles and pedestrians (including Safe Routes to Schools safety and education activities), landscaping and other scenic beautification, historic preservation, and the preservation of abandoned railway corridors for bicycle and pedestrian uses. Regional TAP funds are formula funds that are provided to RPA 10 by Iowa DOT and programmed by the Policy Board using a competitive grant process.

Eligible Applicants and Project Sponsors

Project sponsors must be a local government, regional transportation authority, transit agency, natural resource or public land agency, school district, local education agency, school, tribal government, non-profit entity, MPO, state, or local or regional governmental entity with responsibility for or oversight of transportation or recreational trails within the RPA 10 boundary excluding metropolitan Cedar Rapids and metropolitan Iowa City.

Non-eligible project sponsors may partner with an eligible sponsor in applying for funds if the eligible sponsor is the lead on the project.

Project Eligibility

RPA 10 TAP projects should be limited to capital improvements and must fit into one of the following categories:

- a. Multi-use, non-motorized trails and essential support facilities and on-road improvements to enhance bicycle/pedestrian use
- b. Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations associated with a federal aid roadway project
- c. Construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas along designated scenic byways
- d. Historic preservation of transportation structures with preference given to their functional use
- e. Aesthetic and environmental enhancements to public roadways
- f. Pedestrian improvements related to routes to school or safety issues

Projects that do not meet these guidelines but are eligible under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) are allowed to be submitted, but there will need to be a significant extenuating circumstance in order for them to be considered for funding. This determination will be at the discretion of the RPA.

In addition, all projects are subject to all applicable federal requirements and FHWA approval. To be eligible for TAP funds, the following qualifications must be met:

- Project sponsors must assure they will operate and maintain the property and facility for the useful life (minimum of twenty years) of the improvement and not change the use of any right-of-way acquired without prior approval from the Iowa Department of Transportation.
- Project sponsors must assure ability to let or have the project under construction within two years of when programmed.
- All project bids will be let by the Iowa Department of Transportation.
- Projects must demonstrate a direct relationship to existing or planned surface transportation facilities.
- TAP funding may not be used for engineering or architectural related services during design or project construction.

Additional RPA 10 Requirements

The region has established the following additional funding requirements:

- Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) and eligible scenic byway projects*:
 - Projects must have a minimum total project cost of \$75,000
 - Projects must have a minimum 20% local match
 - Projects must have a minimum federal aid participation level of 50%.

- All other trail projects:
 - Projects must have a minimum total project cost of \$75,000
 - Projects must have a minimum 20% local match
 - Projects must have a minimum federal aid participation level of 50%, however, the minimum federal participation level of 50% may be waived for projects with a total cost great than \$250,000.

**Note: Iowa DOT also has funds available for SRTS projects.*

Projects that would be competitive at the state level may be programmed with RPA 10 TAP funds but should compete for statewide or other funding sources (e.g., REAP, State Recreational Trails Program, etc.) whenever appropriate. Should sufficient other funding be awarded, regional TAP funds will be returned to the program to be reallocated.

Application Requirements

A pre-application must be submitted to determine that a project is eligible for RPA 10 funding. If the pre-application is approved, applicants will complete the full application. The TAP application form was developed by Iowa DOT and is used statewide by all RPAs. **In addition to this statewide form, projects sponsors are asked to complete the following supplementary information, on a separate piece of paper, at the request of RPA 10:**

- Project sponsors are asked to identify how their project relates to the criteria noted below and provide a brief (one to two sentences) description of the relationship.

- Project sponsors are also asked to identify the project timeline, and any additional planned phases of the project.

Application Review Process

The Regional Trails Advisory Committee (RTAC) meets to review all new applications. The RTAC review is based on a pre-determined set of criteria, including project readiness, applicant's ability to complete the project, the project's relationship to the transportation system, the project's associated benefits, benefit/cost and predicted usage. Additional consideration may be given to applications submitted from areas within the RPA that haven't recently received regional TAP funding. All applications are reviewed in pairs to determine project rankings and final scoring. The RTAC prepares a recommendation for the

Policy Committee based on the rankings. The recommendation and copies of the full application are reviewed by the Policy Committee before they make a final determination for funding. Approved projects will be included in RPA 10's Transportation Improvement Program that is submitted to Iowa DOT by July 15. Final approval is complete when projects are included in the State's Transportation Improvement Program that's submitted to the Federal Highway Administration each Fall.