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Street Improvement Funding For Tennessee Cities
By Ron Darden, Municipal Management Consultant

Introduction

This report discusses street projects available for Tennessee cities, the transportation planning process for cities, transportation programs that may assist cities, and participation in a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

Street Projects Available For Tennessee Cities

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) and the Federal Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21) provides funds for street improvements, maintenance and construction. The recently revised TDOT Internet Home Page includes a listing of projects available to cities by population categories as follows:

Cities and towns located in rural areas with less than 5,000 populations may qualify for the following projects to:

- Install a traffic signal
- Paint stripes
- Install a guardrail
- Correct a sight distance problem
- Add a turning lane or lanes
- Install school flashing lights
- Sign and mark a railroad crossing
- Install a flashing beacon
- Remove a roadside obstacle
- Do skid resistant overlays
- Add a shoulder
- Install sidewalks
- Undertake enhancement projects
- Replace a deficient bridge
- Light an interstate exchange
- Construct/reconstruct or widen a road that connects to a new or newly expanding industry
- Construct a road to a new or newly expanding industry

Cities located in areas with populations between 5,000 and 50,000.

Unless cities have been designated as being in an MPO area, cities are eligible to receive a per capita distribution of federal highway dollars for eligible street and highway projects. The Tennessee Development Districts in cooperation with TDOT develop the Rural Transportation Plan that includes eligible projects. In addition to the above eligible

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projects listed for populations of less than 5,000, cities in this category may also qualify for additional projects to:

- Improve air quality or mitigate congestion
- Widen or relocate an existing road
- Construct a new road

CITIES LOCATED IN URBAN AREAS WITH POPULATIONS GREATER THAN 50,000.

Cities located in this category, including smaller cities located within the area, receive federal highway dollars as allocated by the MPO Executive Board. Although dollars are appropriated to the MPO on a per capita basis, the per capita distribution of funds for projects is generally not used by MPO’s. Cities in this category may qualify for any of the projects above outlined for smaller cities.

WHO TO CONTACT FOR INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

Contact the Tennessee Department of Transportation, the MPO Coordinator, the city’s area development district, or your MTAS Municipal Management Consultant.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Cities are either included in the State’s Rural Transportation Plan or they are included in the plan developed by the MPO in cooperation with TDOT. The MPO is federally mandated to provide comprehensive transportation planning in urbanized areas of 50,000 or greater population in Tennessee. Cities located in these areas may be designated to participate in transportation planning in order to become eligible for federal highway assistance.

The MPO responsibilities are administered by an executive board whose members may include locally elected officials, transit providers, the Governor and a representative from TDOT. If the MPO is adjacent to another state, it may include the governor of the other state and representatives from their transportation departments, elected officials, transit providers and others.

An Executive Staff Committee, sometimes referred to as the Technical Committee, comprised of planners, engineers, public works directors, and other technical disciplines reviews technical aspects of transportation planning and projects and makes recommendations to the executive board.

The MPO Planning Coordinator is typically a staff member of the local municipal or regional planning commission. The Coordinator is the liaison between the MPO and the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the Tennessee Department of Transportation, and the local governments, and other groups or individuals interested in transportation issues. The MPO Planning Coordinator serves the executive board and the staff committee and should be contacted for information about
transportation planning and funding availability for cities. The Coordinator is an important contact person for a city in developing transportation projects and in obtaining federal and state financial assistance.

**Required Plans**

The required plans are the Transportation Plan (sometimes called the Long-Range Transportation Plan), the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), and the Unified Work Plan.

The Long-Range Transportation Plan is a 20-year plan identifying streets that should function as an integrated regional system. Cities need to make sure that appropriate streets are included in this plan and that projects are consistent with the plan.

The implementation plan is called a Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). It is a 3-year schedule of all federally funded and regionally significant transportation projects to be implemented in the urban area. This plan includes the list of priority projects to be carried out in each of the 3 years. Projects in the TIP must be consistent with the Transportation Plan. The TIP serves as a strategic management tool that accomplishes the objectives of the plan. City projects need to be on this list of projects in the TIP in order to receive funds. Be sure to ask the MPO Planning Coordinator and the Executive Board to include your project in the TIP.

The Unified Work Plan Program is a one-year schedule of transportation planning activities. It documents work to be performed with planning funds. Cities must monitor this plan to ensure that their projects are funded.

**Transportation Programs**

The Tennessee Department of Transportation has improved their Internet home page to include projects funded from state and federal revenue sources. The programs include:

- **Surface Transportation Program**-a block grant program that may be used by cities for any roads that are not functionally classified as local or rural minor collectors. Bridge projects are eligible under this program.
- **Optional Safety Program**-TDOT indicated that this program may be used for:
  - Installation of traffic signals
  - Street striping
  - Guardrail installation
  - Sight distance problem
  - Add a turn lane or lanes
  - Sign and mark a railroad crossing
  - Install a flashing beacon
Once the city has identified a potential safety hazard, it should contact the Regional Traffic Engineer (RTE) in its area. The RTE will review and advise about the application procedure.

- State Street Aid Program—cities receive a monthly per capita appropriation from the State fuel tax for highway maintenance and improvements under the State Street Aid Program. The current per capita share is $27.13. These funds may be used for eligible street improvement and maintenance within a city. The Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) publishes a State Street Aid Manual that explains the State Street Aid Program and it is available at the MTAS Web Page or upon request.
- State of Tennessee Industrial Infrastructure Program—when an access road or a rail siding is needed in conjunction with an industry location or expansions, this program may provide needed assistance.
- Bridge Replacement Program—to replace a deficient bridge on any public road.
- Interchange Lighting Program—to provide needed lighting at an interstate interchange.
- Office of Local Programs—this program provides 100% funding for the following projects:
  - Traffic control signalization
  - Safety rest areas
  - Pavement marking
  - Commuter carpooling and vanpooling
  - Rail-highway crossing closure
  - Installation of traffic signs
  - Traffic lights
  - Guardrails
  - Impact attenuators
  - Concrete barrier end treatments
  - Breakaway utility poles
  - Priority control systems for emergency vehicles
- Transportation Enhancement Programs—this program provides funding for:
  - Provisions of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles
  - Provisions of safety and educational activities for pedestrians and bicyclists
Acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites
Scenic or historic highway programs
Landscaping and other scenic beautification
Historic preservation
Rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures or facilities
Preservation of abandoned railroad corridors (including the conversion and use thereof for pedestrian or bicycle trails)
Control and removal of outdoor advertising
Archeological planning and research
Mitigation of water pollution due to highway runoff
Establishment of transportation museums

Who to Contact for Information and Assistance

Contact the Tennessee Department of Transportation, the MPO Coordinator, the area development district, or your MTAS Municipal Management Consultant.

Participating in an MPO

The Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21) was approved in 1998 and it provided $217 billion over a six-year period for transportation improvements. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA) is being proposed as the next major transportation program with an increased funding level. If a city is located in an area represented by an MPO, it is recommended that a knowledgeable staff person represent the city at the staff committee level and the mayor or other executive represent the city at the executive board level. Some MPO’s do not provide for direct representation of small cities on the executive board. Projects are funded on the basis of transportation needs to the area transportation system and the number of votes received from the executive board. Personal participation is important in receiving federal highway dollars.

MPO’s In Tennessee

MPO organizations vary greatly in Tennessee. Some have more direct representation than others. In addition to the Governor and a Tennessee Department of Transportation representative the state’s eleven MPO’s and their Executive Boards are:

Memphis Urban Area MPO
Executive Board Members

Mayor, City of Memphis
Mayor, Shelby County, Tennessee
Governor of Mississippi
President of the Desoto County Board of Supervisors
Elected Representative from the MPO’s Regional Advisory Board
Note: The Regional Advisory Board is the elected executive of each county and municipality in the planning area as well as the chairperson for the boards of the Airport Authority, the Port of Memphis, and the Memphis Area Transit Authority. Tennessee Cities and Counties represented on the Regional Advisory board include: City of Millington, City of Lakeland, City of Memphis, City of Arlington, City of Collierville, City of Bartlett, City of Germantown, City of Piperton, City of Galloway, City of Hickory Withe, and Shelby and Fayette Counties. Mississippi representatives include Horn Lake, Southaven, Olive Branch, and Hernado and Desoto Counties.

**Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization**
Executive Board Members

- Mayor, Metro-Nashville
- Mayor, City of Portland
- County Executive, Rutherford County
- County Executive, Williamson County
- Mayor, City of Murfreesboro
- Mayor, City of Springfield
- Mayor, City of Lebanon
- Mayor, City of Hendersonville
- Vice-Mayor, Metro-Nashville
- Mayor, City of Fairview
- Mayor, City of Goodlettsville
- Mayor, City of Nolensville
- Mayor, City of Mount Juliet
- Mayor, City of White House
- Commissioner, City of Brentwood
- Mayor, City of Franklin
- Mayor, City of Smyrna
- County Executive, Sumner County
- Mayor, City of Millersville
- Mayor, City of LaVergne
- Mayor, Spring Hill
- Mayor, Gallatin

**Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization**
Executive Board Members

- Mayor, City of Knoxville
- Mayor, City of Maryville
- Mayor, City of Farragut
- Mayor, City of Alcoa
- County Executive, Blount County
- Mayor, Knox County
- Representative East Tennessee Development District
**Chattanooga Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization**  
Executive Board Members

Commissioner, Georgia Department of Transportation  
Mayor, City of Chattanooga  
Council member, City of Chattanooga  
Hamilton County Executive  
Hamilton County Commissioner  
Elected official, North Georgia legislative delegation from Catoosa, Dade, Walker Counties, Georgia  
Elected official, Tennessee legislative delegation from Hamilton County, Tennessee  
Chairman of the Board, Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority  
Chairman of the Board, Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport Authority  
Elected Representative, Dade County, Georgia  
Elected Representative, Walker County, Georgia  
Elected Representative, Catoosa County, Georgia  
Mayor, City of Chickamauga, Georgia  
Mayor, City of Collegedale, Tennessee  
Mayor, City of East Ridge, Tennessee  
Mayor, City Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia  
Mayor, City of Lakesite, Tennessee  
Mayor, City of Lookout Mountain, Tennessee  
Mayor, City of Lookout Mountain, Georgia  
Mayor, City of Red Bank, Tennessee  
Mayor, City of Ridgeland, Tennessee  
Mayor, City of Ringgold, Georgia  
Mayor, City of Rossville, Georgia  
Mayor, Town of Signal Mountain, Tennessee  
Mayor, City of Soddy-Daisy, Tennessee  
Mayor, Town of Walden, Tennessee

**Bristol**  
Executive Board Members

Mayor, City of Bristol, Tennessee  
Mayor, City of Bristol, Virginia  
County Executive, Sullivan County  
Mayor, City of Bluff City  
County Executive, Washington County, Virginia  
Representative Virginia Department of Transportation

**Clarksville-Montgomery County Metropolitan Planning Organization**  
Executive Board Members

Mayor, City of Clarksville
County Executive, Montgomery County
Two representatives from the Kentucky Department of Transportation
County Judge, Christian County, Kentucky
Representative from Christian County, Kentucky
Mayor, Oak Grove, Kentucky
Representative, Oak Grove, Kentucky
Executive Director of GNRC
Transportation specialist GNRC
Mayor Hopkinsville, Kentucky
Member Hopkinsville-Christian County Planning Commission

**Jackson Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization**
Executive Board Members

Mayor, City of Jackson
Council Member, City of Jackson
Mayor, Madison County
City of Jackson Council Member
Madison County Commissioner

**Johnson City Metropolitan Planning Organization**
Executive Board Members

Mayor, City of Johnson City
Mayor, City of Elizabethton
County Executive, Carter County
County Executive, Washington County
Mayor, Town of Jonesborough
Representative, Johnson City Transit System
Representative, First Tennessee Development District

**Kingsport Metropolitan Planning Organization**
Executive Board Members

Mayor, City of Kingsport
Governor, State of Virginia
Executive Director Lenowisco, Virginia
Tennessee State Representative
Virginia State Representative
Representative from the City of Mount Carmel and City of Church Hill
County Executive, Sullivan County
County Executive, Scott County, Virginia
Representative, Virginia Department of Transportation
**Cleveland Metropolitan Planning Organization**

Executive Board Members

Mayor, City of Cleveland  
County Executive, Bradley County  
Vice-Mayor, City of Cleveland

**Lakeway Area Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (Morristown Area)**

Mayor, City of Morristown  
Mayor, City of White Pine  
County Executive, Jefferson County  
Mayor, City of Jefferson City  
County Executive, Hamblen County

**The MPO Planning Coordinators are:**

- Bristol MPO-Mr. Rex Montgomery, 423-989-5519  
- Chattanooga MPO-Ms. Karen Rhodes, 423-757-5216  
- Clarksville MPO-Mr. J. Stan Williams, 931-645-7448  
- Cleveland MPO-Mr. Greg Thomas, 423-479-1913  
- Jackson MPO-Mr. Keith Donaldson, 731-425-8275  
- Johnson City MPO-Mr. Alan Bridwell, 423-434-6272  
- Lakeway MPO (Morristown)- Mr. Rich DesGroseilliers, 423-581-0100  
- Kingsport MPO-Mr. Chris McCartt, 423-224-2704  
- Knoxville MPO-Mr. Jeffrey Welch, 865-215-2500  
- Memphis MPO-Mr. Carter Gray, 901-379-7845  
- Nashville MPO-Ms. Jeanne Stevens, 615-862-7186

**Summary**

There are state and federal street and transportation programs available for Tennessee Cities. Cities should become aware of street improvement programs and are urged to participate in the transportation planning process that determines the level of project funding for city streets.

**Footnote:** Part of the information for this report came from the Tennessee Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration documents and reports.