

GREAT FALLS TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

2023 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The current Federal transportation act includes a provision for a set-aside of a portion of surface transportation funds to be used for “Transportation Alternatives.” The “IIJA” (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) includes a provision allowing States to allow MPOs (Metropolitan Planning Organizations) to solicit and select eligible projects.

The Montana Department of Transportation has elected to set-aside a portion of its TA funding for Montana’s three MPOs – Great Falls, Missoula and Billings. With approximately **\$2.2 million to allocate**, The Great Falls MPO will be soliciting and evaluating applications for eligible projects for the Great Falls metropolitan area.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Federal law identifies the following broad descriptions for eligible projects:

- 1) on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities;
- 2) infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation and enhanced mobility;
- 3) community improvement activities
- 4) environmental mitigation;
- 5) recreational trail program projects;
- 6) safe routes to school projects;
- 7) projects for the planning, design or construction of boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of former Interstate System routes or other divided highways; and,
- 8) activities in furtherance of a vulnerable road user safety assessment.

In Montana, the types of eligible projects have typically been for construction of new and preservation of existing bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities. Examples include new accessible ramps for people with disabilities; new sidewalks, bike trails or shared-use paths along existing streets or roads; and, resurfacing existing but deteriorated asphalt paths.

In Great Falls, emphasis will be placed upon projects that construct or improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities that are recommended in the Great Falls Long Range Transportation Plan; projects that rectify deficient ADA facilities; or, pavement preservation projects for existing facilities.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

In the Great Falls area, the following entities are eligible to submit applications for consideration:

- local governments (i.e., Cascade County or City of Great Falls);
- tribal governments (i.e., Little Shell Tribe);
- transit agencies (Great Falls Transit District);
- natural resource or public land agencies (i.e., Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks);
- school districts, local education agencies, or schools.

NOTE: If a project application is submitted by an entity for a project that it does not own, the owner **MUST** be a co-applicant.

LOCATION REQUIREMENT

Projects must be wholly located within the Great Falls Metropolitan Planning boundary.

MATCH REQUIREMENT

Projects that are not within the right-of-way of a Federal Aid route must have a commitment for 13.42% of the total project cost, referred to as “non-federal match”.

SOLICITATION AND REVIEW

An open solicitation for applications will be issued by the MPO. Solicitation will include posting on the MPO website, as well as direct e-mails to local agencies that may be eligible to apply. The period for solicitation is expected to match the period for State TA Program solicitation.

A TA Review Committee made up of members from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for Transportation Planning will consider and rate eligible applications for recommendation to the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) for Transportation Planning. The PCC will make the final selection of projects.

EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

Proposals will be evaluated by the TA Review Committee in accordance with the following factors, which are weighted as shown.

1. Conformance with the Long Range Transportation Plan and other local plans and studies: Projects must be listed, either directly or indirectly, in the current Long Range Transportation Plan.
Total points available: 25.
2. Cost Proposal: Projects with accurate cost estimates, firm match commitments.
Total points available: 25.

3. Public Outreach: Projects are expected to have had some sort of prior public engagement process or open, public review and opportunity for public comment.
Total points available: 10.

4. Feasibility: Projects should have been thoroughly investigated for feasibility, including location, right-of-way conflicts, drainage concerns, support from entity responsible for maintenance, etc.
Total points available: 40.

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ADVICE FOR APPLICANTS

Before submitting an application, potential applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the TA Program manager, Andrew Finch, to discuss eligibility and project application requirements.

- Ensure there is public support for your project and be prepared to document public engagement. Check to see if your project is included in the current Long Range Transportation Plan.
- Ensure the project has the support of the agency responsible for ownership and maintenance. Applications without the support of the responsible agency will not be accepted. If you are not sure of the responsible agency, consult with the TA Program manager.
- Consider if your project involves utility impacts/relocations. If it does, begin discussions with the utility companies to get their approval on the project and work through concerns they may have. Clearly identify any costs in the project cost estimate.
- Most projects will require 13.42% local matching funds. If you are not sure of the matching requirement of your specific project, consult with the TA Program manager.
- Work with an engineer on the feasibility of the project, design details, and estimating the project costs and risks (is there enough right-of-way; what are the utility impacts; how will the drainage impacts be handled; etc.)