



**U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration**

Guidance for Project Proposals Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program Fiscal Year 2009

Background

Traffic congestion in and around popular national parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, and other federal lands causes traffic delays and noise and air pollution that substantially detract from the visitor's experience and the protection of natural resources. To address these problems, Congress established the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program (Transit in Parks Program), formally known as the Alternative Transportation in the Parks and Public Lands (ATPPL) program.

The program funds alternative transportation – that is alternatives to the private automobile such as buses, rail, ferries, trams, non-motorized transportation facilities, transit related intelligent transportation systems, and other transportation that helps visitors access destinations in parks and public lands without harming the environment or their enjoyment of the site.

The goals of the program are to enhance the protection of national parks and federal lands and increase the enjoyment of those visiting them. This includes to:

- conserve natural, historic, and cultural resources;
- reduce congestion and pollution;
- improve visitor mobility and accessibility;
- enhance visitor experience;
- and ensure access to all, including persons with disabilities.

Demand for financial assistance through the Transit in Parks Program far exceeds the funds available for the program. Historically, the program was able to fund only about half of the project proposals evaluated. Competition for funds is expected to be even more competitive for future years, as more potential applicants are made aware of the program.

The evaluation criteria are based on those found in the program's legislation, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). They are designed to help the evaluators select the most meritorious projects. There are two sets of evaluation criteria, one for "implementation" or capital projects, and one for planning projects.

Separate criteria are needed for planning projects and capital projects because planning project proposals may not yet have key information that is needed to make a decision on whether or not

to fund an alternative transportation system. Funding capital projects allows for implementation of new alternative transportation systems and expansion or rehabilitation of existing alternative transportation systems. Funding of planning projects ensures the wise use of federal dollars to fund additional capital projects in the future. Planning is intended to identify the best alternative solution to a public land's transportation problem. Operating assistance, such as funds to pay drivers and purchase fuel, is not eligible under the program.

Summary of Criteria

The main section of the proposal form, the project justification section, asks you to justify your projects based on the evaluation criteria.

For implementation projects, you are first asked to demonstrate the need for your project, then to explain the benefits it will bring, and finally to show realistic financial planning.

Implementation projects that score highly will be those that 1) demonstrate strong need for Transit in Parks Program assistance at the site because the site faces significant current or anticipated problems of traffic congestion, natural resources impact, and visitor experience; 2) provide visitor mobility and visitor experience benefits; 3) benefit the environment; and 4) demonstrate realistic, sustainable, and effective financial plans. The criteria are grouped into these four categories and are listed in the chart below.

Criteria for Implementation Projects	Points	Weight
1. Demonstration of Need		25%
a. Visitor mobility & experience	(1-5)	
b. Environmental condition as result of existing transportation system	(1-5)	
2. Visitor Mobility & Experience Benefits of Project		25%
a. Reduced traffic congestion	(1-5)	
b. Enhanced visitor mobility, accessibility, and safety	(1-5)	
c. Visitor education, recreation, and health benefits	(1-5)	
3. Environmental Benefits of Project		25%
a. Protection of sensitive natural, cultural, and historical resources	(1-5)	
b. Reduced pollution (air, noise, visual)	(1-5)	
4. Operational Efficiency and Financial Sustainability		25%
a. Effectiveness in meeting management goals	(1-5)	
b. Feasibility of proposed budget	(1-5)	
c. Cost effectiveness	(1-5)	
d. Partnering, funding from other sources	(1-5)	

For planning projects, you are first asked to demonstrate the need for the project. The demonstration of need section for planning has the highest weight, because the benefits a later project would bring, have not yet been assessed. For planning projects, you are then asked how the planning project's scope and methodology will address issues key to the program. The methodology will be judged on its thoroughness and quality.

Planning projects that score highly will be those that 1) demonstrate strong need for Transit in Parks Program assistance at the site because the site faces significant current or anticipated problems of traffic congestion, natural resources impact, and visitor experience; 2) possess a strong methodology for assessing visitor mobility and visitor experience benefits, environmental benefits, and financial sustainability and operational efficiency. The criteria are listed in the chart below.

Criteria for Planning Projects	Points	Weight
1. Demonstration of Need		50%
a. Visitor mobility & experience	(1-5)	
b. Environmental condition as result of existing transportation system	(1-5)	
2. Methodology for Assessing: Visitor Mobility & Experience Benefits of Project		15%
a. Reduced traffic congestion	(1-5)	
b. Enhanced visitor mobility, accessibility, and safety	(1-5)	
c. Improved visitor education, recreation, and health benefits	(1-5)	
3. Methodology for Assessing: Environmental Benefits of Project		15%
a. Protection of sensitive natural, cultural, and historical resources	(1-5)	
b. Reduced pollution	(1-5)	
4. Methodology for Assessing: Operational Efficiency and Financial Sustainability of Alternatives		20%
a. Effectiveness in meeting management goals	(1-5)	
b. Financial plan and cost effectiveness	(1-5)	
c. Cost effectiveness	(1-5)	
d. Partnerships and funding from other sources	(1-5)	

Other Criteria for both Capital and Planning Projects

Additional consideration will be given to projects based upon:

- geographic diversity,
- balance between urban and rural projects,
- and balance in size of projects.

The program of projects may also be balanced by type of project, as categorized below, to best show accomplishments from the program.

- New alternative transportation systems – to show new systems made possible by this new program.
- Expansion or enhancement of an existing alternative transportation system – to demonstrate improvements and expansions enabled by the program.
- Rehabilitation or replacement of vehicles or facilities of existing alternative transportation systems – to support and sustain existing meritorious systems into the future.

- Planning studies – to prepare for new systems that can be funded in future years.

Responding to the Criteria for Different Types of Projects

As mentioned above, there are two sets of criteria – one for implementation projects and one for planning projects. While there are several different types of projects within these two categories, all implementation projects will be judged by the same criteria and all planning projects will be judged by the same criteria. There may, however, be differences in the arguments an applicant uses to respond to the criteria for different types of projects. The uniform criteria allow evaluators to compare very different projects, based on how well they meet the goals of the program. The guidance below helps applicants justify different types of projects using these same criteria.

For example, for a new alternative transportation system, the applicant should demonstrate the need for the system and describe the benefits it would provide. While for an existing alternative transportation system, the proposal should explain both the need for the existing system and the need for the proposed improvement. The applicant would also describe the benefits of the existing system and the benefits of the proposed improvement.

For example, for replacing two buses in an existing system of 8 buses that takes visitors to destinations within a public land, the proposal should describe the benefits of the existing system (e.g. reduces the number of vehicle trips by x trips, eliminates illegal parking on tree roots on x miles of road shoulder, reduces animal-vehicle collisions by x collisions, ...) and the benefits of the proposed improvement (the buses will replace two buses that are at the end of their life cycle and will go out of operation within 5 months; with the replacement, the system has 8 buses and is able to provide x number of rides and remove x number of vehicle trips, while without the replacement the system has only 6 buses and is only able to provide y number of rides and remove y number of vehicle trips; the new buses produce fewer pollutants than the older buses they would replace...).

For an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) such as electronic signs that tell visitors when the next bus will be at the stop, the applicant should similarly describe the need for and benefits of the system. For instance, such an ITS system may encourage more visitors to use the bus system, thus reducing traffic and pollution.

An example of another type of project that Transit in Parks Program might fund is the replacement of a tram in a public land that does not allow private vehicles to travel on the site. In this case, under demonstration of need, the applicant should describe the mobility and environmental problem that would exist without the tram system and the policy of not allowing private vehicles. Under environmental benefits and visitor mobility and experience benefits, the applicant should describe the benefits of the tram system over the alternative – allowing visitors to drive private vehicles on the tram tour route.

Non-motorized transportation systems

Non-motorized transportation systems, such as pedestrian and bicycle trails, are eligible under the program's legislation. To be funded, a proposed non-motorized project would have to contribute to the program's goals by reducing traffic, improving visitor experience, and protecting natural resources by providing visitors with an alternative to the private automobile. The Technical Review Committee will use the criteria below to select and prioritize those projects most suitable to meeting Transit in Parks Program goals.

- Non-motorized systems must reduce or mitigate the number of auto trips by providing an alternative to travel by private auto.
 - ◆ For example, a new trail that would cause 500 visitors per day to walk or bike to destinations rather than drive would be a good candidate for the program.
 - ◆ A highly rated non-motorized alternative transportation system would connect destinations within a larger transportation system and result in visitors switching from driving to using the new non-motorized system. Such a system would reduce vehicle traffic, improve visitor experience, and protect natural resources.
 - ◆ A non-motorized system that is unlikely to get people to switch from driving to walking/biking/etc would not be a good candidate.
- Non-motorized systems must provide a high degree of connectivity within a transportation system.
 - ◆ The best-scoring non-motorized transportation project proposals are those that expand, complete or enhance an integrated network of motorized and non-motorized transportation systems. Non-motorized transportation systems within that network will provide connectivity among and between:
 - Transportation centers and recreational/resource destinations
 - Interpretive and educational centers and recreational/resource destinations
 - Recreational/resource destinations and other recreational/resource destinations
- Non-motorized systems improve safety for motorized and non-motorized transportation system users.

Description of Criteria for Implementation Projects

This section elaborates on each of the criteria to guide applicants in preparing project proposals.

Demonstration of Need

Severity of current or anticipated visitor mobility & experience problem: Many public lands have problems of traffic congestion getting to the site and traveling to destinations within it. Other sites may have manageable levels of traffic congestion but are experiencing growing visitation and are looking to address future problems before they reach a crisis stage.

To illustrate, because many people want to visit the site and visitors may not have a convenient alternative to the private automobile, the roads and parking lots may end up at or above capacity during popular visitation times. Visitors experience traffic delays and parking shortages. The visitor's experience, or enjoyment of the public land, is diminished by the hassle and frustration

of traffic delays and inability to find parking. In addition, it is difficult for visitors to get to desired destinations. Furthermore, individuals with disabilities and persons who do not own cars often have trouble accessing public lands when there is no convenient alternative to the private automobile.

Projects will be evaluated on the severity of the current or anticipated visitor mobility and visitor experience problem the site faces. This helps evaluators prioritize projects for those sites that face significant current or anticipated problems in order to direct funding to where it is most needed. Proposals should cite documentation, if it is available, such as reports, plans, or studies that support their demonstration of need. Projects for sites with more severe current or anticipated problems have a high need for Transit in Parks Program assistance and will score high on this criterion.

For proposals for projects to expand or rehabilitate an existing alternative transportation system, the applicant should explain the current visitor mobility and experience problem that the project seeks to address and the visitor mobility and experience problem that would result if the alternative transportation system as a whole did not exist.

Severity of current or anticipated environmental problem caused by existing transportation system: Many public lands have current or anticipated problems of pollution and negative impacts on natural, cultural, and historic resources due to high numbers of vehicles. Vehicle emissions can cause air pollution and degrade air clarity. High numbers of vehicles can create noise pollution and can also cause detract from the scenery. Parking lot capacities often do not meet parking needs, resulting in visitors sometimes parking on roadway or other inappropriate locations, damaging vegetation and other resources. Vehicle-animal collisions and run-off from impervious surfaces are other environmental problems that can result when visitors do not have a convenient alternative to the private automobile.

Proposals for sites that demonstrate substantial current or anticipated environmental problems will receive more points on this criterion. For proposals for projects to expand or rehabilitate an existing alternative transportation system, the applicant should explain the current environmental problem that the project seeks to address, as well as the environmental problem that would result if the existing alternative transportation system as a whole did not exist.

The applicant should indicate if the proposed project is to address a current problem, preserve the status quo, or avoid or reduce future problems.

Visitor Mobility & Visitor Experience

Reduced Traffic Congestion: A major goal of the Transit in Parks Program is to reduce or mitigate automobile traffic congestion. The visitor's experience, or enjoyment of the public land, is diminished by the hassle and frustration of traffic delays and inability to find parking.

Many public lands can accommodate more visitors but not more vehicular traffic. By providing an alternative to the private automobile, the same or greater number of visitors can travel to destinations within the public land with fewer vehicles and with fewer parking spaces.

Projects that receive high ratings on this criterion will be those that would significantly reduce traffic congestion to and/or within the public land. Estimates of the number of vehicle trips the project would mitigate, estimates of decreases in time lost to traffic delays, and/or estimates of decreases in parking demand should be provided.

Enhanced Visitor Mobility, Accessibility, and Safety: Another goal of the Transit in Parks Program is to improve the mobility of people and ensure access to all, including persons with disabilities. Alternative transportation can improve mobility by making it easier for visitors to travel to different destinations in the park. It can also improve mobility by linking to other transportation networks, such as the public transportation systems of nearby communities.

Alternative transportation can ensure access to people with disabilities by providing alternatives to the private car, such as buses, rail cars, and paths that accommodate wheelchairs, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Alternative transportation can also provide access to public lands for people who do not have access to a car because they cannot afford a car, cannot drive because of age or disability, or choose not to own a car.

In addition, by reducing vehicle traffic and parking along roads, new alternative transportation systems can improve visitor safety. Upgrades and safety improvements to existing alternative transportation systems can also improve visitor safety. Finally, alternative transportation, by leading to more controlled access to a site and fewer vehicles, can sometimes reduce the risk of vehicle and human caused fires.

Project proposals that receive high ratings on this criterion will be ones that ease travel in and around the public land, improve safety, and provide access to all, including persons with disabilities and persons without cars. The applicant should include the estimated number of visitors that would benefit each year.

Visitor Education, Recreation, and Health Benefits: Alternative transportation can offer improved interpretation, education, and visitor information services as well as recreation, health, and social benefits. All of these are part of the visitor's experience, or enjoyment, of the public land.

For example, visitor education is improved if a staff member of the public land explains the geology of the public land to visitors while they are on a bus. Another example is the increased recreation and health benefits of people who previously were unable to access the public land. Projects rate well if they can demonstrate these benefits to a significant number of visitors.

Environmental Benefits

Protection of Sensitive Natural, Cultural, and Historic Resources: This is a major goal of the Transit in Parks Program. Alternative transportation can reduce impacts on vegetation and wildlife, reduce auto-animal collision rates, and improve habitat connectivity, among other benefits.

Applicants should describe the benefits the proposed project would produce in this area. Applicants should also ensure that visitation does not exceed an area's ability to handle increased levels of visitation (carrying capacity).

Reduced Pollution: Alternative transportation can reduce or mitigate air pollution by removing vehicles from the road and allowing new visitors to come by alternative means. In addition, new vehicles purchased through the program may produce less pollution than older vehicles.

If possible, the applicant should provide such information as reduction or mitigation of vehicle miles traveled (indicating a reduction in pollutant emissions) or, if possible, an estimate of anticipated tons of pollutant emissions reduced or mitigated (ozone, CO₂, PM₁₀, etc). Applicants should also indicate any anticipated increase in air clarity or reduction in noise from autos.

Alternative transportation can also reduce or mitigate the need for impervious surfaces such as parking lots and roads, resulting in decreased water pollution from run-off. Additionally, alternative transportation can reduce or mitigate "visual pollution" such as the visual impact of roads and parking.

Finally, alternative transportation may improve energy efficiency through reduction in the use of fuel from fewer vehicles being operated and from the use of alternative fuels. Applicants should describe benefits the proposed project would have in any of these areas of reducing or mitigating pollution.

Financial Sustainability and Operational Efficiency

Operational Efficiency: Here you are asked to describe how the proposed project is the most effective solution for meeting identified management goals and objectives for the land unit.

Feasibility of Proposed Budget: In order to receive funding, projects must have a realistic financial plan. The project budget must include all revenues, capital costs, and operating costs, including maintenance costs, over five years. Costs estimates should be based on previous experience, similar projects, or other credible information. You may use the budget template provided or attach the budget in another form, as long as the attachment contains at least the items in the template and extends at least five years. Remember to also include a budget narrative that considers how the project will affect the finances of the public land as a whole and describes the maintenance plan.

Cost-Effectiveness: Some measure of cost-effectiveness is needed to ensure good use of funds. Applicants should provide the data requested in the proposal template to enable a calculation of the cost per person using the alternative transportation system. Applicants should also compare the costs of the proposed projects with other alternatives.

Some projects may cost more per user and still be more worthwhile than a project that costs less per user because more resources are preserved and visitors have a better experience. Cost-effectiveness is one factor among several used to compare the merits of competing projects.

Partnering, funding from other sources: Project sponsors are encouraged to form partnerships with other agencies, levels of government, and the private sector. Strong partnerships can improve the success of a project by involving other stakeholders. Partnerships can also aid the finances of a project. Leveraging funding from multiple sources is encouraged.

Any economic, mobility, or other benefits to communities near the public land unit are encouraged. Local communities near public land units may benefit economically from alternative transportation services that cause increased tourism, sales revenues, hotel revenues, and ease of travel between the community and the land unit.

Any time sensitive situations need to be explained – for example if the funding is not matched in a given time period the partnering opportunity may not be valid any longer.

Description of Criteria for Planning Projects

Demonstration of Need

(Same as above under Demonstration of Need criteria for implementation projects.)

Planning projects will be primarily judged by the severity of the problem the public land faces, that is, the demonstrated need for action.

Methodology

The planning project's methodology and scope of work should include tasks that will assess the following in a thorough and professional manner:

- Visitor Mobility & Experience Benefits of Project
 - Reduced traffic congestion
 - Enhanced visitor mobility, accessibility, and safety
 - Improved visitor education, recreation, and health benefits
- Environmental Benefits of Project
 - Protection of sensitive natural, cultural, and historic resources
 - Reduced pollution (air, noise, visual)
- Financial Sustainability and Operational Efficiency
 - Effectiveness in meeting management goals
 - Feasibility of financial plan
 - Cost effectiveness of multiple alternatives
 - Partnerships and funding from other sources

The planning project should have a scope of work and methodology at this proposal phase, though it will be refined when the project starts.

Projects that Take More than One Year to Carry Out

Some projects may take more than one year to carry out. For instance, some bus purchases can take 18 months to complete. While projects must be ready to implement, there is no requirement that funds be spent in the same fiscal year in which they are awarded.

For example, if an applicant submits a proposal to compete for congressionally appropriated fiscal year 2009 funds, and the proposal is selected for funding, the applicant may, for instance, spend part of the fiscal year 2009 funds in fiscal year 2009 on project expenses that are incurred in fiscal year 2009, and part of the fiscal year 2009 funds in fiscal year 2010 on project expenses that are incurred in fiscal year 2010.

In other words, an applicant may propose a project that would expend money in multiple years even though award is from one year's worth of FTA Transit in Parks Program funds. The project would however, need to be ready to begin and need to be completed in a reasonable period of time.

If you seek funds that Congress appropriates for future fiscal years, you must reapply in that year.

Instructions for Filling out Proposal Templates

1. Please complete all sections of the proposal. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.
2. Remember to fill out the project proposal cover sheet. Be sure to fill in every section.
3. The one page executive summary should summarize your project and its justification. It should be able to stand alone.
4. The one page project description is where you should describe what the requested financial assistance would fund (details of planning study, type and quantity of vehicles, details on facility to be constructed, etc...). You may attach up to two pages of maps or other illustrations that do not count towards the page limit. Maps showing alternative transportation system routes and key destinations within and near the public land are particularly useful.
5. The project justification section is where you should justify your project based on the specified criteria. Your responses must total no more than eight pages.
6. For implementation projects, be sure to either fill out the budget template provided or include a budget in your own format that at a minimum contains the items in the budget template and extends at least five years. Be sure to include a budget narrative under the heading under 4b.

Workshop

FTA will hold a “webinar” style outreach workshop to provide information about the program, aid applicants in developing project proposals, and answer any questions. Dates and other details will be available shortly on the program website, www.fta.dot.gov/atppl.