

Living Roadways Task Force

The Living Roadways Task Force seeks the creation of Federal Highway Administration incentives that state DOTs can utilize to make landscape improvements along major transportation corridors. The purpose of the legislation is to mitigate highway noise and air pollution spilling over into adjoining communities, create healthier communities, reduce congestion, and create safer roads.

In addition to creating natural sound barriers, trees trap and remove tiny particles of soot and dust which otherwise damages human lungs and tree root networks filter airborne contaminants, naturally calm traffic, reduce the number of road accidents and fatalities, and keep traffic moving. Each tree removes two pounds of air pollutants annually, and every four million trees saves \$20 million in annual air pollution cleanup. Children in poor neighborhoods and within close proximity to highways and rail lines have five times less lung function.

DOT

- Create the Living Roadways Program with related guidelines. Mandate that all agencies that receive federal funds from this program implement the latest Living Roadways Program guidelines. Consultation during the development of these guidelines must be provided by Technical Advisory Committees that are composed of local planning and arboricultural experts and state university landscape architecture extensions. Science-based tree-siting guidelines should ensure that trees are not planted in locations that will disrupt pre-existing infrastructure or damage power lines. The program will also create an educational campaign that highlights the synergies between trees and traffic calming and safety, and emphasizes planting the right tree in the right place.
- Designate an applicable DOT department to collect information- or fund a national NGO such as the Alliance for Community Trees to create a reporting method that includes detail such as: air pollution, noise pollution, automotive accidents and fatalities, and existing urban forestry data related to neighborhoods and municipalities benefiting from this program. Require municipalities and other participating agencies to include an annual review that:
 - Compares traffic congestion and safety, air pollution, and noise pollution with tree canopy cover.
 - Outlines a 10-year plan for including greening in transportation planning efforts.
 - Establishes a goal for minimum greenspace or canopy cover and timetables within which to achieve those minimums in high-risk traffic areas.
 - Designates a staff member responsible for tracking and educating intra-agency, partnering agencies, and local citizens.

- Encourage DOT to develop working partnerships that are aimed at increasing understanding of and communication with national and local urban forest organizations.
- That all municipalities or other participating agencies include a three-year plan for post-planting tree care as well as a minimum canopy cover goal for developments targeted to benefit from this program. At minimum, trees shall be selected and installed based on appropriate International Society for Arboriculture (ISA), American Planning Association (APA), and best management practices design guidelines and industry standards. The minimum canopy cover goal shall not be less than 40%.

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Implementation

- Create incentives that give preference to roads with the highest safety risks, air pollution, and noise pollution. One approach could be to award grants on a competitive basis, and award points for location priority. A minimum of 50% of program funds must go towards expenses for plant materials and other green infrastructure expenses including tree space preparation, irrigation, and maintenance. For example, in the City of Milwaukee five cents of all transportation dollars go toward expenses for tree planting space, tree and irrigation. In Baton Rouge 0.5% of sales tax goes towards construction of roadways, highway, and bridge projects of which 3% goes towards roads and sidewalk beautification.
- Require municipalities to give priority in awarding grants to projects that meet a verified level of existing and traffic safety, with additional points for more rigorous standards such as air quality and noise levels.
- Require municipalities and other participating agencies to partner with certified tree-planting organization(s) or state university landscape architecture extension who will ensure proper tree planting, maintenance, and at least three years of plant survival or replacement.
- Require municipality planning commissions and other participating agencies to require developers, surveyors, and citizens to submit a site evaluation/analysis of all existing green infrastructure features along with their plans to each applicable

planning board/commission. At minimum, 20% of healthy trees must be preserved.

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Funding

- Incentives may be loans or grants to states or municipalities. Administered by Department of Transportation.
- Make available federal Ice-T funds fund for greening-transportation partnerships.
- Require a cost sharing match of 80/20 (federal to state/municipal/other non-Federal funds). For example, Iowa's Living Roadways and Tennessee's Roadscapes are examples of such programs beautifying state routes, entrance plantings, and historical sites.
- As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, States have until June 17, 2009 to solicit green projects for the State Revolving Loan Funds unless at least 20% of their intended use plans are already green projects. "Green projects" is defined per EPA. No state match is required (never any project level match)

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Partner & Other General Policy Ideas

- Could attach to:
 - H.R. 1780, To amend Clean Air Act to achieve GHG reductions.
 - Could attach to H.R. 1329 (Blumenauer- OR), to reduce GHG due to transportation.
 - S.791, but largely about highway workers' safety

- S.238, Build America Bonds Act- fix highway infrastructure. Draft letter with Friends of Trees to Sen. Wyden.
- Expand criteria under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) to encourage investments in green community redevelopment efforts.
- Look for eligible use of other funds such as pollination.
- Ultimate goal is to encourage state transportation agencies to create a new direction for right-of-way maintenance and roadside infrastructure design and to help set a strong policy agenda for transportation professionals.
- Sec. Biehler (PennDOT) feels that “nothing is being done at all, right now” and wants to change this. He agrees with the imperative to improve air quality, water quality, and increase carbon sequestration. This from a conversation with the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association.
- Preference could also be given to certified economic municipalities. In TN, there is a 3-tiered economic program that municipalities must prove through an application process to be eligible for preference for certain grants. The Tennessee Urban Forest Council recently had urban forestry language included in the application process to recognize green infrastructure. This initiative should attach itself to existing certified economic incentives.
- Rep. Betsy Markey might have in the areas of agriculture and transportation (she worked for Ken Salazar and serves on subcommittees of both committees). She is closely aligned with Blumenauer.
- APA’s transportation objective in 2009 largely centers around providing additional support for Amtrak in this year's reauthorization and expand investment in transit. Otherwise, they also promote the funding the repair and modernization of vital existing municipal infrastructure in keeping with initiatives to revitalize and reinvest in downtowns, developed neighborhoods, historic buildings, urban areas, and first suburbs.
- Potential Partners and Models:
 - National Safety Council. They are leaders in traffic safety and can help with traffic calming perspectives. Scott Jamieson is on their board.
 - Delaware has a successful manual titled, Enhancing Delaware Highways.
 - ANLA definitely interested in anything transportation related.

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