

TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT FUNDING— A GOLD MINE FOR LAND TRUSTS?



The Transportation Enhancements (TE) program could be the biggest source of land protection funding that you never knew about. Created by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA), the TE program funds activities that serve to enhance the overall transportation experience — for drivers and pedestrians.

Over 23,000 projects have been funded to date, largely focused on infrastructure projects such as welcome centers, bike trails, removal of outdoor advertising and highway beautification projects.

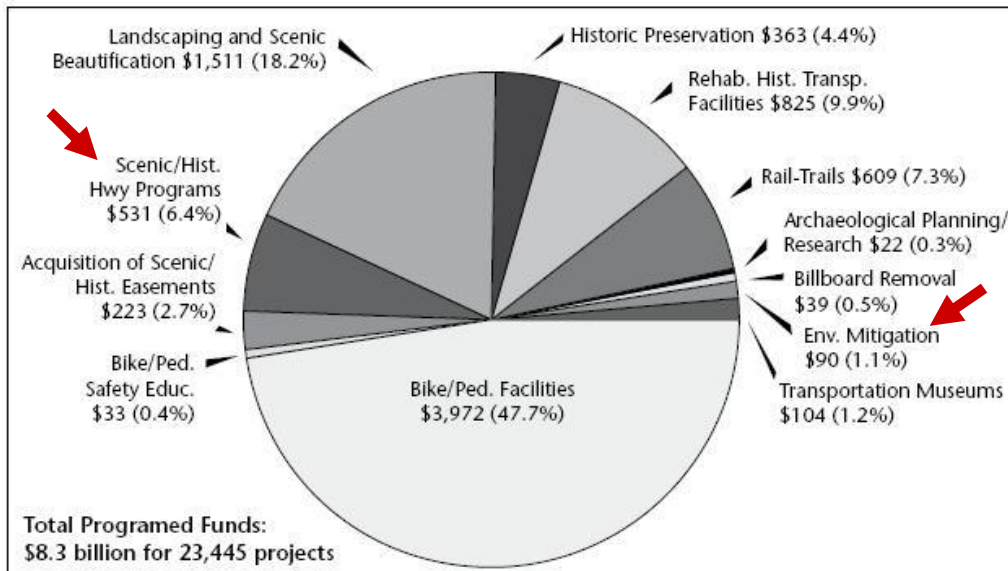
But TE funding can also cover habitat conservation projects such as acquiring scenic or historic easements, constructing wildlife crossings, developing habitat connectivity plans and conducting environmental mitigation to address water pollution.

If that's news to you, you're not alone. In fact, although non-profit conservation groups, like land trusts, are eligible to apply for TE funding in most states, few wildlife conservation projects are actually funded. Why? Quite simply, we aren't asking for it—*if we don't apply, we won't get funded.*

So where's the money going?

Over \$734 million has been available each year for TE projects since 1998. Funds are to be distributed across twelve categories of Transportation Enhancement

Distribution of Federal Funds (millions) by TE Activity: FY1992—2007



Chris Slesar

Activities (see figure). If funding were allocated proportionally across activities, \$61 million would be available for each. Since conservation activities occupy two of these categories, we could have **\$122 million for conservation each year!**

Unfortunately, because so few applications are received for conservation projects, the conservation share is instead directed elsewhere. In fact, just 2.8 percent of the \$8.3 billion distributed to TE projects between 1992 and 2007 was dedicated to conservation activities. This translates to more than **\$1.1 billion in missed opportunities** for land conservation!

Land Trusts as Recipients

To date, few local land trusts have taken advantage of TE funding opportunities but there is a tremendous opportunity to do so. Awards can range from a few thousand dollars to many millions of dollars. One shining success story is the purchase of a \$23 million easement now protecting a large portion of the 82,000 acre Hearst Ranch in California. Of course, many smaller easement projects have also benefited from TE funding.

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Living Lands is a collaboration between Defenders of Wildlife and the Land Trust Alliance to support and increase the capacity of the land trust community to conserve biodiversity on private lands through financial and technical assistance.

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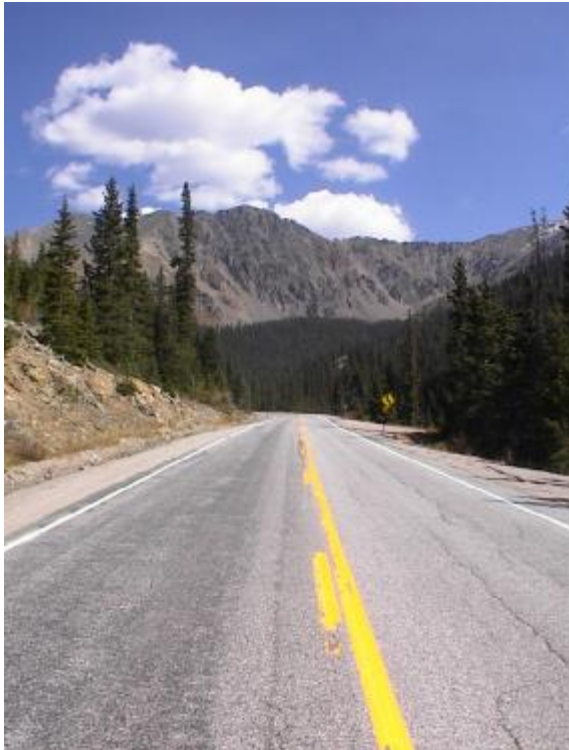


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How does TE funding work?

Each state is required to set aside 10 percent of their surface transportation funds for TE projects. Beyond this, the details of the program are left to the states. Generally, projects are approved through a proposal review process. You can check with your state's TE Coordinator at www.enhancements.org to learn about the process in your area and determine where you are in the funding cycle. A government agency (municipal, county, state or federal) often acts as the official applicant for the project or as a project sponsor (guaranteeing the matching funds) although in many cases, non-profits such as land trusts can also participate in lead roles.

If your project is approved, **you will receive federal reimbursement for 80 percent of the project costs.** The remaining 20 percent match must be non-federal and can include cash or in-kind donations such as donated property, materials or services.



Project Assistance Opportunity

If you have a project idea or would like to explore TE funding as an option, Defenders can help. The Living Lands Project is now offering our support for **outstanding TE projects** proposed by land trusts and their partners.

Simply fill out the short application form at www.defenders.org/livinglands/transportation and send it in. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Five will be selected for assistance each year. If your project is chosen, we will:

- help you navigate the application process
- provide advice on proposal development
- help you form partnerships and connections
- provide support letters for your project
- provide general guidance on all project elements

To Learn More

For an easy to use guide on navigating the TE funding process complete with tips for success, wildlife case studies and a sample application, read Defenders new publication: *The \$61 Million Question: How can Transportation Enhancements Benefit Wildlife?* www.defenders.org/61millionquestion

If you are interested in learning more about TE funding, please contact Aimee Weldon at aimee.weldon@defenders.org or Trisha White at trisha.white@defenders.org.

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