

Safe Routes to School: Construction Funding Program

Version 2

ODOT Policies and Procedures

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Program Implementation and Analysis Unit
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About the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program

“Safe Routes to School” refers to efforts that improve, educate, or encourage children safely walking¹ or biking to school. The Oregon Department of Transportation manages both construction and educational components of the program. The differences between construction and education can be defined as follows:

- Construction (Infrastructure)
Addressing physical barriers for children biking or walking to school, including adding walkways, bikeways, safe crossings, and other features.
- Education (Non-Infrastructure)
Helping children to bike or walk to school safely through education and encouragement programs.

The education program is managed by the Transportation Safety Division of ODOT, while the construction program is managed within the Transportation Development Division of ODOT. Program management consists of project solicitation and selection, agreement development, project and budget tracking, and fund oversight. Individual projects are managed by the recipient of funds, such as a city or county. ODOT projects are managed by the Highway Division Regions, not by the Safety or Transportation Development Divisions. The focus of this document is the construction program.

In 2017, the Oregon Legislature dedicated funding to Safe Routes to School construction projects. The Keep Oregon Moving Act (House Bill 2017) identifies \$10 million dollars of state highway funds be allocated each year to the Safe Routes to School Fund ([ORS 184.740](#)), which increases to \$15 million in 2023 and beyond. The Fund is governed by administrative rule ([OAR 737-025](#)), which was amended in early 2018 to be consistent with the Legislative funding requirements.

Following the Rule amendment, ODOT worked to establish the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program. The policies and procedures for how this program is managed are described in this document. Public-facing information about the program and guidelines are included on the [ODOT Safe Routes to School website](#).

Construction Funding Program Roles and Responsibilities

As mentioned above, the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program is managed within the Transportation Development Division of ODOT. Specifically, it is located within the Active Transportation Section, in the Program Implementation and Analysis Unit. It is one of many funding programs managed by the Unit, in the company of bicycle and pedestrian grant programs, the Small Cities Allotment program, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program, and others. This organizational arrangement helps to create efficiencies and consistencies between funding programs.

¹ Every time the word walk or walking is referenced, it is inclusive of those who travel by foot or mobility device (scooting, skating, or rolling).

The Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program is managed at headquarters by the Program Implementation and Analysis Unit, with support from other Units within the Active Transportation Section (Statewide Programs Unit, and the Program and Funding Service Unit). Work is also supported by ODOT regions. However, due to the nature of the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding programs, there is minimal coordination with ODOT regions in order to mitigate any actual or perceived bias. The entities involved in program management and support are listed below, along with a description of their roles and responsibilities.

Program Implementation and Analysis Unit

The Unit is responsible for overall program management, including leading any rulemaking efforts, design, management, oversight, and tracking of the program. This falls work falls to the Safe Routes to School Program Manager.

- Safe Routes to School Program Manager

The Program Manager is dedicated to the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program. The person is responsible for jointly managing the Safe Routes to School Advisory with the Transportation Safety Division; and leads all conversations related to construction elements of the program. The Safe Routes to School Program Manager convenes the Advisory Committee, prepares content, helps facilitate meetings, and uses guidance to manage the program. The Program Manager is responsible for setting the timing of funding cycles, managing project solicitation and selection processes, overseeing the execution of agreements, receiving progress reports and managing projects accordingly, and monitoring overall progress. The Program Manager is the central point of contact for all Safe Routes to School construction questions and relationships with stakeholders. The person is also responsible for the overall Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program budget.

Statewide Program Unit (SPU)

The Unit is responsible for executing Safe Routes to School Construction Funding agreements once projects are selected. Working with the Safe Routes to School Program Manager, staff develops a standard agreement template and uses information from selected applications to describe the project scope and budget. The Statewide Program Unit ushers the agreements through the procurement process, including review by ODOT agreement specialists and the Department of Justice as needed. They also lead efforts to gather appropriate signatures. Once executed, the agreements and project information is linked to a database managed by this Unit. The database is used to track project information on behalf of the Safe Routes to School Program Manager, who uses the data to manage the overall program.

Program and Funding Services Unit

The Unit is responsible for structuring the funding correctly and assuring expense accounts are established. The Safe Routes to School Program Manager works with this group to set up expense accounts, make sure funding gets appropriately attached to projects, and that budgets are loaded.

ODOT Regions

ODOT is a mix of centralized and decentralized programs that work in cooperation with one another. Relative to funding programs, the five Highway Division regions play important roles because they have the knowledge of on-the-ground conditions, local politics, and context-sensitive solutions. They also have strong relationships with local jurisdictions. Specific to the Safe Routes to School Funding Program, the regions are in a support role, not a program management function. The regions may also be applicants of the Safe Routes to School funding. Below is a list and roles of the primary staff that will interact with the Safe Routes to School Funding Program at ODOT regions.

- **Area Managers**

Area Managers oversee a smaller geographic subset (area) within a region. They are often the agency voting member or liaison for an Area Commission on Transportation (ACT), and serve as a key contact for ODOT with the cities, counties, tribes or other interested parties that participate on the ACT. Area Managers also play a key role with ODOT Safe Routes to School funding applications, because they are responsible for any agency submissions. They identify needs and propose projects in consultation with District, Planning, Traffic, Tech Center, and other region staff.

- **Active Transportation Liaisons (ATLs)**

The ATLs support the program by supplying outreach to local communities, understanding regional resources, and assessing local ground conditions, often in collaboration with other region and ODOT staff. They play a support role in several of the major process steps including: Preparation and Announcement, Letter of Intent, Application, Selection, IGA and Funding, Quarterly Report, and Project Close (which are discussed later in this document and are shown in the process map appendices). ATLs are most heavily relied upon during the project solicitation cycle to: schedule outreach events within their region, provide information on how to apply to local jurisdictions, answer questions from locals in consultation with the Safe Routes Program Manager; and conduct site visits and evaluation for any flagged applications requiring a local ground condition review. ATLs conduct the ground conditions review because they are experts on biking and walking, they know the local areas, and they are located in close proximity to sites. Once projects are selected the ATLs may respond to local jurisdiction questions in consultation with the Program Manager; and will help to oversee any ODOT-selected project within their region working with District staff, project leaders, or others as appropriate.

Others in the region, such as Tech Center, Planning, or District staff, may be consulted at the discretion of the Area Manager or Active Transportation Liaison, based on their needed expertise.

Construction Funding Program Management Policies

The following policies act as guiding principles for the program. The primary program policies include:

- Develop and manage a fair and impartial process
- Foster equal access to the funds

- Run a transparent program
- Assure accountability
- Make program adjustments as needed

Procedures and processes for how these policies get implemented are described below.

Develop and Manage a Fair and Impartial Process

ODOT has been put in the role of both managing a funding program for cities, counties, and tribes, and also being an eligible applicant. ODOT must assure that all applications are treated fairly and that no bias is introduced when projects are selected. To accomplish this, the Agency has initiated several procedures and processes including:

- Separation of duties
 - The ODOT staff who submits an application is different than anyone who might help score applicants or conduct site visits
 - All ODOT applications come from the regions and are scored by headquarters
- Empirical scoring
 - The Oregon Transportation Commission, with input from the Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee, develops a scoring matrix for all projects to be ranked against
 - The scoring matrix is made publically available online prior to the application deadline
 - Only information in the applications is used to score applications
 - Scores are based thresholds of yes or no, or numerical figures; thus they are objective
 - ODOT and non-ODOT projects are ranked using the same scoring matrix
- Third party review and recommendations
 - The Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee is the arbiter of recommendations to the Oregon Transportation Commission, not ODOT
 - Scores are provided to the committee and the committee has discretion on which projects are recommended for approval of the Commission

Foster Equal Access to the Funds

Prospective applicants have differing levels of capacity and ability when it comes to applying for funds. It is important that all cities, counties, tribes and ODOT know about the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program and how to apply. To assure awareness, several communication strategies will be used. Communication strategies include:

- Up-to-date website
- Informational flyers
- Announcements in Association of Oregon Counties and League of Oregon Cities publications

- Targeted comprehensive tribal correspondence
- Social media posts
- Presentations upon request.

It is also important for these eligible entities to get the support they need to compile and submit an application. Unfortunately, ODOT does not have existing capacity to assist entities with individual applications, but ODOT is committed to supporting to the best of its ability within existing resources by:

- Project identification funding and consultant support
 - Through the Safe Routes to School Project Identification Grants awarded to ODOT and through ODOT's funding of the Safe Routes to School education program, the agency will pay for consultant support in small communities and areas that lack sufficient resources to identify and prioritize Safe Routes projects; preparing those areas to apply for funding.
- Online information and responses to individual questions
 - Information, tutorials, and webinars will be held to show eligible entities the steps needed to complete an application. Information will be made accessible online.
 - Active Transportation Liaisons in the ODOT regions and the Safe Routes to School Program Manager will respond to questions via email, on the phone, or in person.

Run a Transparent Program

When and how projects are selected within the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program should be clear and understandable. To accomplish this, ODOT has sought to:

- Develop a comprehensive website
 - The website includes: guidelines, information on timelines and schedules, materials for Advisory Committee meetings, resources of interest to applicants and people who want to implement Safe Routes to School program elements, information on selected projects, and data on performance metrics.
- Up to date guidance
 - The [Program Guidelines](#) are a living document that will be constantly updated to reflect the most relevant and useful information
- Conduct outreach and host opportunities for public comment
 - Prior to each project solicitation cycle, public outreach events will be held across the state to assure that people are aware of the funding opportunity, how to apply, what the review and selection process looks like, and to allow for a dialogue of questions and answers between the Safe Routes to School Program Manager and prospective applicants

- Allow for and encourage public comment and testimony at every Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee meeting

Assure Accountability

When and how projects are selected within the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program should be clear and understandable. Mechanisms to assure accountability include:

- Provide updates to the Oregon Legislature and Oregon Transportation Commission
Upon request ODOT will be ready to provide a full and complete status update of the Safe Routes to School Construction Funding Program, including project identification processes and timelines, project status, budget outlook, and performance measure results.
- Develop programmatic performance measures
Consult with the Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee to develop measures that will track and monitor the progress and impact of Safe Routes to School construction investments. Implement measures through recurring and frequent data collection, analysis and reporting.
- Closely manage project delivery deadlines
Develop at least one performance measure to track on-time and on-budget performance of Safe Routes to School construction projects. Include in the funding application readiness factors to assess applicants' ability to meet project delivery deadlines. Also include in funding agreements deadlines for project completion and clear language that states that any cost overages are the responsibility of the recipient of funds.

Make Program Adjustments as Needed

Using performance measure data tracked and reported over time, as well as feedback from the public and applicants, consult with the Advisory Committee on needed program adjustments. Implement program adjustments, within program limitations (e.g. budget, staffing, etc.).

Construction Funding Program Process Steps and Procedures

In support of the policies listed above, in alignment with the administrative rule governing the program, based on feedback from the Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee, and given direction from the Oregon Transportation Commission, ODOT staff developed the following process steps and procedures. The information provided below are on the high level step-by-step procedures. Details about roles and responsibilities, handoffs, and precise steps are documented in process maps (included as appendices to this document). Process maps were developed from May 2018 through October 2018 and are living documents that will be refined based on identified opportunities or challenges.

The process maps and the policy procedures documented below detail how the Safe Routes to School construction funding program will be executed and managed.

Major Process Steps

- 1) Preparation and Announcement
 - a. High level description: Headquarters Program Manager schedules and facilitates workshops in five ODOT regions plus one webinar to communicate and educate locals about the upcoming SRTS funding opportunity.
 - b. Parties involved: Headquarters Program Management, Regional ATL, Local and ODOT regional applicants, ODOT web coordinator, other regional staff, Advisory Committee
- 2) Letter of Intent
 - a. High level description: Eligible applicants submit a Letter of Intent for projects meeting the SRTS requirements with support from Headquarters Program Management and Local Agency Liaisons when applicable.
 - b. Parties involved: Headquarters Program Management Local and ODOT regional applicants, Regional ATL and other regional staff, ODOT web coordinator
- 3) Application
 - a. High level description: Eligible applicants submit an application for projects meeting the SRTS requirements with support from Headquarters Program Management and Local Agency Liaisons when applicable.
 - b. Parties involved major: Headquarters Program Management, Local and ODOT regional applicants, Regional ATL, ODOT web coordinator
- 4) Selection
 - a. High level description: Headquarters Program Management scores projects based on scoring matrix approved by the OTC. ATLs and other regional staff support by adding knowledge of ground conditions to application locations in the 200% list. The Safe Routes to School Advisory provides a final recommendation list for the available funds to the Oregon Transportation Commission.
 - b. Parties involved: Headquarters Program Management, Regional ATL and other regional staff, Advisory Committee, Local and ODOT regional applicants, Oregon Transportation Commission
- 5) IGA and Funding
 - a. High level description: Once projects are selected the SPU team at Headquarters works with DOJ and new grantees to get IGAs signed.
 - b. Parties Involved: Headquarters Program Management, Local and ODOT regional applicants, web coordinator, Program funding, SPU

6) Reimbursement Request Payment

- a. High level description: The SPU team at Headquarters processes grantee invoices and sends information to Finance CAU to complete invoice payment.
- b. Parties involved: Headquarters Program Management, local and ODOT regional applicants, SPU, Finance/CAU

7) Quarterly Report

- a. High level description: The SPU team and SRTS Program Management at Headquarters analyze quarterly reports submitted by grantees and works with local grantees with advice from ODOT regional staff on issues that arise.
- b. Parties Involved: Headquarters Program Management, Regional ATL and other regional staff, Local and ODOT regional applicants, SPU

8) Project Close

- a. High level description: Headquarters Program Manager work with regional ODOT staff to complete the walk-through of a completed project before the final reimbursement is sent.
- b. Parties Involved: Headquarters Program Management, Regional ATL and other regional staff, Local and ODOT regional applicants, SPU