

# PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE IMPROVEMENTS





**HOUSTON-GALVESTON AREA COUNCIL**

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[www.h-gac.com/go/pedbike](http://www.h-gac.com/go/pedbike)

H-GAC serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the eight-county Houston-Galveston area. As the MPO, H-GAC is responsible for developing and maintaining the Regional Pedestrian-Bicycle Plan, an action plan to guide investments and encourage mobility through active transportation means.



*To create a world-class active transportation network, our region will need to make wise investments in infrastructure and initiatives that make walking and biking safe, comfortable, and convenient. With many other needs competing for limited funding, it can be difficult for municipalities to finance pedestrian and bicyclist projects. Communities nationwide are using a variety of public and private funding sources to support these projects. By taking advantage of innovative funding strategies, our region can maximize the impact of taxpayer dollars.*

*Federal, state, and local programs, along with some private initiatives, are described on the following pages.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Federal Programs ..... Pages 4-9**

- **Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP)**
- **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)**
- **Funding for Transportation Alternatives (TA)**
- **Recreational Trails Program**
- **Highway Safety Improvements Program**
- **Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Program**
- **State and Community Highway Safety Grants**
- **Federal Transit Programs**

### **Local Programs ..... Pages 9-10**

- **Capital Improvement Programs**
- **Bond Initiatives**
- **Developer-funded Facilities**
- **Volunteers**
- **Businesses**
- **Private Foundations**

### **Innovative Funding Sources Examples .... Pages 11-13**

## Federal Programs

Federal funding for transportation initiatives is made available to each state’s Department of Transportation, as described in authorizing legislation. This legislation establishes new federal programs, or continues the operation of existing ones, and lists the amount of anticipated funding available to states. Congress generally reauthorizes federal transportation programs for multi-year periods.

Federal surface transportation programs are currently being implemented in accordance with the [FAST Act](#) (Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act). Signed into law in 2015, it was the first long-term highway authorization enacted in over 10 years. Although funding is generally maintained at previous levels, many existing programs were restructured. Some of the major programs funded under the FAST Act include:

- National Highway Performance Program (NHPP);
- Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP);
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ);
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP);
- Railway-Highway Crossings (set-aside from HSIP); and
- Metropolitan Planning.

Programs that support pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure are described below.

### Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP)

The [Surface Transportation Block Grant Program \(STBGP\)](#) is a flexible funding program that supports a wide range of highway, bridge, transit, and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects. The STBGP replaces the STP program. STBGP funds are allocated to each state; states are required to allocate a portion of these funds to be used in urbanized areas with a population over 200,000. Generally, STBGP funds can cover up to 80% of the total cost of a project, with state and/or local governments paying the remaining costs. With some exceptions, STBGP funds may not be used to improve roads classified as local or rural minor collectors.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) divides federal allocations

into 12 program categories for roadway maintenance and construction, which are described in the statewide Unified Transportation Program (UTP). The 2016 UTP does not reflect changes made in the FAST Act as it was adopted in 2015, prior to the FAST Act authorization. Previously, STP funds were distributed to projects that relate to nine of these categories:

- Preventative Maintenance and Rehabilitation
- Metropolitan and Urban Corridor Projects
- Statewide Connectivity Corridor Projects
- Structures Replacement and Rehabilitation
- Metropolitan Mobility and Rehabilitation
- Transportation Enhancements\*
- Supplemental Transportation Projects
- District Discretionary
- Strategic Priority

Projects funded under some categories are selected by different state entities. Funds for metropolitan mobility and rehabilitation (STP-MM) are suballocated to MPOs, as required by authorizing legislation. Each MPO develops its own selection processes, policies, and criteria used to determine which projects will receive STP-MM funding. Note that any changes to this process resulting from the FAST Act legislation have not yet been reflected in the UTP.

*\*Note: This program was not reauthorized under MAP-21 or the FAST Act. Funds from this category will only be distributed to satisfy commitments made from previous calls for projects.*

### Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ)

The [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program \(CMAQ\)](#) supports transportation projects and programs aimed at improving air quality and reducing congestion in areas that do not meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, or particulate matter (nonattainment areas). Former nonattainment areas that now meet these standards (maintenance areas) are also eligible to receive funds.



### Nonattainment Areas in Our Region

There are three ozone nonattainment areas in Texas. The Houston-Galveston-Brazoria nonattainment area includes Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, and Waller counties.

Each project funded under this program must meet three basic criteria:

- It must be a transportation project.
- It must generate an emissions reduction.
- It must be located in (or benefit) a nonattainment or maintenance area.

The following pedestrian and bicycle projects are eligible to receive funding:

- Building shared-use paths, bicycle racks, and other facilities intended to reduce automobile trips, and that are not exclusively for recreational use;
- Outreach activities that promote safe bicycle use; and
- Establishing and funding state-level pedestrian/bicycle coordinator positions.

The FAST Act establishes a formula that is used to determine how much money each state receives through the CMAQ program. States may transfer up to 50% of these funds to other programs. Each state allocates these funds to MPOs within its jurisdiction, who are responsible for suballocating these funds to different projects. Project selection policies and processes vary considerably among MPOs in Texas. The state’s largest MPOs are those in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston regions; they receive much larger allocations than smaller districts, and they are nonattainment areas that receive CMAQ funds. As a consequence, project selection processes in those regions tend to be much more complex and varied than those used by smaller MPOs.

### Pedestrian-Bicyclist/Funding for Transportation Alternatives

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), created as part of previous legislation, is eliminated as a separate program under the FAST Act. The FAST Act replaces the TAP program (which had previously absorbed the Transportation Enhancements [TE] and Safe Routes to Schools programs) with a set-aside of **STBGP funding for Transportation Alternatives (TA)**. All projects previously eligible under TAP are eligible to receive these funds, including:

- On- and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation (including sidewalks, pedestrian/bicycle signals, traffic calming techniques, lighting and other safety-related infrastructure, and projects that aim to achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)
- Planning and construction of projects that will provide safe routes for non-drivers, including children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities
- Rails-to-trails projects
- Construction of viewing areas and scenic overlooks
- Historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities
- Planning and construction of boulevards within the right-of-way of former interstates or other divided highways

The FAST Act requires all transportation alternative projects to be funded through a competitive process. In addition to all applicants who were eligible under the previous TAP program, nonprofit entities responsible for the administration of local transportation safety programs are eligible to apply for funding under the FAST Act. States are required to allocate a portion of these funds (50%) to metro areas with more than 200,000 people. These areas determine which local projects will receive funding. The remaining 50% are distributed by the state. For most projects, federal funds may be used to cover 80% of total costs, with states and/or local entities providing a 20% match. An urbanized area over 200,000 in population may transfer up to 50% of its STBGP transportation alternative set-aside funds to other STBGP-eligible purposes, as designated by the FAST Act legislation.



Other Relevant FAST Act Provisions

The FAST Act allows for alternative [design standards](#) to better accommodate pedestrian and bicyclists. This design flexibility is intended to promote safety for all users.

The FAST Act continues the [Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act \(TIFIA\)](#) program, which provides federal credit assistance to some transportation projects. Newly eligible under the FAST Act are Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) projects. These TOD projects have a lower cost threshold (\$10 million) than some other projects types under the program. Not all TOD projects will be eligible for the TIFIA program.

## Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

MPOs are responsible for selecting projects to be implemented using some federal transportation funds, such as those from the STBGP–Metropolitan Mobility, CMAQ program, and TA set-aside of STBGP.\* The Transportation Policy Council (TPC) provides policy guidance and overall coordination of transportation planning activities within the region. The TPC approves the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which identifies federal, state, and local funding for transportation projects that will be implemented within the program’s four-year timeframe. Below is the process through which projects are included in the TIP:

1. Transportation needs identified
2. Projects sponsored by cities, counties, and transportation agencies
3. Regionally significant projects evaluated and included in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)
4. RTP adopted by TPC
5. Highest-priority projects evaluated and ranked for inclusion in TIP
6. TIP is adopted by TPC
7. TIP combined into the Statewide Transportation Program, approved by the Texas Transportation Commission

The TPC considers several issues when developing the TIP:

- Both the RTP and the TIP are fiscally constrained, meaning that they may not include more projects than will likely be funded, based on assumptions on the amount of funding that will be available.

- A transportation project must be included in the TIP to receive federal funding.
- The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) reviews regional transportation plans and policies and provides its recommendations to the TPC. The TAC is an appointed body consisting of transportation experts representing local governments and special interest groups. Several subcommittees provide the TAC with additional input, including the TIP Subcommittee and the Pedestrian and Bicyclist Subcommittee.

Pedestrian and bicycle projects submitted by localities throughout our region have been included in previously-approved TIPs.



***Bicyclists traveling along the MKT Trail in Houston are separated from vehicular traffic.***

*\*Note: Only 50% of TA funds apportioned to Texas are suballocated to urban areas. The remaining 50% is distributed directly by TxDOT.*

Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program is also funded through the TA set-aside of the STBG program, but funding is allocated to local projects differently. Money is allocated to the states to develop and maintain recreational trails for both non-motorized and motorized recreational users. In [Texas, funds are distributed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department](#), with the approval of the Federal Highway Administration.

The program funds projects that are primarily for recreational use, rather than for transportation purposes. Public agencies and non-profit organizations are eligible to receive funding to

- Build new recreation trails on public lands or private lands (with certain conditions);
- Repair existing facilities and/or upgrade them to meet guidelines established by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990;
- Construct trailside or trailhead facilities (e.g. signage, parking areas, restrooms, benches, picnic tables, bicycle racks, fencing, etc.);
- Acquire easements or land for trails; and/or
- Install educational signage.

Funding is provided on a cost-reimbursement basis. Project sponsors must initiate their approved projects using their own funds and will be reimbursed up to 80% of allowed costs after submitting documentation of expenses. Individual trail grants can range from \$4,000 to \$200,000 (Total Project Costs: \$5,000 to \$250,000). The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission will authorize funding for selected projects based on recommendations made by the Texas Trails Advisory Board.

Highway Safety Improvements Program

The [Highway Safety Improvement Program \(HSIP\)](#) aims to reduce the number of traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads. Funds may be used for projects to address safety issues and support the state's [Strategic Highway Safety Plan \(SHSP\)](#) (which, in accordance with the FAST Act, must be regularly updated and evaluated). The FAST Act limits project eligibility to only those projects specifically listed in statute, most of which

are infrastructure safety related. The Texas SHSP identifies bicyclists and pedestrians as roadway system users that warrant special protection. Eligible improvements may include

- Intersection improvements;
- Shoulder widening;
- Installation of rumble strips;
- Improvements at railroad crossings;
- Traffic calming techniques; and
- Improvements that increase the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and those with disabilities.

Note that eligible improvements may change when the Texas SHSP is updated to reflect changes to eligibility in the FAST Act. Federal funds allocated through this program can cover 90% of total projects (up to 100% in certain instances). The TxDOT: Traffic Operations Division solicits project proposals from each of 25 districts.

**Texas Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) and Pedestrians and Bicyclists**

The [Texas SHSP \(2014\)](#) identifies bicyclists and pedestrians as roadway system users that warrant special protection. Different countermeasures are identified, which are intended to reduce the number of pedestrians and bicyclists that die or are seriously injured on Texas roadways. Some of the countermeasures supported by the SHSP include

- Conducting public education campaigns on bicycle traffic laws and the use of bicycle safety equipment;
- Continuing support for a comprehensive Safe Routes to School program;
- Encouraging municipalities to pass vulnerable road user statutes;
- Improving pedestrian signals, signs, and crosswalk markings at intersections; and
- Increasing the number of sidewalks and walkways in both rural and urban areas.



Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Program

The [Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery \(TIGER\) Program](#) supports a variety of innovative projects (including pedestrian and bicycle facilities) that are difficult to fund through other federal and state initiatives. Since 2009, Congress has dedicated more than \$4.6 billion to the program. Projects funded must improve quality of life, support economic development, and provide environmental benefits.

State and local governments apply directly to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) for funding. The selection process is highly-competitive, with entities across the country submitting proposals. Since the inception of the program, over 6,700 applications have been submitted and 381 projects have received funding. A cost/benefits analysis must be included in the application, demonstrating the proposal’s positive fiscal, environmental, and economic impacts. Most of the available funding is distributed to “shovel-ready” projects, but a portion may support activities related to the planning or design of transportation infrastructure.

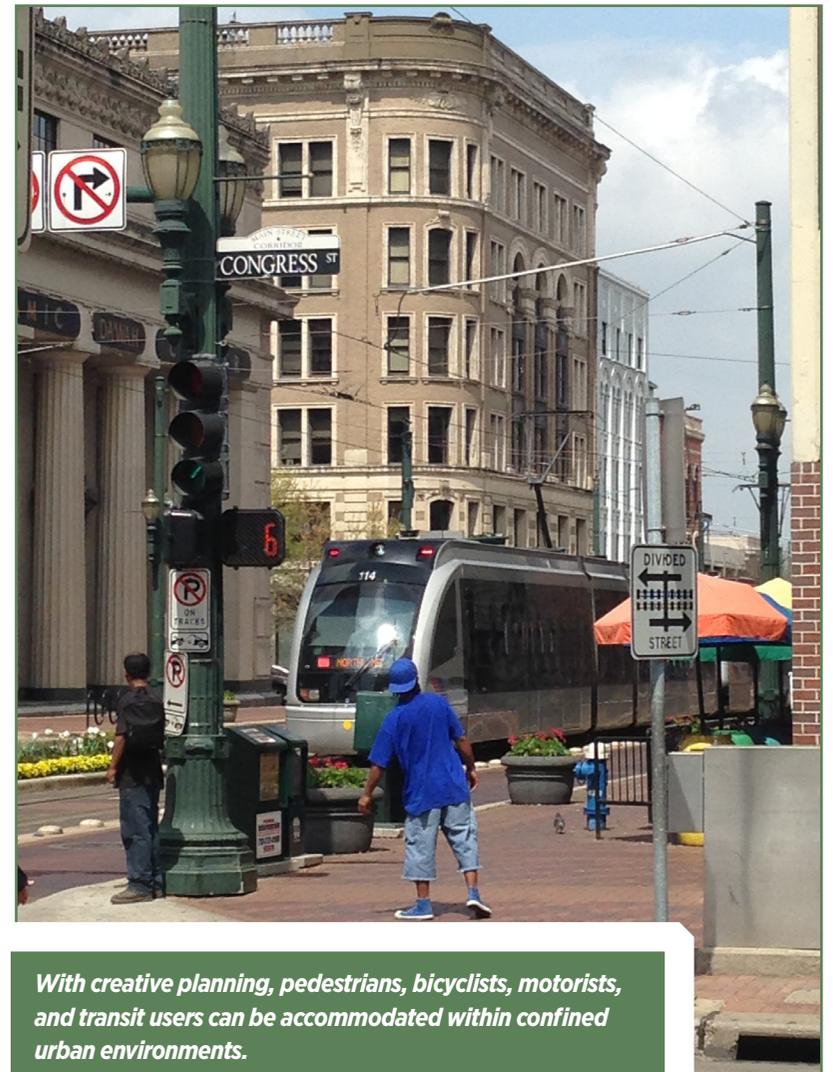
Federal funds allocated through this program can cover 80% of total projects (up to 100% in certain instances). In urban areas, individual grants range from \$5 million to \$100 million; the minimum grant awarded in rural areas is \$1 million.

To date, one local active transportation project has been partially funded through the TIGER program. The City of Houston received \$15 million to build sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and shared-use paths connecting neighborhoods to transit facilities

State and Community Highways Safety Grants

The [State and Community Highway Safety Grant Program](#), commonly referred to as Section 402, supports the development of highway safety programs intended to reduce motor vehicle accidents and related property damage, injuries, and deaths. Funds are distributed to all states, based on population and road mileage. Per federal law, initiatives intended to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety are eligible to receive funding under this program.

In our region, proposed projects are ranked by the Texas Department of Transportation: Traffic Operations Division. Federal funds can cover 80% of total project costs. The minimum and maximum awards vary by area and the type of project.



Federal Transit Programs

Bicyclist and pedestrian projects are broadly eligible for funding under most federal transit programs. Transit agencies are encouraged to improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists when building and improving their transit networks.

The [Urbanized Area Formula Program \(49 U.S.C. 5307\)](#) provides funding to urbanized areas (areas with a population of 50,000 or more designated by the U.S. Census Bureau) for transit capital improvements and operating assistance. Funds can be used for a variety of transit-related projects, including technical transportation-related studies. In urbanized areas with a population below 200,000, funds can be used to offset operating costs. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) apportions the funds to designated recipients, who then suballocate the funds to other agencies, including public transportation providers. The matching funds required vary, depending on the type of project funded.

A previous requirement that recipients spend at least 1% of funds received through the program on “associated transportation improvements” (formerly known as transit enhancements) was repealed in the FAST Act. The FAST Act also specifically prohibits federal transit funding from paying for art and/or non-functional landscaping elements of a transit project.

The [Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program \(49 U.S.C. 5310\)](#) provides funding for both traditional capital transit investments and nontraditional investments that support expanding transportation mobility options for seniors and individuals with disabilities. Similar to the 5307 funds, FTA apportions the funds to designated recipients, who then suballocate the funds to other agencies, including public transportation providers. The matching funds required vary, depending on the type of project funded. Up to 45% of the funds in the program may be used for non-traditional projects which assist seniors and individuals with disabilities. This could include building accessible paths to transit facilities, sidewalks, and accessible pedestrian signals, among other projects.

**Urbanized Areas in Our Region**

Based on the 2010 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau identified four urbanized areas in our region:

- Conroe-The Woodlands
- Houston
- Lake Jackson-Angleton
- Texas City

Local Programs

Capital Improvements Programs

Many localities throughout our region have adopted a Capital Improvements Program (CIP), which is a multi-year plan that describes major capital projects that will likely be pursued over the next five years. The CIP may include repairs or improvements to existing facilities, construction of new infrastructure, and/or acquisition of property and equipment.

Most communities review and update the CIP annually. Projects listed in the first year of the CIP are funded through the locality’s annual operating budget. Those listed in subsequent years are listed for planning purposes only, helping policymakers prepare for anticipated expenditures. Not only are the projects described, but their funding sources are identified. Some projects may be funded solely through local appropriations, while others may be funded in part by developer contributions and/or grants from public and private entities.

Citizens can work with policymakers to have pedestrian and bicyclist improvements included in their local CIP. This will help localities consider funding for these facilities during their annual budgeting processes. This also demonstrates their interest in creating a safe, convenient active transportation network.

Project sponsors frequently coordinate implementation of pedestrian and bicyclist improvements as part of larger roadway projects. For example, during road widening projects sidewalks or bike lanes may also be added. Coordinating project implementation can help to maximize investments.



Bond Initiatives

Voters may authorize local governments (including school districts) to sell bonds to fund capital improvements, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Bonds are similar to loans and other financing mechanisms; local governments gradually pay investors back for the money borrowed.

In November 2012, Houston voters approved a major bond referendum supporting the [Bayou Greenways Initiative](#). The City will provide up to \$100 million to build shared-use paths along its waterways.

Developer-funded Facilities

Localities can adopt policies that encourage or require developers to provide pedestrian and bicyclist improvements as new projects are built. This will ensure that adequate facilities are in place as development occurs, eliminating the need to install these improvements later.

Volunteers

Volunteers can help maintain pedestrian and bicyclist facilities, reducing localities' upkeep costs. These volunteers can help pick up trash, remove debris, maintain plantings, and partake in other activities to keep shared-use paths, bicycle lanes, and other infrastructure safe, attractive, and in good repair. The Woodlands Township has an [adopt-a-path program](#), where interested residents volunteer to clean a path or park at least once per quarter.

Businesses

Businesses, especially those in the healthcare industry, may be interested in providing financial support to help construct or maintain pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure:

- The [Tweetsie Trail](#), a rails-to-trails project in eastern Tennessee, was partially funded through gifts and donations from private entities. Business and individuals providing donations may be awarded naming rights to bridges along the path or receive recognition on trailhead signage (depending on how much they donate).
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas (a health insurance company)

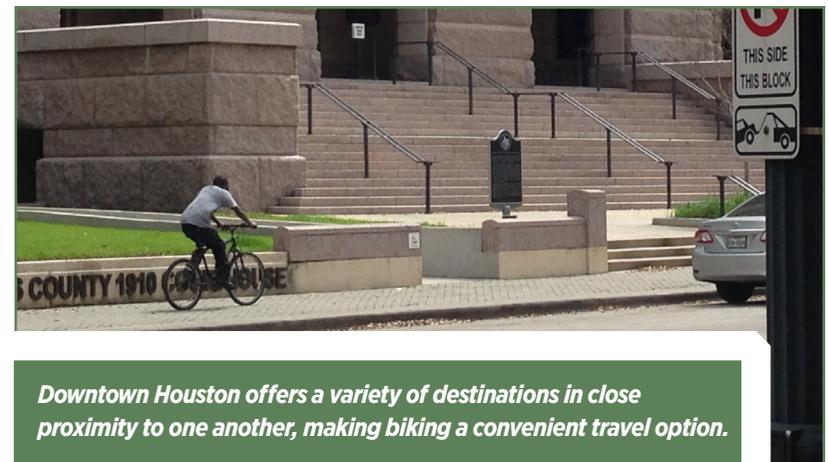
provided \$750,000 to support [Houston B-cycle](#), a local bikeshare program.

- [Citigroup](#) paid \$41 million to be the lead sponsor of New York City's bikeshare program for five years.

Private Foundations

Several non-profit organizations and private foundations provide funding to support the planning and construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities:

- The [American Hiking Society: National Trails Fund](#) offers grants (\$500 to \$5,000) to member organizations for projects that improve hiking trails.
- The [PeopleForBikes: Community Grant Program](#) provides grants to help construct bicycle infrastructure and support large-scale bicycle advocacy initiatives.
- [Advocacy Advance: Rapid Response Grants](#) provide funding to organizations that are part of the League of American Bicyclists and the Alliance for Biking & Walking to support campaigns aimed at increasing or preserving funding for active transportation infrastructure.
- The [Houston Endowment](#) and the [Kinder Foundation](#) have provided funding to support land acquisition and trail development in our region (including projects that support the Bayou Greenways Initiative).



*Downtown Houston offers a variety of destinations in close proximity to one another, making biking a convenient travel option.*

# Innovative Funding Sources Examples

Communities across the country are using innovative funding strategies to improve their active transportation infrastructure. Many are utilizing a combination of public and private funding to complete large-scale projects.

## Atlanta BeltLine

As part of the Atlanta BeltLine project, 22 miles of unused railways will be transformed into a system of shared-use paths and linear parks encircling inner-city Atlanta. The BeltLine will be completed gradually, as funding becomes available. Several funding sources are being used to support the project, which has total estimated cost of \$2.7 billion:

- The Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District is the primary source of funding, generating an estimated \$1.7 billion over the next 25 years. Increased property values generated by new development within the 6500-acre district will be used to pay back bonds used to support the project.
- \$20.5 million has been allocated in the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Transportation Improvement Program for supportive on-street projects in the area.
- The City of Atlanta has invested \$146 million in the project, using funds derived from Park Improvement Bonds and the local Capital Improvement Program.
- Several non-profit organizations, including the PATH Foundation, Trees Atlanta, and the Trust for Public Land have supported different aspects of the project.

Innovative policies are being used to ensure the long-term maintenance of these facilities. As part of the Adopt the Atlanta BeltLine program, local organizations commit to pick up litter, remove weeds, and perform other maintenance activities along a ¼-mile stretch of trail for at least one year.

The Southwest Connector Trail is a significant link in the 33-mile network of paved paths that will form the Atlanta BeltLine. This project was dedicated in August 2013.  
 Source: Attaboy Photography



Seattle Children’s Hospital: Livable Streets Initiative

In 2010, Seattle Children’s Hospital (SCH) launched its [Livable Streets Initiative](#), a collaborative effort with surrounding neighborhoods to enhance the livability of the area as the hospital expands. SCH’s Livable Streets Initiative builds on the [City of Seattle’s Neighborhood Greenways](#) program. This program identifies low-traffic volume neighborhood streets and adds various traffic calming design elements to make them safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Neighborhood Greenway elements include reducing the speed limit to 20 mph, adding speed bumps, incorporating pedestrian- and bike- friendly wayfinding, and adding stop signs at streets crossing the greenway.

As part of the Livable Streets Initiative, SCH has committed to spending \$4 million on pedestrian, bicycle, and other transportation projects in northeast Seattle as part of [Seattle Children’s 20 Year Major Institution Master Plan](#).

SCH completed Phase 1 of the initiative in 2014, spending \$1.5 million on projects:

- SCH, in partnership with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), improved a confusing intersection. This removed a barrier for cyclists getting to the Burke-Gilman Trail, an 18-mile off-road shared-use path connecting different Seattle neighborhoods. The new intersection features many safety elements for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- An ADA-accessible path provides a crucial link to the [Burke-Gilman trail](#) and has railings, benches, native plantings, and information kiosks.
- SCH partnered with SDOT and the Seattle Neighborhood Greenways Program to build one of Seattle’s first neighborhood greenways. This project includes safe intersection crossings for all users, other traffic calming elements, and wayfinding signage.

The Burke-Gilman Trail is a popular recreational trail for walkers, runners, cyclists, skaters, and commuters. It is jointly maintained by the Seattle Department of Transportation and Seattle Parks and Recreation.



- SCH worked with SDOT to install a traffic signal and crosswalk at a busy intersection, offering safer access to a local elementary school, parks, and the Burke-Gilman Trail.
- A new cycle track and sidewalk along Seattle Children’s Hospital provides a safe, comfortable route for cyclists.

City of San Jose’s Downtown Public Spaces Initiatives

Two new initiatives spearheaded by the San Jose Downtown Association are reinvigorating downtown San Jose’s public spaces: the [Public Space Activation Project](#) and the [Street Life Partnership](#).

The Public Space Activation Project supports community events and assists new community groups in planning their first event. In its first year, five micro grants were awarded to local event hosts.

The Street Life Project implements public improvement projects that range in duration and design, such as temporary street furniture, parklets, stages, and public art. This initiative has successfully implemented and continues to support

- Street improvements, including the unique art crosswalks that link the pedestrian-only promenade Paseo de San Antonio, an exercise loop in the city center, and the light installation on the City’s Circle of Palms public plaza;
- Four separate street mural projects that will engage all facets of the art community;
- The development of a plan to convert a vacant lot into a park for residents and their dogs; and
- A partnership with Walk [Your City], a Knight Foundation-funded civic group that creates and installs streets signs that encourage people to walk or bike to nearby places.

*The Knight Foundation*

The [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#) supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities, and foster the arts. Since 2014, the Knight Foundation has contributed \$775,000 to the [San Jose Downtown Association’s Public Space Activation Project](#) and [Street Life Partnership](#) initiatives.



**Art crosswalk on South First Street in Downtown San Jose, part of the San Jose Downtown Association’s Street Life Partnership initiative.**  
*Source: San Jose Downtown Association*





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