



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Guidance for Transportation Alternatives Projects

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Connecticut Department of Transportation

Guidance for Transportation Alternatives Projects

Overview

The Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program funding for transportation alternatives (TA) is a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) program authorized under the most recent Federal transportation funding act, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act). This program replaces the former MAP-21 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).

Projects eligible for TA funding are similar to those eligible under the former TAP, and include those defined as transportation alternatives; including small-scale transportation projects such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities, recreation trails, safe route to schools projects, historic preservation, vegetation management, and environmental mitigation. As with the former TAP program, routine maintenance and operating costs are not eligible for TA funding.

The TA program is intended to help local sponsors fund community based projects that expand travel choices and enhance the transportation experience by improving the cultural, historical and environmental aspects of the transportation infrastructure. The program does not fund traditional roadway projects or provide maintenance for these facilities. Instead, it focuses on providing for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, community improvements, and mitigating negative impacts of the highway system.

The TA program is part of the Federal-aid Highway program, and as such funds are only available on a reimbursement basis with a funding split of 80 percent federal and 20 percent local match. This means that the local project sponsor (typically a municipality) must be able to fund 20 percent of the total project cost. Because it is a reimbursable program the project sponsor must first incur project expenses and then request reimbursement. It is therefore important to plan ahead and have the necessary funding available to pay for services and materials until the appropriate documentation can be submitted and processed for reimbursement.

Additional TAP information and guidance is available on the FHWA website at: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/guidance/

Connecticut Transportation Enhancement/Transportation Alternatives Program History

In Connecticut, past solicitations for Transportation Enhancement (now known as TA) projects were dictated by several items, the largest of which was available federal funding. The Connecticut Department of Transportation (Department) typically solicited for projects when a new federal transportation bill was approved, thus garnering a new round of Transportation Enhancement projects to design and construct. The Department required a minimum project cost of \$300,000 in an effort to minimize the number of small projects and to effect more meaningful improvements. Historically, the Department accepted each of the Regional Planning Organizations' (RPO) top priority projects for funding provided that the towns were committed to the local match. This allowed approximately 12 to 14 projects to be initiated with each new funding authorization.

Over time, the Department and RPOs noted that while many trail type projects were constructed, there were large "gaps" in the regional non-motorized transportation network that were being avoided due to their complexity and cost. These sections were typically very complex and costly to design and construct and therefore were not addressed due to limited funding availability, the local sponsor's inability to fund the match for the project, or to administer the necessary contracts. The Department, through a coordinated effort, determined that many of these gaps involved trails of statewide significance that should be focused on, the most expansive statewide system being the East Coast Greenway (ECG).

Subsequently, the Department developed a plan to try and "fill the gaps" along this non-motorized network by assuming responsibility for oversight, funding and construction of these complex sections of multi-use trail. This undertaking resulted in the creation of a policy ([P&P-8](#)), signed on April 11, 2011. This policy allowed the Department to further emphasize bicycle and pedestrian initiatives for projects that address gaps in major multi-use trail networks. To help achieve these goals, the policy directed the Department to reserve approximately 50 percent of the TE funds coming to the State for enhancement projects with the goal of completing the complex and costly projects that are beyond the capacity of local project sponsors, and to close the remaining gaps in the regional non-motorized transportation network.

The passage of MAP-21 on July 6, 2012, which introduced the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) in place of the Enhancement Program, curtailed these efforts since the Department could no longer be an "eligible entity" of TAP funding. However, the Department's initial efforts to get all parties on board with "filling the gaps" proved successful with the completion of several critical projects.

In addition, the passing of MAP-21 brought significant changes to the TE, now TAP fund source. Under the new TAP, sub allocation rules were applied, similar to the STP-Urban program that required the TAP funds to be distributed by population to the urbanized areas of Connecticut. Additionally, the overall funding amount of the TAP was reduced from the previous TE levels, and both the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) were optional set-asides from the TAP. At this time, Connecticut had elected to continue the RTP, administered by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

The MAP-21 sub allocation rules were a significant divergence from what had been done historically for the old Transportation Enhancement type projects. In the past, monies were allocated by the Department based on population and the fifteen RPOs. This allowed the Department and RPOs great latitude in funding projects. MAP-21 required that monies be distributed similar to STP funds, with 50% to the urbanized areas and 50% to any other areas within the state. MAP-21 also did not allow the Department to be a stand-alone eligible entity, but instead required partnerships with eligible project sponsors in the TAP. This was a significant change in the funding allocation for TAP projects and made it much more difficult for the Department to manage a very small source of funds distributed by urbanized area.

When Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST Act) was signed into law on December 4, 2015, the TAP program was replaced with a set-aside of funds under the Surface Transportation Block Grant program (TA). Fifty percent of the funds received are allocated for use anywhere in the State, to be managed by the State, and the remaining fifty percent is allocated for use based on the populations to urbanized, urban and rural regions of the state. Eligible projects under the TA program include all projects and activities eligible under the previous TAP program.

The total allocation for Connecticut for the five year Fast Act spending bill totals approximately \$44.7 million. The Fast Act allows states to opt out of the RTP program on a yearly basis, and the State of Connecticut has currently elected to exercise this option. However, the State of Connecticut may opt back in during future years as this decision is evaluated annually.

Current Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (FAST Act)

The FAST Act replaces the previous MAP-21 Transportation Alternatives Program with a set-aside of Surface Transportation Block Grants for Transportation Alternatives (TA). These set-aside funds encompass smaller-scale transportation improvement projects that may include bicycle and pedestrian facilities, recreational trails, safe routes to school, historic preservation/vegetation management, and environmental mitigation related to stormwater and habitat connectivity.

Eligibility

To be eligible for TA funding, the design phase of the project must be complete, and construction funds obligated, by the end of federal fiscal year 2020. A project must also have an estimated project cost exceeding \$500,000. In addition, the eligibility requirement detailed on the FHWA Transportation Alternatives website¹ and summarized and supplemented in the following sections must be met to be eligible for TA set-aside funds.

¹ FHWA Transportation Alternatives Website:
https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/guidance/

Eligible Entities

Connecticut's municipalities (local governments) typically sponsor projects within the TA program, however, the following entities are considered eligible project sponsors:

1. Local Government.
2. Regional Transportation Authority.
3. Transit Agency.
4. Natural Resource of Public Land Agency.
5. School District.
6. Tribal Government.
7. Nonprofit Entity Responsible for Administration of Local Transportation Safety Programs.
8. Local or Regional Government Agency Responsible for Transportation or Recreational Trails.

Ineligible Entities

The following entities are considered ineligible project sponsors under TAP funding:

1. State DOTs and MPOs
2. Certain Nonprofit Organizations

Eligible Activities

TA Set-Aside funds may be used for projects or activities benefiting the general public and meeting the following criteria:

1. Construction, planning and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other nonmotorized forms of transportation.
2. Construction, planning, and design of infrastructure-related projects and systems that will provide safe routes for non-drivers, including children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities to access daily needs.
3. Conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors for trails for pedestrians, bicyclists, or other nonmotorized transportation users.
4. Construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas.
5. Community improvement activities including:
 - a. Inventory, control or removal of outdoor advertising.
 - b. Historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities.
6. Planning, design, or construction boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of former interstate system routes or other divided highways.

There are no location restrictions for the TA Set-Aside infrastructure projects, and they are not required to be located along highways.

Ineligible Activities

TA Set-Aside funds cannot be used for the following activities:

1. State or MPO administrative purposes (exceptions may apply).
2. Promotional activities, except as permitted under the SRTS (2 CFR 200.421(e)(3)).
3. Routine maintenance and operations, except trail maintenance as permitted under the RTP.
4. General recreation and park facilities, playground equipment, sports fields, campgrounds, picnic areas and pavilions, etc.

Program Funding

The Fast-Act provides a five-year funding stream from federal fiscal year 2016 through 2020, with a total allocation of approximately \$44.7 million to be distributed in accordance with FHWA requirements. Federal regulations allow individual states, on a yearly basis, to opt in or out of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). If a state opts out of the RTP, these funds are additive to the Transportation Alternative set aside.

The TA program dictates that fifty percent of the funds received (excluding funds allocated to the RTP) are to be suballocated based on Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) and Rural Council of Governments (COG) based on their relative share of the total 2010 Census population. The remaining fifty percent of the funds (excluding funds allocated to the RTP) are to be made available for use in any area of the State, to be administered by the Department, or may be transferred to another category. In accordance with federal regulations, the State of Connecticut exercises this transfer of funds to supplement the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program. As previously noted, the State of Connecticut is not an eligible entity to receive TA funds, therefore, this transfer to STBG facilitates important work by the Department in closing trail gaps and expanding the trail system. *Figure 1*, below, depicts the distribution of TA funding in Connecticut.

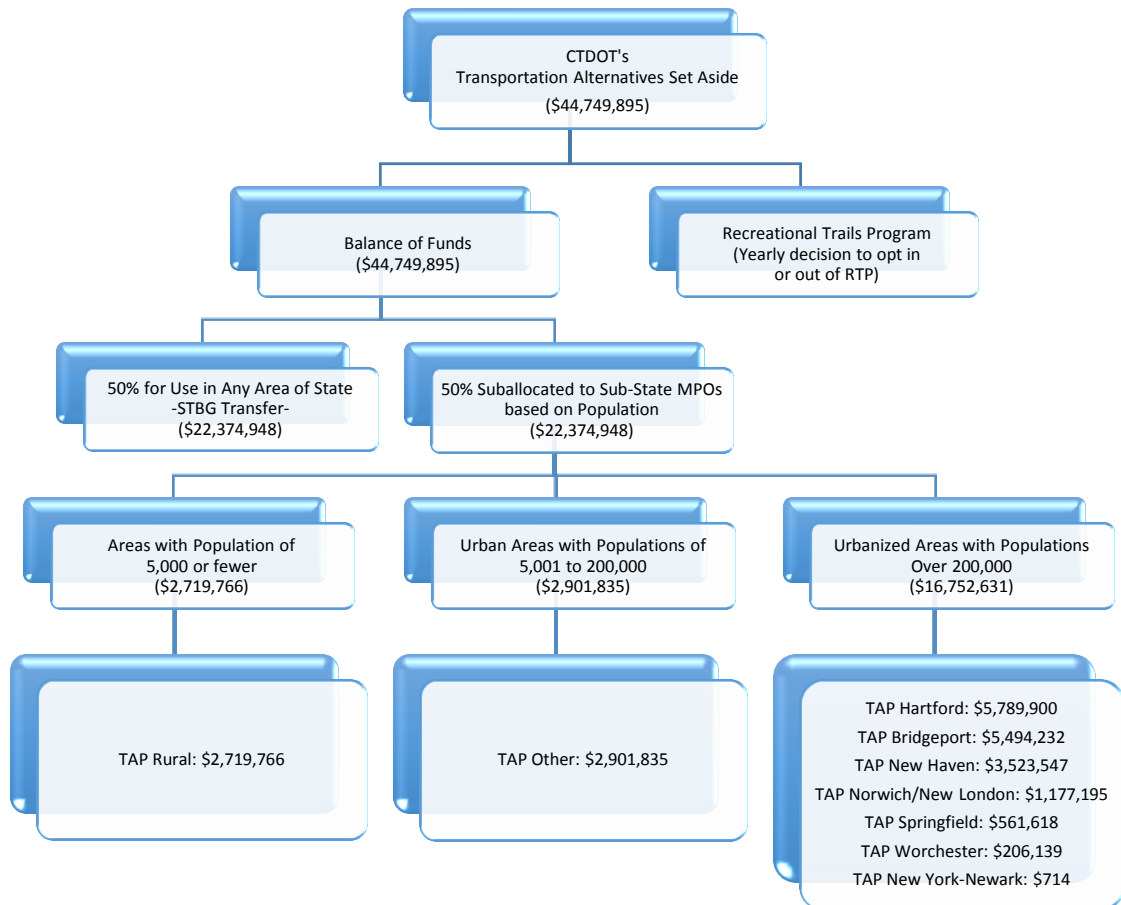


Figure 1. Transportation Alternatives Funding Allocation and Suballocation, FY16-FY20.

Competitive Project Selection Process

Under the Federal FAST Act regulations, all TA funded projects must be part of a competitive selection process in order to be eligible for funding participation. This is a new requirement that was not part of MAP-21. On June 30, 2016 the Department transmitted letters to all MPOs and Rural COGs requesting their solicitation of potential project applications. These applications were to be completed by the project sponsor and prioritized by their respective MPO or Rural COGs. The department requested three prioritized new project proposals from each MPO and Rural COG be submitted to the Department by December 30, 2016.

In addition to the three new projects, the Department requested that any existing project, eligible for TA funds with the potential for a funding shortfall to exist, be submitted through this competitive selection process to the Department by December 30, 2016. These existing projects are considered *Contingency Projects* and are not intended to affect the selection of new TA funded projects. These Contingency Projects are, however, intended to allow for the full and effective use of all TA funds available, and to minimize the potential for lapsing funds given the suballocation and competitive process regulations. The contingency projects will be in place to ensure the maximum expenditure of TA funds available.

The following sections describe how projects are selected and ranked within population based sub-state areas.

MPO Competitive Process (Urbanized Areas with Population > 200,000)

For all funds suballocated to urbanized areas with populations over 200,000 based on the 2010 census, the MPOs representing the urbanized areas are responsible for selecting projects through a competitive process, in consultation with the State. It is important to note that the FAST Act allocates funds by urbanized areas which may span two or more MPOs.

Each of the MPO's are to transmit a prioritized list of projects to the Department for review. The Department's review process verifies each project's eligibility, the accuracy of project's estimates, and the ability to fund the projects given programming constraints.

State Competitive Process

In accordance with FHWA requirements, the Department is responsible for selecting projects through a competitive process for all other funds, including all small urban areas (population 5,001 though 200,000) and non-urban areas (population < 5,000).

For projects located within small urban areas and non-urban areas, based on 2010 census data, the Department developed selection criteria utilized to prioritize projects. This selection criteria, depicted on **Figure 2**, weighs budgetary constraints, public benefit, safety, connectivity, and a project's readiness to proceed. In addition, MPOs and Rural COGs are consulted to ensure that their priorities are considered in the process. A committee comprised of staff from the Department's Engineering, Finance, and Planning units have been assembled to evaluate and prioritize these projects.

FAST Act Transportation Alternatives Project Screening and Scoring Criteria Sheet		
Project Title:		
Application No:		
STEP 1: INITIAL SCREENING		
Screening Requirements:	Confirmed	
The project is eligible for Transportation Alternatives funding		
The project sponsor is eligible to apply for Transportation Alternatives funding		
The project cost is \$500,000 or greater		
An acceptable project budget is provided		
Sponsor provided 20% match commitment		
Project is directly related to the surface transportation system		
Engineering and architectural designs for all facilities conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act.		
STEP 2: PROJECT RATING CRITERIA		
BUDGET	Point* allocation (max 15)	Actual Score
The application includes an accurate/all-inclusive budget.	5	
The application includes documentation of the 20% match readily available to fund the proposed project.	5	
Is the proposed project eligible or programed for any other funding sources Federal, State, or local? please specify.	5	
Project Funding Score:	15	
PUBLIC BENEFIT	Point allocation (max 15)	Actual Score
Describe how the proposed project will benefit the area within the MPO/Rural RPO boundary, is it a regional project?	5	
Describe how the project will improve the public travel experience and travel options, including the benefit to the community.	5	
Demonstration of public/community support, includes documentation of support.	5	
Public Benefit Score:	15	
SAFETY	Point allocation (max 30)	Actual Score
How does the project improve public safety for all transportation users? (collision data, lack of adequately safe crossing or access, high speed/volume).	6	
Does the project provide safe routes for non-drivers, i.e. bicyclists, children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities?	6	
Does the proposed project provide safety related infrastructure (lighting, crosswalks, signals, sidewalks or pathway with curb-outs)?	6	
Does the project implement traffic calming measures?	6	
Does the project have signage markings directed to safety concern?	6	
Safety Score:	30	
IMPROVES TRANSPORTATION NETWORK/CONNECTIVITY	Point allocation (max 20)	Actual Score
Does the proposed project expand or connect directly to existing bicycle, pedestrian or transit facilities? Does it close a gap?	10	
Does the project connect land uses (school, park, library, community center, office/retail) within 1/2 mile of the project?	10	
Connectivity Score:	20	
READINESS TO PROCEED	Point allocation (max 20)	Actual Score
Preliminary work complete: Studies, PD, FD	8	
All Right of Way secured or none needed.	4	
No utility/ other conflicts	4	
List of Federal, State, and local permitting required for the project	4	
Project's Readiness Score:	20	
PROJECT'S TOTAL SCORE	100	
<i>Max project score is 100. Individual categories are rated as 0 being the least up to the max score being the best rating.</i>		
revised 3/28/2016		

Figure 2. Transportation Alternatives Project Screening Criteria.

Program Requirements

Local Match

The TA program funds can be used to reimburse a project sponsor up to a maximum of 80 percent of eligible project costs of any project phase. A local match contribution of 20 percent is required to pay for the remaining project costs. The minimum cost for a project to be eligible for TA funding is \$500,000 for all newly proposed projects.

It is important to understand that the local match requirement is not 20% of the federal allocation, but 20% of the total eligible costs, or 20% above the federal allocation requested. To calculate the match based on the total eligible project cost, follow this example:

Example 1: Total eligible project cost = \$125,000
 Maximum Federal Allocation = $\$125,000 \times 0.80 = \$100,000$
 Local Match Required = $\$125,000 \times 0.20 = \$25,000$

To calculate the match based on the total federal allocation, divide the federal allocation by 0.80, the result will be the total “eligible project cost”. Multiply the total eligible project cost amount by 0.20 and the result will be the required 20 percent local match. To calculate the match based on the federal allocation, follow this example:

Example 2: Federal Allocation = \$100,000
 Total eligible project costs = $\$100,000 \div 0.80 = \$125,000$
 Local Match Required = $\$125,000 - \$100,000 = \$25,000$

In Kind

State funds, as well as donations of cash from non-Federal third parties, may be used to satisfy the non-Federal match requirements for a project.

Although in-kind donations are permitted by the FHWA, it is the Department’s practice to not allow in-kind donations.

Project Sponsor Responsibilities

TA projects are locally administered, Federal-aid transportation improvements whereby the Department will provide oversight on behalf of the FHWA, but the Department will not be responsible for the administration of the construction contract. The sponsor is responsible for project development, quality assurance, daily project management and construction of the project, even if these services or activities are outsourced.

If the project is within Department right-of-way, the sponsor will be responsible for securing an encroachment permit and/or license agreements from the Department for any construction activities.

Maintenance and operation of all project installed features and appurtenances, outside of the Department's right-of-way, especially historic structures and shared-use paths, will be maintained by the municipality in which the constructed facilities lie. Within the Department's right-of-way, it should be assumed that the project sponsor will be responsible for maintenance and operation of all municipal facilities constructed, unless otherwise agreed upon by the Department. Roadway-related items, located within Department's right-of-way, are normally maintained by Department (drainage, roadway pavement, curb and gutter, etc.), however, the sponsor should consult with the Department's local District office to confirm that the Department will continue to maintain items if they are modified by the sponsor as part of the project. It is important to note that the Department does not typically maintain features such as sidewalks, brick or cobble pavers, crosswalks, decorative streetlights, certain curbing materials, etc. ***The project sponsor should discuss maintenance and operation of improvements with the Department's local District office prior to submitting an application for a TA project.***

As the sub-recipient of federal transportation funds and the manager of a Federal-aid project, the sponsor must adhere to all applicable federal and state regulations and guidelines. The project sponsor is also responsible for maintaining all project records – both financial and project development – in accordance with federal record retention guidelines. This documentation will be critical in satisfying federal audit requirements. Maintaining project cost records and reimbursement records is the sponsor's responsibility; it is not the responsibility of the Department. Project records should be maintained a minimum of three (3) years after the FHWA has final vouchered the federal TA project.

Project Advancement

If selected for a TA funded project, advancement through design and construction must follow the Federal-Aid process, which is generally outlined in **Figure 3** for the Planning and Project Development Process and on **Figure 4** for the and Project Design and Implementation process. It is encouraged that all project sponsors become familiar with this project workflow.

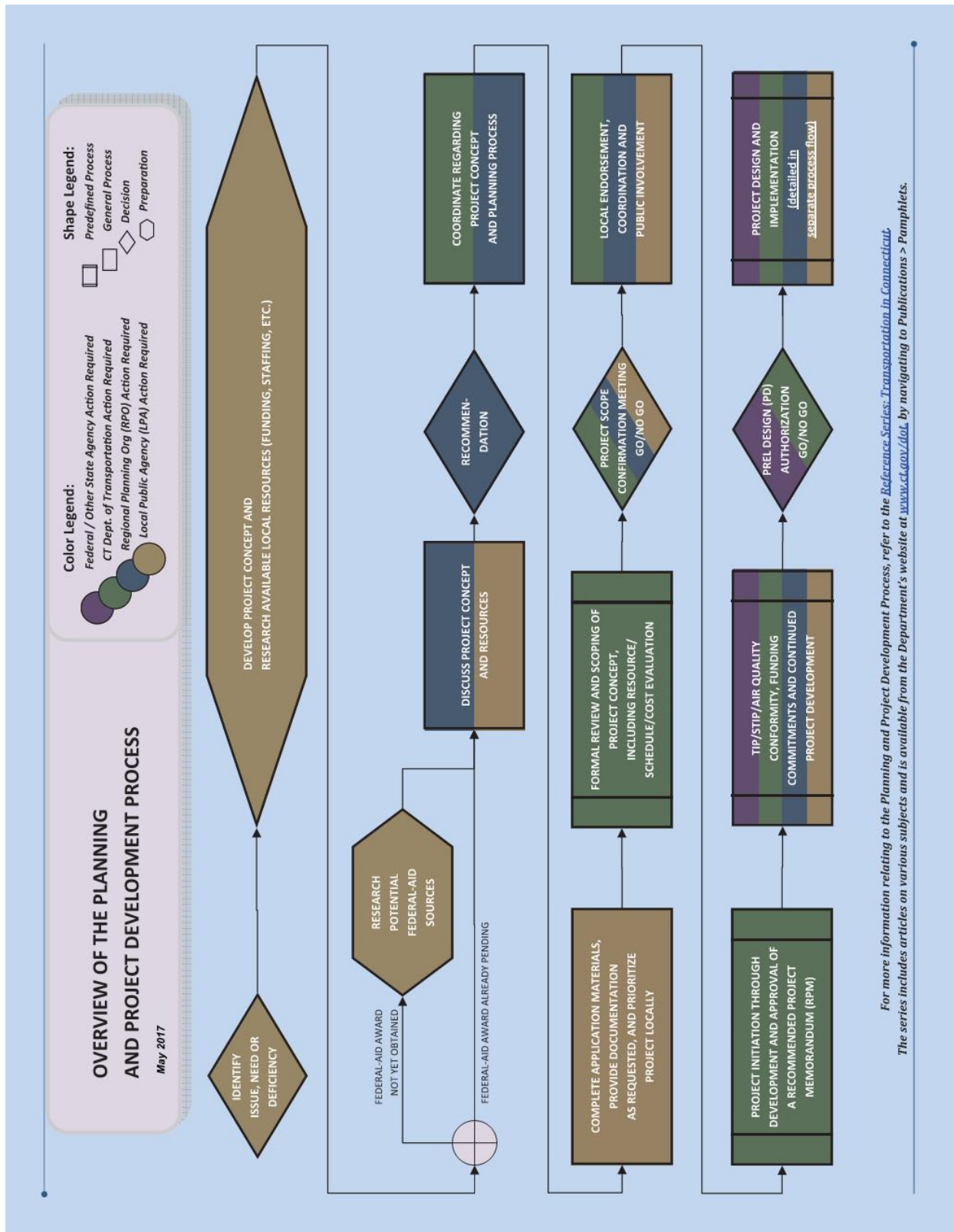


Figure 3. Planning and Project Development Workflow

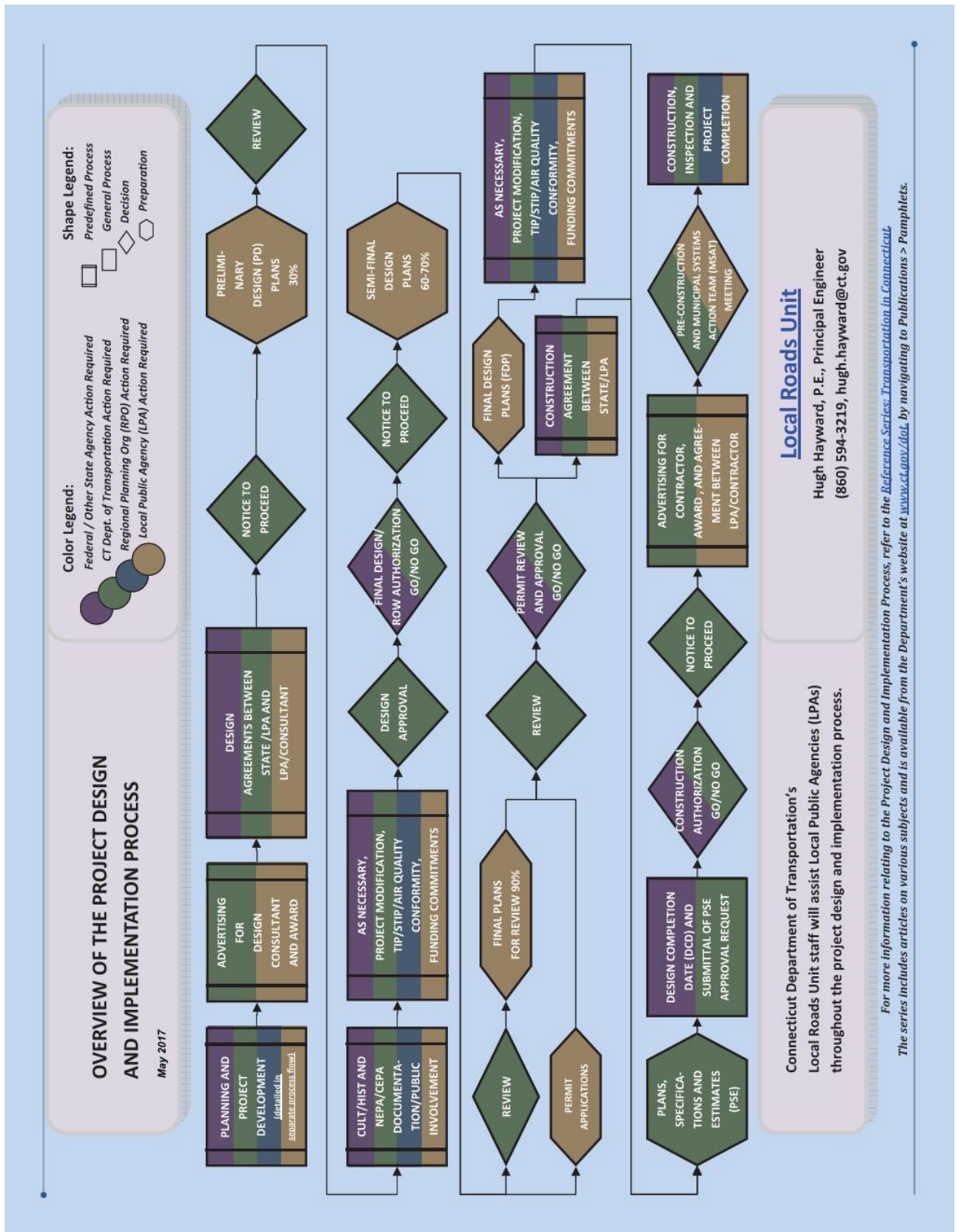


Figure 4. Project Design and Implementation Workflow

Additional Information

The project sponsor should become familiar with the following documents associated with the design development and construction of a Municipally-Advertised Federal-Aid project:

- [Consultant Selection, Negotiation, and Contract Monitoring Procedures for Municipally-Administered Projects](#)
- [Public Involvement Program Guidelines](#)
- [Required Contract Provisions for Federal-Aid Projects](#)
- [Advertising Procedures for Municipally-Advertised Projects](#)
- [Construction Manual version 3.0](#)