



Regional Rural Study

The Colorado Department of Transportation's Division of Transit and Rail is working to develop a Rural Regional Statewide Bus Network that addresses both regional and intercity trip needs by combining private unsubsidized market-based services with subsidized services. The goal is to offer convenient regional mobility between urban and rural areas with connections to air and rail assets that service broader destinations outside of Colorado. In 2004 intercity bus companies like Greyhound cut over 2,500 rural bus stops affecting 8.4 million rural residents due to federal funding cuts that supported these routes. States west of the Mississippi River suffered the most cuts. The recently passed federal transportation authorization (FAST Act) strengthened funding to support the enhancement of rural-urban transit/mobility connections that are part of efforts to incentivize intercity bus service. Public Outreach for the efforts in Colorado will begin in 2016.

Focus on the FAST Act

In December 2015, Congress passed a long term Federal Transportation Authorization. In the coming months we will take a closer look at the FAST Act (Fixing America's Surface Transportation). Last month we looked at the overall funding and structure of the new law. In this issue of Interchange, we will take a closer look at the Block Grant Program and the Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program.

The FAST Act changes the name of the Surface Transportation Program (STP) to the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP). But along with the new name comes other important changes to the program. While all existing project eligibilities remain, several new project types are now eligible for funding from the program including safe routes to schools, workforce development, training and education, projects that facilitate direct inter-modal connection transfers, access into and out of port terminals, costs associated with providing Federal credit assistance through TIFIA loans and public-private partnerships.

The bill also increases local funding from the STBGP. Under MAP-21, 50 percent of STP funding was sub-allocated to metropolitan areas with populations over 200,000 (DRCOG, North Front Range, and Pikes Peak Area). Under the new STBGP, the sub-allocation to these areas increases one percent per year to 55 percent in 2020. This change will result in more funding available to Colorado's three largest MPOs.

FACT Act Series

[January: Block Grants and TIFIA](#)

[February: Freight](#)

[April: Planning and Environmental](#)

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is now rolled into the STBGP as a set-aside and funding is increased from \$820 million in 2015 to \$835 million in 2016 and to \$850 million in 2020. States and MPOs must use a competitive process to allocate the funds to projects.

FAST Act Focus *(Continued from page 1)*

A new provision adds a requirement that MPOs must distribute these funds “in consultation with the State”. MPOs over 200,000 population are also allowed to “flex” up to 50 percent of their STBGP TAP set-aside for use on any STBGP-eligible project.

On the financing side, there are some key changes to the TIFIA federal loan program in the FAST Act. First and foremost, TIFIA is funded at \$275 million in 2016, rising to \$300 million in 2020. This is a sharp reduction from the \$1 billion funding level in 2015, but a new provision that removes the redistribution requirement for unused TIFIA funds helps off-set this reduction.

The bill also expands eligibility to support investments in transit-oriented developments and sets aside a portion of TIFIA funding for small projects with costs of less than \$75 million. Funds that are set aside and not used toward small projects must be made available for any project during the following year. In addition, the cost parameters for eligible projects are modified so that all eligible projects are now expected to cost at least \$50 million, but adds project cost exceptions for transit-oriented development (costs must equal or exceed \$10 million), rural projects (\$10 million to \$100 million), and local infrastructure projects (equal or exceed \$10 million). For more information on the FAST Act or other Federal matters, contact CDOT Federal Liaison Ron Papsdorf at Ron.papsdorf@state.co.us.

Successful I-70 Mountain Express Opening

January 1-3 ranked as the third highest winter weekend traffic count on record for I-70, with 140,014 vehicles. Even with this high traffic count and several incidents along the corridor, speeds remained free-flowing representing a significant improvement over past New Years Day periods. These obstacles were overcome in no small part due to the recent opening of the I-70 Mountain Express Lane. While the toll for the I-70 Mountain Express Lane could range from \$3 to \$30 through this past holiday season, the toll remained at the base fee of \$3 nearly the entire time to allow drivers to learn to use the lane. Tolls have been raised for the following weekends and CDOT will continue to monitor the rates to be responsible to traffic and speeds. The opening and early success of the I-70 Mountain Express Lane is another of CDOT’s incremental coordinated efforts on I-70, such as the widening of the Veterans Memorial Tunnels, the winter driving campaign, and CDOT’s Mountain Radio on COtrip.org.

Opening in December, the new I-70 Mountain Express Lane is a 13-mile toll lane that runs between Empire and Idaho Springs and operates only during peak travel times.

HERE You Go

On Monday, January 11, CDOT and HERE, a leader in mapping and location technology, made a major announcement heralding the first cellular network-based connected vehicle alert system in North America. At the forefront of Intelligent Transportation Systems, the project aims to help maximize driver safety and roadway efficiency along one of the most challenging roads in the United States, the I-70 Mountain Corridor that connects Denver to Colorado’s world-class resorts and mountains. The pilot project will include 1000 participants and launch in winter 2016/2017. This is CDOT’s first industry partnership following the launch of the RoadX program. For more information visit: [RoadX](#).