

Ten Years Forward: An Evaluation of California's Active Transportation Program

Bruce Appleyard, PhD
Mario Carbajal

Madison Swayne, PhD
Nell Ahangarfabrik

Megan Honey

Project 2230
August 2024



Introduction

The Active Transportation Program (ATP) is a competitive grant-based program that serves as a major funding stream for active transportation infrastructure throughout California. The program has multiple goals based on equity, sustainability, and public health. It was the nation's first statewide program dedicated solely to funding active transportation projects, and continues to be the largest public-sector program dedicated solely to active transportation projects. More than a decade after its creation in 2013, an evaluation of the ATP's administrative and scoring processes is crucial to ensure stated goals are being met. This evaluation comes at a vital point, since California faces a looming budget deficit that threatens to reduce funding for the program. Large publicly funded programs like the ATP benefit from formative evaluations of program administrative and scoring processes to identify strengths and weaknesses, inform decision-making, and engage vested parties. This report also provides a framework and before and after studies that can serve as models for measuring success.

Study Methods

Through a formative evaluation including a series of interviews and an extensive review of the documents

and rubrics of the program, this report discusses the ways the ATP functions. It serves as a model for other states, regions, and localities—especially in the sheer size of the program. This report illustrates how staff carry out engagement with stakeholders, the competitiveness of the program and how that likely fosters innovation, coordination with different interests such as the Safe Routes to Schools initiative, and the program's emphasis on social equity. Finally, this research also provides questions and considerations that could lead to program improvements, such as increased funding for projects, increased funding for staff to evaluate applications and conduct outreach, improved data collection and long-term monitoring, and developing a more definitive program evaluation framework to gauge success.

Findings

The Evaluators identified trends in funding and gaps in data collection that warrant consideration by program administrators. The program is designed to fund various types of active transportation projects and programs throughout the state. Using research metrics such as walkability scores and place typology, it was found that most projects that receive funding

are large projects in suburban and urban areas. Through this analysis, gaps in data were discovered that may hinder the accuracy of future analysis, such as limited data on early cycles and the geospatial classification of projects. The formative evaluation of the administrative and scoring documents raised questions for further consideration. Aspects such as the scoring process, application types, and point allocation warrant further discussion, as they may affect project approval in unforeseen ways. Gauging cost-effectiveness is also a major topic, as the program faces possible budget reductions due to looming budget deficits.

A formative evaluation of the Active Transportation Program, this report identifies recommendations and provides a model for future evaluations.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

As an innovative program with a unique tiered scoring scheme and far-ranging goals, the Active Transportation Program can serve as a model for other states seeking to bolster active transportation. This report identified areas where further analysis by program administrators is warranted to ensure goals are being met as cost-effectively as possible. An evaluation of project effectiveness also identified gaps in data that hinder analysis. The study provides a framework and place typology metrics that can be implemented to increase accuracy and gauge effectiveness. Ensuring transportation infrastructure is rooted in equity is an important step toward reparative planning that alleviates the negative effects of a legacy of such movements as auto-dominated planning and racial planning. California's Active Transportation Program prioritizes funding in disadvantaged communities, and this is an important step towards a more equitable future in the transportation sector and ensuring that the many positive health and well-being metrics associated with active transportation are equitably distributed.

About the Authors

Dr. Appleyard is a Professor in City and Regional Planning and Public Administration at SDSU, with expertise in geo-spatial analysis, behavioral economics,

econometrics, applied transportation, land use policy analysis, and in designing and creating livable streets and facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists. Dr. Appleyard is also an Associate Director of the Human Dynamics in the Mobile Age (HDMA) research center, and the Assistant Director of the Active Transportation Research Center, both based at SDSU. Dr. Appleyard is also the SDSU Director of the Center for Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety (CPBS)—the only National UTC dedicated solely to ped/bike safety—and SDSU's Active Transportation Research (ATR) Center.

Mario Carbajal is a Master of City Planning student at San Diego State University. As a graduate assistant at the university, he contributes to studies on transportation and public health.

Dr. Swayne is an Assistant Professor of City Planning in the School of Public Affairs at San Diego State University. She uses mixed methods including big data, automated computing methods, and primary data sources to answer research questions at the intersection of environmental justice and land use.

Nell Ahangarfabrik is a Master of City Planning student at San Diego State University. As a graduate research assistant at the university, she contributes to various projects on transportation and safety.

Megan Honey is a Master of City Planning student at San Diego State University. As a graduate researcher, she contributes to various transportation-related projects.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2230



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.