



## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** TPB Technical Committee  
**FROM:** Jamie Bufkin, TPB Transportation Planner, John Swanson, Consultant  
**SUBJECT:** Project recommended for funding in FY 2027 in Maryland under the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program  
**DATE:** July 1, 2026

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## **SUMMARY**

Under the federal Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) Program, the TPB is responsible for selecting projects using sub-allocated funding for Suburban Maryland, Northern Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The TA Set-Aside, which is part of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, was previously known as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).

For FY 2027 in Maryland, a total of \$2,000,000 was made available for TPB decision-making. The TPB's selection panel has recommended using this entire amount to fund construction for the Heritage Triangle Trail Phase 1 in Montgomery County.

The TPB will be asked to approve the recommendation at its meeting on July 15, 2026.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) Program was established by federal law to fund a variety of smaller-scale transportation projects such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, trails, safe routes to school (SRTS), community improvements, historic preservation, and environmental mitigation. MAP 21, the surface transportation legislation enacted in 2012, established the program as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). The FAST Act of 2015 renamed the program the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) Program. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)/Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), enacted last year, reaffirmed the federal commitment to the program and increased funding for it. Information on the TA Set-Aside is available from FHWA at: [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation\\_alternatives/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/).

The program provides sub-allocated funding for large metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) like the TPB (those MPOs classified as "Transportation Management Areas") to fund local projects. In addition to these sub-allocated funds, a portion of the TA Set-Aside funding is reserved for statewide project selection, which is conducted by the state departments of transportation.

For the National Capital Region, the program offers an opportunity to support and enhance regional planning activities. At the direction of the TPB, our region's TA Set-Aside is framed as a complementary component of the TPB's Transportation Land-Use Connections (TLC) Program, which provides technical assistance funding for small planning studies to TPB member jurisdictions.

The TA Set-Aside offers the region the ability to fund projects that support regional priorities and goals based on Visualize 2050 and the TPB's other policy documents. Applicants from the National Capital Region are asked to show how their projects will serve these priorities when they seek TA Set-Aside funds. The priorities also provide the basis for the selection criteria that the TPB's selection panel uses when it reviews TA Set-Aside applications and recommends projects for funding.

Since the establishment of this program in 2012, the TPB has combined its solicitations with the state departments of transportation in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. As part of this process, TPB staff works with the DOTs to conduct the selection processes.

## FY 2027 SOLICITATION FOR MARYLAND

Maryland conducts its solicitation on an annual basis. This year's solicitation period opened on April 1 and closed on April 30, 2026. For jurisdictions in the National Capital Region, the MDOT application included a supplementary form requesting information about how proposed projects responded to the TPB's regional priorities related to roadway safety, Activity Centers, low-income communities, transit station access, the National Capital Trail Network, and multimodal transportation options.

For the portion of Maryland in the TPB's planning area, MDOT received six eligible applications (see Table 1) representing a total of \$4,553,713 in requested funding. All the applicants made commitments to fund the federally required local match of 20%.

Table 1: FY 2027 TA Set-Aside Applications in Maryland from the National Capital Region

Application Title	Project Sponsor/ Locality	Type of Request	TA Request
Heritage Triangle Trail Phase 1: Dr. Bird Road/Norwood Road Shared Use Path	Montgomery County	Construction	\$2,460,000
Frederick & Pennsylvania Trail Phase 2 and 3 Construction	Frederick County	Construction	\$1,403,200
City of Takoma Park Mobility Plan	City of Takoma Park Housing and Community Development	Non-Infrastructure	\$231,000
Safe Routes to School Data-Driven Community Safety Campaign	City of Takoma Park	Non-Infrastructure	\$219,731
E Gude Drive Sidewalk Study	Mayor and Council of Rockville	Feasibility	\$160,582
South Mountain Connector	Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts/ Frederick County	Feasibility	\$79,200
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$4,553,713</b>

## PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

Consistent with past practice, the TPB convened a selection panel to determine funding recommendations for Maryland's TA Set-Aside funds. TPB staff invited representatives from state DOTs in our region, along with representatives from COG/TPB staff, to participate on this panel.

This year's selection panel participants included:

- Teronda Davis, District Department of Transportation
- Michael Farrell, COG/TPB Staff
- Brittany Voll, Virginia Department of Transportation
- Jamie Bufkin, COG/TPB Staff

MDOT staff member Britney Jackson and MDOT consultant Susan Solo participated in the panel meetings and served as a technical resource for the discussion.

The meeting was facilitated by John Swanson, a former COG staffer who is temporarily working as a consultant managing the TAP selection process, as well as managing other associated programs.

Prior to the panel meetings, individual panelists reviewed and scored applications for a maximum of 160 points. The total score for each project combined each reviewer's professional assessment (80 points) and regional selection criteria (80 points). The professional assessment is based on each panel member's transportation planning expertise, knowledge of transportation planning in the region, evaluation of the project budget, project readiness, and project management experience. The regional criteria are rooted in TPB policies and programs, with the understanding that some projects would not meet all criteria.

The regional selection criteria are listed below:

- *Improve roadway safety (Max 10 points):* Does the application make a compelling case that the project will reduce fatal and serious crashes on the region's roadways? Does the project have a focus on reducing pedestrian fatalities?
- *Expand transportation options (Max 10 points):* Will the project significantly increase transportation options for pedestrians, bicyclists and other non-drivers? Will the transportation benefits of the project be more than just recreational?
- *Support for Regional Activity Centers (Max 10 points):* Does the project enhance walkability and accessibility within or between the region's 141 Activity Centers? Regional Activity Centers are places where jobs and housing are concentrated and it should be easy to walk, bike, or take transit.
- *Access to high-capacity transit and, in particular, in Transit Access Focus Areas (TAFAs) (Max 10 points):* Does the project improve pedestrian and bicycle access in high-capacity transit station areas, and in particular, in Transit Access Focus Areas? Nearly 300 high-capacity transit stations are anticipated in the region by 2045. The TAFAs are a subset of that list. The TAFAs comprise 49 high-capacity station areas that the TPB has prioritized as opportune locations for improving ped/bike access.

- *Access for low-income communities (Max 10 points):* Does the project promote accessibility for low-income communities? In particular, is the project located in a Census tract that has 1.5 times the Federal Poverty level compared to region?
- *Support the National Capital Trail Network (Max 10 pts):* The project supports connections to and completion of the National Capital Trail Network, which is a regional trail network that the TPB approved in 2020.
- *Safe access to schools (10 points):* Does the project enhance safe ped/bike access to schools? (If you believe the project improves access to schools, you may still allocate points under this criterion, even if it is not specifically submitted as an SRTS project.)
- *Increased access for people with disabilities (10 points):* Does the project promote accessibility for people with disabilities?

The selection panel for Maryland met on June 24. To provide a basis for discussion, each panel member provided their scores in advance of the meeting. Staff developed average scores for each project and ranked them by their average scores. It should be emphasized, however, that the final recommendations listed below are the result of discussion and consensus and are not simply based on a sum of the panelists' individual scores.

## **THIS YEAR'S OPTIONS**

In its FY 2027 TA Set-Aside sub-allocation for Maryland, the TPB has \$2,000,000 available, and, as noted above, the total combined funding request was \$4,553,713.

As is clear from the list of applications in Table 1, the requested funding amounts were very uneven. The TPB received two very large applications— which account for more than \$3.5 million, significantly more than the funding available to the TPB. The four other applications requested much smaller amounts— generally about \$230,000 or less.

In addition, MDOT rules shaped the funding decisions available to the selection panel. Since FY 2020, projects in the TA Set-Aside Program have generally been funded in full rather than partially. An MPO can use its entire suballocation toward a single project, and if additional funding is needed, MDOT may provide the remaining amount from statewide TA funds.

As a result, the panel focused on funding projects that could be fully supported within the available funding. If partial awards had been an option, the panel may have been able to distribute funding across a larger number of applications. Given the MDOT rules, the panel essentially faced the following three options:

Option 1: Fund one large construction project – the Heritage Triangle Trail Phase 1 – using the TPB's entire suballocation of \$2,000,000. This would leave \$460,000 unfunded for the project, which MDOT would pick up.

Option 2: Fund the second-largest construction project – the Frederick & Pennsylvania Trail Phase 2 and 3 – and use the remaining funds for most/some of the remaining applications.

Option 3: Do not fund either of the two construction projects and fund the top three remaining applications. This would have amounted to \$611,313, leaving \$1,388,687 on the table. According to MDOT rules, these unspent funds would be rolled over to the statewide TA funds that MDOT will allocate later this year.

Based on a review of readiness for implementation, among other factors, the panel chose the first option above, which would ensure full funding for the Heritage Triangle Trail Phase 1 project.

## **SELECTION OF THE HERITAGE TRIANGLE TRAIL PHASE 1**

The panel is recommending full funding of the Heritage Triangle Trail Phase 1: Dr. Bird Road/Norwood Road Shared Use Path in the amount of \$2,000,000, expending the TPB's entire suballocation. Montgomery County is providing a 20% match of \$615,000. The remaining unfunded portion of the request, \$460,000, will be provided through MDOT's statewide TA allocation, which has been confirmed by MDOT.

This funding award will be used to construct two sections of shared-use path totaling approximately 3,800 feet to complete a separated bike path from MD 108 (Olney Sandy Spring Road) to Ednor Road. The project includes a 10-foot wide shared-use path separated from the roadway by a minimum 6-foot wide grassed green space. The project also provides improvements to the MD 108 intersection at MD 182 (Dr. Bird Road) to provide ADA upgrades, crosswalks, and shorter pedestrian crossings. Improved pedestrian facilities are also provided at the intersection of MD 182 and Ednor Road to provide safe connections to the existing path along MD 182 (Layhill Road) south of the project terminus.

This trail is part of the larger Heritage Triangle Trail network, which is planned to connect four heritage tourism destinations, including the Underground Railroad Experience, Woodlawn Manor, the Sandy Spring Museum, and the Olney Theater. Importantly, the project will provide safer pedestrian and bicycle access to several schools (Good Counsel High School, Sherwood Elementary, and Sandy Spring Friends School). The project will also allow nearby residents to safely access businesses along the trail corridor without a car.

The project has proven to be prepared for construction. The project scope includes required stormwater management facilities and well as other frontage improvements coordinated with Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), the project plans are fully complete, and all permits and permissions have been obtained or are conditionally approved awaiting final signed plans. These include SHA Access Permit requirements for the project as it is located on a state highway, Forest Conservation approvals for tree removals and protection, Historic Area Work Permits for work proposed on Woodlawn Manor, and stormwater management and sediment control permits. Utility relocation design is complete, and Washington Gas is ready to relocate the utility line. Most of the temporary and permanent easements have been secured with negotiations far underway with the two remaining property owners.

The panel's reasons for selecting the Heritage Triangle Trail included the following:

- From conversations with MDOT's technical staff and consultant on project readiness and previous project management experiences, the Heritage Triangle Trail was the only construction application that was properly ready for construction. The project's readiness will

allow for the project to begin construction relatively soon, putting Federal money to use quickly and effectively.

- The selection panel was excited to be fully funding a project for implementation and not leave money on the table in the context of the current uncertainty about the future of Federal grant programs.
- The trail will connect heritage sites, creating a unique recreational and cultural experience.
- The project will allow students in the community to walk or bike safely to school.
- The project will connect existing trails that have the potential to be added to the National Capital Trail Network.

### **PRIORITIZATION OF UNFUNDED PROJECTS**

The panel extensively discussed Options 2 and 3 above, which would have funded several other applications, but not the very large Heritage Triangle Trail. In their review, the panel scored several projects very highly, but there was consensus that all the available funds should be used for a construction project that can demonstrate functional governance while also benefiting a community.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The TPB will be asked to approve the selection panel's recommendation at the board meeting on July 15, 2026.

Following the board's action, TPB staff will forward information regarding the approved project to MDOT for actions at the state level.

For more information regarding the TPB's role in these processes, please contact Jamie Bufkin ([jbufkin@mwkog.org](mailto:jbufkin@mwkog.org)) or John Swanson ([jswanson@mwkog.org](mailto:jswanson@mwkog.org)).