



Environmental Update

Air Quality Opportunities in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)

What is TEA-21?

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) authorizes expenditures of \$218 billion from 1998 to 2003 to fund the development and maintenance of the nation's transportation infrastructure, while protecting the environment and enhancing economic growth. The largest public works program ever authorized, it will have a significant impact on the air quality programs and issues being addressed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and state and local agencies.

TEA-21 contains specific programs and provisions that offer great potential for air quality improvement and other environmental benefits. These provisions, highlighted below, encourage the following measures: reduced single occupant vehicle travel; lower vehicle emissions rates; alternative travel patterns and behavior that reduce vehicle miles traveled; and integrated air quality policies to reduce air pollution from the transportation sector. States and local communities can take advantage of these provisions to obtain federal funding for transportation projects that include these and other measures.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program

Authorized funding for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program increased from approximately \$1.1 billion per year under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), to approximately \$1.5 billion per year under TEA-21. Funding is still targeted to ozone nonattainment areas, but includes carbon monoxide and particulate matter nonattainment areas as well. The law also makes maintenance areas and the nonattainment areas newly designated under the 1997 revisions to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards eligible for CMAQ funds. TEA-21 requires DOT and EPA to request the National Academy of Sciences to study the air quality benefits of CMAQ.

Environmental Streamlining

TEA-21 requires earlier and improved coordination of all environmental reviews for transportation projects. Under the new process federal agencies will work together more closely in considering potential impacts of transportation projects on air quality plans, endangered species, storm water permitting, the National Environmental Policy Act compliance, and wetlands. The Secretary of Transportation is to establish a coordinated environmental review process for federal agencies, ensuring that major transportation projects are advanced within time frames determined cooperatively with the other federal agencies.

Surface Transportation Program (STP)

The Surface Transportation Program (STP) provides flexible funding that allows states and localities to shift funds among various program categories to invest in a wide variety of transportation projects, including but not limited to highways. TEA-21 expands and clarifies STP eligibilities, and includes environmental projects such as natural habitat mitigation, storm water retrofit, programs to reduce extreme cold starts of vehicles and capital and operational improvements for infrastructure-based intelligent transportation systems.

Transportation Enhancements Improving Environmental Quality and Safety

Transportation enhancement activities continue to be funded through a 10 percent set-aside from STP funds and a new one percent set-aside from FTA's urban formula grant funds. The list of eligible projects include, but are not limited to: bicycle and pedestrian pathways, safety education activities for pedestrians and bicyclists, transit improvements, rails-to-trails conversions, and other projects that improve the environmental qualities of existing transportation facilities.

Transit Benefits to Support Commuter Choice

TEA-21 changes the Internal Revenue Code to help level the playing field between parking benefits and commuting benefits (Commuter Choice). For employ-

ees, the limit on nontaxable transit and vanpool benefits will increase from \$65 per month to \$100 per month in 2002. The changes also make it easier for an employer to offer transit and vanpool benefits or cash to an employee in lieu of free parking.

Value Pricing: Reducing Congestion and Emissions, Increasing Efficiency

Replacing the Congestion Pricing Pilot Program authorized by ISTEA, the Value Pricing Pilot Program provides funding for pilot projects that establish pricing strategies for access to roads and bridges. Such programs are aimed at reducing congestion and air pollution. The program allows some exceptions to the usual rules on federally funded highway projects, including the use of tolls on the Interstate System or permitting vehicles with fewer than two occupants to operate in high occupancy vehicle lanes, so long as consideration is given to potential impacts on low-income drivers.

Community Livability and Preservation

The Transportation and Community and System Preservation (TCSP) Pilot Program encourages areas to investigate the relationships between transportation, community and system preservation, and private sector-based initiatives. The program provides funding, through a competitive grant process, to state and local governments and to metropolitan planning organizations for discretionary planning and implementation, with the aim of demon-

strating the feasibility and desirability of coordinating local transportation, environmental, and land-use policies and programs. TEA-21 authorizes \$20 million in the 1999 fiscal year and \$25 million in subsequent years for this pilot program.

For Further Information

For a full text of TEA-21, DOT fact sheets, CMAQ Program data, and outreach information, visit the DOT's website at:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov>.

For more information on transportation and air quality programs, visit the EPA's Transportation Air Quality (TRAQ) Center website at:

<http://www.epa.gov/oms/traq>

or call the TRAQ Center Information Request Line at:

(734) 214-4100.