

# **APPROACHES TO IMPROVING THE GRANT APPROVAL PROCESS FOR TRANSIT PROJECTS**

## **DRAFT FINAL REPORT**

Prepared for  
NCHRP Project 20-65, Task 51  
Approaches to Improving the Grant Approval Process for Transit Projects

National Cooperative Highway Research Program  
Transportation Research Board  
of  
The National Academies

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**November 2014**

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## **AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

John Overman of the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) was the project's principal investigator. Lauren Cochran of TTI compiled the literature review and interviewed appropriate department of transportation (DOT) staff to evaluate the current grant approval process for transit projects and to identify potential improvements. Cochran and Overman co-authored this digest.

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## **SUMMARY**

Transit funding assistance comes from federal, state, and local sources. Federal funds include formula and discretionary grant programs driven by laws and regulations. Each funding program has specific requirements, funding cycles, application, and award processes.

The FTA has awarded and managed federal financial assistance for transit grants through its Transportation Electronic Awards Management (TEAM) system since 1998. As review and approval processes have evolved to meet changing demands and programs, processes have also become more complicated. FTA is preparing to replace TEAM with an online portal called Transit Award Management System (TrAMS).

This research identified and examined approaches to improve the FTA grant approval processes for transit projects. Researchers sought to identify and analyze different grant program models, approaches, and practices used by other agencies within the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) and other relevant grant-making programs. The research also identifies existing process limitations and barriers, benefits, and streamlining opportunities.

To accomplish the project objectives, researchers identified and interviewed agencies that have expedited approval processes using various process tools such as programmatic agreements, pre-defined scopes of work, standardized specifications, recurring and routine procurements, standards for other recurring and routine activities, and grouping projects with similar scopes of work. Based on the interview responses, researchers present the alternative methods and streamlining opportunities, evaluate a selection of these methods, and then present and evaluate a selection of other (non-FTA) DOT grant processes that have been shown to improve grant approval processes.



## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

Section 1 presents the research objectives and scope, and the organization of the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Task 51 Final Report.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE**

This research identified and examined approaches to improve the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant approval processes for transit projects. Researchers sought to identify and analyze different grant program models, approaches, and practices used by other agencies within the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) and other relevant grant-making programs. The research also identifies existing process limitations and barriers, benefits, and streamlining opportunities.

To accomplish the project objectives, researchers identified agencies that have expedited approval processes using various process tools such as programmatic agreements, pre-defined scopes of work, standardized specifications, recurring and routine procurements, standards for other recurring and routine activities, and grouping projects with similar scopes of work.

### **ORGANIZATION OF NCHRP 51 REPORT**

Researchers organize the remainder of NCHRP Task 51 Final Report as follows:

- Section 2 describes federal funding for transit including authorizing legislation, apportionment, funding flow, and funding programs. For each funding program, researchers describe the recipient eligibility, eligible activities, and changes under Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) that may affect the grant approval process for transit projects.
- Section 3 presents the current FTA grant approval process for transit projects including an overview of the grant life cycle, Transportation Electronic Awards Management (TEAM) system, Grants.gov, and new Transit Award Management System (TrAMS) online grants management portal.
- Section 4 presents the interview methodology, interview plan, interview process, and resulting options for improvements to the grant approval process for transit projects.
- Section 5 presents the methodology researchers used to synthesize alternative grant approval processes and methods. Researchers then present the alternative methods and streamlining opportunities, evaluate a selection of these methods, and then present and evaluate selection of other (non-FTA) DOT grant processes that have been shown to improve the grant approval process.

## **SECTION 2: FEDERAL FUNDING FOR TRANSIT**

Researchers obtained information for Section 2 during Task 1: Review the Current FTA grant approval process for transit projects. Researchers used the following methodology to complete Task 1:

- Conduct a literature review of academic, industry, and FTA resources, guidance, and circulars in order to assess the current FTA grant approval processes.
- Prepare key questions about the process from the review.
- Create figures to illustrate the processes where practical.

### **FEDERAL AUTHORIZATION OVERVIEW**

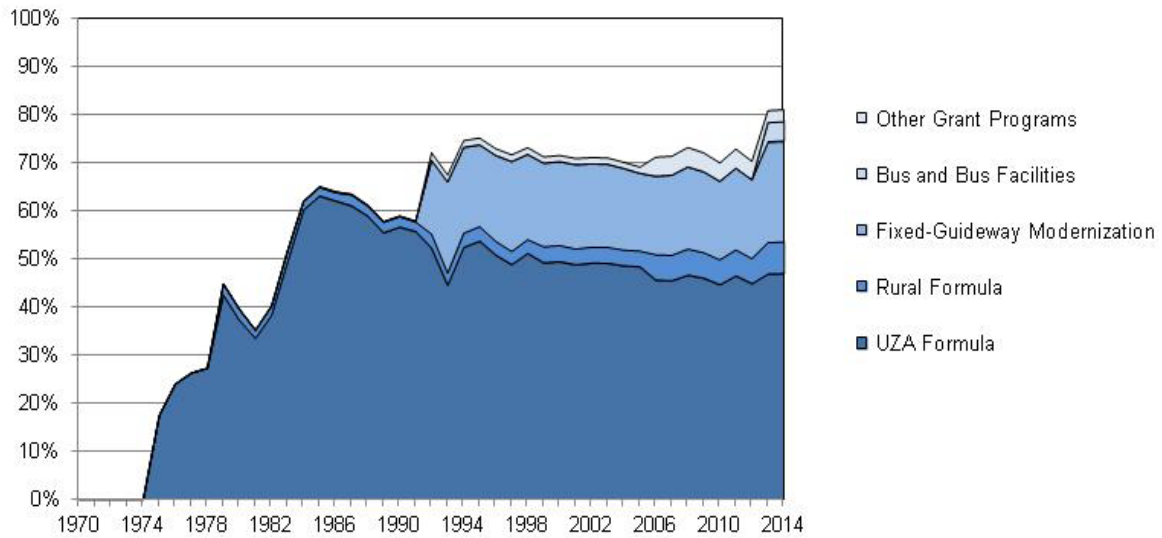
Transit funding assistance comes from federal, state, and local sources. Federal funds include formula and discretionary grant programs driven by laws and regulations. Each funding program has specific requirements, funding cycles, and award processes. This report focuses on federal funds for transit, apportioned by the FTA, the federal agency most involved in funding and grants administration for transit.

The federal government, through FTA, provides financial assistance to develop new transit systems and improve, maintain, and operate existing systems. FTA is one of 10 modal administrations within the US DOT and is headed by an Administrator appointed by the President of the United States. FTA is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and has 10 regional offices and five metropolitan offices. These offices assist transit agencies in the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa (Federal Transit Administration 2008).

FTA oversees thousands of grants to hundreds of state and local transit providers, primarily through its 10 regional offices. As a recipient of program funding, the designated recipient is responsible for administering and managing grants in compliance with all relevant federal regulations. The designated recipient is also responsible for overseeing the funds that it passes through to its subrecipients. The designated recipient must ensure that subrecipients comply with FTA requirements (Knapp 2014).

Transit agencies receive funds under Title 49, Chapter 53 of the United States Code (USC). MAP-21 is the two-year federal transportation legislation that authorizes funding for public transportation and highway projects. President Obama signed MAP-21 into law on July 6, 2012, and the legislation was effective for two years, through September 30, 2014. Congress has since passed a continuing resolution. MAP-21 modifies the previous transportation legislation Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

MAP-21 provides funding for the US DOT and its subsidiary agencies. The FTA apportions funding for transit systems in urbanized and rural areas and for programs for the elderly and people with disabilities. FTA distributes funding and provides technical support and oversight for transit programs on behalf of the US DOT. The FTA distributes funds through formula and discretionary (competitive grant) programs. The total MAP-21 authorization for transit was \$10.578 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2013 and \$10.695 billion in FY 2014. Researchers note that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also administers funding programs for transit. Figure 1 shows the percent of total transit authorization funds distributed by formula from 1974 to 2014.



Source: (Cherrington 2013)

**Figure 1. Percent of Total Transit Authorization Distributed by Formulas 1974–2014.**

Table 1 shows MAP-21 funding authorizations for transit by program. The total MAP-21 authorization is \$10.578 billion in FY 2013 and \$10.695 billion in FY 2014. The bulk of MAP-21 authorizations are formula grant programs funded from the Mass Transit Account, \$8.478 billion in 2013 and \$8.595 billion in FY 2014. General Revenues fund other MAP-21 programs, authorized at \$2.1 billion per year in FY 2013 and FY 2014.

**Table 1. MAP-21 Transit Authorizations by Program.**

	<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>FY 2013 (\$M)</b>	<b>FY 2014 (\$M)</b>	<b>Two-Year Total (\$M)</b>
<b>SECTION OF 49 USC</b>	<b>Formula Grant Programs Total (Funded from Mass Transit Account)</b>	<b>\$8,478.00</b>	<b>\$8,595.00</b>	<b>\$17,073.00</b>
§ 5305	Planning	\$126.90	\$128.80	\$255.70
§ 5307	Urbanized Area Formula	\$4,397.95	\$4,458.65	\$8,856.60
§ 5310	Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities	\$254.80	\$258.30	\$513.10
§ 5311	Rural Area Basic Formula	\$537.51	\$545.64	\$1,083.15
§ 5311 (b)(3)	Rural Transp. Assistance Program	\$11.99	\$12.16	\$24.15
§ 5311 (c)(1)	Public Transp. on Indian Reservations	\$30.00	\$30.00	\$60.00
§ 5311 (c)(2)	Appalachian Development Public Transp.	\$20.00	\$20.00	\$40.00
§ 5318	Bus Testing Facility	\$3.00	\$3.00	\$6.00
§ 5322 (d)	National Transit Institute	\$5.00	\$5.00	\$10.00
§ 5335	National Transit Database	\$3.85	\$3.85	\$7.70
§ 5337	State of Good Repair*	\$2,136.30	\$2,165.90	\$4,302.20
§ 5339	Bus and Bus Facilities Formula*	\$422.00	\$427.80	\$849.80
§ 5340	Growing States and High Density States	\$518.70	\$525.90	\$1,044.60
§ 20005 (b)	MAP-21 Pilot Program for TOD Planning*	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$20.00
<b>SECTION OF 49 USC</b>	<b>Other Programs (Funded from General Revenues)</b>	<b>\$2,100.00</b>	<b>\$2,100.00</b>	<b>\$4,200.00</b>
§ 5309	Fixed Guideway Capital Investment**	\$1,907.00	\$1,907.00	\$3,814.00
§ 5312	Research, Develop., Demo., Deploy.**	\$70.00	\$70.00	\$140.00
§ 5313	TCRP	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$14.00
§ 5314	Tech. Assistance and Standards Develop.**	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$14.00
§ 5322	Human Resources and Training**	\$5.00	\$5.00	\$10.00
§ 5324	Emergency Relief*	(a)	(a)	(a)
§ 5326	Transit Asset Management*	\$1.00	\$1.00	\$2.00
§ 5327	Project Management Oversight	(b)	(b)	(b)
§ 5329	Public Transportation Safety*	\$5.00	\$5.00	\$10.00
§ 5334	FTA Administration	\$98.00	\$98.00	\$196.00
<b>Total All Programs</b>		<b>\$10,578.00</b>	<b>\$10,695.00</b>	<b>\$21,273.00</b>

(a) Such sums as are necessary.

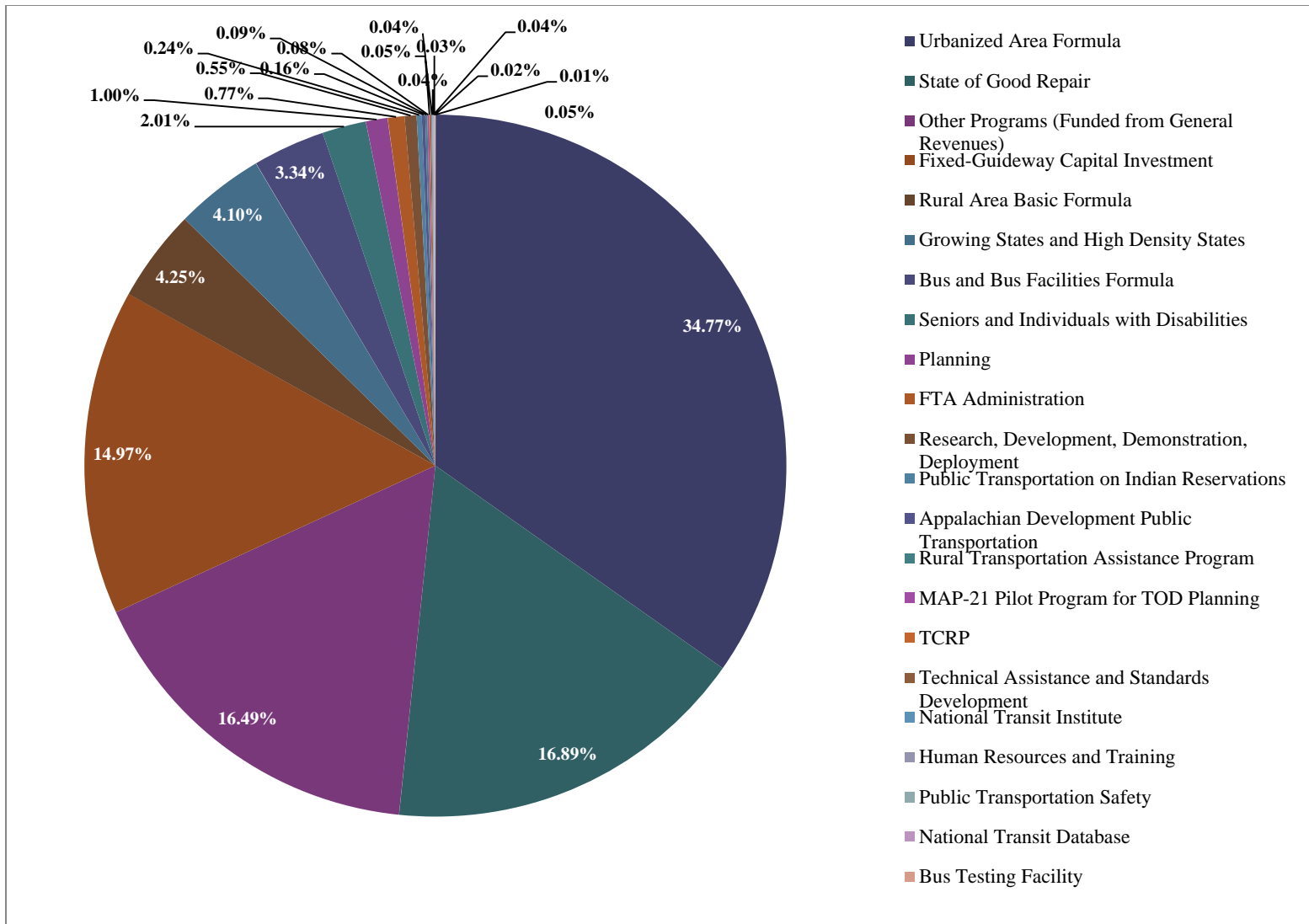
(b) Project management oversight funds are a variable percentage takedown from capital grant programs.

\*New program under MAP-21

\*\*Modified under MAP-21

Source: (American Public Transportation Association 2012).

Figure 2 shows authorization level by program type as a percent of total (two year) transit authorization funding. The color-coded legend in Figure 2 lists the programs in order from highest to lowest percentage of total transit Authorization funding. The Urbanized Area Formula Program receives the largest Federal Authorization (34.77 percent). The State of Good Repair (SOGR) Formula Program (16.89 percent) and Fixed Guideway Capital Investment (16.49 percent) are the next largest authorizations.



Source: (American Public Transportation Association 2012), Analysis by TTI.

**Figure 2. Authorization Level by Program Type (as a Percent of Total Transit Authorization).**

Table 2 shows funding share by primary purpose as a percent of total authorization. The greatest drop in percent share in MAP-21 is for Bus and Bus Facility program funds, which dropped from 9.9 percent of the federal program in FY 2012 to 4.57 percent in FY 2013 and FY 2014.

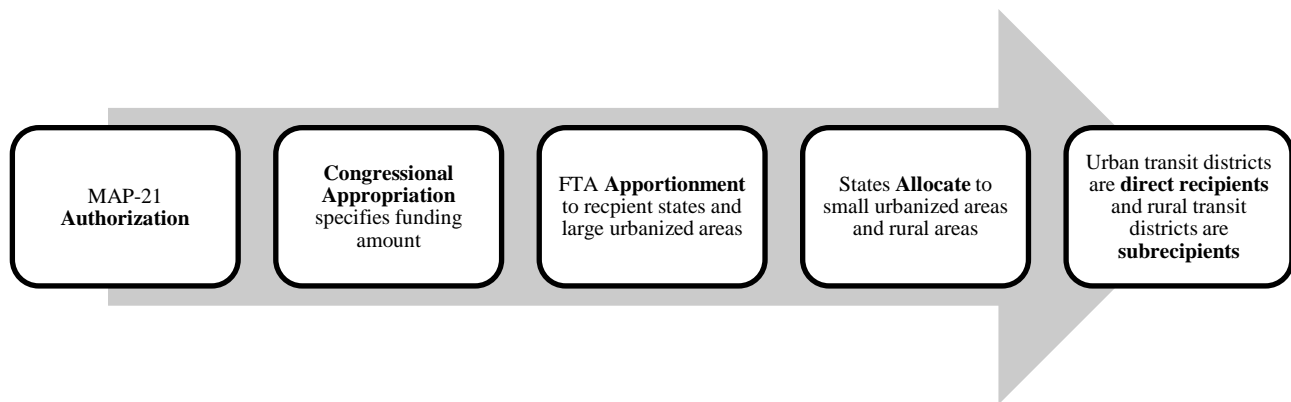
**Table 2. MAP-21 Authorization Levels by Primary Purpose (as a Percent of Total Authorization).**

Primary Purpose	Section(s) of 49 USC	SAFETEA-LU	MAP-21	
		FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Urbanized Area formula	5307; 5340	43.5%	45.7%	45.8%
Rural Formula	5311; 5340	5.1%	6.4%	6.5%
Fixed Guideway Capital Investment	5309	18.7%	18.0%	17.8%
State of Good Repair	5337	15.9%	19.6%	19.7%
Bus and Bus Facilities	5339; 5337	9.9%	4.6%	4.6%
Elderly and Disabled	5310	3.7%	2.4%	2.4%
All Other Grant Programs and Administration		3.2%	3.2%	3.2%
Total Funding		100%	100%	100%

Source: (Cherrington 2013)

## FUNDING FLOW

Understanding the flow of federal funds to designated recipients and subrecipients is important to understanding the approval process for transit projects. Figure 2 shows how federal transit funds flow to recipients and subrecipients. The US Congress appropriates transit funds legislatively authorized under MAP-21. The FTA apportions the funds to designated recipients, either states or large urbanized areas. For example in Texas, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is responsible for allocating FTA funds to small urban areas and non-urbanized (rural) areas. The policy of TxDOT is to designate the urban transit district for each small urban area as the direct recipient of the FTA funds originally apportioned by FTA formula. TxDOT allocates federal funding to rural transit districts as subrecipients according to a specific funding formula for transit.



*Source: TTI.*

**Figure 3. Flow of Federal Transit Funds to Small Urban and Rural Transit Districts.**

### *Role of States*

States are the designated recipients for some funding programs apportioned by the FTA. States must develop and submit a State Management Plan (SMP) to FTA for the Section 5310 and Section 5311 programs. The SMP details the policies and procedures used to administer the transit grant programs and subrecipients use the plan as a guide. States must also submit a Program of Projects (POP) to FTA. The POP lists all subrecipients and identifies the projects for which the state is applying for grant funding. The POP includes a brief description of each project, total project cost, and the requested federal share. States must also ensure that their subrecipients are involved in a coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning process (Knapp 2014).

## **FUNDING PROGRAMS**

FTA funding programs are either formula programs or discretionary programs. Grant programs are the funds that designated recipients submit applications for projects. FTA apportions formula grants to designated recipients by a formula unique to each grant program. Discretionary funds are designated for specific projects or recipients as defined by Congress or distributed for specific projects according to criteria defined by FTA. These discretionary funds are awarded on a competitive basis.

### *Common Characteristics*

NCHRP Web Only Document 203 notes that each grant funding program is different, though some characteristics are common across grant programs, including (Knapp 2014):

- Eligible expenses vary by program (capital, operating, or planning).
- Eligible recipients and subrecipients vary by program (states, local government authorities, private non-profits, public transit operators, etc.).
- All require the recipient to manage the grant approval process.
- All have local match requirements.
- All have post-award reporting requirements.
- Some have National Transit Database reporting requirements.

- All involve FTA oversight reviews. The two comprehensive reviews are the Triennial Review (S. 5307 recipients) and the State Management Review.
- Must meet FTA and other federal requirements including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Buy America, and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise.

The type of transit grant affects the application, approval, application, and post-award management processes. In the subsequent subsection, researchers describe the following six transit grant programs in detail, as these programs are the largest percentages of funds distributed by FTA for which grantees must apply:

1. Section 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula.
2. Section 5311 – Nonurbanized (Rural) Area Formula.
3. Section 5339 – Bus and Bus Facilities.
4. Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities.
5. Section 5337 – State of Good Repair.
6. Section 5309 – Fixed Guideway Capital Investment.

### *Section 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula Program*

The Urbanized Area Formula Program (Section 5307) is the largest source of transit funding and uses a formula to authorize transit funds to 497 urbanized areas (UZAs) in the United States. An UZA is a contiguous urbanized area of 50,000 or more population that meets criteria administrated by the US Census Bureau. Based on legislative formulas, FTA apportions UZA formula funds to designated recipients,<sup>1</sup> which then allocate funds to state and local governmental authorities, including public transportation providers ( Federal Transit Administration n.d.).

The Section 5307 funding formula for small urbanized areas is based on population, population density, low-income populations within the urbanized area (a new funding factor under MAP-21), and an allocation for Section 5340 Growing States. Under the Section 5340 formula, funds in the Growing States category are apportioned based on state population forecasts for 15 years beyond the most recent decennial census. Amounts apportioned for each state are then allocated to urbanized and rural areas based on the state’s urban/rural population ratio.

Capital expenditures, planning, and job access reverse commute (JARC) projects are the designated use of Section 5307 funds.<sup>2</sup> Operating expenses are eligible in certain circumstances including equipment costs and facilities for public transportation in UZAs with populations fewer than 200,000. UZAs with populations over 200,000 can also use Section 5307 funds up to a certain percentage of operating expenses, with certain restrictions. Other eligible operating expenses include preventative maintenance and paratransit service, with certain restrictions.

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<sup>1</sup> Designated Recipient: (A) an entity designated, in accordance with the planning process under S. 5303 and S. 5304, by the Governor of a State, responsible local officials, and publicly owned operators of public transportation, to receive and apportion amounts under S. 5336 to urbanized areas of 200,000 or more in population; or (B) a State or regional authority, if the authority is responsible under the laws of a State for a capital project and for financing and directly providing public transportation (Knapp 2014).

<sup>2</sup> JARC projects are capital, planning, and operating expenses for projects that transport low-income individuals to and from jobs and activities related to employment, and reverse commute projects.



FTA sets aside a percentage of Section 5307 funds for additional Small Transit Intensive City apportionments to eligible small urban areas. FTA apportions these funds to UZAs with a population less than 200,000 that operate at a level of service equal to or above the industry average level of service for all UZAs with a population of at least 200,000 but not more than 999,999. FTA allocates the funds based on level of service and performance in one or more of six categories: passenger miles per vehicle revenue mile, passenger miles per vehicle revenue hour, vehicle revenue miles per capita, vehicle revenue hours per capita, passenger miles per capita, and passengers per capita.

### **Changes to Section 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula Program under MAP-21**

The Section 5307 Program remains largely unchanged under MAP-21 with a few exceptions that may affect the grant approval process for transit projects. MAP-21 rolls JARC funds into each UZA's Section 5307 formula funding. Activities include operating assistance with a 50 percent local match for job access and reverse commute activities. In addition, the UZA formula now includes the number of low-income individuals as a factor. There is no floor or ceiling on the amount of funds that can be spent on JARC activities under MAP-21. The consolidation of the Section 5307 and JARC programs may result in fewer steps in the grant approval process since JARC projects do not require a separate application.

### ***Section 5311 – Non-Urbanized (Rural) Area Formula Grants***

The Section 5311 program provides capital, planning, and operating assistance to support public transportation in rural areas, defined as areas with fewer than 50,000 residents. Section 5311 also includes Section 5340 funding for Growing and High Density States. Funding is based on a formula that uses land area, population, and low-income population. Funds are apportioned to states, and states then allocate to providers of public transportation in non-urbanized areas.

Each state must spend no less than 15 percent of its annual apportionment for the development and support of intercity bus transportation, unless it can certify, after consultation with affected intercity bus service providers, that the intercity bus service needs of the state are being met adequately.

A portion of the Section 5311 is set aside for the Section 5311(b)(3) Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP). RTAP supports training, technical assistance, research, and related support services for states, local governments, and rural transit providers.

Eligible Section 5311 designated recipients are states and Indian tribes. Subrecipients are state or local government authorities, nonprofit organizations, public transit operators, or intercity bus service operators that receive funds indirectly through a recipient.<sup>3</sup>

### **Changes to Section 5311 – Rural Area Formula Grants under MAP-21**

The Section 5311 program remains largely unchanged under MAP-21 with a few exceptions that may affect the grant approval process for transit projects. Activities eligible under the JARC program, which provided services to low-income individuals to access jobs, are now eligible

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<sup>3</sup> Subrecipient: An entity that receives FTA funds via a pass-through agreement with a direct recipient or designated recipient, whereby the original recipient remains responsible for compliance with all terms, conditions and requirements associated with the grant. A state's FTA subrecipients are typically local governmental authorities, private nonprofit organizations, and operators of public transportation (Knapp 2014).

under the Rural Area Formula program. In addition, the formula now includes the number of low-income individuals as a factor. There is no floor or ceiling on the amount of funds that can be spent on job access and reverse commute activities pursuant to MAP-21. Like the consolidation of the Section 5307 program and JARC, the consolidation of the Section 5311 and JARC programs may result in fewer steps in the grant approval process since JARC projects do not require a separate application.

### *Section 5339 – Bus and Bus Facilities Program*

The Bus and Bus Facilities Formula Grant Program replaces the previous Section 5309 discretionary Bus and Bus Facilities Program. Bus and Bus Facilities is a new program under MAP-21 and is a capital funding program to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase buses and related equipment, and construct bus-related facilities.

Eligible recipients are states that operate or allocate funding to fixed route bus operators and designated recipients. Subrecipients are public agencies or private non-profit organizations engaged in public transportation (American Public Transportation Association 2012). Section 5339 funds are apportioned to states (for all urban areas under 200,000 and all rural areas) and to large urbanized areas (over 200,000).

Section 5339 has two distributions. Each year, the national distribution is \$1.25 million to each state and \$500,000 to each territory. The second distribution uses population and service factors to distribute the remaining funds to UZAs. Eighty-seven percent of the remaining funds go to UZAs with populations over 200,000. The federal match for the Bus and Bus Facilities Program is 80 percent.

### **Changes to Section 5339 – Bus and Bus Facilities Program under MAP-21**

The Bus and Bus Facilities Program changed from a discretionary to formula program and dropped from 10 percent of the federal program (\$976 million) in FY 2012 to 5 percent (\$421 million) in FY 2013. Designated recipients receive a smaller funding allocation due to a smaller program. Under MAP-21, transit agencies and states no longer have the ability to pursue discretionary funding for specific projects. Funds are eligible to be transferred by the state to supplement urban (5307) and rural (5311) formula grant programs (Federal Transit Administration n.d.). The Section 5339 program change from a discretionary to a formula program may result in fewer steps in the grant application process for states, because states can no longer apply for bus and bus facilities projects.

### *Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities*

Section 5310 funds are formula funds for transit programs to enhance the mobility of seniors and individuals with disabilities beyond traditional public transportation services and ADA complementary paratransit services.<sup>4</sup> Projects selected for funding under the Section 5310 Program must be included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. The competitive selection process, which was required under the former

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<sup>4</sup> Paratransit means transit service required by the ADA for individuals with disabilities who are unable to use the fixed route transit system.

New Freedom program, is now optional. At least 55 percent of program funds must be spent on the types of capital projects eligible under the former Section 5310—public transportation projects planned, designed, and carried out to meet the special needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities when public transportation is insufficient, inappropriate, or unavailable. Purchase of service is an eligible expense to be reimbursed as a capital project (80 percent federal funds). The remaining 45 percent may be used for operations. Eligible projects include public transportation that exceed the requirements of ADA; public transportation projects that improve access to fixed-route service and decrease reliance by individuals with disabilities on complementary paratransit; and alternatives to public transportation that assist seniors and individuals with disabilities. The federal share for capital expenses (including public transportation service acquisition) is 80 percent, with a 20 percent local match required. The federal share for operating expenses is 50 percent, with a 50 percent local match required.

### **Changes to Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities under MAP-21**

Under SAFETEA-LU, the FTA apportioned Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities funding to the state for allocation. Under MAP-21, the FTA apportions Section 5310 funds to states for all areas with populations less than 200,000 and directly to large urbanized areas with populations over 200,000. This change may result in fewer grant application (and subsequent management) steps for states because the FTA distributes Section 5310 funds directly to large urbanized areas and not to the state.

MAP-21 consolidated the Elderly and Disabled Section 5310 Program and the New Freedom Section 5317 into the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program. The consolidation of these two programs may result in fewer steps in the grant approval process since New Freedom projects do not require a separate application.

### *Section 5337 – State of Good Repair*

MAP-21 establishes a new formula program to maintain public transportation systems in a state of good repair (SGR). The SOGR program is the second largest percent share of the total transit authorization and replaces the Fixed Guideway Modernization Program (Section 5309). Two portions make up the SOGR program: 1) fixed guideway systems including rail, a fixed catenary system, bus rapid transit (BRT), and passenger ferries (97 percent of SOGR authorization) and 2) high intensity buses operating in high occupancy vehicle lanes (3 percent of SOGR authorization).<sup>5</sup> Total funding for the SOGR program is \$2.1 billion in FY 2013.

State and local government authorities in urbanized areas with fixed guideway public transportation facilities operating for at least seven years are eligible recipients (Federal Transit Administration n.d.). Grants go to designated recipients in UZAs. Projects are limited to replacement and rehabilitation, or capital projects required to maintain public transportation systems in a state of good repair. Capital projects include:

- Rolling stock.
- Track.

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<sup>5</sup> High Intensity Motorbus means public transportation provided on a facility with access for other high occupancy vehicles.

- Line equipment and structures.
- Signals and communications.
- Power equipment and substations.
- Passenger stations and terminals.
- Security equipment and systems.
- Maintenance facilities and equipment.
- Operational support equipment.
- Development and implementation of transit asset management plan.
- Replacement and rehabilitation projects.

### **Changes to Section 5337 – State of Good Repair under MAP-21**

MAP-21 emphasizes SGR, both through the creation of the 5337 program and by requiring that all FTA grantees develop a transit asset management (TAM) plan to ensure transit systems are maintained in an SGR. FTA is currently defining SGR based on a public comment. Next, FTA will establish performance measures, and recipients will be required to set targets. Each year, recipients will report asset inventories and condition assessments. The TAM process goal is to inform investment prioritization at the individual provider level, regional, and statewide levels. The designated recipient will be responsible for defining TAM requirements for small urban and rural transit providers. While this program may not affect the grant application process, the requirement will likely require additional reporting to FTA by the designated recipient.

### *Section 5309 – Fixed Guideway Capital Investment*

The Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grants Program reforms the New Starts Program (Section 5309). The program awards grants on a competitive basis for major investments in new and expanded rail, BRT, and ferry systems. The program is authorized at \$1.8 billion dollars for FY 2013.

Eligible recipients include state and local government agencies, including transit agencies. Listed below are eligible projects, defined by FTA:

- **Core capacity** project is a substantial corridor based capital investment in an existing fixed guideway system that increases the capacity of a corridor by not less than 10 percent. Core capacity does not include state of good repair projects.
- A **BRT** project is a bus capital project where the majority of the project operates in a separated right of way dedicated for public transportation that represents a substantial investment in a single route and that emulates rail fixed guideway.
- A **corridor-based BRT** project must meet BRT project criteria and be a Small Start bus project that represents a substantial investment in a defined corridor that does not operated in a separate right of way.
- **New Fixed Guideway Capital** project is a minimum operable segment or extension to an existing fixed guideway or BRT system.
- **Small Starts** is a new fixed guideway capital project or corridor-based BRT project where funding is less than \$75 million and the total net capital cost is less than \$250 million.

## **Changes to Section 5309 – Fixed Guideway Capital Investment under MAP-21**

Section 5309 no longer funds the Fixed Guideway Modernization and Bus and Bus Facilities programs. MAP-21 adds new eligibility for Core Capacity improvement projects.

MAP-21 streamlines the project development process for New Starts. It eliminates the alternatives analysis requirement and instead relies on the review of alternatives performed during the metropolitan planning and environmental review processes. It creates the Project Development phase, during which environmental reviews are completed. MAP-21 reduces the number of FTA approval steps by consolidating the Preliminary Engineering and Final Design stages into a single Engineering step. MAP-21 also requires FTA to develop an expedited review process for determining the technical capacity of project sponsors to undertake the proposed project if they have recently and successfully completed at least one other new fixed guideway or core capacity improvement project.

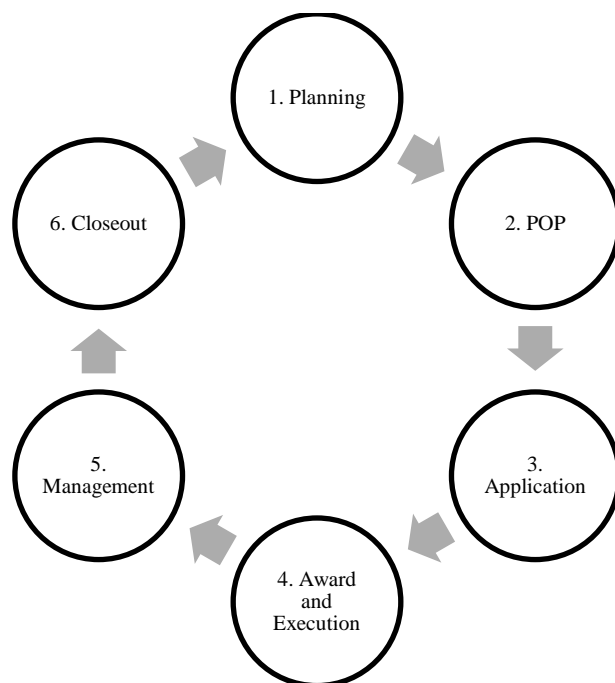
MAP-21 creates a competitive pilot program for expedited project delivery. In addition, it funds Small Starts projects through a single year grant or an expedited grant agreement. New Starts and Core Capacity projects are funded through a full funding grant agreement. Congressional notification of grant award is 10 days for Small Starts projects and 30 days for New Starts and Core Capacity projects. MAP-21 requires FTA to issue policy guidance on the process and evaluation criteria within 180 days of enactment, and a rule within one year of enactment (Highsmith 2013).

### SECTION 3: CURRENT FTA GRANT APPROVAL PROCESS FOR TRANSIT PROJECTS

Section 3 describes the current FTA grant approval process for transit projects including an overview of the grant life cycle, TEAM system, Grants.gov, and new TrAMS online grants management portals. Researchers obtained information for Section 2 during Task 1: Review the Current FTA grant approval process for transit projects, using the methodology described in Section 2.

#### GRANTS LIFE CYCLE OVERVIEW

Each FTA grant goes through six basic steps, as shown in Figure 4. The first step is direct recipient and subrecipient planning, when the recipient identifies projects to propose to FTA for funding. As applicable, the direct recipient receives applications from subrecipients, and then decides which projects to include in its application to FTA. The second step is the POP. The POP lists all subrecipients and identifies the projects for which the state is applying for grant funding. The POP includes a brief description of each project, total project cost, and the requested federal share. The third step is the pre-application and application to FTA using the online TEAM system. The fourth step is the grant award and execution, which is led by FTA and the recipient. In instances where the state is the recipient, FTA awards a single annual grant to the state. The fifth step is the management of the active grant. While the grant is active, the grantee will submit milestone/progress and financial reports to FTA and will be reimbursed for activities. The grantee can make some changes to the grant after FTA awards the grant. The sixth and final step is the grant closeout when the grant activities are complete.



Source: Adapted from (Knapp 2014).

**Figure 4. Life Cycle of an FTA Grant.**

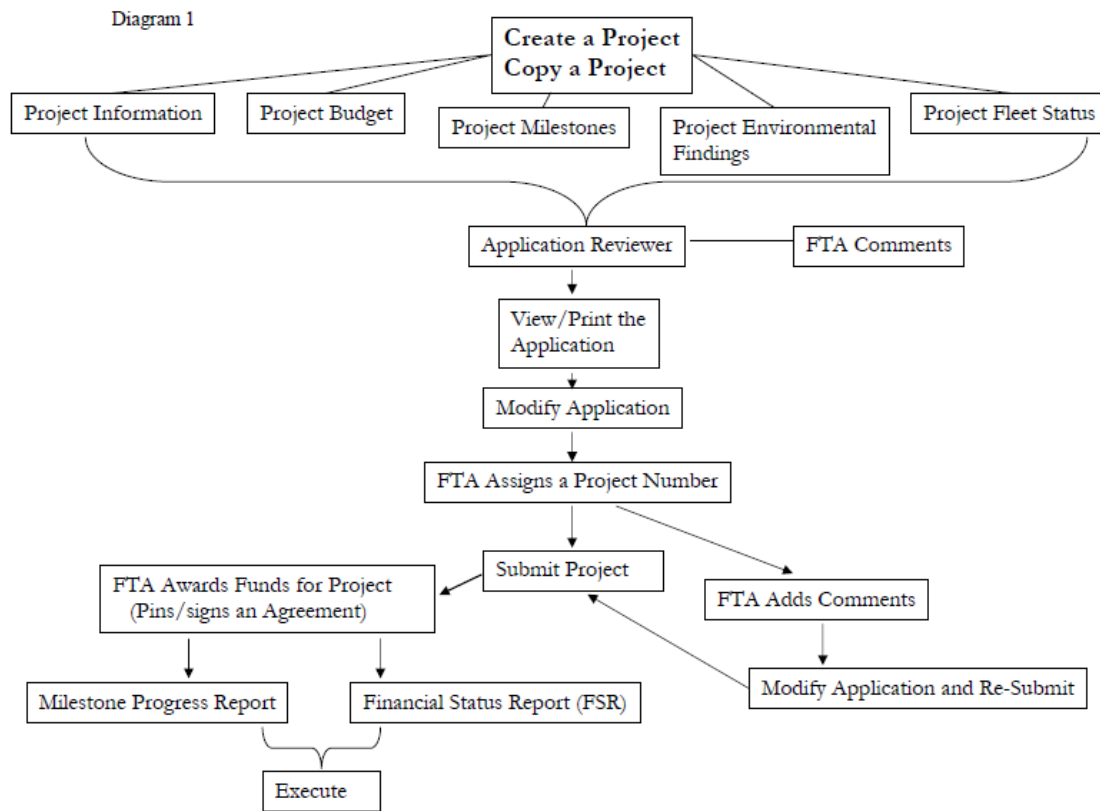
Researchers note that the subrecipient grant process includes all of the six steps described above, plus additional steps including an application to the designated recipient and

reimbursement request to the designated recipient. Researchers limit discussion of the subrecipient grant process as the direct recipient is responsible for the grant application process to FTA.

## TRANSPORTATION ELECTRONIC AWARD MANAGEMENT

FTA has awarded and managed federal financial assistance for transit grants through its TEAM system since 1998. FTA and recipients use the TEAM system during and after the award process. TEAM allows users to monitor the project budget, schedule, milestones, and conduct other project management activities.

There are two stages in the FTA grant approval process for most transit projects. The first stage is the pre-application stage and consists of five steps including registering with the TEAM electronic system and conducting necessary planning activities. The applicant must take these steps prior to applying for federal funding. The second stage is the application stage. Applicants complete the application stage electronically the TEAM system. Figure 5 depicts the general grant application/approval process in the TEAM system.



Chapter 3 Page: 5

Source: (Federal Transit Administration 2014)

**Figure 5. Life Cycle of an FTA Grant in TEAM.**

The first step in the application process is to either establish an account with TEAM or login as a returning user.

Welcome to TEAM-Web!

**LOGIN**

User Name:

Password:

Database:

Change Password

**SECURITY NOTICE**

You are accessing a U.S. Government information system. This information system, including all related equipment, networks, and network devices, is provided for U.S. Government-authorized use only. Unauthorized or improper use of this system is prohibited, and may result in civil and criminal penalties, or administrative disciplinary action. The communications and data stored or transiting this system may be, for any lawful Government purpose, monitored, recorded, and subject to audit or investigation. By using this system, you understand and consent to such terms.

**12/02/2011 Notice:** [Attention FTA TEAM-Web users accessing the application through the DOT Network](#)

[Regions](#)   [Links](#)   [TEAM Reports](#)

[If you're having trouble logging into TEAM-Web, Click Here.]

Source:(Federal Transit Administration 2014).

**Figure 6. TEAM Login Screen.**

Once in the TEAM system, the applicant can create a new project. Figure 7 shows the screen in TEAM when an applicant selects the “create a new project” option. The applicant must enter a proposed environmental classification to proceed. At this point the grant application is created.

The screenshot shows the 'Create New Project' form in a web browser. The browser address bar shows 'https://ftateamweb.fta.dot.gov/?dbname=Quality&GUID=QUALITY\_01251FCEED0F4FFDA85C264E403DBACC'. The form has two tabs: 'New Project Detail' (selected) and 'Project Description'. The 'New Project Detail' tab contains the following fields:

- Recipient ID:** 6696 - COQUILLE TRIBE OF OREGON (dropdown menu)
- COQUILLE TRIBE OF OREGON (text field)
- PO BOX 783 (text field)
- 3050 TREMONT ST (text field)
- NORTH BEND, OR 97459 - 0 (text field)

Below these fields is a section titled 'Enter a requested Project Number (FTA will approve or reassign):'

- Project Number:** (text field)
- Section of Statute:** Not Specified (dropdown menu)
- Brief Description:** (text field)
- Program Date:** (text field)
- Fiscal Year:** 2007 (dropdown menu)

At the bottom is a section titled 'Proposed Environmental Classifications:' with four rows of radio buttons:

- Class I (EIS):**  No  Yes
- Class II (CE):**  No  Yes
- Class III (EA):**  No  Yes
- Other [4(f).106]:**  No  Yes

Callouts are present in the image:

- 8:** Points to the 'Create New Project' option in the left-hand navigation menu.
- 7:** Points to the 'Brief Description' text field.
- 9:** Points to the 'Fiscal Year' dropdown menu.
- 10:** Points to the 'Proposed Environmental Classifications' section.

Source: (Federal Transit Administration 2014).

**Figure 7. TEAM New Project Screen.**



The applicant will then need to fill out fields in the following five areas:

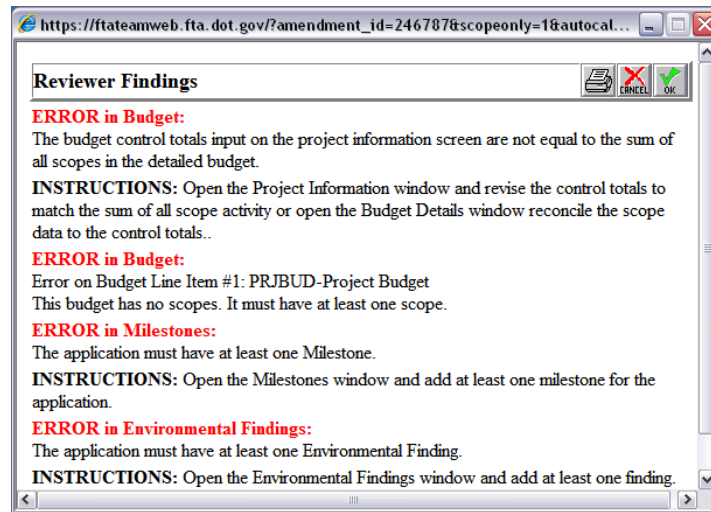
1. Information:
  - General.
  - Control Totals.
  - UZA/Congressional District.
  - Earmarks (only for discretionary funding).
  - Security.
2. Budget:
  - Capital.
  - Operating Assistance.
  - Planning.
  - Rural Transit Assistance Program.
  - Planning.
  - Research/Oversight Training.
  - Other Program Costs.
  - University Research Grants.
  - Other.
3. Milestones:
  - Sequence Number.
  - Milestone Description.
  - Estimated Completion Date.
  - Milestone Detailed Description.
4. Environmental Findings:
  - Class I.
  - Class II (c).
  - Class II (d).
  - Class III.
  - Other.
5. Fleet Status:
  - Active Fleet.
    - Peak Requirement.
    - Spares.
    - Spare Ratio.
  - Inactive Fleet.
    - Contingency.
    - Pending Disposal.
  - Fleet Details.
    - Supplemental information.

To create a separate project with similar information, the applicant can choose to “copy a project,” and information from the copied project will automatically be filled in the newly created project application. The applicant can then edit information as appropriate. Applicants can enter the TEAM system and modify projects up until the point the application is submitted to FTA. The application may not be modified again until the FTA releases the application back to the applicant. Once the grant is approved, if modifications are needed, the grantee can make amendments to the grant in TEAM.

An application is ready for submission when:

- The FTA assigns a project number.
- The applicant verifies the funding request.
- The application satisfies the TEAM Web Application Reviewer Requirements.

The project number is assigned by FTA after FTA receives notification from an applicant requesting a project number. The TEAM Web Application Reviewer feature is used by the applicant when the applicant is ready to submit the application. The Application Reviewer feature lets the applicant know if there are any errors in the application. The findings will display errors that need to be corrected or will state that no errors were found. Figure 8 shows sample findings.

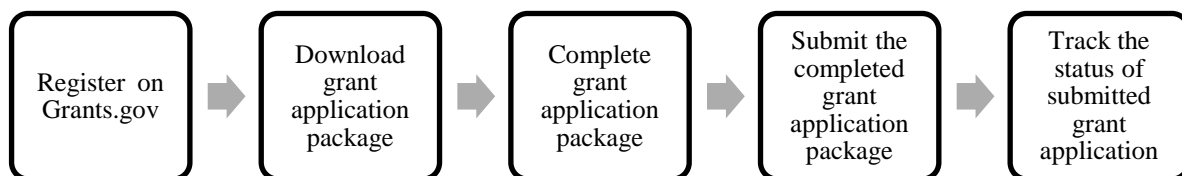


Source: (Federal Transit Administration 2014).

Figure 8. Sample TEAM Web Application Reviewer Findings Screen.

## GRANTS.GOV

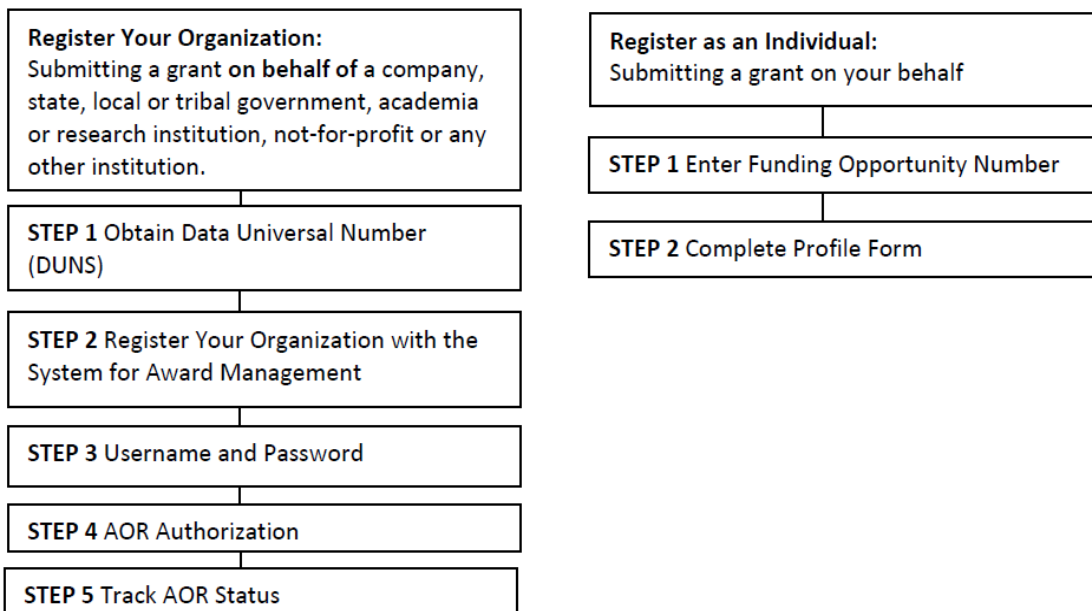
FTA, along with 25 other federal agencies, posts all competitive grant opportunities on Grants.gov. Grants.gov is the single website for information on all discretionary federal grant opportunities. The website is one of 24 government-wide E-government initiatives to improve access to government services via the Internet. The Grants.gov User Guide describes the grant application process. Figure 9 depicts the application process.



Source: (Federal Transit Administration 2014); TTI Analysis.

Figure 9. Grants.gov Application Process.

An applicant must first register their organization on Grants.gov and then register as an individual, as shown in Figure 10. To register, an organization needs a Data Universal Number System number and must register with the System for Award Management.



Source: (Grants.gov 2014).

**Figure 10. Registration Process.**

Once approved the registered user can review grant funding opportunities. The applicant will first need to download a single grant application package or a multi-project application package and save it to their computer. The applicant can fill out the application offline so the applicant may access the application when it is convenient and may circulate the application internally throughout their organization.

The application requests that the applicant enter the following information into the application or attached documentation when applicable:

1. Cover Page.
  - a. Opportunity Title.
  - b. Offering Agency.
  - c. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number.
  - d. CFDA Description.
  - e. Opportunity Number.
  - f. Competition ID.
  - g. Opportunity Open and Close Date.
  - h. Agency Contact.
2. Mandatory Documents.
  - a. Example: Standard Form 424.
3. Optional Documents
  - a. Example: Program Background Statement.

Figure 11 shows a sample form applicants must complete.

The screenshot shows a web-based application form for federal assistance. The form is titled "APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE SF 424 (R&R)". It includes a header with "OMB Number: 4040-0001" and "Expiration Date: 06/30/2011". The form is divided into several sections:

- 1. TYPE OF SUBMISSION:** Includes radio buttons for "Pre-application", "Application", and "Changed/Corrected Application".
- 2. DATE SUBMITTED:** Includes a date field and an "Applicant Identifier" field.
- 3. DATE RECEIVED BY STATE:** Includes a date field and a "State Application Identifier" field.
- 4. a. Federal Identifier, b. Agency Routing Identifier, c. Previous Grants.gov Tracking ID:** Includes three separate text input fields.
- 5. APPLICANT INFORMATION:** Includes fields for "Legal Name", "Department", "Division", "Street1", "Street2", "City", "State", "Country", "County / Parish", "Province", and "ZIP / Postal Code".
- Person to be contacted on matters involving this application:** Includes fields for "Prefix", "First Name", "Middle Name", "Last Name", "Suffix", "Position/Title", "Street1", "Street2", "City", "State", "Country", "County / Parish", "Province", "ZIP / Postal Code", "Phone Number", "Fax Number", and "Email".
- 6. EMPLOYER IDENTIFICATION (EIN) or (TIN):** Includes a text input field.
- 7. TYPE OF APPLICANT:** Includes a dropdown menu and a "Small Business Organization Type" section with checkboxes for "Women Owned" and "Socially and Economically Disadvantaged".
- 8. TYPE OF APPLICATION:** Includes radio buttons for "New", "Resubmission", "Renewal", "Continuation", and "Revision". It also includes checkboxes for "A. Increase Award", "B. Decrease Award", "C. Increase Duration", "D. Decrease Duration", and "E. Other (specify)".
- Is this application being submitted to other agencies?** Includes "Yes" and "No" radio buttons and a "What other Agencies?" text input field.

Source: (Grants.gov 2014).

Figure 11. Sample Form Applicants Must Complete.

When the applicant completes all forms, the applicant has the option to check their package for errors. Once the application is complete, the applicant will need to sign and submit the application online.

## TRANSIT AWARD MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Researchers note that as of January 2014, FTA is preparing to replace TEAM with an online portal called TrAMS. According to the FTA website, FTA will shut down TEAM for grant making March 1, 2015, in order to transition to TrAMS and anticipate deploying TrAMS for grant making in April 2015. The new TrAMS system may address some of the suggestions researchers provide for alternative and improved methods to the current grant approval process for transit projects.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Upon completion of the literature review in Task 1, researchers developed the following list of nine research questions. Answers to the questions either required further analysis by researchers and/or further explanation by those most knowledgeable of the FTA grant approval process for transit projects. Researchers used these questions to guide the development of the interview questions in Task 3:

1. How will MAP-21 consolidated, modified, and repealed programs under MAP-21 change the grant approval process?
2. Why do some grant applications require a Department of Labor Certification while others require Certification of Labor Protective Arrangements?
3. Do applicants have to submit pre-application requirements (*Example: Certifications and Assurances*) for each grant, or are the pre-application requirements submitted once and stored in TEAM for a specific timeframe?
  - a. If the documents are stored in TEAM, how often do the documents need to be updated?
  - b. If pre-application (and other) documents must be submitted for each grant, is there an opportunity for applicants to submit documents once, eliminating duplicative submission efforts?
4. FTA states that discretionary grant applicants apply for discretionary funds on Grants.gov. Would a Fixed Guideway Capital Investment (New Starts) grant applicant apply for discretionary funding on TEAM and on Grants.gov? If applicants are required to enter the information in both places, is the information duplicative?
5. Where is the related Full-Funding Grant Agreement application entered (in TEAM or on Grants.gov or both?) How do internal pre-application processes vary by State for the Section 5310 and Section 5317 programs?
  - a. Are there best practices for streamlining this pre-application process?
  - b. Are there best practices for coordinating TIP and STIPs with MPOs and state DOTs?
6. Not all fields in the TEAM application are applicable in all instances. How does an applicant know when the field is required and/or applicable to the applicant's project?  
*Example: Only certain states need to enter a State ID.*
7. Is there an opportunity to revise TEAM application field names to use common, consistent language? *Example: A field asks the applicant to enter the "Program Date" when FTA is really asking for the "STIP date."*
8. Is there an opportunity to store information in TEAM and on Grants.gov so applicants do not have to enter generic information (*Example: Agency Contact Person, UZA information*) repetitively for different projects?
9. Does FTA provide any recommended practices or standard forms for estimating project costs?

## **SECTION 4: INTERVIEWS - METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**

Section 4 presents the interview methodology, interview plan, interview process, and resulting options for improvements to the grant approval process for transit projects.

Researchers gathered information for Section 4 during project Tasks 3 and 4. In Task 3, researchers identified interviewees from state DOTs, developed an interview plan, prepared an interview script, and conducted outreach with selected participants. In Task 4, researchers conducted interviews with seven people from seven different agencies including FTA, Virginia DOT, Colorado DOT, Florida DOT, Maine DOT, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and FHWA. Researchers then summarized responses to interview questions and identified opportunities for improving the grant approval process for transit projects.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Researchers completed an initial literature review to investigate and document FTA grant approval processes for transit projects during Task 1. At this point, researchers determined FTA and state DOTs to be appropriate interviewees as FTA apportions the funds to designated recipients, either states or large urbanized areas, and state DOTs are responsible for allocating FTA funds to small urban areas and non-urbanized (rural) areas.

To compliment Task 1 efforts, researchers conducted supplemental background research on the grant approval processes for other federal (non-FTA) agencies to become familiar with the respective agency's process and to identify other interviews. Coupled with a literature search, researchers held phone conferences with experts to gain preliminary information about other DOT agency grant processes including FAA, Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA).

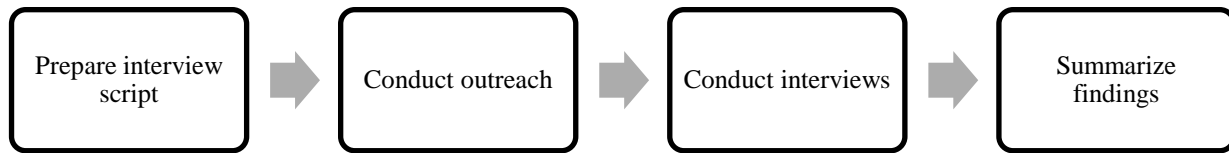
Researchers finalized the agency interviewee list and identified specific individuals to interview from the following agencies:

- FTA.
- State DOTs.
- FHWA.
- FAA.

Researchers attempted to balance the profile of interviewees, acknowledging that the individuals chosen constitute a non-random sample. Individuals were selected that have experience administering the grant approval process for modal projects.

### **INTERVIEW PLAN**

Figure 12 summarizes the performing agency's four-stage interview plan used to guide the interview process. After identifying potential interviewees, researchers prepared two interview scripts: one for FTA and state DOT FTA recipients, and another for other DOT representatives (FHWA, FAA). The questions for each script are similar, but vary as grant approval processes vary by agency. Next, researchers conducted outreach to offer and schedule interviews in various formats. Researchers conducted a pilot interview on May 16, 2014, and then began conducting formal interviews on July 2, 2014. Modest changes were made to the interview script following the pilot interview. The final step in the interview plan summarized findings.



**Figure 12. Interview Plan.**

### *Interview Script*

Researchers prepared questions to determine the following seven elements regarding the grant approval process for transit projects. The seven interview elements include:

1. Current Process.
2. Technical limitations.
3. Administrative barriers.
4. Legal restrictions.
5. Process limitations.
6. Alternative approval methods.
7. Streamlining opportunities.

Researchers provide the interview scripts in Appendix A.

### *Outreach*

The purpose of outreach was to obtain a minimum of five individuals (from various agencies) to interview to provide background on potential improvements to the existing grant approval process for transit projects, including alternative grant approval process and streamlining methods. Researchers invited potential interviewees to participate in the interview via a memorandum distributed through email or, in some cases, read verbally on the phone. The memorandum (and phone script) introduces NCHRP Task 51, describes the project background, and describes project goals. Researchers provide the script to invite potential interviewees in Appendix B.

## **PROCESS**

Researchers contacted 10 individuals from FTA (one from each FTA region), two representatives from FHWA, two representatives from FAA, and state DOT representatives to determine interest and participation. Researchers provided contact information for invitees in case of questions regarding participation. A follow-up email was sent to interviewees to confirm participation and schedule the interview. Researchers offered the following interview formats to participants:

- Teleconference.
- Web-video conferencing.
- Emailed interview questions.

Researchers documented outreach efforts including:

- How, where, how many times, and by whom potential interviewees were contacted.
- How many people were approached and of those how many agreed to participate.

## RESULTS

### *State DOT and FTA Response Summary*

Researchers summarized state DOT and FTA responses to specific questions about the grant approval process for transit projects. Specific questions addressed:

- Ease of system use.
- Efficiency.
- Processing tools.
- Processing time.
- Approval process pros and cons.

### *Ease of System Use*

Table 3 summarizes responses to the first question about the existing grant management system's ease of use from the grantee's perspective. Respondents included in this summary include state DOT representatives and FTA. The average rating of all responses was 2.9 (moderately easy to use) on a 5-point scale, where 1 is very easy and 5 is very difficult. Comments generally described a lengthy review process and the requirement to enter the same information in multiple places in the application.

**Table 3. Response Summary Question 1**

<b>Question</b>	How easy do you find the current FTA grant approval process a numerical scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult? Why?
<b>Average Rating</b>	2.9
<b>Rating Level</b>	Moderate
<b>Comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Duplicative information required.</li><li>• Lengthy review process.</li></ul>

### *One-Size-Fits-All*

Table 4 summarizes responses to the second question about the efficiency of the current online grant approval system. Respondents included in this summary include state DOT representatives and FTA. The average response was “no, I do not think a one-size-fits-all system is efficient.” Comments generally described that each grant program is unique, and the application should be customized based on the grant size and project complexity.



**Table 4. Response Summary Question 2**

<b>Question</b>	Do you think it is efficient to have an electronic system where one-size-fits-all for types of grants, sizes of grants, and funds utilization? If yes, why? If not, why not?
<b>Average Response</b>	No
<b>Comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each program is unique.</li> <li>• Level of tracking and oversight is extensive.</li> <li>• Would like a customized application based on grant size/project complexity.</li> </ul>

*Tools Used to Process Grants*

Table 5 summarizes responses to the third question about tools used by grantees to process grants. Respondents included in this summary include state DOT representatives. The average response was that respondents use Microsoft® Excel and Microsoft Word to process grant applications. Comments generally described the heavy reliance on Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, checklists for subrecipients, and cut and paste from Microsoft Word into the grant application. Other respondents indicated their use of grant making software.

**Table 5. Response Summary Question 3**

<b>Question</b>	What tools does your agency use to process grants?
<b>Average Response</b>	Microsoft Excel Microsoft Word
<b>Comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spreadsheets.</li> <li>• We use grant making software.</li> <li>• We cut and paste from Microsoft Word into the grant application.</li> <li>• Checklists for subrecipients.</li> </ul>

*Processing Time*

Table 6 summarizes responses to the fourth question about how long it takes grants to be processed. Respondents included in this summary include state DOT representatives and an FTA representative. The average response was that grants take five months to process. Comments generally described that the processing time depends on the grant program and that there can be back and forth between the grantee and the Regional Office.

**Table 6. Response Summary Question 4**

<b>Question</b>	How long does it take grants to be processed?
<b>Average Time</b>	5 months
<b>Comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depends on grant program.</li> <li>• We have had trouble with Flex funds.</li> <li>• Very lengthy process.</li> <li>• Back and forth between grantee and Regional Office.</li> </ul>

*Approval Process Pros and Cons*

In the following section, researchers summarize responses to the remaining interview questions. Researchers describe grantee areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the current approval process system, and respondent’s suggestions to improve the grant approval process for transit projects from the administrative, technical, and legal perspectives.

Figure 13 presents a summary of interviewee comments about pros and cons to the current approval process system. Interviewees generally cited that the TEAM system is easy for seasoned grantees, and they like that the system is online and paperless. Many interviewees also cited the availability of training offered by their region, and particularly like hands-on training. Other cited positive aspects of the TEAM system include limited legal restrictions to the approval process; recent improvements/allowance for Categorical Exclusions (CE); straightforward process; and the flexibility to upload documents.

Nearly all interviewees cited a lengthy approval process as the top dissatisfaction with the process. Grant approval time varies by region between three months and one year. Interviewees also expressed dissatisfaction with not being able to see the status of the grant at certain points during the application process. Interviewees also expressed dissatisfaction with the requirement to enter the same information at multiple points in the grant application. Other cited limitations of the TEAM system include that there is not a two-way automatic notification system when there is an item awaiting grantee or Regional Office action in the system; inability of the system to interface with other grantee software to reduce duplicative efforts; a Circular is not available for every grant and/or Circulars have not been updated to reflect changes under MAP-21; and the complexity of the project is not considered by the TEAM system.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited legal restrictions to the approval process.</li> <li>• Online, paperless system.</li> <li>• The system has been around for many years; easy for seasoned grantees.</li> <li>• FTA provides training and technical assistance.</li> <li>• Improvements to CEs.</li> <li>• Process is straightforward.</li> <li>• Flexibility to upload documents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval process can be lengthy (3 months–1 year).</li> <li>• Reviewer comments period between grantee and Regional Office can be lengthy.</li> <li>• No option to see the status of the grant at certain points in the approval process, such as when the grant is with the Department of Labor (DOL).</li> <li>• There is no automatic notification when there is an item awaiting grantee action in the system, or vice versa for the Regional Office.</li> <li>• Program does not allow interface with other grantee programs/software to reduce duplicative efforts.</li> <li>• Comments received from different grant reviewers at different times.</li> <li>• Duplicative efforts. Many of the same items must be entered in the system, year after year.</li> <li>• System requires users to enter the same information in multiple places.</li> <li>• There is not a circular for every grant (with MAP-21 changes).</li> <li>• One-size-fits-all is flawed; complexity of the project not considered.</li> </ul>

**Figure 13. Summary of Pros and Cons to TEAM.**

## **SECTION 5: ALTERNATIVE GRANT APPROVAL PROCESSES AND METHODS**

Section 5 presents the methodology researchers used to synthesize alternative grant approval processes and methods. Researchers then present the alternative methods and streamlining opportunities, evaluate a selection of these methods, and then present and evaluate a selection of other (non-FTA) DOT grant processes that FTA may learn from to improve the grant approval process for transit projects.

Researchers gathered information for Section 5 during project Tasks 5 and 6. Researchers combined Task 5 with Task 6 as separate- and multiple-project grant approvals are alternative grant processes, addressed in Task 6. In Task 5, researchers document, evaluate, and compare the merits of executing separate- and multiple-project grant approvals for a single designated recipient in any given fiscal year. In Task 6, researchers describe alternative grant approval and review processes that would accelerate the process for transit projects.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Researchers prepared a matrix to document alternative and/or streamlined approval and review processes associated to the current grant approval processes for transit projects. These methods are based on state DOT and FTA responses to questions about the current system, general approval process for transit projects, and best practices learned from other DOT agencies.

### **ALTERNATIVE METHODS AND STREAMLINING OPPORTUNITIES**

Table 7 shows alternative methods to the current grant approval process for transit projects. Each method can be implemented independently of other methods. Some methods may be grouped together. The methods are not listed in priority order and are not assessed for ease of implementation.

**Table 7. Alternative Methods to Existing Grant Approval Process for Transit Projects.**

Alternative Method	Example	Anticipated Outcome
1. Establish maximum timeframes for various steps in the grant approval process.	The grantee has 30 days to respond to reviewer comments.	Shorter time for grant approval process.
2. Allow all stakeholders to see the grant steps progress (and current status of their grant with respect to each step) in the TEAM system.	Grantee can log on to TEAM system and see that the FTA Regional Office is currently reviewing the grant.	All parties will know exactly which stage the grant is in the approval process. If coupled with maximum timeframes, all grantees will know how long the grant will remain in each stage.
3. Enable automatic two-way notifications when an item is pending review, comment, or another action in the TEAM system.	FTA Regional Office receives an email when the grantee has responded/updated a grant application based on FTA Reviewer comments.	Stakeholders will not have to log on to TEAM to check to see if an item is awaiting action. This will result in a shorter time for grant approval process.
4. Allow system users to interface with other programs and software.	Grantee can upload/transfer information from transit asset management software or internal grant-making software.	Reduce duplicative efforts; shorter time for grant approval process; fewer resources used.
5. Group reviewer comments into a single response by Regional Office.	Grantee will receive a single response from Regional Office with comments on the application.	FTA will be able to review all comments to ensure consistency in response; grantee will be able to address all comments at one time; shorter time for grant approval process.
6. Determine static items in the TEAM system, and enable data/information transfer from year-to-year.	Certain items will be copied from the previous year's grant application. The grantee will have the option to make changes to the copied items, if necessary.	Reduced duplicative efforts; fewer resources used.
7. Automatically populate duplicate data/information items in the grant management system.	After a grantee enters information into the system one time (and that information must also be entered elsewhere) the system will automatically populate the duplicative information for the grantee.	Reduced duplicative efforts; fewer resources used.
8. Develop positive correlation between project complexity (risk) and administrative steps in the grant approval process.	Standard bus procurement would require fewer steps for grantee and FTA for approval.	Shorter time for grant approval process; fewer resources used.
9. Develop recommended practices or standard forms for estimating project costs and timing.	Vehicle replacement form.	Shorter time for grant approval process; fewer resources used.
10. Develop grant application logic in the TEAM system, or add an option to click "this screen does not apply" to bypass screens that ask for information that is not applicable to certain grants.	The system will either a) recognize that a certain piece of information is not required for a particular grant type and automatically skip the page/screen; or b) the grantee will have the ability to bypass the screen by clicking a bypass button.	Reduced duplicative and unnecessary efforts; shorter time for grant approval process; fewer resources used.

## **NEW TRAMS SYSTEM**

Researchers note that FTA will be launching a new system called TrAMS. FTA will deploy the system after December 31, 2014. The alternative methods that reference TEAM would be applicable to steps in the approval process, but may be addressed in the upcoming TrAMS systems.

The FTA website lists the following TrAMS features:

- **Efficiency:** FTA and its grantees will be able to consolidate redundant activities and streamline grant-making and grant management processes.
- **Transparency:** Stakeholders inside and outside FTA will be better able to understand how taxpayer dollars are awarded and disbursed for specific transit projects and services.
- **Integrity:** Improved internal controls will help ensure that grants are awarded and managed consistent with federal requirements.
- **Consistency:** Data and information in TrAMS will match information found in related government IT systems.
- **Flexibility:** The new system can be modified more quickly, easily, and cost-effectively to make improvements and respond to new directives.

## **ALTERNATIVE METHODS EXPLORED**

### *Training and Capacity Building for Long-Term Relationships*

Respondents that expressed the satisfaction with grant approval processes attributed it to a focus on training, education, and capacity building for recipients and subrecipients. These strategies were also mentioned by other DOT agencies where the focus on the recipient relationship was to develop client expertise for a long-term relationship. The capacity building process was seen as a long-term, on-going core function of the agency or office that pays future dividends. A frequent comment was that although the grant process may only take a few weeks or months now, it took several years of development to achieve the expertise and trust.

- Develop web-based training tools and resources such as online instructional videos that can be used by state DOTs and subrecipients. For example, FHWA has the Federal Aid Essentials website with online video tutorials (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federal-aidessentials/index.cfm>).
- Improve and consolidate training and education materials.
- Capacity building for grant recipients. States work to develop subrecipients prior to grant awards.
- Unified and consistent adult education oriented training.
- Provide frequent and online training products.
- Provide one-on-one training, as needed.

### *Reduce/Consolidate Programs and Requirements*

One streamlining opportunity is to reduce and/or consolidate grant programs and requirements, including application steps. Figure 14 highlights new, repealed, consolidated, and modified programs under MAP-21. Consolidated programs include the Urbanized Area Formula

Program (Section 5307) with JARC (formerly Section 5316); Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) with New Freedom (formerly Section 5317); and Rural Area formula grants (Section 5311) with JARC.

NEW	REPEALED	CONSOLIDATED	MODIFIED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Public Transportation Safety</li> <li>•State of Good Repair Grants</li> <li>•Asset Management</li> <li>•Bus Testing Facility</li> <li>•Emergency Relief</li> <li>•TOD Planning Pilot Grants</li> <li>•Tech Assistance and Standards Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Clean Fuels Grants</li> <li>•Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC)</li> <li>•New Freedom Program</li> <li>•Transit in the Parks</li> <li>•Alternatives Analysis</li> <li>•Over-the-Road Bus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Urbanized Area Formula Grants + JARC</li> <li>•Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities + New Freedom</li> <li>•Rural Area Formula Grants + JARC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Urban Area Formula (100 bus rule)</li> <li>•Fixed-Guideway Capital Investment Grants</li> <li>•Research, Development, Demonstration, and Deployment</li> <li>•Human Resources and Training</li> <li>•Bus and Bus Facilities (now formula)</li> <li>•Fixed Guideway modernization (now State of Good Repair)</li> </ul>

Source: ( Federal Transit Administration n.d.).

**Figure 14. New, Repealed, Consolidated, and Modified Legislation under MAP-21.**

Although MAP-21 consolidates some grants programs, opportunities still exist to consolidate grant requirements, agreement processes, and process steps. Researchers recommend setting benchmark requirements that align and correlate to program or project costs.

*Incorporate Risk-Based Approaches to Grant Approval and Administration*

Another alternative to the existing process is to incorporate risk-based approaches to the grant approval and administration processes. Risk-based approaches provide greater scrutiny for high-cost and high-risk projects and programs. Researchers noted practices in other federal grant approval and management programs. Risk-based thresholds may be dollar-based. For example, FHWA uses project costs thresholds for various reviews and oversight. Risk-based practices may also provide increased flexibility in grant administration requirements whereby experienced recipients with a history of compliance should be rewarded with increased flexibility. Other practices such as using and sharing red flags indicators to identify high-risk projects and recipients, and using and sharing green flags for low risk project and recipients.

Another practice is to rank grantees by various risk factors. Researchers did not interview a representative from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) but reviewed a 2009 report entitled *Risk-Based Monitoring of Community Planning and Development (CPD) Formula Grants*, accessible here: [http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/risk\\_report.pdf](http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/risk_report.pdf).

“The purpose of the CPD risk analysis process is to identify programs that pose the greatest risk to the integrity of CPD’s programs, so that a greater share of monitoring resources can be used to mitigate that risk” (Joice 2009). The report determines the effectiveness of the risk analysis process used by HUD. HUD conducts an annual risk analysis on grant recipients, and

then HUD identifies those most susceptible to waste, fraud, abuse, or mismanagement. There is a separate score for each program for which the grant recipient receives funding. A regional field officer conducts the review. There are five main factors (such as financial management) and corresponding sub-factors that are scored. For each sub-factor, the regional representative chooses a level of risk using a worksheet that explains each risk level. There are usually three options for risk: low, medium, and high. Table 8 provides a sample.

**Table 8. Sample HUD Risk Based Analysis Scoring Worksheet.**

<b>Factor 1- Financial</b>	<b>Risk Definition</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>Evaluator's Rating</b>	<b>Evaluator's Comments</b>
The Participating Jurisdiction's grant amount for the most recently completed program year falls within the top quartile of all HOME founded communities within the Office's jurisdiction for the same program year.	High	5		
The grant amount for the most recently completed program year falls within the second quartile of all HOME grants awarded within the Office's jurisdiction within the same program year.	Medium	3		
The grant amount for the most recently completed program year falls within the third or fourth quartile of all HOME grants awarded within the Office's jurisdiction within the same program year.	Low	1		

After the risk analysis is complete, the grantee is assigned a score for each open grant and the field office translates the score into a monitoring plan. All grantees are ranked by overall risk. Staff monitors the high-risk programs and a sample of other, lower risk programs. The report found that HUD's risk analysis accurately defines risk. The report also suggests recommendations to save staff time and maintain a standardized system for assessing risk.

*Allow States to Assume Federal Responsibility/Authority for Programs*

Allowing states to assume federal responsibility and authority for grant program administration is not a new strategy. Similar efforts to allow states federal authority have been implemented for other disciplines. For example, NEPA assignment allows state DOTs to assume federal responsibility for NEPA. California and Texas are the only two states to pursue federal authority for NEPA, but several states have programmatic agreements that extend federal authority to CE class of action. CEs are projects that do not typically have significant impacts and account for more than 90 percent of all projects. These instances of delegation of federal authority have reduced review times.

Similar agreements could be proposed for FTA grant processes and programs and allow the states an option to assume federal authority for selected low risk grants and programs. When states assume federal authority they also agree to audit and compliance monitoring practices.

The use of separate multiple agreements by a single recipient is similar in concept to using risk-based approaches to grant application and allowing states to assume federal authority. In both instances grant approval processes would improve.



## *“Lean” for Federal Government Processes*

The “Lean” method was originally developed for manufacturing systems; however, private and public-sector organizations have adapted and applied these methods to office environments, service-delivery processes, and administrative processes including permitting. Lean is a combination of practices to reduce activities in a process to a minimum. Lean uses a production approach and set of methods that seeks to eliminate all non-value added activity or waste from a process. Lean may also be applied to grant approval processes for transit projects. Benefits from the Lean processes historically reduce costs and improve productivity.

Approximately 20 federal agencies have used Lean to improve the speed and effectiveness of their processes including Department of Defense, Department of Energy, EPA, HUD, and United States Department of Agriculture. Approximately nine states and their agencies have applied Lean to improve their processes, including departments of transportation in Colorado, Connecticut, and Wisconsin.

There are numerous Lean resources and web portals that provide guidance and implementation materials:

- The EPA website for lean government (<http://www.epa.gov/lean/government/index.htm>).
- *Lean Methods Guide* <http://www.epa.gov/lean/government/pdf/lean-methods-guide.pdf>.
- *Lean Starter Kit* <http://www.epa.gov/lean/government/starterkit/index.htm>.
- The Lean Institute <http://www.lean.org/>.

### **Colorado Department of Transportation Lean Process Improvements**

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) applied Lean principles and methods to address reimbursements for local transit agencies and sub recipients. In 2012, the CDOT Division of Transit & Rail (DTR) worked to streamline the workflow processing steps needed for reimbursement of funds to not-for-profit transit organizations and local governments from 45 days to 10 days. CDOT awards approximately 100 grants every year to fund local transit systems. Under the previous processes, there were 40 steps each grant partner had to go through to be reimbursed. The Lean process determined that out of these 40 steps, five were essential and eight steps were required due to regulations, resulting in a process that was shortened from 40 to just 13 necessary steps.

DTR Project Manager explained that DTR looked at every process closely and put together a checklist to streamline paperwork. The problem was that different entities had different requirements so the challenge was to modify the system so that requirements were met and the responsible agencies were satisfied.

The Lean team identified 12 potential opportunities, and the following three most critical:

1. **Grantee Training Process:** The project team recommended developing a process to train the grantees on submitting correct documentation on the new forms developed for that purpose. Grantees will utilize this new training process to understand the standards and expectations required in order for them to receive reimbursement.
2. **Refining the rules for evidence of payment:** This was to clarify the specific documentation requirements from the grantee and to decrease the amount of paperwork required for each reimbursement. As a result, the detailed documentation is kept by the grantee so that less paperwork is needed for reimbursement. The grantees will submit

- their request for reimbursement from CDOT and their evidence of up-front payment.
3. **Developing a verification process:** Once completed, this will confirm that each grantee is maintaining proper documentation and accounting systems. CDOT will contact each grantee at least once per year to verify that grantees are keeping the proper documentation and have an appropriate accounting system in place to maintain these records.

Table 9 lists the outcomes from the CDOT Lean process improvement.

**Table 9. CDOT Lean Process Outcomes**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Before Improvement Process</b>	<b>After Improvement Process</b>
Step Savings	40 steps in process	Process reduced to 14 steps
Documentation Requirements	Unnecessary amount of documentation submitted	Clear simple documentation requirements
Accuracy	10% accuracy verified	90% accuracy
Reimbursement Time Savings	45–365 days for reimbursement	5–10 business days for reimbursement
Reduced Waiting	Linear approval process	Reviews and approval completed simultaneously

*Source: (Jobe 2014). For more information about CDOT Lean initiative, see: (Colorado Department of Transportation 2014).*

### **Wisconsin DOT Transit Procurement Process Lean Project Report**

The Transit Section provides technical assistance and oversight for local communities participating in the Rural and Small Urban Area Public Transportation Assistance Program. The Transit Section works to ensure the local sponsors of transit understand state and federal regulations and operate transit services in a compliant manner. The goals of this project were to reduce the turnaround time on reviews and approvals, reduce staff time spent on each shared ride taxi (SRT) procurement, and enable the local communities to complete their steps of the process more efficiently and accurately. This project was completed on January 31, 2013. Improvements included (Wisconsin Department of Transportation n.d.) (Wisconsin Department of Transportation 2014):

- Reduced average duration of SRT procurement by 50 percent.
- Reduced average department staff hours on SRT procurement by 70 percent.
- Saved 36 staff hours per SRT procurement annually.
- Implementation of procurement toolkits.

### **OTHER DOT GRANT PROCESSES EXPLORED**

Researchers conducted background research on several federal grant processes and coupled phone conferences with the subject experts about selected federal grant programs from FAA, FRA, and NHTSA.

Table 10 shows key information gleaned during the background research and phone conferences. Key findings include recommended processes and practices inspired by the corresponding federal grant program.

**Table 10. Other DOT Grant Programs Comments and Findings.**

Federal Grant Program	Key Comments
<b>FAA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAA uses paper process, not online. Grantees do not like this.</li> <li>• Grantee can start projects without approval, reimbursed later.</li> <li>• Projects approved at regional level, not by D.C.</li> <li>• Construction projects have a specific template and require monthly reporting.</li> <li>• Other projects (non-construction projects) have a separate, specific template and require quarterly reporting.</li> <li>• FAA works to develop clients/recipients. The analogy is send them to school, prepare them for the job, then pay them for the work. The risk of granting is reduced by developing the recipient over several years. In contrast to we'll give you money if you make these grades, and we are going to check you work closely.</li> <li>• Airport sponsor grant expectations (ASGE) is a form that helps airports understand process. Written for sponsors to use, but really process starts 3 years before to get ready to receive grants.</li> <li>• Some states receive block grants that are administered by state DOT to subrecipients.</li> </ul>
<b>FRA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRA uses delegated responsibility approach.</li> <li>• Suggests risk-based approaches work well (construction vs. non-construction grants; risk determined by grant dollar amount).</li> <li>• There are regional safety offices, but FRA has a centralized grant process in D.C.</li> <li>• If regional and D.C. offices need to review grants, conduct concurrent reviews so as not to slow down the approval process.</li> <li>• There are benefits to regional reviews; regional offices know the players and the regional needs.</li> <li>• Focus, project specific people in D.C. is helpful.</li> </ul>
<b>NHTSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants appropriated to states as block grant.</li> <li>• Suggests risk-based approaches work well (construction vs. non-construction grants; risk determined by grant dollar amount).</li> <li>• Suggests adding scrutiny to the back-end (as opposed to the beginning of the process).</li> <li>• Suggests rewarding those agencies who successfully administer programs year after year.</li> </ul>

## SECTION 6: CONCLUSIONS

Researchers report project conclusions in the list below:

- Understanding the flow of federal funds to designated recipients and subrecipients is important to understanding the approval process for transit projects.
- The type of transit grant affects the application, approval, application, and post-award management processes. Although each FTA grant funding program is different, some characteristics are common across grant programs.
- States play a considerable role in the grant application for transit projects. States are the designated recipients for some funding programs apportioned by the FTA. In addition to the grant application itself, states must develop and submit a SMP and a POP to FTA for the Section 5310 and Section 5311 programs.
- MAP-21 may result in several efficiencies for grant recipients due to the consolidation several programs. Other efficiencies include that MAP-21 streamlines the project development process for New Starts. Researchers note that MAP-21 emphasizes SGR, both through the creation of the 5337 program and by requiring that all FTA grantees develop a TAM plan to ensure transit systems are maintained in a SGR. While this program may not affect the grant application process, the requirement will likely require additional reporting to FTA by the designated recipient.
- The following list documents alternative and/or streamlined grant approval and review processes for transit projects. FTA can implement each method can independently of other methods. Some methods may be grouped together:
  - a. Establish maximum timeframes for various steps in the grant approval process.
  - b. Allow all stakeholders to see the grant steps progress (and current status of their grant with respect to each step) in the TEAM system.
  - c. Enable automatic two-way notifications when an item is pending review, comment, or another action in the TEAM system.
  - d. Allow system users to interface with other programs and software.
  - e. Group reviewer comments into a single response by Regional Office.
  - f. Determine static items in the TEAM system and enable data/information transfer from year-to-year.
  - g. Automatically populate duplicate data/information items in the grant management system.
  - h. Develop positive correlation between project complexity (risk) and administrative steps in the grant approval process.
  - i. Develop recommended practices or standard forms for estimating project costs and timing.
  - j. Develop grant application logic in the TEAM system, or add an option to click “this screen does not apply” to bypass screens that ask for information that is not applicable to certain grants.
  - k. Establish training and capacity building for long-term relationships.
  - l. Reduce/consolidate programs and requirements.
  - m. Incorporate risk-based approaches to grant approval and administration.

- n. Allow states to assume federal responsibility and authority for programs.
  - o. Investigate the Lean method for federal government processes.
- FTA will be launching a new system called TrAMS. Some of the alternative methods that reference TEAM may be addressed in the upcoming TrAMS system.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
CDOT	Colorado Department of Transportation
CE	Categorical Exclusion
CFDA	Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
CPD	Community Planning and Development
DOT	Department of Transportation
DTR	Division of Transit and Rail
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
HUD	Housing and Urban Development
JARC	Job Access Reverse Commute
MAP-21	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century
NCHRP	National Cooperative Highway Research Program
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHTSA	National Highway Transportation Safety Administration
POP	Program of Projects
RTAP	Rural Transit Assistance Program
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users
SGR	State of Good Repair
SMP	State Management Plan
SOGR	State of Good Repair
SRT	Shared Ride Taxi
TAM	Transit Asset Management
TEAM	Transportation Electronic Awards Management
TrAMS	Transit Award Management System
TxDOT	Texas Department of Transportation
USC	United States Code
UZA	Urbanized Area
WOD	Web Only Document



## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPT**

### **STATE DOTS AND FTA REPRESENTATIVES**

#### **Project Introduction**

*The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) is conducting research for the National Cooperative Research Program (NCHRP) Task 51: Approaches to Improving the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Grant Approval Process for Transit Projects. The goals of today's interview are to identify and discuss alternative and improved methods to the current grant approval process for transit projects. Researchers will identify your responses using only your agency name. We appreciate your participation. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

#### **Interview Questions**

The Interviewer will then ask the Interviewee the below listed questions in the following manner and order. The Interviewer will record the responses and will deviate from the script as necessary to clarify responses and gain meaningful feedback.

#### **Current Grant Approval Process**

- 1. We have a few questions about the current grant approval process. How easy do you find the current FTA grant approval process a numerical scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult? Why?*
- 2. Do you think it is efficient to have an electronic system where one-size-fits-all for types of grants, sizes of grants, and funds utilization? If yes, why? If not, why not?*
- 3. What tools (forms, computer programs) do you use to process grants?*
- 4. How long does it take grants to be processed?*
- 5. Are there any recommended practices or standard forms for estimating project costs and timing that your agency uses? Would you be willing to share the forms with TTI?*
- 6. What is the dollar value of federal transit grants processed by your agency?*

#### **Technical Limitations**

- 7. Please describe any recommendations you have to improve any technical limitations of the grant approval process.*

#### **Administrative Barriers**

- 8. What administrative aspects of the grant approval process would you like to avoid (such as having to resubmit pre-approval information)?*
- 9. Please describe any other recommendations you have to improve administrative barriers to the grant approval process.*

#### **Legal Restrictions**

- 10. Please describe any recommendations you have to improve legal restrictions to the grant approval process.*

### **Alternative Methods and Streamlining Opportunities**

- 11.** *We want to speak with you about your experience working with grants from other (non-FTA) organizations, whether they are other federal agencies, state grants, or foundations and non-profits. Please describe the process and flow of other grant approval methods with which you are familiar.*
- 12.** *Please describe any other grant approval process streamlining opportunities or any additional comments you would like to address as it relates to the grant approval process for transit projects.*

### **Thank you**

The Interviewer will thank the Interviewee by reading the script below.

*Thank you for your participation in today's interview. We appreciate your time and the contribution you have made to NCHRP's research efforts.*

## FHWA AND FAA REPRESENTATIVES

### **Project Introduction**

*The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) is conducting research for the National Cooperative Research Program (NCHRP) Task 51: Approaches to Improving the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Grant Approval Process for Transit Projects. The goals of today's interview are to identify and discuss alternative and improved methods to the current grant approval process for transit projects. Researchers will identify your responses using only your agency name. We appreciate your participation. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

### **Interview Questions**

The Interviewer will then ask the Interviewee the below listed questions in the following manner and order. The Interviewer will record the responses and will deviate from the script as necessary to clarify responses and gain meaningful feedback.

### **Current Grant Approval Process**

- 1. Please describe your agency's grant approval process, timing and flow, and any other related methods.*
- 2. How easy do you find your agency's grant approval process a numerical scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult?*
- 3. What tools do you use to process grants?*
- 4. How long does it typically take grants to be processed?*
- 5. What resources are committed to the grant approval process?*
- 6. Are there any recommended practices or standard forms for estimating project costs and timing that your agency uses?*
- 7. What is the dollar value of grants that processed by your agency?*
- 8. What do you think grantees like most/least about the approval process?*

### **Alternative Methods and Streamlining Opportunities**

- 9. We want to speak with you about your experience working with grants from other organizations, whether they are other federal agencies, state grants, or foundations and non-profits. Please describe the process and flow of other grant approval methods with which you are familiar.*
- 10. Please describe any other grant approval process streamlining opportunities or any additional comments you would like to address as it relates to the grant approval process.*

### **Thank you**

Thank you for your participation. We appreciate your time and the contribution you have made to NCHRP's research efforts.

## **APPENDIX B: SCRIPT TO INVITE POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES**

### **SCRIPT FOR CALLING FTA REGIONAL ADMINISTRATORS AND STATE DOTs:**

*The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) is conducting research for the National Cooperative Research Program (NCHRP) Task 51: Approaches to Improving the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Grant Approval Process for Transit Projects. We would like to set up a one-hour phone conference with you to identify and discuss alternative and improved methods to the FTA current grant approval process for transit projects. Researchers will identify your responses using only your agency name. Do you have any availability in the next two weeks to participate in our research?*

### **SCRIPT FOR CALLING FHWA AND FAA:**

*The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) is conducting research for the National Cooperative Research Program (NCHRP) Task 51: Approaches to Improving the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Grant Approval Process for Transit Projects. We would like to set up a one-hour phone conference with you to identify and discuss alternative and improved methods to FTA's current grant approval process by discussing the practices of other agencies. Researchers will identify your responses using only your agency name. Do you have any availability in the next two weeks to discuss your agency's process?*