

How To Get Involved In Transportation Research

A primer on support and funding for research initiatives.

There are a few ways to get involved in transportation research. One is to develop and fund your own research project, and another is to get involved in shaping existing research program efforts. The following list, while not exhaustive, provides some basic information to help direct your search, or at least demystify the process. This fact sheet describes a variety of programs, and includes information on funding sources, applicable deadlines, websites, contacts and where to get further information. Good luck!

TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD (TRB)

Viewed as the nation's main transportation research body, TRB is a private, non-profit entity, which is part of the National Academy of Sciences. TRB's research programs are primarily contract research. There are, however, opportunities for direct funding, such as the IDEA program, and involvement in high-visibility activities such as the Annual Meeting and participation on one of the standing committees.

Publications: The *TRB Publications Catalogue* is available from TRB at no charge, or on the Internet at <http://nationalacademies.org/trb/bookstore/>. The *TRB Directory* contains memberships of TRB committees, names and addresses of all committee members and affiliates, and lists of TRB representatives and staff. Others publications include: *Information for Authors* (updated annually), *Transportation Research Information Services*, the *National Cooperative Highway Research Program*, and *TRB Library Affiliate*.

Contact: To order publications, call TRB at (202) 334.3214, or visit their web site at

Website: <http://www.nas.edu/trb>.

Committees, Panels, and Task Forces There are some great opportunities to serve on a TRB committee, but you do not need to be a committee member to participate. TRB encourages people to get actively involved by attending the meetings and volunteering. TRB committees also provide opportunities to develop research problem statements.

Standing Committees- These are committees that review papers for presentation at the Annual Meeting, conduct other annual conferences and workshops devoted to particular subjects or fields, and offer many other activities with which to get involved.

Contacts: Consult the TRB Directory for names and affiliations. **Research Programs and the Annual Meeting Annual Meeting:** The meeting is a high-level professional meeting in January of each year. People have the opportunity to present their research, and discuss and learn about the latest developments in transportation. The deadline for submitting a paper for the meeting in January is August 1. Call the TRB Annual Meeting Information Line at (202) 334.3472 or Fax (202) 334.2299 for the current guidelines. **Website:** The Advance Program containing full session and presentation information can be accessed at <http://www.nas.edu/trb/meeting>.

IDEA Program: The Innovations Deserving Exploratory Analysis (IDEA) Program funds innovative new concepts, products, or results that would accelerate the development and deployment of advanced transportation methods, processes, systems, or technology. The IDEA program is divided into three areas: the National Cooperative Highway Research Program, the Transit program, and ITS-Intelligent Transportation Systems (the following section has further information on ITS research). The proposal process is open to all researchers, small or large businesses, universities, and research institutions in the United States or abroad.

Deadline: The IDEA is a continuing program, therefore there are no closing dates for

proposal submission. There are, however, two evaluation cycles: the first is for proposals received before March 31, and the second cycle is for proposals received before September 30.

Contact: Call (202) 334.3568 and ask for the *Program Announcement*. Please specify which of the three areas wish to apply to, and you will be directed to an engineer who can clarify proposal requirements and provide further information.

National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP): Administered by TRB and sponsored by AASHTO in cooperation with FHWA, the NCHRP solicits projects from three sources: member DOT and highway departments, chairs of AASHTO committees and, the Federal Highway Administration. Once the problem statements are approved, TRB solicits research proposals from private and public research organizations, including universities, nonprofit institutions, consulting and commercial firms and individual consultants.

Contact: Crawford Jencks, Manager of NCHRP. (202) 334.3224. Email: Cjenck@nas.edu.

Website: <http://www2.nas.edu/trbcrp>.

Publications: See the *Annual Summary of Progress* for a program description. More than 600 research efforts and Syntheses are available.

Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP): TCRP serves as one of the principal means for the transit industry to develop innovative near-term solutions to its demands, such as: solving operating problems, adapting appropriate new technologies from other industries and introducing innovations into the transit industry. Research problem statements are solicited periodically but may be submitted to TRB by anyone at anytime. Each project is assigned to a panel and if chosen, the contract is open to competitive bid.

Deadline: No deadline, but the cutoff for review is in April.

Contact: Stephen J. Andrie, Manager of TCRP at (202) 334.3224. SAndrie@nas.edu

Website: <http://www2.nas.edu/trbcrp>.

Publications: Take a look at the most recent *Annual Report of Progress* to understand the screening process and see which problem statements were funded. More than 50 research efforts and syntheses on various topics are available.

Synthesis Reports: These are reports within NCHRP and TCRP on contemporary transportation projects. The Reports synthesize information on highway and transit practices. Check the TRB homepage in July under "Synthesis" for the announcement of current topics.

Deadline: Topics are submitted by mid-January

Contact: If you are interested in writing a synthesis or submitting topic suggestions, call Sally Liff at (202) 334.3244.

ITS AMERICA

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) is the application of information technologies to improve transportation system performance. What used to be called Intelligent Vehicle Highway Systems (IVHS), is now broadened to include transit and a more multimodal approach. Federal transportation policy allocated a large portion of resources to ITS research. In fact, the federal government directed 1.3 billion over the last six years to ITS research and development. In order to ensure an intermodal approach to ITS, researchers are needed to engender more comprehensive transportation research and solutions. ITS America is a public/private partnership, founded in 1991 by congressional mandate. Their website has considerable information and lists current research opportunities, and their newsletter, *ITS America News*, contains member news, policy updates and a conference calendar of events. To receive the newsletter you must be a member, with rates varying by type of organization. To receive membership information, or for further information on ITS America,

Contact: Diana Gilroy at (202) 484.4669, or by email at dgilroy@itsa.org.
Website: <http://www.itsa.org>

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (DOT)

For general information DOT, access their website at <http://www.dot.gov>.

FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION (FHWA)

The FHWA is the largest modal administration in DOT, with a research budget (from 1992-1996) of \$2.1 billion. FHWA funds highway projects that address current and anticipated challenges affecting national highway transportation. FHWA projects have a gestation of about two years, so they are not for near-term considerations. There is also an Unsolicited Proposal Program in which topics may be submitted as part of a rigorous and detailed proposal, although as their literature concedes, "few unsolicited proposals are funded in any particular year." There are additional programs which are geared towards more technically-oriented research in highway materials and technology development.

Website: <http://www.volpe.dot.gov>; <http://www.volpe.dot.gov/procure/procure.htm>.

Publications: For complete information consult the document entitled, *Highway Technology Research & Development and Test & Evaluation Programs*.

The following research programs are contracted through a competitive solicitation process:

Acquisition and Contract Research and Technology Programs: These are contract awards made to individuals, businesses, organizations and academia by competitive solicitations. External solicitations are published in the *Commerce Business Daily* and via their website.

Contact: Frank Waltos at (202) 366.4205. If you do not have access to the Internet, ask for the acquisition forecast of upcoming procurement activities.

Website: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/aaa/hamhome.htm> and <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/aaa/cursolic.htm>.

Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Program: This program, limited to small businesses, is set up to meet the statutory requirements of the Small Business Innovation Development Act of 1982, to encourage private sector initiative and meet Federal research and development objectives. Topics and project statements are developed by FHWA technical offices and published in the annual DOT *SBIR Program Solicitation* booklet. Consult the booklet to submit a proposal for one of the listed topics.

Deadline: Early February until early May.

Contacts: Charles W. Niessner, FHWA, Turner-Fairbank Highway Research Center (703) 285.2100, or Dr. George Kovatch, John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (617) 494.2756.

Website: <http://www.volpe.dot.gov/procure/programs.htm>.

FHWA Research and Development Pooled-Fund Studies: These projects are initiated when widespread national or regional interest is shown in solving a significant transportation problem. Research, development and technology transfer activities are cooperatively sponsored by several states as *Pooled-Fund Studies*. There are two types of studies: national and regional. The projects may be initiated by a State Transportation Agency, an FHWA field office or the FHWA Washington Headquarters. Funding is provided by the state highway agencies contributing their state planning and research funds to the project.

Contact: Charles W. Niessner at (703) 285.2100

(ITS): ITS comprises a large program within FHWA. When projects come up, the office of Research and Development announces them through an open solicitation process in the *Federal Register* and the *Commerce Business Daily*. The department also periodically engages in "Operational Tests," which are usually joint ventures designed to carry out the testing and evaluation of DOT research. The Tests are also listed in the *Federal Register*, and the procedure for submitting proposals is listed on their website.

* See TRB's IDEA program for information on individual project funding.

Contact: Paula Ewen is the Outreach Team Leader for the Joint Program Office and can be reached at (202) 366.9682, and at paula.ewen@fhwa.dot.gov. Call to get brochures and/or specific government information.

Website: <http://www.its.dot.gov>; or www.fhwa.dot.gov.

THE FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION – FTA

The Federal Transit Administration has a small budget for research, and is open to new ideas. Proposals, submitted by an individual or an organization, are welcome, and if deemed of national significance may be included in the future budget. Or, proposals may be channeled to another research program such as TCRP. If interested in submitting a proposal, send a two page description of the proposal to the Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation, 400 7th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590. Attention: Associate Administrator, Edward Thomas, TRI-1.

Contact: Henry Nejako at (202) 366.0184

Website: <http://www.fta.dot.gov>.

OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES

Agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are great places to get involved in transportation research as it relates to the environment and public housing.

Website: To get information on Notice of Funding Availability (NOFAs), the General Services Administration site <http://www.gsa.gov/fdac> offers easy access. (If you search with the key words, "transportation and research" you can find a list of programs that fund research).

Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS): Part of the Department of Transportation, BTS is a valuable resource for transportation researchers. Collecting information on passenger and freight transportation, the BTS houses data on the nature and trends in transportation. The *BTS Transportation Statistics Annual Report* is a comprehensive evaluation of the transportation system nationwide, and the state of transportation statistics. Data and special tabulations are available on CD-ROM through the DOT and BTS website.

Website: <http://www.bts.gov>

U.S. (Environmental Protection Agency) EPA: Various groups at EPA review proposals with some regularity, and are open to new ideas and/or research partnerships.

Transportation Partners is the primary source for transportation issues, although the Smart Growth Network does occasional transportation projects as well. Both departments work closely together and are good places to inquire about research opportunities.

Transportation Partners - Contact Catherine Preston at (202) 260.5447

Smart Growth Network - Contact Geoff Anderson at (202) 260.2769

Website: <http://www.epa.gov>.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): HUD programs are not directly related to transportation research, but certain HUD initiatives may offer opportunities to link housing and community development with transportation. The following are

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): CDBG funds can be used to locate housing around transit (transit-oriented development).

Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC): EZ/EC projects offer a possible vehicle for transportation-related development projects. There are 72 urban EZ/EC projects, and each community has developed its own governance structure.

Contact: For further information call HUD Community Connections for a list of cities and contacts at: 1-(800) 998.9999.

Website: <http://www.ezec.gov>; <http://www.hud.gov/ezeclist.html>.

Consolidated Planning: Each year, CDBG-eligible communities develop new Action Plans as part of the Consolidated Planning process. These plans can be accessed via the general website.

- *The Regional Connections* demonstration project is designed to link HUD's consolidated planning process with ISTEA's planning process in six communities.

Contact: For further information on HUD projects, contact Michael Freedberg at (202) 708.1283

Website: <http://www.hud.gov>

Publications: The Office of Policy Development and Research undertakes a variety of research efforts. To receive the booklet, *Guidelines for Unsolicited Proposals Submitted to the Office of Policy Development and Research*, contact the office directly.

THE FOUNDATION CENTER

Private foundations often fund research projects, but it takes some investigation to understand each institution's mechanisms and limitations in order to narrow down your search. Some foundations will only fund projects in a specific geographic area, while others may concentrate on particular topics. The Foundation Center is a Library of resources on funding institutions. One publication, *The Foundation Directory*, lists over 35,000 top foundations that can be researched by subject, geographic region, donors or foundation name. The Center also offers workshops for proposal writing, and once a week provides an introduction to their facilities. You can visit the main office in Washington, DC or call (202) 331.1400 to locate a branch near you.

OTHER VALUABLE ADVICE

After talking to several seasoned veterans, the consensus is that the most effective way to advance your research idea is to participate on the committees of the organizations and agencies involved in funding. These include the committees mentioned previously, and also to:

- Participate on TRB and DOT committees.
- Encourage State DOT's and transit agencies to support a specific research proposal by submitting a detailed problem statement and scope of study.
- Encourage a partnership with your local transit agency.
- Get a university to propose your project.

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