

Partnering for Stronger Economies: Regional Councils and Walkable Communities Webinar Follow Up Report

On May 5, 2016, America Walks and the National Association of Regional Councils hosted webinar which examined how federal transportation funding is allocated through Regional Councils and how to access it for projects that promote walkable communities including complete streets, safety efforts and place-making. The webinar explored two unique perspectives from both a planner from a Regional Council and an advocate who has worked to use the resources available from their Regional Council. We received many questions from participants and selected answers are below.

How do member agencies of the MPO react to WFRC's pedestrian level assessments?

Scott Hess: The Walkability Tool is very new, completed just at the beginning of 2016. We are currently showing it off around the region at various committees trying to get the word out. So far the reactions have been positive, but it is yet to be seen if communities will use the tool to better their walkability.

Does WFRC's Regional Transportation Plan include any Target Zero/Vision Zero language to prioritize bike, ped and other transportation investments?

Scott Hess: WFRC's plans include language that supports bike and ped improvements to improve safety, but we do not talk specifically about Target Zero in our plan. UDOT does have the Zero Fatalities program focusing on a goal of zero fatalities on Utah roads, and they also have a program called Road Respect which focuses on the relationship between cars and bikes on the road to improve safety and increase respect between the modes.

Was the Utah Unified Transportation Plan adopted by UDOT and the four MPOs and their communities?

Scott Hess: The Unified Plan is made up of plans that are adopted by the MPOs, UDOT, and UTA. Once the plan is combined into the Unified Plan it is not further adopted that I am aware of. The effort of combining the plans is no small task though. All of the agencies use the same financial constraints, same time horizon for planning, and keep the same update cycle for their large scale plans.

Talk about sources of funding for planning of pedestrian networks versus funding for construction and implementation of pedestrian amenities and complete streets that come through MPOs? Thanks.

Scott Hess: WFRC allocates Surface Transportation Block Grant Funds, Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Funds, and Transportation Alternatives Planning Funds. All three funding sources have been used to fund bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure depending on the project and eligibility. STP and TAP are eligible for planning purposes, and have been used that way. Most funds are prioritized to build infrastructure, but it is not uncommon for planning studies to be funded

through those two sources of funding. CMAQ is not eligible for planning as it must have an air quality benefit to the expenditure.

Have any of you worked with religious minorities and if so, how did you encourage religious minority women to walk instead of driving in less-walkable urban environment with lower walkability index?

Scott Hess: Not necessarily a religious minority, but we do engage our local American Indian Tribal Councils when preparing the RTP. I do not have any other experience than that.

I have been working with a local college professor on getting his students involved with SRTS. They have worked with neighborhoods to identify problem areas and have taken the issues to their local city officials. What is the best way to move this project forward by getting their local MPO involved? What if SRTS isn't really on their radar? Is that where the community involvement/squeaky wheel is so important?

Scott Hess: WFRC allocates SRTS funding through local communities. The projects themselves may be generated from interested citizens, city staff, or an elected official who has heard about an area needing improvement. I would encourage the neighborhood groups to work with the City to apply for funds through SRTS. Typically the matching component is low, and should be within reach of most city budgets. Community involvement is critical because citizens bring issues to light from a user standpoint. As an MPO official or a city staffer, we rely on the input from the locals on their needs within neighborhoods.

