

ACCESS TO TRANSIT PROGRAM

2020 Call for Projects and Applicant Program Guide

Call for Projects open: March 13
Applications due: May 8



**Regional
Transportation
Authority**

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About the Program

The RTA launched the Access to Transit program in 2012 to seek funding for small-scale capital projects that improve access to the regional transit system for pedestrians and bicyclists. New for 2020, micromobility projects that improve access to transit and Phase I engineering are now eligible project types. Depending on the project type the Access to Transit program uses RTA funding as well as leverages local funds with federal [Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program \(CMAQ\)](#) funding to help implement recommendations from planning studies completed through the RTA's [Community Planning](#) program or the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) [Local Technical Assistance](#) (LTA) program. To date, it has funded 28 projects in communities throughout the region for a total investment of roughly \$13 million in Federal, RTA and local funds. Detailed information on past projects is available on [RTAMS.org](#).

Investing in pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure around transit provides a number of benefits for both local communities and the RTA system, such as:

- Increased transit ridership, which helps reduce congestion and vehicle emissions
- Better first and last mile connections that make it safer and easier for riders to get to and from transit service
- Lower demand for commuter parking
- Pedestrian friendly neighborhoods that promote public health through active transportation
- Support for transit-oriented development by fostering active, walkable places

The RTA selects Access to Transit projects via a competitive process according to program criteria, as detailed below, and CMAQ Program requirements.

The funding for selected projects will depend on the type of activity. For applicants seeking Phase II engineering and Construction funding, the RTA staff will combine all selected projects into a single CMAQ application. [Project funding is contingent upon the application being approved to the FFY2022-26 CMAQ program](#), which is finalized in the fall of 2021. If CMAQ funding is approved, projects are transferred to their respective sponsors who are then responsible for implementation. Applicants seeking only Phase I engineering will receive funding directly from the RTA and will not be included in the combined CMAQ application.

Eligible Applicants

The Access to Transit program is open to municipalities and counties that have completed, or are in the process of completing, a planning or implementation project through either the RTA's Community Planning program or the CMAP's LTA Program. The plans should specifically recommend bicycle and/or pedestrian access improvements to transit. This includes communities that have participated in corridor studies as a partner. Applicants must have CTA, Metra or Pace service in their community and be located within the RTA's six-county service area (Cook, DuPage, Lake, McHenry, Kane, Will).

Eligible Projects

There are two types of eligible projects in the Access to Transit program. Category A includes Phase II engineering and construction for small-scale, bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements that are based on recommendations from Community Planning or LTA studies with transit-related components. Category B includes only Phase I engineering for small-scale, bike and pedestrian improvements as described under Category A. Projects should generally be based on recommendations from a previous plan. Unlike Category A, acceptable plans include those completed outside of the RTA Community Planning and CMAP Local Technical Assistance programs.

Category A: Bicycle and Pedestrian Accessibility

Eligible projects must be able to demonstrate the ability to increase ridership, improve access to existing transit services and contribute to reduced vehicle emissions. Furthermore, the RTA may request that applicants revise their proposals after submittal in order to align with CMAQ program requirements.

The following list of improvements are eligible for Access to Transit Category A projects, either individually or combined:

- ADA accessibility improvements, crosswalks, pedestrian signal heads, sidewalk connections, wayfinding signage
- Bicycle infrastructure
- Bus stop infrastructure, rail warming shelters
- Micromobility projects (bike-sharing, scooter-sharing)
- Other innovative projects that support small-scale access improvements to transit

Category A Funding Guidelines

Funding guidelines for the Access to Transit program are as follows:



- Project budgets must be no greater than \$1 million and no less than \$150,000.
- With most projects, the 20% local match required by the CMAQ program will be equally shared between the RTA and the applicant, with each contributing 10% of the total project budget.
- The RTA may provide the full 20% match rate for smaller communities and those with lower tax bases or median incomes based on the economic and demographic characteristics of the area served. Eligible applicants may contact the RTA to determine if they qualify for this exemption.
- If required, Phase I engineering must be funded by the applicant as it is not eligible for CMAQ funding.

Category A Requirements

Phase I Engineering

Applications for Category A projects will be accepted if Phase I engineering is complete or preliminary planning is complete and the project can move immediately into Phase I engineering. Phase I engineering is required to begin immediately after the RTA confirms the project is selected to the Access to Transit program, with a goal of obtaining Phase I approval by the CMAQ application deadline (see Program Timeline for more details). **Applicants will be removed from the RTA Access to Transit Program if Phase I engineering is not complete prior to the CMAQ application deadline.**

Phase I engineering is required to be completed in a manner that preserves eligibility for federal funding. This requires the work to be completed by local government staff or by a consulting firm hired under a Qualification Based Selection (QBS) process. These requirements are available in the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Bureau of Local Roads Manual (Chapter 5, Section 5.06) available for download on the [IDOT website](#).

Category B: Phase I Engineering for Bicycle and Pedestrian Transit Access Projects

In order to address a frequent barrier to securing funding and completing projects, the 2020 Access to Transit Program will accept applications for Phase I engineering to communities of high need. Under Category B, eligible applicants can be awarded full reimbursement of the cost associated with developing Phase I engineering through an engineering firm for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Projects must be acceptable improvements as defined under Category A. Funding is allocated exclusively for communities with lower tax bases or median incomes based on the economic and demographic characteristics of the area served. Additionally, Category B projects completed may be considered for future funding

opportunities through Access to Transit Category A funding. Eligible applicants should contact the RTA to determine if they qualify for full exemption.

Category B Funding Guidelines

Funding guidelines for the Access to Transit program are as follows:

- Project budgets must be no greater than \$50,000 and no less than \$5,000.
- Category B applicants seeking only Phase I engineering will receive funding directly from the RTA and will not be included in the combined CMAQ application with Category A applicants.

Category B Requirements

Support

Applicants are required to show previous plans and support relevant to the project. Projects should generally be based on recommendations from a previous plan. Unlike Category A, acceptable plans include those completed outside of the RTA Community Planning and CMAP Local Technical Assistance programs.

An application form and list of required attachments are available at the [Access to Transit program web page](#). Please submit your application (including form and attachments) as a single PDF file via email to Michael Horsting at horstingm@rtachicago.org. Eligible applicants may apply for multiple projects, although separate applications are required for each project and category. The RTA strongly encourages potential applicants to contact the RTA if you have any questions prior to submitting your application.

Project Selection Process

RTA staff and representatives from CMAP and the Service Boards (CTA, Metra and Pace) will review applications. Applications will first be screened for eligibility and then selected based on the project's readiness, ability to increase ridership, local support, and Service Board support.

For Category A projects, if a project is selected for the Access to Transit program and the RTA secures CMAQ funding for it, the project sponsorship is transferred from the RTA to the applicant. The project sponsor is then responsible for working with IDOT to oversee the project to completion. The RTA requires all project sponsors to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) that confirms the local match funding arrangement and the program standards. Project sponsors are reimbursed by the RTA for the predetermined local match contribution according to the invoicing process established in the IGA.

For Category B, accepted projects will enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the RTA that confirms the local match funding arrangement and the project standards. Once an IGA has been executed, the applicant can begin procuring engineering services. Project sponsors are reimbursed by the RTA for the predetermined local match contribution according to the invoicing process established in the IGA after receiving approval from the RTA. If a proposed project includes the right-of-way of another entity (County DOT, Metra, IDOT, etc.) applicants should submit letters of support or interest with the application.

Timeline

2020		
	CATEGORY A	CATEGORY B
March	Call for Projects opens March 13 Hold program information session on March 23 at 10am	Call for Projects opens March 13 Hold program information session on March 23 at 10am
May	Applications due on May 8	Applications due on May 8
May - July	Application review, selection and notification. Successful applicants begin Phase I engineering	Application review, selection and notification Successful applicants begin Phase I engineering
December	Phase I engineering submitted for approval	
2021		
January	CMAQ Program Call for Projects Released	
January -February	RTA staff prepares CMAQ application	
February - March	RTA Submits CMAQ Application on behalf of selected applicants	
August	Recommended CMAQ Program of Projects released for public comment	
October	CMAQ Program of Projects finalized	

Project Examples

The following pages describe prior Access to Transit projects, which may be useful for 2020 applicants to consider.

Palos Heights

The City of Palos Heights received funding through Access to Transit to improve access to Pace Routes #383 and #386, as recommended in the Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan, which was funded through the RTA Community Planning program. The project consists of new sidewalks, crosswalk striping and countdown pedestrian signals at several locations along Harlem and Ridgeland Avenues. Pace Routes #383 and #386 serve a number of important destinations, such as Midway Airport, CTA and Metra rail stations, Toyota Park, and several major employers and shopping centers.



A new crosswalk at Harlem Avenue in Palos Heights provides better access to Pace's South Harlem route

Rolling Meadows

The City of Rolling Meadows received funding through Access to Transit to improve pedestrian connectivity along a two-mile stretch of Golf Road, which is home to several major employers and served by three Pace fixed routes: #208, #575 and #606. By installing crosswalks, sidewalks, countdown pedestrian signals, and concrete pads for bus shelters, access between bus stops and office parks on this busy corridor has greatly improved, encouraging more employees to commute by transit. The project is based on recommendations in the Golf Road Transit and Pedestrian Mobility Study, completed with RTA Community Planning assistance.



A sidewalk and crosswalk along a two-mile section of Golf Road in Rolling Meadows that is served by three Pace bus routes

Mount Prospect

The Village of Mount Prospect was awarded funding through Access to Transit to construct concrete pads, bike racks and covered shelters at three locations that added roughly 60 new bicycle parking spaces at the Mount Prospect Metra station on the UP Northwest line, which is also served by Pace Routes #234 and #694. The shelters feature solar-powered lighting and have been popular among bicyclists since opening in the fall of 2017. This project was based on recommendations from the Mount Prospect Downtown Implementation Plan that the Village completed with assistance from the RTA's Community Planning program.



A new bicycle parking shelter on Prospect Avenue in Mount Prospect next to the Metra station platforms