



Playing Matchmaker: Choosing the Right Funding Mechanism for Your Safe Routes to Parks Project

You have identified changes that could make your park easier and safer to access. Now it's time to find the money to pay for those improvements. This fact sheet can help guide you toward the right funding sources based on your goals and community context. This resource focuses specifically on funding infrastructure (physical improvements), but some of these funding resources can also pay for non-construction phases that make infrastructure possible like conducting traffic studies and installing drainage to manage storm water.

First, get familiar with the basic structure of local budgets and how active transportation and parks are typically funded by reading [Decoding the Jargon: Local Budget Basics for Funding Safe Routes to Parks](#). Every place is different, but this is a good place to start learning the standard vocabulary.



Photo: Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, Anchorage, AK

Next, consider the following questions to either learn more about your community's context or, if you already can answer the questions, frame how to approach funding Safe Routes to Parks projects.

- **Where does funding for parks and active transportation come from in your community?**
Consider the departments you most often interact with (parks and recreation, transportation, public works, etc.). Typically, cities share budget documents on their website in the interest of transparency. If you are having a hard time finding it online, contact the city department and ask them.
- **When and how does budgeting happen? Are there opportunities to get involved?**
If you can identify when the budget is produced and approved, you may be able to time your advocacy to align with that schedule. It is also good to see what the city plans to spend money on because there may be opportunities to align your work with the projects they have already planned and approved.
- **Does your locality currently have any bond measures or are there plans for any new ones?**
Bond packages are a great way to get funding for multiple projects, but they take effort to create and get voter approval. If your community has had success with bonds, especially for active transportation and or parks, it may be more feasible. Continue reading below to see if a bond package could be a good fit for your funding goals.

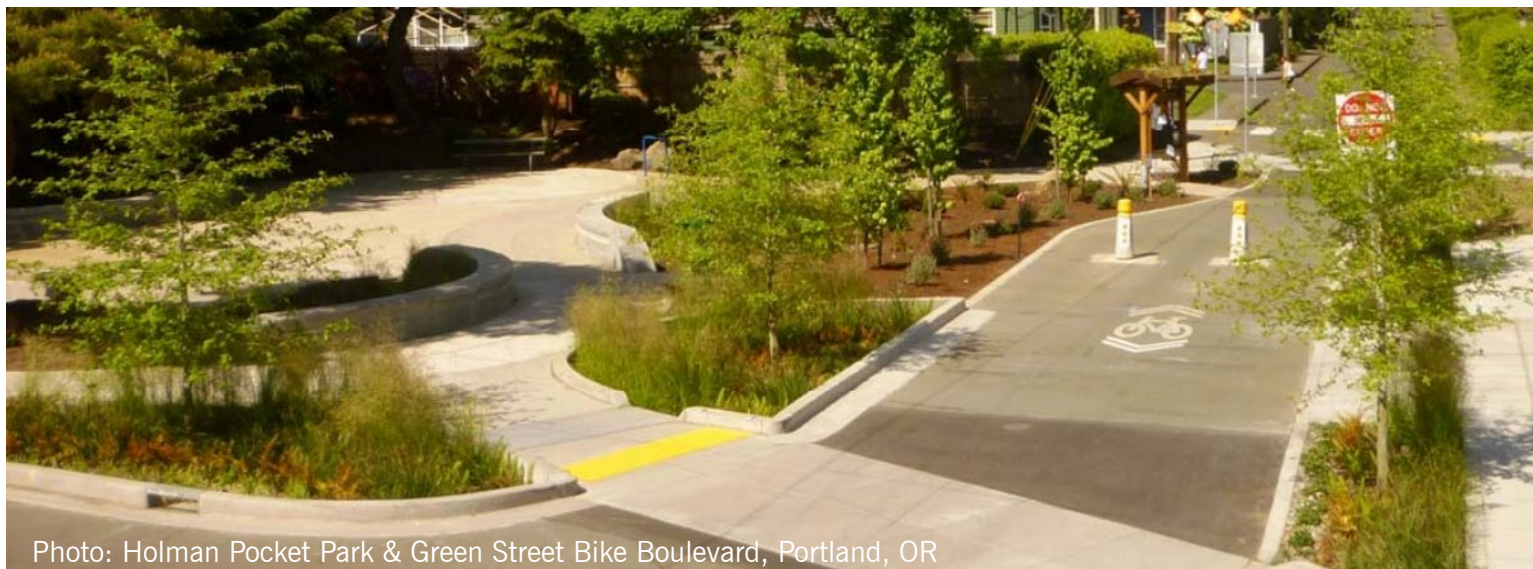


Photo: Holman Pocket Park & Green Street Bike Boulevard, Portland, OR

Once you have a clear understanding of your context and the current funding in your community, you can look toward other potential funding opportunities. To guide your search, think about what kind of infrastructure you want to fund. There are two broad categories of projects: individual projects like adding a high-visibility crosswalk, and system-wide improvements that include multiple infrastructure improvements within a network. Each approach can help move your community toward safer and more equitable park access, they are just different in scale, and therefore, require different funding resources. When combined, individual projects can help build a track record of success and public excitement so that there is enough momentum to implement system-wide improvements.

Below is a graphic to outline potential funding opportunities that could work well for different projects. As you read, remember that these are simplified suggestions to get you started, not set rules for which projects should get which funding.

If you want to...

- Paint a crosswalk
- Install curb cuts
- Make a temporary demonstration project permanent

If you want to...

- Fund multiple projects at once
- Upgrade a network of bike lanes

Look into...

- State and regional competitions for federal funds
- State funding competitions
- Grants

Look into...

- Budgets
- Bonds
- Discretionary grant funds from USDOT



Photo Credit: Krissy Harmsma

Individual projects can be a good fit for grant competitions.

Funding for active transportation can come from the federal, state, or local government. Depending on the location, these competitions may be run through state offices, metropolitan planning organizations, or other government entities like tribal governments.

- **Federal funding competitions:** There are multiple federal funding programs run through state and regional entities that can support Safe Routes to Parks work. They can provide high amounts of funding, but they can also require more preparation and reporting than other funding sources. Read about three specific programs and next steps to access these funds in detail here [link: [Federal Funding for Local Park Access](#)]
- **State funding:** State active transportation funding varies widely by state. Some states provide a few hundred thousand dollars for a limited program or discrete project while others have approved tens of millions of dollars on an ongoing basis. State funding complements federal money because it can serve as the 20 percent match required for most federal transportation programs. Additionally, state funding can be easier for communities to access due to fewer requirements than federal grants. Investigate whether your state has set aside active transportation funding and how states can develop these funding streams in [Investing in Health, Safety, and Mobility: A Report on State Funding for Walking, Bicycling, and Safe Routes to School](#).

System-wide improvements can be bolstered by budget changes and bond packages.

- **Budgets:** Sometimes there is money already available, but it needs to be re-aligned with community-identified goals. Prioritizing Safe Routes to Parks can help increase park access, equity, climate resilience, improved health, and neighborhood revitalization. Look at established plans, and identify where Safe Routes to Parks goals can plug in to help advance those established goals. Perhaps there is an opportunity to prioritize stated goals more explicitly through a project selection process. For more ideas for how to prioritize Safe Routes to Parks in existing budgets and through creative partnerships, read [Link: [Prioritize and Partner Up to Pay for Safe Routes to Parks Infrastructure](#)].
- **Bonds:** These are loans that provide a large amount of funding for a project and can be paid back over time. Voters have to indicate their approval for new bonds, so public support is essential. For more details on how bonds work, read "[But How Will We Pay For It?](#)" [Active Transportation Funding Mechanisms: Municipal Bonds 101](#). You can also read about how two different communities created, passed, and are now implementing bonds measures that support park access via walking and biking in [Link: [Ready, Set, GO Bonds for Park Access](#)].

Funding safe park access improvements can be done through existing public funding streams as well as traditional funding mechanisms like bonds, but it will always require building support from community members and government leadership. Make sure to connect with the departments that are managing these funding opportunities and budgets to fully understand the timeline, guidance, and opportunities for collaboration. Understanding these funding mechanisms in addition to the context of your local jurisdiction and region will be the key to effectively moving public resources toward park access.