Many people and organizations are wondering, “Where does landscaping and other scenic beautification fit into the new Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)?” Landscaping and scenic enhancement are eligible as part of the construction of any Federal-aid highway project under 23 U.S.C. 319, including TAP-funded projects. The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), enacted in July 2012, did not revise the provision for landscaping and scenic enhancement (authorized under 23 U.S.C. 319), so it remains in effect, with implications for the TAP. What does this mean? It means that there are ways in which to achieve the goals of the former TE category within the scope of MAP-21 by taking a holistic approach to project purpose, scope, and implementation.

Landscaping is a necessary part of any infrastructure project to provide a finished product, to protect the project, and to ensure it has the look and feel of being complete. This provision is what makes it potentially possible to obtain funding for landscaping and beautification by way of incorporation. Every highway project needs landscaping to stabilize the roadside; highways and utility corridors need vegetation management to protect their infrastructure. Transportation facilities need landscaping to look usable and to maintain a finished appearance. Federal-aid projects may also have landscaping treatments offered as part of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)-related mitigation.

With this in mind, landscaping and scenic enhancement (including community improvements such as lighting, street furniture, and public art along travel corridors) can be included in the planning and design of many TAP-funded projects. These projects may create new finished products or to enhance areas that may need improvement. Find ways to include these elements in bicycle and pedestrian trails and paths; as decorative and utility features in pedestrian sidewalks along streetscapes; or to complete the attraction to turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas.

The Bradford Streetscape and Beautification project in Rhode Island provides a great example of incorporating landscaping and beautification — as eligible under 23 U.S.C. 319 — into another TE project (that is still eligible as a TA Activity) to produce a complete project. The project aimed to improve safety and accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists, beautify the area of Bradford Village, eliminate erosion into the Pawcatuck River, calm traffic, and provide a “gateway” to the village. Funded as a TE/TA Activity 1 — the construction, planning, and design of pedestrian and bicycle facilities — the project received $120,000 in Federal TE funds with a $30,000 local match. The funded project scope included: “enhancing 1,000 feet of Bradford’s Main Street; streamlining the intersection with Route 91 and at Bradford Elementary School to create greater safety for pedestrians, constructing permanent sediment control measures at the unpaved parking lot near the Bradford Fishing Area to reduce erosion into the river, and the landscaping for an adjoining 11,000 square-foot grassy area to eliminate erosion and to create a park.”

These projects were intended to fill in the gaps left over from previous State and Federal roadway projects, and will complete the scenic character of the area.

MAP-21 TA Activity 7 - Vegetation Management

Vegetation Management is the TA category which provides a way to undertake landscaping as stand-alone, independent projects. The goals of this TA Activity are roadway safety, invasive species management, and erosion control in transportation rights-of-way. These projects can produce aesthetically pleasing results that benefit the
Vegetation Management, continued

The State of Iowa’s Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) demonstrates what the Vegetation Management category can accomplish. It was eligible as TE Category 5 for landscaping and scenic beautification, and remains eligible as a TA activity project for vegetation management practices. Since 1998, the IRVM Program Office has applied for and received Federal TE/TAP funds to purchase native seed for right-of-way plantings. To date, more than 50,000 acres of State and county roadsides in Iowa have been planted with prairie grasses and wildflowers, and more continue to be added every year. These plantings are well-adapted for use on roadsides: providing low-maintenance weed and erosion control, reducing surface runoff and erosion by improving infiltration, reducing snow drifting and winter glare, ensuring sustainability by increasing species diversity, enhancing wildlife habitats, and preserving Iowa’s natural heritage.

Indiana’s “A Greener Welcome” project was also funded by TE Category 5 for landscaping and scenic beautification. The scope and goals of the project in many ways are in line with TA vegetation management projects. The project aimed to beautify the six-mile I-70 corridor running from the Indianapolis International Airport through downtown Indianapolis with aesthetic landscaping and public art to include low maintenance vegetation and tree plantings. The project incorporated several landscaping elements that provide great vegetation management benefits. The use of all native wildflowers and shrubbery in its landscape design provided the secondary benefits of using native species to restore elements of the natural environment, removal of 17 acres from the maintenance schedule, and improvement of stormwater run-off mitigation and quality. Read more about this project and vegetation management practices in the forthcoming NTAC case study, “Best Practices: A Greener Welcome.”

The FHWA Plants and Invasive Species webpage provides resources that cover more specific information, which includes preventing the introduction of invasive species, lists of common roadside invasive grasses and weeds, and a handbook on roadside use of native plants. State specific lists are available within these resources.

Ox-eye sunflowers are a common sight in IRVM Wildflower Plantings.

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