



Collaborative Funding to Facilitate Airport Ground Access

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Airports are major interchange nodes in the passenger and freight transportation system. Here, local and regional transportation systems interface with those for national and international air travel and air freight. However, funding projects to improve the intermodal connectivity between the surface transportation system and airports is often complicated by the need to draw on a range of different funding programs and sources. Each has its own project eligibility requirements and regulations that limit the type and location of projects that can be funded.

This research project has examined the range of funding sources that have been used for intermodal airport ground access projects and has identified a recommended approach to develop collaborative funding strategies for such projects. This would involve a broad range of stakeholder agencies in planning and implementing the project.

Study Methods

The research reviewed the literature on planning and funding airport ground access projects and examined the range of federal, state and local funding programs and sources that have been, or could be, used to fund such projects. It then examined and documented past experience on collaborative funding of airport ground access projects through seven case studies of intermodal airport ground access projects. These case studies included a major intermodal transportation center, automated people-mover links to regional rail systems, airport access roadways, and extensions of regional rail systems to airports. Based on the case study findings, the researchers developed guidance material for planners developing airport ground access projects, as well as recommendations for changes to federal and state policies and funding allocation procedures.

Findings

Because intermodal airport ground access projects can rarely be funded from a single transportation funding program, planning such projects generally requires a funding strategy that involves multiple agencies and funding sources. These sources may include a range of federal, state and local transportation funding programs and possibly private-sector involvement.

Although potential changes to federal legislation and regulations could greatly facilitate funding such projects, many existing funding programs can be used, as illustrated by the case studies described in this report.

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While the exact mix and proportion of funding sources will vary with the nature and scale of the project, the implementation of a multi-agency, multi-program funding strategy will require the development of a broad regional consensus on the importance of the project. A key aspect to developing this consensus is a broad involvement of regional agencies in airport ground access planning. This can be greatly facilitated by establishing a multi-agency regional airport ground access task force that will work continually to identify and plan needed facilities to enhance airport ground access and to develop collaborative funding strategies to implement these plans. This task force should comprise senior staff from the relevant agencies, take a broad perspective on regional airport ground access issues and needs, and have adequate resources to assemble the relevant data and retain consultant support. A second key aspect in developing this consensus is a balanced and thorough documentation of the project's expected benefits.

In developing funding strategies for intermodal airport ground access projects, opportunities should be considered for public-private partnerships that can provide access to private-sector funding. Factors that must be considered in identifying those opportunities include ways to provide sufficient return on investment for private-sector partners.

Policy Recommendations

Current legislation and regulations are unnecessarily restrictive for using federal Airport Improvement Program and Passenger Facility Charge funds for ground access projects located off the airport, particularly in the distinction between on-airport and off-airport project components. The ability to develop effective solutions to airport access would be enhanced if future reauthorization of these programs provides greater flexibility in using these funds for intermodal access projects. In addition, current federal revenue diversion rules unduly limit the ability of airports to use airport revenues to finance improvements to airport ground access, particularly intermodal access projects. Greater flexibility in these rules could help facilitate such projects.



Many states have taken a strong policy position on developing improved intermodal connections within the transportation system. It may be helpful for these states to create a funding program specifically structured to support the development of intermodal connections and improved intermodal coordination. Local transportation funding programs can result from ballot measures that specify the projects to be funded.

About the Authors

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/2503.html