

A Square Peg (Educational Grant) in a Round (DOT) Hole

Success Strategy for Non-Infrastructure Transportation Enhancements (TE) Grants

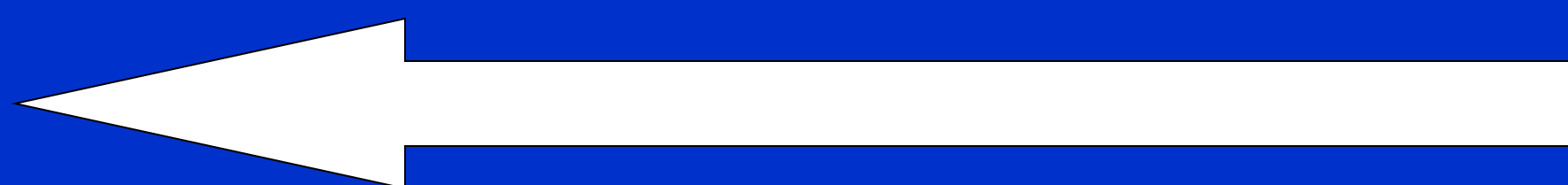
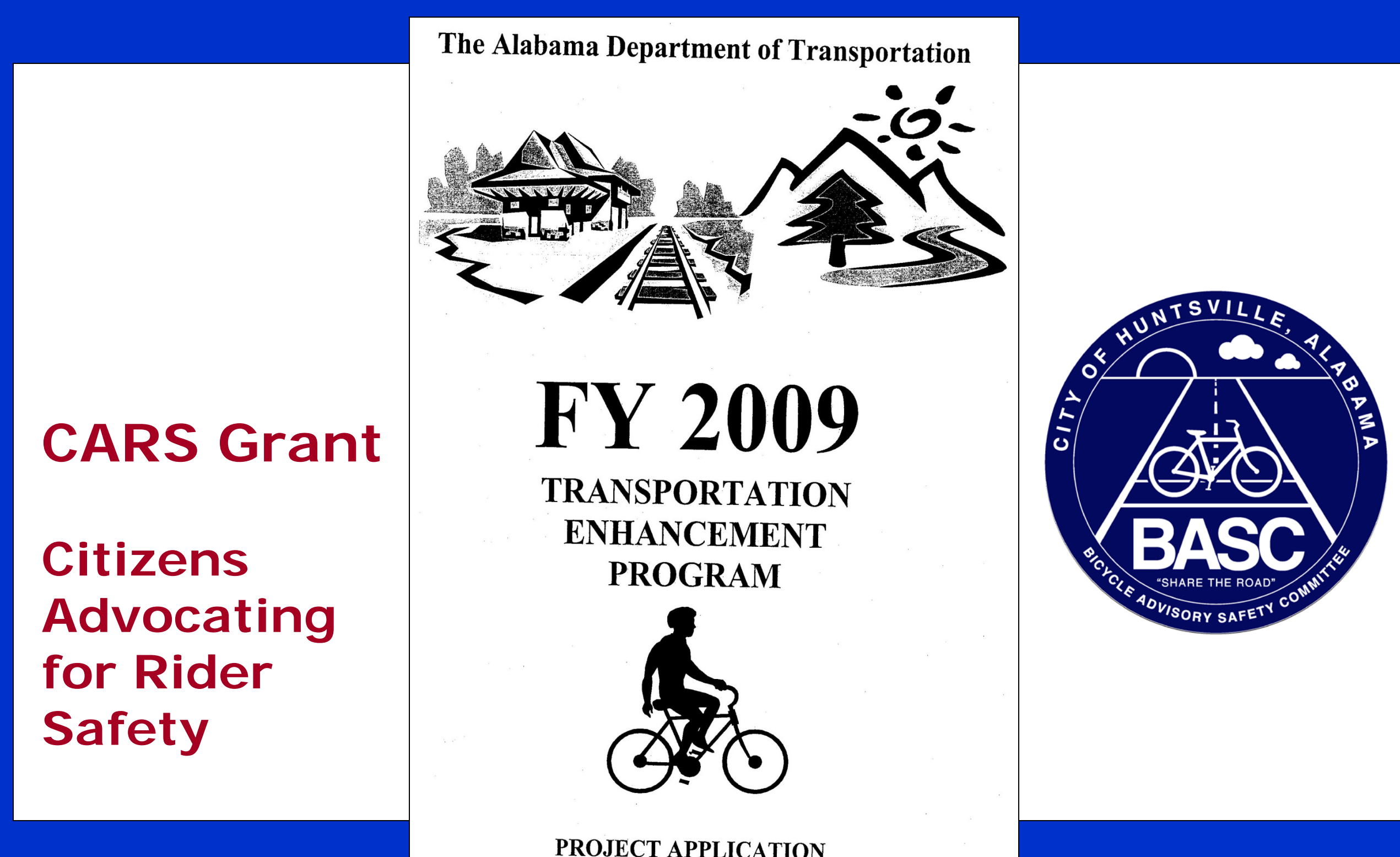
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Summary

The purpose of this poster is to outline the process, as it has recently been documented by members of the Bicycle Advisory & Safety Committee (BASC) in Huntsville, Alabama, to submit a non-infrastructure TE grant with the state DOT. As may be the case in many states, state DOTs, as well as municipalities, are unaccustomed to submitting/processing TE grants for non-construction projects (the square peg).

The BASC project for which TE funding was requested, was designed to be a Public Education & Information (PE&I) campaign to create a safer road environment for cyclists. It was proposed after several needless cycling fatalities occurred in the Huntsville area and was envisioned to reach motorists to improve their driving and attitude towards cyclists in traffic. During the TE grant review process a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) engineer provided some excellent guidance in methodology that may be more effective based on a review of previous PE&I campaigns¹.

ALDOT provided initial guidance to submit a "Research Proposal" format that the DOT was familiar with for non-construction contracts for studies and data collection. These are typically written by a university or organization vying for the contract. Since the municipality as a "Project Sponsor" was not permitted to perform the work, the "Research Proposal" became a "Work Plan" describing the desired outcomes rather than defining the scope for the more knowledgeable professionals and limiting the work to specific methods. Suggested methodology became a Statement of Work (SOW) that was mirrored in a Request for Quote (RFP) prepared to allow private firms or consultants to bid on the project within the funding specified.



A Process to Follow (in Alabama)

- A. Form an alliance or bicycle advisory committee** including city or municipal transportation professionals, such as planners, traffic engineers or public safety officers, the mayor's office, and most importantly, local cyclists.
- B. Hold a brainstorming meeting to identify the Objective and Goals** of the program that are needed, achievable, and within the capabilities of your city. Non-infrastructure bicycling programs are in category #2 of the twelve eligible TE activities².
- C. Identify Funding. Since TE grants are an 80/20 match**, your city must agree to finance 20% of the program cost, unless another source is identified to cover the 20%. Innovative financing is allowed for TE project sponsors that spend local funds on design, preliminary engineering, some materials, and/or right-of-way acquisition³.
- D. Find/contact your state DOT TE coordinator** for application requirements, forms and deadlines: <http://www.enhancements.org/contacts.asp> TE applications must be submitted through a city or municipal government entity. NOTE: In some states, such as Alabama, the forms nor any on-line guidance are not on the ALDOT website and available only through the DOT TE coordinator.
- E. Write the TE project application**, highlighting aspects of "surface transportation" and following your state's TE application format, and submit for approval by the process in Figure 1.

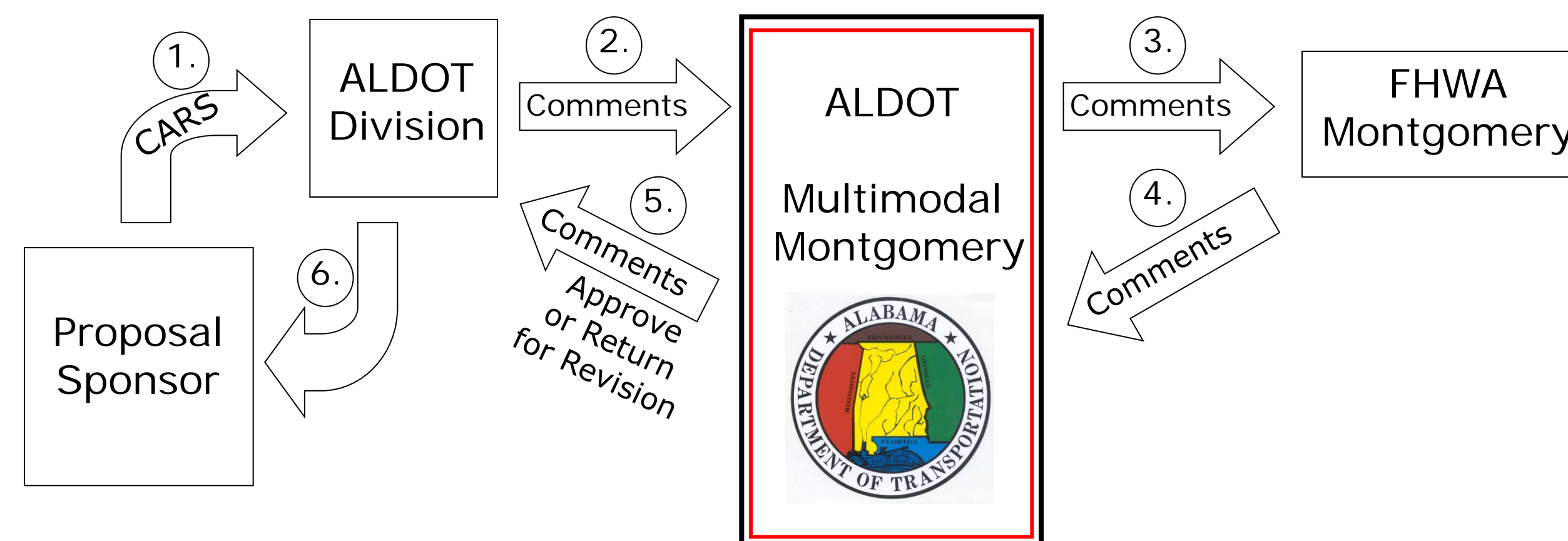


Figure 1. Six-Step Serial Process for ALDOT Submittal/Review Process

ALDOT TE PROJECT APPLICATION SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS:

- *Always include a Cover Letter with each submittal*, even for revisions and re-submittals, to explain the changes.
- The process for TE proposals submittal/review in Alabama is serial and takes some time.
- Have patience.

- F. Next, ALDOT must approve the TE grant proposal.**
- G. Next step, a "Work Plan" must be created to provide a detailed Scope of Work (SOW)** and submitted for approval by the process in Figure 1.
- H. Find out who reviews the TE proposals at Division, Multimodal, and FHWA.** Email them to ask about status, periodically...
- I. Revise the work plan, if necessary, and repeat the submittal process** in Figure 1 until ALDOT approves the Work Plan.
- J. Prepare a Request for Proposal (RFP), based on the work plan SOW** for consultants to bid on the project. The RFP must also be submitted/approved by the process in Figure 1.
- K. Hopefully, the state DOT will approve the work plan and RFP and will then execute a written agreement** with the project sponsor/municipality.
- L. TE grants are regular federal-aid projects and are cost reimbursable.** When ALDOT approves the consultant for the project, the consultant will be issued a Notice to Proceed letter by Project Sponsor (in this case, the City of Huntsville) and will begin work. The consultant will invoice the city and the city will pay the consultant with city funds. Then, the city will invoice ALDOT for reimbursement. The city will be reimbursed for 80% of the eligible cost shown in the invoice. The consultant may invoice the city no more than once per month.



References

1. Transportation Research Board (TRB) Research Results Digest 322, August 2007, "Public Information and Education in the Promotion of Highway Safety."
2. National Transportation Enhancement Clearinghouse website: http://www.enhancements.org/12_activities.asp
[from above...#2 Pedestrian and bicycle safety and educational activities – Campaigns promoting safety awareness; safety training activities and classes; training materials. Examples of projects that may be considered eligible include:
 1. Non-construction safety-related activities, such as a safety promotional campaign;
 2. Bicycle and pedestrian safety training;
 3. Training materials such as videotapes, brochures, and maps;
 4. Rent for leased space and;
 5. Short-term staff salaries.]
3. National Transportation Enhancement Clearinghouse, TECHNICAL BRIEF: " Innovative Financing For TE Projects"
<http://www.enhancements.org/misc/tbfinancing.pdf>
[from above...For these expenditures to become part of their local match in the state of Georgia, the project sponsor must:
 1. Request permission in its TE application to use the innovative financing option,
 2. Submit a detailed proposal,
 3. Complete a pre-award audit process and
 4. Execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU between the sponsor and the DOT secures clearances for the sponsor, acknowledges that innovative financing procedures will be used, and commits the sponsor to securing necessary rights-of-way.]

Conclusions

Hierarchy within ALDOT, DOT federal rescissions, coupled with the learning curve about this type of TE application, as well as ineffective and sometimes indifferent communication between the various state and municipal offices, all contributed to lengthy delays in the review and approval of this TE grant.

In the intervening 18 months since the initial grant submittal, public perception about the possibility of attaining this grant has waned. It has been very frustrating for the Citizens Advocating for Rider Safety (CARS) campaign promoters because they desperately see the need for this PE&I campaign in their community. In fact, one of the BASC members and an author of the grant application, was recently killed in one of several fatal car/bike crashes since the TE grant application was submitted.

In Memorandum

We in Huntsville will miss Sharon and are determined to see the CARS project through. The words below were excerpted from a May 11, 2010 editorial in the Huntsville Times by John Peck.

"...The tragic death of a well-known Huntsville bicycling advocate, Sharon Bayler, is yet another chilling reminder of why motorists and bicyclists must find a way to safely share the roadways.

Sharon was struck from behind by a pickup truck on a rural highway near Taft, Tennessee.

Transportation planners and bicycling enthusiasts must develop a better roadmap on how cars and bicyclists can safely co-exist, whether it be through wider road shoulders, shared lanes with ample markings, bike-dedicated lanes, or ...a more aware and educated driving public that respects cycling as a means of transportation.

Bayler, 52, of Harvest, AL, served on a city panel charged with formulating ways to make area streets more bike friendly. Huntsville's Bicycle Advisory and Safety Committee on which Bayler served was formed in the wake of a bike-car collision in 2008 that killed a 20-year-old University of Alabama in Huntsville student. And just last August, a 49-year-old businessman was killed when he was hit by a car during a bicycle training ride in Scottsboro.

Certainly, various factors were at play in each accident. The point here is not blame but to assess how these kinds of things can be averted. Just a few seconds of inattention behind the wheel could lead to deadly consequences.

Together, the bicycling community and the motoring public should develop a healthier recognition for the respective rights and responsibilities of the other.