

New Jersey Department of Transportation
Bureau of Research

Technical Brief



Criteria for Multimodal Project Rehabilitation versus Maintenance

The purpose of this research project is to help the Bureau of Multimodal Grants and Programs to resolve conflicting information regarding the types of projects that qualify for grants supported by the New Jersey Transportation Trust Fund (TTF). Specifically, the threshold between “routine (or scheduled) maintenance,” which the TTF cannot support, and “rehabilitation” project, which can be supported by the TTF, appears to be inconsistent. The ultimate goal of this research is to develop criteria for the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) to use that reflect the spirit of the TTF, State Airport Aid Grants Program, and Rail Freight Assistance Program legislation and rulemaking, are harmonious with other states, and rational for grant applicants. This research project is being completed in three tasks: conduct literature review and interviews; develop recommended definitions and threshold criteria, establishing bounds for which activities qualify as rehabilitation versus maintenance; and prepare a final report.

Background

NJDOT offers several grant programs to assist owners and operators of private airports, rail lines and spurs, and maritime facilities in the state. The grants programs are funded in part by the TTF. According to state law, the TTF may fund only rehabilitation, or “permitted maintenance” activities and projects, and cannot be used to fund routine or scheduled maintenance. The threshold between routine or scheduled maintenance and permitted maintenance has historically not been well or consistently defined. To resolve this conflict the research team evaluated relevant New Jersey legislation and rules, sought input from current national research on the topic, and conducted a review of other states’ funding programs to identify a “standard” delineation between maintenance and rehabilitation.

Research Objectives and Approach

The purpose of this project was to help the Bureau of Multimodal Grants and Programs resolve conflicting information regarding the types of projects that qualify for grants supported by the TTF. The research objectives included:

- Examine state-of-the-practice definitions for the terms “routine/scheduled maintenance,” “rehabilitation,” and “reconstruction,” based upon the body of transportation planning and engineering literature, laws and statutes of other states and federal agencies;
- Prepare recommended policy definitions of these terms for NJDOT to incorporate into office policy (and into rulemaking and legislation if necessary); and

- Develop recommended criteria for classifying candidate projects (or components of candidate projects) for the NJDOT State Airport Aid Grants Program and Rail Freight Assistance Program as maintenance or rehabilitation.

Findings

There are several cross-cutting themes that the literature review and interviews uncovered. The usage of terms for maintenance and rehabilitation for both aeronautics and rail projects, within the literature and in their application in the industry, illustrate that there is significant overlap in the way these terms are deployed. Thus, the terms are not standardized and cannot be considered “terms of art” in most contexts. Because of this overlap, maintenance and rehabilitation activities are often combined into one program. Where distinctions between maintenance and rehabilitation are made, either by definition or by practitioners’ interpretations, it is generally agreed that rehabilitation activities require significantly greater effort and/or cost, and/or result in a longer extension of service life than maintenance projects.

Examples of criteria used to distinguish maintenance and rehabilitation projects include: whether the activity is part of a regularly-scheduled maintenance program; whether the activity is funded using an annual maintenance or operating budget; whether the activity extends the service life of an asset beyond a specified threshold; whether the activity exceeds a threshold for the types of activities completed or level of effort, for example, whether a project involves replacement of a specified number of ties, or includes milling existing pavement surfaces, etc.; whether the activity is conducted as an immediate response to a fault or defect found during inspection, or requires planning and project development; or whether the asset can remain in operation while the activity is being completed, or if the asset must be taken out of service.

The research team developed recommended policy definitions that define projects eligible for assistance using the state’s airport and rail grants programs. The definitions, lists of eligible project types, and suggested application questions are available in the Final Report.

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A final report is available online at: <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/research/>. If you would like a copy of the full report, send an e-mail to: Research.Bureau@dot.state.nj.us.

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