



Rural Public Transportation Strategies for Responding to the Livable and Sustainable Communities Initiative

DETAILS

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NATIONAL COOPERATIVE HIGHWAY RESEARCH PROGRAM

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Research Results Digest 375

RURAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO THE LIVABLE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

This digest summarizes key findings of research performed under NCHRP Project 20-65, Task 42, "Rural Public Transportation Strategies for Responding to the Livable and Sustainable Communities Initiative," by ICF International. For the study, ICF conducted a nationwide survey of state departments of transportation (DOTs) and their rural livability activities; conducted follow-up interviews about grants from the Partnership for Sustainable Communities; and created a primer highlighting strategies that state DOTs, transit operators, and their partners can use to help rural organizations applying for discretionary grant programs. The material in this digest was prepared by Kathleen Rooney, Senior Associate, and Sonya Suter, Research Assistant, ICF International.

SUMMARY

Livability in transportation is about using the quality, location, and type of transportation facilities and services available to help achieve broader community goals (1). These goals include access to employment options, community services, affordable housing, quality schools, and safe streets, all essential quality-of-life elements of value to rural communities. In June 2009, officials from several federal agencies announced the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) and its six livability principles, which had been developed as a foundation for interagency coordination. The six principles read as follows:

1. Provide more transportation choices.
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing.
3. Improve economic competitiveness.
4. Support existing communities.
5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.
6. Value communities and neighborhoods.

Although the fundamental goals of livability initiatives are similar across urban, suburban, and rural areas, the scale and means of achieving livability differ in rural communities. This means that a one-size-fits-all approach to transportation does not necessarily work for rural America, and more refined strategies and tools may be needed to help rural communities achieve livability outcomes. This research effort aims to understand how state DOTs can help rural organizations applying for discretionary grant programs and advance transit-related solutions to rural mobility challenges.

The intent of the survey was to better understand the rural livability-related initiatives in place at state DOTs across the country and identify needs, challenges, and successes with regard to rural livability. The survey was distributed to members of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Standing Committee on Public Transportation at all 50 state DOTs and the District

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of Columbia. These individuals either responded to the survey or designated others within their agencies as the appropriate respondents. The majority of respondents (59 percent) indicated that they were only somewhat familiar with PSC and its livability-related funding programs, and 28 percent indicated that they were not very familiar.

Only 8 percent of respondents believed their rural communities competed successfully for federal livability funding. Nearly half (49 percent) of respondents indicated that they did not know. Survey respondents had several ideas of what might be helpful in the future, but a significant proportion (43 percent) did not know what successful or promising strategies rural communities were using to be competitive for federal livability funding. The most promising approaches identified by respondents included partnerships with other local or regional organizations or with state agencies. Survey respondents felt that providing planning support, informational resources, and including rural communities in regional initiatives would be the most effective strategies to help these agencies compete in the future.

As a follow-up to the survey on state DOT livability activities, the research team conducted six peer panel teleconferences to further explore how state DOTs can improve livability initiatives in rural communities and more successfully compete for federal livability funds. Peer panel participants included several state DOT survey respondents as well as representatives of local public and private organizations involved in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sustainability and U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) livability grant-winning projects. Five of the six teleconference calls focused on possible strategies for improving rural livability and grant competitiveness (1–5). The peer panel teleconferences concentrated on the following topics:

- Providing program support to rural communities, transit providers, and regional planning organizations (RPOs) from the state level.
- Building awareness of PSC resources and livability in rural communities.
- Creating statewide or regional partnerships to support livability.
- Encouraging transit coordination at the regional level.
- Aligning different forms of transportation service provision.
- Validating these strategies with state DOTs.

The peer panel teleconferences provided useful information about successful strategies for obtaining federal livability funds and applying them to individual rural livability initiatives.

Based on the results of the survey and the peer panel teleconferences, the research team identified four strategies that DOTs can use to support public transportation in rural communities and help them to compete for federal livability funding programs. Drawing on these strategies, the team developed a primer as a resource for state DOTs and transit operators as they work to support innovation in rural areas. The strategies discussed in the primer are:

- Building awareness of PSC resources and livability in rural communities.
- Providing programmatic and financial support.
- Creating statewide or regional partnerships.
- Encouraging transit coordination at the regional level.

BACKGROUND

As regards transportation, livability is about using the quality, location, and type of transportation facilities and services available to help achieve broader community goals (1). These goals include access to employment options, community services, affordable housing, quality schools, and safe streets – all essential quality-of-life elements of value to rural communities. In June 2009, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator announced the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) and its six livability principles. Intended as a foundation for interagency coordination, the six principles read as follows:

1. Provide more transportation choices.
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing.
3. Improve economic competitiveness.
4. Support existing communities.
5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.
6. Value communities and neighborhoods.

As part of this interagency effort, these three agencies have coordinated on a number of funding opportunities for communities across the country. Through multiple rounds of funding, these programs are supporting a wide variety of livability-

related projects. Examples of these grant programs include:

- U.S. DOT Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants.
- HUD Sustainable Communities Planning Grants and Community Challenge grants.
- FTA Bus and Bus Facilities Livability grants.
- EPA Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Pilot Program.

A full list of potential livability-related funding opportunities can be found at: <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/grants.html>.

Many of the most prominent examples of livability projects are in urban and suburban areas. Although the fundamental goals of livability initiatives are similar across urban, suburban, and rural areas, the scale and means of achieving livability differ in rural communities. This means that a one-size-fits-all approach to transportation does not necessarily work for rural America, which encompasses two-thirds of all U.S. counties (2, 3).

Further complicating efforts to improve livability in rural areas is the greater funding and programmatic context. Many rural communities have difficulty competing successfully for regular transit grants through traditional funding sources. The challenges they face can be even more difficult when rural communities seek grants for livability-related objectives. Possible reasons for the increase in difficulty include:

- Lack of connections between rural agencies and other relevant organizations, which may limit relationships between smaller communities and the staffs at larger regional agencies. Many rural systems operate in single counties, cities, or towns (4).
- More limited staffing and financial resource capacity of rural organizations (to prepare competitive grant applications and provide the required local match).
- Lack of planning capacity or experience in smaller organizations.
- Generally higher rural transit costs per trip (due to longer trips with non-productive, “dead” miles), resulting in rural proposals appearing less cost-effective than their urban or suburban counterparts.
- Grants that are commonly available for one-time capital or start-up expenses but rarely available to fund ongoing operations, a situa-

tion that may pose financial limitations for a potential rural grantee.

- Focus among many rural transportation providers on specific populations and programs, such as programs for persons with medical needs or disabilities. Tailoring services to specific needs can rule out providing services to the general public for multiple-trip purposes, and making such services available to the general public may be required to compete effectively for grant funding.
- Increased competition from nonprofit and private agencies providing transit services (4).
- Increased vehicle ownership rates, contributing further to a reduced pool of transit customers (4).

Currently, less than 10 percent of federal public transportation funding goes to rural areas. Given these challenges, how can rural communities support, embrace, and improve their livability? State DOTs have an opportunity to help rural communities overcome barriers to competition for livability-related funding. The goal of this research was to identify promising and proven strategies that can help enhance rural livability and improve the competitiveness of rural public transportation projects for available federal livability initiative funding.

The study included a survey of state DOTs to learn about their roles supporting public transportation and livability in rural communities, followed by peer panel teleconferences representing agencies and nonprofits that have successfully received federal livability funding or initiated similar projects, to learn about what strategies have helped them be more effective. This digest includes:

- A summary of the research approach and key findings of the nationwide survey, literature review, and six peer panel teleconferences; and
- A primer on state DOT support for rural transit and community livability initiatives, including four identified strategies for supporting livability-related projects.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of the research approach and results. The research approach included a nationwide survey, literature review, and peer panel teleconferences. The survey explored the extent of

state DOT knowledge of the federal livability funding programs and their related initiatives to support rural livability and public transportation in rural communities. The literature review provided insight on key strategies for rural livability, particularly related to land use planning and smart growth. The peer panel teleconferences provided concrete insight into strategies for better supporting public transportation and rural livability, which participants acknowledged might be called by different names in different regions and communities.

Survey

The researchers conducted a nationwide survey of state DOTs, starting with members of the AASHTO Standing Committee on Public Transportation and supplemented by members of the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) or the Multi-State Technical Assistance Program. The intent of the survey was to better understand the rural livability-related initiatives in place at state DOTs across the country and to identify needs, challenges, and successes with regard to rural livability. The survey also was used to identify potential case studies of rural agencies and communities collaborating with each other, with state agencies, and with nearby urban communities to promote and advance public transportation in rural areas.

The team secured responses from 39 contacts, representing 39 of 50 state DOTs, equaling a 78 percent response rate. (No rural public transportation is provided in the District of Columbia.) The West and Midwest, two regions of the country that contain large rural areas, had high survey response rates. The Northeast and South had slightly lower response rates. Almost all of the continental United States was represented.

All respondents (100 percent) indicated that they provide technical assistance. Nearly all (97 percent) administer grant money and distribute federal funding. A majority of respondents indicated that they also fill other roles, such as developing a statewide transportation plan or providing planning support. Three respondents indicated that they also provide compliance oversight of federal and state funds, and four indicated that they are responsible for overseeing staff. Between 75 percent and 85 percent of the respondents who worked for agencies that provide technical assistance or administer grant

funding indicated that they also directly perform those services. This response suggests that, for the most part, the individuals taking the survey were those to whom the survey was targeted.

The majority of respondents (59 percent) indicated that they were only somewhat familiar with the PSC and its related funding programs. An additional 28 percent indicated that they were not very familiar with the PSC. Taken together, this high percentage (87 percent) may indicate that education and outreach about livability principles and PSC programs are important strategies going forward. It is also possible that in some DOTs the transit division staff is not involved in other agency livability-related initiatives.

All respondents were asked about their state's rural communities that competed for livability funding and the challenges associated with doing so. Only 8 percent of respondents believed their rural communities competed successfully, and nearly half (49 percent) responded that they do not know. A lack of resources available to complete the application and lack of technical expertise were the most significant challenges identified by respondents for rural communities, with 67 percent and 58 percent respectively rating them as "very important." Half of respondents thought that rural initiatives were too small to be competitive, and this was a larger problem for those without successful applicants in their states. Participants also noted several additional challenges, such as finding sufficient matching funds, or larger transit systems that believe they will be more successful without partnering with smaller providers.

Overall, survey respondents had several ideas of what might be helpful in the future but a significant proportion (43 percent) did not know what successful or promising strategies rural communities were using to help them compete for federal livability funding. Among respondents who did identify such approaches, the most promising approaches included partnerships with other local organizations or with state agencies. Survey respondents felt that providing planning support, informational resources, and including rural communities in regional initiatives would be the most effective strategies to help these agencies compete in the future.

The survey results indicate that most agencies have not begun to change their approach to supporting rural communities in response to federal livability initiatives. Eleven percent have changed

and 11 percent are considering changing. Some of the new approaches that have been adopted include hiring additional staff people, implementation of a multi-agency task force that focuses on transit services, and holding listening sessions to better define and react to livability needs in rural areas. Note: Additional details of the survey responses and a list of the teleconference participants appear in Appendices A and B of the contractor's final report, which are not printed with this digest but are available on request from CRP staff.

Literature Review

The research team reviewed a variety of practitioner-focused publications from federal agencies, research organizations, and advocacy groups including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), EPA, the Transportation Research Board (TRB), and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

The literature review highlighted both the need for public transportation in rural areas and the differences in how public transportation can be provided effectively in these areas. Also emphasized was the need for close coordination between counties, towns, RPOs, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), transit agencies, and other organizations to provide cost-effective services that support enhanced livability. Insight from these sources informed the identification of strategies described in the primer as well as possible peer panel participants.

Peer Panel Teleconferences

The survey results indicated that some state DOT representatives had limited understanding of rural livability issues within their states. In some cases, that limited knowledge may have been due to the survey targeting the transit staff or division, given that DOT planning or policy staff may have been more attuned to rural livability-related issues, especially where the agency's transit staff focused primarily on grant management. Consequently, it was determined that more information was needed from successful recipients of federal livability funds to fully understand how particular strategies had helped them to develop their rural livability initiatives. The researchers examined lists

of recipients of DOT TIGER I, TIGER II, and Bus Livability grants from 2010 and 2011 as well as HUD Sustainable Community and Regional Planning grants. TIGER III grants were not included, as they were released after the analysis had been completed. From these lists, the research team identified 38 projects in rural areas with a public transportation component.

Representatives of all grant recipients were invited to participate in one of four peer panel teleconferences organized to cover the following discussion topics:

- Providing program support to rural communities, transit providers, and RPOs from the state level.
- Creating statewide or regional partnerships to support livability.
- Encouraging transit coordination at the regional level.
- Aligning different forms of transportation service provision.

Participants also were invited from noteworthy and successful rural projects either cited from the survey or identified through the literature review. These projects represented both emerging and established examples.

Another peer panel teleconference addressed building awareness of PSC resources and livability in rural communities. For this teleconference, the researchers solicited interest from survey respondents who had indicated that they were either "somewhat" or "not familiar" with PSC. This peer panel was intended to help learn the extent of state DOT understanding of livability and federal livability initiatives to determine what further support might be needed.

The final teleconference included discussions with interested state DOTs on all the potential strategies and helped to thoroughly explore the challenges and successes with rural livability and public transportation. A list of the organizations that participated in each peer panel teleconference appears in Table 1.

The peer panel teleconference calls were facilitated by the research team. Each call lasted between 1 and 2 hours, and included a welcome and explanation of the project and its objectives as well as time for discussion. Discussion was guided by a series of questions aimed at identifying challenges, successes, and opportunities

Table 1 Organizations participating in the peer panels.

Peer Panel	Participating Organizations
1. Providing Program Support to Rural Communities, Transit Providers, and RPOs from the State Level	Choctaw Nation, Oklahoma
	Estuary Transit District, Connecticut
	Low Country Council of Governments (COG), South Carolina
2. Building Awareness of PSC Resources and Livability in Rural Communities	Montana DOT
	Michigan DOT
	New Hampshire DOT
	Nevada DOT
	Kansas DOT
	Missouri DOT
3. Creating Statewide or Regional Partnerships to Support Livability	New River Valley Planning District Commission, Virginia
	Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
	Southern Apache County, Arizona
	Central Florida RPC
	Low Country COG, South Carolina
	Beaver County Transit, Pennsylvania
	Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, South Dakota
Oglala Sioux Tribe, South Dakota	
4. Encouraging Transit Coordination at the Regional Level	Community Transportation Association of Idaho
	South Central COG, Colorado
	Jaunt, Virginia
	City of Moscow, Idaho
	Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
	Pennsylvania DOT
5. Aligning Different Forms of Transportation Service Provision	Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission, Vermont
	Eastern Maine Development Corporation
	BNIM Architects (for South Dakota)
	City of Ranson, West Virginia
6. Validating These Strategies with State DOTs	Arkansas SHTD
	Idaho Transportation Department
	Oregon DOT

in participants' livability projects. Some of the questions were:

- Tell us about your project/organization's work. Specifically, what is innovative or new about it?
- What support/skill/knowledge would have been helpful in pursuing this project?
- What were some of the factors of success of the project?
- How could your state DOT have helped or been more effective?
- What challenges did you face with: the federal livability funding process? Your state DOT? Public transportation programs?

Participants were also welcome to bring up additional topics for discussion. The following sections summarize the topics discussed and key issues raised in each peer panel teleconference call. Many of the specific success stories and challenges are discussed in more detail in the primer.

Peer Panel 1: Providing Program Support to Rural Communities, Transit Providers, and RPOs from the State Level. This teleconference brought together planners from two transit agencies and a COG. The participants discussed a variety of challenges and successes they have faced in getting support from state DOTs and the federal government. Some participants cited the availability of funds to support capital investments and service and a simultaneous lack of funding (from federal, state, and local sources) to support operations. Participants also mentioned the importance of grant writers and having the time and expertise required to prepare an application successfully. Finally, participants discussed challenges associated with getting state or local matches required for federal grant funding. While some states routinely help localities with established funding programs (e.g., FTA 5311 and 5310 grants), this assistance is more difficult to obtain for discretionary livability funding.

Peer Panel 2: Building Awareness of PSC Resources and Livability in Rural Communities. This teleconference brought together state DOT representatives who had responded to the initial survey. They discussed the context-sensitive nature of livability and the difficulty of defining it at a state level. Although several of the participants indicated that they provide technical planning assistance or assist with other grants, they were also limited by funding, and in

some cases have a very limited ability to fund transit with state funds. Participants saw a need for regions and localities to understand the funding programs, but cited the problem of day-to-day struggles as a potential barrier.

Peer Panel 3: Creating Statewide or Regional Partnerships to Support Livability. Participants in this teleconference represented MPOs, RPOs, and a tribe. All the participants had partnered with a significant number of other local or regional organizations, including universities, local governments, the state DOT, human service agencies, MPOs or RPOs, and tribes. Some successful partnership examples included working with universities to access student demand, receiving technical assistance and state match funds from state DOTs, and leveraging the ability of MPOs to study issues relevant to rural communities. However, the participants emphasized that these partnerships were at times difficult to assemble and maintain, and that changes in local politics could cause dramatic shifts. Additionally, in some regions public sentiment against the terms "sustainability" or "livability" has caused agencies to modify the presentation of their initiatives.

Peer Panel 4: Encouraging Transit Coordination at the Regional Level. Several participants in this teleconference reported strong levels of support for their initiatives from their state DOTs. These initiatives included building a multimodal transit facility, the creation of a statewide mobility management model, and state-supported consolidation of rural transit services, as well as more general state technical assistance. Participants identified a variety of challenges, however, including varying expertise and understanding of individual programs and their implications (i.e., whether some programs have restrictive requirements). Additionally, the definitions of rural and urban issues in grant funding as well as within regional institutions can make collaboration difficult.

Peer Panel 5: Aligning Different Forms of Transportation Service Provision. The participants in this teleconference represented transit agencies, a nonprofit, local government, RPOs, and one state DOT. This group cited less state involvement in their particular initiatives and an increased emphasis on public involvement. They noted the challenge (and subsequent success) of getting a wide variety of partners to the table to engage in dialogue and work out conflicts. They also mentioned conflicting modes

or the challenges of planning and engineering for multimodalism. As in the previous calls, some of the challenges mentioned related to the difficulty of understanding the variety of available grants and their requirements.

Peer Panel 6: Validating These Strategies with State DOTs. This teleconference provided the researchers an opportunity to discuss the strategies identified with state DOTs and learn about their livability activities. All three participating DOTs mentioned at least one successful livability grant applicant in their state, though in some cases collaboration issues have threatened the execution of the plans. The participants all mentioned a lack of funding availability at both state and local levels, as well as very constrained staff time, given that many public transportation divisions have low levels of staffing. These constraints make it difficult to provide resources or find time to focus on livability initiatives. Additionally, several state DOTs have separate modal divisions, with collaboration on livability initiatives requiring coordination with multiple parts of the DOT.

PRIMER

This primer focuses on strategies within states and communities that have successfully competed for livability grants. The survey, case studies, and peer panel teleconferences undertaken as part of this study provided insights and a national perspective on successful strategies and roles taken by state DOTs and rural transit operators to support and implement rural livability initiatives. The strategies summarized in this primer provide a resource for state DOTs and transit operators to help position communities and rural public transportation agencies to secure the resources necessary for rural livability programs.

What Is Livability?

The term “livability” is often used to describe a range of initiatives aimed at improving community quality of life while supporting broader sustainability goals. Livability encompasses multi-dimensional issues relative to community design, land use, environmental protection and enhancement, mobility and accessibility, public health, and economic well-being. In June 2009, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator

announced the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) and its six livability principles. The principles are intended as a foundation for interagency coordination to:

1. Provide more transportation choices.
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing.
3. Improve economic competitiveness.
4. Support existing communities.
5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.
6. Value communities and neighborhoods.

Given that many of the most prominent examples of livability projects are in urban and suburban areas, it is helpful to tailor the question further, asking how can *rural* communities support, embrace, and improve their livability?

What Is Rural Livability?

The fundamental goals of the livability initiative are similar across urban, suburban, and rural areas; however, because the scale and means of achieving livability differ in rural communities, a one-size-fits-all approach to transportation does not necessarily work for rural America (2). Rural communities also contend with issues and problems that are not shared by urban areas, including the following challenges:

- Remoteness from larger population and employment centers (which affects their ability to both provide and receive essential services).
- Limited available funds because of their smaller, more dispersed population bases.
- Diluted political representation at the state and federal levels (with elected representatives having to serve larger geographic districts).
- Isolation of the very young and very old who are not able to drive.
- Multi-directional travel patterns and decentralized trip destinations and origins.
- Variations by type of rural community, particularly in terms of economic base and potential livability or public transportation solutions.

Because rural communities are not uniform, successful approaches to livability will vary based on context. Some of the variables that differentiate rural communities include geography (e.g., proximity to a city or to other small towns); economic situation (e.g., reliance on one industry, employer, or tourist destination); and design (e.g., a compact town center

as opposed to dispersed development). Some general types of rural communities are exurban communities, destination or gateway communities, production communities, and tribal communities (2, 5).

- **Exurban Communities:** Usually located on the fringes of U.S. cities, exurban communities are primarily concerned with improving their connections to the greater region.
- **Destination/Gateway Communities:** These communities usually feature natural amenities. As such, their economic base often relies on service-sector jobs related to these amenities. Destination or gateway communities are primarily focused on regional mobility strategies for the growth of those sectors. One concern they have is how to protect their natural assets, which promote economic development.
- **Production Communities:** The economies of these communities usually are based on a single industry (e.g., agriculture, forestry, or mining) and they may occur in very remote locations. Production communities are primarily looking for transportation solutions that will help to diversify the economic base (3).
- **Tribal Communities:** Tribal communities operate under a different set of institutions and with different funding challenges than other communities. For example, tribal governments are not able to levy income or property taxes on their reservations, and tribal sovereignty means that the relationship between tribes and state DOTs or the federal government is often negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Building choices into rural transportation networks can be successful in spite of all these challenges. Effective strategies that are accessible for rural communities include:

- Creating more multimodal streetscape improvements, such as sidewalks, curb extensions, crosswalks, parking, and landscaping. These can help make small towns more walkable, accessible, and economically viable.
- Building and connecting bicycling and trail networks, helping to make more affordable transportation options possible and accessible.
- Linking ridesharing, rural on-demand transit vans, and commuter buses to regional centers and services.
- Improving connections between neighborhoods, “Main Streets,” schools and parks, housing, and services.

- Coordinating town and county plans and infrastructure investments with a regional vision for growth and resource protection.
- Incorporating community design and land use planning, mobility and accessibility, public health, environmental protection, and economic development.

Just as in urban communities, rural communities see livability in relation to transportation as a matter of using the quality, location, and types of transportation facilities and services available to help achieve broader community goals (1). Although many challenges to implementing rural livability exist, realistic options are available for coordinating livability initiatives with enhanced public transit and improving rural quality of life.

Rural Livability Resources for Communities and Practitioners

In partnership with USDA, PSC created a framework for the partnership’s future work with rural communities, highlighting successful rural collaborations. Released in Fall 2011, “Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities” includes discussions about how the livability principles support rural communities, the role of federal programs in rural communities, performance measures tailored for rural livability, next steps for federal agencies, and a set of case studies showing federal support for sustainable rural communities. The report serves as a resource for rural communities and state DOTs to understand the connection between rural communities and livability.

The report is available at: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/2011_11_supporting-sustainable-rural-communities.pdf.

How Can Public Transportation Agencies Support Livability, and How Can Livability Initiatives Help Public Transportation Agencies?

Most transit operators in rural areas struggle to maintain existing levels and types of service, and have limited capacity to plan for or provide new or enhanced service. They are also not typically “in the business” of planning for the community’s future

growth, land use, or major transportation investments. However, how and where the community and region choose to grow can either improve or detract from the potential for better transit service. Communities can invest in compact, walkable downtowns with enhanced business districts; focus public facilities and investments in existing communities; and ensure that housing for seniors and populations with special needs is located near future transit routes. Economic developers can recruit businesses that want to be near a vibrant main street district. Although many communities might call such decisions simply quality-of-life decisions, they can add up to a more livable community—especially when coordinated with better transit service.

Rural transit operators may find their ability to provide new or enhanced service challenged by one or more of the following factors:

- Lack of connections between rural transit agencies and other relevant organizations (e.g., RPOs), which limits relationships between smaller communities and the staffs at larger regional agencies. Many rural systems operate in single counties or are city or town in scope (4).
- More limited staffing and financial resource capacity to plan for new service, prepare competitive grant applications, and provide the required local match.
- Costs per trip that are generally higher than in urban settings because of longer trips with non-productive, “dead” miles, which results in rural proposals appearing less cost-effective than their urban or suburban counterparts.
- Grants that are commonly available for one-time capital or start-up expenses but rarely fund ongoing operations—a situation that may pose financial limitations for a potential rural grantee.
- Focus of rural transportation providers on specific populations and programs, such as programs for persons with medical needs or disabilities. Tailoring services to specific needs can rule out providing services to the general public for multiple-trip purposes, and making such services available to the general public may be required to compete effectively for grant funding.
- Increased competition from nonprofit and private agencies providing transit services (4).

- Increased vehicle ownership rates, contributing further to a reduced pool of transit customers (4).

Addressing these challenges is more than just having coordination plans, which focus more on service coordination. Rather, it requires embracing a larger strategic perspective on enhancing quality of life. Understanding how rural transit agencies can help advance livability through their programs requires understanding these challenges and identifying opportunities within the rural transit project development process.

Rural Transit Project Development Process

Many rural communities have a difficult time successfully competing for livability and other grants to improve public transportation. Finding the right project is a critical element of funding success. Following is the outline of a suggested process framework with which to develop projects that would lead to the expansion of rural transit and related services such as ridesharing and vanpools (Figure 1). The project development process is general in nature, but it can be adapted to accommodate the wide variety of conditions, environments, and institutional arrangements found in small towns and rural areas nationwide.

Vision/Goals/Objectives. The project development process begins with a clear understanding of the vision, goals, and key objectives that a locality or organization is moving toward. Whatever the desired project is, it will be important to demonstrate to the funding agencies and other stakeholders how the project fits into the big picture. The vision, goals, and objectives may be articulated in plans adopted at the local or regional level, or in program charters in the transit agency. If clarity about the vision, goals, and objectives does not already exist, the community will need a mechanism by which to develop, articulate, and, as necessary, reaffirm it.

Assess Existing Conditions. It is essential for planners to know what is “on the ground now” and what can be reasonably anticipated in the future. Doing this involves having a clear understanding of the rural area’s travel demand, trends and patterns, and the markets and segments the rural community is seeking to serve, consistent with the vision, goals, and objectives. Complementing the travel-demand

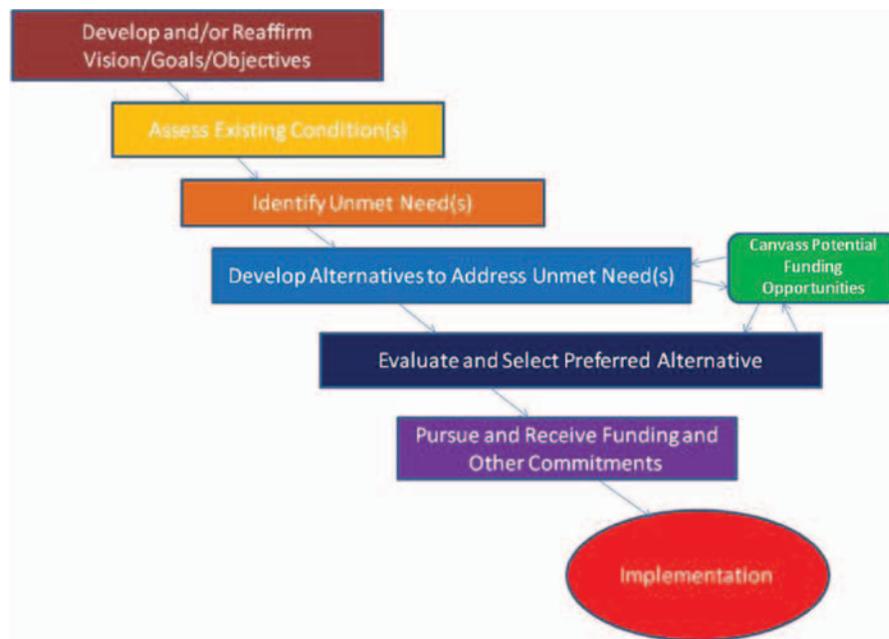


Figure 1 Model project development process.

side, the supply side must also be addressed: the existing (and committed) services, facilities, and systems in place to support the area's mobility. Existing services and facilities may consist of a somewhat informal and flexible system of public, nonprofit, and private providers.

Identify Unmet Need(s). The next step is aligning the market segments of interest, the travel demand generated by the individuals in those segments, and the existing and committed services and facilities available to determine what, if any, gaps exist as unmet needs.

Develop Alternatives to Address Unmet Need(s). Once an unmet need is defined, a range of alternative options or solutions is developed to solve the problem or bridge the gaps. A balance is sought between creativity and practicality. If the alternatives are limited to what has always been done, opportunities may be missed. At the same time, the alternatives considered must be feasible. The canvassing and knowledge of potential funding opportunities both *informs* and *is informed* by the set of alternatives in an interactive, sometimes iterative process.

Evaluate and Select Preferred Alternative. Using evaluation and selection criteria based on the vision, goals, and objectives, the preferred option is selected.

As with the preceding step, the available funding opportunities (and the likelihood of success) are considerations when selecting a preferred alternative. Conversely, a preferred option may drive further exploration of potential funding sources.

Pursue and Receive Funding and Other Commitments. Once the preferred alternative is determined and targeted funding has been identified, grant applications are developed and submitted. Other necessary commitments and/or permissions must be obtained as well (e.g., if a project requires rights-of-way or easements that must be secured). Once funding has been received and other contingencies have been satisfied, the project can proceed to implementation.

Implementation. Implementation may entail the start-up or expansion of new services (e.g., new routes or demand-response zones, or increased frequency); the acquisition of a capital item (e.g., vehicles or computer systems); the design/construction of a new or expanded facility (e.g., a transit center or street segment), or another project type. Whatever the project may be, inclusive, proactive implementation planning is critical to ensure timely implementation once funding has been committed. In the event that only partial grant funding is received, a phasing strategy may be required or the project scope, schedule, and budget may be modified.

Linking the Rural Transit Development Process to Livability Initiatives. The process outlined in Figure 1 summarizes an approach to linking the transit development process with livability initiatives and partners in rural areas. In practice, the approach will vary significantly based on what kind of agency, municipality, tribe, or nonprofit provides the transit service; the service area size; the rural area type; whether the area is largely dispersed or includes town and small city transit targets; how the service is funded; and what are the service's primary mission and customers. The key goals are to ensure that the transit providers can reach out to potential partners in the livability sector, and that it is known how and where those agencies, organizations, and governments can be involved in the support, growth, and development of effective and competitive rural transit projects. Given the complexity of the process and participants, Table 2 outlines just a few of the ways in which livability and rural transit initiatives can be coordinated.

This process helps frame how different transportation partners can work together to advance transit-related solutions to rural mobility challenges

Spotlight on Ranson and Charles Town, West Virginia

A partnership between two West Virginia towns—Ranson and Charles Town—has yielded grants from all three PSC agencies. The cities are currently implementing a complete street/green corridor revitalization project for a major boulevard connecting and running through both downtowns. This corridor, called the Commerce Corridor, is envisioned as transit, bike, and pedestrian-friendly and supported by transit-oriented development. Federal agencies are funding infrastructure improvements and planning activities to help direct growth to be economically and environmentally sustainable. Already, a new mixed-use infill development is designed to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Neighborhood Development standards. These planning efforts will help the two towns combat job losses that have emptied their downtowns as well as sprawl pressures from the nearby Baltimore–Washington metropolitan areas (5, 6).

and develop a framework for project development processes that promote the expansion of rural public transportation.

How Can State DOTs Support Rural Livability and Public Transportation?

The previous section outlined some of the relationships among transit operators, transportation agencies, and other government and nonprofit stakeholders. Clearly, state DOTs can play a critical role in supporting rural livability objectives. State DOTs can develop strategies and practices that will help rural organizations be more competitive when applying for discretionary grant programs to fund and advance transit-related solutions to rural mobility challenges. Four effective strategies were clearly identified through the research, survey, and peer panel synthesis:

- Building awareness of PSC resources and livability in rural communities.
- Providing programmatic and financial support.
- Creating statewide or regional partnerships.
- Encouraging transit coordination at the regional level.

Individually, these strategies can help rural communities and transit operators be more competitive; collectively, they can leverage and maximize the state's investment.

Strategy 1: Building Awareness of PSC Resources and Livability in Rural Communities

Livability initiatives can appear quite different depending on the type of community, its needs, and its values. As a result, gaps exist in understanding and awareness of rural livability and how PSC and its funding programs can be effectively used in rural communities. This variability is frequently more of an issue in communities that use other, locally accepted terms to describe livability-type initiatives; however, evidence suggests that awareness about rural livability and the PSC has begun to increase. Of the \$1.5 billion awarded through TIGER I grants in 2009, approximately \$83 million (5 percent) went to rural projects. This amount was based on an estimate using the following projects:

- US-491 Safety Improvements.
- Lake County Transportation Connectivity Project.

Table 2 Linking the rural transit development process to livability initiatives.

	State	Regional	Local
Develop and/or Reaffirm Vision/Goals/Objectives	Align with statewide vision/goals	Conduct regional scenario planning Align with housing, aging, special needs, workforce, economic development plans	Align with local comprehensive/general plans, downtown revitalization, corridor, and other specific plans
Assess Existing Condition(s)	Provide technical assistance, either direct staff or through nonprofits, consultant contracts, or regional agencies	Assess demand based on desired growth Assess routes, service, and ridership through related planning processes, outreach, and surveys	Assess demand based on desired growth Assess routes, service, and ridership through related planning processes, outreach, and surveys
Identify Unmet Need(s)	Provide technical assistance (per above) Link to state plans for housing, community and economic development	Coordinate with regional and local agency and nonprofit assessments and growth plans	Coordinate with other agency and nonprofit assessments and local growth plans
Develop Alternatives to Meet Unmet Need(s)	Provide technical assistance (per above) Link to state modal plans for rail, airports, ridesharing	Link to designated regional growth areas Consider service consolidation	Link to housing and development plans
Evaluate and Select Preferred Alternative	Provide technical assistance (per above) Resource agency review	Provide modeling and technical analysis	Link to local livability initiatives
Pursue and Receive Funding and Other Commitments	Provide shared match Provide technical assistance for grant development Include projects in state Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and budgets for aging, health-care, housing, economic development	Provide technical assistance for grant development Coordinate local funds Include projects in TIP	Provide shared match Provide technical assistance for grant development Include projects in capital budgets
Implementation	Provide technical assistance (per above), coordination, and facilitation, particularly if the state is a project partner, stakeholder, or interested party	Facilitate partnerships and interagency cooperation to improve and expedite project delivery	Provide project management or grant administration for capital projects

- Improvements to US-18.
- Beartooth Highway Reconstruction Project.
- US-93/2nd Street Improvements.
- Normal Multimodal Transportation Center.
- Black River Bridge Replacement.
- Milton-Madison Bridge Replacement.

More money (approximately 25 percent) was allocated in TIGER II grants, as estimated by the Montana DOT (7). However, this analysis noted that the majority (more than two-thirds) of rural funding in TIGER II actually went to freight and rail projects. In 2011, more than \$150 million of the \$511 million available for TIGER III grants (29 percent) will go to transportation projects in rural areas. Again, the amount of money allocated to public transportation projects in rural areas was substantially less than that awarded to other projects; however, more rural communities are in a competitive position to receive livability grants now than were competitive 2 years ago. The increases in grant funding since 2009 demonstrate a concerted effort on the part of the federal government to increase funding for rural livability

projects, and also highlight the potential for future opportunities.

Much of the PSC model depends on communicating information about livability programs and available federal funding sources through the states and down to local communities. Only 13 percent of survey respondents reported being “very familiar” with PSC; 59 percent indicated that they were “somewhat familiar” with PSC; and 28 percent indicated that they were “not very familiar,” numbers that indicate that education about these opportunities and the relevance of livability to communities is very important.

Getting and Disseminating the Best Information. Sometimes, just getting the right information to share can be a huge step. Some excellent online and accessible resources exist for state DOTs to obtain information to share with their public transportation agencies and rural communities (Figure 2). These resources deal with some of the challenges raised about livability in general and livability in rural communities, and they provide public transportation agency examples. Many of them have in-depth rural

Reports:

- NCHRP. Innovative Transportation Planning Partnerships to Enhance National Parks and Gateway Communities. Available at the TRB website (www.trb.org) by searching for “NCHRP Project 08-36/Task 83”.
- NCHRP Report 582: *Best Practices to Enhance the Transportation-Land Use Connection in the Rural United States*. Available at the TRB website (www.trb.org) by searching for “NCHRP Report 582”.
- NADO. Proceedings of the National Symposium for Rural Transportation Planning Organizations and Metropolitan Planning Organizations, October, 2010. Available at: <http://www.nado.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/2010symposium.pdf>.
- ICMA. *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities*. Available at: http://icma.org/en/icma/knowledge_network/documents/kn/Document/301483/Putting_Smart_Growth_to_Work_in_Rural_Communities.
- USDA. “Rural Transportation at a Glance.” Available at: http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib795/aib795_lowres.pdf.
- PSC and USDA. “Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities.” Available at: http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/pdf/2011_11_supporting-sustainable-rural-communities.pdf.
- TCRP Synthesis 94: *Innovative Rural Transit Services: A Synthesis of Transit Practice*. Available at the TRB website (www.trb.org) by searching for “TCRP Synthesis 94”.

Agencies and Organizations:

- PSC: www.sustainablecommunities.gov.
- U.S. DOT:
 - Livability Website: <http://www.dot.gov/livability/>.
 - Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Livability Initiative: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/>.
 - FTA Livability Initiative: <http://www.fta.dot.gov/livability>.
- United We Ride: www.unitedweride.org.
- Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA): www.ctaa.org.
- NADO Rural Transportation Website: www.ruraltransportation.org.

Figure 2 Resources for rural livability and public transportation.

case studies from across the country and in different types of rural communities. Sharing these resources and using them to start discussions can be influential.

Other activities and outreach opportunities exist within the current state DOT structure. Several survey respondents noted regional and rural workshops on livability enhancements and grant programs as effective outreach tools, including lower cost, highly accessible online forums and webinars. In Oklahoma, a public transportation working group networks online to share information, challenges, and information about potential available grants (8). In New York, another network focuses on mobility management. Other survey respondents mentioned listening sessions to understand what rural livability means to their state's communities. These types of easily accessible forums provide great mechanisms for education and outreach. By engaging in conversation with others, individuals can gather ideas from others' experience with rural livability programs and funding sources and bring those ideas back to their respective communities.

Spotlight on Montana

The Montana DOT is conducting a statewide livability study to analyze what livability means in Montana and how Montana compares to peer states. In early 2011, the project released a benchmarking report that includes extensive analysis of the state's demographics, transportation infrastructure, and existing livability policies. The report also compares Montana to other states in the region, giving the results of interviews with state DOTs in peer states regarding how they see livability in a rural context. Researchers also analyzed the current Montana DOT transportation plan—TranPlan21—to see how it supports livability. The Montana study is an example of how to strategically analyze and simultaneously raise awareness of rural livability issues, leading to enhanced state DOT capacity to fully support rural communities in their livability efforts (7).

Additional analysis from the Montana DOT's analysis of rural communities and federal livability-related funding is available at: http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/research/external/docs/research_proj/benchmarks/interim.pdf.

Participating in and Supporting Regional Efforts. Research suggests that the most effective and efficient land use and transportation planning occurs at the regional level. To increase the effectiveness of planning for rural livability, state DOTs can participate actively in existing regional forums and planning processes for better coordination and collaboration with rural transportation planning organizations, MPOs, localities, and transit operators. If rural communities and transit operators are not at the table, state DOTs can promote their inclusion. It can be significantly more efficient to plan for and coordinate rural transit service at a regional level, whether through existing regional organizations or by coordination at the state DOT and district level.

Reaching out to community residents, organizations, and businesses is another important component of building awareness. Southwest Virginia's New River Valley Planning District Commission (NRVPDC) recently received a HUD grant to create a regional sustainability plan with an important public outreach component. One of the project's first objectives is to engage the region's residents in the community visioning process to ensure they are fully involved in planning for a sustainable future. This effort is intended to reach both the typical participants and populations that are often marginalized in the planning process (9).

Strategy 2: Providing Programmatic and Financial Support

Applying for and receiving federal funding through discretionary grant programs requires a well-written proposal with sufficiently rigorous analysis making the case for the project and, usually, a local match. As discussed earlier, rural communities face additional challenges to success that may include:

- More limited staffing and financial resource capacity of rural organizations.
- Generally higher rural transit costs per trip (due to longer trips with non-productive, "dead" miles), resulting in rural proposals appearing less cost-effective than their urban or suburban counterparts.
- Grants that are commonly available for one-time capital or start-up expenses but rarely fund ongoing operations—a situation that may

pose financial limitations for a potential rural grantee.

- Need for enhanced program and financial support from state DOTs to craft successful applications.

Making the case for funding requires a well-written grant that lays out a compelling vision. Discretionary funding under federal livability programs has been fiercely competitive. In three rounds of TIGER grants to date, U.S. DOT received requests totaling \$90 billion for only \$2.6 billion in available funds, less than 3 percent of the total potential need (10). Many organizations employ professional or expert grant writers; however, employing a specialist, dedicating existing staff time, or accessing outside expertise can be a challenge for smaller organizations. Several DOTs remarked that their rural public transportation agencies were just trying to keep services going and had very little time for longer term planning or additional work.

Many peer experts mentioned either the importance of grant writing experience in developing their application or the difficulty of working without a skilled, experienced grant writer. Three states surveyed also noted that devoting resources to writing grants for new programs is not always a high priority for local agencies. Federal agencies have recognized this need, including “address capacity issues related to grant writing and planning capacity in rural communities” as a mid-term action step related to rural livability (5).

Similarly, many participants in the peer panel teleconferences mentioned the difficulty of securing sufficient local match. Although some specific exceptions related to project type or allowing for in-kind contributions, the federal discretionary grant programs related to livability (e.g., FTA Bus/Bus Livability, HUD Sustainable Communities grants, and U.S. DOT TIGER grants) required a 20 percent local match for almost all projects. TIGER II Planning grants did not require a local match for rural communities, but those applications that included a match may have been more competitive. For example, the rating factors used for HUD Sustainable Communities grants gave credit for leveraging resources greater than 20 percent of the requested amount (11). The local match can come from the state, regional, local, or nonprofit organizations, but even with flexible guidelines for what qualifies as a local match, coordinating those resources can be time consuming, particularly for rural organizations.

Uncertainty about state rules can be a challenge for some local communities, and differing state rules regarding matching funds also can deter localities that might otherwise qualify and be successful in their applications.

Providing Assistance for Grant Preparation. Helping grant applicants obtain the use of talented grant writers could potentially increase the success rate of rural applicants and encourage those who have not considered applying to do so. Economic Development for Apache County largely credits its grant writer, who was able to leverage additional funding sources, for a successful application (12); and the City of Moscow, Idaho, recently hired a grants manager to help prepare the city’s successful application (13).

States can provide direct technical assistance to local or regional entities seeking to apply for discretionary grant programs. This approach can also allow the state to identify additional sources of funding for applicants and potentially help to coordinate initiatives from across the state. The Colorado DOT, for example, reports that it has a grant coordinator who works with all groups to improve accessibility of various funding sources and identify how they can work to improve transportation and community development. Assistance of this type sometimes includes submitting a grant on behalf of a rural applicant: the Michigan DOT and Iowa DOT have done this on behalf of applicants who requested it. Similarly, the Minnesota DOT is adjusting its application process to incorporate the various data sets needed to complete an application for livability funding, and reports that it is in the process of developing program training guidance for 2012 grant applications.

State DOTs also can help multiple local entities (e.g., transportation agencies, local governments, or nonprofits) coordinate to share the staff time of a grants manager or writer, and could allocate funding for such work. Although not as typical for state DOTs, the shared grant writer is a relatively common approach in regional planning and economic development organizations.

Support Grant Recipients with Grants Management. Once a community has been awarded a significant grant, managing the funds, reporting requirements, and project implementation can stretch the limits of an agency’s expertise. The Low Country COG in Beaufort County, South Carolina, was awarded a TIGER grant that did not cover the full amount of their request. Awarded \$3.1 million out of a \$24.7 million

request, the COG is now grappling with how to implement a project effectively under a greatly reduced award amount (14). State DOTs could work with grant recipients to help them manage, monitor, and prioritize their funds in the face of complex federal requirements and inevitable project complications. Even without addressing different grant amounts, many rural communities may not have the administrative staff or knowledge to conform to federal grant requirements.

Assistance with Local Match Requirements. Helping rural organizations find local match money in a streamlined process offers potential as a way to encourage rural applications. Relatively little research and few case studies examine innovative ways of providing a local match for competitive, discretionary grants; however, models for other types of federal funds exist that could potentially be adapted.

For example, the Connecticut DOT automatically provides the match for FTA 5311 and 5317 (New Freedom) funds, with towns contributing approximately 5 percent (15). At present, this model deters rural transit operators from applying for other funding, as the match would be more difficult to obtain for other programs. However, an expanded program to include matching funds for discretionary grants could bring increased federal dollars to the area and fund additional and innovative programs. Even though states may not be able to automatically provide local matches for all who apply, setting up a state process to receive and evaluate applications for livability-related funding could provide some predictability for local applicants.

Other areas have had success finding in-kind donations to meet local match requirements. In Moscow, Idaho, the University of Idaho was willing to contribute land for a future transit stop, which counted toward the local match (16). The Oregon DOT's project to provide intercity bus service around the state found local matching funds through a partnership with Greyhound bus, where part of Greyhound's service acts as the match (17).

Other possible avenues for federal matching are in support of regional entities (at the MPO or RPO level, or potentially an interagency working group) that could be convened to identify funding opportunities and ways of leveraging these opportunities for local areas. For example, regional bodies could help identify partnerships between organizations or funding opportunities that could be successfully combined and leveraged. State DOT participation

could be valuable in helping communities think through their opportunities. Providing assistance specifically related to grant preparation and matching recognizes that the technical skills for preparing an application are very important.

Strategy 3: Creating Statewide or Regional Partnerships to Support Livability

The smaller size of rural organizations makes individual agencies less likely to have staff capacity to organize or coordinate new initiatives relating to livability or public transportation. Small rural transit providers and RPOs may confront day-to-day operational challenges that leave little time for additional planning activities, building stakeholder support, and identifying additional funding sources to meet match obligations. In the nationwide survey, state DOTs identified "lack of resources to complete application," "lack of technical expertise," and "initiatives too small to be competitive" as the most significant challenges that rural communities and transit providers face in competing for federal livability funding.

Respondents to the survey identified partnerships as one of the most successful ways that rural communities have made themselves competitive for federal livability funding. In particular, partnerships with other local organizations or with a state agency were both mentioned by more than 40 percent of respondents. In many areas, an RPO, an MPO from an adjacent metro area, a large private employer, or a local university could be a potential partner for a rural community. Rural communities can leverage funding, staff time and resources, and expertise from these types of partnerships, thereby reducing the burden on agency staff while making for a stronger project or plan. State DOTs can potentially provide the forum for regional or statewide collaboration by putting a process in place for regional or statewide meetings, providing funding, or providing other technical assistance.

Leverage Employers or Destinations of Regional Significance. Another partnership approach is to reach out to significant regional employers and identify possibilities for public-private partnerships. Employers may have an incentive to assist regional transportation to provide access to a larger portion of a region's workforce and because a strong regional transit system can help when recruiting additional employees. As a variation on this model, rural communities that have a significant tourist attraction,

Spotlight on Maine

An example of partnership in action can be found near Acadia National Park in Maine. Beginning in 1999, the Maine DOT, Downeast Transit, a league of towns, FHWA, FTA, and local businesses collaborated to begin the Island Explorer bus service (18). L.L. Bean, a major regional employer, began providing a significant portion of the funding for the service in 2002, and routes now serve both seasonal visitors and residents, bringing employees from up to 60 miles away to Jackson Laboratories and other employers. These types of collaborations are particularly helpful because they help to support ongoing public transportation operations, not just one-time capital projects (5).

such as a national park or private resort, may be able to partner with that tourist attraction to help provide access to the destination.

Collaborating with Universities. Universities can be a rich source of partnership opportunities. Universities may want to reduce strain on campus parking while ensuring that students without cars are able to access local services and amenities. A strong regional transit network also can help attract and retain students and faculty. Universities may be able to offer expertise in planning and data analysis that can help with the grant application process, or they may serve as an appropriate institution at which to convene meetings with other stakeholders.

For example, Radford Transit in Virginia started providing service in August 2011 as a partnership between the city of Radford, Radford University, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, and FTA (19). This partnership expanded a human service transportation (HST) service called the Community Transit Service, increasing the service area by more than 90 percent and providing Radford residents access to nearby towns (20). The university funds routes used primarily by its students and the municipal government funds routes serving primarily residents (21). The service is operated by New River Valley Community Services, a regional human services organization. Similarly, in Moscow, Idaho, the city partnered with the University of Idaho to build an on-campus facility that also serves an urban renewal district, provides bicycle

and pedestrian facilities, and allows for access to the downtown mall (13).

Coordinating Transportation Statewide. DOTs can foster statewide partnerships to help local communities better coordinate their public transportation

Spotlight on Idaho

Coordinated by the CTAI, I-way is about providing people in Idaho the freedom to choose from a variety of connected, convenient, and cost-effective transportation options, including park-and-rides, car and vanpools, bike and walking paths, shuttles, and improved public transportation options. I-way's efforts begin at the local level, then work their way through the local mobility network and district level, ultimately to the state level. Strategies identified through local coordination help improve access to employment, medical appointments, recreational activities, and education. Local partnerships provide opportunities to create connections statewide.

The core philosophy of I-way is to improve mobility for the people of Idaho by working with stakeholders and leaders while advocating for safe, cost-effective, accessible, integrated, and affordable mobility services and systems throughout the state. Employees from the Idaho Transportation Department have seen a noticeable shift in local stakeholders' approaches to public transportation, which now focuses more on mobility and integrating multimodal policies. The Division of Public Transportation is funding projects in local mobility plans with the goal of increased funding in the near future.

The Idaho Transportation Department provides funding to the CTAI, which hires and supervises six mobility managers, enabling them to help regions apply for federal funding. Two other sources of I-way funding are RTAP and 5309 grants. RTAP is a source of funding to assist in the design and implementation of training and technical assistance projects and other support services tailored to meet the specific needs of transit operators. The 5309 grants provide capital assistance for new and replacement buses, related equipment, and facilities. More information on I-way is available at: <http://i-way.org/>.

service provision and reduce service gaps across large rural areas. If the state provides a framework for local and regional organizations, transit, and other service agencies to engage with each other, it can increase the likelihood that this coordination will occur, while also allowing for it to be driven by local actors.

One effective example of this is the I-way program in Idaho. The Idaho Transportation Department is a sponsor of I-way, but the organization is run by the Community Transportation Association of Idaho (CTAI), a nonprofit membership association. CTAI facilitates local mobility plans by providing district mobility managers in the six Idaho Transportation Department districts to work with MPOs, transportation providers, citizens, and local leaders to improve multimodal services and coverage throughout the state (22). The Idaho Transportation Department's sponsorship has provided an important framework for I-way, but the program has been particularly successful in giving local areas the opportunity to collaborate and find their own solutions (23).

Supporting Statewide Transportation and Land Use Integration. Regional and statewide partnerships also can bring together larger coalitions to collaborate on regional land use issues and coordination of land use and transportation planning and investments. Similar to the approach described above, the state can provide leadership and establish a process, which regions can then adapt and expand to meet their own needs.

A statewide, interagency process in Pennsylvania has helped to improve local coordination of land use, transportation, and planning related to natural resources, energy, and economic development. The Land Use, Transportation and Economic Development (LUTED) initiative was developed in collaboration among the Pennsylvania DOT and the state's departments of Community and Economic Development, Environmental Protection, Conservation and Natural Resources, and Agriculture. Based on a day-long brainstorming session attended by more than 300 decision makers at the 2003 Governor's Conference on Land Use and Transportation for Economic Development, the agencies prepared a state action plan for the LUTED process in 2004. After a series of regional conferences held throughout the state, seven regions were asked to submit action strategies and the state provided funding to support these initiatives. Each region has approached the process differently, but the state-level process

Spotlight on Pennsylvania

The LUTED initiative began in 2002 when Pennsylvania was one of six states invited to participate in the National Governors Association Policy Academy. The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) used the LUTED initiative to adapt the region's visioning process and long-term plan to better integrate transportation planning and economic development planning. SPC embarked on a scenario visioning process that involved extensive public outreach to build consensus around the region's future. Participants in the scenario visioning process included project sponsors and funding agencies that could provide guidance and recommendations. Within the working groups, primary funding agencies and supplementary funders were on hand to provide technical review and comment on plan components. The selected scenario plan became officially known as the 2035 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania. SPC is seeking opportunities to fund projects identified in the scenario planning process, including looking at TIGER grants and other smart transportation subsidies (25).

and funding opportunities have led to fruitful new partnerships and have even led to some organizations finding new funding sources (24).

Strategy 4: Encouraging Transit Coordination at the Regional Level

Even in rural areas with well-developed and managed public transportation systems, coordination is often lacking between small rural communities. As a result, the transit systems may duplicate service or may miss opportunities to improve connectivity between services. When nearby communities do not collaborate and communicate with each other about their transit systems, the potential is high for overlap in the dispatch and use of human service, medical, and paratransit vehicles. Nevertheless, with tight transit budgets, limited staff, and little or no time to create new partnerships, rural communities find these issues difficult to address.

Building new partnerships and making changes to a region's transit system can be difficult, but it can have widespread benefits. State DOTs are in

Spotlight on Linking Rural Regions of Four Counties in Maine

Eastern Maine Development Corporation is working with Mobilize Maine, a collaborative, bottom-up economic development effort that works to create opportunities and projects that benefit the 21 communities of Greater Bangor to focus on a regional approach. They realize that considering the needs of the four-county region as a whole will be more productive than focusing separately on individual subpopulations. At the same time, they recognize that because needs vary from community to community, no single solution will work for every community. An advisory group of key stakeholders is currently working on developing a region-wide needs assessment to assess ways of effectively connecting the communities (26).

a position to encourage transit coordination at the regional level either by providing support and resources directly to rural communities or by facilitating coordination at the MPO or RPO level. Ultimately, the goals of coordinating regional transit service are to improve efficiencies and customer service, and to expand service where possible. State DOTs have a variety of opportunities to increase regional collaboration.

Consolidating and Streamlining Service. Rural communities situated within the same region often experience inefficiencies or redundancies in HST and other transit services. On-demand service, a popular form of public transportation in rural areas, is significantly more costly than fixed-route service. Many communities lose money on their on-demand services. As a result, quality of service declines and those individuals who rely on on-demand transportation do not have the access that they need. Particularly for small communities, streamlining transportation processes is a cost-effective strategy that results in improved customer service and enhanced service delivery.

HST systems in Pennsylvania were facing significant budgetary strains when the Pennsylvania DOT conducted the HST Coordination Study to assess potential for coordination in an HST system provided by multiple agencies in nearby communities (27). The study found that the current system has inefficien-

cies and complexities at both the state and local levels; that consumers are not having all of their basic needs met; and that regional service consolidation offers the greatest opportunity for improved efficiencies, cost savings, and increased service quality (28). Although the local governments will be responsible for ground-level coordination, the Pennsylvania DOT will facilitate collaboration and will ultimately oversee all HST improvements. Just as important, the Pennsylvania DOT is also promoting this perspective of consolidation across many of the rural transportation systems in the state.

Promoting Multimodal Examples. The construction of multimodal centers promotes regional transit coordination and linkages between rural and urban areas. Intermodal or multimodal hubs bring together transit; pedestrian and bicycle accommodations; parking; and regional train and intercity bus service, among other features. Combining multiple transportation services in one central location requires the creation of partnerships to build multimodal networks. Constructing such a system facilitates easy and accessible mobility throughout the region.

Several cities have been recognized as TIGER grant winners for new multimodal projects that promote regional coordination. Alton, Illinois, was awarded a TIGER III grant to build the Alton Regional Multimodal Transportation Center, which will stand adjacent to the city's Amtrak station. The new multimodal center both requires and encourages regional coordination by linking Amtrak service to regional transit lines, bicycle trails, and pedestrian facilities. Another winner, the South Central COG in Trinidad, Colorado, will construct a multimodal transit center in historic downtown Trinidad. This transit center will provide connections for Amtrak's Southwest Chief, Greyhound, and other inter- and intra-city bus services. Located within walking distance of retail shops and restaurants, and parallel to an off-ramp of Interstate 25, the transit center is extremely accessible. The center will provide park-and-ride facilities, parking for large buses and vans traveling into Trinidad, and shuttle service for passengers to hotels and other destinations (29).

Mountain Rides, the transit system serving Blaine County, Idaho, provides a variety of coordinated service and constitutes an innovative partnership between Blaine County and the towns of Bellevue, Hailey, Ketchum, and Sun Valley. The transit system is funded by a local option sales tax, general funds from local communities, FTA grants, and its fares.

Before Mountain Rides—which provides inter-town bus services, vanpool and ridematching service, and demand-response service—the region was served by three separate organizations. Coordination among these communities improves service for all of their residents (30). Other rural communities with similar projects include Huron, South Dakota; Meridian, Mississippi; and Normal, Illinois.

Expanding Public Transportation Services. In areas with insufficient transit, the problem may not be inefficient services, but rather a lack of service altogether. In this case, state DOTs can take the initiative to help local communities envision what a strong public transportation system would look like to meet their needs. One particularly innovative example of service creation comes from north central Montana, where a local nonprofit, OpportunityLink, initiated a transportation planning process in 2007 to launch transit service in the region. As a result, the region is now served by four new transit systems with coordinated routes designed to connect low-income residents dispersed through several small towns and reservations to regional amenities. This initiative required coordination of a large number of funding sources from local governments, universities, and nonprofits (5).

In the region surrounding Charlottesville, Virginia, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission uses its regular federal and state planning and rideshare program funds to support rural transit planning activities for Jaunt, the rural transit operator, aimed at improving rural transit services, new park-and-ride lot development, linking transit to park-and-ride locations, and on-site economic development. It also coordinates a community mobility committee and regular transit and rideshare staff meetings to coordinate rural transit service with the Charlottesville and University of Virginia bus systems (31).

Leveraging a More Robust Mobility Management System. Mobility management describes an approach to providing transportation services through interdisciplinary coordination between districts and within multiple sectors. The idea behind this approach is that improved coordination between agencies will create an efficient and collaborative system that better serves users. Building partnerships is an important component of developing a mobility management system, and it requires continuous communication between agencies and with the public. The mobility management system uses mobility managers who

work closely with local districts to facilitate coordination between communities and with the state DOT and MPO or RPO.

Several states have implemented successful mobility management systems that rely on collaboration across all areas of the state. For example, with regards to I-way, Idaho's districts are subdivided into local mobility management networks (LMMNs), and I-way promotes coordination not only between the state DOT and MPOs, but also among local communities, LMMNs, and districts. Using I-way as a platform, communities are effectively coordinating local planning and decision making by building partnerships based on community needs and values.

Partnering with Nearby Cities or a Larger MPO. Most rural areas have a need for transit, but many rural communities are not large enough to support operating a system that serves only a small area. Alternatively, some rural areas have transit systems but have difficulty serving residents effectively because they are too small and do not provide enough connections to other regional destinations. Particularly in small states where rural areas are relatively close to urban areas, coordinating with MPOs and nearby cities facilitates the creation of a cost-effective public transportation system for rural residents.

In southeast Connecticut, the rural Connecticut River Estuary Region lies between the cities of New Haven, Hartford, and New London. With its MPO partner, 9 Town Transit has focused on developing a wide transportation network that links rural and urban systems and creates efficient service for the entire region. As a result, one common fixed-route and on-demand transit system links the Estuary Region with four surrounding urban areas (New Haven, Hartford, New London, and Middletown) and with the commuter rail and Amtrak. A recent addition from the long-range transportation plan has expanded transit service hours to and from New London, Connecticut (15).

Summary

The four strategies outlined in this primer include a variety of effective approaches that state DOTs can use to support rural organizations as they work to improve community livability through public transportation. The strategies are:

- *Building awareness of PSC resources and livability in rural communities:* States can help

rural communities understand what livability looks like in rural areas and recognize what resources are available to provide improved service. This can be done by providing quality information to rural communities and by participating in and supporting existing regional forums.

- *Providing programmatic and financial support:* Rural organizations may benefit from additional support to develop funding applications and manage the implementation of successful projects. Support may be particularly needed in the areas of grant preparation and generating local match.
- *Creating statewide or regional partnerships to support livability:* Supporting regional or statewide collaboration can help coordinate rural transit planning and livability initiatives, which are especially effective at the regional level. States can support partnerships that involve regional employers or universities, or create frameworks for statewide partnerships and integrated planning.
- *Encouraging transit coordination at the regional level:* State DOTs can help rural transit systems improve service by enhancing connectivity between services or reducing duplicative services. Depending on the regional transit context, the DOT might support service consolidation or expansion, leveraging a mobility management structure, or partnerships with nearby cities or a larger MPO.

As with most livability initiatives, application of these strategies needs to be sensitive to local context. This menu of strategies has been vetted by stakeholders representing a variety of livability and rural transit initiatives across the country. Although the methods used and outcomes will vary widely, these strategies can be used as a starting point for agencies looking for ways to strengthen rural livability through improved transit.

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