

National Rural Assembly

PRINCIPLES FOR SOUND RURAL TRANSPORTATION POLICY

Rural Transportation Policy Group

The Rural Transportation Policy Group upholds the following five principles as a framework for developing an integrated transportation policy that supports rural America:

WHO WE ARE

The Rural Transportation Policy Group is a national coalition of rural individuals and organizations networked through the National Rural Assembly.

OUR GOALS

- *To coalesce the voices of a diverse set of rural-based organizations in support of new and innovative transportation policy and investments.*
- *To articulate and advocate for national transportation policies that support the health and well-being of rural people and places throughout the nation.*
- *To ensure the next federal transportation bill strengthens and supports rural people, rural places, and sustainable commerce, acknowledging the interdependence of the nation's metropolitan and rural economies.*

- Rural and Native American voices must be included in regional and statewide transportation planning processes.
- National, state, local, and tribal governments must work collaboratively¹ to design, build, maintain, and coordinate transportation infrastructure, including broadband technologies.
- Rural residents need and deserve available public transportation, including regional and intermodal systems, and need those systems to be accessible to all. Accessibility should, at a minimum, meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (ADA).
- Transportation infrastructure investments should promote the economic and environmental well being and social health of rural communities and landscapes.
- Flexible funding and public-private coordination are needed to support the unique transportation needs of diverse rural communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION BILL

We believe the following recommendations, if adopted, will strengthen and support economic opportunity and growth across the entire nation, specifically by supporting those Americans who live, learn, and work in rural places.

- 1) **Integrate rural communities and Native American tribes into regional, statewide, and national transportation planning processes through Rural**

Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) and statewide transportation planning entities.

Rural communities and tribes have a limited voice in the transportation planning process. There is a clear interdependence of urban and rural areas for workforce opportunities, market access, natural resources, and other needs. Rural communities and tribes should be given a “seat at the table” in their statewide transportation planning processes through the creation or recognition of Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs). These organizations can help increase the technical capacity in rural areas and help ensure these areas have an informed voice at the table.

Tribes and tribal lands are integral to rural America and to the network of state and county roads that exist in many rural areas. Tribes have separate funding allocations that support transportation planning, construction, and maintenance. To better coordinate transportation systems, and to make the most efficient and effective use of resources, there should be tribal representation at the state transportation planning level.

To amplify the rural voice at planning tables, we recommend:

- The creation of RTPOs recognized by state and federal transportation agencies. RTPOs should be included in both planning and resource allocation processes. RTPOs should include representation from public health organizations; the disability community; conservation, youth development, and education organizations; community development organizations, including housing and workforce development; in addition to tribal and local governmental entities.
- The requirement that state departments of transportation (DOTs) as well as metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) coordinate with adjacent RTPOs when developing plans and programs.
- The authorization of planning and project funds to RTPOs and/or consortiums of tribal, county, city, town, and transit agency officials, and to nonprofit transit service providers to enable the development of sustainable transportation systems that support the long term economic viability of rural areas.

2) Increase availability as well as access to transportation options for all rural residents, reducing barriers to employment, healthcare, and other services.

Rural areas are very automobile dependent. Rural residents without access to cars or driver licenses -- especially low-income people, young people, elderly people, and people with disabilities -- face enormous barriers commuting to jobs, healthcare services, and training opportunities located within their own counties, much less neighboring counties and urban centers. Meeting the transportation needs of rural residents will necessitate a combination of approaches including available and accessible public transportation, coordinated van and car pools, flexible vouchers, and programs that assist low-income individuals in financing the purchase of personal vehicles in places where public transportation options are unavailable or not economically viable.

Below are five recommendations to increase access to transportation and connect rural people to the jobs, healthcare, and training they need:

- Require and assist public transportation systems to meet the minimum access requirements stipulated in the ADA. Today, para-transit systems operate only where public transit routes exist, being complementary to and running parallel with those routes. By improving access to public transportation stops and vehicles, and by ensuring that public transportation accommodates all riders, reliance on more expensive para-transit systems could be drastically reduced.
- Provide incentives for the utilization of collaborative approaches to increased transportation options by enabling para-transit providers, as well as private van-pool operators, to work with local governments, non-profit organizations, and employers to create affordable transportation arrangements for students, workers, consumers, and others.
- Support cross-jurisdictional planning and intermodal transportation, for example, regional bus services that link to commuter rail or airports.
- Support low-income car ownership for areas where public transportation is not possible, feasible, or economically viable.
- Require states to designate geographic regions for rural and small urban areas and facilitate the development of a coordinated public transportation/human service plan for all transit service in these areas. In addition, allow flexibility in use of 5310, 5316, and 5317 funds in rural and small urban areas.

*★ Families
in the lowest
income quintile
spend 40% of
their budgets on
transportation.*

★ Only 6% of federal transit funding is allocated to meet rural needs.

3) Align transportation investments with “livable communities” principles, supporting the economic, environmental, and social well-being of rural communities and landscapes.

Well planned transportation infrastructure projects provide jobs to residents during construction and maintenance, but more importantly, they can encourage the development of “livable communities” by promoting existing towns, increasing resident mobility, and connecting rural and urban job and consumer markets. However, infrastructure projects in rural areas must also take into consideration natural resources, landscapes, and ecosystems for which rural areas are valued and renowned. Aligning our goals for economic and environmental health will enable rural areas to be truly desirable and livable communities. To that end, we have the following recommendations:

- Require MPOs and RTPOs to adopt “complete streets” policies addressing the safety of all users, including pedestrians of all ages and those who need mobility aids, bicyclists, motorists, transit, and freight. In order to compel local and regional jurisdictions to adopt “complete streets” policies, these policies should be required for all projects receiving federal funding, including new and retrofit projects.
- Consolidate existing funds used to support transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes (including funding currently integrated into human service programs) into one coordinated program. At a minimum, develop and disseminate joint policy guidelines across programs to encourage coordinated, effective, and efficient delivery of transportation opportunities.³
- Provide the transportation industry with requirements and incentives to retain existing workers, and provide career ladders and training for youth including apprenticeships, preparing them for jobs in the public and private transportation sectors.⁴
- Prioritize projects that use local contracting and fair wage labor within the rural areas of the project in order to support strong rural economies.
- Set aside funding in the federal transportation bill for the repair and maintenance of existing infrastructure in rural areas.

Living Independence Network Corporation

Richie Miller doesn't drive, but thanks to a transportation program run by the Living Independence Network Corporation (LINC), he gets where he wants to go. Miller is one of more than 1,050 clients who have joined this Twin Falls, Idaho, nonprofit's transportation program since it began in 1997. The program gives community members with disabilities and senior citizens voucher cards they can use to ride wherever they wish.

On a typical weekday, Miller used one of his vouchers to take a break from his volunteer position at LINC to ride to the store. Richie, like many of the clients who use the program, calls the cab company he's established a rapport with, in this case Magic Valley Cab and Courier.

"I've gotten a bond with them, and I can joke around with them," said Miller, whose disability results from a traumatic brain injury.

The driver from the Magic Valley Cab company arrived at the LINC office to pick Miller up within 10 minutes of his call.

The beauty of LINC's Twin Falls transportation program is this total freedom to use rides for anything - whether it be the pressing trip to visit relatives in the hospital or the ride to the grocery store.

LINC uses money from the Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (5310) to fund the program. Because Miller volunteers more than 16 hours each week, he is entitled to a white card and a blue community access card. The white card is worth \$40 in rides, giving him about 10 rides each month with a co-pay of \$4 per ride. The white card is worth about 15 rides each month, allowing Miller to get to and from his volunteer work.

LINC plans to begin using money from the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (5316) and the New Free-



dom Program (5317) later this year. The 5316 program aims to address job access challenges for low income people, while the 5317 program gives funding to help Americans with disabilities to access jobs and participate fully in society.

LINC's directors say these sources of funding are helpful, but they wish the stipulations would be changed so that more of the funding could be used for administrative costs. Currently, LINC is able to use just 10 percent of the 5310 grant toward administrative costs, which puts a heavy burden on the nonprofit to supplement the salaries of employees who run the program.

- Set aside funding for rural and tribal governments, RTPOs, and non-profits to support local projects that contribute to the development of “livable communities” through coordination of transportation, land use, environment and economic plans.⁵
- 4) **Address the needs for movement of goods and services to strengthen and support rural places, people, and economies.**

★ Six out of 10 rural areas are lagging behind the national economy in adding new jobs.

The distance to markets creates unique challenges for building and sustaining the economies of rural communities. An interconnected, multimodal system that provides users with options is critical to meet current and future needs of rural communities while addressing climate change challenges.

Broadband infrastructure is an essential tool for rural communities distant from centralized markets and services. Broadband access facilitates the delivery of education, healthcare, emergency/safety information, and commercial exchange. It also connects local entrepreneurs to the increasingly Internet-based global economy and should be integrated into overall transportation planning.

Rural areas are largely dependent on natural resources and open space for the growth and resilience of their economies. The connection to the land, wildlife, and open space defines many of these communities. In order to support the livability, heritage, and treasures that rural communities share, we recommend the following:

- Road and rail rights-of-way should be considered a public asset and utilized to support a wide range of transit needs including the accommodation of communication infrastructure such as broadband, as well as trails, bicycle paths, foot paths, etc.⁶
- New and retrofit transportation projects should be coordinated with local and regional efforts to connect communities with high-speed broadband in rural areas. Preference should be given to projects that address communications infrastructure needs, including the laying of conduit during the project.
- Transportation modes and corridors that support the building of rural economies should be prioritized and maintained to assure the efficient movement of goods and services.
- Transportation planning should be required to include conservation and mitigation

Good News Mountaineer Garage

Emmanuel Terrell and his wife Bunda moved to West Virginia four years ago because it was an easier place to raise a family than Emmanuel's native Washington D.C. But without a car the state's rural stretches made many parts of that family dream difficult. Terrell had to depend on coworkers to get him to his job as a weatherizer, which made employment precarious.

But when a social worker referred Bunda to Good News Mountaineer Garage, a West Virginia nonprofit that provides donated vehicles to low-income families, their lives changed dramatically. Suddenly, Bunda could drive her husband to work, her children to daycare, and then drive the 45 minutes to Hagerstown, Maryland, where she took classes at Kaplan University in criminal justice.

"It helped me and my family a lot," Emmanuel said. "Now we have a bigger car to fit the whole family in."

When Bunda had a baby last year, Emmanuel took pride in being able to pick her and the new baby up at the hospital in the 1995 Caprice Classic that the program donated to them.

Good News Mountaineer Garage is able to provide about 250 vehicles each year to families across the state. Barbara Bayes, the director of the nonprofit, says that in this primarily rural state where public transportation is lacking, vehicles have more power than any other type of assistance to radically change lives.

More than 90 percent of Good News Mountaineer Garage's clients are off government assistance within a year, a result that Bayes says the state legislature is keen to continue.

The funding for Good News Mountaineer Garage comes primarily from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services. The group also raises funds by fixing vehicles and selling them to those going through rehabilitation training.



Bayes' commitment to the program comes not only from watching hundreds of lives change, but from her own experience growing up in a poor town in Appalachia.

"When I was growing up we would open the store at 9 a.m. and close at 6 p.m.," Bayes said. "We didn't have big box stores that rely on shift work." Stores like Walmart, which is the largest private employer in the state, are located far from people's homes, Bayes said, so employees must use a vehicle to get to work.

It costs Good News Mountaineer Garage \$4,500 to give a family a vehicle, including the cost of repairs, the warranty, an orientation class, taxes, tags, and the title.

Good News Mountaineer Garage is one of about 120 car ownership programs in the United States, according to Carolyn Hayden, who helped to create the car ownership network Opportunity Cars. The programs range in their funding sources and strategy, Hayden said. Not all 50 states have such programs.

Now, Hayden and Bayes would like to change the language in the Job Access Reverse Commute program so these federal funds can be used for car ownership programs.

"Approximately half of low wage workers use their Earned Income Tax Credits to put as a down payment on a used car and fall into predatory quicksand. These folks are the people we want to help with JARC funds," Bayes said.

strategies that preserve open space, avoid utilization of prime farm and forestlands, expand support for establishing wildlife corridors, preserve and enhance wetlands, and manage invasive species that can be devastating for local agriculture and native habitat.

5) **Decrease high traffic crash, mortality, and injury rates on rural highways.**

★ Sixty percent of fatal automobile accidents occur in rural areas.

Mortality rates on rural highways are 58 percent higher than metropolitan ones.⁷ Many rural communities are still bisected by federal highways, where traffic patterns have changed significantly over time, creating particular danger to pedestrians walking alongside or crossing. In some communities these areas also include high concentrations of low-income individuals and families who have few alternatives to walking to destinations.

The risk of death among American Indians in motor vehicle crashes has been shown to be greater compared with other races. One study found that mortality rates among injured American Indians in rural Nevada exceeded those among non-American Indians injured in motor vehicle crashes.⁸

The federal transportation authorization bill should include aggressive goals to reduce deaths and injuries on and along rural highways, requiring state highway safety programs to:

- Identify high risk rural roads.
- Prioritize projects based on criteria that include crash rates per vehicle miles traveled; projects that address areas of high numbers of pedestrian accidents; projects that can be completed in existing rights-of-way; projects that minimize the impact on communities and the environment; and operational improvements such as signage and Intelligent Transportation Systems.⁹

North Central Montana Transit

In rural north central Montana, defined as “frontier” because of its extremely low population density, no single municipality can afford to fund a public transportation system. But transportation is exactly what people here need.

Opportunity Link, a non-profit dedicated to reducing poverty, cobbled together funding from 10 government entities and private organizations to make such a system possible. Now, a typical day sees about 100 riders using the free service. Dubbed NCMT (North Central Montana Transit), the bus line transports passengers working at a local hospital, teenagers participating in a YouthBuild program, students at Montana State University Northern, members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe who live on the Rocky Boy Reservation, and members of the GrosVentre and Assiniboine tribes who live on the Fort Belknap Reservation. A typical route runs 80 miles long, with the longest route at 160. After nearly two years, the Havre-based NCMT provides upwards of 3,000 rides every month, ten times the most generous original estimate.

NCMT serves an area the size of Maryland, but with a population density of just 1.5 to 5.7 people per square mile. Poverty rates are higher than average: 24 percent in Blaine County and 18.3 percent in Hill County. Making a transit system work in those conditions takes a different approach.

Jim Lyons took on the job of designing the system in 2009. Lyons recalls attending dozens of community and government meetings to rally support. The big breakthrough came when Montana State University Northern pledged the first check.

“Once Northern stepped up to the plate, it made other organizations much more comfortable at that time to give money to the program,” Lyons said.

The contributors to the roughly \$300,000 annual budget are Hill County, Blaine County, the City of Havre, Montana State University Northern, Opportunity Link, Triangle Com-



munications, Hill County Electric, Bear Paw Development, Fort Belknap Indian Community, and Chippewa Cree Tribe. Additional services are donated, such as staff time and materials from Opportunity Link and bio-diesel from Montana State University Northern.

The success of the system and the rising cost of fuel have forced Opportunity Link to make plans to charge for rides to maintain its growing fleet of buses, now numbering five. While this may curb ridership somewhat, the cost of a ride will still be just \$1 for most trips.

Physical therapist Scott Marshall uses the bus to commute 90 miles a day for his job. He moved back to northern Montana for a position on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Marshall lives in Havre with his wife because the town has more services. He says that more professionals like him are likely to move to the area now that the bus system is in place.

“The system expands who employers can hire,” Marshall said. “It can be a valuable recruiting tool.”

Another rider is Bobby Campine, who lives on the Rocky Boy Chippewa Cree Indian Reservation. Campine has been participating in the YouthBuild carpentry training and youth development program since January. Without NCMT, he says he’d have to depend on finding daily rides to the program.

NCMT allows Campine to be dependable and consistent in his attendance at YouthBuild. These are traits he says will help him find a job when he finishes the YouthBuild program.

Without NCMT, he said, “I wouldn’t be able to make it every day, and I don’t want to be absent for any of the days.”

Endnotes

1. We define collaboration as a group of diverse stakeholders working together to solve a common problem or achieve a common objective.
2. <http://www.completestreets.org/policy/complete-streets-work-in-all-communities/>.
3. The United We Ride Dialogue, National Academy of Public Transportation and Easter Seals Project Action, February 2010. (www.unitedweride.gov).
4. These concepts were included in Rep. Nadler's Transportation Job Corp Act of 2009.
5. See legislation introduced by Senator Dodd (CT): Livable Communities Act of 2009. (S. 1619).
6. Elements of this have been addressed in the Broadband Conduit Deployment Act of 2009, SB1266 and HR2428.
7. Robbin Shoemaker; David McGranahan; William McBride. (2008). Agriculture and Rural Communities Are Resilient to High Energy Costs. USDA. www.ers.gov/AmberWaves/April06/features/energy.htm.
8. Rural Injury Deaths in Nevada: A Comparison of American Indians and Non-Indians, 1980-87, by David Wallace.
9. The term intelligent transportation system (ITS) refers to efforts to add information and communications technology to transport infrastructure and vehicles. These systems manage factors that typically are at odds with each other (such as vehicles, loads, and routes) to improve safety and reduce vehicle wear, transportation times, and fuel consumption.

R u r a l T r a n s p o r t a t i o n P o l i c y G r o u p

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Alabama

Independent Living Resources of Greater Birmingham

Alaska

Access Alaska

Arkansas

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)

California

Alternatives to Violence of Mendocino County

California Foundation for Independent Living

Placer Independent Resource Services

Redwood Coast Rural Action

Florida

FILC, Inc. (Florida Independent Living Center)

Idaho

Living Independence Network Corporation

Kansas

Living Independently in Northwest Kansas (LINK), Inc.

Kentucky

Appalshop

Center for Rural Strategies

Hazard Perry County Community Ministries, Inc.

Maryland

Garrett County Community Action Committee

Massachusetts

YouthBuild USA

Maine

Beau Chemin Preservation Farm

Michigan

Blue Water Center for Independent Living

Michigan SILC

Mississippi

Citizens for Educational Awareness

Minnesota

Land Stewardship Project

Main Street Project

Missouri

Southwest Center for Independent Living

New York

Community Resource Exchange

Center for Social Inclusion

The White House Project

E n d o r s i n g O r g a n i z a t i o n s (c o n t .)

New Hampshire

The Carsey Institute

North Carolina

Center for Rural Arts Development and Leadership Education

DisAbility Partners

The Adaptables Center for Independent Living

Oregon

Ecosystem Workforce Program, Institute for a Sustainable

Environment, University of Oregon

Sustainable Northwest

South Carolina

Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment

Texas

Llano Grande Center for Research and Development

Vermont

Onion River Community Access Media

Virginia

disAbility Resource Center

Virginia Rural Health Association

West Virginia

Edvantia

Good News Mountaineer Garage

West Virginia Council of Churches

Wisconsin

International Trade, Business and Economic Development
Council

Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers

Wyoming

Wyoming Independent Living Rehab, Inc

Wyoming Services for Independent Living

Equality State Policy Center