



Rural Policy Research Institute

Media Advisory

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Transportation Options Crucial to Rural and Small Town Economic Development, Quality of Life, RUPRI Study Finds

America's rural areas, small towns, and small cities require more flexibility in choosing among transportation investment options to maintain strong economies and quality of life, according to a new study released during a briefing in the U.S. Capitol today by the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI).

The report shows that a variety of transportation investments — including transit, vanpools, walking and biking paths and roads and highways — are critical to the economic development and well-being of our nation's smaller communities and rural areas. Transportation investments that are not driven by locally-identified priorities, and that do not build collaborative approaches, will lessen the potential to achieve key outcomes, including the creation of vibrant communities, are more likely to diminish the overall rural economic development potential, and may lead to unintended negative consequences, such as a reduced ability to pay for existing transportation improvements and services.

This study reports upon an in-depth literature review and offers policy recommendations as Congress considers reauthorizing the federal surface transportation bill, including:

- 1) Supporting local engagement in planning, decision-making and resource allocation
- 2) Encouraging innovation and integration, for effective rural transportation outcomes
- 3) Shifting resources, where appropriate, to address the most pressing rural needs and opportunities, locally-defined
- 4) Creating integrated regional transportation, economic development, and land use planning and implementation
- 5) Supporting greater attention to rural "place-making," through quality of life investments that offer amenities that attract people to work and live in small cities and towns.

"Transportation investments are critical to the future of America's small towns and cities, and the rural regions surrounding them. With public resources growing ever scarcer, federal policy must now give these regions the same latitude to set their own priorities, and build collaborative and innovative approaches to achieve them, that our nation's metropolitan regions have long benefited from," commented RUPRI President and CEO Charles W. Fluharty.

The Rural Policy Research Institute provides objective analysis and facilitates public dialogue concerning the impacts of public policy on rural people and places.

RUPRI's rural transportation policy framework is fully consistent with the institute's emphasis upon a new paradigm for public and private investment in rural America: "Rural Regional Innovation." This framework, equally applicable in all public sectors, is premised upon several overarching principles for policy and program practice:

- Recognizing and valuing the interdependence of rural and urban economies and regions, and the vital contributions that rural people and places make to national prosperity and well-being, particularly through the stewardship of the nation's natural and cultural resources.
- Encouraging systems-based and collaborative approaches to the design and delivery of public services in rural areas, across jurisdictions and sectors, as a direct, pragmatic response to the challenges of long distances, low densities, limited institutional capacity, and declining fiscal resources.
- Identifying, valuing, and stewarding economic, social and environmental assets of rural regions to create new economic opportunity for all rural people, particularly those in regions of persistent poverty and disinvestment.
- Focusing on innovation and entrepreneurship as the key to rural economic development, to ensure that rural regions and communities are not only maximizing their economic competitiveness, but also their resilience in the face of natural and economic challenges and/or disasters.
- Providing the complement to metropolitan economic clusters that thrive on proximity and the strength of interactions, through supporting and growing economic activities that need and value space, and can thrive on community and virtual networks.

ABOUT RUPRI

The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) provides nonpartisan analysis and facilitates public dialogue regarding the rural impacts of public policies and programs. Congressionally-funded for the past two decades, RUPRI's reach is national and international, and it is one of the world's preeminent sources of expertise regarding the opportunities, challenges, and needs facing rural people and places. RUPRI's core operations are located within the Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri and in Washington, D.C., and support national RUPRI centers, policy research panels, and RUPRI's ongoing research, analytic, and policy education programs.

The full report can be accessed at the RUPRI website: <http://www.rupri.org/>.

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