



Smart Growth America

Improving lives by improving communities

Contextualizing the Transportation Policy and Funding Paradigm for Rural Transit

CSG East Policy Summit (5 April 2025)



Presenter



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**Transportation
for America**



National Complete
Streets Coalition



State
**Smart Transportation
Initiative**

LOCUS
Responsible Real Estate
Developers & Investors

FBCI Form-Based
Codes Institute

“We envision a country where no matter where you live, or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient.”



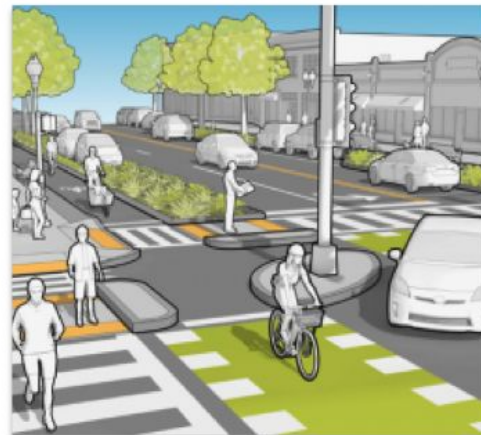
What We Do



Technical
Assistance



Advocacy



Thought
Leadership





Learn more: t4america.org/platform



PRINCIPLE #1

Design for safety over speed

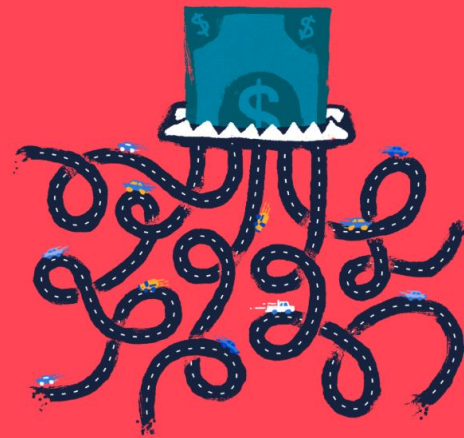
Any serious effort to reduce deaths on our streets and roads requires slower speeds. Federal funding should require approaches and street designs that put safety first.



PRINCIPLE #2

Fix it first

If your house has a leaky roof, you fix that before remodeling your kitchen. The federal transportation program should do the same and prioritize existing maintenance needs ahead of building new things which require decades of additional repair costs.



PRINCIPLE #3

Invest in the rest

For 60 years we've invested hundreds of billions of dollars in highways. Now it's time to **invest in the rest** to create a complete transportation network so more Americans can safely travel by foot, bike, bus, or train.



Who are we designing for?





Vehicles, or People?

No two communities are the same



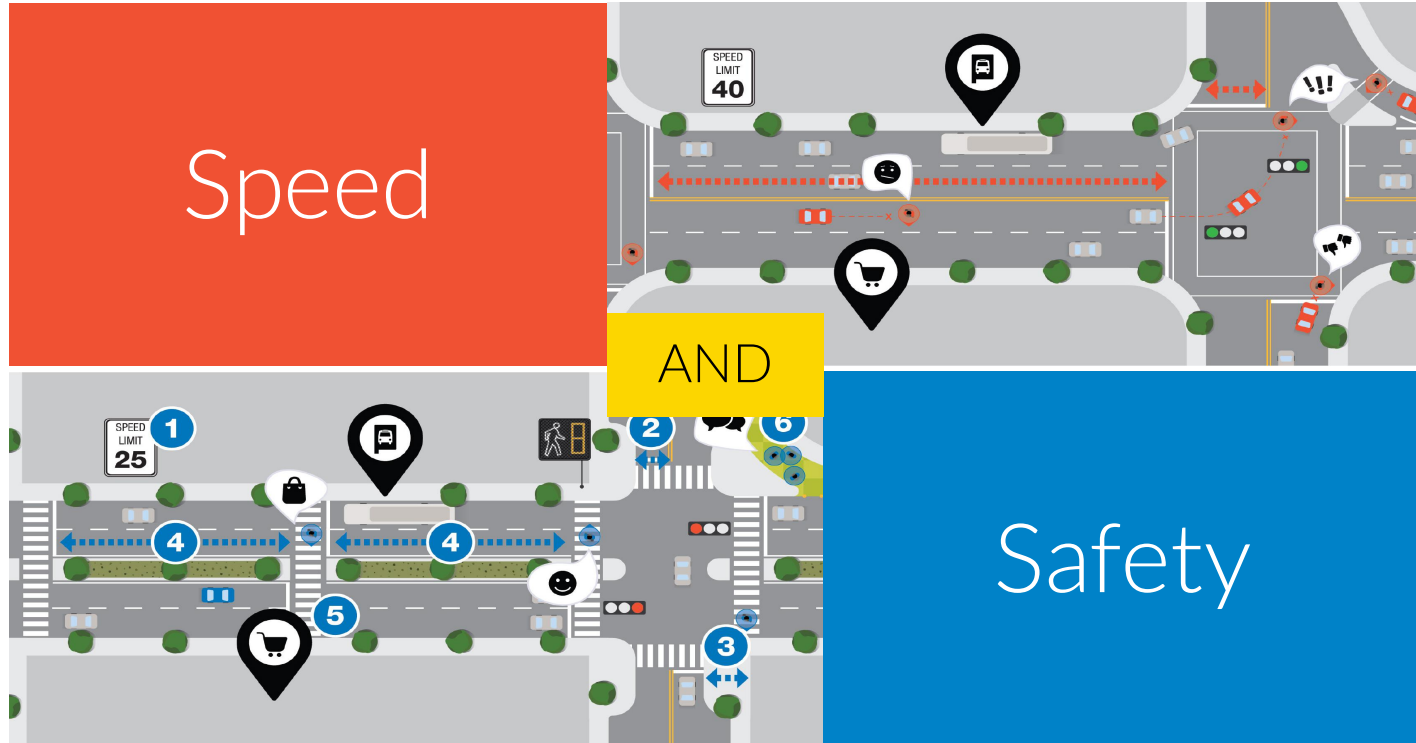
Influencing the Status Quo



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It's Impossible to prioritize both...





Herber, UT



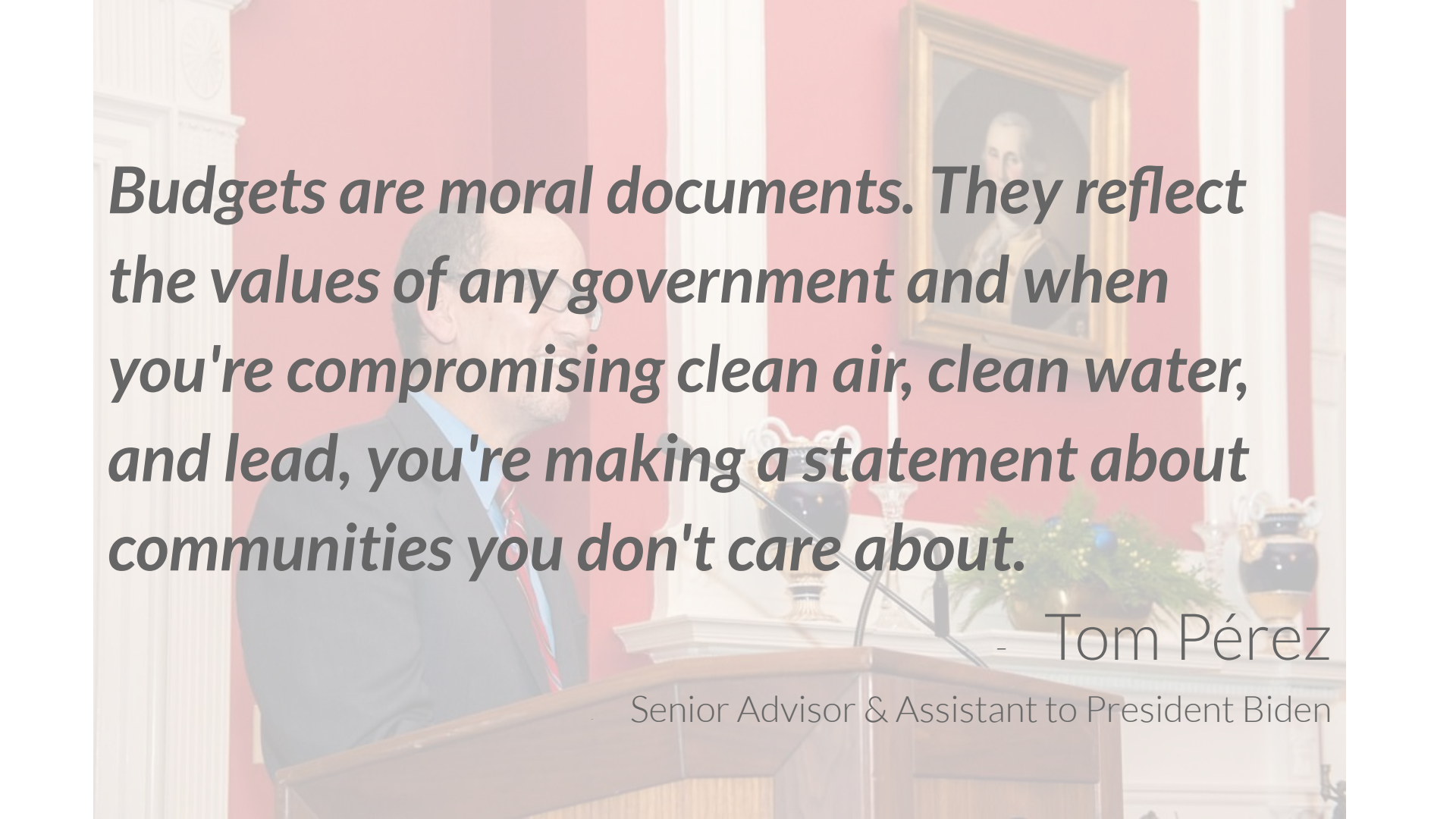
Boise, ID



We design for 9-to-5 **downtown** work trips.



Lewiston, ME

A photograph of Tom Pérez, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and red tie. He is standing behind a wooden podium, smiling and looking to his right. The podium has a microphone and some decorative items, including a small potted plant and a vase. In the background, there is a red wall with white columns and a framed portrait of a man in a suit. The text is overlaid on the image in a large, bold, black font.

Budgets are moral documents. They reflect the values of any government and when you're compromising clean air, clean water, and lead, you're making a statement about communities you don't care about.

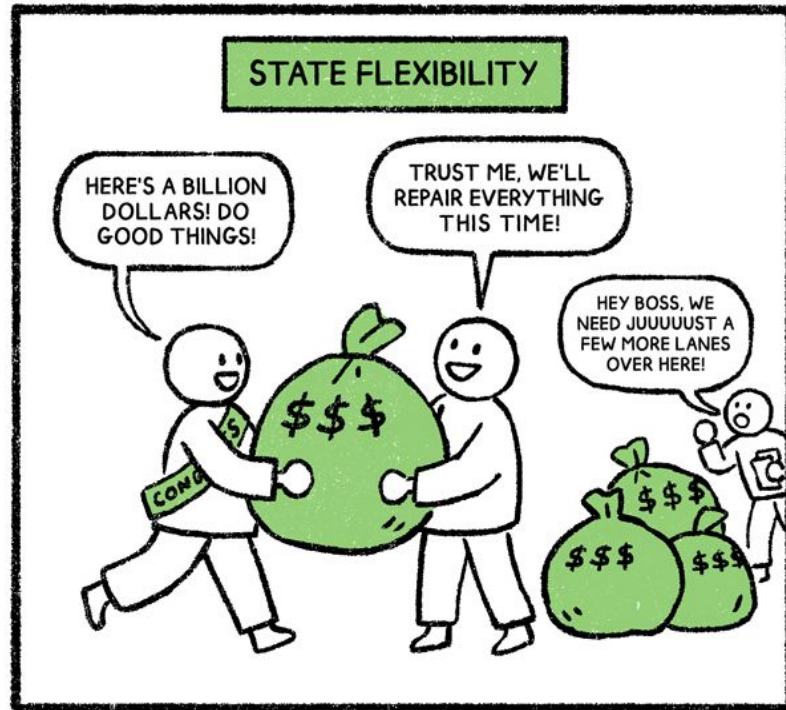
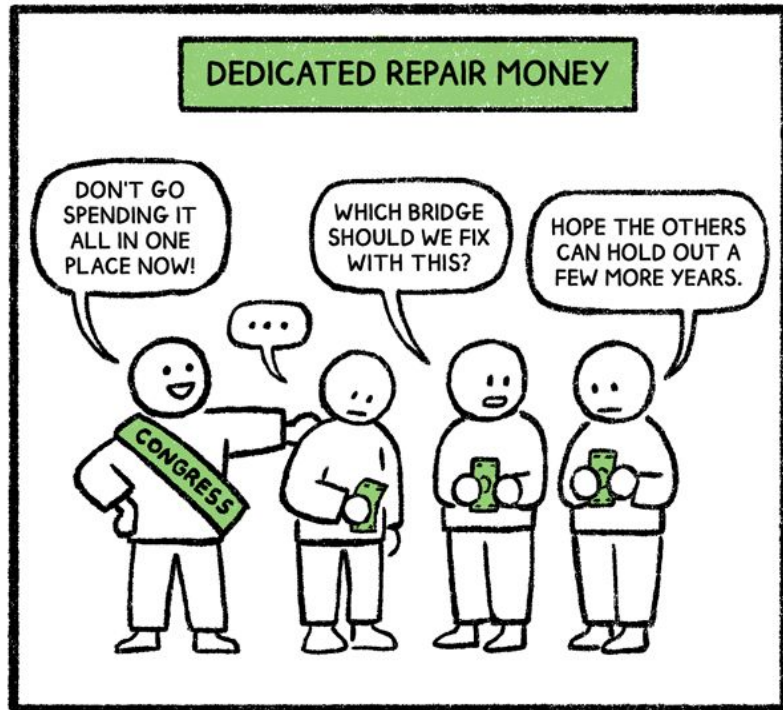
- Tom Pérez

Senior Advisor & Assistant to President Biden



More Money, More Problems

MONEY FOR REPAIRS

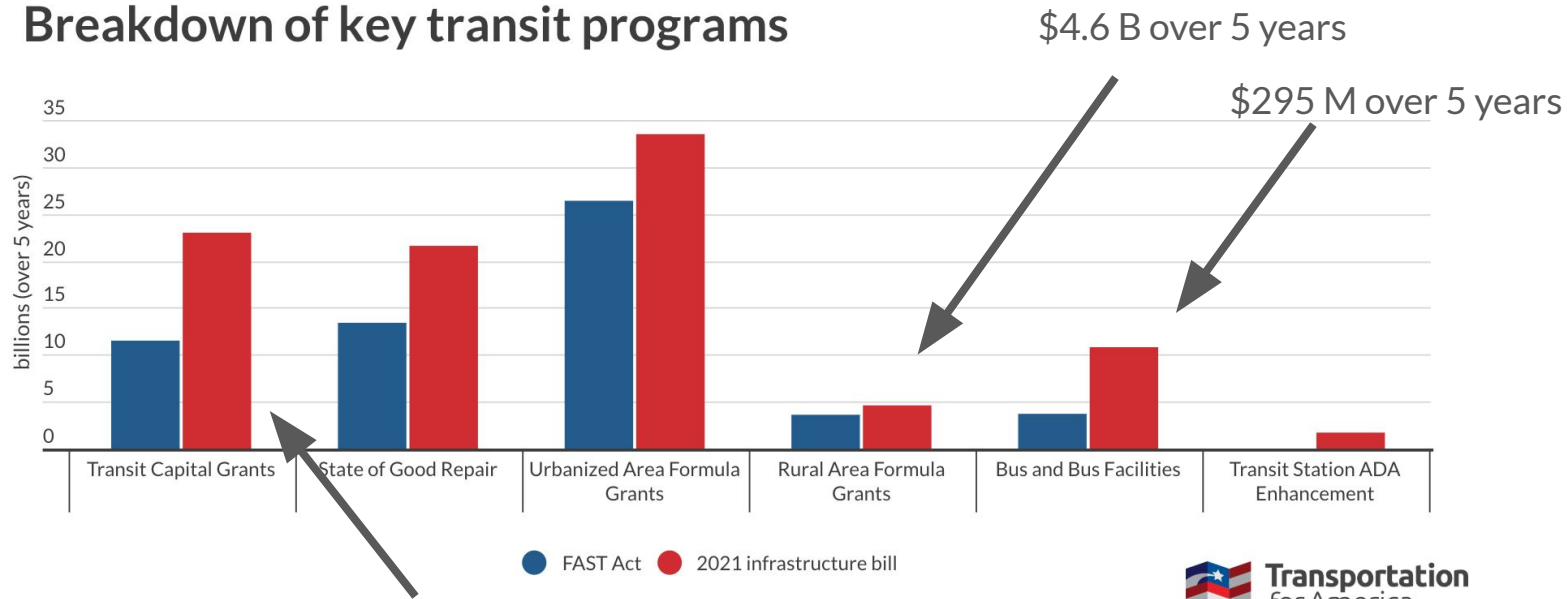




Funding for Rural Transit

1,279 rural transit agencies in the US as of 2023

Breakdown of key transit programs



Share



Transportation
for America

made with

infogram



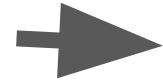
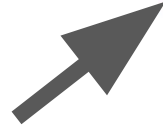
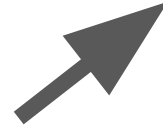
Funding for Rural Transit



Federal Transit
Administration



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION





State Legislative Oversight

- Accounting for spent funding
- Discussions with executive on funding / policy adherence
- Transparency / accountability for executive actions
- Review policy/funding intent versus outcomes



Challenges & Opportunities for Rural Transit



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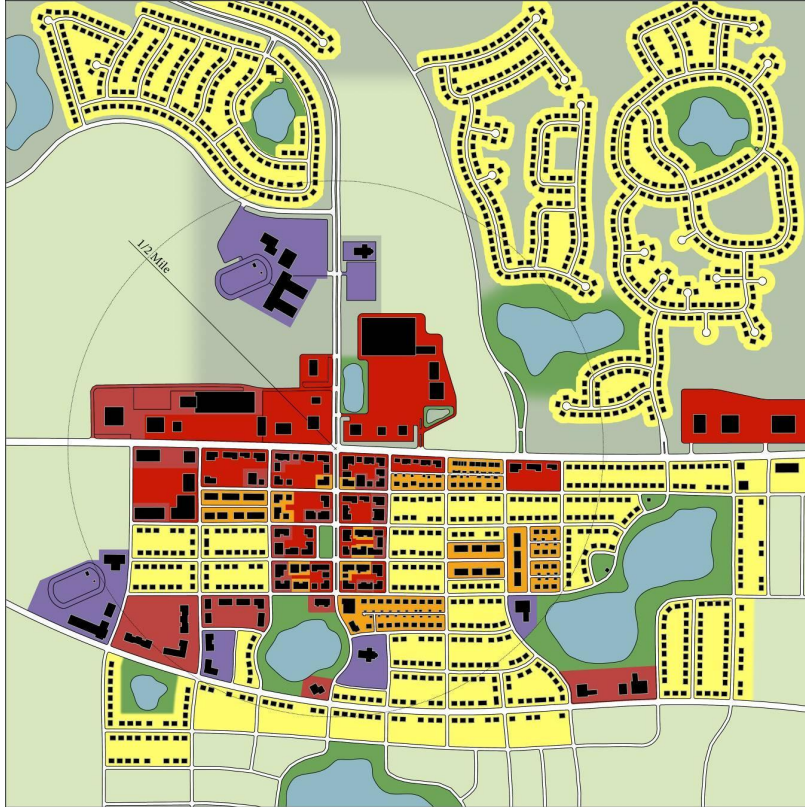
Implications from Transportation Decision Making



Siloed approach to the built environment perpetuates livability challenges



Ongoing Transportation Challenges



Development
patterns &
transportation
context



Ongoing Transportation Challenges





Rural Transit & Land Use



Rickenbacker, OH



Rural Transit Workforce

- Between 75-95% of staff are “Front-line” - drivers, dispatchers, mechanics, etc
- Between 50-75% of staff are part-time workers
- Staffing shortages
- Hyper competitive recruitment





Recommended Actions



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Leveraging Transportation Funding: Maintenance / People First



PROJECTS MUST MEET 2050 TARGETS TO
reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 20%
reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 100%



If it doesn't meet VMT and GHG targets, MnDOT must cancel or adjust the project...



GHG VMT



or offset the increased GHG and VMT by adding sustainable options, like bike lanes and/or new transit lines



GHG VMT

Resources



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Active Roadmap

An Active Roadmap: Best Practices in Rural Mobility

JULY 2023



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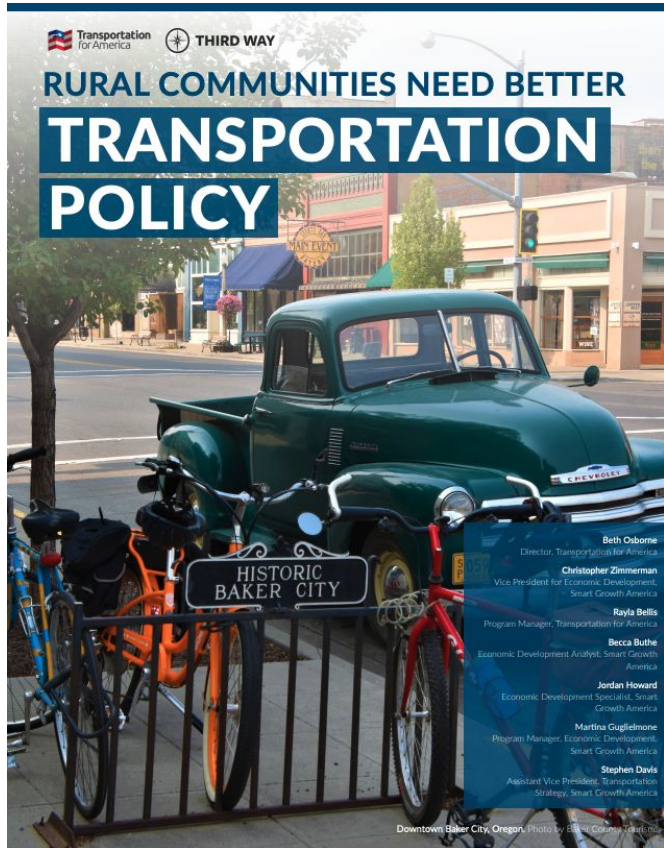


National Complete
Streets Coalition

- Defines the variety of rural typologies, their demographics, and mobility patterns.
- Nearly a third of rural residents do not have access to and/or can't operate a vehicle
- The importance of scaled relationship between landuse and multimodal transportation (i.e. rural transit, active transportation networks)



Rural Communities Need Better Transportation Policy



- Nearly a third of rural residents do not have access to and/or can't operate a vehicle.
- Rural residents are driving farther distances, especially those in lower density communities (vs rural town centers).
- Rural household VMT remains stagnant despite driving farther distances.
- Six recommendations to improve rural transportation.



Community Connectors



This Community Connectors portal is our evolving tool for explaining:

- 1) Who is involved,
- 2) How the process unfolds, and
- 3) What DOTs really mean when they say, and then sharing
- 4) Real world stories from advocates—both successes and looming challenges.

Ever growing resource, both in T4A content and connecting to partner content.

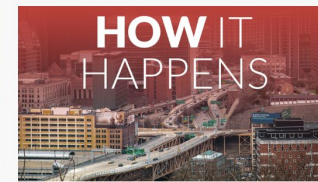
<https://t4america.org/community-connectors/>



Explaining the actors

Who has control over the hundreds of billions in federal and state transportation dollars for transportation projects? Who are the entities involved in spending this money? Who are the agencies involved in making the decisions? Start here to find out more about the people you need to know: **who is involved**.

- State DOTs
- USDOT
- Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs)



Demystifying the process

How does transportation money get spent? Where does the money come from? What things *can* federal transportation money be spent on? Start here to find out more about the process: **how it happens**.

- How are projects chosen for funding? (Programming)
- A plethora of plans: what do they all mean? (Planning)
- The limits of environmental laws (like NEPA) to protect communities



Decoding common terms

Transportation engineers, planners, and decision makers often bury advocates in a sea of jargon and acronyms, accompanied by an explicit message that you *can't* possibly understand things well enough to suggest a different path. Start here to learn about the obscure, complex measures and models that have incredible influence over what gets built and where: **things DOTs say**.

- "We have to preserve level of service (LOS)"
- "Widening this road is guaranteed to improve traffic"
- "Sorry, our street design standards don't allow that"
- "The transportation models tell us that we have to..."
- "This project will definitely save people time"
- "We can't do that, we'd get sued!"



Advocate stories

"Community Connectors" all across the country are **fighting divisive, destructive, and unaffordable freeway expansions**, advancing projects to remove old highways, making wide, dangerous arterial roads a little safer for people to cross, or just improving basic infrastructure people depend on each day. These battles are won and lost—often on the same project. **Read a growing list of profiles** our team is producing about these stories.

Stories of success

- Greenville, SC: Out with the cars, in with the people
- Gretna, LA: Tracking a downtown divide
- Milwaukee, WI: The long fight for connectivity



Foot Traffic Ahead



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Places
Platform

Foot Traffic AHEAD

- Report focused on the nexus of transportation, land use, and economic output.
- Areas with mixed, higher density land use, multimodal transportation options yield the highest economic output.



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QUESTIONS

