



2010 Excellence in Rural Transportation Awards



The 2010 Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards mark the fourth year that regional transportation-related programs and projects are being recognized for their innovation and impact on communities throughout the nation. This year, 22 projects from organizations in 13 states are being recognized for their innovative and excellent approaches to regional transportation planning and program implementation.

This year's winning projects help meet their regions' needs through various program areas, including: economic development impacts; regional transit and vanpools; corridor studies; freight planning; air quality; safety planning; transportation's connection to environment and land use planning; public participation; mapping; trail planning; and other areas. The projects are profiled by state, and contact information for each awardee is provided.

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(Top left): River Valley Regional Commission (Columbus, GA) undertook the Activevalley Bicycle & Pedestrian Initiative to plan, develop and execute bicycle and pedestrian programs, including a Bike to Work day.

(Top right): Lower Savannah Council of Governments (Aiken, SC) completed a Goods Movement Study for the Lower Savannah Region to identify and prioritize improvements and strategies that accommodate and enhance mobility of goods.

(Bottom left): Mid-Columbia Economic Development District hosted the Columbia Gorge Transportation Summit, which emphasized partnerships, innovative approaches and strategies to meeting the region's transportation needs, as part of the Gorge TransLink Alliance.

(Bottom right): Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (Fort Myers, FL) launched the Creating Better Places: Transit-Oriented Development Design Competition to challenge citizens and design professionals to visualize transit-oriented development, solicit creative ideas and generate interest and discussion about livability (illustration credit: Seth Harry and Associates).

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Bicycle/Pedestrian, Greenway and Trail Plans



Photo courtesy of RVRC

The **River Valley Regional Commission's Active Valley Bicycle & Pedestrian Initiative** focuses on planning, developing and executing bicycle and pedestrian programs that have positive impacts on citizens' quality of life. These projects serve as the first step toward creating livable and sustainable communities. This initiative has had a tremendous impact within the region by providing safety education; developing creative programs toward safety, education

and encouragement; partnering with the Clean Air Campaign to achieve a better air quality index and increasing physical activity; and developing Safe Routes to School Programs to provide the necessary means for elementary- and middle school-aged children to safely walk and cycle to school. Two annual Bike to Work days with over 400 participants, five Safe Routes to School Plans, and the first regional bicycle and pedestrian website are among the accomplishments of these efforts.

River Valley Regional Commission

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The **Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments (INRCOG)** has partnered with a number of local organizations, including Silos and Smokestacks, the Grout Museum District, the Waterloo and Cedar Falls Tourism and Visitors Bureaus, George Wyth State Park, the Black Hawk County Conservation Board, Cedar Falls Parks and Waterloo Leisure Services to provide an innovative approach to trail enhancement. Through the **Prairie Pathways Initiative**, trail users gain a thorough understanding of how the Cedar Valley developed, the people who shaped it, and the forces and influences that impacted this development. A total of eight kiosks, 41 interpretive panels and 21 map panels are being installed throughout the Waterloo, Iowa area. Prairie Pathways will bring further positive attention to the Cedar Valley Trails, which now encompass over 100 miles of hard surfaced trails, and serve as a model for other communities.

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Photo courtesy of INRCOG

The **High Country Council of Governments** partnered with Wilkes County, area cyclists, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and others to develop a map to provide cyclists with valuable travel information. Fifteen hundred **Wilkes County Bicycle Route Maps** have been printed and distributed as a result of this effort. The maps provide cyclists with the location of routes, route descriptions, elevation profiles, climate data, camping locations, parking areas, and local points of interests. Maps have been made available through Wilkes County Government, local cycling groups, bicycle shops, the Chamber of Commerce, and a visitors' center/rest area located near the center of the county. In addition, NCDOT and Wilkes County have worked together in a joint effort to sign each of the 14 routes that were identified as a result of this project. The signage will not only direct cyclists along the routes, but also draw attention to cyclists utilizing the routes, and make organizing rides or races much easier for cycling groups. It is also expected that cycling tourism will increase as a result of the distribution of the maps.

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The **Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission's Regional Greenways and Open Space Network Plan** was the first regional greenways plan in Pennsylvania. The plan is unique in that it was developed to be twofold: it serves as both a regional plan as well as separate individual county plans. The plan outlines a series of policies and projects for linking existing natural and man-made resources within the region's six counties. By connecting these assets into a comprehensive greenway network, the region's natural resources are leveraged to promote and strengthen their value to the region for a range of purposes. In addition to delineating the elements that make up the greenway network, the Plan identifies a strategic framework for implementation and management of these valuable resources. This framework provides an overall strategy for prioritizing greenways or project corridors as well as a palette of potential implementation tools and a summary of support and funding sources that can be utilized locally to complete projects.

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Image courtesy of SAPDC

Bicycle/Pedestrian, Greenway and Trail Plans



Photos courtesy of RVARC

The **Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission** partnered with the City of Roanoke to organize **Ciclovia**, an event that creates temporary public space by opening a circuit of streets for residents to interact with each other through exercise, entertainment and fun. A variety of participants including bicyclists, walkers, runners, artists and children all enjoyed streets of downtown Roanoke traffic-free. The event is an effort to get citizens to reconsider the use of urban space, to experience the urban center in a different way, and to transform space dedicated to motor vehicles into human space. Roanoke's first Ciclovia in 2009 drew very positive attention from city officials and residents, who have requested more frequent Ciclovías. A second event has already been held in the summer of 2010. The event was covered extensively by media, including the Extra Section of the *Roanoke Times*, WVTF's *Morning Edition* show from NPR, WBDJ News Channel 7, WSLC Channel 10, *Roanoke Free Press* and Streetsblog New York City.

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The **U.S. Highway 30 Corridor Study** provides a compilation of past trends, existing conditions and future projections in the areas of population, housing and economic conditions along the route. Additionally, existing conditions of U.S. Highway 30 itself have been collected and evaluated, including traffic counts, truck traffic, safety, surface width, shoulder width, surface condition, safety issues, high accident locations, trip generation and structures. The study was completed jointly by six regional planning affiliations that are bisected by the U.S. 30 Corridor, **Region XII Council of Governments, Metropolitan Area Planning Agency – RPA 18, Central Iowa Regional Transportation Planning Alliance, Region 6 Planning Commission, East Central Iowa Council of Governments, and East Central Intergovernmental Association.** These points of information are used to justify and prioritize improvements along U.S. Highway 30. The U.S. Highway 30 Corridor Study provides the U.S. 30 Coalition, local governments, the Iowa Department of Transportation and legislators a comprehensive, fact-based look at the entire corridor. Before the completion of this study, there was no document, plan or study that provided a detailed and broad investigation into the conditions along the corridor or the need for transportation improvements.



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Corridor Plans and Projects

Missouri Highway 72 is a main route through Madison County, passing through downtown Fredericktown, Missouri. However, the corridor was prone to flooding, restricting emergency response and access to the municipal water plant. The city also needed access into a developing business park. After the **Southeast Missouri Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission** developed a cost share application on behalf of Madison County, the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) agreed to fund 50 percent of a **Highway 72 bypass** as the agency was improving the corridor. To fund Madison County's share of over \$3 million, the RPC prepared a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Plan and a loan application to MoDOT. Both projects were approved, and funds generated in the TIF are being used to pay debt service. To address the funding gap that still existed in providing access to the City's business park from the bypass, the RPC prepared a successful application for Community Development Block Grant funds.

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Photo courtesy of UVLSRPC

New Hampshire Route 12 is the only link between the towns of Charlestown and Walpole, and is a regionally important artery for commerce, commuting and recreation. The roadway lies between the Connecticut River and an active passenger rail line. Over time, erosion of the Connecticut River's banks not only created serious safety issues for drivers, but threatened the roadway itself, and by extension local businesses and the regional economy. The New

Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH DOT) and **Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission** (UVLSRPC) employed the **NH Route 12 Context Sensitive Solutions Project Development Process**, a first for a rural corridor in New England. The initiative formed a collaborative decision-making process between the two communities and NH DOT to develop a project design that not only addressed the safety concerns, but fit the context of the region in an environmentally sensitive manner. Through a two-year process facilitated by UVLSRPC, hundreds of citizens were directly involved in shaping the \$15 million project, and broad consensus was reached on a preferred design alternative.

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In conjunction with NCDOT's transportation reform and the Governor's Executive Orders 2 and 3, **Triangle J Council of Governments (TJCOG)** provided **GIS Support for Transportation Reform** by mapping all of the local road requests in the Triangle Area RPO. The resulting data were used to help quantify benefits such as bike/pedestrian connections to schools. Local jurisdictions provided ranked project lists. These were mapped, and data needed for NCDOT's Policy to Projects process were determined. Based on the quantitative score from NCDOT, local projects were then ranked regionally across two funding divisions. All transportation modes were included, with separate rankings by mode. The spatial nature of the data also allowed for standardized cost estimates based on length and number of bridges or grade separations needed.

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Images courtesy of NCRPDC

North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission

created a database for the identification, assessment and management of locally owned bridges. The **Local Bridge Inventory Project** focused on bridges less than 20 feet long, about which information may be lacking, as federal regulations do not currently require routine inspections for local bridges of that length. To gain a greater understanding of needs, locally owned bridges in the six-county North

Central region were tentatively located using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis, then confirmed through site visits. Data on 865 locally owned bridge structures were collected. The final reports developed for each municipality have made the value of such information clear, since the region is at the forefront of a natural gas well drilling operation in the Marcellus Shale formation. These roads and bridges functioned well enough to provide typical access to parts of the region, but they were never intended to stand up to the sustained truck traffic necessary to support drilling activities.

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The **Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT)** initiated its **U-PLAN Mapping Initiative** three years ago to facilitate shared data access across agencies such as Utah's Associations of Governments, MPOs, RPOs, utility providers, local governments and other state agencies. Users from these organizations can view layers, download data and access more information about data points from all other participants' databases. U-PLAN contains information related to infrastructure, current and planned projects, environmental data, cultural and historic resources, land use, demographic data and more. Although startup required significant investment by UDOT, overall maintenance is minimal because each database is updated by the entity that owns it. Through U-PLAN, UDOT created a new collaborative paradigm for owning and sharing data.

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Land Use and Transportation

“What should Smart Growth and transit-oriented development look like?” was the question raised through the “**Creating Better Places**” design competition conducted by the **Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council** for Lee County in cooperation with the City of Fort Myers, Reconnecting Lee County,



Illustration by Seth Harry and Associates

and Florida Gulf Coast University's Center for Public and Social Policy. Eight teams and individuals submitted entries for a specific site with access to potential light rail service. Entries included a site plan, illustrations and narrative describing the factors such as place-making, multi-modal transportation opportunities and mixed-use development. Winners were selected by 20 volunteers representing citizens, design professionals and finance professionals. An awards reception was held in conjunction with an Art Walk event, and hundreds of participants viewed the entries.

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Land Use and Transportation

Through a series of charettes and public meetings, **Hidalgo County MPO** staff was able to identify preferred public opinion on growth scenarios incorporating transportation planning and land use scenarios. This project incorporates **Long-Range Scenario Planning** as a facet of transportation planning by examining the needs of the region based upon preferred growth patterns. The outputs of the scenario planning process are incorporated into the long-range, 25-year plan to assist community and elected leaders develop criteria based upon a range of scenarios which included information on a value of return in dollars, person hours, congestion and land use development. This provided a more accurate reflection of a transportation projects cost and the return on the investment.

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When planning future transportation projects, it is critical to evaluate land use in the same context to account for varying vehicle, pedestrian, bicycle and transit trips. Central Pulaski County, including the towns of Dublin and Pulaski, is a growth

area that contains a mix of industrial, commercial and expanding residential developments and that suffers from an inefficient transportation network. The **Central Pulaski Transportation and Land Use Master Plan**

completed by the **New River Valley Planning District Commission** and other partners evaluated current characteristics and incident data, population and workforce projections, hotspots for safety and congestion improvements, and existing bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.

The process included analysis of

intersections attributed to safety and congestion issues, existing roadway corridor geometric improvements, proposed interchange improvements that would utilize existing infrastructure, and planned corridors for vehicles, freight, bicycles and pedestrians.

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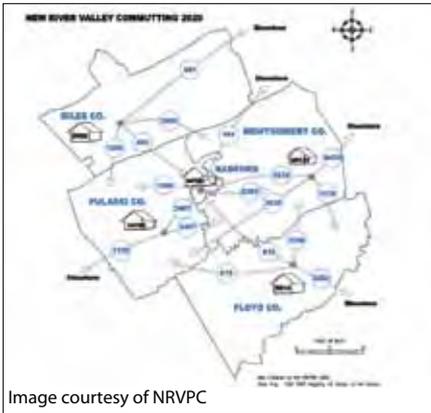


Image courtesy of NRVPC

The administrative guidance for North Carolina's Rural Planning Organizations had not been updated since 2005. The existing guidance was disjointed, unclear and did not represent the state of practice in RPO administration at the local or state level. The creation of the **2009 RPO Manual** was a collaborative effort, with contributions from each RPO in the **North Carolina Association of Rural**



Planning Organizations and **North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Planning Branch Staff**. After nearly a year, the result was a clear, comprehensive set of descriptions, administrative guidelines, deadlines and document templates for RPOs and NCDOT to use beginning with the 2010 fiscal year in a searchable format with downloadable templates. To ensure compliance with the manual, each RPO administrator and state coordinator have jointly signed a copy. Use of the manual has resulted in fewer delays in NCDOT approval of common administrative documents, submittals and invoices and reduced the burden on NCDOT staff by implementing document standards and clarifying expectations.

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Public and Human Services Transportation

The **Southwest Georgia Regional Commission's Coordinated Transportation Program** system was inspired through contact with the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR), which needed critical services for its clients. Nearly all of DHR's clients either cannot afford or are incapable of accessing safe, dependable, and necessary transportation through their own means. DHR has myriad programs capable of paying for transportation services; however, most of the service in 1999 was not coordinated or readily available to the clients on a reliable basis. There is little or no public transit service available to them in this very rural region, generally considered not only one of the most demographically challenged in the state, but also the nation. The system was designed by the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission in concert with DHR and Georgia Department of Transportation staff, beginning service in 2000 with private vehicles owned by Transportation



Provider Organizations and vehicles owned by various governmental organizations that were in need of services. Today, the system uses not only private transportation providers, but contracts and cooperates with publicly operated services to provide nearly 1.2 million trips annually.

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East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG), Corridor MPO and United Way of East Central Iowa partnered in 2007 to develop a regional transportation-human service coalition, the **Human Services Transportation Advisory Group** (HSTAG). In August 2007, HSTAG sent a team to the Community Transportation Association of America's annual Institute for Transportation

Coordination. An action plan was completed at that time which pointed to a need for mobility-management type activities. HSTAG's Marketing and Education committee planned a two-day event that included a daylong mobility management workshop and a full-day transportation forum, the first Community Transportation Forum. The second Community Transportation Forum was recently held. A mobility manager was hired in November 2008. With support and guidance from staff liaison and HSTAG, the mobility manager has developed many new partnerships and opportunities for coordination. A regional transportation resource guide serves as a tool to provide train-the-trainer opportunities to agency supervisors on transportation programs and options.

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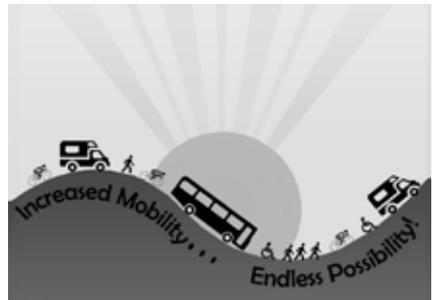


Image courtesy of ECICOG



Photo courtesy of Region XII COG

Region XII Council of Governments developed a website specifically for **Job Jet Commuter Vanpool Program** and also developed English and Spanish brochures and driver and rider agreements to be used to promote and operate the program. Region XII staff worked with economic development groups, major employers and the media to promote Job Jet as a viable option for commuter transportation. Job Jet is currently operating and recruiting additional drivers,

riders and employment sites. During the first six months of operation Job Jet has provided 1,453 rides and traveled 3,700 miles. Job Jet has provided an important alternative mode of transportation for commuters in the region and reduced single occupancy trips. Job Jet is the first rural commuter vanpool operating in the State of Iowa.

Region XII Council of Governments

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Photo courtesy of MCEDD

In April 2010, **Mid-Columbia Economic Development District** hosted the Columbia Gorge Transportation Summit which emphasized partnerships, innovative approaches and strategies to meeting the region's transportation needs. **Gorge TransLink Alliance** is an informal coalition of public transportation providers, Medicaid transportation brokers, human service and planning agencies who serve a five-county area bordering the Columbia River in both Oregon and Washington State. Through a mobility management initiative, regional service providers and numerous stakeholders are working collaboratively to enhance transportation networks to increase access in rural communities to health care, employment, shopping, recreational and other activities. The primary beneficiaries of this project include the elderly, disabled and low-income individuals. In August

Public and Human Services Transportation

2009, Gorge TransLink successfully secured a highly motivated and innovative mobility manager to offer services in the region. The immediate outcomes of hiring a mobility manager have resulted in a regional transportation services assessment, the creation of a transportation resource guide, the development of coordinated transportation plans and increased advocacy for the region's needs.

Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
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Rural transit programs are lacking in the sparsely populated region of Central Utah. The **Six County Association of Governments** did not have a formal organization to oversee transportation coordination activities. Today's state of the art technology was underutilized, so staff implemented a Google calendar and partnered with the existing State of Utah 2-1-1 program in this **Mobility Management Implementation Project**. This pioneering idea is an effective method to implement the Six County Transportation Implementation Plan because no costly administrative expenses were required to mobilize the coordination of ridership within the central part of Utah. Local trips are provided for shopping, medical and other social services for those who do not have transportation options. Minimal costs to the participating agencies are realized.

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The **Travel Demand Management Website** (www.monadnocktma.org) is a centralized clearinghouse of information and tools for those interested in learning more about sustainable transportation. Developed by the **Southwest Region Planning Commission** and other partners, the site consolidates information on transportation services, concepts, programs and tools in the rural Monadnock Region. To streamline the delivery of information, it is tailored to provide layers of information to four different audiences: residents, employers, municipalities and educators. On this site, visitors can explore the transportation options available in the region, as well as the environmental, economic and health benefits of each mode. Also incorporated are strategies for employers, municipalities and educators to support and plan for travel demand management. Word about this resource has spread via newspaper articles, speaking engagements, a public service announcement, flyers, the local cable TV station and radio talk shows, and a six-week promotion of green community activities. Efforts are in place to expand marketing of the site.

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Image courtesy of SWRPC



Photo courtesy of RVRC

**Congratulations
to the 2010
Excellence in Regional
Transportation Award
Winners!**

*Learn more about the winning projects at
the Excellence Awards Reception during the
National Rural Transportation
Peer Learning Conference*

*Wednesday, October 20, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.
Hilton St. Louis at the Ball Park
St. Louis, Missouri*