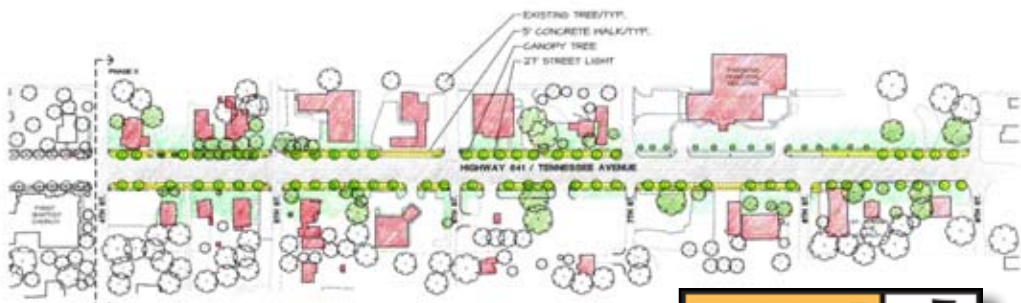


# 2012 Excellence in Regional Transportation AWARDS



# 2012 Excellence in Regional Transportation AWARDS



This year marks the sixth year that regional transportation-related programs and projects are being recognized for their innovation and impact on communities throughout the nation. In 2012, 18 projects from organizations in 10 states are being recognized through the Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards program 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: bicycle/pedestrian, greenways, and trail activities; disaster response and recovery; freight and economic development; incident management; innovative finance and project delivery; local, regional, and statewide partnerships; public transit and human services transportation; safety; and technology. Contact information for each award-winning organization is also provided.

The Excellence in Regional Transportation Award is a program of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation and its program affiliate RPO America. RPO America serves as the network for the nation's rural and small metropolitan transportation planners and other professionals.

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*Cover images (from top to bottom):*

*Southwest Tennessee Development District – City of Parsons Enhancement Project*

*Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System and Greater Portland COG –*

*2009 PACTS Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*

*Northern Maine Development Commission – Aroostook Rail Preservation (image courtesy of MaineDOT)*

*Back cover: River Valley Regional Commission – More Pedal-Less Metal*


*Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies –*

*RPC Involvement in Transportation Network Recovery*

*New River Valley Planning District Commission – Regional Bikeway, Walkway, Blueway Plan*

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## *Bicycle/Pedestrian, Greenways, and Trail Activities*

Building on enthusiasm from the previous year, the **River Valley Regional Commission** staged the second annual **More Pedal-Less Metal: Urban Cycling Initiative**, a project aimed at encouraging greater and safer bicycle ridership. The cities of Americus and Columbus, GA each staged events that started with a ride through the downtown core of each community. Afterward, the children



*Images courtesy of RVR.*

participated in a “Bicycle Rodeo” that included being fitted with a free helmet (compliments of Safe Kids Columbus) and visits to various stations where they learned about bicycle maintenance, crossing the road safely, and had fun cycling an obstacle course. Parents were encouraged to participate in all the activities with their children. The successes achieved by this initiative include exposure to the Georgia Safe Routes to School Program. The event was more successful than the previous year, growing by 135 participants, and was completed for only \$1500 and a generous donation of \$700 worth of complimentary helmets from Safe Kids Columbus.

**River Valley Regional Commission**

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To help facilitate trail stewardship, the **Region XII Council of Governments (COG)** in Carroll, IA founded the Region XII Bike-Ped Roundtable, a body of organizations and individuals interested in promoting trail usage and an increased commitment to cycling and walking. To this end, the roundtable established the **Region XII Bike-Ped Roundtable Trail Count Initiative**, a program focused on tracking and maintaining data on the popularity of trails in the area. Region XII COG deployed 27 trail counters throughout the region to document the number of users, and acquired tracking data for 26 locations on three major trails. The region plans to continue data collection in the future, including counts on the

last major regional linear trail. The counting process lasted 160 days during summer and fall and generated nearly 2600 pages of time-stamped data. Staff also deployed six counters for heavily used snowmobile trails during winter. Region XII COG manages the data and develops annual trail count reports documenting findings. The information is used to justify future trail investments, assess the contribution they make to the local economy, determine trail funding, and assist with trail maintenance and construction.

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Four years ago, the **Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS)**, the MPO housed in the **Greater Portland Council of Governments**, partnered with a diverse group of planners, advocates, and officials dedicated to sustainable transportation to discuss ways to increase cross-organization com-

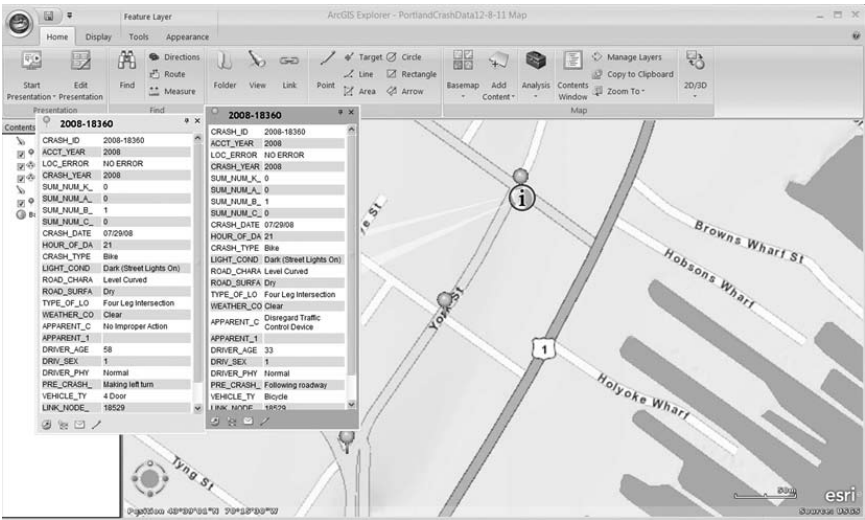
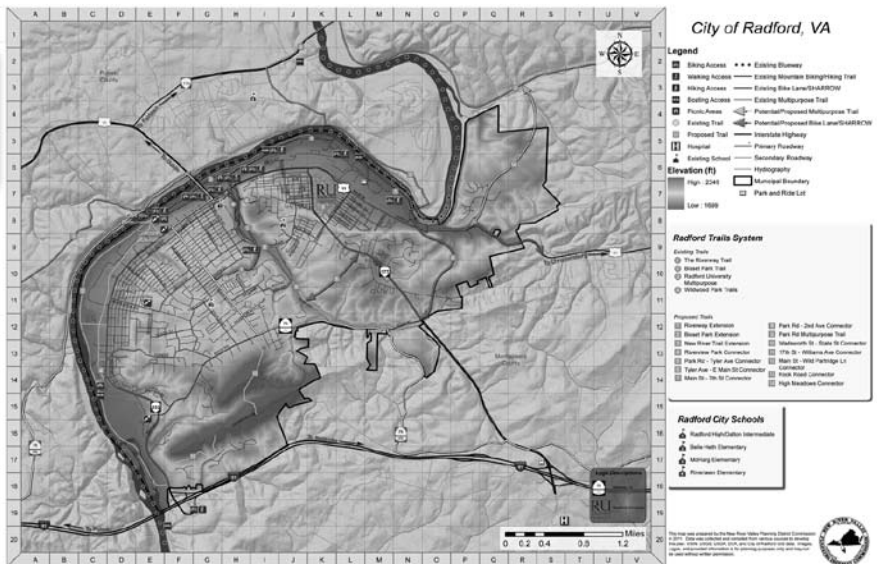


Image courtesy of PACTS/GPCOG.

munication and program efficiency. The hope was to carve out common ground, amplify their voices, and make initiatives easier to implement. The result was the **2009 PACTS Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan**. With emphasis on collaboration, the plan has led to the funding of many important bike and pedestrian projects, the inclusion of bike and pedestrian space on three large bridge projects, and the development of bike/pedestrian committees. PACTS was also very in-

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To further the region's multi-jurisdictional, multimodal transportation system, the **New River Valley Planning District Commission (PDC)**, in collaboration with local governments within the region, created the **Regional Bikeway, Walkway, Blueway Plan**. The goal was to produce a tool that would consolidate all the information about different transportation modes within the region, while adhering to a bottom-up approach that honored the differences between jurisdictions. In the early stages, the PDC met with public officials from each jurisdiction to learn about local transportation needs and related initiatives. The PDC then performed additional research, collaborated to share data, performed site visits for photos and alignment planning, and set up a web page to communicate with the public. The work included mapping trails and access points across the region,



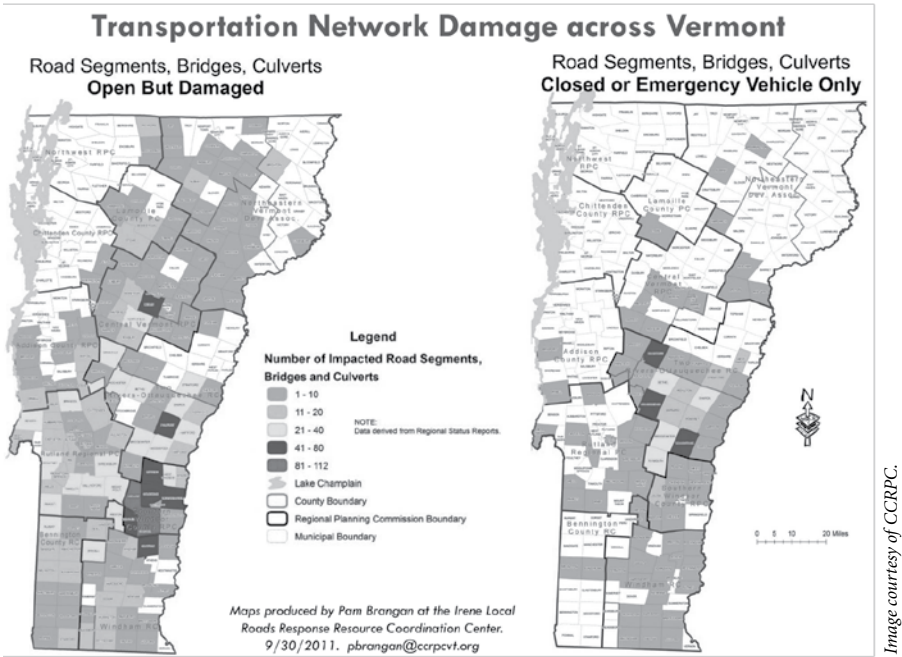


some of them for the first time. The end product details the various transportation modes in existence, and includes interactive Google maps and a common GIS file. It helps establish common goals, creates multi-jurisdictional connections, serves as a resource for local or statewide planning, and provides materials that can be used to pursue funding.

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## Disaster Response and Recovery

On August 28, 2011, intense rainfall from Tropical Storm Irene caused flash flooding and inundation across Vermont, particularly in the southern half of the state. Within 24 hours the flood waters washed away and severely damaged roads, bridges, culverts, utilities, and buildings, leaving behind devastated communities





*Images courtesy of SWCRPC.*

and a crippled transportation network. Due to the extent and magnitude of the damage, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) requested assistance from the state's Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs), which make up the **Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies**, with conducting **Tropical Storm Irene Response and Recovery**. These tasks were beyond the normal scope of their work, training, and funding. There were no advance plans or procedures in place for this type of response and recovery effort. Beginning in September, RPCs assisted local towns with recovery efforts while VTrans focused on repairing damage to the state highway network. The RPCs set up a Regional Coordination Center (RCC) at the state's sole Metropolitan Planning Organization office to coordinate, collate, and share information between various partners and agencies. RPCs in badly hit areas focused on initiating regular contact with towns to collect detailed damage assessments, updates on recovery progress and unmet needs, and provide other transportation-related assistance. RPC staff in less impacted areas provided support staffing at the RCC and State Emergency Operations Center.

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Through a series of special studies completed as part of the **Planning for Freight in Small MPOs** program, the **Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC)** keeps track of freight usage in the Valdosta, GA urbanized area not only in terms of who is making the most of the rail lines and to what degree, but how freight movements impact the local community in a variety of ways. The project began in 2009, and so far, the commission has succeeded in completing detailed reports on those industries using shift share and location quotient analysis, as well as analyzing how railroad traffic in Valdosta and Lowndes County has impacted the local economy. More reports are planned, including one examining how particular infrastructure projects might reduce the crash rate of commercial vehicles. The SGRC is a small MPO, and this report series allows the region to assess freight and goods movement on a manageable scale, keeping all related activity in-house without the need for an outside consultant.

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In the summer of 2009, the Montreal, Maine, and Atlantic Railroad announced its intention to abandon 233 rail miles in Aroostook County, Maine. This line was a crucial transport route for 23 local shippers, and hundreds of jobs depended on the connection. Citizens and local organizations wanted to find a way to save the line. Among the interested parties were MaineDOT and **Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC)**, who together spearheaded the **Aroostook Rail Preservation** initiative, focused on buying the rail assets and preserving the route as a state-owned, but privately-operated service. NMDC knew the shippers who counted on this line for their business, and acted as a facilitator between them and the buy-out process, including conven-



Image courtesy of MaineDOT.

ing a meeting of shippers, the railroad, and MaineDOT at a juncture critical to negotiations. The initiative was highly collaborative, involving many parties at various points along the way. Legislators, industry representatives, community and economic development officials all participated during the process, supporting MaineDOT and NMDC efforts. Through this hard work, MaineDOT was able to purchase the Aroostook rail assets in January 2011 for \$21.1 million, with a combination of public and private funding sources.

Northern Maine Development Commission  
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## *Incident Management*

Staffed by the **Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission**, the Traffic Incident Management Group is a body of stakeholders consisting of law enforcement, fire and rescue, and transportation agencies from a bi-state area of southern Maine and New Hampshire. The group was convened to find efficient and meaningful solutions to growing traffic flow challenges resulting from crashes, natural disasters, and other disruptions. A popular idea suggested by members to help reach the goal of reduced traffic disturbances was the creation of a set of common guidelines that on-the-scene responders could use to help them deal with problems as effectively as possible. The core objective is to ensure that incident responders operate under a clear set of understood and agreed upon management practices that enhance cooperation and reduce traffic circulation interruptions. To this end, a subcommittee of the Maine-New Hampshire Traffic Incident Management Group developed the first **Traffic Incident Operating Guidelines** in fall 2010. The guidelines are a live document, subject to additional changes and upgrades as more information comes to light through responder experience. The group also developed training materials for agencies involved in incident response to follow the guidelines.

Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission  
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To address severe congestion problems along U.S. 190, the only East/West Corridor in central Texas, the **Killeen-Temple Metropolitan Planning Organization (KTMPO)**, staffed by the **Central Texas Council of Governments**, proposed the construction of an alternative route in nearby City of Copperas Cove. The city is adjacent to the very large Ft. Hood Military Installation, making transportation options in the area crucial for military activity. Creating a limited access, unpaved highway on the north side of the city, the **Copperas Cove Bypass Project** promises to increase economic opportunities along with congestion reduction. Given the limited construction funding available to complete needed transportation projects, KTMPO partnered with state and regional transportation leaders to develop an innovative funding package. This included collaborating with the state's other MPOs to secure the right to spend their entire projected 10-year funding allocation up front rather than complete the project in incremental phases (now known as a model of interest for other major projects in the state). As part of the finance package, the City of Copperas Cove had its largest bond issue ever, and a finance package and advance funding agreement between the City of Copperas Cove and the Texas Department of Transportation was facilitated. Bypass construction began in September 2011, and is scheduled to be complete in fall 2013. Complementing this are plans to complete a million square foot regional shopping center expected to generate close to \$160 million in annual sales tax revenue and create over 1,000 jobs. Several other development projects are also in the works.

**Killeen-Temple Metropolitan Planning Organization and**

**Central Texas Council of Government**

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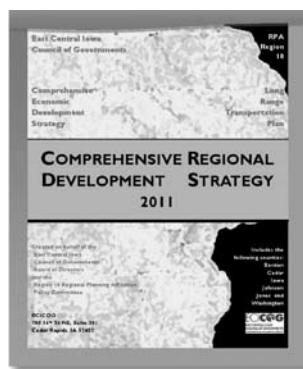
**[annette.shepherd@ctcog.org](mailto:annette.shepherd@ctcog.org), [jreed@ctcog.org](mailto:jreed@ctcog.org); [www.ktmpo.org](http://www.ktmpo.org)**

## Local, Regional, and Statewide Partnerships

To streamline organizational responsibilities, the **East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG)** merged transportation and economic development strategies into one cohesive document, the **Comprehensive Regional Development**



**ment Strategy (CRDS).** The CRDS essentially combines the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) with the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the seven-county region. ECICOG partnered with Corridor Business Alliance (CBA), a private coalition with a mission to “create a vital regional economy through the creation and growth of business,” to produce the comprehensive strategy. To seek input, ECICOG held county meetings, implemented an online survey, and staffed work group meetings. And most notably, ECICOG and CBA staged a well-received regional development summit in April 2011. More than 200 people participated in the planning process, an example of successful public/private collaboration.



Images courtesy of ECICOG.

East Central Iowa Council of Governments  
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The mid-1990s saw the birth of wind development in Minnesota, and within two decades, wind turbines and farms grew large enough to begin impacting transportation infrastructure, sometimes requiring expensive repairs funded by local units of government. The **Southwest Regional Development Commission** is responsible for reviewing large energy projects in the region, and provides information and comments to the state permitting authority about these outcomes. This communication resulted in the addition of E911 wind installation addressing, and working with local highway engineers and wind developers to better understand concerns on both sides. From this partnership, **Wind Development Agreements** were established, creating a win-win for road authorities and wind energy developers.



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The **City of Parsons Downtown Enhancement project** is a community redevelopment initiative in Decatur County, Tennessee, focused on improving the economic health, transportation infrastructure, and aesthetic climate of Parsons. The project is divided into three phases: core downtown improvements; comple-



*Before*



*After*

*Images courtesy of SWTDD.*

mentary upgrades to an area south of the core, including connecting the downtown to a variety of retail and commercial businesses, industrial areas, churches, a new municipal center, and an adjacent city park; and ongoing projects to strengthen connections between the core and a region to the west. All phases involve aesthetic and safety projects, such as tree planting, park construction, sidewalk maintenance, and improved lighting. **South West Tennessee Development District** coordinates the initiative, and the City Beautification Committee oversees implementation. The area has already started to reap the benefits of this initiative through increased accessibility to the over 50 businesses located in the area, greatly enhanced safety, and more pedestrian friendly options.

South West Tennessee Development District  
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Building on a robust tradition of collaboration and communication, the **Missouri Association of Councils of Government (MACOG)** assembled the **MACOG Transportation Planners Group**, a committee of transportation planners from regional commissions across Missouri. They meet quarterly to discuss planning strategies, help members address various challenges, and improve efficiency through the standardization and streamlining of transportation procedures. Noteworthy programs and accomplishments resulting from these meetings include the Transportation Planners Reference Guide, the State-wide Sidewalk Inventory, the Road Safety Audit Introduction, and Work Plan requirement sessions held with the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT). The Work Plan sessions were introduced to improve capacity and statewide consistency, and provide orientation to new hires. This includes the formation of a mentoring program that provides shadowing opportunities, among other training activities. MoDOT presents Work Plan requirements, and planners share best practices to consolidate tasks, provide a methodology for task completion, and simplify the reporting process.

Missouri Association of Councils of Government  
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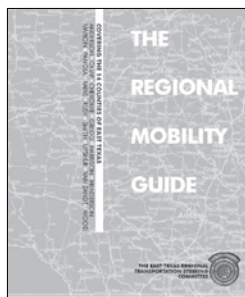
As the regional transportation coordinator and provider for the 10-county region of southeast Georgia, the **Coastal Regional Commission (CRC)** Coordinated Transportation Division has established a fully synchronized transit system called **Transportation for Everyday Life**, with participation from all counties. The system operates across counties, making it more flexible than traditional fixed route



systems, and is available to any resident of the region. The costs are moderate, only \$3.00 one-way per county travelled, and provides door-to-door service. So far, the system has provided over 200,000 trips per year and is expanding. Since inception, the fleet has grown tremendously, from 42 vehicles in 2010 to 82 in 2012, all of which are ADA compliant with wheelchair lifts. The CRC collaborates closely with the Georgia Department of Human Services, the Georgia Department of Transportation, human service agencies, senior centers, medical facilities, and private agencies to schedule transportation services to make the system as user friendly as possible. The CRC is currently adding Mobile Data Terminals, Automatic Vehicle Locators, video surveillance equipment, and new bicycle racks, and future enhancements include a smart card fare system.

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**East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG)**, the lead agency for the East Texas Regional Transportation Coordination Steering Committee (Steering Committee) that services 14 counties within the area, wanted a one-stop method for customers to find all the transportation providers available to them. Up to that point, the information was only accessible via each individual provider, which discouraged efficiency and limited client options. To remedy this, ETCOG and the Steering Committee reached out to the public through a series of community workshops. They quickly learned that most East Texas residents were unaware that public transit services existed. The solution was to design a regional trans-



portation brochure, or **Regional Mobility Guide**, to be placed at key activity centers throughout the region. The end product is an 11-page color brochure containing all multi-modal transportation choices (including air, rail, and bus) available to regional residents. The brochures are distributed at Veteran's Administration agencies, retirement centers, social service organizations, activity centers, and to high-use public transportation groups.

East Texas Council of Governments

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The **East Texas Council of Governments (COG)** adopted an **Awareness Branding Campaign** to create a distinctive identity for its passenger bus fleet that would be recognizable to the public and result in increased ridership. After a series of public



forums, ETCOG settled on a new slogan, “GoBus, Get on the GO” and a distinctive purple and green logo, an easily remembered tagline written in colors that stood out in the East Texas landscape. Through a successful marketing campaign that included 11 public forums, 14 county-specific brochures, 50 buses wrapped in the logo, drivers in recognizable shirts, and media exposure, ridership increased by 44 percent over 2010. The buses are particularly helpful to older adults, who are reassured by the branding that they are boarding the right bus.

East Texas Council of Governments

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## Safety

The **South Central Safe Community Partnership (SCSCP)** is a coalition of 35 traffic safety professionals and advocates in south central Louisiana, staffed and administered by the **South Central Planning & Development Commission (SCPDC)**. The coalition was established in October 1999 through a Safe Communities Grant from the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission (LHSC). The goal is to reduce automobile accidents by establishing a regional action plan that addresses highway safety needs. SCSCP holds quarterly meetings and an annual Traffic Safety Summit to encourage communication among partners and share successful projects. SCSCP also participates in nationwide campaigns like “Buckle Up,” “Click it Or Ticket,” and “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over,” and highway safety initiatives like Road Safety Assessments, Local Road Safety Programs, Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancement Programs, and Bike & Pedestrian Safety. The Transportation Division of SCPDC is the liaison between federal, state and local partners to assist with the implementation of highway safety programs. Over the past three years, crash and fatality rates are down dramatically across the state. Fatalities alone are down 30 percent from 2007–2010.

South Central Planning and Development Commission

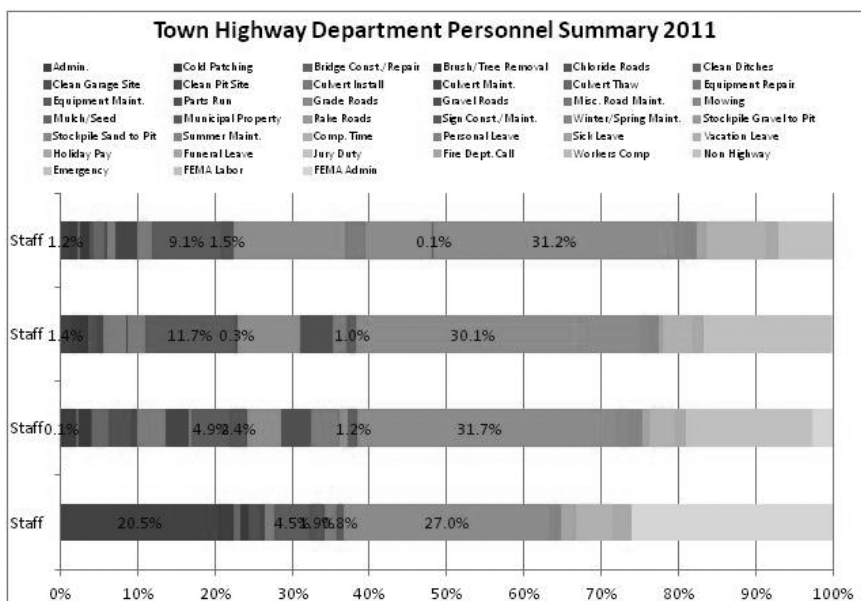
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## Technology

**Two Rivers-Ottawquechee Regional Commission** wanted to help rural highway departments track operational patterns by developing alternatives to paper timesheet and file folder procedures, and improve the ability to analyze activities across time. To this end, they created the **Rural Highway Department Management Program**, a customized Excel spreadsheet that summarizes yearly operational data through charts and other organizational devices. There is a different spreadsheet for each highway department, and the data is updated annually. Among the material gathered and tracked are staff hours, work activity, work locations, amount of materials used, and equipment hours. The tool permits an assessment of trends over time, enhances efficiency through superior data



management, and makes it easier to highlight the progress of initiatives to the public. The program also serves to enhance the commission's relationship with local road managers.

Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission

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