

2008 Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards



The 2008 Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards mark the second year that transportation-related programs and projects are being recognized for their innovation and impact on communities throughout the nation. This year, 34 organizations from 21 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; long-range planning; transportation's connection to the environment or to land use; effective partnerships with stakeholders, officials, state agencies or neighboring regions; byways; bicycle/pedestrian planning; transit; freight planning; and many more areas. The projects are profiled by state; contact information for each awardee can be found in the index.

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Cover photos:

(Top left): The Wisconsin Freight Rail Transit Commission Program has been key to the presence of freight rail in the Wisconsin region.

(Top right): A law enforcement officer collects data for the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's Improving Crash Data for Central Ohio Communities program.

(Bottom left): The Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) has attempted to increase awareness of wind development impacts on public infrastructure (primarily road networks) with their Wind Development, Roads, Bridges and Land Use Initiative.

(Bottom right): The Ark-Tex Council of Governments Job Access and Reverse Commute program provides local residents with vital transportation services.

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The **Lee Russell Council of Governments** has embarked on a project to create a coordinated transportation system that can be duplicated across Alabama. **The**



United We Ride Pilot Project helps ensure that areas lacking public transportation are better served. During the first six months of the program, a directory of regional transportation resources was compiled and a regional transportation council has been formed with a drafted implementation plan. Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) funding is now available in the region and the program has hired its first Mobility Manager.

Arizona

In order to create a unified alliance on transportation issues, Arizona's Councils of Governments spearheaded the statewide **Rural Transportation Advocacy Council (RTAC)** and its **Rural Arizona Transportation Lobbying Program**. An advocacy network that promotes sound transportation infrastructure development, the RTAC consists of an appointed board of one elected official from each of the seven rural COGs and MPOs and one full-time staff member. Taking formal positions on legislation, RTAC staff has testified on specific bills and policy measures before the State Transportation Board. The RTAC has also been involved in developing and influencing the direction of the statewide long-term transportation needs study and a ballot measure to implement a statewide sales tax dedicated to transportation infrastructure.

Georgia

Member governments that comprise the McIntosh Trail Regional Development Center (MTRDC) all participated in establishing the first rural public transit service area within the state of Georgia. The Regional Rural Public Transit Initiative uses a regional approach to provide rural citizens with affordable transportation throughout Butts, Lamar, Pike, Spalding and Upson Counties. Pooling financial resources from local governments, the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) and Georgia Department of Human Resources, the system is most heavily used by senior citizens, local workforce and disabled residents.

Iowa

Through publicly held meetings, the **Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission (SEIRPC)** generated the support it needed from local stakeholders to launch a regional **Safe Routes to School (SRTS)** initiative to help communities encourage and enable their students to safely walk and bike to school. SEIRPC was able to complete the Southeast Iowa SRTS Plan in August 2006, prior to the first SRTS grant cycle in Iowa. Having a completed plan helped SEIRPC staff justify projects in Southeast Iowa when applying for grants. Five of the six grants written by SEIRPC were awarded funding for a total of over \$309,000.

Michigan



The **East Central Michigan Planning and Development Region (ECMPDR)** teamed up with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to produce the **Bay Region Road and Trail Bicycling Map**. The map not only charts routes and lists regional points of interest, but also motivates community members to get out and enjoy the picturesque orchards and waterfront that the area has to offer. The bike map encompasses a 13-county region in East Central Michigan, including Arenac, Bay, Clare, Genesee, Gladwin,

Gratiot, Huron, Iosco, Isabella, Lapeer, Midland, Sanilac and Tuscola. Nearly 21,000 copies of the map were printed and are being distributed to local and visiting bike enthusiasts.

Minnesota

The implementation of wind farms in Minnesota has brought jobs and economic growth to the area, but it has implications for planning and zoning. The **Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC)** attempted to increase awareness of wind development impacts on public infrastructure (primarily road networks) with their **Wind Development, Roads, Bridges and Land Use Initiative**. Through an interactive workshop, county zoning administrators, highway engineers, wind developers and state wind permitting staff discussed wind development issues, impacts and processes. The workshop provided a forum to learn and interact with peers to identify promising practices in their counties.

Providing a safe and affordable alternative to drinking and driving, the **East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC)** in Minnesota has worked with a variety of partners including local bars, courts, community groups and other stakeholders to develop the **Isanti County Safe Cab program**. Since 2003, ECRDC has led the group's efforts to address traffic safety issues as a local component of Minnesota's state-wide "Toward Zero Deaths" initiative. Utilizing local cab services to provide rides home to persons who have had too much to drink, the service is funded by cost splitting between partners. Results have shown an improvement in reducing the number of DUI arrests in Isanti County and a dramatic lowering of the average Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) readings. The program has been operating successfully for three years.

In northeast Minnesota, more than 70 percent of children ages five to 12 ride bicycles. In an effort to promote bike safety and reduce bicycle related injuries, the **Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC)** has championed the **HelmetHero Bicycle Education** program. ARDC has mapped several bicycle routes in communities for children's use, and ARDC planners have taught 1,100 third-grade students the health benefits of bicycling and the importance of wearing a helmet.

Busing Northwest Missouri to Safety enhances communication between local schools and the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT). Driven by the **Northwest Missouri Regional Council of Governments (NWMORCOG)**, this project is currently in its pilot phase to see how MoDOT could use information from local bus routes when planning construction projects and how schools could communicate safety issues upward to MoDOT to ensure that students are transported safely to school. As a result of the information compiled by the NWMORCOG, area commissioners received a list of safety concerns that would better enable MoDOT to disseminate information on road closings, detours and potential safety issues.



Missouri

The **Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety and Missouri Association of Councils of Government** combined efforts to establish a **Blueprint for Safer Roadways** to reduce traffic fatalities to 1,000 or fewer by 2008—a decrease of nearly 19 percent from the 2003 benchmark. The Blueprint increases coordination, communication and cooperation among hundreds of key partners, including state and local agencies, law enforcement, planning organizations, nonprofits and other safety advocates. The strategy involved all four Es of safety: engineering, enforcement, education and emergency medical services.

Montana



Tiger Transit Buses

Western Transportation Institute performed an **Assessment of Campus Transit Program** to evaluate the efficiency of Auburn University's campus transit in Auburn and Opelika, Alabama. The assessment, performed in 2006, led to multiple recommendations streamlining the service, including migrating to alternative fuels and

the introduction of a GPS-based program so riders can locate their buses online. After the suggestions were implemented, ridership increased from 13,000 in 2006 to 17,000 in 2007, making a significant impact on users' mobility.

Navajo Nation

The **Navajo Department of Transportation's U.S. 491 Project** will enhance safety and sustain a high quality of socio-economic development and growth to the Navajo Nation and residents throughout the region once it is completed. With construction beginning in 2008, the corridor's additional lanes will help the transportation system meet existing and future travel demands in northwest New Mexico, enhance mobility and access along the route, and establish a link that supports long-range planning goals.

The **Regional Aviation Working Group** developed by the **Southern Tier East Regional Planning and Development Board** coordinates activities and developments at three commercial service airports and six publicly-owned general aviation airports in New York's southern tier. The working group has helped these airports meet increased security requirements and enhanced aviation standards for airport operations. It has also facilitated the exchange of information relating to the provision of scheduled and chartered air passenger service in three small metropolitan markets. Initially supported by a Regional Aviation System Planning grant, this activity has been continued as part of the Regional Board's ongoing programs funded by its counties.

The **Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board** created the **Southern Tier Extension Railroad** to save a dormant main-line railroad extension and spur economic growth in New York State. The effort brought together public and private entities including school districts, local governments, six counties in two states, the state and federal government, Norfolk Southern and a short line railroad. Addressing deferred maintenance issues through capital rehabilitation of the line and providing a low cost operating environment to stimulate rail activity, the project has ample benefits for local businesses. Since 2001, the number of shippers using the line increased from one to 20, and traffic increased from 75 to 54,000 annual carloads. Businesses now have competitive rail service, enabling them to maintain and even expand operations in the region, resulting in additional private investment in facilities and job creation.

North Carolina

In order to evaluate traffic patterns and county-wide safety issues, the **Kerr-Tar Regional Planning Commission** performed the **Granville County Intersection Report**. The local RPO planner and county transportation planner evaluated over 50 intersections using a list compiled from public surveys and the County Transportation Planning Committee. The report will be shared with the local North Carolina DOT office to help prioritize spending of safety funds in the county.

North Carolina

Using state rural transportation funds with a match from local governments, the **Piedmont Triad Rural Planning Organization** developed the **PedPower Project**. The program serves as a regional clearinghouse for bicycle and pedestrian information, education and encouragement activities. Implemented in 2006, PedPower has provided unique opportunities for collaboration between rural and urban areas through events like Bike to Work Week and programs like Safe Routes to Schools. The RPO also created the www.pedpower.org Web site containing detailed information for residents.

In an effort to educate RPO planners, the **North Carolina Association of RPOs (NCARPO)** offered a **Rural Transportation Planning Techniques Course**. The three-day training course covered a variety of topics, including comprehensive transportation planning, air quality basics, public outreach techniques, land use and transportation linkages, using GIS in RPO projects, multimodal issues, modeling, data collection and project innovations. In addition, each RPO provided a poster to enhance dialogue in projects from across the state. The course was attended by 24 people, including RPO planners and other local and state staff.

Ohio



Alum Creek Trail Greenway Signs

Linking communities and encouraging a healthy lifestyle was the motivation behind the **Central Ohio Greenways Initiative** championed by the **Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission**. Working across trail-owning jurisdictions to foster preservation of greenways for water quality, habitat preservation and transportation routes, the greenway trails have become major North-South arteries of the alter-

native transportation system following the many waterways flowing through the region. The group has also adopted a unified trail signage system, making the trails more user-friendly.

The **Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission** has set in motion an initiative called **Improving Crash Data for Central Ohio Communities**. To improve the quality of Ohio's accident reporting, this project provides more accurate and spatially-referenced crash data to local governments to assist in improving traffic safety and increase regional funding opportunities. Two jurisdictions have already obtained multi-million dollar funding for road safety projects. The project also includes a component to improve the accuracy of incoming crash data collected in the field by law enforcement officers.

Pennsylvania

Designed to meet the region's expectations for day-to-day business processes, the **North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (NCPRPDC)** developed a robust and scalable **Web portal** for mapping, managing, modeling and maintaining its transportation-related infrastructure. Long-range transportation planning involves a wealth of spatial data including environmental, socio-economic, demographic and cultural disciplines. The site allows counties in North Central Pennsylvania counties to access up-to-date information and tools to assist them in making community decisions. The site features an expandable table of contents, a link to the PennDOT Video Log site, tool tips, an overview map and help options associated with each map component.

Consisting of a broad coalition of business, community and government leaders, the **Focus 81 Committee** works to enhance safety and reduce congestion along Interstate 81. Orchestrated by the **Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance**, Focus 81 works continuously with partners to draft short-, mid- and long-term initiatives to make I-81 safer for drivers and to identify and secure funding to improve the roadway, enhancing regional economic development and compliance with air quality standards. The committee utilizes a multidisciplinary approach involving engineering, enforcement, education and emergency response resources, and has convened three subcommittee task groups to assist in reaching their goals.



South Carolina

Using a model focused on increasing tourism while preserving historic landmarks, the **Lowcountry Council of Governments** has set out to connect sites of renowned Revolutionary War skirmishes across southern South Carolina using Transportation Enhancement funds, donations, membership in the trail foundation and in-kind staff time. Linking Revolutionary War sites that existed during the 18th century in a driving trail, the **Lowcountry Revolutionary War Trail Initiative** is intended to educate tourists and residents, bringing historical and archaeological data to life at various locations along existing roads.

South Dakota



(left to right) Dick Edenstrom with the First District Association of Local Govts. displays a copy of the Study with Dwaine Chapel of the Lake Area Improvement Corporation.

The **First District Association of Local Governments** in South Dakota is performing an **Economic Impact Study** along the region's Highway 34 corridor to determine the effects of widening the roadway from two to four lanes. A cost-benefit ratio was developed based upon non-traditional, non-econometric measurements, including South Dakota Department of Revenue data and safety data provided by the state's Department of Public Safety. Historical documentation provided by the Federal Highway Administration served as a basis for the numerical data used to project economic impacts.

Texas

In 2007, **Texoma Council of Governments (COG)** embarked on the **When You Hear TAPS (Texoma Area Paratransit System) Initiative** to salvage the only public sector transportation within a six county area—an essential link to medical services for a significant elderly population. Founded by the COG over twenty years ago as a free-standing organization, TAPS faced financial insolvency last year. Based on recommendations from an outside consulting firm and strong board leadership, TAPS is now on the road to recovery and is even exploring the first fixed-route service in the region. The COG assisted in providing staff support as the system transitioned to private sector management.

The **Ark-Tex Council of Governments (ATCOG)** provides vital transportation services to low-income workers and suburban and urban



Residents are provided vital transportation services via the JARC Program.

commuters with rural jobs through its **Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program**. Through partnerships and coordination of transit services, ATCOG offers JARC transportation services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, creating a seamless transportation network for program participants. In October 2007, the first month of the program, 431 trips were provided. By March 2008, 2,092 one-way trips were provided for 259 participants, making ATCOG

the leading provider of JARC trips in the state.

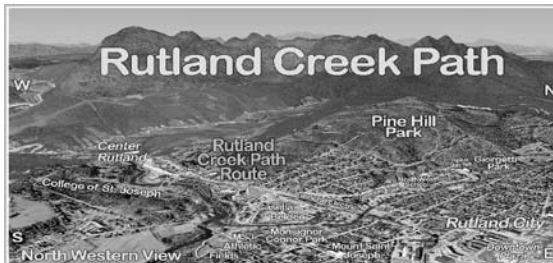
The **East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG)** pooled resources from state and local entities to embark on a **Transportation Extreme Makeover Program**, bringing a private sector transit subcontractor in-house with ETCOG. Using such resources as advanced technology, transit veterans and counsel from community leaders and elected officials, ETCOG has designed, implemented and maintained an efficient, effective rural transportation system without decreasing service during the transition, and has even set a new record for trips provided in a one-month period.

Utah

What began as a question raised by Wasatch County and Heber City elected officials about how to evaluate a proposed bypass project eventually became the **Wasatch County RPO Travel Demand Model** project. The **Wasatch County RPO**, a program of the Mountainland Association of Governments, has developed the model to include network and preprocessing scripts, an auto ownership model, a trip generation model and a trip distribution model. Using the model, the RPO developed the 2030 regional transportation plan and impact fee schedule to maintain the transportation level of service currently enjoyed.

Vermont

The **Rutland Creek Path** project promotes non-motorized transportation to connect schools, neighborhoods and parks, and helps restore neglected areas while fostering a sense of community. Using funds from Transportation Enhancement grants and a variety of private sources, the **Rutland Regional Planning Commission** is overseeing the 1.5 mile paved pathway project between East and Otter Creeks in Rutland City. This transportation facility is related to another commission project, the Rutland Creative Economy initiative, enhancing economic development throughout the diverse aspects of life in the Rutland community.



Aerial view of the Rutland Creek Path

The **Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission** is the first group in Vermont to map trip origins and destinations for all elderly and disabled transportation services over a one-year period. Using ridership dispatch logs, the commission used GIS technology to geo-reference and visually summarize transportation services for its **Elderly and Disabled Transportation Services Mapping Initiative**. The project is being funded by the Vermont Agency of Transportation's United We Ride program and has become a springboard for coordination in the region.

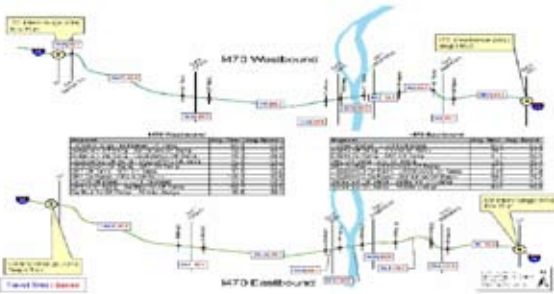
Virginia

In order to encourage the use of bicycles as a form of commuter transportation, the **Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC)** created the **RIDE Solutions Interactive Bicycle Map** online at www.ridesolutions.org/bikewalk/map.shtml. Using Google Maps technology, the interactive map shows regional bicycle facilities including bike lanes, racks, wide shoulders, alternative routes, bike shops, greenways and other accommodations. Clickable map elements provide specific information about each location. The map is one aspect of an online alternative transportation community that RVARC has nurtured.

In southern Washington State, the **Benton-Franklin Council of Governments** has updated 20-year old data through a comprehensive review of the metropolitan area Park and Ride system to assess current usage, unmet demand and possible locations for new facilities. Recommendations in **Tri-Cities Park and Ride Lot Report** identify short-, medium- and long-term needs for park and ride lots, which will require the cooperation of multiple agencies and jurisdictions.

West Virginia

The **Bel-O-Mar Regional Council**, a bi-state organization in Ohio and West Virginia, conducted the **Travel-Time Study Using GPS Initiative**. Travel time and stop delay studies are resource intensive, making it difficult for small MPOs and rural areas to undertake them. Since the region was non-attainment for air quality, the area needed such a study to enhance its planning efforts. Using a GPS system to document travel time in the study greatly reduced the need for human resources and led to more accurate and widely applicable results.



An example of the travel time map

A three-state show of cooperation between the **KYOVA Interstate Planning Commission**, the Lawrence County Port Authority in Ohio, and the Transit Authority, a provider in West Virginia, resulted in the development of the **Lawrence County Public Transit System**. The system will implement a combination of fixed route, ADA complementary paratransit and coordinated human service agency services throughout three municipalities and four counties. KYOVA, the MPO, devised a creative financing plan using Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds.



Freight rail in action in Wisconsin. (Photo courtesy of Ken Lucht, Wisconsin and Southern Railroad)

Wisconsin's Freight Rail Transit Commission

project is a public-private partnership that works to preserve and maintain freight rail service and fund acquisition and rehabilitation of the system.

The **Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWWRPC)** has played a significant role in this collaboration

since the mid-1970s when line abandonments threatened the region's service. SWWRPC worked with member counties and its legislative delegation to ensure that right-of-ways were preserved and service was maintained where feasible. Legislative action enabled formation of Rail Transit Commissions (RTCs) to represent member counties. As a result of the RPC's work with the RTCs in its region, today local rail shippers employ more than 20,000 people and generate nearly \$24 million in taxes annually.

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