



2009 NADO Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards

Cover photos:

Front cover, top to bottom: The Tanglefoot Trail map shows the 44-mile length of the rail trail corridor. Image courtesy of Three Rivers Planning and Development District.

Community leaders and members of the public examine maps during the U.S. 72 Corridor Study process. Image courtesy of Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments and Gresham, Smith and Partners.

The Dixie Depot was rehabilitated into new administrative offices for Wiregrass Transit Authority and provided a new waiting area for transit passengers. Image courtesy of Wiregrass Transit.

Students in Southeast Iowa communities participated in a Walk to School Day as part of the region's Safe Routes to School Program. Image courtesy of Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission.

Back cover: The Port of Duluth-Superior is a major regional freight hub, being the western-most point reached via the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway. Image courtesy of Arrowhead Regional Development Commission.

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The **2009 Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards** mark the third year that regional transportation-related programs and projects are being recognized for their innovation and impact on communities throughout the nation. This year, 17 projects from organizations in 11 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.

This awards program is partially funded under cooperative agreements (Nos. DTFH61-06-H-00029 and DTFH61-07-C-00047) with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program and any related publications are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the FHWA.

Through the creation of regional **Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plans**, the 12 members of the **Alabama Association of Regional Councils** provided a resource that benefits residents across the state. Within each region, planners and providers worked jointly to identify clusters of need, destinations and existing services and resources. Under contract with the Alabama Department of Transportation, the regional councils also became clearinghouses federal funding applications. Through this statewide effort, transportation stakeholders have a better understanding of the varying needs for public transportation, the resources available to meet those needs, and significant opportunities for collaboration.

Contact: Bill Tucker or John Sorrell
Montgomery, Alabama; 334.277.2221
director@carpdc.com or jsorrell@searpdc.org; www.alarc.org

Mobility and access to natural resources have made the U.S. 72 Corridor in Northwest Alabama a popular destination for industry and tourism. The economic backbone for the region, mobility along U.S. 72 is threatened as burgeoning growth erodes the corridor's rural character. The **U.S. 72: Mobility, Economy and Rural Preservation Corridor Study** was initiated by the **Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments/Shoals Area MPO** to alter this trend without disrupting transportation for area residents and business owners. Using a variety of methods to engage stakeholders about tradeoffs between mobility, access and economic development and rural preservation, the corridor study provides a guide for future growth and access by effectively striking a balance between competing pressures through local land use policies and access management techniques.

Contact: Keith Jones or Jesse Turner
Muscle Shoals, Alabama; 256.389.0513
kjones@nwsc.edu or jturner@nwsc.edu; www.nacolg.com



Courtesy of NACOLG and Gresham, Smith & Partners

Alabama



Significant repairs were needed to rehabilitate the Dixie Depot in downtown Dothan, Alabama. Photos courtesy of Wiregrass Transit Authority.



Rehabilitation of a historic structure and community development were the motivations behind the **Dixie Depot** project. The centerpiece of a downtown revitalization initiative for the city of Dothan, Alabama, the Dixie Depot is a 100-year-old passenger rail station that had fallen into grave disrepair. But through a three-way partnership and federal funds, **Wiregrass Transit Authority**, a program of the **Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission**, redeveloped the depot for use as its administrative offices and restored the historic and aesthetic transportation icon for the benefit of the community. The project also improved local traffic patterns, added a passenger waiting area and increased parking and green space in the area.

Contact: Thomas Solomon or John Sorrell
Dothan, Alabama; 334.794.4093
tsolomon@searpdc.org or jsorrell@searpdc.org; www.searpdc.org

To create awareness about the impacts of freight movement, routes and volume, the Southwest Transportation Planning Region (TPR), administered by the **Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado**, developed the **Southwest Transportation Planning Region Freight Profile** as a comprehensive freight manual for regional decision makers. Developed with assistance from the Federal Highway Administration's Colorado Division, the project was a first step toward identifying gaps and areas of improvement. Throughout the process, the TPR forged new relationships with regional freight companies and added freight as its own section in the regional transportation plan. The profile will guide next steps for the region, including collecting more quantifiable data and implementing recommendations to address freight issues.

Contact: Ed Morlan or Laura Lewis Marchino
Durango, Colorado; 970.247.9621
ed@scan.org or laura@scan.org; www.scan.org



Employees at the Durango-based Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory, a regional freight stakeholder, prepare to ship candies to national and global markets.



In Fall 2009, Bi-State Regional Commission held a Transportation Alternatives and Air Quality Summit to launch a voluntary Clean Air Partnership, a coalition of public and private entities working together to address high levels of ozone and particulate matter. Images courtesy of BSRC.

The **Bi-State Regional Commission** (BSRC) initiated the regional **Aware of Air Program** to improve local knowledge of air quality issues using Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) funding. Although the area currently meets federal air quality standards, future growth and development could increase emissions and cause air quality problems. With the Aware of Air Program spanning the region's MPO and its rural areas, BSRC has used multi-media advertising to educate households about transportation and air quality, marketed regional transit services, and developed a regional transit web portal. In addition, BSRC hosted a regional Transportation Alternatives and Air Quality Summit and the launch of Bi-State Region Clean Air Partnership to facilitate voluntary emission reduction activities by local governments, businesses and organizations. Future steps may include conducting a targeted land use analysis to encourage further emission reductions for ozone and fine particulates.

Contact: Denise Bulat or Gena McCullough
Rock Island, Illinois; 309.793.6300; dbulat@bistateonline.org or
gmccullough@bistateonline.org; www.bistateonline.org, www.qctransit.com

For the **Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission**, safety was the primary motivation behind the **Louisa County Traffic Study**. The study analyzed multiple years of geographic and statistical data for vehicle crashes to determine locations of safety issues. Armed with this data, the organization sought potential solutions and funding sources with which to make improvements. Since its completion, the study has been presented to the County Engineer and County Board of Supervisors for use in addressing safety issues and developing grant applications.

Through its regional **Southeast Iowa Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS)**, the **Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission** has worked with multiple communities and school districts to implement local SRTS programs, with four local SRTS plans completed and two additional SRTS plans in development. As a result of the planning initiative and the partnerships that have evolved, the region has received nearly \$500,000 in SRTS grants, and new educational programs in Southeast Iowa communities have been initiated.

Contact: Brian Tapp, Nick Stark or Zach James
Burlington, Iowa; 319.753.5107
btapp@seirpc.com, nstark@seirpc.com or zjames@seirpc.com; www.seirpc.com

Students participate in Walk to School Day and Bike Rodeo events through the region's Safe Routes to School program. Photos courtesy of SEIRPC.



Michigan

The East Central Michigan region possesses natural beauty, abundant natural resources and multicultural diversity. But local communities have realized a need for technical assistance and regional discussion because poorly planned development poses a threat to these characteristics. To fill that gap, the **East Michigan Council of Governments** established a **Transportation, Land Use and GIS Committee** (TLAG). TLAG members are promoting integrated planning through activities such as policy analysis, public education, research and grassroots action. In addition, TLAG is conducting campaigns on smart growth, affordable housing, comprehensive regional transportation planning, transportation justice, geographic information systems and bicycle and pedestrian access.

Contact: Sue Fortune or Anamika Laad
Saginaw, Michigan; 989.797.0800
sfortune@emcog.org or alaad@emcog.org; www.emcog.org

Administered by the **Northwest Michigan Council of Governments** and **Traverse City Transportation and Land Use Study** (TC-TALUS), the **Grand Vision** is a citizen-led land use and transportation study that provides a framework for the next 50 years of development.



The six counties involved in the planning process have established economic development and smart growth concepts as fundamental elements in the region's land use and transportation planning. Using funds re-programmed from a controversial bridge project, extensive public outreach was

conducted, with over 15,000 individuals participating in the process to select a scenario for future development. The Grand Vision is already moving toward implementation, with local agencies coordinating working groups to identify and execute next steps.

Contact: Elaine Wood or Matt McCauley
Traverse City, Michigan; 231.929.5000
ewood@nwm.cog.mi.us or mccauley@nwm.cog.mi.us
www.thegrandvision.org, www.nwm.org

The **Northern Minnesota/ Northwest Wisconsin Freight Plan** was developed by the **Arrowhead Regional Development Commission** and **Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council** to analyze current and projected freight trends. The information in the plan will assist decision-makers to make investment decisions that address freight-related needs. These projects will support job creation and retention in key industries such as mining, energy, manufacturing and forest products. Through the process, the agencies also strengthened relationships with the business community.



Over 1,000 vessels each year visit the Port of Duluth-Superior. Photo courtesy of ARDC.

Contact: Pat Henderson or Andy McDonald; Duluth, Minnesota; 218.529.7514
phenderson@ardc.org or amcdonald@ardc.org; www.ardc.org

The **East Central Regional Development Commission (RDC)** planned long-term public transit solutions to meet rural transportation needs through the **Transit Collaboration in East Central Minnesota** project. The regional project provided the impetus for local counties to develop an implementation strategy to fund transit services together with an effective delivery model, including in two counties that previously had no public transit available. Service was launched shortly after the plan was completed.



Contact: Robert Voss or Robert Bollenbeck; Mora, Minnesota; 320.679.4065; robert.voss@ecrdc.org or robert.bollenbeck@ecrdc.org; www.ecrdc.org

Photo courtesy of East Central RDC.

Mississippi

Three Rivers Planning and Development District (PDD) is partnering with three counties and six municipalities to convert a 44.5 mile abandoned railroad to a multi-use recreational trail. The **Tanglefoot Trail** project preserves the abandoned railroad and its right of way as a rail banked corridor. Local officials established the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Trails District with the PDD as fiscal agent to purchase and maintain the corridor. The district was successful in obtaining federal Transportation Enhancement funds and state funds along with local investment to preserve the corridor, promote tourism, and provide recreational activities and heritage displays for the residents and visitors to the region.

Contact: Vernon R. Kelley, III or John Byers
Pontotoc, Mississippi; 662.489.2415
vrk@trpdd.com or john@trpdd.com; trpdd.com

North Carolina

Using Google Maps and Google Earth as low-cost and user-friendly software, the **Piedmont Triad Rural Planning Organization** developed the **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Priority List Interactive Map** to provide greater access to information and public participation opportunities through interactive online maps of projects and programs. To be effective as a public participation tool, the map needed to not only provide visual information, but also to allow the public to comment on proposals at any time, from any location. The map illustrates the priority projects for the RPO area, provides background on each project and allows the public to provide project specific input through a survey link. The TIP map is the first of several interactive map layers planned, including bicycle and pedestrian facility maps, high incident crash locations and long range transportation plans for localities in the region. View the map at <http://www.ptcog.org/Google/TIPprojects2009-2015.htm>.

Contact: Randall Billings or Hanna Cockburn
Greensboro, North Carolina; 336.294.4950
rbillings@ptcog.org or hcockburn@ptcog.org; www.ptcog.org

Pennsylvania

To implement the statewide Land Use, Transportation and Economic Development (LUTED) program, **North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission** conducted the **Operationalizing Plans for Project Prioritization** initiative. The project translates planning directions contained in the Regional Action Strategy, Long-Range Transportation Plan, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and other plans into selection criteria. These criteria were used to establish a process for prioritizing projects and identifying projects of regional significance, resulting in steps to implement the region's plans and vision.

Contact: Eric Bridges or Amy Kessler
Ridgway, Pennsylvania; 814.773.3162
ebridges@ncentral.com or amy@ncentral.com; www.ncentral.com



The Rural Transportation Planning Committee discusses priority projects. Photo courtesy of North Central.

South Carolina

Providing affordable and dependable transportation to employees was the goal of the **Regional Rural Rideshare Program** initiated by the **Santee-Lynches Council of Governments (COG)** in partnership with a local transit authority and regional public and private employers. For only \$2,500 in start-up costs and under a year of planning, the region launched the service, providing low-cost rides using a private vanpool provider and online ride-planning service. Recently, the COG assisted the Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority in obtaining a two-year, \$100,000 grant to study public transit routes that may develop out of the rideshare program.

Contact: Jim Darby or O.J. Papucci
Sumter, South Carolina; 803.775.7381
slrcog@slcog.org or sltransit@slcog.org; www.santeelynchescog.org

South Carolina

Since its launch in 2008, **TriCounty Link's** new **Commuter Solution** routes have provided over 17,000 rides in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties. A successful public/private partnership between TriCounty Link and Santee Cooper Electric, the service has effectively increased the labor pool for Santee Cooper and other employers, providing a benefit for recruitment and retention. Employees also benefit by reducing their commuting costs.



Photo courtesy of TriCounty Link

Contact: William S. Hutto
Moncks Corner, South Carolina; 843.899.4096
rtma@homesc.com; www.ridetricountylink.com

Virginia

Funded by the Virginia Department of Transportation's Multimodal and Land Use Grant, the **New River Valley Planning District Commission's Employment Mobility Study** analyzed commuter patterns and regional transportation solutions. One survey for Park & Ride users addressed how formal and informal Park & Ride lots are utilized and assessed how these lots could serve as rural bus stops along a fixed or semi-fixed transit route. A second survey was designed for all commuters. The area's existing transportation providers analyzed the data from 900 survey responses and provided recommendations for a regional transit system. Using a combination of deviated fixed-route vanpool service and fixed bus routes along the region's major corridors, the regional rural transit system differs from its urban counterpart in its curb-to-curb service.

Contact: Dave Rundgren or Jennifer Wilsie
Radford, Virginia; 540.639.9313
dave.nrvpdc@nrvc.org or jwilsie@nrvc.org; www.nrvpdc.org



NADO
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS
RESEARCH FOUNDATION

A PROGRAM AFFILIATE OF NADO
RPOAMERICA
SERVING AMERICA'S RURAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROFESSIONALS

**National Association of Development Organizations
and the NADO Research Foundation**

400 N. Capitol St., NW, Suite 390

Washington, DC 20001

202.624.7806 • 202.624.8813 (Fax)

www.nado.org • www.RuralTransportation.org