

2011 Excellence in Regional Transportation Awards



2011 Excellence

in Regional Transportation Awards

This year marks the fifth year that regional transportation-related programs and projects are being recognized for their innovation and impact on communities throughout the nation. In 2011, 16 projects from organizations in 11 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 plans; disaster mitigation; local and regional partnerships; public transit and human services transportation; and safety. Contact information for each awardee is provided in the project descriptions.

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Cover photos (clockwise from top left):

Western Piedmont Council of Governments - Regional Transit Authority

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission - Woodstock Full Circle Electric Trolley

Mo-Kan Regional Council of Governments - Regional Road Safety Audit Program

Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission - Flint River Trail

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

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BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN, GREENWAYS AND TRAIL PLANS

The **Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission** facilitated collaboration between the City of Burlington and Des Moines County to create southeast Iowa's first recreational trail. When complete, the **Flint River Trail** will connect the downtown waterfront of Burlington, Iowa with Big Hollow Recreation Area and three other recreation and conservation areas along a 20-mile route. The per-mile cost to build the trail has been relatively expensive because the chosen route requires many land easements and a number of bridges to traverse the terrain. To overcome these challenges, local governments aggressively sought funding commitments and pledged their own, raising over \$4.5 million to date, allowing construction to proceed on 15 miles of the trail corridor. The County also purchased land and negotiated easements from a number of landowners along the Flint River Trail in order to make the project possible. The first sections of the trail will open in 2012, and the full trail is scheduled to be complete in 2013.



SEIRPC - Flint River Trail

Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission
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A centralized source of data about public infrastructure like sidewalk coverage has never existed in northwest Missouri communities. The **Northwest Missouri Regional Council of Governments** began to fill this void with the **Regional Sidewalk Assessment**, a two-phase project to gather and compile this information for use by local governments. To create the assessment, Council of Governments staff visited each municipality to conduct a block-by-block survey of sidewalk conditions; sidewalks on each block were



NW Missouri COG - Sidewalk Assessments, poor condition



NW Missouri COG - Sidewalk Assessments, fair condition



NW Missouri COG - Sidewalk Assessments, excellent condition

BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN, GREENWAYS AND TRAIL PLANS

rated excellent, good, fair or poor. This information was compiled into a comprehensive report and a location map of all sidewalks, then provided to the respective local governments for use in planning future pedestrian infrastructure and competing for grants that would allow the sidewalks to be improved.

Northwest Missouri Council of Governments

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In response to the North Carolina State Legislature's directive to begin multi-county bicycle plans for the first time in the state's history, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) asked the **Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG)** in July 2008 to develop a bicycle route around Lake Norman, a large man-made reservoir in four counties. The vision of the **Lake Norman Regional Bicycle Plan** was to create a bicycle trail around the lake with an emphasis on using non-road facilities and spurring economic development, as well as creating a methodology to write subsequent plans across the state. NCDOT chose Lake Norman as the site of the state's first bicycle plan because of the area's history of regional cooperation, tourism potential and high growth rate. The plan development process was complicated by the large geographic scope in addition to the number of local governments and overlapping transportation planning entities in charge of Lake Norman. To move forward effectively, CCOG held monthly steering committee meetings where all affected public agencies and interested citizens met to provide input on the evolving plan. The key outcomes of CCOG's staff work and steering committee meetings were a plan and route map (including some road segments) around the entire lake, as well as route modification procedures as new non-road segments are constructed. Finally, CCOG created a comprehensive document of its methodology and timeline to facilitate a similar process in other North Carolina regions.



*Centralina COG - Lake Norman
Bike Plan*

Centralina Council of Governments

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The **Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission** undertook a **Regional Greenway Interactive Mapping and Trail Users Count Program** to better market their regional greenway system to the public and more accurately measure the number of users in the system. The Roanoke Valley Greenways – Interactive Map highlights the greenway system as an open space amenity, an alternative mode of transportation and a contributor to public health and community development. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data of trails and amenities, the product of the mapping initiative is an interactive online map that shows trail locations as well as entry points, amenities like restrooms and parking lots and driving directions and printable maps to facilitate an easier trip to the greenway.

BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN, GREENWAYS AND TRAIL PLANS

Through the Trail Users Count Program, staff collects, disseminates, and utilizes quantitative data on greenway and trail use in the region using infrared and magnetic trail counters. The trail counts contribute quantitative data to local government greenway planning, fundraising and promotion. Other greenway stakeholders use the data for a range of purposes, including assessment of the Greenway's economic impact, contributions to nationwide data banks on greenway systems and to measure progress in residents' use of recreational/outdoor amenities over time.

Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission

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DISASTER MITIGATION

Following the massive Gulf Coast evacuations in 2005 due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) decided to study how transportation-dependent people can be better served by coordinated regional evacuation plans. **The Planning Framework for the Evacuation of the Transportation Needs Populations in Central Ohio** was one of two nationwide pilot projects funded by the FTA for this purpose. It was led by the **Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission** and covered a seven-county area including the City of Columbus, its suburbs and rural areas. This project allows existing emergency preparedness plans to be coordinated and consistent with a regional strategy that focuses on the Transportation Needs Populations. These are defined as people that do not own cars, residents of assisted living and inpatient health care facilities, people with sight, hearing and mobility impairments and those with limited English proficiency. The Framework is not intended to replace existing plans but will enhance existing agency plans by identifying potential conflicts and providing improvement and coordination recommendations to specific agencies, thus greatly minimizing the potential dangers of miscommunication or inconsistencies between plans. The project created a seamless framework for the region that builds upon and supplements existing jurisdictional plans.

Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

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LOCAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The **Region XII Council of Governments** in western Iowa undertook the **Regional Retro-reflectivity Compliance** pilot project to ensure that all road signage in the region will be able to comply with new Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regulations intended to increase sign reflectivity and make driving at night safer. The project yielded data on over 7,000 signs, including Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates for future uses, and will be expanded to additional areas to ensure the Region XII area fulfills FHWA's signage assessment deadline of January 2012 and replacement deadline of January 2018. The Compliance Project realized cost-savings by working at a regional level rather than forcing each local government to

LOCAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

conduct its own road sign assessment. Key to the project's success was the recognition of a uniform problem that all Region XII counties faced—measuring the reflectivity of thousands of signs on many types of roads—that could be best addressed regionally, purchasing less equipment and utilizing employee time more efficiently.

Region XII Council of Governments

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The **Mankato Area Transportation and Planning Study (MATAPS)** established a vision for meeting the long-range transportation needs of the Mankato/North Mankato region of Minnesota through the year 2035. MATAPS 2035, completed in December 2010 by the **Region Nine Development Commission**, builds on previous transportation studies for the region. The Development Commission interviewed civic leaders and gathered public input through open houses and online surveys to gauge the area's transportation needs. The completed plan addresses connections between transportation modes for people, including roadways, transit operations and non-motorized facilities, and also recommends improvements to freight rail operations. Toward this end, many MATAPS recommendations benefit multiple transportation modes. For example, non-motorized improvements directly benefit pedestrians and bicyclists as well as transit riders by enhancing connections to and from bus stops and major trip destinations.

Region Nine Development Commission

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PUBLIC TRANSIT & HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION

The Mid-Iowa Development Association (MIDAS)'s **Rural Intelligent Transit Systems** project has applied the concepts of cost-sharing via consolidation with application of state-of-the-art technology to develop a coordinated system that efficiently provides transit services to area residents. The **MIDAS Council of Governments** significantly improved the performance of their existing shared-ride dispatch transit service by employing intelligent transportation systems technology, including GPS tracking of all transit vehicles, automated calls to riders' mobile phones and a consolidated dispatching system for vehicles. These enhancements allow trips originating and/or ending in similar areas to be grouped together and allow users to be informed when their bus or van is on the way. These improvements work together to create a more efficient use of existing transit capacity and improve rider satisfaction.

MIDAS Council of Governments

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PUBLIC TRANSIT & HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION

Staff of the **Western Piedmont Council of Governments** coordinated and managed the preparation of a feasibility study and plan for **Regional Transit Authority Development and Implementation**. The plan was prepared in response to a request by the managers of seven local governments who recognized the advantages of regional transit consolidation. The study determined that one regional system could provide cost efficiencies while providing better public transportation service delivery than the four existing systems. The Western Piedmont Regional Transportation Authority (WPRTA) was formed and began regional transit service on July 1, 2008. At the time of its inception, WPRTA was the first consolidated multi-county, urban/rural public transportation system in North Carolina. WPCOG staff provided leadership in the transition from four systems into one, and remains involved in short- and long-term transit planning for WPRTA.



Western Piedmont COG - Regional Transit Authority

Western Piedmont Council of Governments
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The **Cross County Connection** is the first transit system to serve Orangeburg and Calhoun Counties in South Carolina. Leaders of the two counties, along with the **Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG)**, realized that in order to have a trained workforce, it was critical for residents to have reliable transportation to reach jobs and educational opportunities. However, neither county had any public transit in place. LSCOG staff, elected officials, transit advocates and others in the two-county area began meeting in hopes of finding a way to offer public transit. A “Call for Ride” system began in 2009, followed by a regularly scheduled downtown circulator in the City of Orangeburg. Next routes were started in outlying areas of Orangeburg County that could be provided one day a week on a fare-free basis with connections to the downtown circulator. The latest effort has been a route linking Calhoun and Orangeburg Counties, along with a small downtown circulator in the Town of St. Matthews. In summer 2011, construction began on a transfer facility which will connect all parts of the system for easy passenger transfer.

Lower Savannah Council of Governments
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The **Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments (SLRCOG)** began the **Volunteer Transportation – Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities** program—known as Assisted Rides—in October 2010 to streamline four separate services that offered transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities on a volunteer basis by community members. The program ensures that its clients have access to life-enriching activities without incurring up-front costs. As the sponsoring entity of the program, SLRCOG developed a web-based application

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to match, schedule and monitor rides within the system. Some special features of the application include automatic phone notifications for clients, drivers and escorts, tracking of volunteer hours and miles and sharing of software and resources among multiple organizations. SLRCOG staff also investigated funding streams to continue support for the Assisted Rides program and researched similar programs across the nation to identify ways to save money.

Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments

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The aim of the **Brazos Valley Transportation Partnership** is to coordinate on-demand transportation while improving access to health-related services for mobility-impaired residents within four rural Texas counties represented by the **Brazos Valley Council of Governments**. Residents that do not have cars or are unable to drive due to mobility impairments are eligible for free rides upon registering with the program. The service was initiated due to survey responses identifying transportation as the primary barrier to health care access for rural residents. Vans and 18-passenger buses comprise the fleet, and paid drivers and volunteers transport passengers to grocery stores and shopping centers in addition to health care facilities. Four county health resource centers formed the partnership and provide funding to operate the service, supplemented by funding from the Brazos Valley Area Agency on Aging and each county's general fund. The Council of Governments provides support for all four agencies to develop partnerships, leverage common resources and supply mobility management services for the four-county area.

Brazos Valley Council of Governments

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The **Woodstock Full Circle Electric Trolley** debuted in summer 2010 with support from the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park, the **Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission**, the Village of Woodstock, and Advance Transit (the local public transit provider). The trolley runs five days a week and connects downtown Woodstock, including the Town Hall, Public Library and shopping areas, with the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park. The 22-passenger trolley is Vermont's first electrically-powered trolley and runs on methane-generated electricity from cow manure sold by Vermont dairy farms. It is a renewable and sustainable source of energy that supports the local economy and Vermont agriculture. During the first pilot season from August to October 2010, about 2,500 riders used the trolley, representing both local residents and visitors. This project was made possible through a U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) grant to connect communities to national parks using alternative transportation, and allows Advance Transit to offer



TRORC - Woodstock Full Circle Trolley

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rides free of charge. The remaining funds from the USDOT grant fund a second pilot season in summer 2011.

Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission

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SAFETY

The River Valley Regional Commission launched the **Rural Georgia Safe Routes to School Initiative** to develop Safe Routes to School plans for different areas in rural Georgia. These plans address aspects of “the five Es” (engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation) to determine why children in rural areas of sixteen west-central Georgia counties are not walking or cycling to school. These plans serve as a guide for teachers, administrators and local governments to educate and encourage students on the importance of staying active and engaging in safe walking and cycling to school. Furthermore, these plans serve a tool for rural law enforcement agencies to enforce traffic rules and regulations that allow for better and safer walking and cycling conditions for school-aged children and all other citizens. Finally, these plans allow local governments to identify

where infrastructure improvements are needed in order to provide all residents with adequate facilities for safe non-motorized travel. Once the committee determined the goals and objectives for the project, River Valley Regional Commission staff began to implement parent and student surveys, map a two-mile radius area from the school along with student addresses, develop walkability and bikeability assessments and analyze schools’ wellness policies and local walking and cycling infrastructure. The outcome was a comprehensive Safe Routes to School Plan for each school that also serves as a handbook for local governments.

River Valley Regional Commission

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River Valley RC - Rural Georgia Safe Routes to School

The three regional planning commissions (RPCs) that make up northwest Missouri (**Mo-Kan Regional Council of Governments**, **Northwest Missouri Regional Council of Governments** and **Green Hills Regional Planning Council**) joined together to begin the **Northwest Missouri Regional Road Safety Audit** program across a 20-county region. Road safety audits

SAFETY

(RSAs) are a formal safety performance examination of an existing or future road or intersection by an independent audit team. RSA teams typically consist of five to 10 members, often including planners, engineers, law enforcement and local officials. Utilizing resources from the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT), the FHWA, elected officials and residents, the RPCs will coordinate three RSAs per year across the region, producing a report for each audit with suggestions for safety improvements. Because most municipalities have limited budgets, the focus of the reports will be low-cost safety improvements that a community can reasonably pursue, and RPC staff will work with the municipalities to help secure funds for improvements upon request. MoDOT has also welcomed RSAs on state routes and has expressed intent to consider suggested safety improvements. Keeping the focus of the project on the region and partnering with neighboring RPCs ensures that the most appropriate roads in the region are assessed. This regional focus also helps generate more interest from MoDOT and FHWA, both of which are essential to the program's sustainability.



Mo-Kan Regional COG - Road Safety Audit

Mo-Kan Regional Council of Governments
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The **North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission** undertook the **Corridor Safety Analysis** to examine existing roadway conditions that impact safety, including congestion, mobility and accessibility for drivers, pedestrians, transit users and bicyclists in the six-county North Central Pennsylvania region. The analysis also evaluated roadway safety related to economic development, including Marcellus Shale drilling activity, and important connections to rail and air transportation. This was achieved by collecting and analyzing crash records for each roadway from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to determine crash cluster areas, systemic crash trends and likely root causes of crashes. Concurrently, the project team developed an online survey that encouraged residents of the region to voice their transportation safety concerns. The result is a comprehensive list of improvement projects prioritized by level of urgency. The list will help planners and government agencies make this priority roadway system safer for multi-modal transportation users. The results of the data collection and analysis, public input and prioritized list of projects were summarized in a Final Regional Safety Study Report.

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