

ONE COUNTRY

RURAL ROADMAP: TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Background:

America's transportation infrastructure – its waterways, airports, railways, roads, terminals, pipelines, and more – are the arteries of our economy, connecting people and products. However, much of America's transportation infrastructure needs repair, which hurts both the economy and quality of life, especially for those in rural communities:

- 13 percent of U.S. rural roads are in poor condition, while 21 percent are in mediocre condition.
- 8 percent of the nation's rural bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition.
- Two-thirds of rail freight originate in rural areas, and nearly half of all truck vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) occur on rural roads. These industries require heavy trucks that create significantly more wear-and-tear on roadways.
- There is also a safety issue – while only 19 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, 45 percent of all roadway fatalities occur in rural areas and the fatality rate on rural roads is 2 times higher than on urban roads.



Why Rural Transportation Infrastructure Matters

Rural roads account for a 68 percent of total lane miles in the United States. They play a significant role in our nation's transportation system and are critically important for domestic production and export of agriculture, mining, and energy commodities.

It's clear investment in rural transportation infrastructure is desperately needed - and improving rural infrastructure will not only benefit the communities that use it everyday, but will boost the American economy as a whole. Benefits of investing in rural infrastructure include:

1

Ensuring that critical services for rural residents remain accessible and available;

2

Increasing capacity of rural communities to deliver goods and services;

3

Helping rural communities attract new business, industry, and skilled workers;

4

Enabling rural communities to modernize and compete in the global economy; and

5

Guaranteeing farmers and ranchers can continue to reliably support the food Americans need.

How to Fix Transportation Infrastructure

To fix transportation infrastructure and ensure rural roads and bridges are safe and resilient, the government must invest significant funding in improvement projects and innovative solutions, including:

- **Projects to modernize** the bridges, highways, and roads that are in critical need of repair, especially in rural communities that have been cut off and hard-to-reach due to roads that are impossible to travel on.



Source: Transport Topics

- **Direct funding to reliable passenger and freight rail service.** Rural Americans often use trains to see the doctor, travel for work, or visit family. Investing in robust and modern rail services will also provide alternatives for freight and shipping which can cause increased wear-and-tear on roads.
- **Improvements to ports, waterways, and airports** can help transport freight and alleviate the toll shipping trucks take on roads. Modern airports will also benefit rural Americans by making travel easier and opening communities to greater commercial access.

Policy Solutions:

Rural transportation infrastructure is expected to be a key legislative issue as Congress considers the bipartisan infrastructure bill. President Biden's American Jobs Plan lays out key funding for transportation infrastructure:

- **\$115 billion** to modernize 20,000 roads and repair 10,000 bridges that provide critical connections to rural and tribal communities;
- **\$50 billion** dedicated specifically to resilience to make infrastructure safer and more reliable in the face of extreme weather events; and
- **\$42 billion** to improve airports and ports.

While most of transportation infrastructure may be covered in the Surface Transportation Authorization Act within the bipartisan infrastructure bill, members of Congress have also introduced a few other notable bills:

- **Connecting Opportunities through Mobility Metrics and Unlocking Transportation Efficiencies (COMMUTE) Act:** This bill would provide data to states and local governments to inform investments in transportation systems and connect employers to workers, ensuring American transportation is efficient and creates jobs.
- **Rebuild Rural America Act:** This bill would establish a dedicated stream of federal funding for rural communities to support economic development, including updating and modernizing transportation infrastructure.



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