

Transportation and Rural Livability

Preserve and strengthen towns, working lands, resources, and rural economies

Livability in rural areas focuses on the towns, villages, working lands and natural resources that surround and connect them. Rural communities vary widely based on location, geography, economic and resource base, and other factors. “Rural” can describe farming, destination, gateway, resource-based, recreational, or other types of communities. Transportation investments that support rural livability also vary depending on location and context. For rural areas between towns, livability can mean safer highways and intersections, context-sensitive roadway design, multi-purpose trails, or rural on-demand transit and carpool information linked to smartphones. In small towns and villages, livability can mean a revitalized Main Street, sidewalks and improved crossings, a gateway entry, senior housing in walking distance to a redeveloped shopping district, or new neighborhoods built on the town’s existing walkable street network.

Provide transportation choices and connections. Building choice into rural transportation networks can happen at both the community and regional level, and can make it easier to get around, while encouraging more social interaction, and supporting local businesses. Effective strategies include:

- Add sidewalks, curb extensions, crosswalks, parking, and landscaping to make small towns more walkable and economically viable.
- Build and connect bicycling and trail networks.
- Link ridesharing, rural on-demand transit vans, and commuter buses to regional employment centers and services.
- Improve connections between neighborhoods and Main Streets, schools and parks, housing and services.
- Coordinate town and county plans and infrastructure investments with a regional vision for growth and resource protection.
- Incorporate community design and land use planning, mobility and accessibility, public health, environmental protection, and economic development.

Benefits of rural livability. When livability principles are incorporated into coordinated plans and investments at the local and regional level, there can be significant benefits. Focusing new growth in and around existing communities can protect fields, farms, and forests, and reduce consumption of open land and rural landscapes. It can help protect water quality, and preserve treasured resources and community character.

Developing in and around existing towns can also reduce infrastructure and operating costs for new roads, water and sewers, schools, and services.¹ Making rural downtowns more convenient, accessible, and walkable



Small town Main Street districts can be revitalized with better sidewalks, curb extensions, crosswalks, parking, and landscaping (H.B. Rue).



Trails can connect downtowns with nearby neighborhoods and natural areas (Dan Burden).

¹ *Regional Approaches to Sustainable Development*, National Association of Development Organizations, 2011.
www.nado.org/regional-approaches-to-sustainable-development/

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



encourages everyday exercise and social interaction, improving individuals' health and strengthening communities.

Success Stories

Connecting transportation hubs in Brattleboro, VT. Brattleboro is a town of about 12,000 residents on the Connecticut River, bordering New Hampshire. In 2003, with Federal (FTA and EPA), local, and regional funding, Brattleboro built a transportation center with parking spaces, bike racks, and new commercial space served by regional and local bus lines. Improvements to the nearby regional Amtrak station are underway with similar funding. The transportation center and regional rail connection have encouraged development of restaurants, and theatre and arts campuses, with a mixed-use retail and residential project slated for the near future. The transportation hub has also freed up on-street parking and improved access to downtown shops.²



Brattleboro's new transportation center helps connect a small town with the surrounding region. (US EPA)

Separating Delaware's U.S. Route 13 from local traffic. In 2002, U.S. Route 13 corridor improvements were completed by the Delaware Department of Transportation.³ While this major corridor connects many small towns and communities, it often carries a mix of local and through traffic. The project was intended to improve traffic flow on the corridor, while separating through travel from local trips. Strategies included reducing traffic lights, adding interchanges and service roads, and connecting local multimodal streets. The improvements make it easier to travel along the corridor, while reducing traffic impacts on local communities. Each town is now separated from high-volume through traffic, while being better connected to nearby communities. It is a win-win for local residents and businesses, tourists and truck drivers, and, over time, will encourage further community and economic development.



US 13 in Delaware provides for through travel while connecting local communities (DelDOT)

Revitalizing downtown with streetscape improvements in Bingen, WA. Located along the Columbia River in southern Washington State, Bingen is home to about 680 residents. Working with the Washington State DOT, the town applied a context sensitive solution to improve SR-14 through its downtown. One of the town's goals was to revitalize its main street while reducing traffic congestion and improving safety along that section of SR-14. Through community outreach, the town enlisted support from residents and other stakeholders to improve the accessibility and appeal of the revamped facility. Completed in 2004, the project incorporates wider-than-standard sidewalks with bulbouts, turning lanes, wider shoulders, and other streetscape improvements. Utilities were placed underground through downtown, with street trees, planting strips and street furniture added, to attract more people to stop and stroll through the downtown.⁴



Downtown Bingen, WA was revitalized with context-sensitive streetscape improvements (WSDOT).

² NADO Research Foundation, Brattleboro, Vermont: Intermodal Facility Sparks Revitalization, www.ruraltransportation.org/uploads/RegTransit.pdf.

³ Delaware Department of Transportation, *The Corridor Capacity Preservation Program*, www.epa.gov/dced/pdf/DelDOT_CCPP_Manual.pdf.

⁴ Context Sensitive Solutions.org, FHWA. www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/content/case_studies/sr-14_bingen_wa/#

Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability

Partnership for Sustainable Communities: www.sustainablecommunities.gov/

