



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 solutions and 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



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



Trails can connect downtowns with nearby neighborhoods and natural areas (Photo used with permission of Dan Burden)

¹ National Association of Development Organizations. “Regional Approaches to Sustainable Development.” 2011.

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



rural downtowns more convenient, accessible, and walkable encourages everyday exercise and social interaction, improving individuals' health and strengthening communities.

Success Stories

Enhancing Quality of Life in Watford City, ND. Watford City, a small town in western North Dakota, experienced rapid population growth and economic development during the oil boom of the late 2000s. The rapid growth led to an ensuing jump in traffic, which exceeded the capacity of the highways in and out of Watford City, leading to increased travel times and reduced mobility in the area. The North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) successfully leveraged context sensitive design and solutions principles to quickly plan and build a bypass around the city. Through proactive public involvement, NDDOT encouraged the community to provide input and gain a sense of ownership of the bypass project, which ultimately resulted in significant safety improvements, and improved quality of life for residents.²

Improving Safety for Students and Residents in Gallup, NM. Located along historic Route 66, Gallup, NM is small city with a rich Native American culture. The city hosts a number of popular cultural events each year including the Red Rock Balloon Rally, which contribute to considerable traffic volumes in and around the city. This increased traffic led to concerns for pedestrian safety, especially along Boardman Drive where several schools are located. In order to improve safety along the corridor, the New Mexico DOT awarded the city \$2.6 million in funding from FHWA's Highway Safety Improvement Program through the High Risk Rural Roads Program to install a road diet section with pedestrian improvements. The project added sidewalks and a bicycle lane to the corridor, helping to promote safety and encourage a healthier commute for students at local schools.³

Creating an Active Transportation Network in Moscow, ID. Moscow, ID is a small city near the University of Idaho with a footprint of under seven square miles and a population of about 25,000. The city had an interest in expanding its active transportation network, but had not been focused on building staff capacity to implement widespread multimodal projects or gathering data to determine their impacts. The city was able to leverage a grant from a local nonprofit organization to administer a multifaceted complete streets effort, which included implementing a program to count bicyclists and pedestrians on busy roadways and the construction of a greenway offering the community increased access to jobs and amenities.⁴



NMDOT installed bike lanes along Boardman Drive in Gallup as part of a road diet that converted the roadway from a four- to three-lane cross-section (Photo used with permission of NMDOT)



Volunteers and staff from local organizations teach kids about bike safety (Photo used with permission of Officer Newbill Kids Safety Fair)

² Federal Highway Administration. "Accelerating Project Delivery and Enhancing Quality of Life Using Context Sensitive Solutions: A Case Study of the Watford City Bypass." 2017.

³ Federal Highway Administration "Multimodal Connectivity Newsletter: Road Diet in Gallup, New Mexico Improves Safety for Residents and Students at Nearby Schools." January 2020.

⁴ Federal Highway Administration. "Creating and Measuring an Active Transportation Network in Moscow, ID" October 2017.

