



# REBUILD RURAL

#RebuildRural



## TRANSPORTATION

Rural America's transportation infrastructure needs serious investment. Home to 60 million people and playing a vital role in the U.S. economy, rural America contains much of the country's natural resources and is the primary source of food, fiber and energy. Roads, bridges, railroads and waterways provide the first and last links in the supply chain from farm to market and need of significant investment. It's time to Rebuild Rural.

The roads and bridges that serve and connect our country's rural areas face significant challenges. Inadequate capacity to handle growing levels of traffic and commerce, limited connectivity, the inability to adequately accommodate growing freight travel and deteriorating road and bridge conditions top the list. The nation's rural roads and bridges have significant deficiencies due to underfunding: 15 percent of the nation's major rural roads have pavements rated in poor condition and 21 percent rated in mediocre condition, and 10 percent of rural bridges are rated structurally deficient.

We need increased federal transportation funding and a recognition of rural roads' and bridges' unique needs to ensure their eligibility for federal grants and funding. State, local, rural and agricultural stakeholders also should be able to prioritize federal funds to best meet the needs of their communities.

The nation's 600 short line and regional railroads operate 29 percent of the nation's freight rail network. For large areas of small-town America, short lines offer the sole method for shippers to connect to the national rail system, helping businesses and employment stay local. As short lines buy or lease abandoned or low-density track, frequently they inherit track with years of neglect and deferred maintenance.

Expanding the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant program, which supports freight projects in rural America, is essential to keeping small railroads alive and improves safety. Short line railroads also caution against unnecessary regulations (e.g., crew size mandates) that provide no safety or operational benefits.

America's inland waterways system provides the lowest-cost, most fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly method to transport products. Exports of agricultural goods make up 20 percent of farm income and support more than one million jobs. In 2017, 70 percent of U.S. agricultural exports, valued at \$90.5 billion, travel by water. And every \$1 billion in U.S. exports shipped through ports supports 15,000 U.S. jobs.

The system of locks and dams that facilitate this transport urgently needs extensive maintenance and modernization. Most were built in the 1920s and 1930s and have far exceeded their 50-year design lifespan. In 2017, 49 percent of barge vessels experienced delays, up from 35 percent in 2010. These delays cost nearly \$45 million annually and adversely affect the price farmers earn for their commodities.

The inland waterways system currently benefits from a successful public-private partnership, commercial users help pay for inland waterway construction and rehabilitation through a 29-cent-per-gallon diesel fuel tax paid into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund. Under the Water Resources Development Act of 2020, the IWTF funds 35 percent of the cost of these projects while 65 percent is funded through the Treasury. However, it's clear that we need additional investment to keep commerce flowing on our inland waterways. The Biden administration and Congress should prioritize providing \$7 billion in increased funding to complete the 17 congressionally authorized inland waterways navigation projects. In addition, a continued focus to ensure that Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund dollars go towards their intended purpose of dredging will also help to boost American competitiveness.

REBUILD RURAL COALITION

50 F Street, NW, Suite 900 · Washington, DC 20001 · 202.626.8710