



MAASTO Policy Recommendations for a Discretionary Rural Program

ISSUE

Rural states across the nation, especially those in the heart of the country (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin – aka Mid America Association of State Transportation Officials, or MAASTO, States) are facing an immediate crisis – deteriorating rural infrastructure, including highways, local roads, bridges, railways, locks and dams, and harbors and port facilities. Over the years, infrastructure initiatives have largely favored urbanized areas. Consequently, the lack of attention and underfunding of the nation's rural infrastructure has created a void in the heartland, where access and connectivity for 60 million Americans is in critical need of investment and renewal.

A reinvigoration of investment in rural infrastructure is essential to improving both mobility and quality of life for residents. Rural infrastructure provides individuals the access they need to health care facilities, educational opportunities, and jobs. In addition to moving people, this infrastructure is also critical to moving goods and connecting rural communities to national and global markets. Rural areas remain critical to the nation's economic success through the production and movement of goods such as in agriculture, forestry, energy, manufacturing, fishing, and mining. Improving rural infrastructure connections will ensure these goods can travel efficiently to national and international markets.

The health of our rural communities is inextricably linked to the overall prosperity and continued success of our nation's economy and its ability to compete globally. Therefore, a new infrastructure initiative should focus on the needs of rural America to not only meet the needs of these communities, but to energize to full potential the economic engine of the nation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM STRUCTURE

MAASTO provides the following suggestions for how the \$25 billion discretionary rural infrastructure program could be structured and administered.

Program Objectives:

- Provide additional, flexible funding for states to improve connections between rural communities and national and international economies via projects that preserve and modernize rural, multimodal infrastructure (highways, roads, bridges, transit, waterways, ports, locks and dams, freight centers etc.), including safety improvements.
- Invest in rural infrastructure that increases access to improve opportunity for residents (health care, education, jobs), as well as enable the efficient movement of goods all year round (including first/ last mile challenges, farm-to-market), and expand opportunities for tourism.
- Use federal funding to leverage state, local, and private resources.
- Create efficiencies in larger scale projects by encouraging coordination between government agencies (and with the private sector) within the same geographic location.



Eligible Recipients/ Investment Locations:

- States, Counties, Municipalities, Townships, and Taxing Authorities, or other entities eligible for federal transportation funding that can assume the responsibilities of a project sponsor.
- Projects should be located in any rural area not defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as an Urban Area (population of 50,000 or more) or Urban Cluster (population of 2,500 and less than 50,000).

Project Selection Criteria:

- Freight movement, with focus on projects that improve connections between rural communities and national and international markets
- Condition
- Access to healthcare, educational institutions, job centers, etc.
- Safety
- Poverty/ employment rates and population trends of the local community
- Leverage of non-federal resources
- Multijurisdictional coordination (across levels of government, as well as public-private coordination)

Additional Considerations

- Projects eligible for funding include highways, bridges, transit, passenger and freight rail, airports, waterways, port infrastructure, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
 - An ideal project could be one that improves access (i.e., via widening of narrow shoulders to accommodate semi-trailers and vehicles with multiple wheels) to a rural port facility that helps move agricultural goods and natural resources from one mode to another.
 - The program should promote “template projects” that are less customized but meet the basic requirements needed. For example, using standardized bridge superstructure designs of incremental lengths that are designed once and use the appropriate length based on location needs. This limits the design to the foundation needs and leverages the superstructure design over many applications. The use of log job (proposal only and no plans) for resurfacing type projects focusing on pavement only and minimizing design costs should also be promoted.
 - Infrastructure at the local level could be expanded to include infrastructure assets like water mains, sewers, and even broadband (especially when improvements can be made concurrently with above-ground infrastructure improvements).
- Funding through this program should not include additional rules/ restrictions above and beyond those associated with existing funding programs. Fragmented federal funding with different rules and requirements can hinder the execution of awards.
- Funding for this program should be new, rather than diverted from existing programs.



- State standards should be applied regardless of federal aid route designation. This places more emphasis on the asset needing repair than the ancillary assets within the corridor. State's standards are commonly less stringent on global assets and focus the needed funds more efficiently.

MAASTO's Rural America

- The rural populations of the ten MAASTO states (16.8 million) comprise over 28 percent of the nation's rural population. 28 percent of all rural vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is in MAASTO states.
- Total rural lane miles of MAASTO states (nearly 2 million) comprise over 31 percent of the nation's rural Lane Miles.
- Amongst MAASTO states, the state DOTs are responsible for over 132,000 miles of rural roads (14 percent of all MAASTO rural miles).
- MAASTO state DOTs own over 21 percent of all state-DOT nationwide rural roads.
- MAASTO state per capita income is below the national average.