Active Transportation Beyond Urban Centers

Walking and Bicycling in Small Towns and Rural America

rails·to·trails conservancy

Crete, Neb. (Pop. 6,960)

Piedmont, Ala. (Pop: 5,120)

Montpelier, Vt. (Pop. 7,855)

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Cover photo: Northville, Mich. Pop: 6,063

Northville, Mich. (Pop. 6,063)

Putnam Lake, N.Y. (Pop. 3,844)

North Warren, Pa. (Pop. 1,934)

Tupelo, Miss. (Pop. 34,546)

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West Windsor, N.J. (Pop. 27,165)

Some commentators and decision-makers have long assumed that biking and walking are strictly a "big city" phenomenon, and that rural America can't benefit substantially from bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure.[1, 2, 3] Previous research has found that rural Americans walk and bicycle at 58 percent of the rate that urban Americans do.[4] However, the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) tell a different story.

For some categories of rural communities, active transportation—human-powered mobility, including biking and walking—is as common as in urban areas. The share of work trips made by bicycle in small towns is nearly double that of urban centers. Further, biking and walking count as significant means of transportation all across the countryside. In coming years, active transportation can play an even bigger role in making small town America more attractive for young families and business investment—improving economic vitality, public safety and overall health in smaller communities in every U.S. region.

This new information has several critical if not surprising policy implications.

- **Federal investment in biking and walking** benefits rural areas as much or more than urban centers. Rural areas receive almost twice as much funding per capita as urban areas from the federal Transportation Enhancements (TE) program.


Holland, Mich. (Pop. 7,016)


Sheboygan County, Wis. (Pop. 115,000)

There is a special need for this federal role because smaller communities are often unable to make necessary community improvements without federal support.

- **Active transportation programs directly benefit America's youth,** and thus can help rural areas to retain talented young people and families. Safe Routes to School, TE and other programs have made dramatic differences in the safety, health and quality of life for numerous children and families in rural communities from Florida to Idaho.

- **Active transportation is a smart investment** relevant to all Americans at a time when our nation grapples with budget deficits, high unemployment and rising energy costs. Biking, walking and trail projects are very cheap compared to road projects and can reduce the need for costly new highways. Active transportation creates more jobs per dollar than highway projects[5], and attracts business investment.

All Small Communities Don't Fit in the Same Box

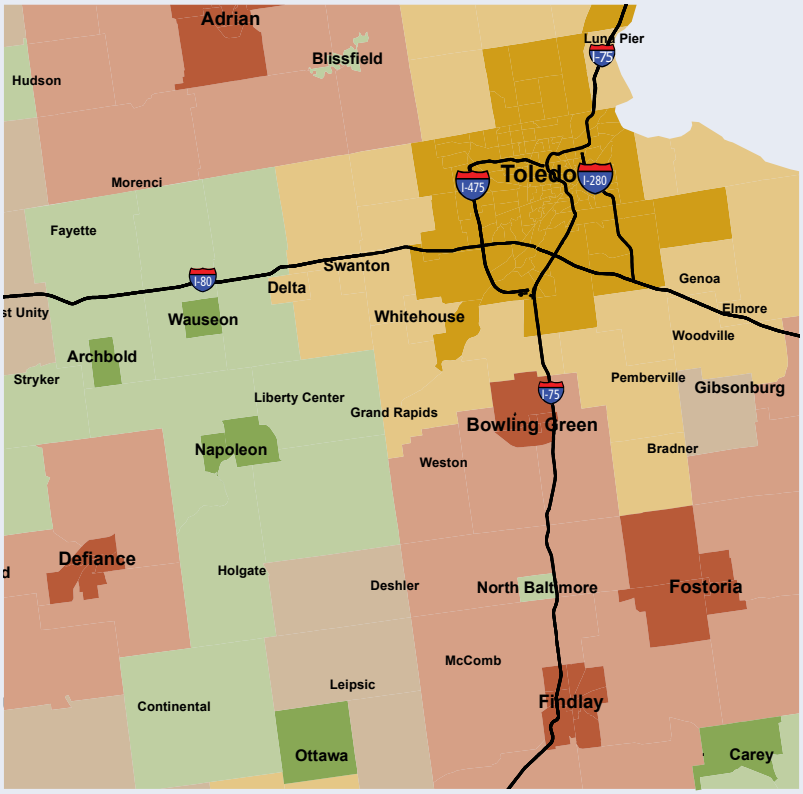
From Exurbs to Farm Country to Resort Towns, Rural America Represents a Wide Spectrum of Life

Anyone who thinks rural communities are all alike doesn't spend much time in the countryside.

Rural America is a big place. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, 80 percent of America's 3,000 counties qualify as rural and cover 81 percent of our land, with 21 percent of Americans living there. (53)

A recent white paper from Transportation for America classifies more than half of those counties (53 percent) as classic farm/ranch country. Exurban communities that are economically and culturally connected to nearby metropolitan areas comprise 25 percent of rural counties, while 23 percent are tourism or recreation destinations. These last two categories, which account for most of the growth in rural America, are home to many groups that are now developing a greater interest in walking and biking: young families, retirees, former urbanites and outdoors enthusiasts, as well as tourists.(53)

Yet walking and biking are common even in more traditional rural communities. The data presented here are from the U.S. Department of Transportation's 2009 National Household Travel Survey. Figures were tabulated for five different types of rural communities identified by researchers at the University of Washington in an adaptation of the Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) classifications, which the USDA Economic Research Service developed to chart rural transportation patterns.(13) The RUCA classification improves on other urban-rural typologies by incorporating both population and travel behavior to identify urbanized areas and distinguish between areas within an adjacent city's area of "influence" and local rural areas.(54) The five rural community types (condensed from the RUCA's original seven) are:



Large Rural Core Towns of 10,000 to 50,000, often regional centers.

Outer Large Rural Smaller communities from which many people travel to Large Rural Core towns for work, shopping, services or school.

Small Rural Core Towns of 2,500 to 10,000, often county seats.

Outer Small Rural Smaller communities from which many travel to Small Rural Core towns for work, shopping, services or school.

Isolated Rural Communities without strong economic and social links to a town of more than 2,500.

As a means of comparison, the urban categories in the adapted version of RUCA classifications are as follows:

Urban Core Cities and close-in suburbs of metropolitan regions with a center city of more than 50,000.

Outer Urban Outlying suburbs of metropolitan regions with a center city of more than 50,000.

In this typology, 81% of US acreage and 20% of US population falls into rural categories. See page 25 for a full breakdown of how the people and land area of the United States are distributed in this typology.






Orting, Wash. (Pop. 6,746)

Growing evidence from across America documents the beneficial effects of walking and biking. People who live in communities where it is safe and convenient to engage in active transportation enjoy better overall health[6, 7], greater economic opportunities[8], a cleaner environment[9], lower energy bills[10] and numerous personal and social gains associated with a strong sense of community.[11]

Unfortunately, most people think these advantages apply only to metropolitan areas. The belief is that low-density communities such as small cities, towns and rural areas will never sustain more than a few walkers and bike riders.

But a closer look at Americans' actual travel patterns debunks that view. Dividing America into binary categories of urban and rural masks the real story. The Rural Policy Research Institute emphasizes that there is more than one type of "rural" community, and the travel behavior and needs of rural residents vary depending on whether they live in an exurb, a tourist destination or an agricultural or mining community.[12] In most cases, rates of bicycling and walking in rural communities are not dramatically different from that of large cities. This report presents an innovative analysis of the most recent National Household Travel Survey (2009) based on an alternative geographic typology—the Rural-Urban Commuting Areas (RUCAs) developed at the University of Washington using models from the USDA's Economic Research Service[13] (see "All Small Towns Don't Fit in the Same Box").

Walking and biking are woven into the fabric of rural life. In terms of total trips (see chart on page 6), rural Americans walk at a rate between 58 and 80 percent of the overall national rate, depending on what type of community they live in. For biking, the numbers are even higher—between 74 and 104 percent.

And when it comes to work, residents of certain kinds of rural communities walk and bike almost as much (and in a few cases, even more) as residents of cities and inner suburbs. Within small towns of 2,500 to 10,000 residents (defined as Small Rural Core on accompanying charts), people walk for work purposes (both commuting and during work) at a rate similar to cities and close-in suburbs (defined as Urban Core on accompanying charts)—3.7 percent of all trips, compared to 3.9 percent.

When we look at all trips taken, residents in four out of five categories of rural communities walk more frequently than people living in the outlying suburbs of metropolitan regions (defined as Outer Urban on accompanying charts), ranging from 8.5 to 7.2 percent. The figure drops to 6.7 percent for outer ring suburbs. Indeed, the walking percentages of these rural communities approach the 10.6 percent of trips made on foot nationally.

Share of Total Trips Made on Foot and Bike

Across 5 Types of Rural Communities

Travel Mode	Urban Core	Outer Urban	Large Rural Core	Outer Large Rural	Small Rural Core	Outer Small Rural	Isolated Rural	National
Walk	**11.97%**	**6.68%**	**8.46%**	**6.13%**	**7.20%**	**7.33%**	**7.38%**	**10.60%**
CI (95%)*	11.75% 12.20%	6.35% 7.04%	7.85% 9.12%	5.45% 6.90%	6.46% 8.02%	6.19% 8.65%	6.77% 8.03%	10.43% 10.78%
Bike	**1.10%**	**0.92%**	**1.11%**	**0.82%**	**1.04%**	**0.80%**	**0.78%**	**1.06%**
CI (95%)*	1.03% 1.18%	0.79% 1.07%	0.90% 1.35%	0.62% 1.09%	0.75% 1.45%	0.40% 1.59%	0.64% 0.96%	1.00% 1.12%

Share of Work Trips Made by Walking and Biking

Across 5 Types of Rural Communities

Travel Mode	Urban Core	Outer Urban	Large Rural Core	Outer Large Rural	Small Rural Core	Outer Small Rural	Isolated Rural	National
Walk	**3.91%**	**1.69%**	**3.26%**	**2.79%**	**3.67%**	**1.66%**	**3.39%**	**3.52%**
CI (95%)*	3.59% 4.25%	1.37% 2.08%	2.53% 4.20%	1.88% 4.13%	2.84% 4.74%	1.03% 2.65%	2.72% 4.22%	3.27% 3.77%
Bike	**0.83%**	**0.38%**	**0.27%**	**0.19%**	**1.61%**	**0.03%**	**0.13%**	**0.71%**
CI (95%)*	0.69% 1.01%	0.25% 0.59%	0.20% 0.38%	0.11% 0.32%	0.68% 3.75%	0.01% 0.09%	0.06% 0.30%	0.60% 0.85%

Data Source: 2009 National Household Travel Survey / nhts.ornl.gov

*A confidence interval (CI) measures the uncertainty of an estimate of a population parameter based on a sample. In this case, based on the NHTS sample size, there is a 95 percent likelihood that the real U.S. population parameter falls within this range.

Langley, Wash. (Pop. 1,035)

People assume biking and walking are strictly for big cities. But a new analysis of the latest federal data tells a much different story.

Bicycling, too, is far more prevalent outside of urban centers than many would expect. The share of work trips made by bicycle in small towns (Small Rural Core, 2,500–10,000 people) is nearly double that of urban centers. And among all trips taken in towns between 10,000 and 50,000 population in rural regions (Large Rural Core on accompanying charts), just as many people bike as in the urban core.

Due in large measure to lack of heavy traffic, smaller towns offer viable choices for people of all ages to travel without climbing into a car. Parents are more likely to let younger kids bike to school or baseball practice, while seniors feel more comfortable strolling to the library or local café. Many small towns and cities developed prior to World War II were originally designed with pedestrians in mind, so taking a walk downtown or riding a bike for exercise feels safe.

Due to huge increases in vehicle-miles traveled in recent decades, and land-use patterns that ignore walkers and bike riders, there is a pressing need for action to make sure residents can continue to enjoy the benefits of active transportation throughout rural America—and to offer more people an opportunity to share in the health, economic, environmental and social advantages.

Cars travel fast on the state highways and county roads that run through rural communities, posing a significant threat to safety. A pedestrian struck by a vehicle traveling 20 mph will die in 5 percent of cases, while those struck by vehicles traveling 40 mph die 85 percent of the time.[14] According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 14 percent of all U.S. highway fatalities in 2009 were pedestrians and bicyclists.[15]

We have built half the transportation system we need for the 21st century, say a number of transportation experts.[16] Now it's time to finish the job by building better biking and walking facilities, which will be much less expensive than highways but make a big difference in people's lives. This work ought to be easy to do in smaller communities, where lighter traffic and less dense development means that space is more readily available for active transportation improvements.

Yet in Crystal River, Fla. (pop. 3,500), surrounded by state parks on the Gulf Coast, Richard Marion lobbied his city council for 13 years to build a sidewalk on an avenue near a senior community and U.S. Highway 19. He kept at it for so long because he frequently saw his neighbors piloting walkers and wheelchairs down the middle of the road to reach the nearest food store.

For a project that cost only $75,000—a fraction of most street improvement projects—Marion and other supporters saw the sidewalk as a cost-effective investment. But as a local official explained, "We're trying to be a walkable and bikeable community, but we have a limited budget."[17]

That's a familiar refrain in small towns across the land, many of which are struggling with declining populations, downturns in the agricultural economy or factory closings. Better conditions for biking and walking can enhance their quality of life and prospects for the future if the popular, cost-effective federal programs that fund these projects across rural America continue. Without this support from the federal government, fundamental improvements to bicycle and pedestrian networks can be nearly impossible to create.

A modest Safe Routes to School grant means that half the students now walk to the local elementary school in Alpine, Utah.

Thankfully, many communities have been able to use federal funds to remedy dangerous gaps in their transportation systems for pedestrians and bicyclists. Federal programs included in transportation funding bills signed by Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have brought measurable improvements to many places. Three critical federal programs for rural communities are:

Transportation Enhancements, which has been the nation's primary source for funding trails, bicycling and walking infrastructure for 20 years, also improves local communities by preserving historic landmarks, creating safe and attractive streets and otherwise mitigating problems created by roadways.

Safe Routes to Schools, which zeroes in on the barriers that prevent children from gaining the health and fitness advantages of biking and walking to school.

The Bike/Walk Pilot Program, which provides focused investment to develop active transportation networks in four American communities—including rural Sheboygan County, Wis. (city pop. 49,000) and the city of Columbia, Mo. (pop. 108,000).

In Alpine, Utah (pop. 10,000), a fast-growing community between Salt Lake City and Provo, a $71,000 Safe Routes to Schools federal grant awarded by the Utah DOT allowed the town to install solar-powered speed signs, build an active transportation path and improve bike storage facilities near the local grade school. The city of Alpine also pitched in $125,000 in labor and materials to fix up sidewalks and crosswalks. The result: 50 percent of students now walk or bike to the Alpine Elementary School.

This shift translates immediately into less traffic and safer conditions in the neighborhood, since fewer parents are driving to school twice a day. For years to come, it also means reduced obesity for kids in Alpine and better nutrition for those in Nairobi, Kenya. Students have raised pledges for the 72,000 miles they've walked to school during the past two years and donated the money for lunches at the Candle Light School in Nairobi.[18]

Portland, Maine (Pop. 66,194)

Active transportation programs represent a smart financial investment. Biking and walking account for less than two percent of the entire federal surface transportation budget yet account for 12 percent of all trips taken in America. In rural communities, that number stands between 6.9 and 9.6 percent, depending on the size and geography of the community, according to the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS).

And these numbers are growing fast. Bicycle commuting across the United States rose 40 percent in the past decade, according to the American Community Survey. For skeptics who grouse that American communities are too spread out for any transportation except automobiles, consider this: half of all trips made by Americans today are within 20 minutes or less by bicycle; and 28 percent are within 20 minutes by foot. For rural residents, the picture is very similar: nearly 40 percent of trips are shorter than three miles, and of those, half are shorter than one mile.[19]

That's only the beginning. Making it safe and practical for more people to walk and bike will mean further savings throughout rural America through energy independence, improved fitness and public health, a cleaner environment and the economic and social gains that come from a strengthened sense of community. It also offers residents of small communities a choice of transportation options, which Americans repeatedly say they need in public opinion surveys .[20, 21]

Active transportation investments add up to the best bargain in our federal budget.

Tough economic times demand that every federal project strenuously justify itself in terms of cost-effectiveness. Because active transportation facilities cost a tiny fraction of roadways, and because there is pent-up demand due to past failures to build safe and convenient bicycling and walking networks, active transportation investments offer taxpayers a far greater return on their money. Additionally, these projects create more good jobs per dollar than large highway projects, and the money stays closer to home in small, local businesses. And when you consider that more Americans biking and walking means less spent on health care to counteract effects of the obesity crisis (the federal government pays 30 percent of all health care costs[22]) and less of our money flowing out of the country to pay for foreign oil, active transportation adds up to the best bargain in our federal budget.

Many in rural America already know these benefits. The Transportation Enhancements (TE) program provides dedicated federal funding to the states for transportation investments that improve communities and preserve environmental and historical assets. Individual communities bring their own ideas for improving the transportation system in their community to the state DOT and compete for these funds.

TE funds are most often used for projects that improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Another popular activity is the preservation of historic transportation infrastructure, often from the age of rail and river transportation, when many small American rural towns were founded as transportation hubs in these historic networks. Data collected by the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy shows that cumulative average per-capita TE spending in rural counties is almost twice that of urban areas ($66 versus $36, 1992–2008). There is a powerful demand for non-highway projects in rural areas seeking to build sidewalks, preserve historical downtowns and promote a way of life that in many cases has roots in a pre-Interstate America.

Alpena, Mich. (Pop. 10,483)

Sheboygan County, Wis. (Pop. 115,000)

Sheboygan Shows the Way

A Rural Wisconsin County Pioneers Innovative Bike and Walk Policies Thanks to a Federal Investment

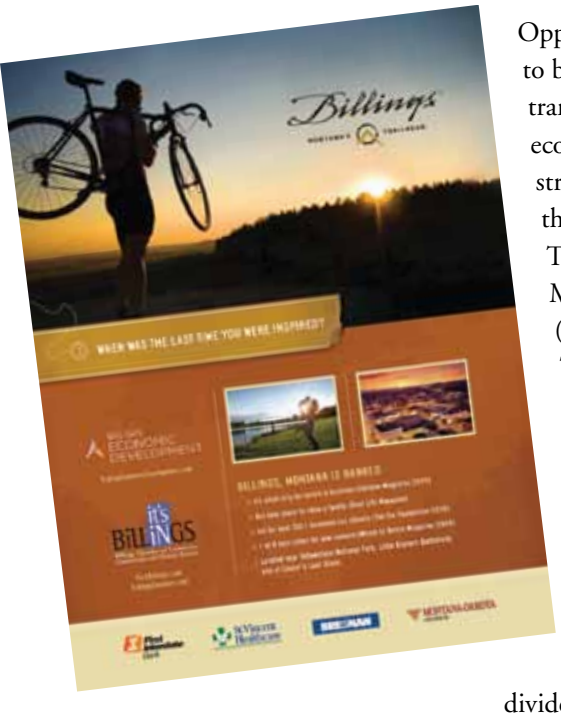
Sheboygan County, Wis. (pop. 115,000), on the shores of Lake Michigan, is one of four communities chosen as a pilot project to showcase what can be accomplished by focused federal investment to shift short driving trips to biking and walking. (Columbia, Mo.; Minneapolis, Minn.; and Marin County, Calif., are the other participants in the Bike/Walk Pilot Program launched by the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, passed with bipartisan congressional support and signed by President George W. Bush.)

Bicycle traffic rose 23 percent from 2007 to 2010, and walking is up 12 percent in a county whose largest town is under 50,000. This sizable jump happened thanks to a high level of collaboration by the business community, police departments, school districts and citizens in each town and village to promote active transportation. Eventually, 70 miles of bike lanes will be built throughout the 500-square-mile county, including the Union-Pacific Rail-Trail. Already, 1,700 bike parking spaces have been added, and all buses are equipped with racks. A Safe Routes to School program has been developed along with the ReBike Project, which gets donated bikes into the hands of people who want them.

Bicycle traffic rose 23 percent from 2007 to 2010, and walking is up 12 percent in a county whose largest town is under 50,000.

The prevalence of biking and walking in smaller communities is not only a surprise, it's a hopeful sign for the future of rural America. Recent research links active transportation to improved health and social cohesiveness,[7, 11] as well as the growth of high-paying jobs.[5]

According to a USDA Economic Research Service study,[23] rural counties able to attract "creative class" businesses enjoy job-growth rates higher than even metropolitan counties. According to the study, two qualities sought by creative class workers are "active streets scenes and outdoor recreation opportunities"—both of which are fostered when people are given the option of safe walking and biking facilities.[24] As Norman Whitaker, executive director of South Carolina's Central Midlands Council of Governments, observes, "The creative class is attracted to bike/ped[estrian travel] as modes of transportation and recreation."[25]



Opportunities for people to bike and walk can transform a community's economic picture, as a string of towns along the Root River State Trail in far southeastern Minnesota discovered (see "A Tale of Four Trails"). Lanesboro (population: 750), which was fast becoming a ghost town before the state built the trail on an out-of-service rail line, now reaps a $1.5 million yearly dividend from bike riders and other trail users, and has seen many new businesses open on its now-thriving Main Street. Other communities along the 60-mile trail network have seen similar gains.[26]

Even in an area that already attracts plenty of tourists, new facilities for hikers and bikers can mean more income and jobs. In the popular Outer Banks of North Carolina, a one-time investment of $6.7 million of federal, state and local funds in new trails has created 1,400 jobs and now pays back $60 million a year, according to a study by N.C. State's Institute for Transportation Research and Education for the North Carolina Department of Transportation.[27]

> "In Billings—and I think throughout the country—there has been a paradigm shift. Trails are no longer viewed as community amenities; they're truly viewed as *essential infrastructure* for business recruitment."
>
> —JOHN BREWER, CEO OF THE BILLINGS, MONT., CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

But tourism is not the whole story. Some visitors become residents and business owners (see "A Tale of Four Trails"). Montana is a rural state whose outdoor resources are a leading asset. A study of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem area (which includes Billings and Bozeman), in fact, shows that one in four businesses in this rural region was started after the owner visited as a tourist.[28] At a U.S. Congressional briefing hosted by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in April 2011, Billings Chamber of Commerce CEO John Brewer got right to the point: "Talented people move to Billings in large part because of our trail system that creates the quality of life they are expecting. A healthy trail system is vital to a healthy community." As evidence, he noted that *Fortune* magazine named Billings as "the number one small city in attracting business."

Brewer exhibited a poster branding Billings as "Montana's Trailhead"—a joint project of the Chamber of Commerce with the Economic Development Council, the First Interstate Bank, St. Vincent Healthcare and other businesses. He also heralded the completion of a long-awaited bicycle and pedestrian underpass in downtown Billings, which was built with federal Transportation Enhancements funding, along with nonprofit grants and private investment. "This is one of the best examples of private-public partnerships. It would not have happened without federal funding."

"Federally funded investment in our non-motorized transportation sparks private investment in trails and trail projects," Brewer explained, "which lures companies, increases residential quality of life and retains a qualified workforce. Trails are vital to the business and the economy and jobs in Billings."

Yet, sadly, these promising economic benefits will bypass communities unable to make investments so that walking and biking become more safe and convenient. Because rural areas have proportionately less spending power than metropolitan areas in terms of both household income and tax base, many of them would miss out on these simple, cost-effective programs for revitalization without federal support under the transportation bill.

Move Over, San Francisco

Eight Regions Led by Small Cities Are Among the Nation's Leaders in Driving Less

According to a recent *Atlantic* article by noted economic analyst Richard Florida[56], more than half of the top 15 metropolitan regions where people drive the least are cities with fewer than 160,000 residents. Often college and military towns, these communities confirm that biking and walking are not exclusively a big-city habit.

The data also confirm that communities wishing to attract more young people should offer a variety of transportation options, not just driving. The figures below are from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2009 1-year estimates) of how people travel to work. The totals are for the entire designated metropolitan region, not just the center city. (Besides biking and walking, the non-driving figures also include public transportation and shuttle services.)

Top 15 Metropolitan Statistical Areas for Non-Driving Commuters—Share of Trips by Mode

City	Walking	Biking	Total*
1. New York City	6.3%	0.4%	42.6%
2. Ithaca, N.Y. (Pop. 30,000)	**14.1%**	**0.7%**	**28.8%**
3. Boulder, Colo. (Pop. 94,000)	**13.7%**	**4.8%**	**28.1%**
4. San Francisco Bay Area	4.4%	1.5%	28.0%
5. Jacksonville, N.C. (Pop. 80,500)	**6.9%**	**0.5%**	**24.4%**
6. Boston	5.1%	1.0%	23.4%
7. Washington, D.C.	3.2%	0.6%	23.3%
8. Champaign-Urbana, Ill. (Pop. 81,000 & 41,000)	**8.6%**	**2.3%**	**20.8%**
9. Eugene, Ore. (Pop. 156,000)	**4.2%**	**5.6%**	**20.5%**
10. Chicago	3.2%	0.6%	20.3%
11. Honolulu	5.3%	1.5%	19.5%
12. Seattle	3.6%	0.9%	19.4%
13. Santa Barbara, Calif. (Pop. 88,000)	**4.8%**	**3.7%**	**19.1%**
14. Iowa City, Iowa (Pop. 67,830)	**8.0%**	**2.2%**	**19.3%**
15. Bellingham, Wash. (Pop. 81,000)	**4.9%**	**2.8%**	**19.1%**

Population totals are for city centers. Trip rates are for metropolitan areas.

*Total non-driving rate includes transit.

Eugene, Ore. (Pop. 156,185)

Crete, Neb. (Pop. 6,960)

Walking and biking are good for all Americans, but there are particular benefits for rural communities.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has identified aging as a major challenge for rural areas, raising stark questions about the tax base, the workforce and their very survival as communities.[29] However, both grassroots organizations and federal agencies recognize that rural areas have a lot of sustainable potential as places offering a unique quality of life, connection to land and the outdoors, and historical assets.[30, 31] Many parents dream of moving to a family-friendly community where their kids can grow up self-reliant, getting around town safely on their own rather than staying inside playing video games or nagging mom for a ride to the mall, but fears about safety and risk dominate.[32] Active transportation projects like Safe Routes to School, multi-use trails and pedestrian-friendly Main Streets can help both of these wishes come true.

A growing body of American research has found that residents of rural areas are more likely to be obese than their urban counterparts, even when controlling for other factors like smoking and education levels.[33] Particularly concerning are findings of extremely high rates of childhood obesity in rural areas when compared to urban or national averages.[34, 35] Local communities and public health researchers are increasingly realizing that access to opportunities to walk and bike for transportation or for fun is an important part of the solution.[36] The Centers for Disease Control's "Communities Putting Prevention to Work" program recognized and provided funding support to support small towns and rural areas like Olmstead County, Minn., where there are already 95 miles of paved walking and biking paths. In order to fight obesity and boost activity levels, the community will encourage residents to take advantage of these facilities through improved signage, media promotion and elementary school education programs. The community will also develop its first Bicycle Master Plan.[37]

Giving rural Americans more choices to walk and bike also provides economic relief from higher gas prices.

Journalists and researchers have both identified sidewalks, or the lack thereof, as a leading reason why people, especially children, do not walk more.[38, 39]

A healthy share of federal bike and walk funding is directed at this problem. The remote town of Burlington (pop. 250) in northern Wyoming had no sidewalks at all (as well as unpaved gravel streets), except along a state highway, until a Safe Route to School grant through the Wyoming DOT enabled sidewalk construction on 11 blocks leading to the local K-12 school, as well as street lights and school crossing signs.

A parent survey since these improvements found that many more kids are walking or biking to school. Senior citizens and mothers pushing baby strollers are also seen walking in greater numbers. "I believe sidewalks leading to school have been a great benefit to those who use them, especially those who bike, [inline skate], skateboard or ride scooter," commented one parent. A project extending sidewalks to other streets around town is now beginning.[40]

Ottawa, Ill. (pop. 18,000), home to glass and plastics factories, features sidewalks in the old sections of town but not in subdivisions on the south side. A Safe Routes to School grant —which was a joint mission of city officials, school officials, teachers and parents—jumpstarted a project for sidewalks in the vicinity of two schools in the newer part of town, as well as repairs to sidewalks around three other schools.[41]

Transportation is the biggest expense for American families after housing.[42] Giving rural Americans—who have less disposable income on average than city or suburban residents[43] —more choices to walk and bike also provides economic relief from higher gas prices, which have passed $3.50 nationally for the second time in three years.[44] By shifting some short trips away from cars and trucks, families can make the household budget stretch further. For example, Thomas Hylton of Pottstown, Pa. (pop. 22,000, and the home of Mrs. Smith's frozen pies), estimates he has saved $100,000 during the past 30 years by walking to work instead of buying and driving a second family car.[45] Considering that the American Automobile Association estimates the cost of owning and operating a vehicle at more than $8,500 per year, any savings gained from walking and biking can make a huge difference.[46]

Hancock, Md. (Pop. 1,545)

Lanesboro, Minn. (Pop. 754)

A Tale of Four Trails

How Small Town Entrepreneurs Capitalize on the Benefits of Rail-Trails

1 Ed Hughes was unemployed, out of money and lacked any business experience, but he had a big idea: open a bike shop in the empty five-and-dime store on New Freedom's (pop. 4,464) Main Street in south-central Pennsylvania, where the Heritage Rail Trail County Park was slated to run. Bankers politely but quickly showed him the door when he asked for a loan, but Hughes finally secured a Small Business Administration loan and is now the proprietor of a thriving business in a town that grew 12 percent in population during the past decade.[26]

2 The Great Allegheny Passage trail, running 141 miles from Homestead, Pa., to Cumberland, Md., in its initial years attracted 700,000 yearly users, who infused $40 million into eight small towns along the way. Since 2007, 54 businesses catering to trail users have opened or expanded, creating 83 new jobs and paying out $7.5 million in wages each year.[57]

3 Farmer Charles Ruen did not like the idea of people biking and walking through the middle of his fields when the state first proposed creating trail on an out-of-service stretch of Milwaukee Road rail line running through the rolling dairy country of the southeast corner of Minnesota.

"Originally I was opposed," the Lanesboro (pop. 750) farmer admits. "Trails were quite new. I didn't think it was going to be used enough." In fact, he helped organize a group of farmers to purchase the 100-mile right-of-way to prevent the rail-trail from going in.

The trail turned out to be wildly popular, so the practical-minded farmer decided to convert an old farmhouse on the trail into a bed-and-breakfast, which he operated for more than 15 years before retiring from innkeeping. About the Root River State Trail, he says, "It's been good—I'll have to say that. It's brought a lot of benefit to this part of southeastern Minnesota. It far exceeded what I thought would happen."[26]

4 Marc and Jeanne Sather in the nearby town of Preston (pop. 1,300), Minn., found themselves in exactly the opposite situation as Ruen. They had moved from Northern California to buy an inn, housed in a handsome 1869 building that once had been the county jail, and longed to see bikers and hikers pass by on another unused rail line that ran through town. So they helped organize a campaign to build the Harmony-Preston Valley Trail, which now connects to the Root River State Trail. It opened in 1996. Another new trail, running west from Preston, is now being planned.[26]

New Freedom, Pa. (Pop. 4,464)

Ohiopyle, Pa. (Pop. 82)

Rocheport, Mo. (Pop. 239)

Longmont, Colo. (Pop. 86,270)

Kids become the biggest losers when all transportation funding gets spent to benefit motor vehicles. Not only do children miss out on the independence that comes from getting around on foot or bike, but trends show their health suffers, too. In the early 1970s, half of all American kids walked or biked to school; now the figure is only 15 percent.[47] Since 1980, the obesity rate among kids ages 6 to 19 has tripled to more than 18 percent.[48]

The reasons for this health crisis are complex, but one of the easiest ways to improve youth health is for kids to get more regular exercise—and few activities are more regular than getting to and from school. That's the mission of the Safe Routes to School program funded in the 2005 federal transportation bill: Remove the barriers that prevent kids today from walking to school as their parents and grandparents did.

A number of Nebraska towns—Diller, Deshler, Exeter, Wilber, Wymore and Crete, all in the southeast corner of the state—enthusiastically launched programs aimed at exciting kids about walking and biking. The "No Child Left Inside" campaign in Crete (pop. 6,000) drew 142 adult volunteers for Walk to School Day. Even kids making long bus rides could be dropped off at designated points and be accompanied to school by athletes from nearby Doane College.

The other five towns (with populations between 300 and 1,600) collaborated on the "No Child Left on Their Behind" project, which encouraged families to walk to school together. Students received awards for walking at a celebration headlined by cheerleaders and the Lil' Red mascot of the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers. "This program has impacted not only the students and parents, but the entire community," says Project Coordinator Diane Epp, who noted she now sees older citizens walking to the coffee shop.[49]

Students in Cape Girardeau, Mo. (pop. 38,000)—Rush Limbaugh's hometown—benefited from a $103,000 Safe Routes to School grant that paid for new sidewalks, safety signs and flashing crosswalk beacons at eight local schools. Students participating in Walk to School Day helped city officials identify missing or broken stretches of sidewalks.[50]

Never Underestimate the Power of a Third-Grader

One Persistent Kid Gets His Classmates Out of Cars and on Bikes, Even in a NASCAR Town

If you don't believe the power of a third-grader, just ask Dr. Boen Nutting, principal at the Lake Norman elementary school in Mooresville, N.C. (pop. 32,000), which is known as Race City, USA, because of the many NASCAR teams based there.

"He would get out of the car every morning and say, 'Dr. Nutting, why can't I ride my bike to school? Dr. Nutting, where's the bike rack?'"

The principal finally purchased a bike rack and initiated school activities that would promote safe biking and walking to school. For a week, the boy was the only student to ride. But soon there were five, then 15, and Dr. Nutting decided it was time to paint a crosswalk and build sidewalks on the blocks leading to the school. With the help of the school board and the North Carolina DOT, that was accomplished.

Now there are 30 kids biking on an average day, and 50 on Fridays. Biking is taking off, even in a city famous for racecar drivers.[58]

Alpine, Utah (Pop. 9,061)

Saugatuck, Mich. (Pop. 925)

Other towns are focusing efforts on making all their streets friendlier for walkers and bike riders. Tupelo (pop. 39,000) and Hernando (pop. 110,000) in northern Mississippi were two of many rural communities passing "complete streets" ordinances last year, which direct local officials to accommodate all users in transportation planning. Hernando Mayor Chip Johnson hailed the action as the city's response to community desires. "This policy will create a safer and healthier environment for all the citizens of Hernando."[51]

Tupelo mayor Jack Reed trumpeted the move as a big step in the city's goal to become the healthiest place in Mississippi. "I'm proud of our city council's unanimous support of this initiative as we proactively change Tupelo's culture into a more walkable, cyclist-friendly community." One project already under way is to make the Main Street corridor—a state highway that runs from downtown to the Elvis Presley birthplace—more safe, appealing and pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.[52]

Downtown reinvigoration also figures prominently in the plans of Red Wing, Minn. (pop. 16,000)—a Mississippi River town whose name is associated with high-quality work boots and shoes. The community sports a Norman Rockwell-worthy downtown full of locally owned businesses, which have been steadily losing ground to a shopping strip on the outskirts. The town recently hosted a "complete streets" policy workshop to explore how to bring people back downtown. The business district, though charming, is bounded on two sides by wide, busy, fast-moving highways. Roaring trucks and cars on U.S. 61 sever downtown from riverfront parks and the Victorian St. James Hotel, which is a tourist magnet. Local planners believe that a push to make downtown more pedestrian-friendly will pay off in a town whose economy depends on the Red Wing Shoe company.

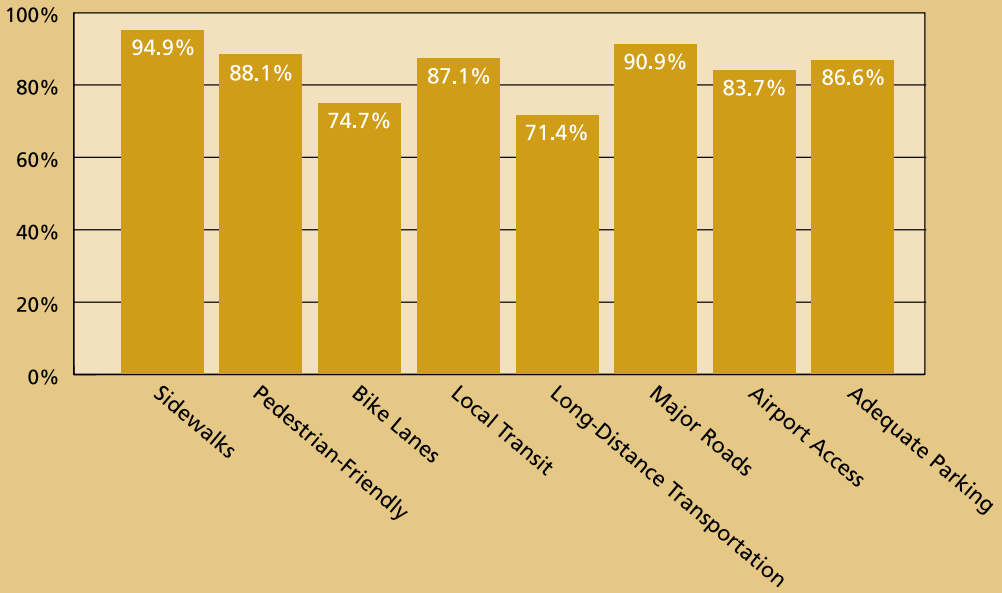
Rural Americans Value Sidewalks and Bike Lanes, According to Federal Study

More Than 9 Out of 10 Rank Sidewalks Important, and Nearly 3 Out of 4 Value Bike Lanes

The importance of walking and biking for rural Americans is underscored by a recent study by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Research and Innovation Technology Administration.

Rural Americans ranked sidewalks the most important of eight transportation-related facilities, ahead of major roads, long-distance transportation and parking. Almost nine in 10 also cited the importance of pedestrian-friendly communities, and nearly three out of four reported that bike lanes are important.

Percent of Rural Americans Finding Transportation-Related Facilities Important



The data are from the 2009 US DOT Omnibus Household Survey conducted by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.[55]

Rural America today is facing many challenges. Active transportation is a creative, cost-effective, simple solution that addresses multiple challenges in a single step: affordable transportation, changing demographics, obesity and economic development. Walking and bicycling deliver potent benefits positively disproportionate to the cost of providing the infrastructure to support them.

This report's new analysis of the 2009 National Household Travel Survey through the lens of rural America debunks the myth that walking and bicycling are prevalent only in big cities. In fact, beyond urban centers are communities across the country that are ambitiously pursuing and enjoying the benefits of the trails, sidewalks and road improvements that enable safe and convenient active transportation. The federal government has played a critical role in advancing this trend through programs such as Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to School, and Communities Putting Prevention to Work. In a time of serious budget constraints, continued federal investment in active transportation infrastructure is essential to a balanced transportation system that meets the needs of all Americans. Contrary to preconceptions, those needs are at least as critical in small town America as in our larger cities.

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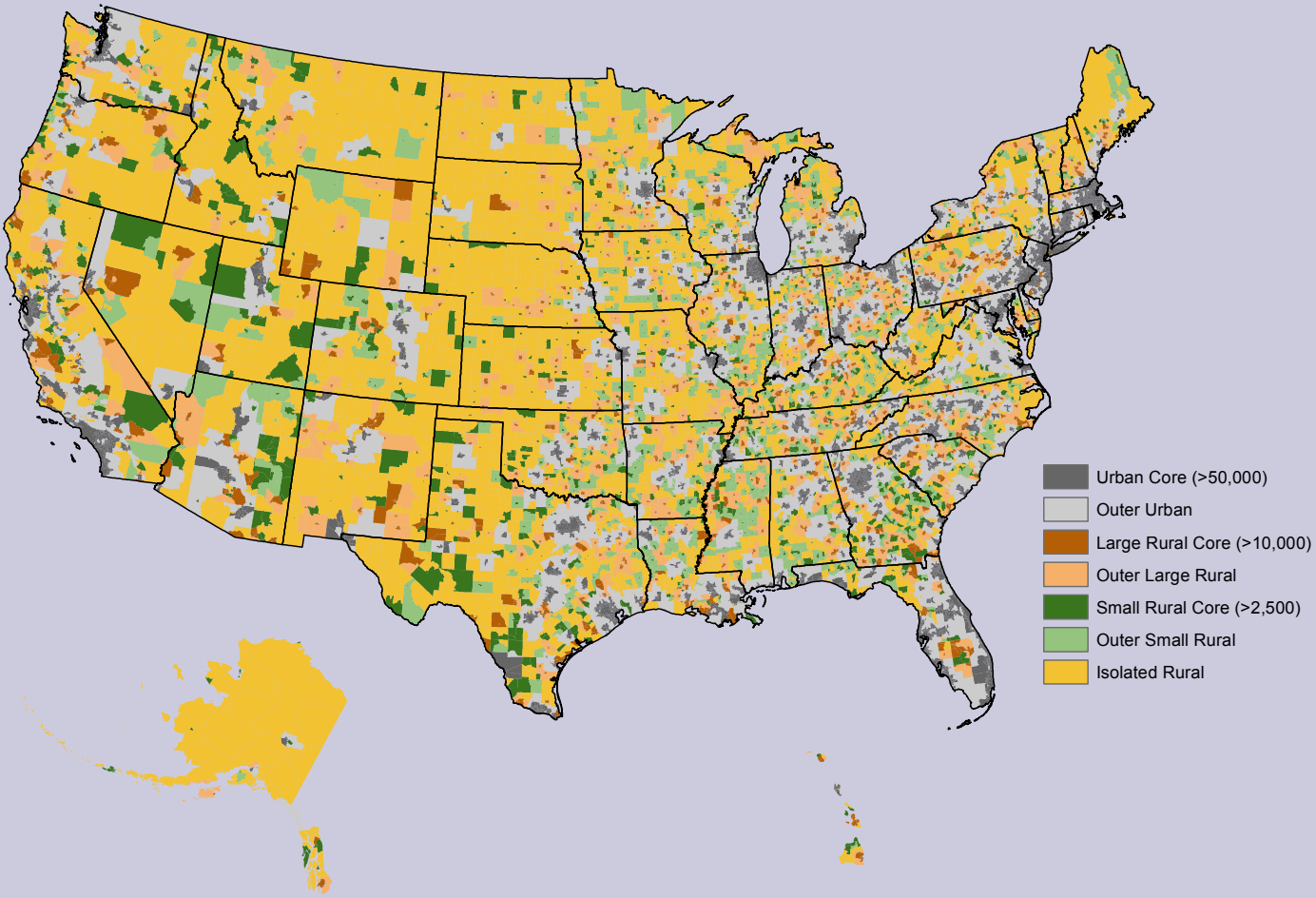
Simplified RUCA Urban-Rural Typology

To explore your area in greater detail, please visit **www.railstotrails.org/beyondurbancenters** for an interactive version of this map, integrated with other relevant data.



Distribution of U.S. Land Area and Population by RUCA Typology

	2009	
	Land Area	Population
Urban Core	4.76%	69.92%
Outer Urban	14.58%	11.35%
Large Rural Core	2.88%	6.26%
Outer Large Rural	9.60%	3.23%
Small Rural Core	5.82%	3.21%
Outer Small Rural	7.07%	1.66%
Isolated Rural	55.29%	4.36%
Rural Subtotal	80.65%	18.72%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2009 American Community Survey

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