

Office move pays off big for Wisconsin county veterans

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The County Veterans Service Office was, appropriately enough, the Army brat of Winnebago County, Wis.

Its office space had moved three times during Interim Director Lydia Wilz's tenure, but the latest, in 2022, seems to be the right fit. The office is now located in the county's Human Services Department building, where it is primed to

"It simplified things for the veterans, that's for sure," she said. "You don't have to worry about something happening or getting in the way when they're traveling between offices."

In addition, the opportunities and awareness of county services available to veterans and their families are that much more visible, said County Executive Jon Doemel, who prioritized the move upon taking office.

"When I got here, it almost

'This location has been the most beneficial for the veterans we serve.'

strike gold, mining the county's offerings for other benefits and programs.

"We would be able to do our job in a van down by the river if that's what it came to, but this location has been the most beneficial for the veterans we serve," she said of all the moves.

The office wasn't exactly hidden previously — it had been in the county administration building. But the new location is much closer to the services to which Wilz, who has served as benefits supervisor, would be referring veterans to anyway.

felt like a veteran service office was a separate line from everything else," he said. "For a long time, everybody thought veteran services was just 'What can I help you get from the VA (Veterans Administration)?' 'Can I help you challenge a claim?' but it wasn't so much on one of the other things that you're going through and maybe other programs with the county that we can wrap around you."

Wilz said the relocation has made it easier to ensure a "warm handoff" to human service agencies, many of which

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Eamonn Radburn of the Prince William County, Va. Fire and Rescue department, leads a group of fellow bagpipers in last year's ceremony honoring veterans at a county Veterans Day ceremony. Across the country, counties will be holding similar ceremonies to honor local veterans on Veterans Day, Nov. 11. Photo courtesy of Prince William County

Tall in the saddle: Commissioner moonlights at Saturday rodeo

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

It's a Saturday night in Salem County, N.J., which means everyone is at the Cowtown Rodeo.

"When you think about tourism and recreation in Salem

County, number one is Cowtown Rodeo, and number two is Cowtown Rodeo," said Mickey Ostrum. "This is it. This is what you do here."

Another rider gets bucked off a bull — tonight's been one of those nights — and Ostrum has the perfect song to capture the

energy in the stadium. Cheers and whoops echo throughout Cowtown as Queen blares over the loudspeakers:

"Another one bites the dust / Another one bites the dust. And another one gone, and another

See **RODEO** page 3

County's fish hatchery offers lessons for high school students

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Every day, 40 Stevens County, Wash. teenagers leave school to tend to another school.

Thanks to the county's purchase of a local fish hatchery, Colville High School offers classes in natural resource

management that teaches students math, practical skills raising and caring for fish, and offers them the chance to be a part of a coming milestone in regional wildlife.

"It was an unplanned acquisition," said Tami Mills, the fish hatchery and applied math teacher at Colville High School. "But it was one that

our community made happen."

Stevens County Commissioner Wes McCart, president of NACo's Western Interstate Region (WIR), said the state Fish and Wildlife Commission had closed the hatchery and planned to dispose of the

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Stevens County, Wash. hatchery caters to Fish and Wildlife Management students

From HATCHERY page 1

property after consolidating hatchery operations in Spokane County, but in 2013, residents recalled that the county had given the state the land 80 years prior, which gave the county the right of first refusal.

said, “but every year we make the payment in fish.” Dr. Seuss can take a break from counting fish individually — the state buys the fish by weight. At \$4 a pound, that’s 2,625 pounds to get to that \$10,500 payment — regardless of whether they’re red fish or

seniors, who take Fish and Wildlife Management, which is part of the school’s career and technical education curriculum. Part of the class is theory — conservation, ecology, biology, endangered species studies, wildlife diseases and career exploration. There’s

“It’s a little bit of an accounting nightmare,” McCart said, “but every year we make the payment in fish.”

“All we have to do is pay for major improvements, the school ends up paying the mortgage on the building,” he said. That’s where the story takes a turn. That payment isn’t made with traditional currency. It’s an in-kind payment of \$10,500. “It’s a little bit of an accounting nightmare,” McCart

blue fish. The school sells surplus fish to local landowners to stock local lakes and raise additional money, for \$5 per one-pound fish. That helps defray some of the operating expenses for the facility, which includes 19 acres. The investment is worth it for the 40 students, mostly

enough material there for two years of class, Mills said. The other part is hands-on work with the fish — feeding them, monitoring water quality and maintaining equipment, all working in groups. “I tell the students that what we do is a little unrealistic,” she said. “When you work at a hatchery, it’s usually one guy cleaning, another guy’s feeding, another guy’s welding pipe so you’re doing a lot on your own, but they learn well in groups. And they love the teamwork.”



Western Interstate Region Board of Directors Meeting attendees examine a tank of fish while touring the Colville Fish Hatchery in Stevens County, Wash. Photo by Zeke Lee

offers. “I’m a math major myself, but I know that people can just get a roadblock when you bring up numbers,” he said. “But in this class, they’re applying math in the process of doing something else. You have to count the fish, you have to weigh the fish, you calculate how much they weigh and how much food they need, but it’s all part of a process, not just abstract work.” Mills concurs. “They feel like they’re not at school,” she said. McCart also takes pride in a handful of Colville alumni who have found work in the wildlife and natural resources field, given its regional prominence. He showed off the hatchery to WIR members who were in town in October for the Board

of Directors meeting. The continued success of the hatchery is opening the doors for the students to play a part in reintroducing salmon to the Columbia River, which has been blocked to the species since the Grand Coulee Dam was built — nearly as long as the Colville Hatchery has been in operation. “I was at a meeting the other day with members of different tribes and they said they wanted to develop another hatchery to raise salmon and I asked them why not look just eight miles from the river in Colville,” he said. “They’re very interested in looking at the hatchery and exploring the idea of raising salmon there for the reintroduction,” he noted. And Colville High School students would be a part of that historic effort. **CN**

SNAP/STATS

Top Cranberry States

STATE	ANNUAL BARRELS
Wisconsin.....	4.9 million
Massachusetts	2.2 million
New Jersey.....	580,000
Oregon	560,000

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistic Services

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County commissioner splits his time between county board meetings and rodeo

From RODEO page 1

one gone / Another one bites the dust (yeah)."

Every other Wednesday at 6 p.m., Mickey Ostrum puts on his commissioner "hat," where he deals with everything in Salem County, N.J. from agriculture and public safety to education and social services. But on Saturdays at 6 p.m., he puts on his cowboy hat and gears up for Cowtown Rodeo.

Cowtown Rodeo, the longest-running weekly rodeo in the country, is the backdrop of Ostrum's life: "It's my love," he said. "I grew up right here. Actually, that's not true — nobody grows up in Cowtown," he added with a laugh.

Ostrum's father was close friends with the owner of Cowtown, and by the age of 5, Ostrum was spending his free time at the rodeo, "rolling around on the ground and playing tag." Roughhousing around the rodeo soon turned into feeding and branding the cattle and learning how to rope and ride. And in high school, vacations meant taking the rodeo on the road to Madison Square Garden and up through New England.

In the 1970s, Ostrum fell into the role of Cowtown Rodeo announcer — one he would have for roughly a decade, he said. The previous announcer "decided to move to Texas, and [the owner] thought that, I guess, I had a big mouth," he joked. Rodeo announcing has evolved a lot since Ostrum's days behind the microphone, he said.

"If you've ever seen any sports broadcast from back in the old days, it was much drier, like, 'OK, running back's got the ball, he hits the tackle, and he's down,'" Ostrum said. "Now, these guys are doing so much analysis and just putting more emotion into it. It's been a changing industry, and that has hit rodeo as well."

In July 1978, *The New York Times* published an article, "Saturday Night Is Rodeo Night - Deep in the Heart of New Jersey," about Cowtown.

"For spectators unfamiliar with the event, announcer Mickey Ostrum (a second-year resident in obstetrics in Wil-

ington who likes to say that he's delivered more calves than babies) did a lucid job of explaining the fine points," the article reads. "He also mentioned that the riders' spurs are not pointed, and that the leather flank straps used to make the animals kick higher are wool-padded and cause annoyance but not pain."

Ostrum was an announcer at Cowtown throughout his medical residency and during his early years as an obstetrician, but stepped back when things picked up at his practice, he said. However, he never left Cowtown, spending his free time working livestock and helping out around the arena. And he raised his son Jake around the rodeo, just as he had been. Now, Jake is Cowtown's musical director and Ostrum takes over several times a season.

"When he's out West, I'm spinning tunes at the rodeo," Ostrum said. "But I always laugh, I call myself the 'Chief Medical Officer of Cowtown Rodeo.'" The father-son duo

have different styles when it comes to rodeo music, Ostrum said. "Although, he certainly got a lot of his musical taste from me," he adds.

The elder Ostrum gravitates toward classic rock and country — the kinds of songs he would hear playing at the rodeo back when it had a live band, he said.

"And I do some sing-alongs — everybody knows 'Don't Stop Believin,' 'Sweet Caroline,' 'Friends in Low Places,'" Ostrum said. "When action drags a little bit, you come up with a sing-along to bring the crowd back into it. And I try to find something that is applicable to what's going on in the rodeos, sometimes you get a chuckle out of that."

Tom Petty's "Free Fallin'" is a crowd favorite after a rider's been bucked off, along with "Another One Bites the Dust,"



Mickey Ostrum (left) pauses with Marvin Blanton, current rodeo announcer, for a photo.

Ostrum said. Rodeo competitions have, on the whole, become much more of a production than they were when Ostrum was growing up. Rodeos are on streaming services and network television, and people tune in to be entertained, he said.

The crowd is there to have a good time, Ostrum said. "If there happens to be a good rodeo, that's a plus, but they're just there to listen to music and dance and rock and roll in the stand. And the announcer gauges that and encourages it — it's much more proactive than it used to be."

While rodeo has become more readily available to the mainstream in recent years, Cowtown has been airing its competitions on network television since the weekly rodeo

started in 1955, which Ostrum attributes to some of its longevity.

"In '55, going on network TV, it was very avant-garde," Ostrum said. "The rest of the rodeo establishment was [saying], 'Why are you giving it away when you want to sell tickets?' But obviously they were very short-sighted."

Today, Cowtown's doing better than ever. Coming out of the pandemic, ticket sales in summer 2021 were 50% higher than they had ever been. Long-time lovers of Cowtown were eager to return, and it attracted a whole new group of people who had never been to a rodeo before.

"It's been embraced," Ostrum said. "The crowds are better than they've ever been, I think in part due to Covid, because it's an outdoor venue and people discovered it and fell in love with it and keep coming."

Ostrum's 2-year-old grandson recently got on a horse for the first time, and the family's ties to Cowtown now go back four generations. While many things change, it's nice that the slow pace of life in Salem County (the least populous county in New Jersey) and Cowtown Rodeo have largely stayed the same, Ostrum said.

"We're blessed to live in an area that, in many ways, hasn't changed for the 60 years that I've lived here," Ostrum said. "The pastures are still open, and as long as I don't look in certain directions, it looks exactly like it did when I was a kid, and that's a good thing."

Ostrum splits his time now between Cowtown and county board meetings, but he'll never give up the rodeo.

"It's my roots," he said. As a Salem County commissioner, Ostrum said he doesn't see himself as a politician, but as someone who's trying to do the best for all of his neighbors. He brings the work ethic and honesty that is "central" to rodeo and cattle wrangling into his public service, he said.

"I'm learning a lot and it's stimulating," Ostrum said. "You know, the worst thing you can do is ride off into the sunset, fall asleep and fall off of your horse." **CN**



Salem County, N.J. Commissioner Mickey Ostrum helps out at Cowtown Rodeo. Photo courtesy of Mickey Ostrum

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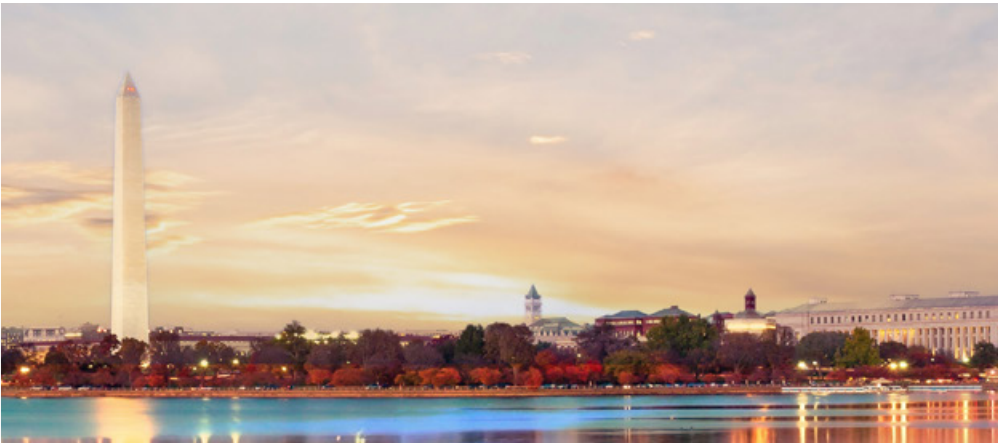
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Spotlight on NACo High Performance Leadership Academy

The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy empowers frontline county government professionals with fundamental, practical leadership skills to deliver results for counties and residents. Graduates of the NACo Leadership Academy join a distinguished network of alumni, united by their shared commitment to excellence in leadership. As alumni, they continue to grow, collaborate and lead with the knowledge and skills gained from the academy, making an impact across industries. This article showcases a recent graduate of the NACo Leadership Academy, showcasing their county and key takeaways from the program.



Sharmane Anderson
Executive Director
Clarendon County, S.C.
Voter Registration
 NACo High Performance Leadership Academy Graduate

- **Number of years in your role:** One
- **Don't miss this in my county:** Santee Lakes and the City of Manning Downtown area.
- **My biggest challenge:** The lack of transportation in rural areas.
- **My motivation for signing up for the NACo Leadership Academy:** Additions to my toolbox and learning how to become an effective leader.
- **My favorite part of the NACo Leadership Academy:** My favorite part

was connecting with colleagues across the country who experienced some of the same challenges our county faces.

- **My favorite leadership rule of the NACo Leadership Academy:** Don't allow your ego to become tied to your position.
- **My leadership oath:** Serve first. Evaluate all positions before making a decision. Bring your weather.

- **In my spare time I:** Travel a lot!
- **I'm most looking forward to:** Creating new experiences and goals that will stretch my leadership capabilities

Enrollment is now open for the new year in our January 2025 Cohorts. Learn more at NACo.org/skills or email Luke Afeman at lukea@pdaleadership.com.



BEHIND THE SEAL

WARE COUNTY, GA.

The middle of the seal is the shape of the county, which is the largest county in Georgia. There are four images surrounding the shape of the county. The four industries represented are:

Timber: Ware County is one of the top five timber-producing counties in the state of Georgia which happens to be the top timber-producing state in the United States.



Agriculture: Today's top crops are blueberries, cotton and peanuts. In the seal, they are tobacco, cotton and corn.

Manufacturing and Construction: Mobile homes, boats, food processing and vendor trailers (food trucks).

Railroad: CSX Transportation put the Waycross Rice Yard at the of its list of 10 largest terminals and yards based on annual volume.

County Clerk Melinda Brooks interpreted the seal.

Would you like to see your county seal featured in County News? Please contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.

Locating veterans office in human services dept. sees benefits

From **VETERANS** page 1

offer same-day service.

"We don't have to leave the building to make sure someone can get help with their Medicare or Medicaid services," she said.

"We know for a fact that not only are they getting seen by somebody, but that they're in the right location and they're talking to a human. They're not getting lost in a telephone menu."

One easy opportunity to pair services comes from locating the veterans service office across the hall from the county's Aging and Disability Resource Center, which offers programming that applies to many of the county's aging veterans and their spouses.

Doemel's goal is for veteran service officers who are experts in VA benefits to grow their expertise to cover ancillary pro-



grams that could apply to different veterans.

One example: When a veteran in his 70s who was facing early-onset dementia came to the CVSO, the staff was able to get \$50,000 in back pay for him and \$4,700 a month in perpetuity, with a survivor's benefit for his wife.

Doemel's response?

"Give me a call back when you're finished," he said.

"Have you called our health-care facility yet and locked down a bed for him? Someday, his dementia is going to get to the point where his wife can't manage it and he should be in a local facility so she doesn't have to drive too far to visit him." **CN**

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How counties can promote civic engagement

by Julia Haskins

When people contribute to the safety, well-being and resilience of their communities, they are participating in something bigger than themselves — they are working toward a society that reflects their goals and values. Civic engagement — the actions carried out by residents to improve the quality of life in their communities — shapes health outcomes. Civically engaged community members enjoy boosts to their mental wellness and greater social connectedness among other benefits.

County officials have deep ties across their communities, making them integral in setting the tone for civic engagement. Their influence goes a long way in promoting stronger, healthier communities, during election cycles and beyond.

Voting is a matter of health

Voting is one of the most powerful forms of civic engagement to drive community health improvements. Voting puts critical policy decisions in the hands of people who are most affected by these choices, many of which have implications for public health. For example, a jurisdiction may vote on whether to implement policies for complete streets or healthy rental housing. These policies can impact generations of residents.

As the Health & Democracy Index shows, greater voting access and civic participation corresponds with better health outcomes. County officials can support residents in making their voices heard, considering how longstanding inequities have affected voting patterns. Decades of racist policies have barred many people of color and other historically



marginalized groups from full participation in voting. Collaborating with non-partisan entities like health departments and community-based organizations serving underrepresented groups gives county officials insight into why voting access, education

‘Consider ways to meaningfully involve residents in decision-making such as holding regular forums...’

or enthusiasm may be lacking among certain communities.

Conversations around voting can be especially fraught in presidential election cycles, pitting red versus blue voters. But research shows that concerns about many public

health issues, from mental health to COVID safety are shared by people across the political spectrum. County officials can help to steer conversations away from partisan divides to focus on joining people of all backgrounds. Rallying around improvements to community health is a unifying goal, regardless of political party affiliation.

The National League of Cities’ Cities Vote initiative offers resources including a list of interventions for voter turnout. Some recommendations from this list: deputize trusted local messengers, remove barriers to transportation and pursue innovative partnerships.

Civic engagement takes many forms

As important as voting is to a fair and free democracy, it is far from the only way for residents to be civically engaged. County leaders can use their platforms to spread aware-

ness of various opportunities for civic engagement and give residents a more active role in advancing community health.

Encourage connection in third places. Beyond their workplaces and homes, people yearn for the connectedness that third places foster. Recreation centers, places of worship, coffee shops and gyms are just a few examples of third places where people can forge social connections. Use channels such as official county social media and newsletters to point residents to local third places and the activities and events they offer. When amplifying third places, highlight virtual means of social connection such as Facebook or NextDoor communities as well.

Promote opportunities for volunteering. There is no shortage of ways for people to get involved in their communities. While many people are probably familiar with

volunteering at a food bank or homeless shelter, other non-profits like schools, health departments, and libraries often need helping hands as well. (These organizations are often part of voting efforts during national and local election cycles.) For residents exploring their options, VolunteerMatch compiles local volunteer opportunities based on their interests and skill sets. Advise local organizations to make their volunteer opportunities publicly available on VolunteerMatch or other channels such as a county listserv.

Bring residents into decision-making. For residents to be motivated to engage with their communities, they need to know that their leaders have their best interests in mind and are actively working to address problems. Creating this trust starts with increased transparency into government functions. Consider ways to meaningfully involve residents in decision making, such as holding regular forums, establishing a citizens’ advisory board, or inviting public comments on initiatives with implications for community well-being. Be receptive to and act on feedback.

Civic engagement is often framed in terms of one-time participation: casting a vote for president every four years, donating to a food bank during the holidays, or picking up trash on the street. But being civically engaged is an ongoing commitment to one’s community grounded in a desire to serve a greater purpose. County leaders have an important role in facilitating acts of civic engagement, helping residents create communities that promote and protect health for all.

Haskins is a senior editorial associate with the de Beaumont Foundation.



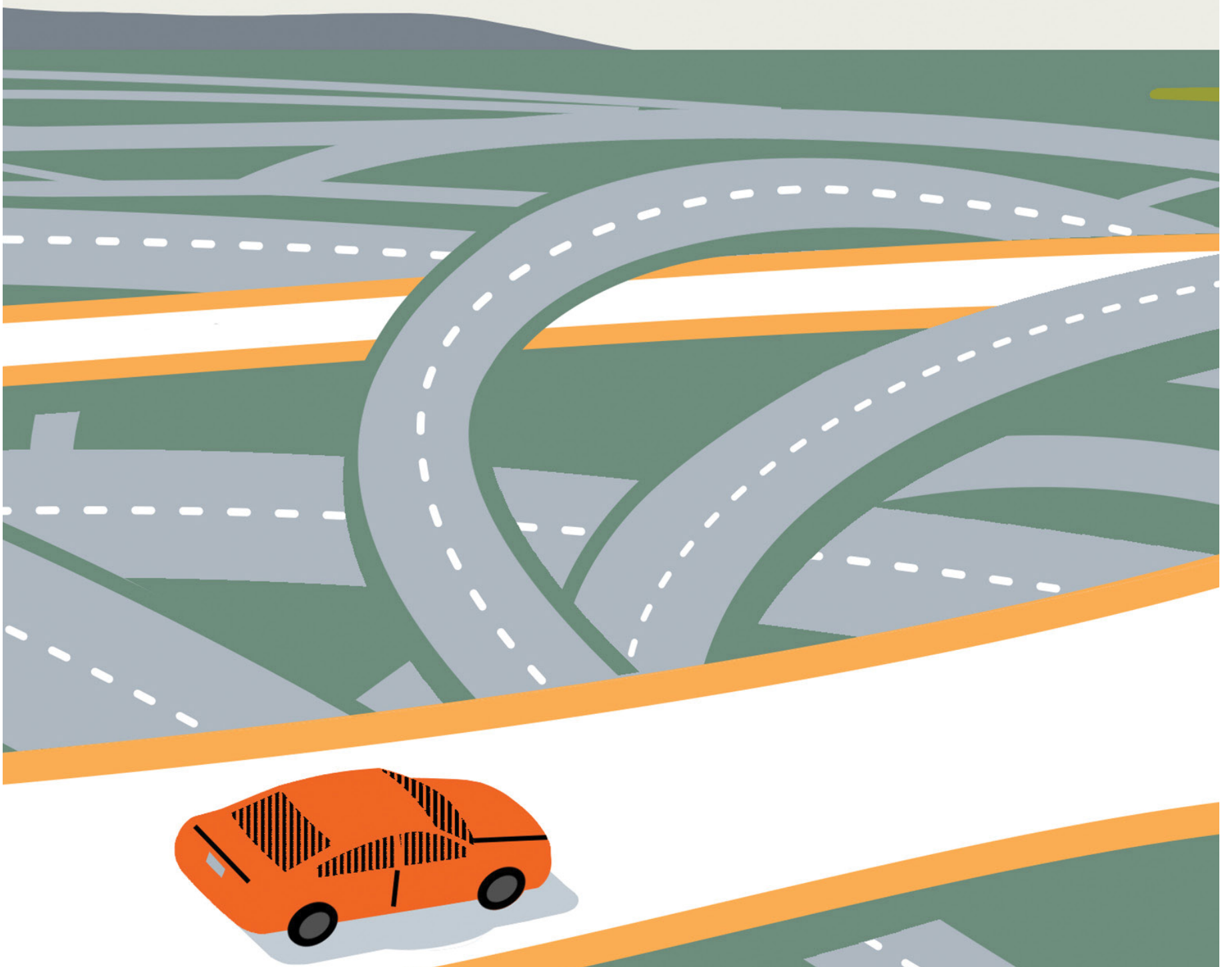
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THE COUNTY ROADMAP:

Challenges and opportunities
in infrastructure



HEAVIER TRUCK PROPOSALS IN CONGRESS THREATEN COUNTY BRIDGES



Industrial carriers blue and white big rig semi-truck tractors transporting cargo on dry van semi-trailers running on the truss metal arch I-5 Interstate Bridge between Washington and Oregon across the Columbia River.

by Matthew Muir
director of policy and technology,
Coalition Against Bigger Trucks

As Congress considers proposals to allow heavier semi-trucks on U.S. highways, county officials across the country should be sounding the alarm.

The potential consequences for local infrastructure, particularly bridges, are staggering. A recent study, *The Impacts of Heavier Trucks on Local Bridges*, (conducted by NACo and the National Association of County Engineers, with the input of numerous county highway officials), underscores the risks to infrastructure across the country should Congress green light heavier trucks. The upcoming highway reauthorization process promises to bring this issue to a head, and the stakes could not be higher for county officials.

At the heart of this debate is a proposal to increase the maximum allowable truck weight to 91,000 pounds. The current limit is 80,000 pounds.

Congress has already taken steps toward making this change a reality. Last year, H.R. 3372, a bill proposing a pilot project to allow 91,000-pound trucks on U.S. highways, was passed out of the House Transportation and Infrastructure

Committee, with attempts to bring it to the House floor for a vote.

While this pilot project allows any state to increase weights for a period of up to 10 years, it is just the beginning of an unfunded federal mandate for localities as roads and bridges face costly damage due to the added weight. As trucks do not load and unload on interstates, these heavier trucks will find their way onto local roads and bridges across the country.

According to the study, which examined local bridges off the National Highway System, a staggering

72,240 bridges would be put at risk by these heavier trucks. The cost to replace those bridges is estimated to be \$60.8 billion. For counties specifically, the financial burden is overwhelming. Of the total bridges at risk, 40,907 are owned by county governments. The study estimates that replacing these county-owned bridges would cost \$20 billion—a monumental price tag for county governments already struggling to maintain existing infrastructure.

County budgets are tight, and asking local taxpayers to foot such an enormous bill is both unrealistic and unfair.

Counties are already overburdened with the responsibility of maintaining America's bridges. Despite owning 36%

Heavier trucks would harm county-owned infrastructure.



of all bridges nationwide, counties oversee 51% of the bridges rated in poor condition. This overrepresentation underscores a critical point: Counties have struggled for years with underfunding from the federal government and growing maintenance backlogs. Now, with the potential of heavier trucks on the horizon, those challenges could quickly become insurmountable.

The data makes one thing clear: Heavier trucks would disproportionately harm county-owned infrastructure. As bridges deteriorate under the strain of increasing truck weights, local officials would be forced to make difficult choices — whether to raise taxes, cut services or simply close failing bridges.

None of these options are acceptable for the millions of Americans who rely on safe, functional roads and bridges for their daily commutes, commerce and emergency services.

For rural communities, particularly in areas with large rivers, the closure of even a single bridge can have a devastating ripple effect. Farmers, small businesses and emergency responders all depend on safe and accessible transpor-

tation networks. Forcing rural counties to close critical infrastructure due to unsafe bridges would be a step backward for these already vulnerable areas.

County officials cannot afford to sit on the sidelines as this debate unfolds. The time to speak out is now, before decisions are made that could irreparably damage local infrastructure and finances.

If you are concerned about the impact of heavier trucks on your community's infrastructure, now is the time to act. Please reach out to me at mmuir@cabt.org. My organization, Coalition Against Bigger Trucks, can equip you with talking points that convey key messages and data demonstrating that bigger trucks have no place on our roads. We can also provide you with contact information for your legislators in Washington, D.C.

The future of America's roads and bridges depends on county officials and concerned citizens raising their voices before it's too late. Let's ensure that our local infrastructure is preserved, not crushed under the weight of heavier trucks. ■



Muir is director of Policy and Technology for the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks. Scan the QR code to read *The Impacts of Heavier Trucks on Local Bridges*.

Building Bridges (Literally) and Empowering Communities Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

by Eileen Higgins

Miami-Dade County, Fla. commissioner

As we approach the third anniversary of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Nov. 15, as enacted in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, we are reminded of the transformative power that smart, targeted investments in infrastructure can have on our communities.

This legislation has addressed long-neglected needs and opened the door to new opportunities for counties across the nation. From enhancing public transit systems to repairing aging roads and bridges, the BIL has empowered counties to invest in infrastructure that connects people to jobs, healthcare, and education — improving their quality of life in tangible ways.

Serving as chair of NACo's Transportation Steering Committee and a frequent transit rider myself, I've had the privilege of witnessing the real-life impact this historic investment has made. Counties, many of which have struggled with underfunded and outdated systems, now have

access to the resources they need to build sustainable, efficient transportation networks. These improvements don't just make our commutes easier; they make our communities more resilient, more equitable and better positioned for future growth.

At its core, transportation infrastructure is about more than roads, bridges or transit lines — it's about people. It affects how Americans access essential services like education and healthcare, and it connects them to better-paying jobs. Reliable, modern infrastructure empowers individuals, strengthens local economies and creates pathways for upward mobility.

But for too long, this critical infrastructure has been underfunded, leaving many counties with the challenge of maintaining aging systems that no longer meet the demands of today's population and needs. NACo has been instrumental in ensuring counties

have access to these funds and are using them wisely — whether by expanding bus systems, upgrading highways and roads, modernizing air and seaports or enhancing mass rapid transit networks.

One of the clearest examples of this impact is in public transit. It offers a path forward by not only relieving one of the most significant expenses facing American families — owning and maintaining a car — but also addressing the growing stress of time-consuming, traffic-heavy

commutes. Between gas, repairs, insurance and tolls, car ownership can be a major financial burden for many families. That's why car ownership is

out of reach for many families. That's true in both rural and urban counties. Public transit systems help alleviate this burden while offering a more sustainable and efficient alternative to individual car travel. Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, counties are now better equipped to upgrade and expand public transportation across America. From rural bus service to regional rail to subway extensions, more people will now have access to economic opportunity.

However, transportation infrastructure doesn't stand in isolation — it's inextricably linked to housing affordability, another pressing issue facing communities nationwide. There is a growing recognition that affordable housing is a critical need in every community, and the crisis is no longer confined to high-cost urban areas — it's truly a national challenge.


NACo has been at the forefront of these discussions through its Housing Stability Task Force. Under the leadership of

co-chairs, Commissioner Kevin Boyce of Franklin County, Ohio and Commissioner Sherry Maupin, Valley County, Idaho, the Task Force has been instrumental in making recommendations for implementable local solutions to the housing crisis.

One solution lies in transit-oriented development, which offers a win-win opportunity for counties. By developing affordable housing near transit hubs, we can ensure that residents — especially low- and middle-income families — have access to reliable and efficient transportation options. This reduces housing costs while promoting economic mobility and improving the overall quality of life for our communities. Transit-oriented development represents an innovative approach to addressing the two largest expenses families face each month — housing and transportation.

As we look ahead, it's clear that investing in infrastructure must remain a priority. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided a historic level of funding for bridges, highways, transit, airports, seaports, rail and safety.

Counties across America are constructing and cutting ribbons on tens of thousands of projects funded by the legislation, but their infrastructure to-do lists continue to be long. The BIL provided a much-needed boost to accelerate the maintenance and construction of the infrastructure America needs to be competitive, but the work is far from finished and the funding gaps remain large.

NACo must continue to advocate for sustainable funding solutions that ensure critical long-term infrastructure investments, especially for county-maintained systems. The many members of NACo's Transportation Steering Committee are committed to doing just that so that all Americans, regardless of where they live, have access to the transportation infrastructure they need to thrive. At NACo, we will continue to advocate for increased investment in infrastructure. 

Higgins is chair of the NACo Transportation Policy Steering Committee.



Eileen Higgins

HOT topics

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COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENTS: ENDURING THE TRIALS OF ADDING BIKE, HIKE TRAILS

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Trail systems routinely rank as one of the top amenities in surveys about the quality of life in different communities, but while they may seem a world apart from the congested roadways and for all their bucolic tranquility, trails are anything but simple.

Rush hour on the roads? Some cyclists pedal furiously to make it home before the trail closes at sunset. Road rage between drivers of a sedan and an SUV? Imagine a walker passing too close to an electric bike cyclist, particularly if that walker is listening to headphones and has no idea anyone is approaching. Even the development of trail systems is complicated by trying to fit them into an existing built environment.

Trail traffic patterns have recently changed. Jonathan Vlaming, associate superintendent for the Three Rivers Park District, a special taxing district in Hennepin County, Minn., noticed it after the pandemic reshuffled work locations for many residents. Vlaming is a member of the NACo and National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officers (NACPRO) boards of directors.

“The actual trips for transportation purposes on our trail networks have decreased in length,” he said. “People aren’t biking downtown as much anymore, however, they’re still biking and they’re still using the trails for transportation purposes. It’s just that now, if they’re working from home, they’re going out to lunch, they’re biking to a park, they are biking to friends’ houses. All the other aspects of transportation other than commuting have seen significant jumps.”

In 2004, the district’s studies showed that 5% of trail use was for transportation purposes, a number that has increased to 33% in recent years.

“We also found out that people are willing to take a longer more circuitous route if it’s pleasant,” Vlaming said. “It’s not just about getting from point A to point B. It’s the journey in between A and B, they want to hit up population centers, they want to hit up retail service centers, government centers, amenities, parks and pubs.”

One challenge inherent in trail networks is the patchwork of localities which they cross, particularly because those trails include paths separate from roadways, side paths, sidewalks, bike



Cyclists use a trail in East Baton Rouge Parish, La. Photo courtesy of Recreation and Parks Commission for East Baton Rouge Parish

lanes and shared road lanes. Because most trails are located on parkland, they fall under the jurisdiction of park districts or like Vlaming’s organization, a special taxing district. That organization limits the sharing of equipment and expertise that is typically the realm of county public works departments.

Recognizing the high use of trails in a very dense urban county, Arlington

County, Va.’s Parks and Recreation Department purchased snow removal equipment and sends three-person crews out to clear trails simultaneously with the county’s public works department getting to work on main roads.

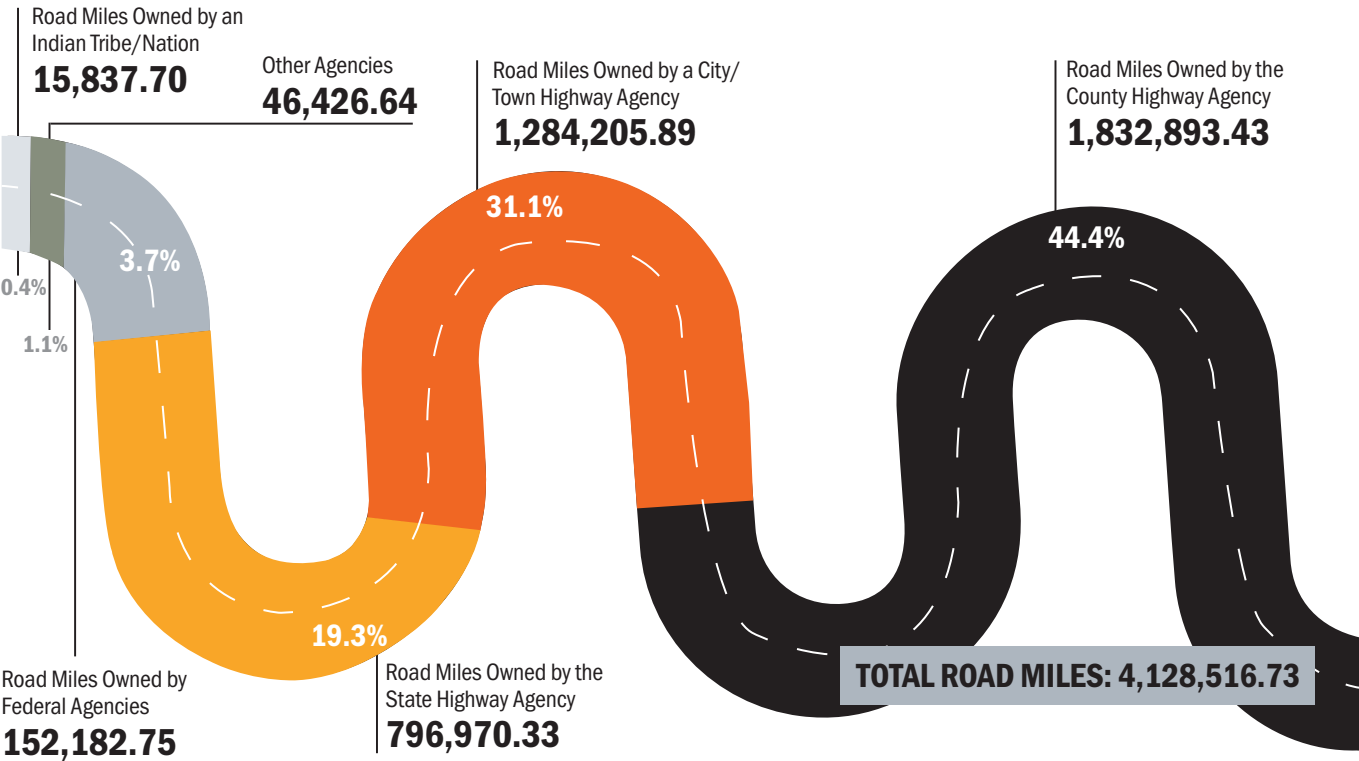
Nearly half of the trails in Lake County, Ill. are located in the county’s Forest Preserve, which grew in parallel with the county, so most residential areas are

well connected. Those trails, however, are closed to the public after dark because they lack lighting.

“We don’t have the resources to have lighted trails throughout our entire system and of course, lighted trails are not that great for wildlife,” said Rebekah Snyder, director of Community Engage-

See TRAILS pg H5

County Roadway Statistics



From TRAILS pg H4

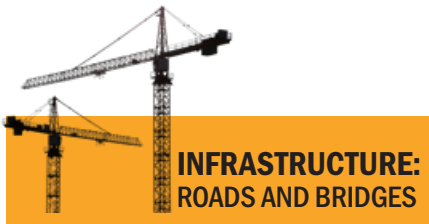
ment and Partnerships for the forest preserve.

The accelerating adoption of electric and motor-aided bicycles has added a wrinkle to regulations guiding trail use. The addition or clarification of speed limits on trails regarding e-bikes opens up the question of enforcement and highlights the potential for conflict with non-e-bike users. King County, Wash. recently allowed e-bikes and scooters on its trails, joining several other counties.

“I know that regulating e-bike use has been kind of a headache, but in the end, it’s expanding the number of people who are on the trails, which means reducing the people on the roads, which in the end, makes people pretty happy,” Vlaming said.

Trails as an afterthought

After several pedestrian and cyclist deaths, the Federal Highway Administration identified Baton Rouge, La. as a “focus city.” In the 2000s, East Baton Rouge Parish began developing a bike and pedestrian master plan, led by the Recreation and Parks Commission for East Baton Rouge Parish, where Reed Richard is assistant superintendent for system planning.



“We don’t have any defunct railroads, so we’ve had to concentrate our trails on drainage easements and creeks,” he said.

It’s a compromise to the heavy auto-oriented development that led the way through the second half of the 20th century, which has resulted in unconnected subdivisions.

“It’s incremental progress, very slow,” he said.

The trail plan had a breakthrough when a housing developer signed on for easements that will allow for several miles of trail construction.

Richard lamented that movement toward trail adoption has run into entrenched attitudes of residents who don’t see a need for them.

“We don’t have a lot of infusion of people coming in long term, like North Carolina or Florida,” he said. “You have

‘It’s not about just getting from point A to point B. It’s the journey between A and B.’

people who are just stuck in their old ways, whereas if we had people moving here to work for a Fortune 500 company, they’d probably add some new opinions and build political momentum for change.”

Instead, as home to Louisiana State University, among other colleges, East Baton Rouge Parish’s newcomers are generally four-year rentals who would benefit from the trails but don’t have the political will to fight for them.

The next realistic target for Richard will be to attain some north-south trail that connects a loop near several hospitals to the northern part of the parish. Like anything, it will require compromise.

“Some of that will be on the road, but that’s what you have to do sometimes,” he said. “You can do that the right way, with wayfinding and going on streets that have the right speed limit or lend themselves to maybe a road diet (of design to reduce driving speeds) or if nothing else, just sharrow markers (alerting drivers to look out for cyclists) but again, that also requires that cultural shift,” for drivers to recognize the need to share the road.”

HEAVY TRUCKS CAUSE HEAVY CONCERNS FOR COUNTIES

by Charlie Ban senior writer

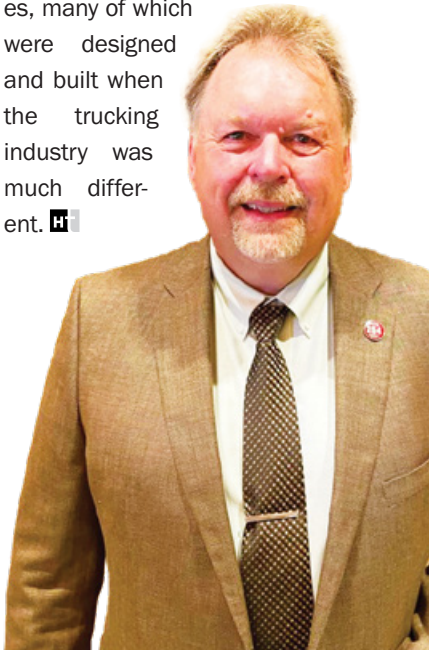
With a road network that brings trucks carrying nearly 80,000 pounds of gravel and sand through downtown Cleburne, Texas, Johnson County roads and bridges are feeling the impact of heavy trucks on a daily basis.

Johnson County Commissioner Rick Bailey spent 35 years in the trucking industry prior to running for office, and he offers two perspectives on the issue backed by his experience, but there’s no reason to save the surprise — he doesn’t approve of proposals to increase the weight limit on trucks.

“It’s such an inconvenience to the driving public who live down these roads because now they have to find an alternate road to get home,” not to mention access for emergency responders who need access to bridges that have been taken out of commission due to safety concerns.

That wear and tear, along with a confluence of market forces and inflation, makes managing the budget for his precinct’s roads and bridges a considerable challenge.

Listen as he tells the County News Podcast all about the issues surrounding heavy truck proposals and what they would mean for county roads and bridges, many of which were designed and built when the trucking industry was much different.



Johnson County, Texas Commissioner Rick Bailey

FUNDING RESOURCES FOR BUILDING ROADS, BRIDGES



USDOT

Counties can apply for competitive grants through the Multimodal Project

Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG), which includes the Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program, Mega grants and INFRA grants. In FY 2025 and FY 2026, counties are eligible for \$5.2 billion in competitive transportation grants. <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/mpdg-program>



Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)

This discretionary program is funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and provides grants to local, regional, and Tribal initiatives to prevent serious injuries and roadway deaths. <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/SS4A>



Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

This reimbursable federal aid program

supports non-traditional transportation-related community projects. Projects are selected based on a competitive process that considers the project’s expected benefits, feasibility, and consistency with agency plans. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap>

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

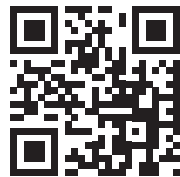
Provides funding, technical assistance, and other resources to local, Tribal, and State agencies for the construction, maintenance, and preservation of bridges, highways, and tunnels. The FHWA also offers the Bridge Investment Program (BIP). <https://highways.dot.gov/>

FHWA Rural Programs

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) supports rural communities with the construction, maintenance, and preservation of highways, bridges, and tunnels. FHWA offers funding, technical assistance, and other resources to State, Tribal, and local agencies to advance safe, efficient, and reliable transportation on all rural roads. [https://highways.dot.gov/rural#:~:text=The%20Federal%20Highway%20Administration%20\(FHWA,freight%2C%20and%20infrastructure%20asset%20decisions](https://highways.dot.gov/rural#:~:text=The%20Federal%20Highway%20Administration%20(FHWA,freight%2C%20and%20infrastructure%20asset%20decisions)

Bridge Improvement Program

The Bridge Improvement Program provides funding for bridge replacement, rehabilitation, preservation, and protection projects that reduce the number of bridges in poor condition, or in fair condition at risk of declining into poor condition. <https://www.transportation.gov/rural/grant-toolkit/bridge-investment-program#:~:text=>



You can listen at www.naco.org/podcast or by scanning the QR code.



NUMBER OF BRIDGES	SHARE OF COUNTY-OWNED BRIDGES	SHARE OF STRUCTURALLY DEFICIENT BRIDGES	SHARE OF OFF-SYSTEM BRIDGES
609,737	38%	7%	46%

STRUCTURALLY DEFICIENT BRIDGES

A bridge is classified as structurally deficient if the deck, culverts, superstructure or substructure are rated in poor or worse condition.

40,904

Share of County Owned	52.3%
Share of City/Town Owned	14.1%
Share of Other Locally Owned	0.3%
Total Locally Owned	66.7%

OFF-SYSTEM BRIDGES

Off-system bridges are located on a public road that is not part of the federal-aid highway system.

280,645

Share of County Owned	61.4%
Share of City/Town Owned	17.6%
Share of Other Locally Owned	0.5%
Total Locally Owned	79.5%

Source: NACo Analysis of the U.S. Department of Transportation — Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) — 2024 [National Bridge Inventory](#) Data.

Notes
Structurally Deficient (SD): This term was previously defined in www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/0650dsup.cfm as having a condition rating of 4 or less for Item 58 (Deck), Item 59 (Superstructure), Item 60 (Substructure), or Item 62 (Culvert), OR having an appraisal rating of 2 or less for Item 67 (Structural Condition) or Item 71 (Waterway Adequacy). Effective Jan. 1, 2018, FHWA changed the definition of structurally deficient bridges. This term will be defined in accordance with the [Pavement and Bridge Condition Performance Measures final rule](#), published in January of 2017, as a classification given to a bridge which has any component elements — the deck, superstructure, substructure or culverts — rated in poor or worse condition [a rating code of 4 or less].

Good (G), Fair(F), Poor(P): Bridge Condition is determined by the lowest rating of National Bridge Inventory (NBI) condition ratings for Item 58 (Deck), Item 59 (Superstructure), Item 60 (Substructure), or Item 62 (Culvert). If the lowest rating is greater than or equal to 7, the bridge is classified as Good; if it is less than or equal to 4, the classification is Poor. Bridges rated 5 or 6 are classified as Fair.

Safety improvements on the way for rural roadways thanks to new program

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

The Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program, established through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is distributing \$5 billion over a five-year period to over 1,400 communities across the country, funding planning, infrastructure, technology and data-monitoring and evaluation projects to make America's roadways safer. The same year the law was passed, roadway deaths reached a 16-year high nationally — an estimated 42,915 people died in motor vehicle crashes in 2021.

Despite only around 20% of the U.S. population living in rural areas, approximately 40% of all roadway deaths in the country occur on rural roads, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Nearly half of the communities receiving funding through SS4A are in rural areas, and 43% have populations under 50,000.

Rural Iowa roads not all 'flat and corn fields'

Fayette County, Iowa, which is home to fewer than 20,000 people, will be one of the first SS4A communities to begin the letting process, which is when a road construction project is put out for bids to be completed by a contractor. The first phase of the project will happen in February and construction will begin in 2025, according to Joel Fantz, Fayette County's engineer.

Nearly 60% of road fatalities and serious injuries in Fayette County are due to lane departure crashes. The safety improvements made possible through SS4A will include shoulder widening and installing rumble strips (which alert drivers when they leave their lane).

"People think of Iowa as all flat and corn fields," Fantz said. "We've got the corn fields, but we've also got limestone bluffs, deep valleys and trout streams up in this corner of Iowa that's called the Driftless bridge. So, running off the road, or lane departures, on these curvy roads, or edge line riding, where people drop a tire off the road — those things have serious consequences, so we expect to have a lot of lives saved over the course of these safety countermeasures."

Mountain roads in Alabama

In Jackson County, Ala., roughly 78% of fatal and serious injury crashes take place on rural roads. Receiving SS4A funding is a game-changer for the county, which otherwise can't afford to adequately maintain and improve its roadway system, according to Garon Machen, Jackson County Public Works' assistant county engineer. According to the Department of Transportation, 68% of the SS4A funding is going to underserved communities, like Jackson County.

"Our budget is pretty much 'ate up' with just our maintenance activities," Machen said. "So, these safety improvements that we're doing with this grant, there's really no other way for us

to be able to do them, unless we were to get an opportunity like this."

Safety countermeasures — which will include creating a paved two-foot shoulder with a sloped pavement edge, widening mountain roads and extending culverts beyond the clear zone (which moves them further away from the edge of the roadway) — will be implemented at nine rural roadway segments that a

county study found had the highest instances of roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

"We're in the southern portion of Appalachia here in Jackson County, so those roads include mountain roads and very rural areas across the county," said Jackson County Chair Bill Nance. "We have one of the largest counties in the state of Alabama, so every district is getting the benefit of what we're going to be able to do with these roads over the next five years."

'Everyone deserves a right to a safe roadway'

The county solicited community input, which helped inform its safety action plan, along with data analysis.

"With 1,100 miles of roads and our ability to service those roads, it takes us a number of years to get around to it," Nance said.

"Well, that means that in many cases, our roads are deteriorating faster than we can get to them, so our residents across the county let us know areas where there were roads that needed to

be repaired and let us know their concerns about certain roads, with curves or steep slopes or where the right of

ways did not have good viewing."

Jackson County received nearly \$16 million through SS4A, and is devoting an additional \$4 million in state and federal aid exchange fund dollars it received through the Rebuild Alabama Act, which provides funding to the state's counties to rebuild road infrastructure, to the projects, according to Nance.

"Jackson County, we're a really poor area, but we feel that everyone deserves a right to a safe roadway, regardless of income," Machen said. "And the routes that were selected are high priority roadways for us and the people here, as far as their commute to work, so this will carry a lot of our rural workers into our cities for them to be able to get to and from work."



To find out more about the Safe Streets and Roads for All program, scan the QR code.





STOP SIGN IMPROVEMENT ILLUMINATES SAFETY HAZARDS IN RURAL COUNTY

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

After enough repeated trips, some details can fade back into the scenery for drivers.

Sometimes it's a once-noteworthy tree, or maybe it's a house where a friend's grandparents lived years ago. Unfortunately, some of those things that fade from a driver's attention are stop signs.

So the Saline County, Kan. road and bridge crew made it hard to miss them. They picked out one particularly troublesome intersection and replaced the stop sign with a larger model and outfitted the post with reflective tape that will catch approaching headlights.

"Then one of my employees came up to me and said, 'Why don't we do that at all the intersections?'" said Darren Fischel, the county's road and

bridge supervisor. "And we should treat the 'stop ahead' signs where there's no line of sight to the stop sign.

"You think of Kansas as pretty flat until you visit, but there are a lot of hills near intersections."

Those 246 new stop signs are 36 inches, an increase over the previous 30-inch signs, and the reflective tape along the post is 48 inches long. The "stop ahead" signs get yellow reflective tape. Very few Saline County roads are lit, so headlights are doing most of the work with regard to visibility.

"It's hard to miss when you're driving at night," Fischel said. "The whole thing lights up."

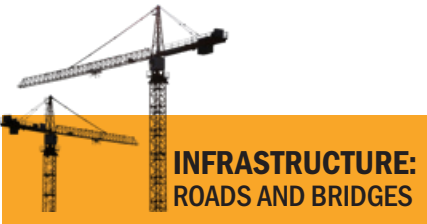
The rural county of 55,000 has a road network of 1,080 miles of road, 195 miles of which are earthen and 700 miles are gravel. Each type of road presents a different safety challenge.

"The paved roads, that's where people can drive at a higher rate of speed, so we concentrated the large stop signs at those intersections," he said. "We added a second stop sign at one intersection to make sure nobody missed it."

The reflective tape is attached to every sign post—the crew is 80% through installation, with more than 325 posts outfitted with tape. Adding tape to the posts costs \$11 each and per sign, and replacing the stop signs costs \$72 per sign. Fischel said it's a bargain compared to the safety it enhances.

He takes pride in the idea coming from inside his building, from his staff.

"Innovation happens every day, you just have to recognize it," he said. "Safety for the traveling public and safety for employees is really the important thing for us."



In the 12 months before the new program was implemented, Saline County experienced 11 crashes at major intersections. In the 12 months following the new signs' installation, the county recorded seven crashes at the same intersections.

Safety has changed with the roads, Fischel notes.

"Our roads weren't designed for modern day 40-, 50-, 60-mile-per-hour traffic, but you could pull a horse and buggy over pretty quickly," he said. **ti**

Saline County's Stop Sign & Advanced Warning Enhancement won a 2024 NACo Achievement Award in the Transportation category and was a 2023 honorable mention in the Federal Highway Administration's "Build a Better Mousetrap" national recognition program for transportation innovation.



NOW I KNOW

...You Can't Rehearse Everything

by Gunnar Malm
Laramie County, Wyo.
commissioner

I thought I knew exactly what I was getting into when I joined the Laramie County Board of Commissioners, because I watched four years of meetings when I was starting my campaign.

The commission records their meetings, so every night, I'd watch one. I wanted to get an idea of the breadth of issues the commissioners could face so I would be ready if I were elected. Much to my wife's dismay, I'd watch 2-3 hours a night.

I saw how our development process works, our land use policies. I learned about all kinds of interesting issues around fireworks, malt beverage permits, motorcycle gangs. I saw how the work was done and what people expected from their commission.

I met with anybody who



Laramie County, Wyo. Commissioner Gunnar Malm discusses what it takes to be a county commissioner. Photo by Charlie Ban

would talk to me — former commissioners, current commissioners, department heads — I just tried to get a handle on what county government did. I met with the Wyoming County Commissioners Association to get an idea of its role and the interplay between the counties in our state.

I felt like as a commissioner,

'I met with anybody who would talk to me...'

it was really important that I understand the funding structure for the county government. I felt like I had a good handle on the budget and how we work with our federal partners and grants to accomplish

things. We're a small county of 100,000, but we're the largest in the state of Wyoming.

I was always interested in politics—when I was in fifth grade, I wrote a letter to President Clinton, telling him how to solve all of these different problems. I was the public policy director for the state for the National Association of Realtors and always knew I would run for office. But I wanted to make sure it was the right time — I have a hard and fast rule to not run just to run — so I would only run if there

was an opening or if someone wasn't doing a good job. Then there was an opening in 2018. With my background in land use and private property rights, I felt like commissioner was the appropriate role for me, rather than city council or the Legislature. And I've really, really enjoyed my time as a commissioner, it's given me a chance to learn even more about the community where I have been living for 40 years and my family has been living for 150 years.

What strikes me is that with all of that research and all of those meetings, I watched, within a month, I was dealing with issues the county hadn't dealt with before. In a year, we were all dealing with issues nobody had considered for 100 years. They don't put global pandemics in the pamphlet "So you want to be a county commissioner."

It was an interesting time, a trying time, but ultimately, a rewarding time to see our community ultimately come together. [CN](#)

Now I Know explores experiences that have shaped county officials' approach to their work, as told to Senior Writer and Digital Editor Charlie Ban.

WORD SEARCH

WESTCHESTER COUNTY, N.Y.
Created by Mary Ann Barton

B P N C O U R T H O U S E B X R S T F R
J R O O P C P M Z R W T X L S Q R R O E
U I U P T H R Z F B B X L I J O O G R S
A V T B U B E V E Q W H U V P C O W T T
L L P V U L P X C V X G K R K M L F U A
V I D G K S A C K C R X I E X G U L N U
W E F Y F O P T I W B A F L L K V H E R
I H Q S Y T S T I M U E T A E S V E K A
D I R U Q O W U L O L B X S W H G C Q N
K E Y Y A O E D Z L N X N L Z B G S X T
G H C U V M N M E U C Y R V K E W R R T
T N M L A I B R B R E E D S O I X S S V
T R I A A B T D B F O C P G G A R K Q B
E D F V D R N B G P W T R Y R O T S I H
U H W C R A A X Y T V A P I T C H E R S
L P F L L I X T J B P J G F C Q F T E K
D A U Y L U X Y I H A L O Y Y S R O K K
I N A T R Z G S Y O M E Q D G A X R K E
C L N U X P X S O Q N S N R G G Q T X U
P U C S Z Z M X U H W S W V D B E E U T

HISTORY: The county, named for Chester, England, was one of the original 12 counties formed in New York in 1683.

IRVING: Washington Irving, author of "Sleepy Hollow" was a resident of the county.

NEWSPAPER: The local newspaper in the area is *The Journal News*, dating to 1852.

PLAYLAND: The 280-acre amusement park open since 1928, is owned by the county.

PITCHER: Former Yankees pitcher Mariano Rivera, inducted into the Hall of Fame, is from the county.

POPULATION: The county population is nearly 1 million, with about 25 percent born outside the country.

RESTAURANT: One of the oldest restaurants in the county is Gus's, opened in 1931.

ROCKEFELLER: The Rockefeller 40-room mansion for four generations, Kykuit, located in the county is now open for tours.

SEAT: The county seat is White Plains, since 1757.

SUBURB: The county is often referred to as the first suburb in the United States.

AIRPORT: Westchester County Airport is owned by the county and in use since 1945.

COURTHOUSE: The county is on its eighth courthouse, built in 1974. The first was built in 1720.

DECLARATION: The Declaration of Independence was first read from the Westchester County Courthouse steps, on July 11, 1776.

FORTUNE: The county is home to several Fortune 500 companies including IBM, Mastercard, Pepsi, Morgan Stanley and more.

GEOGRAPHY: The county is bordered on the southeast by Long Island Sound and on the west by the Hudson River. The county is north of New York City.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

● West Region Representative **Joe Briggs** attended the North Dakota Association of Counties Annual Conference in Burleigh County.

NACo STAFF

● **Christina Loukos** has joined NACo as a meetings planner. She was previously a project manager for Meeting Management Services, holds a B.A. in International Affairs and a certificate in Event Management from George Washington University.

● Legislative Directors **Seamus Dowdall** and **Owen Hart** attended the United Counties

Council of Illinois Fall Conference in Sangamon County, Ill.

● National Program Director **Kyle Cline** attended the Tennessee County Services Association Annual Conference in Rutherford County.

● Program Manager **Patrick Spence** attended the Retail Opportunity Network Annual Convening in Benton County, Ark.



Loukos

PROFILES IN SERVICE

KRISTI HARSHBARGER

NACo Board member
General Counsel
Iowa State Association of
Counties (ISAC)

Number of years active in NACo: My first NACo conference was the Annual Conference in Pittsburgh in 2012.

Years in public service: I started with ISAC in May 2011.

Occupation: General Counsel for ISAC

Education: Bachelor of arts degree from the University of Iowa in Journalism and J.D. from Drake University



HARSHBARGER

The hardest thing I've ever done: Be a full-time working parent of a then-2-year-old and 4-year-old during the pandemic.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Brené Brown, Brandi Carlile, and my grandmother

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Have taken 738 (and counting) Pure Barre classes

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Class IV whitewater rafting in New Mexico.

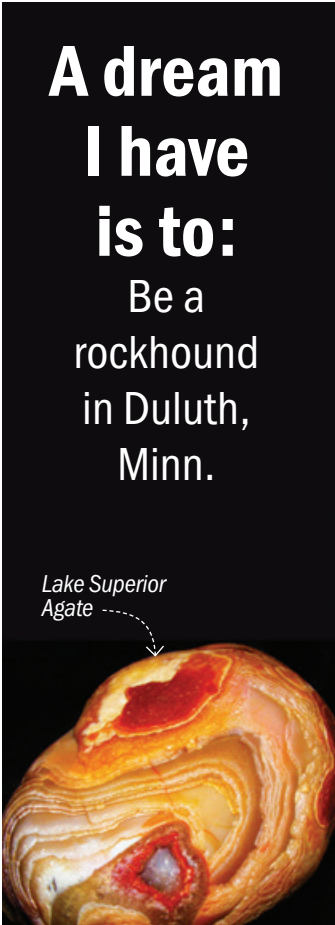
My favorite way to relax is: Traveling as much as possible.

I'm most proud of: My children – Emerson and Margot.

Every morning I read: I have Kate Baer's poem "Moon Song" framed in my bathroom and I read through it at least once while I get ready for the day.

My favorite meal is: Crab, oysters and clams from Jetty Fishery in Oregon.

My pet peeve is: People who lack courage.



My motto is: Spread joy (at least this is what I tell my kids every day when I drop them off).

The last book I read was: "Women of Good Fortune" by Sophie Wan

My favorite movie is: The original "Parent Trap"

My favorite music is: I've jumped on the Swiftie train with my kids!

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because we share a birthday (Feb. 12).

My affiliate is a NACo member because: County government is the best form of government and the people I have met through and the knowledge I have gained from NACo is priceless.

GET TO KNOW...

Sioux County, N.D.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

(With a nod to National Native American Heritage Month this month, we're featuring Sioux County, N.D., which is located within a Native American reservation.)

Established in 1914, Sioux County, N.D., is named for the Indigenous people who inhabited the land. It's the only county in the state that is entirely within a Native American reservation, forming the northern 30% of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Standing Rock, home to the Lakota and Dakota nations, is the sixth-largest reservation in land area in the country, stretching 2.3 million acres across South and North Dakota.

In 2016, thousands of protestors stood with the Standing Rock Sioux, who called for a halt to construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (which was created to transport crude oil from the North Dakota Bakken region into Illinois), because it could destroy ancestral

burial grounds and contaminate the reservation's water supply. The protest brought together roughly 200 tribal nations that previously hadn't all united for more than 150 years, according to the American Civil Liberties Union. The pipeline is operational today, while the Army Corps of Engineers conducts a court-ordered environmental impact study.

The county seat of Fort Yates is the tribal headquarters of the Standing Rock Sioux. Sitting Bull, a Native American chief who united the Sioux tribes of the region in battle against white settlers who were taking their land, was originally buried in Fort Yates. The U.S. government broke the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty, which established the Great Sioux Reservation and the Black Hills as Native American land, after gold was discovered on it, which led to the Battle of Little Bighorn.

Before the battle, Sitting Bull danced for 36

hours straight, as part of a Sun Dance ceremony, in which he made 50 sacrificial cuts on his arms before falling into a trance, where he said he had a vision of U.S. soldiers falling like grasshoppers

from the sky. He interpreted the vision as an omen that the Native Americans would win the battle, which they did. Sitting Bull was later forced to surrender to the U.S. Army in exchange for the amnesty of

his people. After the federal government lost the Battle of Little Bighorn, the government devoted more resources to defeating the Sioux and the increase of white settlers on the land led to the death of many buffaloes, which the Native Americans depended on for food.

Roughly 14 years later, Sitting Bull was shot and killed by Native American police on the Standing Rock Reservation, because they feared he would lead a rebellion by joining the Ghost Dance movement, which centered on the idea that the spirits of dead Native Americans would return to the land, driving out white settlers and restoring the traditional ways of life.

Sitting Bull was initially buried in an unmarked grave at Fort Yates, but his grave was vandalized many times, and his remains were later exhumed and brought to South Dakota, where his descendants thought he should be laid to rest.



Sitting Bull

Get to Know features NACo member counties.

BRIGHT IDEAS | GUILFORD COUNTY, N.C.

North Carolina County Decreases 911 Non-Emergency Calls by Connecting Residents to Services They Need

PROBLEM:

The county was inundated with 911 calls because residents didn't know where to go to get non-emergency support.

SOLUTION:

Connect residents to resources, including primary care physicians and access to food, so they don't feel the need to call an emergency line.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Overwhelmed with a large volume of non-emergency calls made to fire and emergency medical services, Guilford County, N.C. created an Adult Resource Team of social workers to better serve its most vulnerable communities — particularly its low-income aging population — and free up emergency services to respond to the county's most urgent situations.

Many residents don't have a family support system or access to resources such as in-home healthcare or a primary care physician, and they were reaching out to the Fire Department and EMS any time they needed assistance or healthcare. Responding to one emergency call costs Guilford County roughly \$1,100, so the county was rapidly spending money on emergency response, while many people were still not getting proper or long-term support. One Guilford County resident dialed 911 6,700 times over a 17-year period.

The county's Adult Resource Team (ART) is made up of four social workers who work with EMS and Fire partners to make referrals to resources and provide education on when to reach out to emergency response, which is cutting costs at the county level, allowing emergency services personnel to respond to actual medical emergencies and fire suppression and rescue and helping residents meet their basic needs.

"There was a network there,



Then-NACo President Mary Jo McGuire of Ramsey County, Minn. (far left) pauses for a photo with Guilford County, N.C. staff after announcing their win July 14 in the Best in Category NACo Achievement Award in the Human Services category, at the NACo Annual Conference in Hillsborough County, Fla. Photo by Denny Henry

but all the players didn't know where everybody was or the services they provided," said Justin Hargett, Guilford County's EMS manager.

"What we're really trying to do is find a 'No Wrong Door' approach for people in our community, so that no matter which entry pathway they take into the system, somebody's there to help them, and the ART team is navigating them through their needs and through their care," he said.

Previously, referrals could only be made through Adult Protective Services, which has an extensive form process, and not every adult who needs some kind of help needs Adult Protective Services, Hargett said. Now, when paramedics are called to a scene, they can provide a quick referral through submitting a patient's information into a Google form, which is immediately sent to the Adult Resource Team, and a social worker will follow up with them to assess the type of support they need and make the necessary connections.

"Even if it's not somebody that's called a bunch and it's just something [EMS] sees, like they might need help in their home, or they might need a nurse to

come in once a week to help with their medications, we can get that referral," Hargett said. "And now, our social services team can take care of community members who they never knew needed help or didn't know how to access it."

The Adult Resource Team partners with local organizations that provide in-home aid services, home healthcare services and mental health services to connect their clients to resources. If someone needs handicap equipment, for example, the team will connect them with someone in its network who can provide that, according to Scott O'Connor, Guilford County EMS' shift commander.

"If they're short on meals, we would make sure they have what they need to get food, look at guardianship for a patient, look at Meals on Wheels for the patient, and see what the patient needs," O'Connor said. "We can look and see what kind of safety hazards are in the house, falls on rugs, making sure they have handicap accessories.

"We can reach out to the community and say, 'We have an 85-year-old female who is living alone, and she needs some grab

bars in the bathroom,'" he said.

Social workers also work with the hospital system to ensure patients have the equipment they need in their homes upon release, because, before the established collaboration of the Adult Resource Team, "a lot of times, the patient was discharged by ambulance home, but there wasn't a hospital bed, or there wasn't a potty chair," O'Connor added.

Once someone receives a referral through the Adult Resource Team, a social worker continues to check in for around six months — sometimes shorter, sometimes longer depending on the situation — to ensure a client doesn't fall through the cracks, according to Cheri Stinson, the Adult Resource Team supervisor.

In its pilot phase, the Adult Resource Team worked with 27 adults who were regular contributors to the county's high volume of 911 calls. In the 30 days prior to the pilot, the clients called EMS or the Fire Department 440 times. In the 30 days following case work, the same clients only called 911 4 times, resulting in a 99.1% decrease. The county is projecting about a 5% reduction in its overall 911

call volume in this year alone, according to Hargett.

"We know as this program grows, that number is also going to grow," Hargett said. "So, ART is helping to take off a large portion of our volume, and then most EMS systems, you see 3-5% growth in call volume per year, so they're essentially flattening our call volume growth out for this upcoming expected year."

The county dedicated \$352,000 for staff, training and program development for the Adult Resource Team and the expected annual cost savings is \$4.5 million, according to Hargett.

"In addition to the benefits to our public safety, and being able to put ambulances on calls that they need to be on or fire trucks when that true emergency happens, it has a lasting community impact that we don't see necessarily," Hargett said. "Because there are people who are getting taken care of in multiple ways now that they never have, and it's improving the quality of life of our community." **CN**

Guilford County, N.C. won the "Best in Category" 2024 NACo Achievement Award in the Human Services category.

CALIFORNIA

• **FRESNO COUNTY** is taking action to **help protect property owners from fraud**, KFSN-TV reported. The county assessor recently announced the formation of a new program called the Fresno County Property Owners Protection Alert. Property owners can enroll to be notified when documents are recorded using their personal or property information. County officials say it will help alert potential cases of real property title fraud, which they say is a growing problem across the country.

• **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** recently held a **“Service Connection Day”** for about 100 participants of its Pathway Home program who had been evacuated from riverbeds ahead of a tropical storm and were staying in interim housing while awaiting placement into permanent housing. During Service Connection Day, Pathway Home participants were able to engage with county departments:

- Department of Health Services-Housing for Health for primary, specialized and behavioral health care services, and to enroll for Social Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- Department of Mental Health for support services and access to outpatient mental health treatment, including the Veterans Peer Access Network (VPAN)
- Department of Public Health for substance use disorder treatment
- Department of Public Social Services for enrollment in General Relief, CalFresh and Medi-Cal programs as well as free tablets and cell phones.
- Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk to help LA County-born

CALIFORNIA

• **MENDOCINO COUNTY** has officially received the **Blue Zones Project Approved** status, marking a milestone in its commitment to fostering a healthier, happier work community, Mendocino reported.

“We are thrilled to achieve

the Blue Zones Project Approved status,” said Darcie Antle, chief executive officer. “This designation underscores our dedication to improving the well-being of our employees and their families by promoting healthy living and creating an environment that supports longevity.”



“Being part of the Blue Zones Project is an honor and a testament to our county’s hard work and dedication,” Maureen Mulheren, District 2 supervisor added. “We look forward to continuing our efforts to create a healthier environment for all

our employees.” Several initiatives contributed to the designation, including:

- **Nutrition:** Educating employees on the importance of mindful eating and balanced nutrition.
- **Physical Activity:** Programs encouraging daily exercise and the creation of safe, ac-

cessible spaces for walking and biking to and from work.

- **Social Engagement:** Events and community spaces that foster connections among employees.
- **Purpose and Well-being:** Activities and resources that help employees find and pursue their purpose.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



HAWAII

The **COUNTY OF HAWAII** Department of Environmental Management collected 5,000 tires from a recent **Toss Your Tires recycling event**. Tires from 472 vehicles were collected at a local middle school, filling 23 roll-off containers in just five hours. The mass recycling protects the environment from potential hazards like mosquito breeding and illegal dumping. The purpose of the recycled tires is to be turned into useful products and fuel for energy production outside Hawaii.

Pathway Home participants access their birth certificates.

- Department of Consumer and Business Affairs-Office of Immigrant Affairs for a variety of services for documented and undocumented immigrants.
- Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to assist veterans in establishing bene-

fits on the State or federal level, including enrollment in VA healthcare.

- California Department of Motor Vehicles for no-fee ID vouchers and ID services.
- Metropolitan Transportation Authority for free/discounted rides.

IOWA

LEE COUNTY Board of Supervisors Chairman Gary Seyb said there’s been an awakening of how to get things done in Lee County in the last three or four years, at a recent ground-breaking ceremony to **add broadband** to 100 homes, the *Pen City Current* reported.

“This is one of the first projects with ARPA funding,” Seyb said. “We got \$6.5 million, so this is not an insignificant investment. This is almost one-third of the funding that came to Lee County. We were able to come together and work through a group that I really hadn’t heard that much about – the Southeast Iowa Regional & Economic Port Authority (SIREPA).”

“They’ve been an amazing partner over the last two or three years, not just on this project, but on a number of critical projects to Lee County,” he noted. SIREPA had a hand in setting up the funding for the Lee County Career Advancement Center.

Seyb said with the Meller Health Family Center, the new Keokuk Ambulance Bay and now the broadband project is a testament to the collaboration going on. He said the county’s \$1.95 million helped spur another \$33 million in broadband investment. “We’re expanding with this and I think you’ll continue to see more of this throughout the county with broadband,” he said.

MARYLAND

• **ANNE ARUNDEL County** Executive Stuart Pittman recently launched his **new podcast**, “Pittman and Friends.”

The podcast offers listeners another inside glimpse at governing, this time through fun and revealing conversations between the county executive and his staff, community leaders, policy experts and elected officials.



Pittman

See **NEWS FROM** page 11

From NEWS FROM page 10

“The goal of ‘Pittman and Friends’ is to offer county residents a behind-the-scenes look at our work, similar to my weekly letters,” Pittman said in a news release.

“I hope this podcast will provide our residents with an opportunity to learn more about what government does, and how they can engage with government to make an impact in their communities.”

The first episode of “Pittman and Friends” features Christine Anderson, Anne Arundel County’s chief administrative officer, and includes a discussion on government service delivery and budgeting, the ongoing efforts to streamline processes and transparency, and the county’s new PAVE program to increase minority-owned business contracting opportunities. Listeners can

tune in to Pittman and Friends on major podcast platforms such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, YouTube and Pocket Casts. New episodes will be released weekly on Tuesdays and are provided as a public service of Anne Arundel County.

For more information about Pittman and Friends or to listen to the first episode, visit <https://www.aacounty.org/pittmanandfriends>.



NEW JERSEY

In an effort to **attract new businesses** to the area, **SOMERSET COUNTY** launched a new website promoting the No. 1 consideration when businesses are deciding where to invest: Talent.

To roll out what

PENNSYLVANIA

ALLEGHENY COUNTY officials recently cut the ribbon on a newly built **bouldering park and pump track**, next to an existing skate park, TribLive.com reported. “With BMX, you almost don’t want to pedal,” said Chris Doyle, 43, who spent 20 years as a professional BMX rider from 1998 to 2016. “You want to use your core to gain speed.”

The pump track, at first glance, looks like it would be an awfully bumpy ride, with small hills all along its length.



The goal is to use the topography to build momentum. Doyle said the tracks have become much more popular over the past decade. Next door to the track is another

new feature, a bouldering park, a group of climbing-wall-style “boulders” with handholds and footholds, surrounded by a soft shredded rubber landing area.



MARYLAND

• **WASHINGTON COUNTY** Division of Planning and Zoning recently announced the **preservation of the historic 40-acre Hogmire-Berryman Farm**, adding to the more than 41,000 acres of permanently preserved land within the county. The conservation easement was secured through the Rural Legacy Program. The property’s preservation marks another milestone in the county’s commitment to land conservation.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the farm features a brick house, barn and several outbuildings dating to the early 19th century. The farm has received multiple awards and recognition for its historical significance.

The Rural Legacy Program has been instrumental in safeguarding more than 9,000 acres of land, accounting for 22% of the county’s total permanent easements. The majority of funding for the easement was sourced from Washington County’s Agricultural Transfer Tax, a critical resource dedicated to land preservation.

the team says is a first-of-its-kind campaign from a county government, the Somerset County Office of Economic Development updated its business card. The back is now emblazoned with a QR code introducing the new talent attraction tool: “Why Somerset?”

“We had been looking to move in this direction for some time,” explained Jessica Paolini, manager of Economic Development. “It’s really the way that a lot of economic development practice has shifted — to a focus on talent.”

UTAH

• A program previously based in **SALT LAKE COUNTY** that combats **home and property fraud** is going statewide. The program is called Property Watch, and was created by Salt Lake County Recorder Rashelle Hobbs. “In 2019 I created Property Watch, it’s a service that alerts you to changes in your property’s record,” she told KSL NewsRadio’s Dave and Dujanovic.

The program alerts homeowners when title or other changes are made under their address. It’s also completely free. Typically, scammers pretend to be a homeowner, set up a bank account and then sell the home or property without the real owner even knowing it. Hobbs says this type of scam often targets older populations.

• As young Utahns struggle with **mental health, lack of sleep and excessive screen time**, health officials are preparing to launch a crucial sur-

vey aimed at understanding and addressing the challenges and opportunities local youth face, the *Park Record* reported.

School districts throughout the community are partnering with the Summit County Health Department and the Utah Department of Health and Human Services to prepare for the biennial Student Health and Risk Prevention survey set to launch in early 2025.

Pamella Bello, the director of behavioral health prevention at the Health Department, expects the SHARP survey to be conducted in 6th-, 8th-, 10th- and 12th-grade classrooms between March and May of next year.

VIRGINIA

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY received more than 500 applications in a week last month for **emergency housing assistance** from low-income and at-risk populations, *Potomac Local News* reported.

Although federal funding has helped provide rental assistance, the demand far exceeds available resources.

The county board discussed the potential for increased local funding to help bridge the gap for families struggling with eviction or foreclosure. Woodbridge District Supervisor Margaret Franklin highlighted the need for collaboration with state programs to expand access to emergency rental assistance.

“We’re facing a tough situation,” Duckett explained. “Stable housing is essential for the health and well-being of families, but the rising cost of

living, particularly for seniors, is forcing many into precarious positions.”

The board discussed potential solutions, including developing an Affordable Dwelling Unit ordinance and establishing a housing trust fund.

WASHINGTON

The **PIERCE COUNTY** Council allocated \$15 million of American Rescue Plan Act dollars for **broadband partnerships** in the 2022-2023 Biennial Budget, *Tacoma Weekly* reported. It carried over \$12.8 million in unspent dollars in the 2024-2025 Biennial Budget. The continued focus on broadband equity has yielded some exciting results.

On Sept. 30, Pierce County and Astound Broadband announced they are bringing high-speed internet for the first time to several rural and underserved areas of the county, including Herron Island, Key Peninsula and the Nisqually region.

When construction is complete, more than 3,200 homes will gain access to a fiber-to-the-home network, offering symmetrical internet speeds of up to 5 gigabits per second.

The project is a \$12.1 million public-private partnership, with Pierce County contributing \$7.15 million from federal American Rescue Plan Act funds and Astound Broadband covering the remaining \$4.95 million.

Share your news and photos with Mary Ann Barton at mbarton@naco.org.



TOP 3 REASONS COUNTIES NEED PULL-TYPE PNEUMATIC ROLLERS IN THEIR FLEETS

LOWER COST

Pull-type rollers are generally less expensive to purchase and maintain compared to self-propelled rollers. They also offer flexibility by allowing you to use existing tow vehicles, reducing the need for specialized equipment.

FLEXIBILITY

The weight of the roller can be easily adjusted with ballast to suit different materials and compaction needs. Additionally, the ability to switch towing vehicles offers flexibility across various job sites and applications.

SUPERIOR COMPACTION

The pneumatic tires provide a kneading effect that results in more uniform and consistent compaction, especially for aggregate surfaces. This leads to better sealing and fewer air voids, resulting in a more durable finish.



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