

CONGRESS AVERTS A SHUTDOWN

by Seamus Dowdall and Sarah Gimont

President Joe Biden signed into law a continuing resolution (CR) late last month to fund the government through Dec. 3, averting a government shutdown while congressional lawmakers work to reach an agreement on final Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 spending levels.

The stopgap spending measure maintains level funding for most government spending programs while also providing \$6.3 billion in aid to help resettle Afghan refugees as well as \$29 billion in aid for disaster relief related to Hurricane Ida. Notably, the CR did not include a measure to suspend the debt ceiling, despite previous proposals to attach a suspension to the stopgap funding bill. The issue reached a new level of urgency, with the U.S. Department of Treasury projecting that the government would reach its borrowing limit on Oct. 18.

Republicans and Democrats in the Senate reached a tentative agreement Oct. 7 to raise the debt ceiling until December.

Raising the debt limit does not incur new federal debt, but it is a statutory requirement to allow for previously approved borrowing. Counties support raising the debt

limit and welcome a conversation about long term debt and deficits.

However, the CR did provide Congress with additional time to finalize the FY 2022 appropriations bills. While the U.S. House of Representatives has passed nine of the 12 annual spending bills, the U.S. Senate has yet to pass any.

This lack of progress is likely due to the fact that negotiations over both the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and reconciliation have taken precedence and progress on these two packages appear to be largely stalled.

While Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) had previously committed to moving IIJA in tandem with the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package, they have faced some resistance.

Some Democrats in the Senate, including Sens. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) and Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), have stated they will not vote for the reconciliation package unless its price tag is significantly lowered. Meanwhile, other members in the House are standing firm on their goal to move infrastructure

See CONGRESS page 2



MEET 'N GREET: New York Gov. Kathy Hochul greets Broome County Executive Jason Garnar as Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro (left) and Monroe County Executive Adam Bello (center) look on. Hochul, the Empire State's first woman governor and a former Erie County clerk, met with county officials Oct. 5, after taking office following Andrew Cuomo's resignation. Photo by Mike Groll/Office of Gov. Kathy Hochul

Rental assistance programs target tenants, landlords

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Counties are ramping up rental assistance and eviction prevention programs following the end of the federal eviction moratorium that now leaves millions facing housing

insecurity exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a temporary national moratorium Sept. 1, 2020 on evictions for nonpayment of rent to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Federal aid includ-

ed a total of \$46.5 billion for emergency rental assistance.

The initial moratorium expired on July 31.

The CDC then announced a limited eviction moratorium through Oct. 3 for those rent-

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Poet laureate program helped residents beat Zoom fatigue

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced in-person events to go remote, it added a challenge to the story Heather Lang-Cassera was trying to tell.

As Clark County, Nev.'s poet laureate from May 2019-May

2021, she was working to bring more cultural events to rural parts of the county, a far cry from the Las Vegas Strip.

"When I first moved here, every search seemed to direct me there," she said, "It was harder to find local cultural happenings that were unrelated to whether or not they existed."

During the pandemic, even "The Strip" wasn't an option anymore, nor were the readings and workshops Lang-Cassera planned for community centers all over the county. But she still saw opportunities, and perhaps an even greater need.

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Congress negotiates

From CONGRESS page 1

and reconciliation together. As the negotiations continue, the deadline to enact a surface transportation reauthorization passed. The 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act expired Sept. 30 and, as Congress had not passed the reauthorization included in the IJA by that date, funding for surface transportation programs lapsed. Congress passed a 30-day stopgap funding bill to cover these programs until an agreement can be reached on infrastructure and reconciliation. As talks over infrastructure, reconciliation, FY 2022 spending and the debt ceiling progress, NACo will continue to advocate for county priorities. **CN**

Dowdall is a legislative assistant and Gimont is a legislative associate. Eryn Hurley, deputy director of Government Affairs, contributed to this article.

Poetry 'made people feel connected in a genuine way'

From POET page 1

"I knew poetry could offer our southern Nevada community an opportunity to sit and reflect, especially when everything shut down," she said. "A lot of folks found that they had more time to sit with their feelings, sit with their emotions."

The poet laureate program is subsidized by the Clark County Public Arts Fund and managed by the Winchester Dondero Cultural Center. Dozens of counties nationwide offer poet laureate programs to deputize artistic ambassadors who represent their counties regionally and nationally and offer artistic outreach at home. In Clark County, Lang-Cassera had neighbors whose livelihoods were at stake, particularly in the hard-hit tourism-related sectors. But she also saw more than that.

"What I witnessed was that a lot of folks had things seemingly unrelated to the pandemic sort of come to the surface, something they could explore and

work through when they had that extra time, space and isolation."

Like many, she continued her programming remotely, which allowed more people to participate, including poets and poetry enthusiasts from other regions of the state, though she found more than a few people suffering from "Zoom fatigue."

But in the craft of poetry, she viewed an antidote.

For some, it was participating in a collaborative poem, with different contributors taking turns, stanza by stanza, which Nevada Humanities published.

"I got a lot of positive feedback about how that helped people feel connected in a genuine way," Lang-Cassera said. "And it demonstrated that there were other meaningful ways to communicate besides looking into a camera."

"Art helps us experience one another and experience the world in a way that we don't necessarily need to be there in the moment," she noted, "because it evokes images and memories — we are physiologically affected by poetry. We can stay healthy and wholly connected human beings in ways that transcend Zoom and text messages and phone calls."

She also took poetry out into the general public, using video trucks to display poems alongside photography in Clark County parks and along The Strip.

"It was fun, meaningful and outdoors," she said. "That seemed like it really brought the community together."

Lang-Cassera, who teaches at Nevada State College, saw a renewed general interest in poetry after the presidential inauguration made poet Amanda Gorman a celebrity. Students of all ages in Lang-Cassera's classes found themselves interested in writing again after abandon-



Heather Lang-Cassera served as the poet laureate for Clark County, Nev., from May 2019 to May 2021. Photo by Heather Lang-Cassera

ing poetry in middle school.

"Poetry really does still have a place," she said. "It opens up discussions, makes people feel empowered."

"It's this amazing vessel when it comes to art, because you can spend your entire life working to master it. Unlike some physical art forms that you need equipment to do, literally anyone can write a poem and get started. If you are sitting down with someone who is passionate about it and interested in teaching you something about it, you can have a poetry prompt and walk away and have a poem written in 30 minutes."

And it all adds up to a richer communication, both between poets and readers and for the writer to express themselves and what is happening in their community.

"It gives folks a vehicle for exploring their feelings and understanding how to tell their story," she said, adding that those expressions offer a chance for deeper interpersonal communication.

"So many issues are very po-

larized, and people don't even know how to start talking about them openly," Lang-Cassera said. "Getting people into a different vehicle for discussion can really open us up for honest authentic conversations about things and that is something that really needs to happen in our community."

One role of the poet laureate is to write about events that affect Clark County, exploring the community experience, whether it's matters of trauma or celebration.

Lang-Cassera has been working on a book dedicated to residents affected by the Oct. 1, 2017 mass shooting in Las Vegas.

"I feel like it's tough because folks have still been feeling the effects of the October 1 tragedy," she said. "I try to take time to reflect before I write about it."

She absolutely sees the art form as something anybody can immerse themselves in.

"It brings people to spaces, physically emotionally or cerebrally, that they don't often go to," she said. **CN**

SNAP/STATS



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2. LABRADOR RETRIEVER
3. GOLDEN RETRIEVER
4. GERMAN SHEPHERD
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Counties ramp up rental assistance, eviction prevention programs

From RENT page 1

ing in areas with a surge in COVID-19 cases. This covered an estimated 80 percent of all counties and 90 percent of renters, according to the CDC.

However, the Supreme Court ruled to block the eviction moratorium, ruling the CDC exceeded its authority.

A recent Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey from Sept. 1 to Sept. 13 found 3.3 million renters are very likely or somewhat likely to leave their home because of eviction in the next two months.

In DeKalb County, Ga., a judge in the DeKalb Superior Court extended a local eviction moratorium that lasted for an additional 60 days and ended in September.

The county established the Tenant Landlord Assistance Coalition, a multi-agency effort that includes the magistrate court, the clerk of court, Atlanta Legal Aid, the DeKalb Housing Authority and other nonprofits.

The program initially launched in February and reopened in June. DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond said the county is using \$21 million of federal funds to support tenants and landlords during the pandemic.

"The focus of course is to prevent evictions," he said. "Generally, the narrative has been, 'How much money has been distributed?' but we prioritize our help for people who are most at risk of being evicted."

The coalition has helped over 1,600 tenants and landlords and distributed \$11.4 million, according to Thurmond.

Thurmond said they worked to target the "mom and pop" landlords who may only own one or two units. He said it is important to be inclusive and re-affirm that this coalition is about both helping tenants and providing financial support for landlords, many who have not received rent payments for close to 20 months.

"If the landlord chooses and says 'I don't want to participate,' that just creates a backlog and makes it more difficult to achieve the objectives of the initiative," Thurmond said.

The program currently has 2,000 pending applications.

Osceola County, Fla., also started an eviction diversion program last year. The county made a recent addition to the program, after realizing court residents were not being connected to help and placed an individual in the courthouse to serve as a liaison, Commission Chair Brandon Arrington said.

Arrington said the county contacted the justice department and the court system and partnered with the clerk of court to place the individual in the courthouse to help divert evictions.

The county had over 1,600 open applications for evictions, according to Arrington. Over 220 individuals have completed the program and received payment.

"We've tried to make all the players that deal with this throughout the court system aware of the opportunities as

well and so we really wanted to make sure we could keep people in their housing as much as possible," he said.

In addition to helping tenants, Arrington said the county wanted to ensure that land-

'We've tried to make all the players...aware of the opportunities...to keep people in their housing.'

- Brandon Arrington

lords could benefit from the program.

"We've been able to really utilize the revenue we've seen from the Biden administration and really ramp up some of these programs so much that we're obviously continuing these programs still to this day to make sure we connect with

everybody possible," he said.

Arrington said in central Florida, a lack of housing availability makes it challenging to find housing, especially for those who have been evicted.

"I encourage everyone to look out to our county, and any other county they might be in, in the central Florida area and utilize the resources that are available," he said.

New Hanover County, N.C. launched a Workforce Housing Gap Rental Assistance pilot program as one of several programs launched by the county using American Rescue Plan funding to provide housing assistance.

Before COVID-19, half of renters in the county were burdened by housing costs and spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, said Rachel LaCoe, a planner for the New Hanover County Senior program.

The primary goals for the

Workforce Housing Gap Rental program are to focus on housing stability and reducing displacement, she noted.

"The way that this program is structured, it's not an emergency program meant to catch folks up, it's ongoing monthly help to try to bridge incomes and the costs of rent," she said.

The program uses \$300,000 of American Rescue Plan funds to offer monthly subsidies of \$200 per month for a single person and \$300 per month for a multiple-person household.

LaCoe said they found about 42 percent of the applicants eligible for the program initially were housing cost burdened, but after factoring in the \$200 to \$300 subsidies, the number decreased to about 10 percent.

"So far, it looks like it's going to make a big impact," LaCoe said.

The county received 300 applications in the two-week application window. **CN**



Osceola County, Fla. Commission Chair Brandon Arrington announces the county's eviction diversion program that includes a liaison in the county courthouse to help divert evictions. Photo courtesy of Osceola County, Fla.

STUDENTS SHARE TAKES ON FINANCIAL FUTURE

For the 17th year, high school seniors participating in the NACo/Nationwide scholarship essay contest shared their unique perspectives on financial freedom and retirement.

Graduating seniors became eligible by having a parent or grandparent contribute to the NACo 457 Deferred Compensation Program. They were asked to write a short essay on the importance of saving for retirement now. The winning entries were submitted by:

- Kiley Coy, Northfield Township, Ill.
- Melissa Gingold, Maricopa County, Ariz.
- Ariel Johnson, Charlotte County, Fla.
- Molly Zhao, Monmouth County, N.J.



In their essays, each student communicated the importance of preparing and securing financial freedom in this digital world in response to the following prompt:

"The pandemic has changed the way we interact and engage with each other on a daily basis. As it relates to our counties and jurisdictions in America, it has accelerated planned initiatives to explore various mediums of access to reach current and future customers. Due to this new reality, what are three creative and strategic ways that you would recommend in preparing and securing financial wellness in this new digital world? Please incorporate technology options as well as forms of education and access into your response."

Each winning senior received a \$2,500 college scholarship from Nationwide and NACo. The following are portions of their essays as well as their future plans.

Kiley Coy

The pandemic has advanced the development of the digital world in many ways. The first, and most important, way to prepare for financial wellness is to invest in yourself. By taking time to educate yourself on finance, you are securing a safe

and comfortable future.

New technology and online resources have made it easier than ever to access information regarding effective ways to secure financial wellness. Websites such as NerdWallet and Forbes continue to release knowledgeable tips in respect to achieving financial stability. Additionally, YouTube creators like "Next Gen Personal Finance" and "Two Cents" create wonderful videos that explain all there is to know about money, retirement, investing, etc. Additionally, the website themuse.com provides links to free classes on how to manage your personal finances. Overall, modern technology has opened many doors to education on personal finance.

Future plans

Kiley will pursue a major in occupational therapy due to her passion for helping children with disabilities. During her senior year, she served as the co-president of Council for Exceptional Children, a club that encouraged socialization between students with special needs and their peers. She also tutored her neighbor, who has cerebral palsy. The relationships she formed at these activities encouraged her to become an occupational therapist. She is attending Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Mo.

Melissa Gingold

In this new digital world, and in light of the 2020 pandemic, it is more important than ever to adapt to a changing world. In order to prepare and secure financial success in the future, three creative ways technology can be implemented into society is the use of unconventional platforms of education, interactive learning and peer support.

With the pandemic, most people's human contact has never been lower. As a social species, this is a devastating loss of contact, resulting in many people to feel anxious, uncertain and depressed. According to the CDC, in just June, 40 percent of adults admitted to struggling with a mental health issue or substance abuse with a rise of 31

SPEEDREAD

SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

- **Kiley Coy**, Northfield Township, Ill.
- **Melissa Gingold**, Maricopa County, Ariz.
- **Ariel Johnson**, Charlotte County, Fla.
- **Molly Zhao**, Monmouth County, N.J.

percent of adults reporting anxiety/depression symptoms, 26 percent reporting trauma/stress related disorder symptoms, 13 percent starting to use or grow in substance abuse, and 11 percent admission of legitimate consideration of suicide. Now more than ever in a digital world, it is important to remember that we are still humans and still need each other, making peer support programs for financial wellness essential.

Future plans

Melissa is excited to begin her schooling as a pre-nursing major. Health care is something she is incredibly passionate about and she is excited to get started. Other than her passion for health care, she also enjoys volunteering, crocheting, baking, reading, hiking and playing the alto saxophone. Born in Arizona, it was a natural choice for her to go the University of Arizona and her father is an alumnus as well.

Ariel Johnson

Individuals have been slowly progressing into a digital world from generation to generation. However, COVID-19 propelled an entire society to become more tech-savvy in a single swoop, with social distancing requirements forcing online applications. The educational experience has opened new pathways for information-sharing, providing easier access and utilization of financial websites, budgeting applications and monetary tracking methods. Such success has also increased availability for financial counseling through digital webinars and tele-visits.

To secure my future fiscal health, I took advantage of the



flexible virtual applications provided by working more and establishing an auto-pay plan for my retirement account. I am confident that others will also capitalize on the shadow benefits COVID-19 produced by utilizing digital processes to grow and secure their financial well-being.

Future plans

Ariel graduated high school with nearly 30 college credits from the dual enrollment program at State College of Florida, along with maintaining high school courses and two jobs. She is a waitress at Venice Island Coffee Café and Outback Steakhouse. She has worked hard in order to be able to pay for her schooling and notes that this opportunity will help tremendously. She is attending the State College of Florida and then plans to earn her master's degree at Florida Gulf Coast University and pursue a career as a psychiatrist.

Molly Zhao

The shift from surviving to thriving, COVID-19 has completely changed the financial industry by shedding light on the shifting mindsets of most Americans. Consumers have realized that they are in control of their financial wellness and are beginning to prioritize a healthy balance between financial and mental well-being more than ever before. To prepare and secure financial wellness in this new era, consumers should incorporate personalized digital planning tools, access e-learning financial education resources and utilize holistic financial wellness programs. In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has

arguably offered everyone a fresh perspective on achieving financial wellness. As the times change, so should financial options. It is time to face the new digital era with confidence and preparation.

Future plans

Molly is a recent graduate of the Academy of Allied Health and Science in Neptune, N.J., and an incoming student at Johns Hopkins University intending to major in neuroscience or cognitive science on a pre-med track. She is passionate about a variety of academic subjects and extracurricular activities, but her interests mainly lie at the intersection between science, medicine and journalism. Outside of academics, she loves playing volleyball, listening to music and above all, hunting down new food places or spots to try.

NATIONWIDE AND NACo OFFER THEIR CONGRATULATIONS TO EACH OF THE 2021 HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS.

Scholarship honors partnership

Nationwide and NACo are committed to helping participants plan for retirement as well as their family's future.

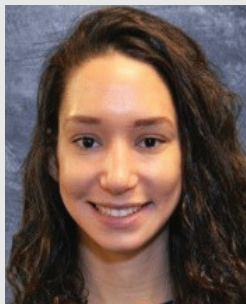
Nationwide sponsors the Nationwide/NACo scholarship to recognize its nearly four-decade-long partnership with NACo and its member counties.

For additional information about the NACo Deferred Compensation Program, contact Carlos Greene at cgreene@naco.org or (770) 881-0100.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS AND STAFF

- **Nina Ward** has joined NACo as senior program manager for Justice and Behavioral Health in the Counties Futures Lab. She was previously a management analyst for the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission and associate program officer for the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. She earned a master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Maryland, College Park and a bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Elon University, Elon, N.C.
- **Michelle Stuckey** has joined NACo as a conference registration specialist in the Public Affairs department. She previously served as a meetings assistant for the American Intellectual Property Law Association.
- **Eryn Hurley** is NACo's new deputy director of Government Affairs. She will continue to manage the Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs Steering Committee. She previously served as an associate legislative director, legislative assistant and legislative intern at NACo.
- **Sarah Gimont** and **Aaliyah Nedd** were each recently promoted to legislative associates in NACo's Government Affairs department. They previously served as legislative assistants.
- **Marc Chavez** is now the special assistant to the CEO and liaison to the NACo Board of Directors. He previously served as an administrative assistant at NACo.
- President **Larry Johnson** and Associate Membership Director **John Losh** attended the Wisconsin Counties Association Annual Conference in La Crosse County.
- **Hurley** and Membership Director **Kim Hall** attended the Montana Association of Counties Annual Conference in Flathead County.
- Past President **Mary Ann Borgeson** and Associate Legislative Director **Jonathan Shuffield** attended the Nevada Association of Counties Annual Conference in Churchill County.
- **Johnson, Hurley** and **Losh** attended the North Dakota Association of Counties Annual Conference in Burleigh County.



Ward



Stuckey



Hurley

PROFILES IN SERVICE



Bowen

CHRIS BOWEN

NACo Board Member
Supervisor
Forrest County, Miss.

Number of years involved in NACo: 14 years

Years in public service: 27 years

Occupation: Forrest County supervisor/geologist

Education: Bachelor of Science in Geology from the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Miss.

The hardest thing I've ever done: Buried one of my best friends.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: My dad (deceased); one of my best friends, Stan Hall (deceased) and my maternal grandfather (deceased).

A dream I have is to: See personal responsibility restored to the American way of life. Government is not the answer, government is the problem.

You'd be surprised to learn: I have a dual citizenship. I have both U.S. and Australian passports.

My favorite way to relax is: As a supervisor and caregiver, I find relaxation on the end of a chainsaw.

I'm most proud of: Right at 33 years of marriage.

Every morning I read: Emails, texts and Facebook – I miss reading multiple daily newspapers.

My favorite meal is: Crab quiche, English peas and garlic bread with my wife and mom.

My pet peeve is: Litter.

My motto is: "I cannot undertake to lay my finger on that article of the Constitution which granted a right to Congress of expending, on objects of benevolence, the money of their constituents." – James Madison nailed it.

The last book I read was: Somebody has time to read a book? Rather binge watch a season of "Alone."

My favorite movie is: "Platoon," "No Country for Old Men," "True Grit"

My favorite music is: Collective Soul, Spinners, Wagner, country outlaw, etc.

My favorite U.S. president is: George Washington

My county is a NACo member because: Lineage, lobbying and perspective.

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MT counties unite to revive passenger rail. **H5**
Commissioner Hausmann talks infrastructure. **H6**

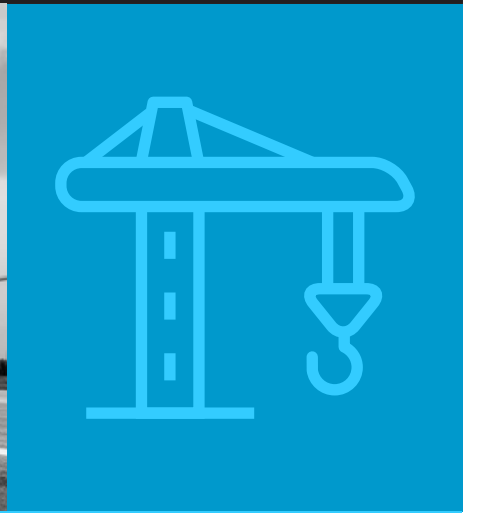
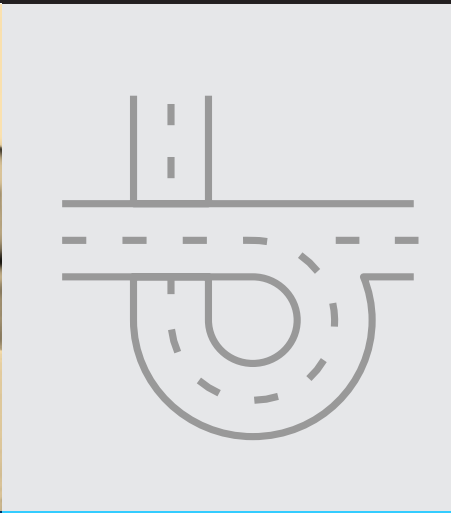
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COUNTIES LOOK
TO UPGRADE
ROADS AND MORE

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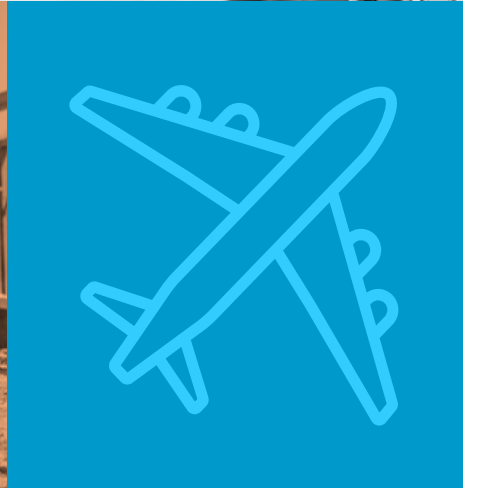
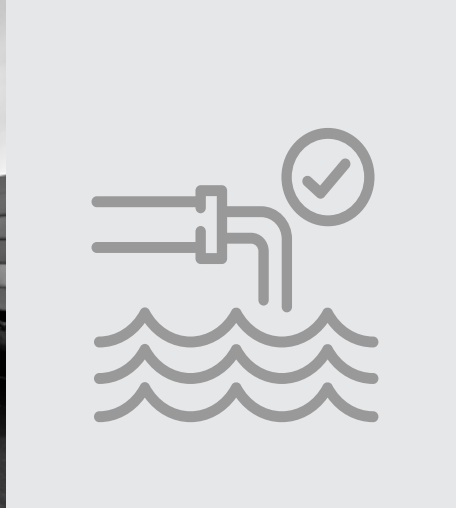
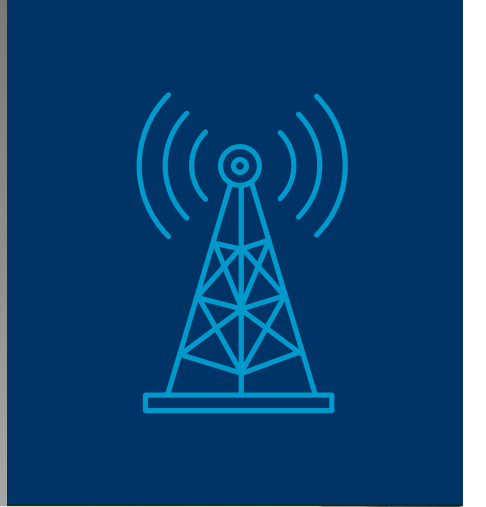
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INFRASTRUCTURE

needs abound for counties

BY CHARLIE BAN SENIOR WRITER



For all the counties with all their varying infrastructure needs, the common theme seems to be water.

Treading water.

Years of deferred maintenance has left many counties feeling like making meaningful advances in their infrastructure systems is out of reach, particularly as some redefine the term as they rethink their systems.

"We'd like to move forward, but we face a backlog nearly everywhere we look," said Mary Jo McGuire, a Ramsey County, Minn. commissioner and NACo second vice president.

Voters support funding infrastructure improvements

From a wider perspective, there is cause for optimism. The American Society of Civil Engineers raised its grade for America's overall infrastructure out of the D range for the first time in 20 years, noting improvements in aviation, drinking water, energy, inland waterways and ports, with only bridges, for lack of a better term, falling.

But 11 measures, including some of the improvements, remained a "D" on the 2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure. This was the first year that stormwater infrastructure was evaluated, and it too rated a D.

What did meet with approval? Voters' willingness to support measures to fund projects, to the tune of approving 98 percent of local infrastructure ballot initiatives in 2020.

That's a lifeline, but counties are still waiting on the House passage of the bipartisan infrastructure bill that passed the Senate and would provide \$973 billion over five years, including \$550 billion in new investments for all modes of transportation, water, power and energy, environmental remediation, public lands, broadband and resilience.

'We're just trying to catch up'

Lane County, Ore. Commissioner Heather Buch is a constituent of U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), who is currently chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. She has followed the bill closely, with hopes for what some of that funding would mean for Lane County's needs. She is chair of NACo's Highways Subcommittee.

"COVID-19 affects everything, but we had so much backlogged maintenance anyway, that we're just trying to catch up, which makes this bill so important, let alone to move forward," she said.

Big picture, Buch's eyes are on the chance to connect the cities of Eugene and Springfield through the Glenwood neighborhood.

"It's a nice corridor but needs a lot of infrastructure investment to bring it up to new development standards," she said. "There's so much opportunity for business and housing there, but they lack the things that go underground to make that happen."

That development could be a force multiplier for the area, eventually paying for itself through the transformational development that could take place with those upgrades.

She also wants to explore development for a convention center in Eugene, eyeing large events and accompanying hotel additions that could make the central Oregon region a destination.

"Too often, people skip us to look north to Portland because we don't have the capacity," Buch said. "We have the scientific and athletic attractions at the University of Oregon to draw a lot of interest, but we can't support as many visitors as we'd like."

"Or they are fine with staying in Linn County for hotel rooms, so we're losing out," she noted. "A developed Glenwood would make it so much easier to keep people in Lane County."

Flooded sheriff's office, dilapidated museum

Milwaukee County, Wis. Executive David Crowley also wants to keep people coming to his county, and right now, he is worried about his museum.

"We're the owners of the public museum's artifacts, and we're on the brink of losing accreditation over how dilapidated it is," he said.

"If we lose that, we lose one of the things that makes our county distinctive... plus, we'll still be spending more to protect the artifacts."

A Milwaukee County without its unique

features threatens its economic vitality.

"We're dealing with deferred maintenance across the board, and that means we haven't been able to invest in the parks and things that make this county a great place to be," Crowley said. "Our sheriff's office floods, so we need to make improvements to our public safety building just so it can function properly."

"Of course, we want to take care of the bread-and-butter features like roads and bridges, so that the workforce and the commerce that we bring here have a good experience," he noted.

"The more we can put into our infrastructure, the more we can go to businesses and say 'Is this where you want to do business?'"

Rural roadways

In rural Dunn County, N.D., Commissioner Daryl Dukart feels good about the pace of bridge replacement and repair but worries about the state of the county's 60 miles of paved roads.

"We're seeing the energy industry and the agriculture equipment getting bigger and wider, and truckloads are getting longer and heavier," he said. "We're seeing more and more accidents involving ag equipment and residents. Little misdemeanor things, but no fatalities."

No fatalities so far. Widening roads will help keep it that way, and those heavier loads will start to wear on the road surfaces faster than the engineers would have predicted when they were built.

Buch is seeing the same in Lane County, thanks to the longer and hotter wildfire seasons. Though central Oregon's economy grew from logging, now most of the trucks carrying trees are hauling cleanup loads of burned trees and the accompanying hazmat trucks.

"Our main arterial roads are being used

extraordinarily more than normal because we have to do all these cleanup trips," Buch said. "That kind of heavy traffic was never expected for these roads. They're getting battered and won't be able to keep up — they need to be reinforced."

That's what Dukart is seeing from North Dakota counties who haven't been beneficiaries of revenues from the Bakken shale extraction boom.

"Other counties in the east aren't as lucky," he said. "They have a lot more bridges that need refurbishing or rebuilding. And a lot of those areas have greater needs for water development and broadband."

In Ramsey County, the smallest of the large urban counties, McGuire said planners are looking for the area of greatest impact.

"We have a ton of needs. We want to do it all, but we're very focused on housing," she said.

It's a back-to-basics move for the Minnesota county where people left out in the street during the winter face potentially deadly conditions on a nightly basis.

"We're focusing on housing affordability and the kind of housing that allows for services to be provided," she said. "We have the most concentrated areas of poverty in the state, and until we address that, we won't be focusing on the area of greatest impact for what we as a county can do. Why would we want these structures without the people working in them? We plan our infrastructure planning to put humans in there."

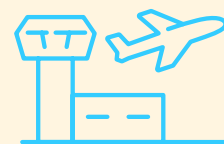
Of course, the pandemic has forced the county to reevaluate its hard infrastructure needs in terms of office space and what it needs to maintain or even own.

"Maybe we don't need all the buildings we did before," McGuire said. "We're reassessing everything we do." ■

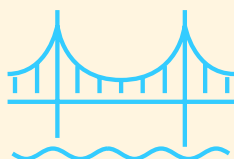
Counties lead our nation's infrastructure network:



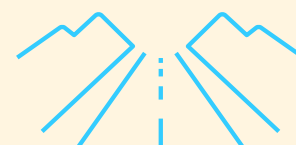
Counties invest \$134 billion in building, maintaining and operating physical infrastructure and public works.



Counties support 78 percent of transit agencies and **34 percent** of airports.



Counties own and maintain 38 percent of bridges.



Counties own and maintain 44 percent of public road miles.



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Montana counties unite to revive passenger rail efforts

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Montana's Missoula County and Dawson County have 129,000 residents and 500 miles between them, and 120,000 of those people live in the former. But they also have something else that spans those differences: a drive to renew long-dormant passenger rail service on the south side of the Treasure State.

The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority has already gained 17 participating counties before the coalition celebrates its first year in November, with communities big and small seeing the social and economic opportunities that will be within reach once the state diversifies its transportation infrastructure.

"This is an effort, a need and desire that transcends any party line or socio-economic line," said Jason Stuart, executive director of the Dawson County Economic Development Council, near the state's eastern border. "You have counties that are incredibly diverse, from tiny little rural counties with 1,000 people to the counties that count as 'urban' in Montana."

Stuart serves as the authority's vice-chairman.

"From the moment I came to eastern Montana, I'd felt the big divide and long-standing resentment toward the western part of the state, where all the political power and money is," Stuart said. "I've never seen an issue that unites east and west like this before."

There is rail service, the Empire Builder, running the width of Montana, crossing the northern part of the state on its way between Chicago and the West Coast. That's been it since 1979, when Amtrak canceled the North Coast Hiawatha line. Missoula County Commissioner Dave Strohmaier said there aren't as many residents who remember that service the way they once did and convincing a new generation of Montanans to believe that kind of service was possible was daunting before the authority launched in 2020. Strohmaier is chairman of the rail authority.

"Interest waxed and waned in the 2000s," he said. "Once there was a feasibility study, it came back with a big price tag, it took the wind out of people's sails. There was always enthusiasm for rail service, it was just subterranean."

The rail authority's composition looks to make a difference this time. A state law passed in the 1990s allows multiple counties to form their own rail authority. The authority has cast a net to 26 counties that were former passenger rail counties or counties that are adjacent to them, all good candidates for service restoration or expansion.

"The effort had been led for 40 years by passionate individuals, advocacy groups and municipalities, cities and towns," Strohmaier said. "What we lacked was the institutional, governance infrastructure to move an effort like this forward in a sustainable fashion over the number of years it will take to make this happen. The counties are making a difference, because by our nature, we work across jurisdictional lines to accomplish something bigger. We're contiguous in a way that municipalities, cities and towns aren't."

The potential return of rail service has enormous practical implications for many of the counties along its route.

"Look at the route from Glendive to Helena," Stuart said. "It's 450 miles, there's one way to get there and for four or five months out of the year, driving can be a dicey, difficult proposition. Getting to a doctor's office or the VA could kill someone."

When it came time for Dawson County to make its contribution to the rail authority, the total came from the county government, the city of Glendive and the Dawson County Tourism Business Improvement District.

"The hotels want people coming through town more and they'll pay to help make that happen," Stuart said. "They

want to give people a reason to come and visit, explore, stay a few days or be a place to stay if someone is driving to town to board a train.

"One of the most popular places people travel is to Sandpoint or Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and this train would take them right there. Or to North Dakota or Minnesota to visit family."

With hopes high for funding from the proposed infrastructure bill in Congress, including \$50 million for the Department of Transportation to conduct a nationwide study on restoration of long-distance passenger rail service and \$2.4 billion for passenger rail enhancements, members of the authority anticipate some traction, particularly if they can win over remaining statewide officials. The effort already has endorsements from Sens. Jon Tester (D) and Steve Daines (R).

"It's time to strike while the iron is hot," Strohmaier said. "In my most wildly optimistic dreams, we're talking three-to-five years until we see things happening, but I don't want to be having this conversation in 10 years, waiting for another study."

In addition to the bipartisan consensus the plan has from its U.S. senators, Strohmaier sees some positive by-products coming from the rail authority's work.

"I've seen elected officials get togeth-

er on this who wouldn't work together on anything else and it could be the start of a lot more regional cooperation," he said. "These relationships we're building are changing the way leadership works in Montana."

"This is a big bold initiative and goes well beyond potholes and zoning and the stuff that counties oftentimes deal with. It's a multiyear effort and something we haven't done before. I cannot think of an issue that has garnered as much bipartisan support as this."

It encouraged Strohmaier to see the more rural counties join the authority early.

"They're keenly aware of their demographics, they have an aging population and recognize that this has become a matter of transportation equity," he said.

Stuart said though passenger rail culture is centered in the Northeast states, it could very much become a way of life in southern Montana.

"It's easy to look at a big place like Montana and say 'not enough people live there to make rail service make sense,' but there are more people living along the southern line than did when they stopped service in 1979," he said. "This isn't going to get done just because 18 counties want it to happen, it's going to be a regional effort, it will be a regional collaboration." ■



People wait at the former Glendive, Mont. passenger rail depot in Dawson County. Part of the depot still exists and is in use by BNSF Railway. Photo courtesy of the Dawson County Economic Development Council

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE: 'MUCH ON THE LINE' FOR COUNTIES

by **Liz Hausmann**

As a clearer legislative timeline for October begins to emerge, the fate of badly needed federal infrastructure investments hangs in the balance, and much is on the line for counties across the United States. Congress, of course, is deliberative by constitutional design and the legislative process is intended to allow for a robust exchange of ideas.

However, we can all agree that America's infrastructure is aging and in dire need of expansion, maintenance and modernization. America's counties are hopeful that Congress can compromise and ensure this historic opportunity to make the most substantial investment in America's infrastructure since the Eisenhower Administration does not pass us by.

Counties play a major role in America's transportation and infrastructure network. We own and operate 44 percent of public roads and 38 percent of bridges, more than any other level of government. At the same time, we directly support 78 percent of public transit systems and 34 percent of airports. Each year, we invest \$134 billion in the construction of infrastructure and the maintenance and operation of public works. Our investment keeps our residents connected, allows for economic development and job growth and gets people where they need to go.

No matter the legislative vehicle Congress decides to pursue, at the local level, we know bipartisan solutions last. Our nation's physical infrastructure is deteriorating and causing real-life consequences for Americans, including serious safety risks, inefficient commerce and global trade implications.

As I stated earlier, America's infrastructure is aging. We are quickly falling behind other developed nations, and without action, we risk putting ourselves at a serious competitive disadvantage in the decades ahead. For example, the United States currently spends less than 1 per-



Fulton County, Ga. Commissioner Liz Hausmann, chair of NACo's Transportation Steering Committee, addresses members at the 2021 Annual Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

cent of our GDP on transportation, while China invests approximately 10 percent. We cannot ignore that the need to invest in transportation infrastructure is becoming more and more urgent. It is time we invest in ourselves.

Delaying critical federal investments in infrastructure is felt most locally where resources may already be constrained. Unique to counties is the majority ownership of off-system bridges. Due to the location of these bridges off the National Highway System, they often suffer from chronic underinvestment and, as a result, can pose a serious danger to road users. In rural counties, these critical local connections can often serve as the only means of accessibility for residents. Congress must act to ensure that our nation's infrastructure is improved to ensure the health, safety and security of all Americans.

Let's talk about what improved transportation infrastructure actually means: It means economic development and job creation and providing opportunities to embrace private equity. It directly provides good-paying jobs that require

education and training. It means launching "shovel-worthy" and not just "shovel-ready" projects. It means embracing innovation and preparing our infrastructure for fast-coming technological advances. It means fixing old assets while at the same time thinking anew, and it means doing all of this without raising corporate taxes.

Here in Fulton County and the 13-county Metro Atlanta Region, we are the economic engine of the South and we expect to grow by 2 million people over the next two decades. Unfortunately, our growth is hindered by some of the worst traffic congestion in the nation. To address this, we have done extensive planning to expand our transit system, including holding site visits with our county and city leaders to transit assets of other major metropolitan areas.

Additionally, our county has legislatively created a regional authority to coordinate efforts with existing transit agencies across the region. Unfortunately, we simply do not have the resources necessary to implement these plans alone and must rely on the intergovernmental partnership to meet the needs of not only our

residents but the many travelers whose commutes take them through our local community each day.

Locally, we are especially pleased to see that investments in public transit continue to be at the forefront of infrastructure negotiations. For Fulton County and Metro Atlanta, expanding eligibility and increasing cost thresholds for our transit projects to access federal resources means continuing our growth and economic development.

Counties have long suffered with having to locally fund what, in actuality, are regional infrastructure problems. Financial constraints, heavy trucks, and extreme congestion are just some of the transportation obstacles that counties face each day. Local authority may stop at a county line, but our transportation challenges certainly do not respect those boundaries.

Rebuilding and modernizing America's infrastructure is a tall task that is too complex for any single level of government to undertake. Simply stated, counties cannot modernize our nation's infrastructure without the support and partnership of the federal government. We cannot afford to put off investing in America's infrastructure any longer. Congress must continue to work together to keep their commitment to delivering critical infrastructure investments for the American people. **■**

Fulton County, Ga. Commissioner Liz Hausmann is chair of NACo's Transportation Policy Steering Committee.

HOT

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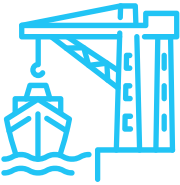
COUNTIES ALSO SUPPORT 78 PERCENT OF TRANSIT AGENCIES AND 34 PERCENT OF AIRPORTS

ANNUALLY, COUNTIES INVEST:

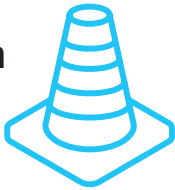
Over **\$6 billion** in air transportation for the provision, operation, construction and support of airport facilities.



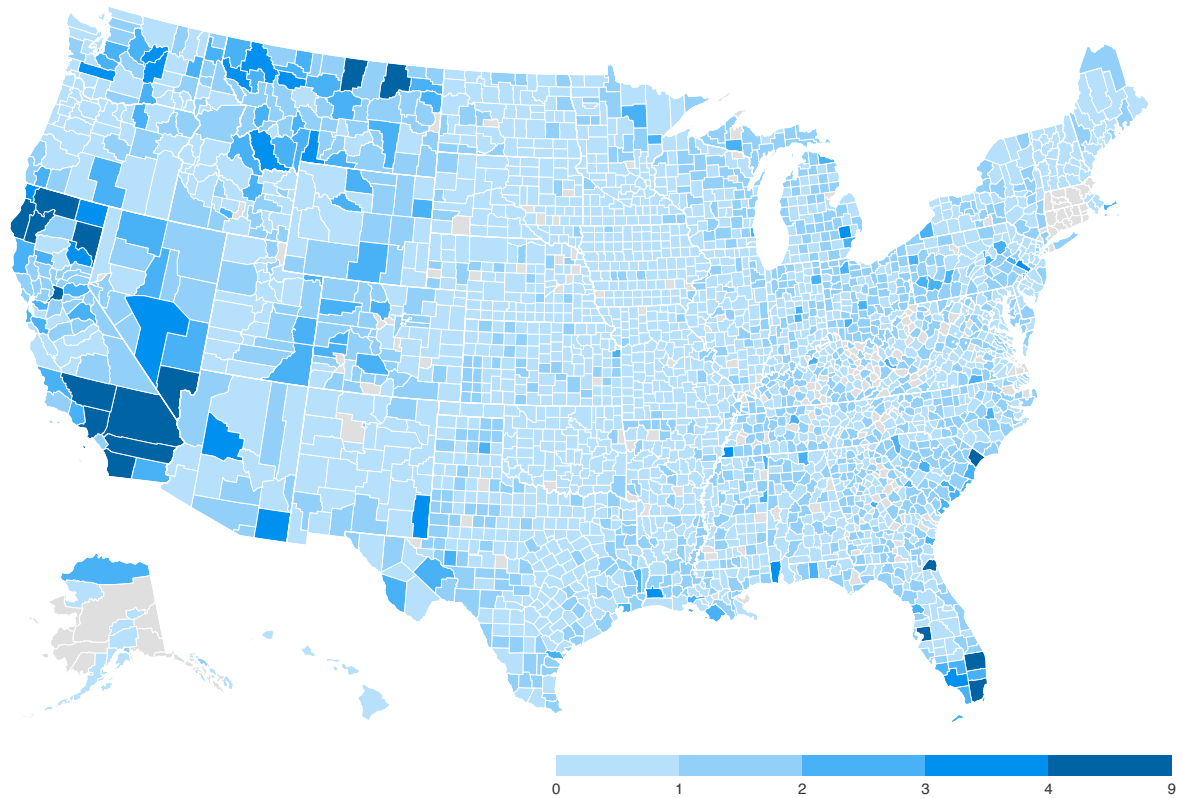
Over **\$550 million** in the operation, maintenance and support of sea and inland port facilities.



Nearly **\$474 million** to operate, maintain and support parking facilities.



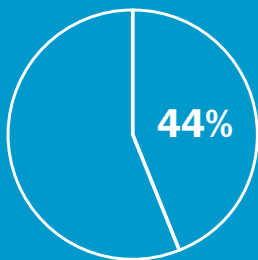
2017 County Airports



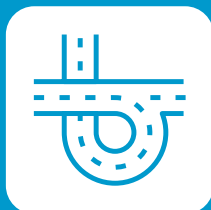
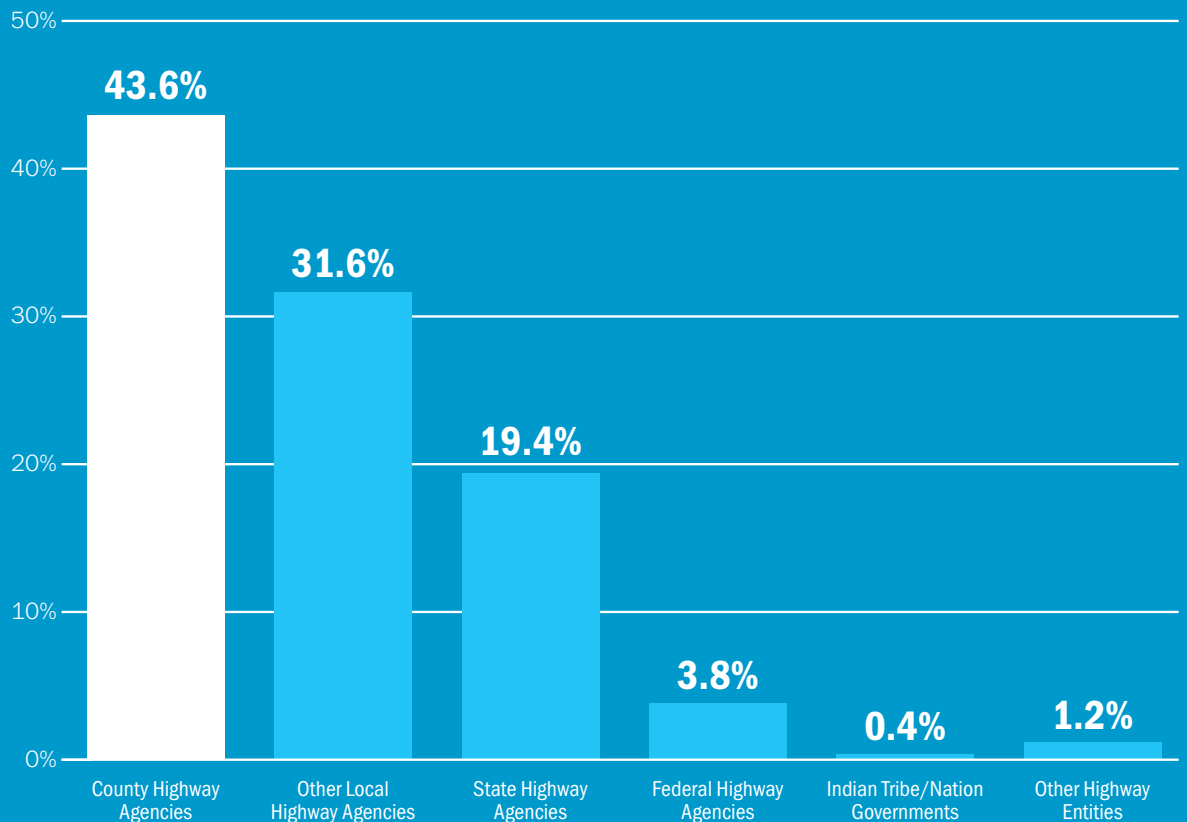
COUNTIES OWN AND MAINTAIN 44 PERCENT OF PUBLIC ROAD MILES

Breakdown of Ownership of Public Roads by Highway Agency, 2019

There are **4.1 million public road miles** within counties across the nation where the majority of trips both start and end.



Counties own and maintain **nearly half (44 percent)** of these road miles.



In total, local highway agencies including, cities, counties and municipalities, own and maintain **3.1 million road miles.**



Each year, counties invest over **\$30 billion** in the maintenance, operation, repair and construction of toll and non-toll highways.



MORE THAN A PIPE DREAM

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Sometimes a widened creek does the job to alleviate flooding. Perhaps a stormwater detention feature does the trick. Or maybe, if you're Harris County, Texas and facing massive floods every hurricane season, it's time to start thinking about digging enormous underground tunnels.

The Harris County Flood Control District is in year two of a study to figure out where larger tunnels could best divert millions of gallons of floodwater, saving lives and untold amounts of property damage annually. A successful 2018 bond measure gave the district \$2.5 billion, but also an expectation that it could ameliorate flooding problems. The measure came on the heels of Hurricane Harvey, which dumped more than 1 trillion gallons of water on the county in four days the previous year.

"We were charged with being innovative, to come up with new technologies," said Scott Elmer, assistant director of operations for the flood control district. "The bond came with a high degree of trust that the citizens invested in us, it's something we have to deliver on."

The flat coastal region that Harris County calls home is dotted with bayous and wetlands that have demonstrated for millennia how hard it is naturally to move water away. Add in 22 different watersheds in the county and the hundreds of municipal and special utility districts

Harris County is experiencing frequent flooding, such as during Hurricane Harvey in 2017, pictured here. Photo by Getty Images

responsible for managing development and the 34 different floodplain administrators and the flood control district can often find itself penned in by chaos, trying to move away excess water from Hurricane Harvey, Tropical Storm Allison and any number of heavy rains.

The region's development, notoriously unguided by zoning, only makes the task harder.

"Predicting future land use and development is not as easy when you don't have an overarching comprehensive plan of development," Elmer said. "There are a lot of constraints on implementing our traditional methods of flood control in a densely developed urban environment."

Tunnels aren't new to Harris County, but they've tended to be closer to 10 feet in diameter and 20 feet below ground. The tunnels in the district's study are closer to 45 feet in diameter and 120 feet below ground.

"We're getting to the point where the engineering and constructability of large-diameter deep tunnels have really advanced a lot in the last 20 or 30 years," Elmer said.

The first phase of the study determined that geological conditions work in favor of

large tunnels, and they would be capable of carrying enough water to address the kind of flooding the region has seen recently. The study is currently determining which of those 22 watersheds would be best served with large tunnels.

"Some are more suited for traditional methods — detention facilities, channel widening, home buyouts, but what we're finding is in more highly developed watersheds, watersheds where flooding happens on a more frequent basis, tunnels start outweighing traditional methods," Elmer said.

"There's no denying the fact that tunnels are an expensive technology, but in general, we can deliver a tunnel quicker than a traditional program that would achieve the same level of benefits," he noted.

It's a long process, and one that won't show any performance improvement until completion, compared to traditional remediation methods that can be done incrementally, like creek widening.

"If you have no budget limitations and you start a tunnel today, you're still looking at 10 years until a finished project is in the ground," Elmer said. "But at the same time, traditional methods could

take up 2,900 acres in what a tunnel could accomplish in 27 acres. That's a lot of property we don't have to acquire and take off the tax rolls.

"It's a much smaller footprint and much less of an impact to our citizens."

Similar tunnels have been successful in diverting excess storm water and sewage in Dallas, San Antonio and Austin in Texas and in Washington, D.C.

So far, the flood control district has funded studies with the Economic Development Administration and Community Development Block Grant funding, but the tunnel projects have been projected to cost \$1.5 billion.

"If I had to guess 10-15 years down the road where we would be, it would be having a spine tunnel to start serving and getting relief and serving to bring branch tunnels to that spine where the water can empty out into bayous and waterways without negative impact," Elmer said.

"I honestly do believe tunnels can work in the Harris County region," he said. "I believe they provide transformational means of flood control. I believe that they are complex and they are expensive, but I think they will be one of the bigger tools in the future for us to utilize." ■

Counties use ARP funds to bridge digital divide

by Adam Pugh

Rural broadband is an issue that stretches far beyond political lines. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when workers were sent home to work remotely, there have been constant examples of the critical need for investments in broadband, especially in rural America. If there is a silver lining to this pandemic, it is that the digital divide in this country demonstrates that the lack of broadband access puts our rural economies at a disadvantage as communities get left behind.

In July 2021, NACo's Broadband Task Force issued its report, "Broadband Task Force: High-Speed Internet is Essential for All Counties," emphasizing that access to affordable high-speed internet is one of the primary equity issues of our time. NACo Past President Gary Moore chartered the task force with the premise that "if you can't connect, you can't compete."

Under the American Rescue Plan Act

(ARP) and the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, investments in broadband infrastructure are a priority of the program. In NACo's public comment to the Department of Treasury, we highlight that the Fiscal Recovery Funds are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to enhance county broadband infrastructure to help us compete in the global economy well into the future. As we look to that future, designing and constructing broadband networks that employ numerous technological solutions and guarantee both redundancy and scalability should be the ultimate target. The advantages of creating future-proofed infrastructure are that economic, education and health care sectors will have the necessary "backbone" infrastructure to propel our rural communities forward for generations to come.

Counties that have utilized their recovery funds under the ARP on broadband expansion are dedicated to closing the digital divide and reaching our most un-

der-served residents. A few examples include:

- Hanover County, Va. recently approved \$17 million in ARP funds to fund high-quality broadband access. The initiative, dubbed "Connect Hanover," will be a public-private partnership that will put fiber optic cables on existing power lines in underserved areas of the county. This project may begin as early as fall 2022 and offer speeds of 100 Mbps for both download and upload.

- Eau Claire County, Wisc. approved investing \$2.8 million on projects to help bring high-speed internet to county residents. The money is a massive step to help the county's Broadband Committee achieve its overarching goal of bringing high-speed internet to the whole county.

- Trigg County, Ky. approved a public-private partnership for up to \$2 million in ARP funds. The contract will outfit the entire county with consistent and affordable broadband service.

- Miami County, Ind. pledged \$1.4

million to fund a significant expansion of high-speed internet to rural parts of the county, including underserved students in low-income areas. As a result of ARP, the local internet provider now plans to install 800 miles of fiber internet and provide access to the public that only has wireless internet or no internet at all.

- Kandiyohi County, Minn. will spend \$1.3 million expanding high-speed broadband to its communities and providing fiber-to-the-home for 755 households.

County officials continue to play a crucial role as policymakers, funders, data aggregators, conveners and partners in pursuing sustainable broadband access, affordability and reliability solutions. By facilitating access to high-speed internet, county leaders are investing in the future of their local communities. ■

Adam Pugh is an associate legislative director at NACo for Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Environment, Energy and Land Use.

DOE launches challenge for communities to increase solar access

by Jack Morgan

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) last month announced an ambitious new target for local governments to increase solar deployment and access: Sixty new SolSmart communities in six months.

Since 2016, the SolSmart program has provided local governments with free assistance and training to help become more solar-ready and streamline practices — such as local planning, zoning, permitting and inspection — that make it easier and more affordable for residents and businesses to go solar. Further, SolSmart provides national recognition for local governments who have taken action to advance solar through a bronze, silver and gold community designation process.

The cost of solar energy has declined 80 percent over the past decade. However, "soft costs," burdensome requirements and other red tape increase costs and discourage solar investment and development. Counties and other localities are uniquely positioned to shape and influence the prospects for solar energy growth.

By streamlining processes and taking other steps to encourage solar development, DOE and SolSmart are supporting counties to become "open for solar business."

The 60 new SolSmart communities challenge follows DOE's successful Summer of Solar campaign, which signed up more than 125 communities for the newly developed, SolarAPP+ tool. DOE's Na-



SolSmart Program Manager Theresa Perry (center) poses with (l-r) San Miguel County, Colo. Commissioner Hilary Cooper, Elkart County, Ind. Councilwoman Tina Wenger, Santa Fe County N.M. Commissioner Anna Hansen and Yadkin County, N.C. Commissioner Kevin Austin.

tional Renewable Energy Lab developed this free web-based platform to fast-track residential solar installation permits. The lab will continue updating the tool to include energy storage permitting and other resources. These efforts support the deployment of more solar energy to reach the Biden-Harris Administration's goals of achieving 100 percent clean electricity by 2035 and a net-zero economy by 2050.

"Everyone has access to sunlight but not everyone has access to solar power — this Administration is committed to changing that," said Secretary of Energy Jennifer M. Granholm. "DOE's SolarAPP+ tool and SolSmart program are helping

communities tear down barriers to clean energy and unlock the health and economic benefits of solar. We are challenging communities to increase solar deployment and providing them the tools they need to succeed."

To date, 90 county governments have become more solar-ready and reached SolSmart designation. Recent SolSmart third-party evaluation and research found that SolSmart-designated communities added between 300-450 megawatts (MW) of solar capacity, which translated into \$1 billion to \$2 billion in additional solar investment. Research also found that local governments cited that one of

the largest impacts of SolSmart has been increased knowledge about solar energy. Earlier this year, DOE announced a \$10 million funding opportunity to expand SolSmart over the next five years and incorporate new solar-related technologies while emphasizing assistance for underserved communities.

To take solar action and meet the SolSmart challenge, please visit www.solsmart.org or contact Jack Morgan at jmorgan@naco.org. ■

Morgan is senior program manager, Resilient Economies and Communities at NACo.

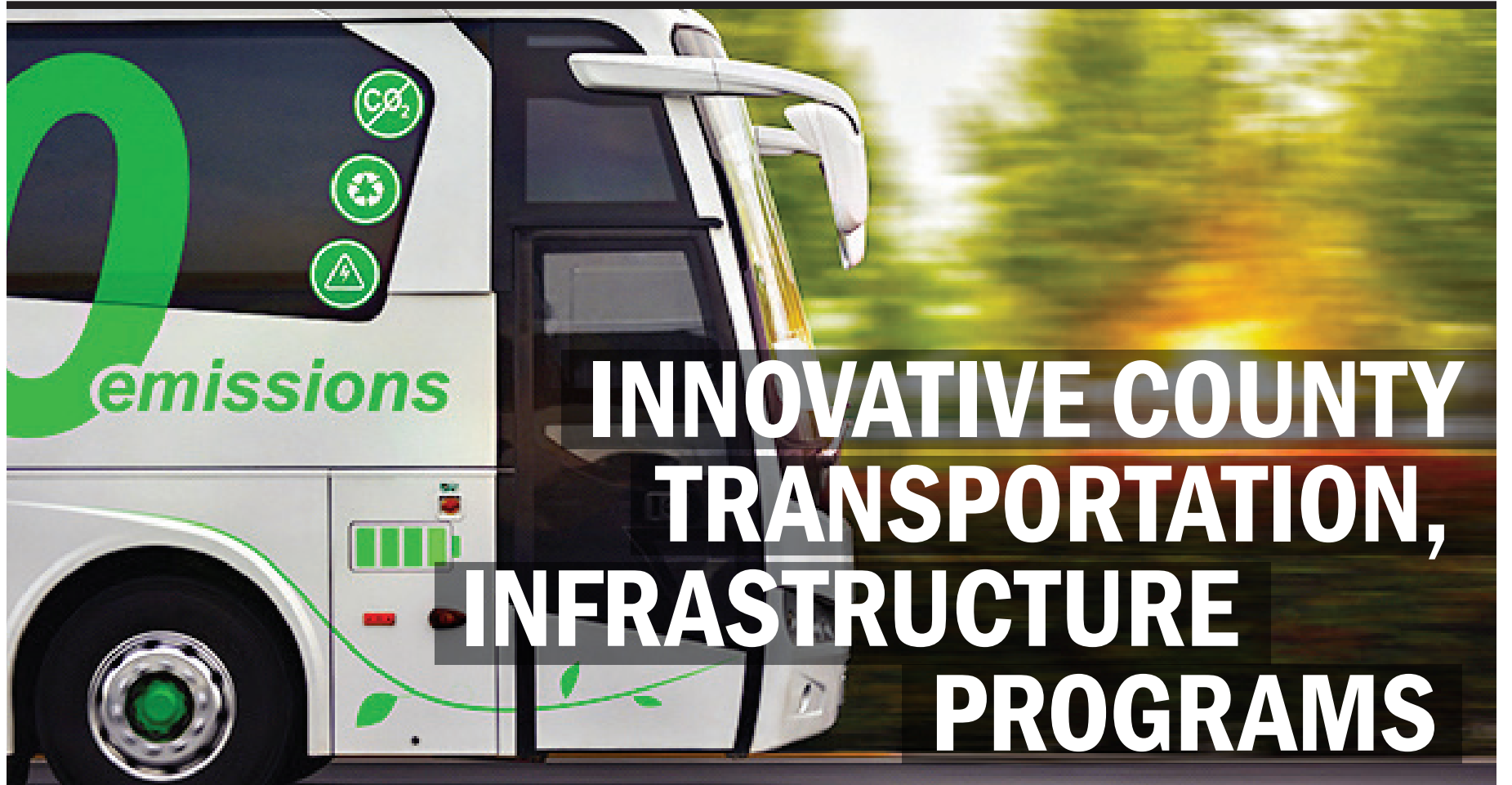


Photo courtesy of Fairfax County, Va.

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

Across the country, counties are working to bring innovations to transportation and infrastructure programs that help county residents. Here's a sampling.

Electric bikes

In Colorado, Pueblo County will equip low-income essential workers with an electric bicycle as part of a new program aimed at providing reliable transportation options and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the *Pueblo Chieftain* reported.

The Colorado Energy Office awarded \$135,000 to the county through its Can Do eBike Pilot Program, enough to purchase 42 e-bikes which vary in price from \$2,100 for a Class 1 model to \$1,600 for a Class 2 bike.

That grant money doesn't require any matching funds from the county.

The idea is for the bicycles to act as reliable, consistent transportation for working people who may not be able to afford a car or who cannot rely on the city's public transportation.

Ferry system connects island to mainland

Sometimes, counties must advocate for funding of innovative solutions for county residents. In Hyde County, N.C., businesses depend on a state-run ferry system that takes tourists and residents to and from Hatteras to Ocracoke Island in the Outer Banks. Hyde County Commissioner Tom Pahl last week wrote in an editorial in the *Ocracoke Observer* that fully funding the ferry service is necessary to keep the region humming: "Revenue gen-

erated to State and Local government in the form of sales taxes, income taxes, property taxes and occupancy taxes is all tied to a healthy tourism economy – which in turn is tied to fully operating ferry service."

Electric buses

In a step forward toward a zero-emissions vehicle fleet, Fairfax County, Va. will buy new all-electric buses, trash and recycling trucks and a box truck using \$4.4 million in state grant funds.

The money will go toward four electric Fairfax Connector buses, four solid waste trucks and one medium-duty truck, as well as installing electric charging stations for these vehicles. These demonstration projects will advance the county's efforts to electrify its fleet, helping officials learn more about operating and maintaining these vehicles.

"To cut carbon emissions we have to reimagine the way in which we travel," said Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeffrey McKay. "As a county, we are already actively moving towards cutting our emissions from our public transit and this will move us closer to our end goal."

Solar energy powering county buildings

Montgomery County, Md. encompasses 19 municipalities and is home to more than 1 million people. Christopher Brown, chief of Montgomery County's Office of Energy and Sustainability, said in the past five years, solar panels have been installed atop libraries, recreation centers and a fire station. In deploying the technology, Brown said Montgomery

County aims to set an example for other counties and cities about the benefits of solar programs.

"Municipalities and counties know that solar is the wave of the future," said Warren Leon, executive director of the Clean Energy States Alliance. "They also want to encourage their residents and businesses to install solar. By putting solar on their own buildings, they are leading by example."

New York counties band together to procure electric vehicles

Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy last week made a major announcement with Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone for a new shared services partnership to procure electric vehicles together. Albany County now joins Suffolk and Westchester counties in a tri-county agreement that increases the combined purchasing power and will drive down the costs associated with transitioning the counties away from fossil fuel-powered fleets.

"Just last week, Albany County was designated a Climate Smart Community by New York State because we've demonstrated our commitment to preventing and preparing for climate change, including through our past investments in electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. Today, I'm proud to build on that progress by partnering with like-minded county executives through this innovative shared services plan," said McCoy.

"Through this plan, all three counties will be able to transition to 100 percent electric fleets no later than 2030. Not only will we cut our emissions through

this plan, we will also be cutting the price tag, which will ultimately benefit our taxpayers. It's my hope that more counties will partner with us, and this progress will encourage those in the private sector to follow suit," he added.

Electrified roads? Michigan will start pilot program

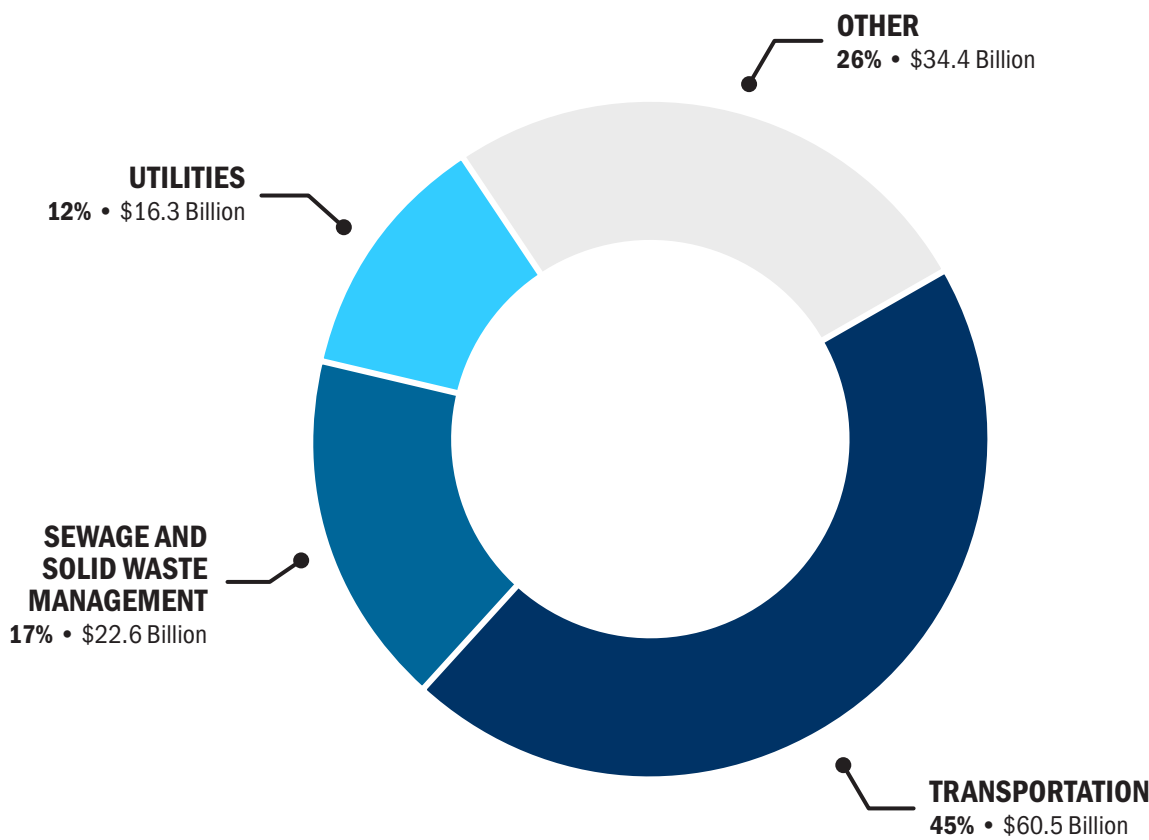
A one-mile stretch of road somewhere in Wayne, Oakland or Macomb counties will be picked to host the Inductive Vehicle Charging Pilot, according to the *Detroit Free Press*. The Michigan Department of Transportation was planning to issue a request for proposal late last month. It's not clear how the technology would work, how soon the pilot project would be operational or how much it might cost, although this type of advance has been discussed by experts as one possible future for EV charging and testing has been tried in Europe.

Gondolas

Tired of traffic? How about boarding a gondola instead? Proposals have been made for gondolas in unlikely places (not ski resorts) including Los Angeles County and Arlington County, Va. The LA proposal would connect riders from downtown to Dodger Stadium in about 7 minutes according to the company behind the project. In Arlington County, Va., a gondola going across the Potomac River would connect the county to Washington, D.C.'s Georgetown neighborhood, bypassing traffic. The idea has been the subject of countless studies for the past five years, but county officials are looking at more realistic plans such as extending metro or adding new bus lanes. **LI**

COUNTIES INVEST \$134 BILLION IN BUILDING, MAINTAINING AND OPERATING PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC WORKS

Share of Total County Infrastructure Spending, by Category, 2017

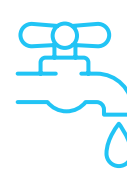


ANNUALLY, COUNTIES INVEST:

\$61 billion in transportation infrastructure, such as roads and bridges.



\$61 billion in the construction of public facilities, such as hospitals, schools, jails and other local institutions.



More than **\$22 billion** in sewage and solid waste management.

More than **\$100 billion** in community health and hospitals.



\$12 billion in building and maintaining parks and recreational facilities.

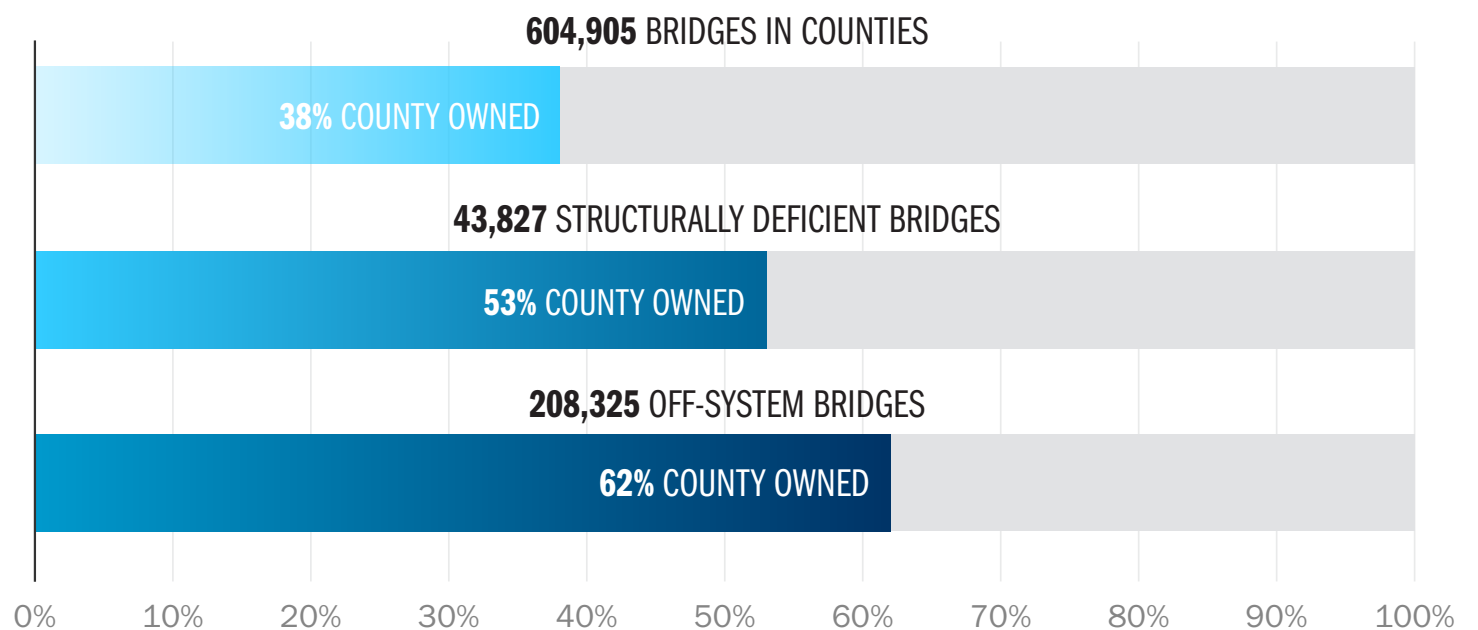


Counties lead our nation's infrastructure network, investing in roads, bridges, airports, public transit and ports to keep America moving and our economy growing.

COUNTIES OWN AND MAINTAIN 38 PERCENT OF BRIDGES

Breakdown of County Owned Bridges, 2020

Counties own and maintain **38 percent** of the more than **600,000 bridges** that comprise the national bridge inventory.




FCC awards first round of connectivity grants

by **Rachel Mackey**

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) last month announced that it is committing \$1.2 billion in grants to 3,040 schools, 260 libraries and 24 consortia under the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) program. Authorized under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the fund provides competitive grants to schools and libraries to purchase laptop and tablet computers, Wi-Fi hotspots and broadband connectivity for students, school staff and library patrons who lack broadband access during the COVID-19 pandemic. County school districts and county libraries are among the recipients of these funds.

While the county role in local public schools varies across the country, all counties share a tax base with local school boards and provide complementary services to local students.

Counties also play an active role in supporting and funding K-12 schools in five states including Alaska, Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee and support more than 1,000 libraries across the nation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the digital divide impacting counties across the nation, with rural and low-income students, in particular, facing barriers to remote learning. While many county governments have used local funds to provide devices, hotspots and other resources to ensure continuity in learning, the fund will serve as an important resource as NACo works with federal partners to implement long-term solutions that address the digital divide. 

Rachel Mackey is an associate legislative director, Human Services and Education, in NACo's Government Affairs Department.

INFRASTRUCTURE RESOURCES

■ **Airport Improvement Program:** The AIP provides grants to public agencies for the planning and development of public-use airports. [faa.gov/airports/aip/overview/](https://www.faa.gov/airports/aip/overview/)

■ **Bike League:** How to create a bicycle-friendly community. [bikeleague.org/community](https://www.bikeleague.org/community)

■ **Broadband funding:** BroadbandUSA's federal funding site connects you to various funding opportunities that support broadband planning, digital inclusion and deployment projects. [broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/federal/federal-funding](https://www.broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/federal/federal-funding)

■ **Department of Transportation grants:** Find out about grants at the DOT. <https://www.grants.gov/learn-grants/grant-making-agencies/departments-of-transportation.html>

■ **Emergency Broadband Benefit:** The Emergency Broadband Benefit is an FCC program designed to help families and households struggling to afford internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic. [fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit](https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit)

■ **Emergency Connectivity Fund:** The FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) is a \$7.17 billion program that will help schools and libraries provide the tools and services their communities need for remote learning during the COVID-19 emergency period. [fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund](https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund)

■ **Environmental Protection Agency:** An important focus of the Water Infrastructure and Resiliency Finance Center is encouraging effective use of federal, state and local funds. <https://www.epa.gov/waterfinancecenter/effective-funding-frameworks-water-infrastructure>

■ **Federal Transit Administration:** Find out about grants at the Federal Transit Administration. [transit.dot.gov/grants](https://www.transit.dot.gov/grants)

■ **ROUTES Initiative:** Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) is an initiative to address disparities in rural transportation infrastructure. [transportation.gov/rural](https://www.transportation.gov/rural)

■ **FRA CRISI grant program:** The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant program offers nearly \$360 million for counties. CRISI grants can be used for highway-rail grade crossing improvement, rail line relocation and improvement and multimodal connection enhancement projects. <https://www.naco.org/fradot>

■ **SolSmart:** Helping counties go solar. [solsmart.org](https://www.solsmart.org)

■ **County Explorer Report on Infrastructure:** Read the report here: <https://www.naco.org/county-role-infrastructure>

Photo Taken By Wilfong Works

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October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month

Do your part: #BeCyberSmart

by Rita Reynolds

For the past 18 years, October has been considered National Cybersecurity Awareness month. So much has changed in these 18 years. As I ponder on what life was like in 2004, it amazes me at how the technology advances have forever changed our lives. Facebook was just starting its journey in 2004. Twitter wasn't even around — that came in 2007. How did we live without Facebook and other social media access? (That's



Reynolds

for another article!) Another marvel is that mobile phones like the iPhone weren't in circulation either; we used flip phones!

As one can imagine, cybersecurity back then was a bit simpler, but not completely obscure. One would think that cyberattacks were unheard of then. Well, interestingly, the first cyberattack was in 1988, when Cornell student Robert Morris launched the very first computer worm on the internet! Since then, cyber hacking has become an industry, with a significant growth in reported losses (see below).

Fast forward to today. All walks of life use technology in some fashion that is connected to the internet. For the younger generation, it's online banking, online purchases, smart homes with always-on internet access (think Alexa or Google Home). For the older generation, I would venture to say that some of these same activities are occurring, but throw in e-signatures for car loans, mortgages and other major contracts.

Local government is no different. Back in the early 2000s, county government was only just beginning to implement enterprise email systems, actively create static websites to share information and automate some of its financial systems. In some situations, automation in specific areas like jail management and children's services was taking hold. The cyber landscape for hackers was much less prevalent and available for exploitation.

Today is a whole different

story. Cyber activities permeate all of our daily activities, both from a personal and work perspective. As a matter of fact, if it weren't for the advancement in technology, I would venture to say that the pandemic situation would have resulted in dire consequences across the board for access to citizen's services as well as keeping not only the lights on, but county employees working.

What does all of this have to do with October being cybersecurity awareness month? As one can see, it is even more imperative that everyone make cyber safety a priority, both in your work life as well as your private life. The work/life balance truly takes on new meaning when it comes to cybersecurity. We don't differentiate near as much as we did even five years ago. One may ask, "Why?"

First, the increase in technology is allowing remote work to occur more frequently, on an as-needed basis as well as a permanent basis. Secondly, there's no longer a fine line between what you do on your work device as opposed to a personal device. In some cases, they are interchangeable. Cloud access to both work and personal accounts and information contributes to that.

As you reflect on personal and work cybersecurity, here is a short list of practical takeaways as well as resources for both areas of your life.



- 1. MFA:** Implement multi-factor authentication on your mobile phone, your online accounts (especially banking) and talk to your county IT support, to see if MFA is implemented for the county.
- 2. Mobile devices:** Secure your cell phone and other mobile devices with a passcode and/or biometrics. And don't save bank account information or your Social Security number (or your kids') on those devices.
- 3. Mobile App Access:** When you get that message from an application to allow access to your mobile device, think before you select "allow." The more apps you allow access to your mobile device, the more vulnerable you are to attacks. Not to mention, that it drains your battery life.
- 4. Text messages from unknowns:** If you don't recognize the cell number and the text is saying you just won a prize, you can pretty much bet on it being a "phishing text." Don't respond. Be sure to block the caller as well.
- 5. Wi-Fi:** It is good practice to turn off your cell phone Wi-Fi, especially when you are in public places like airports, hospitals or sports/entertainment venues. I know it's convenient to have the mobile Wi-Fi on, but keep in mind the security exposure you may be creating.
- 6. Change home passwords:** When you implement new devices in your home (home Wi-Fi, security cameras, baby

monitors, Alexa, Google Home), make sure to change the default admin password.

- 7. Use password keepers:** It's tough keeping track of all those passwords! Think about using a password keeper. Here are a few suggestions (KeepPass, LastPass, RoboForm).

For more practical tips and security best practices, here are some valuable resources from nationally known organizations:

- **CISA resources:** <https://www.cisa.gov/cybersecurity-awareness-month> The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (a part of Homeland Security), provides a plethora of educational materials for employees and organizations. There are also templates to use for each week during October that follows a theme.
- **Staysafeonline:** <https://staysafeonline.org/stay-safe-online/> This resource provides great information on online safety basics, how to secure your key accounts and devices, how to report cybercrime, managing your privacy, how to check your privacy settings and other tools to help you stay safe online. Consider sharing with your county employees
- **MS-ISAC:** <https://www.cisecurity.org/ms-isac/ms-isac-tool-kit/> The Center for Internet Security hosts the Multi-State Information and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC). Each year they also put out additional materials and guidance on helping your county and employees increase their cyber awareness.
- **NACo:** <https://www.naco.org/articles/do-your-part-becyber-smart>

Throughout the month of October, NACo will provide weekly articles following the following themes:

- Week 1:** Be Cyber Smart
- Week 2:** Fight the Phish!
- Week 3:** Explore. Experience. Share. – Cybersecurity Career Awareness Week
- Week 4:** Cybersecurity First

Rita Reynolds is the chief information officer at NACo, overseeing internal technology operations.



SUMMIT COUNTY, OHIO

Summit County, Ohio's first County Executive John Morgan held a public contest to design the official Summit County seal. George Francis Seigman, a retired teacher with the county seat of Akron's public school system, won the contest and received two \$50 savings bonds for designing the winning seal. The Summit County Council officially adopted the seal in 1981.



The factory in the upper left portion of the seal represents the manufacturing industry that boosted the county's economy.

The image in the upper right portion of the seal symbolizes how the land that was to become Summit County was situated as the westernmost point of the Western Reserve, home to Native American tribes.

A depiction of a boat represents how Summit County was a major stop along the Ohio and Erie canals. The county received the name "summit" because it was one of the highest points along the canal route.

Farmland in the lower left portion of the seal depicts how many residents farmed the county's fertile soil and utilized the many fresh water sources prior to the county developing into a manufacturing center.

The 10 stars around the seal's perimeter represent the county's 1981 ranking as having the fifth-largest population and the fifth-largest income level in the state.

If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Rachel Looker at rlooker@naco.org.

BRIGHT IDEAS | MARICOPA COUNTY, Ariz.

Maricopa County Taking Innovative Steps to Address Future Water Supply Demand

PROBLEM: Changing weather conditions and climate change creates a need for new water management strategies.

SOLUTION: Recognize stormwater as an important resource and establish programs that utilize alternative water management strategies.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

The Flood Control District in Maricopa County, Ariz., is taking innovative steps to address future water supply-demand imbalances throughout the state.

The district in 2015 updated its mission statement to recognize stormwater as an important resource “for the long-term benefits of the community and environment.”

“It was a big deal when that mission statement was changed because it opened the door for the program, the branch and our ongoing projects under that,” said Nichola Balik, Water Resources and Conservation planner.

The updated mission statement launched a new chapter for integrated stormwater and land management in the district and led to the creation of the Water Resources Program.

Started with the help of a staff intern, the program increases regional collaborations with public agencies to promote integrated water resources management as a component of flood risk mitigation.

Climate change, drought conditions and continued population growth has caused the area to seek alternative strategies to manage future water-related imbalances.

“Instead of treating it [stormwater] as a nuisance, we’re trying to treat it more as a resource,” Balik said. “Because in the arid southwest, any type of water you have is extremely



Members of the Maricopa County Flood Control District partner with the Watershed Management Group during a volunteer work event to plant drought-tolerant cacti, wildflowers and grasses at the Durango Campus in Maricopa County, Ariz.

valuable.”

The flood control district seeks alternative water management strategies such as establishing green infrastructure and using watershed-based planning as tools in the flood management toolkit.

Terry Cooper, manager for the flood control district’s Landscape Architecture and Water Conservation Branch, served as the driving force for the Water Resources Program, Balik said.

The program launched in 2016 and works with all municipalities within Maricopa County, the state and other regional agencies to find innovative ways to conserve water and find alternative stormwater management techniques.

Through the program, the

flood control district produces documents for water resources management strategies and assists with education and outreach activities.

The district is working on multiple projects within the program. One, dubbed the Durango Retrofit, is looking to create a sitewide stormwater management system at the district’s administration building office.

The Durango Campus Landscape and Water Conservation Retrofit Feasibility and Costing Assessment is estimated to reduce 1.2 million gallons of potable water annually by updating landscaping and an aging irrigation system.

The goals of the retrofit are to reduce outdoor water use by two thirds, optimize

stormwater runoff in the landscaping through green infrastructure and low-impact development practices and use highly drought-tolerant plant material on smart irrigation systems.

Balik said the district will turn the office campus into a living lab to collect long-term, quantitative data that can help with other implementations of green infrastructure and low impact development.

“We’re trying to take a massive county that has 86 various large structures conveying large amounts of stormwater, which inherently people see as a nuisance, and now we’re changing that paradigm to try to appreciate that water and find more inclusivity to that,” he said.

Construction for the retrofit will start next year.

The flood control district owns over 33,000 acres of land and has also begun a structure evaluation of its 104 structures for potential water conservation strategies and future retrofits.

Another project through the Waters Resources Program is a tall-pot nursery originally established in 2002. The nursery serves as a mechanism for re-vegetating disturbed sites after projects by using native plant material that’s drought tolerant.

More than 4,500 native tall pot trees are ready to be planted for revegetation efforts throughout the flood control district’s projects.

Balik said the plants save water because they need little to no irrigation to grow.

“Every day, we are creating models that focus on hydraulics and hydrology and we have to convey that water and direct it to protect people and property,” he said. “We have a responsibility to find the best use for that water.”

Other projects through the program include the creation of a comprehensive green infrastructure handbook, forming a workshop on green infrastructure and low-impact development and studying different forms of rainwater harvesting.

“It’s time to recognize that we live in response to nature, and we need to live with it,” Balik said. “As a public agency, we have a responsibility to be better and by constantly excluding nature from the equation, it’s making things worse.”

“There isn’t another option,” he said. “We have to figure out a way to work with nature.” **CN**

Maricopa County’s Water Resources Program is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the County Resiliency: Infrastructure, Energy and Sustainability category.

Student artwork depicts scenes of Pitt County, N.C



Winning artwork by Camden Atkinson of Pitt County, N.C.

Camden Atkinson is the 12th-grade winner of the NACo student art competition held this year. Camden graduated from D.H. Conley High School in Pitt County, N.C.

Camden's artwork is a pencil drawing showing different aspects of the county, including a county fair, the county courthouse, a middle school, the water tower with the words "Home to the East Carolina Pirates," as well as a local hospital. His work, along with 12 others, will be featured in a 2022 NACo calendar.

When Pitt County Board Chair **Ann Floyd Huggins** read about the competition in *County News*, she sprang into action. In her previous career working as a caseworker and field representative for members of Congress in her district, she ran the annual Congressional Art Competition. She reconnected with local art teachers, who prompted their students to enter the competition. In particular, art teacher



Ann Floyd Huggins

Jane Behan, who recently retired as coordinator of arts education, was instrumental in inspiring students to enter the competition.

"It wasn't just one phone call," Floyd Huggins said. "We called and called and said, 'Are you doing anything?'" The teachers did something. In all, the county has five winners in the competition, including one honorable mention.

"The art competition is a fantastic idea," Floyd Huggins said.

"It's a great way for students – and adults – to find out about all the services that counties offer. It's hard sometimes to get the idea across about all the things that counties do."

The Pitt County Board plans to recognize the winners at an upcoming board meeting.

The art competition is sponsored by Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading non-profit arts organization, which serves, advances and leads a network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain and support the arts in America. They have partnered with NACo for almost 25 years to educate and inform county elected leaders about the importance and value of the arts to their community, both culturally and economically. **CN**

Winning artwork will be featured in a 2022 NACo calendar and featured in County News.

GET TO KNOW...

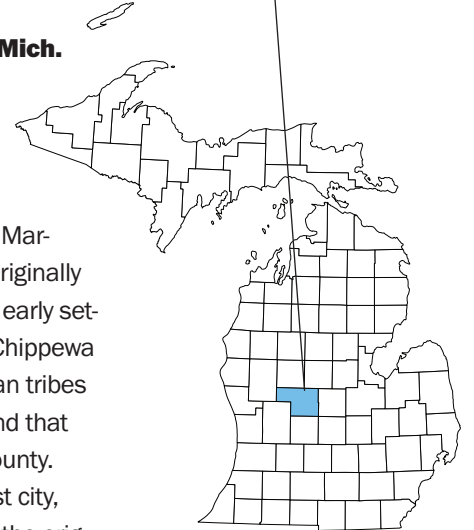
Montcalm County, Mich.

Welcome, Montcalm County, Mich.

Located in western Michigan, Montcalm County is named after French military commander General Marquis de Montcalm. Originally established in 1850, early settlements of Ottawa, Chippewa and Potawatomi Indian tribes encompassed the land that now makes up the county.

The county's largest city, Greenville, served as the original county seat. The current county seat of Stanton started as a lumber town, home to lumber and shingle mills. Montcalm County now has a population of around 63,000.

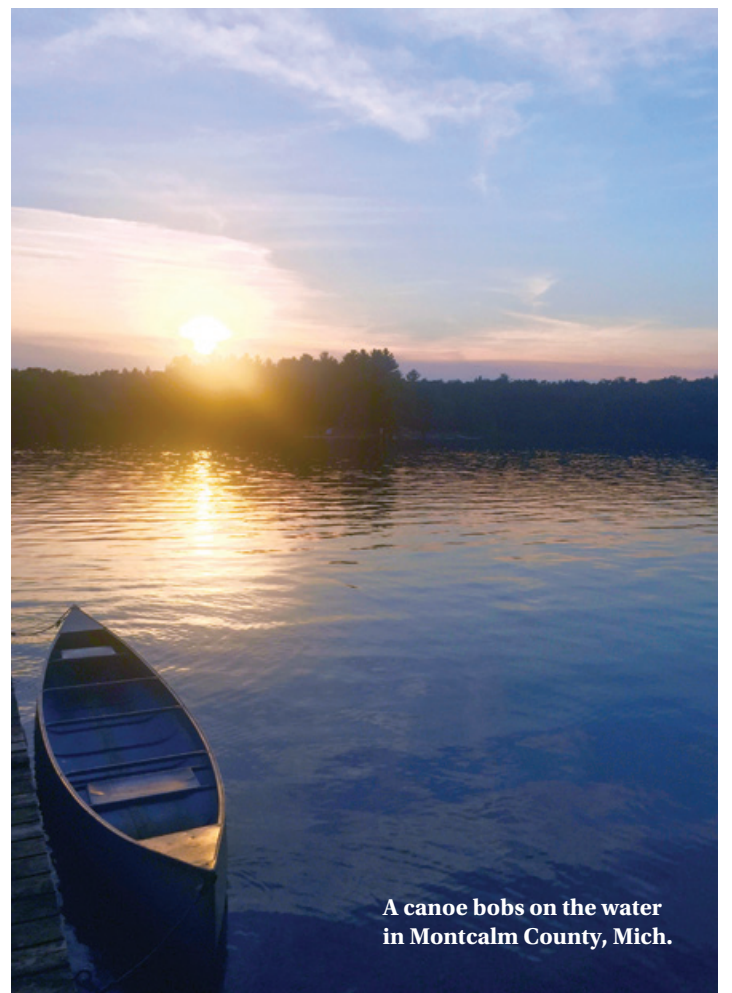
Surrounded by the Great Lakes, the county featured many lakeside amusements, including swimming and boat races at pavilions constructed



in the early 1900s. A portion of the Manistee National Forest is located in the county.

Supermarket chain Meijer is headquartered in Greenville. Meijer is credited with starting the modern supercenter concept.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.



A canoe bobs on the water in Montcalm County, Mich.

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NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

CALIFORNIA

• **CONTRA COSTA COUNTY** has launched a **resentencing program** to address harsh prison terms and roll back sentences that do not “serve the interest of justice.” A law that went into effect in 2019 allows district attorneys to petition a court for resentencing, *Richmond Confidential* reported. Funding from the state for the initiative will be used to add staff to the resentencing units of the district attorney and the public defender. Two people have been resentenced under the new law. Nine other counties in the state have launched similar programs.

• The Department of Public Health in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** issued an order requiring **vaccine verification** for customers and employees at indoor bars, wineries, breweries, night clubs and lounges. Customers and employers were required to have at least one dose of the vaccine by Oct. 7 and both doses by Nov. 4, according to the order. The order also requires vaccine verification or proof of a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of attending outdoor “mega events.” Those attending indoor mega events are already required to show proof of vaccination or proof of a negative test.

COLORADO

• **BOULDER COUNTY** Public Health is offering a program to businesses that will allow customers and staff to **not wear masks indoors**. Masks are

currently required in indoor public spaces, but the Vaccine Verification program allows business owners to submit an application to shed the masks if 95 percent of people in the indoor space are vaccinated, *Daily Camera* reported. The number of unvaccinated people cannot exceed 5 percent. Businesses are responsible for verifying vaccine statuses.

• Commissioners in **MONT-EZUMA COUNTY** approved a **Community Intervention Program** to dispatch EMTs (emergency medical technicians) and mental healthcare workers to 911 situations. The program assists those suffering from non-criminal emergency situations related to public intoxication, mental illness, suicide threats, homelessness or family disputes. An EMT and clinical social worker will work to de-escalate and mitigate problems, *The Journal* reported.

FLORIDA

• **MIAMI-DADE COUNTY** launched a **Public Electric Vehicle Charging Program** to offer “smart” electric-vehicle charging stations (“smart” refers to sharing data connections) at parking facilities. The program aims to make the county a more resilient community and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told WFOR-TV the charging stations eliminate a barrier to purchasing an electric vehicle.

GEORGIA

The **CHATHAM COUNTY**



CALIFORNIA

• **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** concluded its first-ever Live Well San Diego **Youth Mentorship and Internship Program**. Local young people met with county employees over the course of three months to learn about the role of county government. Participants in the cohort found themselves working in county divisions such as health, emergency services and parks and recreation. The program is part of Live Well San Diego Youth Sector’s yearlong leadership program, which formed to encourage youth civic engagement. Photo courtesy of San Diego County News Center

Board of Commissioners **issued an apology** for the county’s role in the lynching of a Black teen in 1921.

Sixteen-year-old Eugene Daniel was unlawfully taken from the Chatham County Jail and lynched on Sept. 18, 1921 by a mob of residents on the basis of an unsubstantiated allegation. He was denied the opportunity to present his defense and his constitutional right to a fair trial.

Chatham County officials recently said that there is evidence that a county commissioner, the sheriff, the county coroner and the Chatham County jail keeper were complicit in the perpetration of Daniel’s lynching. No

suspects were ever investigated or prosecuted.

NEVADA

• **WASHOE COUNTY** will take over primary responsibility for **homeless services** in northern Nevada as of July 2022. The City of Reno had directed homelessness services since 2008, but always had to receive approval from the county for funding. The agreement transferring authority will include a formalized cost-sharing agreement with the county, Reno and the City of Sparks, *The Nevada Independent* reported.

See NEWS FROM page 11



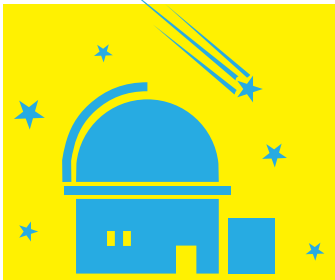
MARYLAND

The **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** Department of Transportation is encouraging parents to use a “Walking School Bus” to safely get their children to and from school. A walking school bus is similar to a carpool group and is organized by parents. Adults supervise children as they walk to and from school, leading children along a set route to pick up or drop off children at designated spots. The effort is part of the department’s Safe Routes to School program that encourages children to safely walk or bike to school.



FLORIDA

• The sheriff’s office in **ESCAMBIA COUNTY** has launched an initiative to help **law enforcement identify individuals with autism**. The Occupants with Autism program alerts all first responders when an individual with autism may be in a vehicle or home. The sheriff’s office provides residents free decals that can be placed on the rear window of a vehicle or door to a home to inform first responders that there is a person inside with autism. First responders will then use autism training skills when responding to a situation. Photo courtesy of Escambia County Sheriff’s Office



MICHIGAN

Construction has started for a **public observatory** that will house a permanently mounted telescope in **OTTAWA COUNTY**. Ottawa County Parks and Recreation partnered with the Shoreline Amateur Astronomical Association to design and construct the 15-foot fiberglass dome, *The Holland Sentinel* reported. Once construction is complete, the groups' goals are to host public-viewing nights and leave the park open late for people to use the observatory or view special astronomical events. County Park staff will operate the telescope.

From NEWS FROM page 10

NEW YORK

- **WARREN COUNTY** administrators are considering allowing **e-bike** users to ride the Warren County Bikeway trail. Advocates say the bikes, which have a supplementary motor to help climb hills or cross intersections, could encourage more seniors to use the trail, the local ABC affiliate reported.

- Water fountains in **WEST-CHESTER COUNTY** parks will soon be replaced by **bottle filling stations**. The stations will make it easier to fill water bottles and, county officials hope, discourage single-use plastic bottle use.

OHIO

CUYAHOGA COUNTY has created a new **public utility division** to manage its proposed microgrid energy program. The public utility would provide electric, natural gas and thermal energy to select geographic locations suitable for microgrids, renewable energy and, potentially, cogeneration, but first will look for a design consultant to plan several microgrids.

OREGON

When **MARION COUNTY** employees contract COVID-19, they will now be paid, rather than having to use sick leave or vacation leave. The Board of Commissioners adopted a policy requiring employees to provide proof of needing to isolate through a local public health department letter, but doesn't allow a doctor's note. The policy is retroactive to July 1 and lasts until the end of the 2021.



VIRGINIA

- **ARLINGTON** and **FAIRFAX counties** have adopted 5-cent taxes on **plastic bags** starting

in 2022. The tax will apply to bags from grocery stores, convenience shops and drug stores. For the first year, retailers will be able to keep 2 cents for each bag taxed, but in 2023, that will be reduced to 1 cent, ARLNow.com reported. The revenue can be used to offset environmental cleanup, fund educational programs around reducing waste and mitigating pollution or to provide reusable bags to recipients of human service agencies.

- The **LOUDOUN COUNTY** Board of Supervisors recently directed its joint committee with the School Board to study the **harm done to the county's Black community** by county policies over the past 80 years. The committee will report back to the Board of Supervisors with recommendations for possible solutions, in partnership with the county's Black community, the *Loudoun Times-Mirror* reported. Such policies have included the prevention of



NEVADA

- Better late than never, **ELKO COUNTY** celebrated its **100th county fair** over Labor Day weekend, making up for lost time after the technical centennial celebration was canceled in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.



WYOMING

ALBANY COUNTY won the elite award in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) **Breastfeeding Award of Excellence** program. The annual program recognizes exemplary local WIC breastfeeding programs and provides models to motivate agencies to strengthen their breastfeeding promotion and support activities, with the goal to ultimately increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates among WIC participants.

funding and improvements to Black schools during segregation — which lasted until the late 1960s in Loudoun County.

gram would target 17-24-year-olds, who officials say are most likely to reoffend, Wisconsin Public Radio reported.

- **PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY** has created an online checklist to help residents who want to **install solar panels**. The tool will outline panel installation, building permits and plan review requirements and will offer interactions with designers and plan reviewers.

ACROSS THE NATION

Several counties have joined **SAN DIEGO COUNTY**, Calif. in passing resolutions declaring COVID-19 vaccine misinformation a public health crisis. In September, **SACRAMENTO** and **MONTEREY** counties, **CLARK COUNTY**, Nev. and **JEFFERSON COUNTY**, Wash. passed similar resolutions.

WISCONSIN

A program designed to reduce recidivism rates in **MILWAUKEE COUNTY** may be pairing young adults leaving jail with community members who were previously incarcerated. The proposed mentoring pro-

News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.

WASHINGTON

Maybe taking videos of fireworks will be a good idea after all, because maybe enthusiasts in **PIERCE COUNTY** will only have two opportunities to see them per year. The County Council passed legislation limiting fireworks use in incorporated areas to two days per year — the Fourth of July and New Year's Eve, starting in 2023. Fireworks are currently allowed from July 1-5.





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