



# THE COUNTY ROLE IN INFRASTRUCTURE

COUNTY EXPLORER | JULY 2021

A blue-tinted photograph of a construction site. In the foreground, a worker in a white hard hat and safety vest is partially visible on the right. In the background, another worker is near a white pickup truck. The scene is outdoors with some structures and utility poles visible.

FROM BUILDING AND MAINTAINING  
ROADS AND BRIDGES TO PROVIDING  
EFFICIENT TRANSIT SYSTEMS,

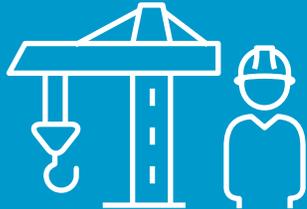
COUNTIES ARE A DRIVING FORCE

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND

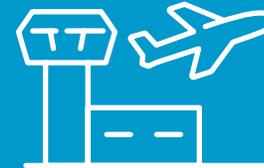
STRENGTHENING OUR ECONOMY.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

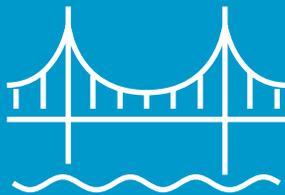
Counties lead our nation's infrastructure network:



**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.



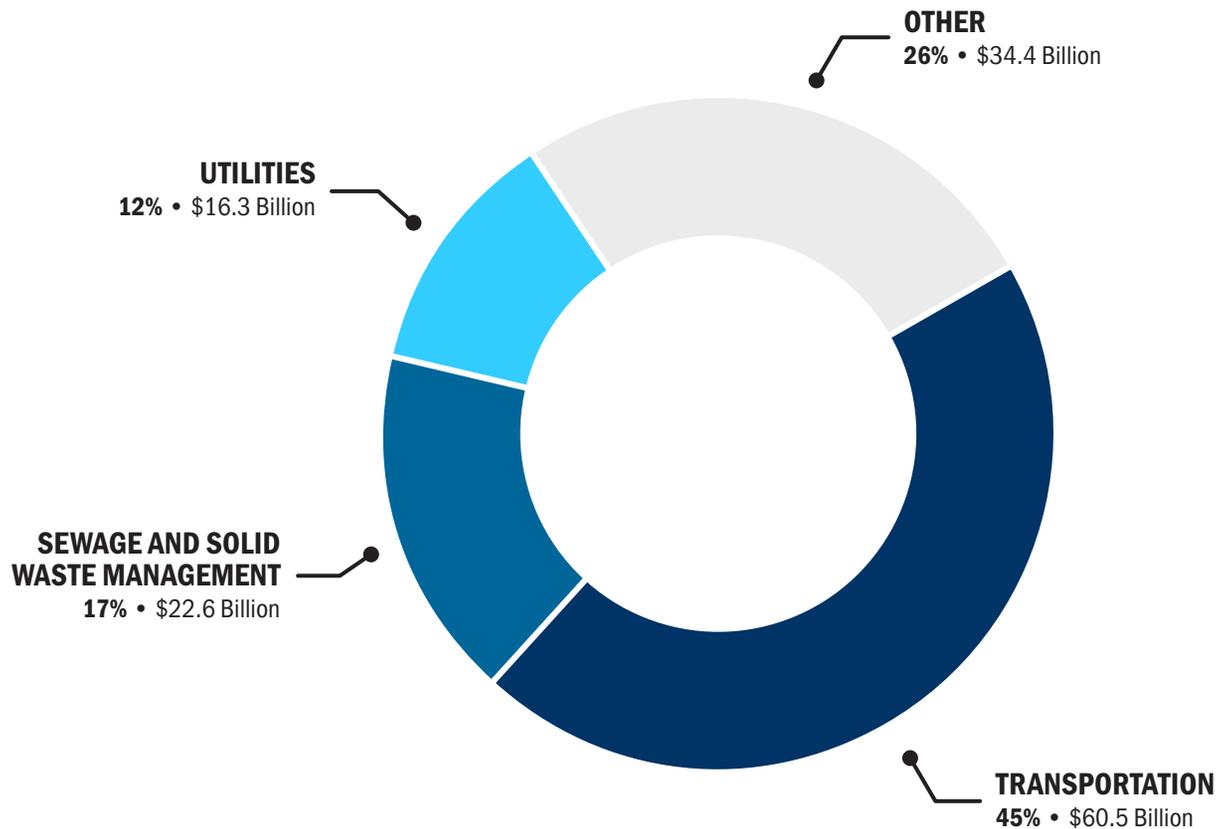
**Counties own and maintain 38 percent** of bridges.



**Counties own and maintain 44 percent** of public road miles.

# 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.

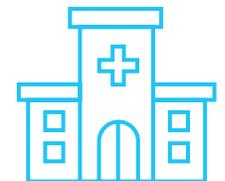


**\$61 billion** in the construction of public facilities, such as hospitals, schools, jails and other local institutions.

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.

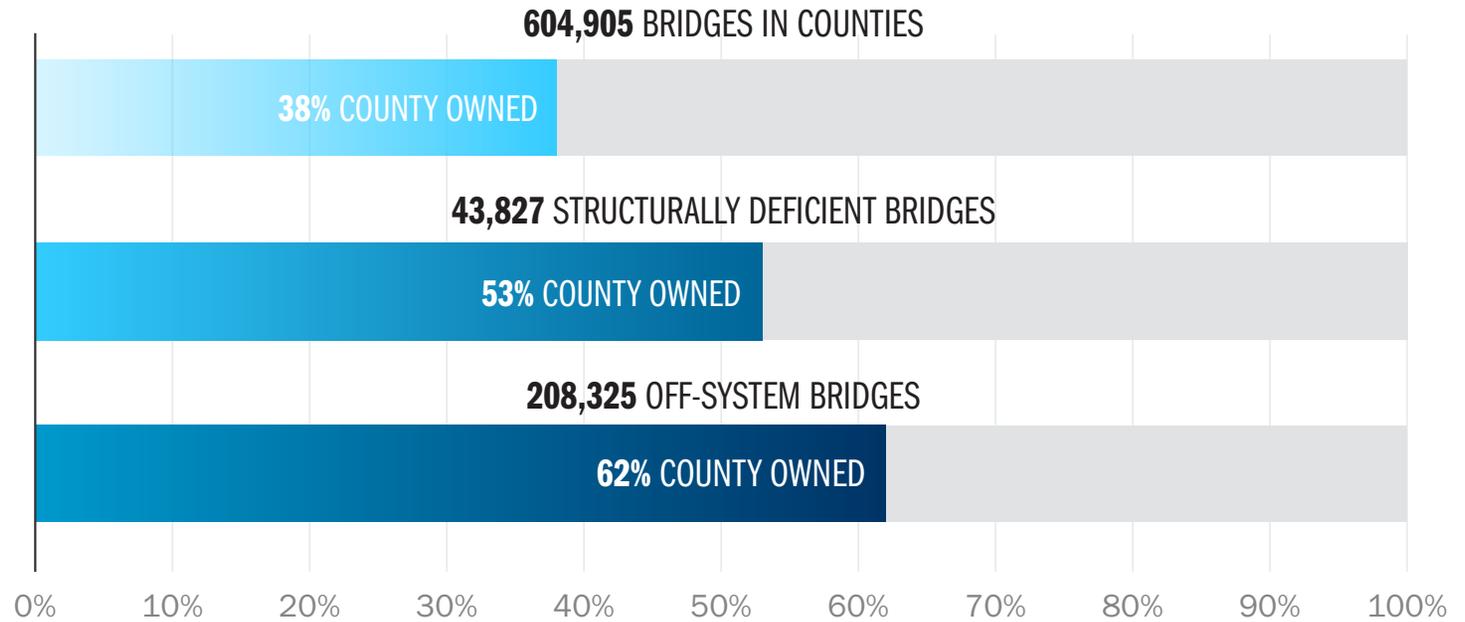
COUNTIES ALSO PLAY A ROLE IN BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT AND OTHER CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, SUCH AS SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS, JAILS, COURTHOUSES AND PARKS.



# 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.



Off-system bridges comprise **46.3 percent** (over 280,000 bridges) of the nation’s bridges.



According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, **7.5 percent** of the nation’s bridges are considered structurally deficient, and **178 million** trips are taken across these bridges every day.<sup>[1]</sup>

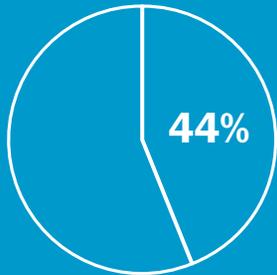


In 2020, more than **43,800 bridges** were classified as structurally deficient and considered to be in poor condition, of which **53 percent** are county owned.

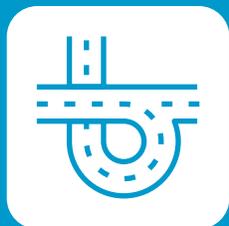
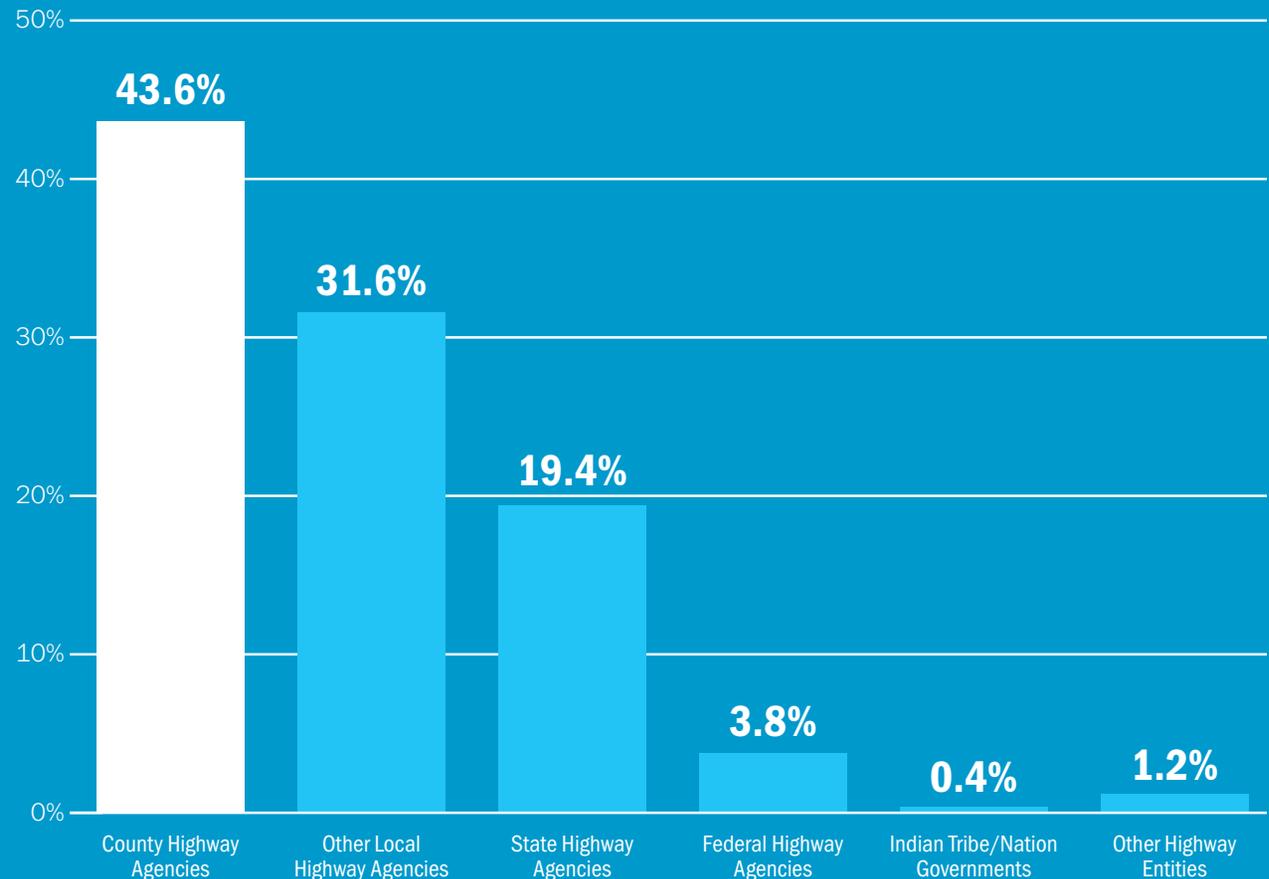
# COUNTIES OWN AND MAINTAIN 44 PERCENT OF PUBLIC ROAD MILES

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.

A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a light green surgical face mask and white earbuds, is looking out a window on a bus or train. She is wearing a grey pinstriped blazer over a white collared shirt. She is holding a white smartphone in her hands. The background shows the interior of the vehicle with yellow handrails and another passenger in the distance.

COUNTIES INVEST OVER \$23 BILLION

EACH YEAR IN THE OPERATION, MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION OF TRANSIT UTILITIES AND PUBLIC MASS TRANSIT SYSTEMS, INCLUDING SUBWAYS, SURFACE RAILS AND BUSES.

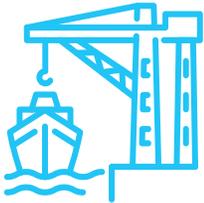
# COUNTIES ALSO SUPPORT 78 PERCENT OF TRANSIT AGENCIES AND 34 PERCENT OF AIRPORTS

## ANNUALLY, COUNTIES INVEST:

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



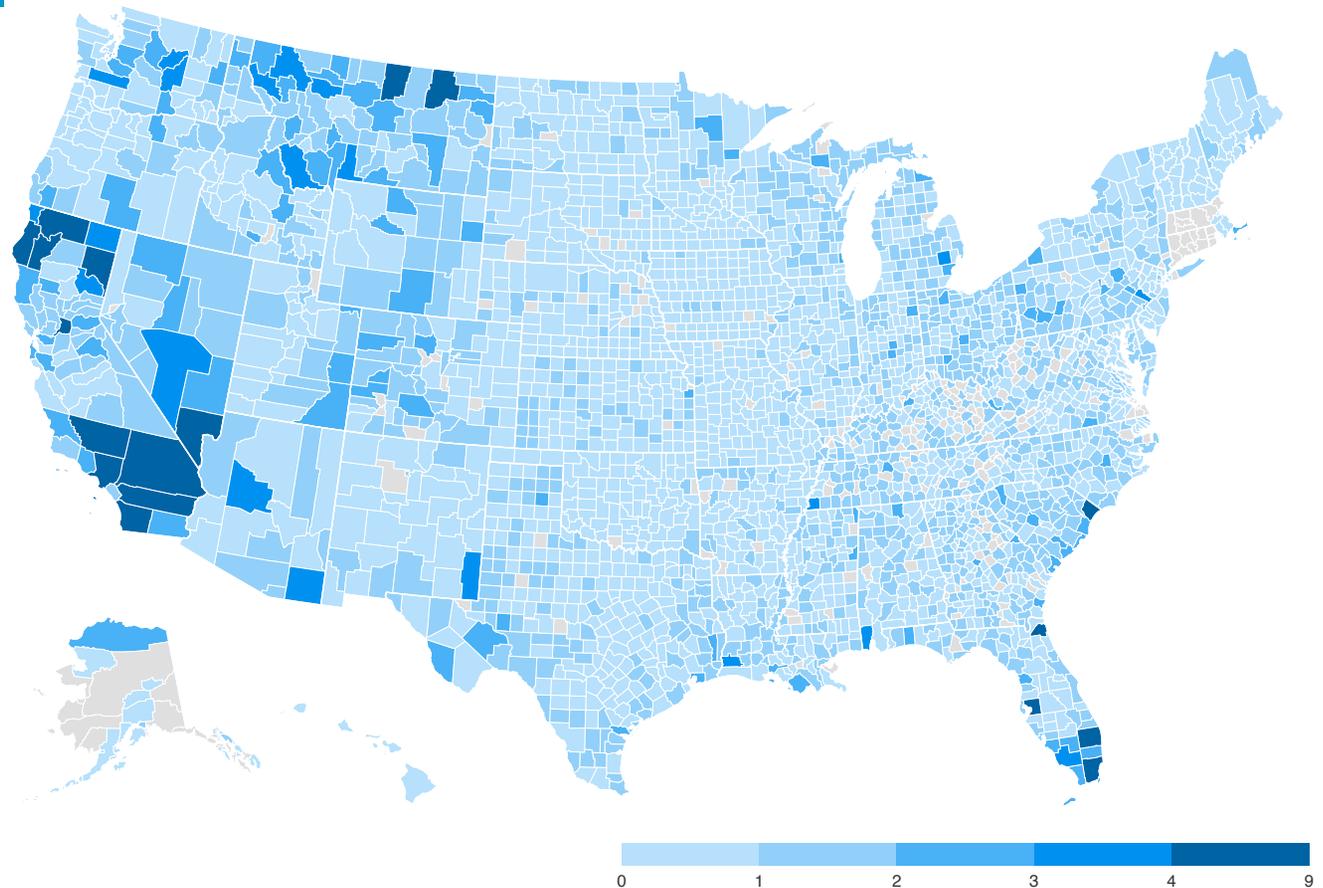
Over **\$550 million** in the operation, maintenance and support of sea and inland port facilities.



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



2017 County Airports



# COUNTY EXPLORER RESOURCES: COUNTY BRIDGE INVENTORY PROFILES

NACo's County Explorer tool provides county-level profiles which provide informative, statistical summaries based on available data. Check out your county's latest individualized bridge inventory profile on County Explorer: [CE.NACo.org](https://ce.naco.org)

**POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY, IA**  
BRIDGE INVENTORY | 2020

| NUMBER OF BRIDGES | SHARE OF COUNTY-OWNED BRIDGES | SHARE OF STRUCTURALLY DEFICIENT BRIDGES | SHARE OF OFF-SYSTEM BRIDGES |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>562</b>        | <b>55.7%</b>                  | <b>11.7%</b>                            | <b>52.0%</b>                |

## STRUCTURALLY DEFICIENT BRIDGES

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

**66**

|                                     |               |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Share of <b>County Owned</b>        | <b>83.3%</b>  |
| Share of <b>City/Town Owned</b>     | <b>16.7%</b>  |
| Share of <b>Other Locally Owned</b> | <b>0.0%</b>   |
| <b>Total Locally Owned</b>          | <b>100.0%</b> |

## OFF-SYSTEM BRIDGES

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

**292**

|                                     |              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Share of <b>County Owned</b>        | <b>84.2%</b> |
| Share of <b>City/Town Owned</b>     | <b>10.6%</b> |
| Share of <b>Other Locally Owned</b> | <b>0.0%</b>  |
| <b>Total Locally Owned</b>          | <b>94.8%</b> |

Source: NACo Analysis of the U.S. Department of Transportation – Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – 2020 National Bridge Inventory Data.

### Notes

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

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

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## DATA SOURCE AND NOTES

### Sources:

NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017; NACo Analysis of National Bridge Inventory Data - Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), 2020; NACo Analysis of Federal Aviation Administration and Office of Aviation Analysis, U.S. Department of Transportation; NACo Analysis of U.S. Department of Transportation – Federal Highway Administration, Highway Performance Monitoring System; NACo Analysis of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) - National Inventory of Dams - 2019 Data and NACo Analysis of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) National Transit Database (NTD) Data, 2015.

### Notes:

- The county expenditure analysis is based on revised estimates published by the U.S. Census Bureau in September 2020.
- All analysis is based on 3,069 counties with active county governments. Thus, Connecticut, Rhode Island and portions of Alaska, Massachusetts are excluded since they do not have active county governments. Independent cities in Virginia are also excluded from the analysis.
- For the county bridge data, effective Jan. 1, 2018, the Federal Highway Administration changed the definition of structurally-deficient bridges which limits the classification to bridges where one of the key structural elements – the deck, superstructure, substructure or culverts – are rated in poor or worse condition.

<sup>[1]</sup> *American Society of Civil Engineers, 2021 Report Card for America's Infrastructure, available at <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/infrastructure-is-everywhere/> (2021)*

## NACo's MISSION

Strengthen America's counties.

## NACo's VISION

Healthy, safe and vibrant counties across America.

## ABOUT NACo

The National Association of Counties (NACo) strengthens America's counties, serving nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to:

- **Advocate county priorities** in federal policymaking
- **Promote exemplary county policies** and practices
- **Nurture leadership skills** and expand knowledge networks
- **Optimize county and taxpayer resources** and cost savings, and
- **Enrich the public's understanding** of county government.

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