Rural Public Transportation: Small Places, Big Impacts

John Robert Smith
AARP Livable Communities: Rural Livability Workshop

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Who is Smart Growth America?

Smart Growth America envisions a country where no matter where you live, or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient.

We empower communities through technical assistance, advocacy, and thought leadership to realize our vision of livable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity.
What is smart growth about?

Shaping the quality of the place and the lives of the people who live there.

...and it’s not new!
Patterns of development

The ways we plan our cities

Image source: https://travelbob.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/pompeii-20.jpg
Traditional town plan

- Mixed-use
- Compact
- Buildings of several stories
- Blocks with multiple building types
- Street grid
THE INSPIRATION

Eastport, Maine 1879

Source: http://turnofthecenturies.blogspot.com/2014/05/a-birds-eye-view-drawing-of-eastport.html
Downtown Eastport, 1870s
“Euclidean” zoning
• Fragmented land use
• Drive-only

Then came zoning...
and the automobile.

(and the interstate highway program, and new federal programs for homebuilding, and new rules for capital depreciation . . . )
Prime retail location
(late 20th century)

“Walmart Supercenter, an archetypal big box store, in Madison Heights, Virginia.”
(from Wikipedia entry for “Big-box store”)
Poor, rural areas will be most affected by Walmart closing 154 stores

Related story: What happens to a tiny town when Walmart disappears?
Abandoned Sardine Cannery, Eastport (2010)
Prime Residential location
(late 20th century)
Suddenly, things are different

THE ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC FUNDAMENTALS HAVE SHIFTED
Economic growth

20th century vs. 21st century

“From tools and spools to eds and meds”*

Chasing smokestacks vs. Chasing talent

Manufacturing economy vs. Knowledge economy
The 21st Century Economy

Manufacturing is changing

- Smaller part of our economy
- Its nature has changed
The 21st Century Economy

- Creativity, knowledge, innovation
- Importance of networking, interaction
- Demand for skilled workers

“Talent is replacing the tax incentive as the No. 1 economic-development tool in America.”

Mark Wilson, president and CEO
Florida Chamber of Commerce
Quoted in Palm Beach Post, June 9, 2016
Demographic Change
Boomers are a different kind of Senior Citizen
“Adulthood II”

Boomers not ready for the rocking chair

– Today’s retiree can live past 90

– “These additional 31 years of expected life have not been just tacked on at the end . . . Today’s 65-year-olds are starting new careers or continuing old ones, traveling around the world, and eloping with new loves, in a stage of life we are calling ‘Adulthood II.’”

- cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson, quoted in ULI report
Boomers and housing

Boomers are downsizing
Millennials are different:

Your children and grandchildren

Millennials

They follow lifestyle, not jobs.

Millennials choose where to live before finding a job.

Of all college-educated 25- to 34-year-olds 64% looked for a job after they chose the city where they wanted to live.

(U.S. Census)
Preferences: Transportation
These economic and demographic changes have big implications
Core Values
Why American Companies are Moving Downtown

Download the report at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/core-values
Traditional Main Streets are back

Fairhope, Alabama
Source: Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce
Preferences: Housing

47% 12% 40%
Preferences: Housing

Eastport, Maine

Davis image source: User jmd41280 on flickr
Communities are now in a ferocious competition over creating a sense of place (whether they know it or not) and transportation is key to creating that sense of place.
Without transportation choices... we face the continued depopulation of small town and rural America
Tiers of transportation...

Transportation begins with our feet
Complete Streets mean:

The entire right of way is planned, designed, operated and maintained to provide safe access for all users.

Photo: Hamburg, NY; Dan Burden, Walkable and Livable Communities Institute
Bath, ME
Tiers of transportation...

Our feet take us to transit
Snap Shot of Rural Transit

- Home: 34.2%
- Commute to Jobs: 19.3%
- School/Child Care/Religious Activities: 13.1%
- Social/Recreation: 8.1%
- Transport Someone: 6.2%
- Shopping/Errands: 5.9%
- Social/Recreation: 5.4%
- Other: 5.2%
- Meals: 4.5%
- Medical/Dental: 2.7%

Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities
Snap Shot of Rural Transit

Nationwide, rural population loss of 500,000; rural transit ridership up 8% from 2007-2015 (vs. 2.5% growth in urban areas)

1,400 rural transit providers nationwide

Rural areas greater percentage of seniors, people with disabilities & veterans

Rural poverty rates higher than urban areas

Per-capita transit investment lower in rural communities
Washington State: rural vanpool
Paris, Texas: Paris Metro

Image source: https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/project-examples/954
Lone Tree, CO - “Lone Tree Link”

• Free fixed-route circulator between major destinations

Images from Lone Tree Link website.
Volunteer Rural Transit Programs

• A short-term solution at best… Minnesota’s experience

Source: www.coordinatemntransit.org
Tiers of transportation...

Transit takes us to rail
Normal, IL

Uptown Station

Image source: www.greatamericanstations.com
Normal, IL

Uptown Station
Kirkwood, MO
Amtrak Station
Kirkwood, MO
Amtrak Station
Which critical transportation choice is missing from your community today?

Respond at PollEv.com/aarprural  Text AARPRURAL to 22333 once to join, then text your message

No responses received yet. They will appear here...
It’s all about location
It’s all about location
It’s all about location
Your Identity is Key

In any public project you need to know:

• Who you were in the past
• Who you are now
• And who you aspire to be
Who You Were in the Past

“Meridian, with its depots, store-houses, arsenal, hospitals, offices, hotels, and cantonments no longer exists.”

General Sherman
February, 1864
Who You Were in the Past
Meridian’s Union Station
Who You Are Now
Who You Aspire to Be
Union Station at Completion

- Annually, Union Station hosts 250 events and 300,000 people
Union Station Development Results

- Private development of $165 million in surrounding area
- New life for historic structures
Restored City Hall

Smart Growth America
(photo credits: City of Meridian)

Transportation for America
Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience
It Is Critical to Engage Future Generations
What is one transportation investment that your community can make to improve the quality of life for the next generation?

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Thank you.

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More information: www.t4america.org