

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify about rural transportation issues. My name is Thomas Adler. I've lived in Norwich, Vermont for 25 years and am currently President of Resource Systems Group, a transportation and environmental consulting firm with a national practice headquartered in White River Junction, Vermont. For ten years I was a professor at Dartmouth College, director of its graduate program in transportation and its research program, which included projects addressing the transportation needs of rural areas. I'm testifying today as a Board member of the New England Transportation Institute and Museum and as acting director of the Institute's programs, which include the Rural Transportation Learning Center.

I'd like to describe why, from a national perspective, rural transportation issues and priorities are, in many important ways, different from the transportation issues that face major metropolitan areas. As a nation, we simply haven't examined the needs of our rural citizens as extensively as we have the needs of the citizens of the major metropolitan areas.

But we do know some basic facts about transportation problems in the rural areas of this country. In the 13 Northeastern states, we see that our rural citizens have significantly lower levels of household income than in those in the more urbanized regions. But, at the same time we observe that the rate of auto ownership is significantly *higher* in the rural areas. We know also that our rural citizens have to make longer trips and in fact travel about 30% more miles than their urban counterparts. This translates into the fact that our rural citizens spend a far greater proportion of their total income on basic transportation and it means that they have less money to spend on other necessities such as housing, food, or education. On the other hand, we also know that work commuting distances are shorter than the national average among residents of the small towns within rural regions and that focusing rural development around these traditional town centers reduces dependence on automobile travel.

And, there's so much we don't know. We haven't properly examined the problems of limited mobility among important segments of the rural population, particularly as experienced by older citizens, and those who do not have access to a car. As the population ages, this will become an even more pressing issue for the rural regions.

Just as railroads and automobiles have had profound impacts on the shape of rural communities, new information and communication technologies will also significantly affect the ways in which these communities develop in the future. We have already seen new types of economic clusters forming in rural

New England around information-oriented businesses. These businesses in turn have new and very different transportation needs.

Our region is fortunate to have intercity rail, bus and air services that connect our rural areas to the major metropolitan areas. But, planning a trip by combinations of bus, rail, and even air simply cannot be accomplished at any one location. One important strategy to deal with rural mobility is to help travelers understand just what combinations of services are available. Every major nation in Europe has a program to help its citizens plan rural trips by modes other than the private auto; from a technical point of view, it would be easy to apply this technology to our rural areas. In general, complementary investments in a multimodal transportation network and in technologies to provide information to the users of that network will greatly facilitate new economic activities as well as tourism and the other traditional parts of northern New England's rural economy.

These are just a few of the issues that affect rural areas to a much greater degree than metropolitan areas. The primary goal of the Rural Transportation Learning Center is to heighten the level of policy, technical, and cultural learning relating to these and other rural transportation issues and their impact on communities. This Center is a program of the New England Transportation Institute and Museum, which is located in historic downtown White River Junction, Vermont. Our focus is both regional and national, as we aim to explore our region's, past, present and future as a means to inform the national understanding on rural transportation and its relationship to national economic, social and environmental goals. Our organization has grown rapidly into a bi-state project that has involved the unusually large population of transportation professionals from New Hampshire and Vermont. With the interest and commitment of nationally-known professionals, such as Thomas Horan and Matthew Coogan who participated in the preparation of this testimony, it is now growing into a national resource. We have attached to our written testimony a more detailed description of the Learning Center and its research agenda.

I'll close by thanking you for holding this hearing in Vermont and for focusing attention on the federal government's policy opportunity to address the unique needs of the country's rural regions. The coming surface transportation re-authorization represents a unique opportunity to ensure that transportation policy enhances rural communities and the Committee's interest in this topic is most appreciated. We look forward to working with you, the others here today and the community of national transportation professionals to ensure that transportation issues in rural areas are more fully understood and addressed.