



We hope everyone continues to stay safe and healthy as our country begins to reopen. Here are a few updates from over the last couple of weeks. Quick reminder to be sure to visit the [Rebuild Rural website](#) to view newly updated [coalition factsheets](#) and [REBUILD RURAL letter to Congress](#) on the need for rural infrastructure investment as part of the next COVID-19 relief package.

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## New

**TRIP Report on Rural Roads and Bridges:** On May 12, TRIP, the National Transportation Research Nonprofit, released a report entitled [Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland](#). The report finds, "Thirteen percent of U.S. rural roads are rated in poor condition, while... Eight percent of the nation's rural bridges are rated in poor/structurally deficient condition." TRIP uses data from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the U.S. Census Bureau and other public sources to conduct their analysis. It provides detailed state level breakdowns on the structural conditions of rural roads and bridges as well other information related to the challenges of repairing rural transportation infrastructure, such as sources of funding. The report concludes, "America's rural transportation system is in need of repairs and modernization to support economic growth and improve traffic safety in the nation's Heartland, but the U.S. faces a \$211 billion backlog in funding for needed repairs and improvements to the rural transportation system." To read more about this report click [here](#) and [here](#).

**DoT Release Updated Hours of Service Rule:** On May 14, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) published its final rule updating hours of service rules. The changes update existing regulations to provide greater flexibility for drivers, subject to those rules without adversely affecting safety. Some of the changes the rule makes include expanding the short-haul exception to 150 air-miles and allowing a 14-hour work shift to take place as part of the exception. It also expands the driving window during adverse driving conditions by up to an additional 2 hours. You can find a final copy of the rule with additional information [here](#). House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Ranking Member Sam Graves [released the following statement](#) about these updates: "America's truckers have been on the front lines in fighting the coronavirus pandemic, and these regulatory improvements to help them do their jobs as effectively and safely as possible come at a critical time. These improvements to hours of service rules won't increase driving time, but they recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach does not give drivers the necessary flexibility to make the right decisions to safely operate their vehicles. I applaud the Secretary Chao and the Trump Administration's continued commitment to improving the regulations in a manner that benefit workers, the flow of commerce, and the safety of our transportation system," For more information click [here](#) and [here](#).

**Lugar Center Releases Paper Calling for More Ag Research Funding:** On May 5, The Lugar Center an independent nonprofit organization founded by former United States Senator Richard G. Lugar, released a paper looking at the benefits of increased investment in agricultural research. The paper looks beyond the increase in yields and food production normally associated with ag research and includes other issues, such as: impact on U.S. exports, the environment and decreased global conflict. The paper states, "The U.S. agriculture sector plays a critical role in the national and global economy. Exports of U.S. agricultural goods totaled \$137 billion in 2019. Sustained public investment in agricultural sciences has the potential to multiply this figure both directly and indirectly. Returns from the \$69.3 billion invested by private and public sources worldwide in annual agricultural science are significant: it is estimated that every dollar spent on agriculture reaps \$32 in returns." You can find the full version of this paper [here](#) and for more information click [here](#).

**Senate EPW Committee Passes Water Infrastructure Bills:** On May 8, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee voted unanimously to advance its water resources bill. The legislation would provide approximately \$17 billion in new authorization for infrastructure projects, cut red tape and push a two-year goal for completing feasibility studies, deepen nationally significant ports and maintain inland waterways navigability. America's Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA) of 2020 (S.3591) now heads to the Senate floor along with the Drinking Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 (S.3590), which also received a 21-0 vote. Included in the AWIA bill is a provision (Section 1069) to increase by 65 percent the federal government's share for funding construction and major rehabilitation of each inland waterways navigation project. The remaining 3 percent would be paid by commercial users of the inland waterways, such as barge and towboat operators, through barge diesel fuel taxes deposited into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF). Currently, the cost-share formula is an even 50:50 split. "Our committee has taken a significant step to improve our dams, ports, flood-prevention infrastructure, reservoirs and drinking water systems," chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Sen. John Barrasso in a statement. To learn more, click [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

**FCC to Vote Next Month on First Round of RDOF Funding:** FCC Chairman Ajit Pai announced on May 18, that the Federal Communications Commission is planning to finalize draft procedures for the \$16 billion first phase of the [Rural Digital Opportunity Fund \(RDOF\)](#) by next month. The draft procedures for the first phase of the \$20.4 billion overall RDOF initiative is set for a vote on June 9. The RDOF will offer funding over ten years for broadband services. The first phase, or [Auction 904](#), requires internet service providers to offer minimum 25 megabits per second (MBPS) download and 3 MBPS upload speeds to improve upon the current 10/1 MBPS speeds. The areas must be wholly unserved to qualify for funding. Phase II will provide \$4.4 billion in census blocks that are partially served, as well as locations not funded in Phase I, according to FCC. To read more click [here](#) and [here](#).

**Senate Commerce Committee Hearing on Broadband:** On May 13, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing entitled "[The State of Broadband Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)." The hearing examined the ongoing efforts led by the FCC to maintain and expand high-speed and reliable broadband service to all Americans during this national public health emergency. The hearing also examined the impact of funds provided through the CARES Act to support broadband initiatives and legislative proposals focused on addressing the digital divide during the COVID-19 outbreak. The hearing, conducted partly by video conferencing, included testimony from: [Steven Berry](#), President and CEO of the Competitive Carriers Association, [Gene Kimmelman](#), Senior Advisor for Public Knowledge, [Jonathan Spalter](#), President and CEO of USTelecom and Rebuild Rural Coalition member [Shirley Bloomfield](#), CEO of NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association. To watch a video recap of this hearing or for more information click [here](#)

## Recap

**Please Continue to Utilize #RebuildRural:** Please help us promote the needs of rural communities for increased investment in their infrastructure by using [#RebuildRural](#) in your social media posts.

This month, we highlight [TRIP's](#) social campaign in support of rural infrastructure, surrounding the release of their report. Their 20+ tweets, which included everything from graphics to article amplification, tagged both [#RebuildRural](#) and institutions that contributed to the report. Additionally, we'd like to thank those of you who amplified our coalition letter to Congress by sharing media mentions and using the hashtag, including [@AgRetailers](#), [@ASA\\_Soybeans](#), [@NAFISschools](#), and [@NRHA\\_Advocacy](#).

Please continue using the [#RebuildRural](#) hashtag as you highlight issues important to rural infrastructure. Be part of the conversation and help us send the message to policymakers that rural American infrastructure need to be addressed soon. Together we can show a groundswell of support.

Thank you very much for your continued partnership and collaboration toward [REBUILD RURAL Coalition](#) activities. As always, please feel free to contact us at [boone@fccouncil.com](mailto:boone@fccouncil.com) or (202) 879-0855 with any questions or concerns.