



**NARC**  
*Building Regional Communities*

**National Association of Regional Councils**

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## Written Statement for the Record

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Webster County, Kentucky

and

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Before the U.S. Senate

Committee on Environment and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

Mobility and Congestion in Urban and Rural America

March 18, 2010



Good morning and thank you, Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Inhofe and members of the Committee. I am honored to be before you today to testify on the important role our nation's regions play in promoting solutions to mobility and congestion in urban and rural America.

I am James Townsend, the Judge Executive of Webster County, Kentucky, and the President-Elect of the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC). In addition, I serve on the Executive Committee of my Council of Governments, the Green River Area Development District (GRADD) headquartered in Owensboro, KY. Today, on behalf of NARC and my region, I will share with you the good work happening throughout the nation's regions, in particular rural America. I will illustrate how urban and rural regional planning organizations efficiently, effectively and successfully plan intermodal transportation networks, and link policy concerns with practical solutions.

All of NARC's members, GRADD included, support this Committee's efforts to create and maintain a robust transportation network, and commend the Committee's commitment to a strong federal partnership with our nation's local elected officials. NARC and its members welcome the Committee's questions in addressing the needs, opportunities, and challenges facing our nation's regional organizations and constituent local governments.

### **Background**

The National Association of Regional Councils is a non-profit trade organization that serves as the national voice for regionalism, advocating for multi-jurisdictional cooperation as the most effective way to address community planning and development opportunities and challenges. NARC is governed by local elected officials and represents member organizations composed of multiple local governments that work together to



improve America's communities - large and small, urban and rural. Through advocacy and assistance, NARC's mission is to increase funding and authority for all regional councils (RCs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), regardless of their size or location, and to strengthen American regions and communities in transportation, economic and community development, homeland security, and the environment – cross-linking fundamental planning and implementation functions within these areas.

Regional councils deliver an array of federal, state and local programs that provide planning support and technical assistance to local governments. The network of nationwide RCs includes organizations such as MPOs, Councils of Government (COG), Rural Planning Organizations (RPO), Economic Development Districts (EDD), Area Development Districts (ADD) and Local Development Districts (LDD). Most regional councils are created by compact and enabling legislation as consortia of local governments. Their mission is the delivery of services and programs for economic development, emergency management, infrastructure development, aging services, air and water quality, land-use planning, work force development, and transportation planning at a regional level. MPOs are mandated under federal law and have important responsibilities in planning and programming federal transportation dollars at the local and regional level. As such, regional councils and MPOs represent local elected officials from cities, counties, townships, and villages.

My COG and an active NARC member, GRADD, is one of fifteen Area Development Districts statutorily created by the State of Kentucky. Each ADD represents a multi-county planning district and provides resources to the localities in their regions. The GRADD Board of Directors is comprised of elected officials and community leaders. The seven counties comprising GRADD's region serve as a forum, clearinghouse, technical center and convener for the region. Unlike many other organizations structured along multi-jurisdictional lines, the ADDs have both federal and state statutory authority.

Through GRADD's efforts in rural and urban transportation planning, the organization seeks to address challenges within our transportation infrastructure system. Like many rural areas nationwide, GRADD's region faces a deficiency of rail access, insufficient access to public transportation, safety concerns stemming from aging infrastructure, the inadequacy of service and size of the Owensboro Airport, and the lack of interstate access. GRADD's regional work includes its work as an Area Agency on Aging; Regional & Local Health Councils; Elder Abuse Prevention; Economic, Community, and Small Business Grants; Water & Sewer System Development, Regional Industrial Parks, Homeland Security and Emergency Responder Grants; Census & Demographic Data; Air Quality Improvement activities; Traffic Studies; Public Transit Assistance; and Workforce Development Activities. **(attachment 1)**

### **Current State of Play**

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Future Highway and Public Transportation Finance Study, our nation needs to invest an additional \$50 billion annually to maintain our infrastructure network, and another \$100 billion annually to improve it. The American Society of Civil Engineers has given the nation's infrastructure network a "D" grade, estimating that \$2.2 trillion is needed over the next five years for infrastructure upgrades. All of our regions, as studied by NARC, face severe underinvestment as needs outstrip our ability to fund critical infrastructure, while both urban and rural America are sitting on billions of dollars of unfunded, dormant infrastructure projects. In my region, we estimate over \$2.5 billion in unfunded, needed transportation improvements and these numbers are even after the much appreciated infusion of federal stimulus funding.

Regional planning organization's are today's "boots on the ground" planners and implementers of tomorrow's regional infrastructure. The nation's regional planning organization's are currently working on their comprehensive transportation plans to create a vision of what users of a system in the year 2040 will need, and forecasting future activities for the approximately 120 million projected additional users by 2050. In order to

continue our successful efforts, regional planning organizations need a strong federal partner and decisive federal leadership to help make safe and secure transportation a reality. If the federal government wishes to be part of a unified solution tomorrow, federal leadership needs to be at the table today.

Mr. Chairman, the convergence of a softening economy, rising unemployment, forecasted population growth, and the clear need for substantial investments in the country's infrastructure provides us with both a great challenged and tremendous opportunity to ensure future generations of Americans can compete in a global economy. The question is – how can Congress best direct funding not only to provide congestion relief, increased mobility, family-wage jobs, while creating a world class, globally competitive transportation system in the process? Let me offer the GRADD region as a successful example of progress toward that goal.

### **Safety**

The creation and promotion of a safe transportation system is the fundamental federal interest in surface transportation. The transportation community describes the approach to developing a safe transportation network through the five “E’s”; Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement, and Evaluation. NARC appreciates Congress’ focus on safety in the last surface transportation authorization, SAFETEA-LU, and the holistic approach to the development of a safe transportation system, but more can be done. Often, Education and Encouragement are not recognized to the level needed to affect culture change in this area. Regional planning organizations, especially their local elected officials, are in a strong position to help change that.

Each year, *Forbes Magazine* publishes its list of the 10 deadliest roads in America, and nearly all of them are two-lane, undivided highways running through rural America. When the Administration talks about promoting its “Livable Communities” agenda, many of my counterparts in rural America interpret that as keeping people alive on the roads. In the early 1990s, GRADD created a national demonstration program, the *Citizens Regional Awareness for Safe Highways* or “CRASH,” (**attachment 2**) that sought to increase public awareness



of the effects of high speed driving and alcohol involved crashes within the region. Because the GRADD region represents a mixture of urban and rural roads, the need to educate the public on safe driving habits to reduce the number of fatalities is critical in addressing both the isolation of rural areas as well as the congestion in urban areas. Through this program, GRADD led the Citizens Advisory Boards (CAB) within each county and further developed a communities plan to reduce fatalities and injuries. We did this by leveraging existing highway safety materials throughout the GRADD region; providing highway safety training to each county CAB; and, providing highway safety programs that are presented to schools, civic and religious organizations, businesses and any other public or private group. This program served the five “E’s” by providing selective enforcement and public education in high crash corridors in identified areas with GRADD through coordinated efforts with the Kentucky State Police, local police agencies and sheriffs’ offices.

After the passage of SAFETEA-LU, the State of Kentucky embraced safety as a priority. Due to this attention from both state and local governments, highway and traffic safety programs have flourished throughout the GRADD region and the State. **(attachment 3)** At least on the surface, the public education efforts appear to be working, indicating that the State and the region are moving in the right direction to increase traffic safety and to reduce fatalities.

### **Connectivity and Mobility**

The movement of people and goods has a significant impact upon the economy of a region. The quality of transportation options and ease of access influences how business is conducted and where people decide to live. Creating a connected transportation network, which promotes mobility, in both urban and rural America is highly important to achieving these goals. Regional planning organizations, MPOs in the urban areas and RPOs in the rural areas (where they exist) are experienced partners in promoting linkages between people through transportation. Through the incorporation of the federal planning factors, MPOs translate the federal vision into local priorities. This process provides both city and county officials the best opportunity to tie in the

needs and priorities of their constituents directly into the transportation planning process. In rural America, however, the creation of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) through the Economic Development Administration helps RPOs communicate their vision and priorities for local mobility and connectivity projects. While the federal government does not currently recognize a rural counterpart to the MPO, it is NARC's hope that the same "process" by which decisions are reached in urban areas will be afforded to the elected officials in rural America. The decision making process is the same whether urban or rural. It is our hope that rural regions will be given a similar voice at the table to express their needs and priorities.

### **Livability**

Rural regions are moving forward to implement their livability vision, much like their urban counterparts. Local elected officials nationwide are engaging in a discussion on how best to make their communities livable based on local desires, community needs and on-the-ground economic benefits. By directly responding to constituent needs, local elected officials, through their RCs and MPOs, are gaining marked success. NARC is excited to see a commitment from the federal government to support this type of work, and applauds the efforts of the US Department of Transportation (DOT), US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in their efforts to breakdown programmatic and funding silos and engage in a constructive dialogue on the future of their programs, and how they might best work together to achieve federal objectives. NARC has developed the report, "Federal Livability Framework: A Central Role for Regions," (**attachment 4**) which has several important recommendations to Congress and the Administration on this topic, including the important role local governments play in implementing livable communities. Additionally, for rural regions, strengthening the DOT-HUD-EPA federal interagency partnership with involvement from the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Commerce is critical to ensuring the needs of rural America are strategically incorporated.



For my region, GRADD has demonstrated a commitment to livability in its 2008 Transportation Goals and Objectives, and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs). **(attachment 5)** Our plan's transportation goals focus on increasing access to all modes of transportation within the region, improving transportation safety, developing intermodal access of the transportation system, and providing access to tourism and agri-tourism related venues in the area. These goals emphasize a desire for increased interconnectedness and accessibility within the transportation system. Livability is an important consideration in the economic development of the region, and this can be seen in GRADD's CEDs' goals, which are to:

- promote an economy that will allow the citizens of GRADD to achieve and maintain a quality standard of living;
- recognize it as an integral part of its economy;
- make higher education more accessible and affordable;
- provide an adequate inventory of sites and buildings to attract and retain business and industry;
- improve the quality and qualifications of the workforce and expand employment opportunities;
- improve transportation access and capacity;
- ensure that all residents have clean, affordable water; and,
- promote efficient handling and disposal of solid waste.

These goals emphasize the need to solve the economic problems of the region, form a plan of action to implement its goals and strategies, and develop performance measures to evaluate if goals are being met. The strategic projects of the CEDs reflect the priorities of both community and regional actors, and highlight a common theme of dedication to job creation, economic prosperity and improved quality of life – all of which are critical to the livability and sustainability of a region.

### **Stimulus Success**

Regional planning organizations have proven successful at steering federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. In my region of western Kentucky, GRADD was responsible for helping to bring in over \$55 million in ARRA funds, of which over \$35 million were focused on improving the region's transportation system. These projects included:

- \$1.1 million for Owensboro Transit System to purchase buses;
- \$4.1 million Green River Intra-County Transit System to parking Garage and 4 Hybrid Buses;
- \$27,200,000 for the US 60 Bypass Extension;
- \$2,500,000 for Owensboro – Daviess County Airport Improvements; and
- \$480,000 for Hazard Elimination Projects for Henderson, KY

This type of success was possible because of this Committee's efforts to ensure that portions of ARRA money were directed to local governments, and NARC would like to thank you for your leadership in this area.

GRADD is certainly a success story in all facets of ARRA requirements. **(attachment 6)** We used our organization website, e-mail updates, and weekly briefings to keep the local elected officials and citizens updated. Our ARRA data has been accessed consistently throughout the process, and appears to have been the most effective way informing the region's communities. GRADD was influential in tracking and reporting information on federal stimulus money and assigned staff to assist the local communities with preparing funding applications and reporting upon request. Because of this assistance, GRADD has been able to eliminate a number of transportation infrastructure hazards, purchase buses, and make needed upgrades to both airports and highways. NARC would request that additional stimulus funding that Congress sees fit to appropriate be distributed through similar mechanisms.

### **Local Authority**



None of the above successes and solutions would have been possible without the ability of local elected officials to participate directly in the process. We [local governments] are the unit of government most closely tied to the electorate, and as local elected officials, we bring a high level of accountability to the federal government, our States and, most importantly, our citizens. Our communication and representation of local needs is an important part of translating the federal vision into local priorities and strategies. NARC is requesting through the next surface transportation authorization, that any federal policy that is developed be considered through the lens of how it will ultimately be implemented, and what urban, suburban and rural local elected officials will need to get the job done. Regional planning organizations, and the localities they serve, continue to develop consensus and further federal, state and local objectives. NARC recommends that Congress continue to use regional collaboration and consensus as an integral tool in the implementation of the federal surface transportation program, and expand it to address the needs of rural America as well.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, on behalf of GRADD and NARC, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the importance of urban and rural regions in promoting connectivity and mobility in surface transportation. On an equally important note, you will notice that my discussion on the importance of the CEDS process, authorized under the Economic Development Administration is an important, and existing, program critical to funding rural transportation needs. As the authorization for EDA falls under this Committee's jurisdiction as well, NARC would like to reiterate its support for a speedy reauthorization of both the federal surface transportation program, as well as the Economic Development Administration. Both authorizations are necessary to promoting enhanced mobility and reduced congestion across America.



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## **GRADD SERVICES**

### **AGING, HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES**

- Area Agency on Aging
- Senior Citizen Centers
- In-Home Assistance Programs
- Community Services Programs
- Consumer Directed Option Medicaid Waiver Program
- Regional & Local Health Councils
- Long-Term Care Ombudsman
- Elder Abuse Prevention/TRIAD
- AmeriCorps Service Program
- Family Caregiver Support
- Aging & Disability Resources
- Special Events & Activities for Senior Citizens

### **COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- Economic Development Grants & Loans
- Community Enhancement Grants
- Water & Sewer System Development
- Local Government Assistance
- Low-Income Housing Programs
- Small Business Assistance
- Regional Industrial Parks
- Resource Conservation & Development
- GIS/GPS Mapping
- Recreational Grants
- Hazard Mitigation Planning
- Homeland Security Grants
- Emergency Responder Grants
- Census & Demographic Data

### **TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**

- Oversight of Regional Transportation Planning Process
- Owensboro-Daviess County Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Traffic Studies
- Analysis of Motor Vehicle Accidents
- Air Quality Improvement Efforts
- Owensboro Public Transit System Assistance

### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

- Labor Market Trends & Analyses
- One-Stop Career Center Services
- Job Search Assistance
- Training for Dislocated Workers
- Linkages with Economic Development
- Organizing Community Resources
- Administration of Workforce Investment Act Program

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**A. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION (Continued)**

The Green River Area Development District (GRADD) represents a good mixture of urban and rural roads. The rural roads present a problem because of their extreme isolation from the urban areas. This isolation is cause for the excess speeding, high number of accidents and driving under the influence, that is so prevalent within the GRADD region.

According to the, "Analysis of Traffic Accident Data in Kentucky (1989 - 1993)," Kenneth R. Agent and Jerry G. Pigman, the cities and counties of GRADD are identified as having high rates involving total accidents, pedestrian, bicyclists, motorcycles, speeding tickets issued and driving under the influence. Seatbelt usage in GRADD, 26 percent, is below the statewide average of 39 percent.

The above mentioned statistics are the justification for GRADD being chosen for the national demonstration program, Citizens Regional Awareness for Safe Highways, "CRASH."

**B. GOALS**

To increase the public awareness of the effects of high speed driving and alcohol involved crashes within GRADD. To educate the public on safe driving habits to reduce the fatalities and injuries on the highways within the seven counties of GRADD. To increase the seatbelt usage of the general public.

**C. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

To develop or use existing highway safety materials, with the assistance of the Kentucky highway safety leaders, for public distribution to the GRADD area.

Continue to lead the Citizens Advisory Boards (CABs) within each county and further develop community plans to reduce fatalities and injuries specifically related to that county.

Continue to provide updated and specific highway safety training to each county CAB.

To provide highway safety programs that are presented to the schools, civic and religious organization, businesses and any other public or private group.

To provide selective enforcement and public education in high crash corridors in identified areas with GRADD through coordinated efforts with the Kentucky State Police, local police agencies and sheriff's offices. (These would incorporate the four major holidays and their specific programs).

**D. STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES**

Attend various community events to bring the message of highway safety to the public, such as, Christmas Parades, county fairs, festivals and any other event that requests the service.

To work with the highway safety leaders within Kentucky on various projects & programs

To develop a comprehensive highway safety media campaign.

Continue to produce the quarterly newsletter, "The Insider," throughout GRADD that details the programs efforts and future projects.

Bring programs to the communities that are suggested by individual CABs in each county.

Provide training, such as, TIPs, Child Safety Seat Usage, Alcohol and Speed-related programs to the members of each CAB.

**D. STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES (Continued)**

Ensure that each CAB is represented by a diverse group of local volunteers.

Produce brochures and pamphlets to be distributed within the GRADD area.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES IMPACT**

Conduct "Battle of the Belts" at all local high schools and safety programs at elementary schools along with seatbelt surveys/checkpoints in efforts to raise the seatbelt usage rate one percentage point in each county.

When a road segment is determined to be a high accident location, will work with the transportation planners of GRADD to determine appropriate measures to reduce the number of accidents, such as, installation of pavement markings, new signs or recommend speed limit change.

Provide TIPS training to reduce the number of alcohol related accidents.

**ADMINISTRATIVE**

Provide monthly progress reports.

Provide quarterly financial reports.

Prepare bids for commodities, receive quotes and analyze for best price, award contract for commodities.

Prepare meeting notices for the seven CABs within GRADD, prepare meeting minutes and follow up on any items the CAB members need additional information on.



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**GREEN RIVER AREA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT  
HIGHWAY SAFETY PROGRAM**

The Green River Area Development District (GRADD) has worked to reduce highway collisions, fatalities, injuries and economic losses relating to traffic collision in GRADD's seven counties. GRADD's award-winning public awareness and education programs touched all age groups. From car seat safety for newborns, to school-based education, to safer driving classes for senior adults, GRADD offered a variety of programs.

Some examples include:

- Safety Belt Rollover Simulation at local schools
- "Seat Belt Promise" Program at local elementary schools
- High school "Buckle Up" initiative
- Regional Safety Fairs
- Back-to-School Readifests
- Car Seat Safety Awareness
- "Stop Red-Light Running" campaign
- Safe driving classes for senior adults
- Highway safety awareness at community events and health fairs
- Identification of Low-Cost Safety Improvement Projects
- Road Safety Audits
- US 60 Safety Corridor Team
- Alcohol prevention programs

GRADD has been recognized for its highway safety efforts at both state and national levels. During 2006, the GRADD US 60 Safety Corridor Team was honored at the Kentucky Lifesavers Conference for having "The Second Highest Reduction in Fatalities along a Safety Corridor for 2005". In 2007, the GRADD Regional Highway Safety Program was recognized by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) with a 2007 Excellence in Regional Transportation Innovation Award.

The safety programs utilized over the past eight years brought about proven results. Fatalities decreased and safety belt usage increased for the GRADD area.

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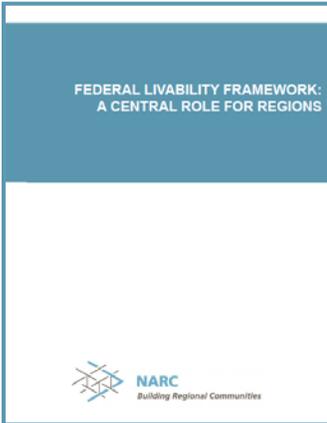




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## Available NARC Policy Reports



**Federal Livability Framework: A Central Role for Regions** provides background information and recommendations on how to position regional planning organizations and their local governments at the center of a federal livability initiative that promotes comprehensive, cross-linked regional planning and project implementation. The document includes a sampling of regions – urban and rural, large and small – that are leaders in livability efforts throughout the country.

This report is available at [www.NARC.org](http://www.NARC.org).



**Climate Change Framework: An Incentive-Based Approach** provides policy recommendations for any potential federal cap-and-trade bill to best position metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and their local governments for meeting any new federal requirements for reducing greenhouse gas emissions through transportation planning. NARC offers 18 suggestions focused on flexibility, incentives, local buy-in, tools, capacity and data in order to tap into the innovation required to make our communities better places to live, work and grow.

This report is available by contacting Shannon Menard at [shannon@NARC.org](mailto:shannon@NARC.org).



**Areawide Water Quality Management Planning: An Integral Component to Water Quality and Protection** recommends reinstating a federal commitment through adequate and sustained funding for the Clean Water Act's (CWA) Sec. 208 Areawide Water Quality Management Planning (WQM) program as a key step for establishing local water quality and watershed protection programs, and actions for achieving the implementation of improved water quality standards. The document includes specifics on how regional planning organizations would be able to use a reinvigorated program to address 21<sup>st</sup> Century problems.

This report is available by contacting Shannon Menard at [shannon@NARC.org](mailto:shannon@NARC.org).



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## TRANSPORTATION

**GOAL:** Improve transportation access and capacity throughout the region.

**OBJECTIVE:** Support and endorse projects that positively impact the region, including those that are currently listed for engineering and construction in the Transportation Cabinet's Six-Year Plan, as well as highway construction not listed in the plan.

### STRATEGIES:

- Promote more efficient movement of people, goods, and services throughout the region.
- Support an increase in federal and state funding for transportation projects (highway, rail, air, water, mass transit, and bikeways).
- Establish a Truck Network in all GRADD counties.
- Develop a four-lane interstate connector to Owensboro.
- Develop a major north to south interstate highway, such as I-69, through the district.
- Develop a major east to west high through or near the district.
- Construct interchanges to provide direct access to all industrial parks within the region.
- Restrict heavy truck traffic in downtown business districts within the region.
- Improve access to regional transportation services between the seven area counties with attention to elderly and persons with disabilities.
- Improve intermodal access of the district's transportation system through the Owensboro and Henderson riverports.
- Promote the development of a north to south passenger train route through the area.

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## **PROGRESS:**

- **Congress approved the designation of the Audubon and Natcher Parkways as interstate spurs.**
- **KY 56 in Union County has completed the design phase and is now in the right-of-way phase.**
- **The US 60 Bypass in Owensboro is on target to begin in late 2009.**
- **The Southtown project in Owensboro is in the process of completing the right-of-way phase.**
- **The Sand Lane project is in the construction phase.**
- **Design began for the US 60 bridge approach in Hawesville.**
- **The Owensboro Regional Airport completed a runway extension.**

**OBJECTIVE:** Improve safety of the region's transportation system.

## **STRATEGIES:**

- **Reduce the highway fatality rate in the region to 1.0 per 100 Million Vehicle Miles.**
- **Establish increased funding for highway safety initiatives.**

## **PROGRESS:**

- **The highway fatality rate has shown a decline over the past few years. GRADD will continue to work to reduce the fatalities on the GRADD highway network.**
- **Child Safety seat checks were conducted on three separate occasions, resulting in 45 inspections overall.**

**Total GRADD Region funding to date = \$51,725,974**

Major Projects Funded

\$27.2 million – Owensboro Bypass Extension (DOT)

\$3.4 million – Audubon Area Community Services – GRITS Parking Garage (FTA)

\$2.5 million – Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport Improvements (FAA)

\$2 million – Hartford Sewer Improvements (USDA)

\$1.6 million – Owensboro Public Schools – Title I (Dept. of Ed)

\$1.4 million – Daviess County Public Schools – Title I (Dept. of Ed)

\$1.35 million – Owensboro Housing Authority – Public Housing (HUD)

\$1.3 million – McLean & Webster County Trover Clinics – Medical Staff (HHS)

\$1.1 million – Owensboro Transit System – 3 Buses (FTA)

\$1.05 million – Henderson County Schools – Title I (Dept. of Ed)

**Funding received through GRADD directly = \$28,854,234**

**(55.8% of regional total)**

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Owensboro Bypass Extension – \$27.2 million (DOT)

Summer Works Program – \$595,000 (DOL)

Dislocated Worker Program – \$575,000 (DOL)

Adult State Grants – \$261,000 (DOL)

AmeriCorps Program – \$154,000 (CNCS)

Senior Citizen Meal Programs – \$62,000 (HHS)