

Community Building in Rural America—Fixing Pennsylvania’s Bridges

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According to PennDOT, Pennsylvania has the third-largest number of bridges in the nation, but we lead the nation in the number of bridges classified as “structurally deficient.” As a result, PennDOT is adding new weight restrictions or lowering existing restrictions on approximately 1,000 bridges.

To help with this issue, USDA Rural Development can assist rural townships and boroughs with funding to replace or repair deficient bridges. USDA’s Community Facilities (CF) loan and grant program is often the best financing option for rural communities. The current loan rates are 3.5% and up to a forty-year term.

Royalton Borough, Dauphin County was one of first, and for many years, one of the largest villages along the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. After too many years of use, a bridge that provided a primary route through the borough was closed due to structural deterioration. In 2008, USDA provided a \$250,000 CF loan to replace the primary borough bridge and restore the flow of traffic through the borough.

Community Facilities loans can also assist with associated projects that arise from bridge repairs or replacements, including road and street repairs, sidewalks and lighting. For example, in Scott Township, Lackawanna County, USDA provided a CF loan to repave existing township roads. In Luzerne County, Pittston City received a CF loan to replace uneven and/or missing sidewalks, add ADA curb ramps and install street lights. The improvements included the addition of patterned and colored crosswalks and a pedestrian bump to help slow traffic and make crossing safer. A CF grant will be used to purchase street lights around a monument in Lewistown, Mifflin County, supporting ongoing community development efforts in the downtown.

As evidenced by the examples above, I am convinced that Pennsylvania rural communities can, with a shared vision of the federal and state governments and local partners, work toward building stronger rural communities for the 21st century so that Pennsylvania rural communities remain a great place to live, work and raise a family. For more information on USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Programs, visit our webpage at: www.rurdev.usda.gov/pa or contact Tonya St. Clair, Program Specialist at 610-791-9810 ext. 112.