

Transportation and Housing Alliance Toolkit

DEVELOPING A RURAL LONG RANGE PLAN (RLRP)

What is THA

The Transportation and Housing Alliance was established by the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, with funding from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), as a way to help meet the housing and transportation needs of people with disabilities. THA is established as a standing committee of the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions, with the goal of providing information, resources, technical assistance and education on accessibility and the interconnection between housing and transportation.

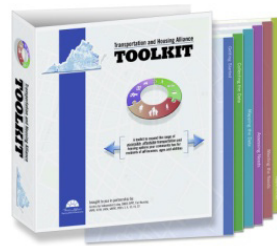
The RLRP

Each regional plan has a 20-year planning horizon and is intended to address the anticipated effects of population and employment growth on an area's transportation system. These plans will be reviewed every five years and updated as needed. A primary function of the RLRP is to coordinate State and regional transportation priorities to ensure that future resources are allocated accordingly. While the RLRPs lack a fiscally constrained project list, each is developed as a vision plan, to help every region to identify priorities for funding.

Aside from helping identify regional priorities, the project recommendations from the RLRPs feed into the State Highway Plan, which is a major component of the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, called VTrans

Involved in the Process

- VDOT
- VDOT Consultants
- PDCs
- Local Representatives
- The Public



Refer to the THA Toolkit when developing your Rural Long Range Plan

The THA Toolkit is a comprehensive catalog of resources that can assist with developing or updating a region's Rural Long Range Plan (RLRP). The Toolkit refers to several web based sources and provides guidance that can help you collect data on population and employment, two basic topics that are fundamental to these plans.

Getting to Know the THA Toolkit

THA developed the *Toolkit* to help provide a better understanding of transportation and housing needs of people with disabilities and others who may otherwise be excluded from the planning process. It is a catalog of tools with instructions and tips on how to collect and analyze information on your community. The Toolkit was expanded in 2007, when THA added a section that focuses on analyzing employment and economic market conditions.

With references on housing, employment and transportation, the Toolkit serves as a comprehensive guide for many types of planning projects, including work on Regional Long Range Plans. It can be a useful tool for all those involved in the RLRP process, which includes VDOT, their private consultants, Virginia's Planning District Commissions (PDCs), and their local governments.

The Rural Initiative

In November 2005, VDOT unveiled a proposal to develop RLRPs that are focused on rural transportation in 20 of the 23 Planning Districts in Virginia. This initiative is intended to create regional rural plans that compliment those in the metropolitan areas of the state and to elevate the role of PDCs in the transportation planning process. These plans identify transportation needs and opportunities in rural areas, guided by goals derived from the local communities. The importance of this initiative is supported by the following: Almost 70% of Virginia's state maintained roads are located in rural areas; A disproportionate amount of traffic fatalities occur on rural roads; Many disadvantaged groups live in rural areas and have fewer transportation options; And a considerable amount of freight moves through rural areas impacting highway facilities (safety, maintenance, capacity) without providing economic benefits.

Typical Tasks and Components to RLRPs

The Rural Long Range Plan is intended to address the anticipated effects of population and employment growth on an area's transportation system, recognizing the inherent relationship between land use and transportation. The THA *Toolkit* contains several resources that are described in the following pages, which can assist with gathering information on these topics.

Population and Employment Growth

RLRPs assess population and employment trends to determine their implications on the region's transportation network.

Commuting Patterns

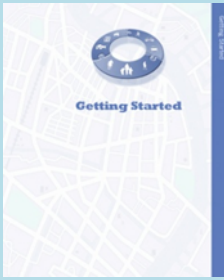
A commute is a home-to-work or work-to-home trip, and is one of the main functions of a transportation network. While there are other types of trips, commuting patterns are consistent, predictable and make up a major share of roadway traffic. Assessing these travel patterns is a vital exercise in understanding a community and its transportation network.

Demographic trends

RLRPs address disadvantaged populations, including people with disabilities and those that are classified as minority, low-income or elderly. These considerations help determine if there are any groups or deficiencies in the transportation network that could affect these groups.

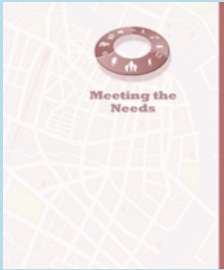
Mapping Infrastructure and Land Use Information

An RLRP contains a great deal of data that can be complex and difficult to comprehend. Some of this information is best depicted graphically, with maps and tables.



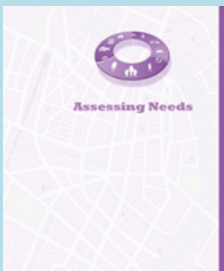
Getting Started:

A good place to begin with the *THA Toolkit* is under its first tab, **“Getting Started.”** This provides further background on tools and resources found throughout the document, helping to build familiarity and a basic understand of the *Toolkit*. The following are tips on how to use those sections of the *Toolkit* to conduct work on the state mandated Rural Long Range Planning process.



Public Involvement:

The state set public participation requirements for the RLRP process that fall under the responsibility of VDOT and their consultants. The region’s Rural Technical Committee typically plays a role in these efforts as well, pulling together resources from the given Planning District and local representatives. The *THA Toolkit* offers ideas and guidance on ways to obtain input for plans such as the RLRP and other regional or local plans it may reference.



Under the **“Meeting the Needs”** tab, the *Toolkit* discusses how to facilitate community-based charrettes, to gain input from area citizens and stakeholders. The *Toolkit* also provides tips on building partnerships and offers a ‘Best Practices’ section for looking at land use and transportation. The *Collecting and Digitizing Data* section, under the **“Collecting the Data”** tab, has audit forms with several questions that may be useful for getting started with the public. These are basic questions that can be presented directly to citizens or function as ideas for focusing public comments. Under the **“Assessing Needs”** tab, there are additional questions that may be helpful, once again, either to grasp the public’s needs or to serve as questions in public meetings.



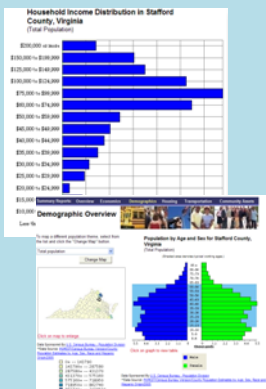
Population and Employment Growth:

The Rural Long Range Plan is intended to address the anticipated effects of population and employment growth on an area’s transportation system, recognizing the inherent relationship between land use and transportation. The *Toolkit* refers to several web based resources that provide information on these topics. The first place to begin collecting this data is under the *Toolkit’s* second tab, **“Collecting the Data.”** The introduction section provides a list of websites, labeled **“Resources for Data on the Web.”** Several of these sites contain specific population and employment data that is needed for developing the RLRP.

The first resource listed is the [U.S. Census Bureau’s](#) website, which has population and demographic figures for any jurisdiction in the state. For more detailed directions on finding and retrieving census data, refer to the **“Collecting US Census Data”** section of the *Toolkit*, which is also located under the **“Collecting the Data”** tab. If your region has a Metropolitan Planning Organization, which is excluded from the RLRP, then this section will be useful. It provides directions on how to gather census data on the census tract or block level, allowing you to leave out those areas in the MPO and focus only on the rural areas of the region. This exercise will likely require access to GIS maps, to determine how the census tracts or blocks line up with the MPO boundaries.

The **“Resources for Data on the Web”** also lists the [Weldon-Cooper Center](#). This website contains a large amount of data on population, employment, demographics, housing and other topics. The Weldon-Cooper Center typically has more current figures and estimate for these topics, filling in the gaps between the decennial census. The center creates population and other estimates for each Virginia community that are based on the latest census data and other calculations. There are also links to several other resources from the Weldon-Cooper website, which may be helpful with RLRP research.

The *Toolkit* list includes two sites, the [Virginia Employment Commission](#) and [Virginia’s Workforce Connection](#), that provide information on labor markets throughout the state. These are helpful resources when collecting data on employment trends for a given region or locality. The [Virginia Economic Development Partnership](#) website is particularly helpful with this research. On their homepage, click on the Community Profiles tab. This displays





detailed profiles on any city or county in Virginia. These profiles include a great deal of data, including information on employment, population, community amenities, commuting, transportation and more.

To focus on employment research, the last section, called *“Economic Market Conditions,”* under the **“Collecting the Data”** tab is particularly helpful. This section of the *Toolkit* gives detailed instructions on three web based resources. One is HotReports, which can provide a general overview of a community’s market conditions by using charts, maps and tables. The *Toolkit* also refers to Workforce Indicators, which is a site that provides further detail on an area’s employment opportunities, such as turnover rates, new hires, etc. OneTheMap is the third source under this section. The U.S. Census Bureau maintains this mapping program, which can identify residential and employment centers with online maps. This can be an effective way of examining land use patterns within a region and how people get to work.

Commuting Patterns:

Commuting patterns indicate how people travel between their homes and workplaces, representing one of the main functions of a transportation network. While there are other types of trips, commuting patterns are consistent, predictable and make up a major share of roadway traffic. Assessing these travel patterns is a vital exercise in understanding a community and its transportation network, thus representing a significant topic for a Rural Long Range Plan.

The *Toolkit* references several resources that provide information on commuting patterns. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership website, listed under *“Resources for Data on the Web”* has community-wide data on commuting patterns moving in and out of any given city or county in Virginia. Under the *“Economic Market Conditions”* section, two of the websites that were previously mentioned have information on this topic. The HotReports site has tables and charts on the modal split of how people get to work. This indicates the count and percentage of people who drive alone, carpool, take transit, bike, walk, or work from home. The OnTheMap program provides maps and tables on commute and labor sheds. This mapping program allows the user to define a study area, which could be the size of the region or as small as a designated growth area. OnTheMap can produce reports with data on commuting patterns for that study area.

Commuting Patterns - 2000 Census	
Live and work in Loudoun County	4,383 28.3%
Total In Commuters	2,857 18.1%
Total Out Commuters	7,654 52.1%
Net Out Commuters	4,807
In Commuters From:	
Orange Co. VA	584 35.3%
Albemarle Co. VA	267 17.4%
Spotsylvania Co. VA	276 16.1%
Fluvanna Co. VA	285 16.8%
Harrison Co. VA	241 14.6%
Out Commuters To:	
Harrison Co. VA	1,554 31.0%
Albemarle Co. VA	1,248 24.9%
Charlottesville City VA	892 17.8%
Rappahannock City VA	732 14.0%
Hanover Co. VA	629 12.4%

Definitions

A **labor shed** focuses on employment centers in a specific area and records where those workers live.

A **commute shed** focuses on residential centers in a specific area and records where those residents travel for work.

Demographic Trends:

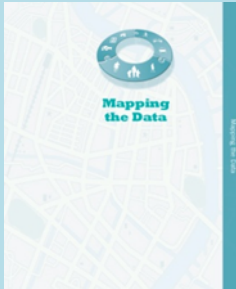
The RLRPs also address disadvantaged populations, including people with disabilities and those that are classified as minority, low-income or elderly. These considerations help determine if there are any gaps or deficiencies in the transportation network that could affect these groups. The THA *Toolkit* was meant to address these types of issues, making it an ideal tool for helping to gather this information.

Most of the guidance on collecting demographic data is under the *Toolkit’s* second tab, **“Collecting the Data.”** Once again, the introduction section provides a list of websites, labeled *“Resources for Data on the Web.”* In this list, the U.S. Census Bureau and Weldon-Cooper Center have data on general demographics and disadvantaged groups. The *“Collecting US Census Data”* section of the *Toolkit* describes how to access this type of information from the census website and how to display it on GIS maps.

Mapping Transportation, Land Use and Other Information:

An RLRP contains a great deal of data that can be complex and difficult to comprehend. Some of this information is best depicted graphically, with maps and tables. Maps can be a critical tool for analyzing information and reaching out to the public. People typically relate to and understand graphics more than text and can better grasp complex concepts and trends with these illustrations. Maps also allow people to easily identify important community resources, destinations, areas needing improvement and other important locations.

The *Toolkit* refers to the [OnTheMap](#) website, under the “[Collecting the Data/Economic Market Conditions](#)” section. Again, this is an online mapping program that identifies employment and residential centers within a defined area, helping to illustrate commuting patterns within the defined study area. While OnTheMap offers the ability to map this information, there are further options under the “[Mapping the Data](#)” tab. This section has guidance on how to use GIS maps for communicating certain information and themes.



As discussed earlier, the “[Collecting the Data/Collecting US Census Data](#)” section provides instructions on how to extract data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s website. The first section, “[Mapping Census Data](#)” under the “[Mapping the Data](#)” tab shows how to insert this information into a GIS map. This provides guidance on how to create several different themes that may be useful to the RLRP. These maps may include information on race, age, income, people with disabilities and other demographics. The second section, “[Geocoding Place](#),” shows how to map important locations, such as medical, educational, recreational, civic, and employment centers, along with other community amenities. This can be useful information for assessing the rural transportation system. An RLRP will focus on determining the location of employment centers and their impact on the local transportation network. For this map, focus on section three, “[Geocoding Employment Centers](#).” Section four, “[Mapping Residential Growth](#),” shows how to illustrate trends in residential growth throughout a community. Some regions have fixed route or para-transit services, where the sixth section, “[Proportion of Persons served by Transit](#),” may be helpful. After collecting information on your transit services, this will instruct you on how to map this information. By overlapping the transportation information with housing, employment and other important places, there will be a clear understanding of existing gaps in your transportation network or challenges in accessibility.

Using the Toolkit

The *THA Toolkit* is a large document, which can be intimidating for anyone considering to use it to help with a given planning project. The guidance in this fact sheet calls out those areas of the *Toolkit* that would be most useful or applicable for developing a Rural Long Range Plan. While this directs the user to those specific sections, skimming through the entire document is also recommended. The *Toolkit* as a whole represents an inclusive approach to planning that is particularly important for state initiatives, such as the RLRP, and topics, such as transportation, that affect everyone. This approach may be difficult to grasp when selectively reading certain sections. With this said, this fact sheet refers to the most critical sections for developing a RLRP.

