

# ***Africa Transport Technical Notes***



Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Program (SSATP) Rural Travel and Transport Program (RTTP)  
UNECA and the World Bank

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*Giving Rural Communities Access to Goods and Services*

## Planning Rural Transport in Africa

Rural transport services affect the lives of millions of rural Sub-Saharan Africans. Agricultural producers, commuters, service providers, and local residents depend on the ability to travel in and out of communities to access jobs, schools, health centers, markets, and household staples, such as water and firewood.

Rural transport should rightly be thought of as “rural access” — the access rural communities have to goods and services, including markets. Transport thus consists of (a) a power source—e.g., human, animal, or mechanical; (b) a means of transport—e.g., bicycle, head basket, truck; and (c) some kind of fixed rural transport infrastructure (RTI)—e.g., road, track, or path.

The fixed RTI components of rural access are unlikely to be provided by private firms or individuals. Instead, some form of collective or group effort is necessary. This means that normal market mechanisms cannot be relied upon to plan for such investments. Public sector or some other form of collective planning is needed. But, just because the private sector is unlikely to provide RTI, private individuals and firms can be quite appropriate *producers* of such infrastructure. In fact, private organizations may have the strongest incentives to design, construct, and maintain RTI investments.

Planning is essentially a process for deciding how to allocate resources. Given the circumstances in Sub-Saharan Africa, that process should maximize the net benefits from access while keeping the investments in RTI—both the initial capital and subsequent maintenance efforts—affordable.

### **Multifaceted Aspects of Rural Access Planning**

Effective rural access planning is multi-dimensional, and not related exclusively to transport. For example, since access depends on the location of services, such as health centers and water supply, improvements can be achieved either by developing local roads and paths or by relocating the services.

Because rural transport infrastructure is part of a larger transportation network, local RTI planning decisions should not be made independently of national

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This note is based on an SSATP Working Paper, “Rural Transport Planning,” by Ed Connerly and Larry Schroeder.

This series is intended to share information about issues raised in various SSATP reports. The views expressed in the paper, and in this note, are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the World Bank Group, UNECA, or any of the RMI stakeholders.

For more information about these notes, please contact Leita Jones in the World Bank. Internet: [LJONES2@WORLD BANK.ORG](mailto:LJONES2@WORLD BANK.ORG)

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### Box 1. Decentralized Planning and Governance

Ghana illustrates a broad-based approach to improving decentralized *governance*, rather than an attempt to improve a stand-alone rural planning system. Over the last several years, the Government of Ghana has cautiously, but consistently, evolved in the direction of a more decentralized and more democratic political system and a more market-driven economic system. The net effect of a variety of laws passed during the first half of the current decade is clearly to devolve significant responsibilities for decision-making and planning to private individuals, private firms, traditional authorities, non-governmental organizations, and, on the governmental side, District Assemblies.

The decentralization efforts are given credibility by the willingness of national decision-makers to help improve District Assembly finances. The District Assemblies Common Fund Act of 1993 provides that not less than 5 percent of all national government revenues must be allocated to the District Assemblies. Although the law specifies that the funds will be used for “development purposes,” this has been interpreted to allow both capital and maintenance spending to be financed from these funds. With 70 - 90 percent of District Assembly total revenues derived from this source, it is clear that the Government of Ghana is strongly supporting this decentralization policy.

decisions. In addition, the technical skills for planning may be unavailable locally and therefore require assistance from the national level. But rural access planning cannot be effective if implemented solely at the central or national level. If demand for access is to be assessed accurately, local information must be included and final decisions must be made locally.

Finally, RTI planning should not focus exclusively on investments in new or rehabilitated infrastructures. Maintaining existing infrastructure is as important and economically beneficial, if not more, as adding to the capital stock, and should be part of the planning.

### Current Rural Access Planning Practices

Unfortunately, the “systems” of rural access planning in Sub-

Saharan Africa do not generally reflect these attributes. Most systems are dominated by national interests and focus disproportionately on the national road and highway network. Access planning that does occur nationally is generally not multi-sectoral—that is, decisions about facility sites made by Ministries of Health or Education are usually made without considering RTI investment decisions.

Even where multi-sectoral local development plans are prepared, the process and coordination of local plans are almost always controlled by the national planning agency. Much local planning is designed to make the locality accountable to the center rather than to local transport users.

Infrastructure planning processes in place also tend to be oriented toward “supply” rather than

“demand.” They focus on transport infrastructure without determining users’ willingness to pay for such investments. And relatively few efforts are made at systematically planning for and expending resources on maintenance.

### National Support for Rural Transport Planning

National governments, however, still can and should play a role in the planning process, and appropriate national economic policies are crucial. National agricultural pricing and rural credit policies, together with policies concerning investments in complementary agricultural inputs, such as irrigation, go a long way in determining the payoff to investments in rural roads.

Perhaps the most important national policy supporting local rural access planning is decentralization. When all resource allocations are made at the center, there will be few incentives for planning decisions to consider local preferences and knowledge. Not only must there be a decentralization policy in effect, but if the policy is to be credible it must be supported by a strong central commitment to decentralization (see Box 1).

Finally, national governments can and should provide resources to localities. Such transfers facilitate the local planning process and ensure that resources are available to help implement planning. Where

civil engineering, rural planning, and other technical skills are in short supply, the central government will probably have to provide them. It is likely that monetary resources will also have to be transferred since few Sub-Saharan localities have the finances to invest in local transport. As an indicator of support for decentralization, these transfers should be made without unnecessary conditions.

**Local Rural Transport Planning**

Designing a demand-oriented planning system is complex since determining real or effective demand for public goods (which rural roads are) faces many difficulties. Yet, if planners ignore demand, the resulting investments will not be sustained. Effective planning will be an aspect of governance rather than a highly structured, technocratic exercise which is more often supply-oriented than demand-oriented.

A local rural access planning system should:

- be *integrative* and aware that rural access is achieved from the full array of RTI, including formal roads as well as local paths, tracks and trails;
- be *simple* in order to allow prioritization of competing alternatives without carrying out complex rate-of-return analyses;
- be *participatory*, relying heavily on the expressed needs of

current or potential users of the rural access system’s RTI components; and

- require some type of *cost sharing* arrangement whereby the users bear some portion of the costs of constructing and maintaining the infrastructure. Without some form of cost sharing requirement, participant’s statements of “demand” for access will not be credible (see Box 2).

Given the many differences in economic, political, demographic, and environmental conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa, a single

parts of the local (tertiary and community) road network. Among the characteristics of this key component of the network are that the links (a) serve a broad base and significant portion of the local population; (b) are deemed, on the basis of discussions with local users, to be especially important to productive efforts—e.g., link villages to markets or the secondary road system; (c) are used extensively; and (d) either be in good enough condition to be considered “maintainable,” or have the potential to become maintainable without significant investment in construction or reconstruction.

**Box 2. Leveraging Funds To Improve Local Access**

Of crucial importance to the annual planning process is considering how funds made available to the locality—e.g., the local government—can be leveraged to encourage self-help efforts on the part of identifiable users and/or beneficiaries sharing a common interest in improving local access. Where the anticipated amount of revenues exceeds the amounts necessary to maintain key parts of the existing RTI network, the excess can be used to support user-based groups associated with individual road links that serve an identifiable group of users. Through a series of meetings throughout the locality, local links in the RTI network can be identified as being especially important to users. But allocation of resources to improve those links would be recommended only if the users are willing to provide additional resources (monetary or non-monetary) to support the improvement. Such cost sharing helps ensure that the stated demand for the improvements are genuine, and increases the likelihood that the improvements are both affordable and sustainable.

blueprint approach to the appropriate planning system is unrealistic. At the same time, long-term rural access planning in any country could require that the local planner draft a 3-5 year RTI planning document with a long-term RTI strategy. The planning document would delineate the key

A short-term planning of one year could then complete the long-term planning process. This process, equivalent to an annual budgeting process, will be done through (a) estimating monetary resources available from central government transfers; (b) estimating the costs

of maintaining at minimal levels the key parts of the tertiary and community road network; (c) where the total amounts available for maintaining and/or upgrading local RTI exceeds the amounts necessary to maintain the existing key parts of the local road network, the excess can be allocated to support user-based groups associated with individual road links that will provide additional resource; (d) submitting to the appropriate authority a suggested plan for allocating next year's resources; and (e) allocating and monitoring resources by the appropriate

authority.

The planning process should focus on the ability of RTI links to serve broad-based transport needs and *demands* of the local populace. The strategy would then suggest how these key components of the local road infrastructure network could be maintained and, perhaps, improved in order to enhance local access.