



United States Department of Agriculture
Economic Research Service

The Economic Returns to Rural Infrastructure Investment

April 10-11, 2018 National Press Club – Washington, D.C.

Workshop Agenda

Tuesday, April 10, 2018

8:30 a.m. Welcome

Mary Bohman, Administrator, USDA Economic Research Service
Constance Cullman, President, Farm Foundation

9:00 a.m. Keynote Address

Steve Censky, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture

9:30 a.m. The Economically Efficient Composition of Rural Infrastructure Investment

This paper develops a more precise economic explanation for why public-sector infrastructure investment is economically efficient public policy. By specifically accounting for the spatial nature of network infrastructures and commerce, the authors describe why many necessary investments must be sited in and/or available to rural communities and tentatively offers forecasts regarding the nature and value of efficient, forward-looking rural infrastructure outcomes.

Panelists: Mark Burton, University of Tennessee

Discussant: Steve Deller, University of Wisconsin

10:30 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m. Economic Impacts, Costs, and Benefits of Infrastructure Investment: Lessons from the Literature

This paper will review concepts and approaches for measuring the economic impacts, costs, and benefits of infrastructure investments; review published literature on these impacts, costs, and benefits for the United States, selected other developed countries and developing countries; synthesize the main findings from the literature; and discuss implications for policy and research.

Panelists: John Pender, USDA Economic Research Service, and Maximo Torero, World Bank

Discussant: Jack Molyneaux, Millennium Challenge Corporation

11:45 a.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. Infrastructure Project Prioritization in Theory and Practice: Examples in Federal U.S. and International Programs

This paper will examine the approaches to identifying, ranking, and selecting infrastructure investments, focusing on uses by U.S. federal government agencies, with some international comparisons.

Panelist: Mike Bennon, Stanford University, and Rajiv Sharma, Stanford University

Discussant: Tom Hughes, U.S. Army, Civil Works

2:00 p.m. Rank and Selection of Infrastructure Projects: State and Local Perspectives

This paper will examine approaches to ranking and selecting infrastructure investments, focusing on uses by state agencies.

Panelist: Kent Wolfe, University of Georgia, and David Tanner, Carl Vinson Institute of Government

Discussant: Sarah Low, USDA Economic Research Service

3:00 p.m. Break

3:15 p.m. Examining Benefit-Cost Analysis in Infrastructure Projects

This paper will review the Department of Transportation's use of benefit-cost analyses in the review of Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program for surface transportation infrastructure projects.

Panelist: Anthony Homan, Federal Maritime Commission

Discussant: Chad Shirley, Congressional Budget Office

4:15 p.m. Government Panel: Reaction to Papers and Discussion

Moderator: Constance Cullman, Farm Foundation

Panelists:

Chris Brazell, Appalachian Regional Commission

Jannine Miller, U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Secretary

Andrew Neely, U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation

Hugh Weathers, South Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

8:30 a.m. Review of Discussion

John Pender, Branch Chief, Rural Economy Branch, USDA Economic Research Service

9:00 a.m. The Value of Rural and Urban Public Infrastructure

This paper considers how infrastructure affects the value of agricultural land, housing stocks, and local wage levels. The authors will construct a panel of infrastructure stocks for U.S. counties over several decades, using the perpetual inventory method, and considered how changes in rural infrastructure spending influence land and property values, income levels, and land-use patterns.

Panelist: David Albouy, University of Illinois, and Arash Farahani, Independent Budget Office of New York City

Discussant: Mark Partridge, Ohio State University

10:00 a.m. Impacts of the USDA Broadband Loan and Grant Programs: Moving Toward Estimating a Rate of Return

In this paper, the authors use U.S. zip code level data on payroll and employment from 1997 to 2006 to estimate the impact of federal grant and loan programs aimed at increasing the provision of broadband internet across rural areas. The authors will provide some initial estimates on the rate of return on rural broadband investments and discuss data needs and program evaluation techniques that could be used in future research.

Panelist: Ivan Kandilov, North Carolina State University

Discussant: Brian Whitacre, Oklahoma State University

11:00 a.m. Industry Panel: Reaction to Papers and Discussion

Moderator: Constance Cullman, Farm Foundation

Panelist:

Shirley Bloomfield, NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association

Robbie Boone, Farm Credit Council

Garry Niemeyer, Niemeyer Farms LLC

Jon Samson, American Trucking Association

12:00 p.m. Wrap-Up Discussion

Mary Bohman, USDA Economic Research Service

Constance Cullman, Farm Foundation

12:30 p.m. Adjourn