

Arts in Transportation

State Infrastructure Partnerships

NASAA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY of
STATE ARTS AGENCIES

Knowledge ▲ Representation ▲ Community

Our nation is on the cusp of historic investments in infrastructure. After years of grappling with stressed, decaying and limited systems, there is new impetus at the federal, state and local levels to improve and expand infrastructure to become efficient, accessible and affordable to all American communities. Arts can be a transformational ingredient in transportation initiatives, benefiting communities through improved engagement in planning processes, better transportation experiences, and an enhanced sense of place that inspires community well-being, tourism and economic development.

Arts in transportation touches many lives. Every day hundreds of thousands of people travel on roads, through stations and rest stops, on buses, subways, trains, bikes, and scooters and on foot. Transportation provides a platform for showcasing art and capturing the imagination and attention of commuters and travelers. Transportation also can help bring funding to the arts.

Arts enhance transportation by transforming public spaces, creating stimulating environments, informing users, inspiring local communities and making transportation a better experience. Through art, travelers are connected to the local heritage and history of the communities through which they pass. Art installations add public value to transportation infrastructure by building a unique sense of place and transforming travel experiences. Arts programs, as well as planning processes that include creative practices, allow planners and transportation agencies to connect with the communities they serve—an often-important element as these agencies can be perceived as disruptive and rigid. Involving communities and enlivening planning practices can be achieved through arts partnerships like artist-in-residence programs, which offer creative ideas and a creative talent pool that can help transportation agencies with planning, public engagement, design and other aspects of transportation development.

Partnerships

For the various synergies between arts and transportation to take root, partnerships between arts and transportation agencies are critical.

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In transportation, art occupies physical space in the system. Transportation agencies need to be involved to negotiate the access, but first the appropriate agency must be pinpointed. No one transportation agency governs all modes of transportation. In order to develop partnerships, it's important for arts leaders to identify the appropriate government pathways for policymaking and program development. Transportation systems and the rights to land vary by city, county and state as well as by mode. For example, streets are often governed by cities and counties, while state highways are governed by state departments of transportation that coordinate with the federal government. Public

transit and the rights to the public space are governed by cities, counties and states, all through their own programs and services.

Transportation agencies not only work with the art and the space, but also can provide resources including funding, staffing and knowledge of federal grant making. Many transportation agencies across the country see arts as positive and instrumental for transportation and are ready and willing to forge creative relationships.

State arts agencies can be instrumental partners for transportation agencies, as their wide community networks and arts expertise position them to facilitate connections with communities and artists. State arts agency expertise—especially within public engagement practices and art selection processes—is helpful for involving a variety of local stakeholders, from civic leaders to resident youth to tribal leaders.

While initial relationships can be difficult to forge, once on their way, partnerships between arts and transportation often become fruitful and beloved. Following are four examples of successful transportation partnerships with state arts agencies.

Examples of State Arts and Transportation Partnerships

Turnpike Commissions

Engaging Youth through the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

[The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission](#) was looking for a partner to install large-scale artworks in its 17 service plazas across the state. Because the commission is always seeking ways to demonstrate local relevance and develop public goodwill, it needed a partner to engage and excite communities about the plazas as public spaces. The [Pennsylvania Council on the Arts](#) (PCA) caught wind of this need and knew that PCA would be the right fit. From the partnership grew [Art Sparks](#).

PCA works with its [Arts in Education \(AIE\) partners](#) to develop installations for the service plazas. The AIE partners reach out to educators in the service plazas' communities to find classrooms or schools interested in taking on plaza artwork as a creative project. From there, PCA and the respective AIE partner in the region support a teaching artist who works with students to design and create artwork to be permanently displayed. Sometimes an additional piece is developed for the school as well. The Turnpike Commission and PCA split the costs. The students select the content of the artwork. While brainstorming, a Turnpike Commission representative teaches the students about the organization and history of the turnpike. Representatives from the local tourism bureau also meet with students to discuss the local heritage and attractions of the community. When the artwork is finished, an opening event is attended by executive directors, school administrators, participating students and their families, and state and local officials. The school may have its band or chorus present, along with yearbook clubs and local newspapers.

As of 2022, artwork had been installed at eight plazas, with more nearing completion. So far, the installations range from dyed silk, sculpture, 2-D murals and glass mosaic to felted wool, welded metalwork and photography. Rack cards featuring an image of the artwork and background information on the piece are available at each of the 17 locations, and a reward may be offered to those who collect every card.

Turnpikes and other major highways are all too often experienced as impersonal throughfares that pass by—or even divide—communities. Art Sparks projects are an antidote to that problem, evoking some of the people and places that make each region of Pennsylvania special.

“Hundreds of thousands of people pass through these plazas. When they stop and rest, these artworks allow them to get a glimpse of what is beyond the walls.”

— Jamie Dunlap, chief of creative catalysts & lifelong learning, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

Instrumental to the success of Art Sparks is a great relationship. “We have a wonderful relationship with the Turnpike Commission,” says PCA Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning Jamie Dunlap. “Our agency teams work really well together. We get to have fun while achieving our goals of connecting to communities and supporting lifelong learning in the arts.”



The unveiling of “Our Life. Our Story,” a sculptural photographic collage installed at Pennsylvania’s Sideling Hill Turnpike Plaza. The artwork was created by Southern Fulton High School art students and Fulton County Area Vocational Technical School (FCAVTS) welding students under the guidance of professional photographer and teaching artist Dorie Heyer, art teacher Carolyn Mottern and FCAVTS welding teacher Bruce Shipley. Photo courtesy of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

State Departments of Transportation

Bridging Rural Communities through Art with the North Dakota Department of Transportation and the North Dakota Council on the Arts

North Dakota is a huge state with low population density. How can its rural communities engage in placemaking? One way is through the roads that connect them. [Arts Across the Prairie: Placemaking in Rural North Dakota](#) is a program designed by the [North Dakota Council on the](#)

[Arts](#) (NDCA) to bring large-scale artworks to North Dakota's eight regions, creating a network of landmarks accessed through roads. To bring art to roads, the arts council needed to form a partnership with the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT).

When completed, Arts Across the Prairie will feature eight large-scale public artworks in North Dakota's eight regions. Each work will reflect the unique history, landscape and cultural heritage of its region. NDCA facilitates the interagency cooperation needed across counties and regions to select artists and artwork and seek funding, which is a combination of public and private. This work bolsters NDCA's role as a rural development partner and spurs economic development by encouraging tourism. For each region, the goal is to bring native elders, tribal leaders and historians into the conversation.

“Although people usually associate the NDDOT with license plates, roads and plows, we’re much more. Creativity is engrained in everything we do—from engineering to design to the way we serve the public. We’re happy to partner with the NDCA to make art more accessible to all North Dakotans.”

— Bill Panos, former director, North Dakota Department of Transportation

NDDOT contributes to stops and signage at selected sites, allowing the public a safe and convenient way to view the artworks. Because NDDOT has larger staff and resources, it can help with grant applications by providing staff time and knowledge of federal grant making.

NDCA Executive Director, Kim Konikow recommends using a memorandum of understanding when forming a partnership. “Even if you don’t know the details, having in writing the goals of the program is important, so that everyone gets the message,” she says. “Also critical to the process is a champion, and that is what [former NDDOT Director] Bill Panos was. His passion helped to make Arts Across the Prairie possible.”

One of the problems the program has faced is that many of the roads are county roads, and federal dollars can be spent only when the project is on state highways. Both organizations are working to find solutions here. In the future, legislation that would allow federal dollars to be spent on county roads will help. Currently, funding sources for the projects come from the North Dakota Department of Commerce, private foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts Our Town program and the North Dakota legislature.

The COVID-19 pandemic briefly halted Arts Across the Prairie, although work for [Region 1 is underway in northwest North Dakota](#) and will break ground in spring 2023. Simultaneous processes are underway in regions 2 and 4, with stakeholder groups in formation in regions 3, 6 and 8. Benefits already being experienced by the communities include integrated participation of statewide transportation, tourism, business and arts partners. Decisions are being precipitated by working across state agencies and community partners to navigate uncharted territory. Finding consensus among diverse stakeholders is challenging, but progress is being made. The long-term economic development and tourism created from these conversations and installations is reaching across county lines and has spurred conversations about future projects at the local level. Arts Across the Prairie has inspired other conversations at the state level as well. NDDOT is considering

an artist in residence program as well as art installations placed at rest stops along North Dakota's federal highways.

Arts Across the Prairie: Selected Site

Region 4 - NE North Dakota

- Stakeholder group developed and active
- Site selected – Dahlen Esker, a glacial formation
- Along State highway; ND-DOT assists with turn-out, parking, byway signage
- Drafting request for artist proposals (RFP)



Quick facts about the selected site for Arts across the Prairie in Region 4. Photo compilation courtesy of the North Dakota Council on the Arts

Transit Agencies

Enhancing Transit through Art with NJ TRANSIT and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts

[NJ TRANSIT](#) has been actively involved in the arts since the passing of [New Jersey's Public Buildings Arts Inclusion Act](#) in 1978. The state's percent for art legislation positions the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#) as a resource for advising and assisting with the integration of arts into new construction for public facilities.

“Because of the way the Public Arts Inclusion Act is worded, no agency is required to include art into the public places they serve,” says Danielle Bursk, director of community partnerships and artist services at the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. “NJ TRANSIT *wants to.*”

The partnership between NJ TRANSIT and the state arts council began with permanent station art. When New Jersey builds a new station or renovates one, NJ TRANSIT works with the state arts council to install and/or integrate works of art. The art helps make the stations more inviting to travelers and improves the rider experience while providing an opportunity for local artists to work with large-scale public art installations. The arts council and NJ TRANSIT both appreciate that the

“It’s a joy to work with the New Jersey Transit. Combined efforts with our team and theirs allow bigger, bolder goals to be achieved.”

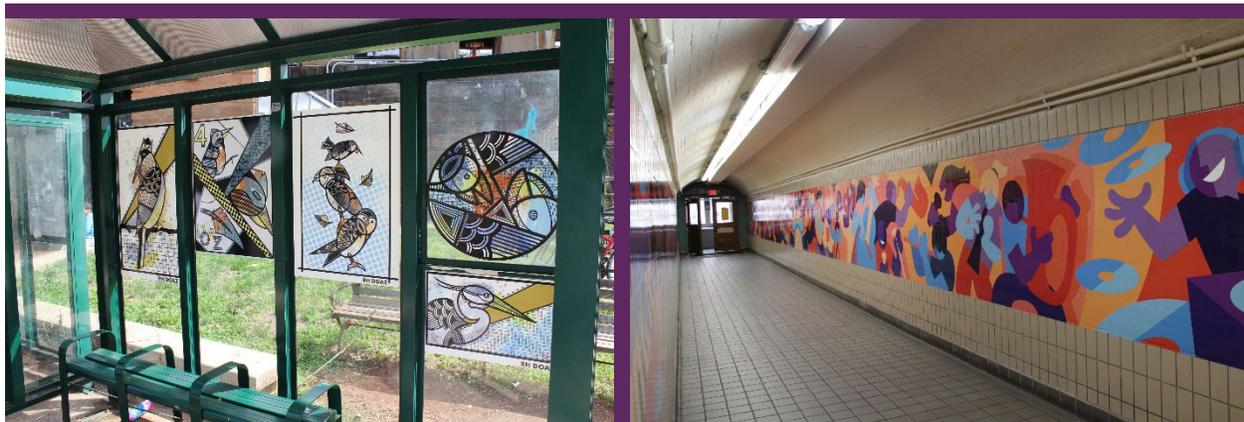
— Stephanie Nerbak, program associate for artist services, New Jersey State Council for the Arts

program provides passengers and local communities the opportunity to engage with art in their daily lives.

The interagency collaboration has been so successful that they developed a new program called [The TRANSITional Art Project](#) (TAP), which funds projects outside of the Public Building Arts Inclusion Act and has been in operation for four years. TAP provides temporary art (three-month-long installations) in transit spaces including stations and bus stops and is

designed to showcase a diverse range of local artists. So far, exhibitions have been launched at Newark Penn Station, Atlantic City bus and rail terminals, and the Trenton Transit Center. Currently, the [New Brunswick Station](#) is featuring a temporary exhibit.

Each project is funded at \$30,000 by the arts council and matched by NJ TRANSIT with staff time, materials, installation and maintenance. Once a station is chosen, a committee curated by the arts council and the NJ Transit arts team designs and issues an open call for artists, evaluates submissions and selects artists, with a focus on local artists. Another goal of TAP is to engage with artists who may not have as much experience with public art projects. Once artists are selected, the arts council and NJ TRANSIT work with them to establish the particulars of the installations, such as what, when, and where. Once the artwork is selected and developed, NJ TRANSIT collaborates with the artist to install the artwork.



Left: New Brunswick bus shelter, artist RH Doaz. Right: New Brunswick passenger tunnel, artist Haley Potter. Images courtesy of NJ TRANSIT

Multipartner Collaborations

Creative Placemaking with the Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Vermont Arts Council

The relationship between the [Vermont Agency of Transportation](#) (VTTrans) and the [Vermont Arts Council](#) (VAC) began in 1999 when they partnered on the oversight and management of the Danville Transportation Enhancement Project, a program designed to nurture collaboration between artists, community members and engineers in the redevelopment of a section of U.S. Route 2 that runs through the center of Danville, Vermont. The project was inspired by the principles of “context sensitive design” defined by the Federal Highway Administration as “a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders in developing a transportation facility that complements its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, and historic and environmental resources while maintaining safety and mobility.”

Prior to VAC’s involvement, the Route 2 project through Danville had been stalled for over a decade for a variety of reasons, including community concerns about the incursion of an expanded federal highway (which serves as a major east-west thoroughfare in Vermont) on the village center of Danville. This project aimed to preserve the essential rural character of Danville and to keep its village center intact, while meeting the essential need for an important state transportation corridor. It was hoped that involving artists in the redesign could engage the community and could help to minimize the impact of Route 2 on the village center. The project was completed in 2014, with traffic-calming elements and artistic enhancements to the surrounding area that include sculptural granite posts, a redesigned bandstand, stone walls and plantings.

By the end of the 14-year period over which the Danville project was designed and implemented, leadership at VTTrans had changed and federal funding for enhancements in transportation projects had declined. Building upon the work that had begun with the Danville project, in 2015 VAC developed a program called [Animating Infrastructure](#) to integrate art with infrastructure improvements. Infrastructure is considered broadly to include community facilities, buildings, trails, water or sewer systems, roads, power systems, parks, and more. VAC partnered with VTTrans and the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development to connect with communities. In the first year of Animating Infrastructure, four projects were funded and they were very well received by the community.

“VTTrans is supportive of the program. They are interested in community development and placemaking and understand that art is essential to community vibrancy and livability.”

— Michele Bailey, senior program manager, Vermont Arts Council

Integrating art in transportation projects can be a complicated process for communities due to the many safety and engineering considerations. VTTrans, in consultation with VAC and other state and federal partners, developed a [set of guidelines and an application process](#) for art installations at state transportation facilities. VTTrans also provides a coordinator tasked with helping communities navigate the art application process.

Many Vermont agencies have common goals of promoting placemaking, tourism and economic development. VTrans has an ongoing partnership with Vermont's Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), Department of Environmental Conservation, and Department of Health on a program called [Better Connections](#). The program funds planning efforts to improve transportation, land use, public health and economic vitality in Vermont. Likewise, housed within ACCD is the [Better Places](#) program, a community matching grant program designed to help Vermonters create inclusive and vibrant public places.

A team of partnering agencies and organizations meets regularly to promote and support these placemaking efforts and to support communities in accessing the funds available. As a recent example of the interagency synergy, the community of [Hyde Park](#) received a Better Connections grant to complete a planning project to understand how the community could see improved transportation outcomes. One recommendation was to enhance community assets like the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, which is a trail under VTrans's jurisdiction that runs through Hyde Park. The result was a plan for art installations along the trail, and the project received funding from Animating Infrastructure to design a sculpture for the trail head in the village. Because the community needed more funding, the town of Hyde Park sought and received additional resources through the [Better Places program](#). The sculpture has recently been approved to be installed through VTrans's new art guidance and application process.

As partners, these departments work together to make their communities better places to live, and Vermonters are better off because of these relationships.



Vermont artist [Dan Gottsegen](#) worked with the community to design this landmark piece of art for the head of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail in Hyde Park, Vermont. The piece reflects local stories and images transferred into a series of historical panels of colorful glass in a playful shape of bending railroad tracks. Photographer and artist: Dan Gottsegen

Artists in Residence

Artist-in-residence programs provide creative ways to integrate arts with transportation. In [Bringing Creativity to DOTs](#), Forecast observes that resident artists not only have made substantive contributions to transportation planning and public engagement practices, they also have strengthened the internal workings of transportation departments and helped transportation personnel find new meaning in their work.

While such programs have historically existed at the local level, Washington and Minnesota were the first states to create artist in transportation residencies at the state level within their departments of transportation. In 2019, both states participated in programs that supported trained artists to work alongside department of transportation staff to help them conceive of and implement [creative solutions to common transportation challenges](#).

[Washington State DOT's Artists-in-Residence Program](#) arose when [Transportation for America](#) (T4America) approached the [Washington State Department of Transportation](#) (WSDOT) about hosting an artist. WSDOT selected two artists, who spent the first several months of their residency listening and absorbing the goings-on of the department, reading nearly 80 reports, interviewing several hundred staff and traveling close to 3,000 miles. The final products of the residents include transforming WSDOT's headquarters into a gallery and gathering space, creating a bumper sticker and conversation card campaign, and publishing a newspaper on WSDOT's maintenance efforts. Through these and other creative activities, the artists reinforced the public value of work often perceived as purely bureaucratic. The artists facilitated internal information sharing about team needs and catalyzed brainstorming about future projects. They also elevated the importance and complexity of road repair and maintenance, services that provide an especially critical lifeline for the state's rural communities.

[Minnesota DOT's Artist-in-Residence Program](#) also arose from conversations with T4America. The [Minnesota Department of Transportation](#) (MnDOT) selected a behavioral artist who made rotations through various divisions within the department, having conversations with staff about their roles and the communities they serve. Comments from staff members included, "We are bound by technical processes." As a result of the conversations, the resident developed the Land Acknowledgement Confluence Room, a renovated conference room where staff can get creative and explore practices of land acknowledgement and recognition. Other achievements include hosting visioning sessions with community members on MnDOT's Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan. The sessions illuminated the histories and heritage linked to the land through storytelling and listening. A significant outcome of the sessions was "Turn the Highways to Rivers," a pilot art project that pushes the state plan beyond traditional boundaries and explores innovative thinking and planning.

Tips for State Partnerships

Policy Rationale

- Arts can enliven and beautify transportation while celebrating local culture and history.
- Arts can help transportation agencies looking to improve their public perception and services.
- Arts can engage stakeholders and the community in transportation projects.
- Arts can preserve small-town heritage that may be disrupted by transportation.
- Arts can encourage cross-sector network building among government departments and fields working to meet complementary goals.
- Arts can contribute to distinctive travel destinations for residents and tourists, forming good glue between transportation, tourism and economic development.
- Thoughtful integration of arts in planning can help address community divisions caused or exacerbated by transportation projects.
- Incorporating creative processes can result in transportation projects that are more supported and beloved.
- Finding one partner or interested party can lead to future relationship building with other partners.

Getting Started

- Review the many benefits and policy talking points described above and the resources provided below.
- Become familiar with the mode of transportation with which you want to work and with your transportation/transit agencies. Understand their goals and funding cycles and learn to recognize the constraints under which they operate.
- Where the art will be featured is important. If art will be featured on highways or if your agency is interested in advocating for a statewide artist-in-residence program, connect with your state department of transportation. If art will be featured in transit locations, connect with your local and state transit agencies.
- Use the examples mentioned in this brief and the resources below to generate program ideas that could be adapted in your own state or community.
- Connect with state and local arts agencies that have created successful projects.
- Create a memorandum of understanding with the transportation or transit agency that delineates what is expected of each organization and the purposes and benefits of the project.
- Understand how partners can provide not only funding but capacity.

Recommended Resources

[The Scenic Route/transportation.art](#)

This site is a great place to begin exploring arts in transportation. Start with the how-to guide developed by [Smart Growth America](#) and [Transportation for America](#). The website includes many case studies and ongoing projects by transportation mode and provides further resources.

[Arts, Culture and Transportation: A Creative Placemaking Field Scan](#)

Developed by Transportation for America, this field scan provides seven in-depth case studies of how arts have provided solutions to transportation problems.

[ArtPlace America Archive: Transportation Case Studies](#)

[ArtPlace America](#) was a 10-year collaboration of foundations, federal agencies and financial institutions to support and strengthen creative placemaking. One of the policy areas that ArtPlace supported was transportation. This website features various resources and case studies.

[Best Practices for Integrating Art into Capital Projects](#)

Developed by the [American Public Transportation Association](#), this guide outlines best practices for integrating art into transit.

[Asphalt Art Guide](#)

An initiative of Bloomberg Associates, this guide describes why art is important for streets. It includes best practices for traffic-calming projects and provides case studies.

[Creative Placemaking in Rail Transit Corridors](#)

Hosted on the transportation.art website, this guide is written by the [American Planning Association](#). It examines rail transit corridor project issues and the creative placemaking strategies used to solve them.

[Arts, Transportation & Infrastructure](#)

Published by [Americans for the Arts](#), this essay discusses how arts can play a positive role for changes occurring in transportation.

[Arts + Social Impact \(Transportation\)](#)

Click on the Transportation spoke on the social impact wheel and download the fact sheet. The fact sheets, created by Americans for the Arts, are useful, quick reads on how arts impact social

aspects of our lives. The transportation fact sheet provides talking points and highlights case studies.

[Arts and Planning Toolkit](#)

Created by the [Metropolitan Area Planning Council](#), this toolkit is a resource for anyone wanting to integrate arts into more innovative community development and planning. Learn about tools and approaches and explore case studies.

[Springboard for the Arts Irrigate Program](#)

In response to disruptive construction of a light rail line, an initiative was created by [Springboard for the Arts](#) with the City of Saint Paul and Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation. This website features the program Irrigate, a community development strategy using creativity to create solutions to local challenges.

For More Information

For more information on arts and transportation, contact NASAA Research Manager [Mohja Rhoads](#), who researched and wrote this strategy sampler in 2022.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization. In collaboration with the nation's 56 state and jurisdictional arts councils, we advance the arts as a powerful path to economic prosperity, rural resilience, good health, education success and strong communities in which everyone thrives. NASAA serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding for the arts as well as the policies and programs of state arts agencies. For more information about NASAA and the work of state arts agencies, visit www.nasaa-arts.org.



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