

Promote Needs of Rural Communities in Infrastructure Package

Key Findings

- Co-ops support bipartisan efforts to develop a robust infrastructure package that improves the economic outlook in America's rural communities.
- Lawmakers should recognize and support electric co-op modernization efforts and support programs that enable broadband access for all Americans.
- Electric co-ops support policies and investments that promote electrification throughout the economy.

Electric cooperatives are a transformational force in their local communities, enabling rural economic development and improving the quality of life for 1 in 8 Americans. Co-ops support bipartisan efforts to develop a robust infrastructure package that improves the economic outlook in America's rural communities. As owners of critical infrastructure, co-ops play an important role in our nation's economy – supporting 612,000 American jobs and generating \$88 billion annually toward U.S. GDP.

As Congress and the Administration explore options for a broad infrastructure package, they should look beyond urban centers and traditional improvements such as roads and bridges. Further, Congress should support three key infrastructure investments: 1) modernize the electric grid; 2) expand rural broadband access; and 3) electrify the economy.

Modernize the Electric Grid

In response to evolving consumer expectations, electric co-ops are adopting grid modernization, security and resilience technologies. Co-ops rely on a diverse energy mix to meet the energy needs of their local communities and invest heavily in energy innovation, including advanced metering, community solar, battery storage, electric vehicle infrastructure and energy efficiency. Co-ops constantly work to improve resiliency and expand resources to meet the cybersecurity needs of small and medium-sized electric providers. Lawmakers should recognize and support electric co-op modernization efforts by:

- Funding research and development programs that enable the use of AI and technology to get the most out of grid-enabled devices.
- Investing in programs that promote more efficient data transfer and feedback between transmission and distribution systems and support the development of distributed energy resources, which help enhance resiliency and reliability.

Expand Rural Broadband Access

Access to broadband infrastructure is essential for a modern economy. Electric co-ops are essential partners in many communities in the effort to close the digital divide. More than 100 electric co-ops are employing meaningful, diverse solutions to bridge the digital divide and jump start local economies.

According to the FCC, an estimated 6.3 million households in electric co-op service areas lack high-speed internet access. These rural families and businesses fight an uphill battle in the 21st century digital economy. Research shows that a lack of rural broadband to those unserved co-op households leads to \$68 billion in lost economic value over 20 years.

Congress should support programs that enable broadband access for all Americans. Specifically, lawmakers should target federal resources at unserved and underserved communities through existing grant and loan programs that:

- Leverage federal funds to support networks that will meet the growing speed and data needs of the future.
- Improve the accuracy of federal broadband data maps to better identify broadband coverage gaps and target federal resources to close the digital divide.

Electrify the Economy

With advances in technology and the diversification of the electric fuel mix, substituting electricity for other energy sources can provide economic and environmental benefits. Electrifying the transportation sector, for example would result in lower vehicle emissions, improvements in air quality and a reduction in petroleum consumption.

Electric co-ops support policies and investments that promote electrification throughout the economy, including the expansion of electric vehicle use and charging infrastructure to optimize the grid, improving the management of electric use and integrating renewable energy resources.

- Congress should support renewable energy advances alongside the development of increased energy efficiency and interoperability standards in appliances and utility electricity management assets.

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