

## FOREWORD

The purpose of this paper is to assist rural transport planners, rural road agencies, donor agencies, local governments, and communities in the design and appraisal of rural transport infrastructure (RTI) interventions. It especially focuses on how RTI can contribute to poverty reduction. *Design and Appraisal of Rural Transport Infrastructure* appears as part of a four-volume compendium of rural transport knowledge under development by the World Bank's Rural Transport Thematic Group. The other three publications are *Options for the Managing and Financing of Rural Transport Infrastructure*, published in 1998,<sup>1</sup> *Improving Rural Mobility*, and *Developing Rural Transport Policies and Strategies*.<sup>2</sup>

The poor condition of rural transport networks in many developing countries blocks poverty-reduction efforts and stifles economic growth. A period of government and donor focus on the management and financing of main road networks is beginning to yield increased institutional and financial capacity, as well as improved main roads. Coupled with the clear emphasis on poverty reduction, this has led developing countries and the donor community to show new interest in building sustainable rural transport networks.

Meanwhile, a more holistic view of rural transport has emerged. Instead of narrowly focusing on roads, it takes into account the provision and affordability of transport services, intermediate means of transport, and the location and quality of services. The sustainable provision of rural transport networks (referred to as rural transport infrastructure, so as to include tracks, paths, and footbridges) crucially depends on appropriate management and financing arrangements, including a sound approach to design and appraisal.

This paper focuses on the design and appraisal of rural transport infrastructure. The task is especially urgent considering evidence that developing countries often adopt excessively high standards of access, particularly when donor financing is involved. Given scarce resources, such an approach raises long-term maintenance costs and denies access to underserved populations. Instead, a *basic access approach* is recommended, whereby priority is given to the provision of reliable, least-cost, all-season basic access to as many people as possible.

For some time now, it has been clear that rural transport infrastructure is ill-suited for appraisal using the conventional economic cost-benefit analysis, as it is applied to highly trafficked main roads. Rather, a wider view is needed to assess the role of low-volume transport infrastructure interventions, including the social importance of ensuring a minimal level of access to resources and opportunities. Examples of economic appraisals applied in recent World Bank rural transport projects illustrate this approach.

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