



Hollandale, Mississippi

Recognizing that the availability of public transportation would enhance its economic development prospects, Hollandale partners with its neighboring communities to design, test and implement an innovative rural transportation network.

	Hollandale
Population (2000)	3,190
Municipal budget (2005)	\$650,000 ⁴³
Per capita income (2000)	\$9,200
Median household income (2000)	\$20,100
Poverty rate (2000)	39%
Minority population (2000)	84%
Proximity to urban center	106 miles to Jackson, Miss.
Proximity to interstate highway	68 miles
Strategic approach	Transportation
Time frame	1998–2004

A prominent challenge in rural Hollandale is the town’s relative isolation – from health care facilities, institutions of higher education, job opportunities and basic shopping. Prior to 1999, a resident without a car had to pay \$20 for a simple trip to the grocery store, 30 miles away in Washington. In 1999 the Hollandale Economic and Community Development Foundation committed to solving the town’s transportation issues. Doing so, foundation members believed, would help address other challenges for Hollandale, including low educational attainment, high unemployment and inadequate housing. In 2000 the foundation received a grant to purchase several vans and hire drivers to transport residents to and from work, school, shopping and health care. Today residents of Hollandale (and the surrounding area) have an affordable and reliable mode of public transportation.

The community and its history

Hollandale is a small community that has been mired in poverty for decades. As in many other rural communities in the Mississippi Delta, services and amenities are few. Most shops and grocery stores are 30 miles away in Elizabeth.⁴⁴ The nearest colleges are Mississippi Valley State University, 50 miles away in Itta Bena, and Mississippi Delta Community College, 40 miles away in Moorhead. Most doctors and hospitals serving the community are 30 miles away in Greenville.

⁴³ Interview with Willie Burnside, mayor of Hollandale, January 9, 2006.

⁴⁴ Kellogg Foundation interview with Lillie Ayers, president of the Glen Allan Improvement Association, October 2005.

The largest employers in Hollandale are the Delta and Pine Land Co. (a cotton and soybean processor) and the local public school system. Another large employer, the Hollandale Farm Fresh Catfish processing plant, closed in 2004, laying off 240 workers. Most new job opportunities are located in other towns far away, often across many miles of cotton fields, and a majority of housing units in the town are substandard. To make matters worse, according to Mayor Willie Burnside, the former Director of Hollandale Economic and Community Development Foundation, “many students have no motivation to seek higher education because college seems inaccessible.”

Beginning in the late 1990s, Burnside initiated a strategic planning exercise to jump-start development activity in Hollandale. The foundation sent staff and volunteers door to door to survey residents and, not surprisingly, found that the lack of jobs, housing, transportation and education were the greatest issues of concern for local residents. “We looked at all of these problems and saw that each of them depended on transportation,” said Burnside, who is now mayor of Hollandale. “If we could improve transportation for people, we could get at a lot of these other issues.” Reliable and affordable transportation could provide residents with a way to get to school, work and health care facilities.

The strategy

Hollandale partnered with two neighboring communities, Elizabeth and Glen Allen, and together they created a transportation system to connect residents to health care facilities, educational institutions, regional amenities and job opportunities. The process began in 1999 when the communities jointly applied for a Kellogg Foundation planning grant, which would allow them to create a long-term transportation strategy. HEGA, the transportation entity created by these three communities, received an initial \$10,000 planning grant in late 1999. HEGA then worked with the U.S. Small Business Administration and Delta State University to draft a business plan, which was submitted to the Kellogg Foundation for implementation funding.

HEGA’s objective was to create an affordable transportation network. In 2000 HEGA received a \$100,000 grant from Kellogg, with which it bought two 15-passenger vans and hired two full-time drivers. HEGA also received funding from the Mississippi Department of Transportation and the Mississippi Rural Development Group. In an important strategic decision, HEGA funded an academic study of the likely economic and social impacts of a rural transportation network for the region. The results from this study gave the organization specific data that could be used in future fund-raising efforts.

Over the next four years, Hollandale received more than \$500,000 in grant money to purchase additional buses and vans (including six 7-passenger vans and a 21-passenger bus). Round-trip

fares are \$5 for seniors and \$7 for all others. In 2004 HEGA transported approximately 1,000 residents to jobs, 6,000 residents to educational institutions and 2,000 residents to medical facilities.

In addition to meeting basic transportation needs, HEGA has lowered the barriers for students and residents seeking employment and educational opportunities. "I know for a fact that a lot of kids wouldn't be able to go to college without this transportation system," Mayor Burnside said. "In fact, in January, my son, who is entering college, is going to start taking the bus." At the beginning of each school year, Burnside travels to the high schools in each community to see how many students are interested in going to college. This helps Burnside determine the following year's budget for the bus system and demonstrates to students that higher education is now an accessible option.

What are the lessons from this story?

Regional collaboration is critical when facing the challenge of rural transportation. For Hollandale to develop a transportation network to serve its rural population, the town had to reach out and include its regional neighbors in the conversation at the outset. Not only did the initial Kellogg grant require such collaboration, but the long-term sustainability of HEGA depended on having a critical mass of fee-paying riders. Organizations in each town were ready and willing to work together on the transportation challenge. These included the Hollandale Economic and Community Foundation, the Elizabeth Community Development Corp. and the Glen Allan Improvement Association. Communities with similar challenges should seek out partners with common issues and craft regional solutions.

Find a common solution to persistent rural challenges. The Hollandale foundation started with a survey to identify the major issues confronting the town's residents. The survey identified four of these issues: education, health care, jobs and transportation. The foundation looked at relationships among these issues and found that most were contingent on people having access to transportation. Local leaders then understood that all their problems were interrelated. This analytic process produced a solution that addressed each of Hollandale's needs.

Reliable local data help convince outsiders to believe. Hollandale took an important step when it commissioned a local transportation impact study. This study resulted in specific community-level transportation data, which the town used to convince outside grant-makers that HEGA was a smart investment. In addition, it helped to convince policy-makers that rural transportation was a viable (if incremental) strategy for alleviating a range of economic challenges.

Contact information

Willie Burnside

Mayor, Hollandale

Past Director, Hollandale Economic and Community Development Foundation

Hollandale, Mississippi

662-827-0569

hega_rt@bellsouth.net