



P.O. Box 27766  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611  
919.782.1705

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Raleigh, N.C.  
Permit No. 825



the  
**LEADER**

**INVESTING IN  
INFRASTRUCTURE**

**INVESTING IN  
INFRASTRUCTURE**

At the time of printing, the bipartisan Infrastructure Bill is scheduled for a vote in the House on September 27th and, if passed, is expected to be signed by the President. The bill is unlikely to change before receiving an up-or-down vote in the House since Senate negotiations that got us to this point were fraught and any future changes would likely impact compromises made and items agreed to in earlier negotiations.

Things can change quickly on Capitol Hill, but please know that our federal legislative and public policy staff are monitoring the negotiations closely and will work with our Congressional delegation to ensure the needs of North Carolina farmers and rural communities are recognized.





# INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE

America is home to some of the best roads, bridges, highways, railways, ports and other transportation infrastructure you'll find anywhere in the world. The historical investment in American infrastructure has been a key component of our economic success, including American agriculture, because it allows commerce to take place with as little friction or disruption as possible. But agriculture and rural communities have a unique set of infrastructure needs and challenges that haven't always been prioritized in the past, threatening our competitive advantage over the rest of the world.

*Past infrastructure initiatives often focused on urban and suburban areas while not adequately addressing the unique needs of rural communities. Meanwhile, rural communities have seen their infrastructure deteriorate, jeopardizing jobs, health and wellbeing, and overall competitiveness in agriculture and other industries important to rural America.* — AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

In August the US Senate passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the INVEST in America Act or as you may know it – the Infrastructure

Bill. Modernizing America's transportation infrastructure has long been a priority for Farm Bureau and is the reason why the American Farm Bureau Federation supports the bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. The package contains many policy priorities while also not including pay-fors that would have been detrimental to our members.

Specifically, the bipartisan Infrastructure Bill invests \$110 billion in U.S. roads and bridges and \$17.3 billion for ports and inland waterways. In addition, this bipartisan agreement includes several provisions designed to boost the resiliency of our farms, ranches and rural communities. Farm Bureau also strongly supports Section 23018 of the bill that would provide the flexibility needed to safely transport the animals in our care by exempting livestock and insect haulers from Hours of Service regulations within a 150 air-mile radius from their final destination. This exemption has long been a priority for our members.

This bill is not a cure-all, but it does offer a step in the right direction for rural infrastructure investment. It is imperative that farmers and other rural businesses have safe, reliable roads and bridges to help grow their operations and get their goods to market on time and in one piece.

Infrastructure isn't just about trucks and trains though – businesses of all types and sizes have come to depend on reliable high-speed internet as the "fourth utility." The bipartisan Infrastructure Bill goes beyond traditional transportation infrastructure to include investment in broadband infrastructure, offering promise that access to high-speed internet in rural America might be getting better. No doubt every one of our farmers working the land agrees that broadband is essential to the current and future growth of rural North Carolina.

There's a lot of good news in the bill. The bill provides \$65 billion for broadband infrastructure, much directed to addressing our country's digital divide. Most importantly, Congress recognizes that broadband is critical infrastructure for all American citizens and businesses. They also recognize that vast portions of our country are not served with high-speed service.

For the 75% of American farmers that do have some degree of internet access, service is often slow and there's no choice in providers. Here in North Carolina, we know our farms have relied on DSL provided through legacy phone landlines or high orbit satellites for internet service. Slow speeds, high latency and intermittent outages are typical with these options. When one yield monitor working a field can gather 7 gigabits of data per acre, the need for broadband connectivity and real time data manipulation is clear. Today's farms must be able to gather, interpret and manipulate data from the farm to be profitable. We must do better than to force our farmers to rely on phone lines that are no longer maintained or high orbit satellites that quit working in the rain.

*(For more on rural broadband investment in North Carolina, check out our March 2021 edition of The Leader here: <https://www.ncfb.org/news/the-leader/>.)*

This bill would create better informed customers by requiring greater price and subscription transparency. Add to that, a focus on improving the data that drives service maps and a requirement that providers report the services they provide accurately. If these aspirations materialize, a new day could potentially dawn, where customers have clear understanding of which providers serve what specific locations and at what connection speeds. Consumers would be better informed and government funding could be better directed to increase broadband availability in lesser populated rural areas and other underserved areas.

Congress' bipartisan Infrastructure Bill allocates \$100 million to each state for rural broadband funding and would also help fund delivery of middle-mile broadband to anchor institutions such as schools, libraries and government complexes, where private providers can then connect and deliver last-mile service to local residents.

The bipartisan Infrastructure Bill would also boost USDA's rural broadband programs by \$2 billion. USDA, through its Reconnect Grant and Community Connect Programs, has already invested about \$200 million in rural broadband in North Carolina. With additional funding, we should see more projects on the ground.

Last year, USDA estimated that if U.S. farms could realize a benefit of nearly 18% of U.S. market production if they had greater access to broadband and were able to adopt greater technology. That's the kind of boost that will bring a smile to every farmer's face.

Negotiations around a separate domestic spending package that is advancing simultaneously have implications for the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. House and Senate Democrats are currently working on the larger spending package that is to be advanced under the budget reconciliation process, meaning it could potentially be passed with only a 50-vote threshold in the Senate. It is important to note that these two spending packages are separate, and while politically they may be connected, support for the bipartisan Infrastructure Bill that has already passed the Senate does not imply support for any other legislative effort.

