

## **The Impact of Bridge and Road Developments on Rural Communities in the United States (1920-1950)**

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### **Abstract**

The advent of the automobile sparked major changes in infrastructure planning and development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century yielding unanticipated impacts on the rural United States. The nation's adaption to the automobile was principally implemented between 1920 and 1950 in response to increased use of the automobile and the pressing need to replace transportation facilities originally designed for comparatively slower moving horses and wagons. This paper specifically examines the rural changes to bridge and road infrastructure during this time period within rural communities in the United States. A comparative case study approach was used to highlight the differences in infrastructure development and its impact on two rural communities. The two cases for this study were the US Route 340 corridor in Virginia and the small town of Ritchey, Missouri. Primary sources, including original Department of Transportation road and bridge plans, annual reports, maps, personal interviews, photographs, written memoirs, and a collection of 180 personal letters were used to document both the governmental action and individual impact of rural infrastructure changes. In rural communities, bridge construction and replacement projects represent significant community investment and are critical elements to the provision of continuous travel corridors that connect communities and individuals. In both of the explored case studies, local bridges are the most visible and documented of the changes to the localities. This paper reveals the different short and long term effects on each community that experienced different approaches to infrastructure development during the same time period. This paper also demonstrates the impact of other factors that mitigate or affect influences of infrastructure. Infrastructure, with its foundational connection to the economic, cultural, and social function of a society, inevitably impacts all aspects of a community.