

Element Two: Infrastructure - Access to safe roads, clean and affordable water, reliable wastewater systems, dependable energy utilities, and reasonably priced broadband are essential for quality of life, and community and economic development. SENDD will work to address infrastructure gaps and needs.

Goal: A safe, reliable transportation system is key to every aspect of life. Supporting transportation improves commerce and economic development opportunities.

Objectives:

1. Facilitate regional transportation improvement: SENDD will coordinate public hearings and strategy sessions to support the expansion of rural transit options. The organization will prepare transportation-related grant applications as needed.
2. Foster community involvement: SENDD will incorporate transportation issues into community meetings, such as SERN, SENDD board meetings, etc., in order to facilitate better communication with Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) and federal highway staff. SENDD acknowledges concerns that decisions are often made with little feedback from local jurisdictions. Improving the lines of communication will help coordinate local needs with state funds.
3. Strengthen relationships with transit providers and county and NDOT officials to eliminate barriers for transit development in rural communities. Currently, obstacles to transportation limit access to employment, healthcare, education, and basic commerce for residents. The impacts of weak transit systems are particularly felt by an aging population.
4. Continue planning towards the implementation of a cohesive, coordinated regional transportation system.

Goal: Provide safe, affordable, potable water and wastewater systems, which is essential for a community's well-being. Access to clean water coupled with a reliable water distribution and wastewater collection and treatment systems can help determine a jurisdiction's future.

Objectives:

1. Identify funding opportunities for communities with water and/or wastewater systems that require expansion, maintenance, or are failing. SENDD will partner with local, state, and federal agencies to determine resources that could be utilized to address local needs.
2. Work with regional, state, and federal agencies to educate/inform local decision makers best practices for utility management. This might include rate studies, improved fire suppression, mapping utilities lines, and system management.
3. Explore the concept of the regionalization of water and/or wastewater systems. As southeast Nebraska's population declines and federal resources become limited, the idea of utility systems combining to improve efficiencies and distribute costs may be a long-term solution for shrinking jurisdictions. SENDD will continue to work with villages, towns, engineering firms, and agencies to ensure good decisions are made.
4. Routinely meet with engineering firms and state partners to improve communication relating to projects.

5. Find affordable and reachable training opportunities for water and wastewater operators.

Goal: Maintain existing and support efficiency and innovation in energy utilities. Nebraska's public power districts are a good resource for the state; SENDD will work with regional power districts as well as member jurisdictions to identify and expand development opportunities.

Objectives:

1. Partner with power districts to explore alternative energy options, including wind and solar generation. This might include exploring ways to expand the grid network to allow for the construction of additional turbine farms in southeast Nebraska.
2. Assist communities to improve efficiencies in their local power utilities as well as the removal/clean-up of shuttered city-owned power plants.

Goal: Broadband is no longer an amenity; it is a utility, an essential tool that residents and businesses rely on for daily activities. Much of the southeast Nebraska region lacks quality, reliable, and affordable broadband options. This lack must be addressed if the area wants to stem outmigration and retain industry.

Objectives:

1. Accurately assess the current state of broadband in the region is critical for identifying gaps and needs across the 15-county area. SENDD will collaborate with local, state, and private sectors to generate a more accurate map detailing broadband access, including speeds and costs, throughout the region. Partners for a broadband mapping project might include the Nebraska Farm Bureau and USDA.
2. Like the public power districts, there is need for investigation of opportunities for public or public and private partnership to lead the build-out of broadband infrastructure. To expand broadband, it will be necessary to establish investors for middle- and last-mile solutions. SENDD will identify best practices in regards to what other regions and states are doing to address the need.
3. SENDD will host regional events to discuss broadband expansion and how to address existing shortfalls.