



Dear Residents of Central Arkansas;

Metroplan invites members of the public to voice their opinion on a proposed amendment to *Imagine Central Arkansas*, the region's transportation plan, for the proposed I-30 reconstruction/improvements project, called *30 Crossing*. In addition to the public comment period, which ends May 30, a Public Hearing has been scheduled for you to comment directly to the Metroplan Board of Directors.

This project has stirred controversy within the central Arkansas community, because of the project's scale, its surroundings, and its impact to neighborhoods and the downtowns. Public concerns remain regarding the project's impact on historic districts, ancillary roadway impacts, and local input into aesthetics during the design-build phase of the project.

Metroplan is the regional metropolitan planning agency for Central Arkansas. It has a federally mandated role in approving the expenditure of federal transportation funds in the region. Approval of the *30 Crossing* project will require Metroplan to make two amendments to its regional plans. The first will be a Long Range Plan amendment to add the words "*Capacity Improvements*" to the project description in Metroplan's 20 year Long Range Plan. Capacity Improvements must be understood to include major widening among other improvements. This current comment period is only for the plan amendment. Metroplan Board action on this first amendment is scheduled for its June 28th board meeting.

The second amendment involves the current four-year work program called the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This second amendment would approve the specific details of the project. Both amendments are necessary before construction is fully authorized and federal funds expended. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the TIP amendment and environmental assessment as project development continues. The TIP amendment comment period and any subsequent board action will follow the Long Range Plan amendment later in the year.

The Public Hearing is set for May 17 at 6:00 p.m. at Pulaski Technical College, Campus Center Building (the clock tower building), 3000 West Scenic Drive, North Little Rock. Doors will open at 5:00 p.m. with displays of the *30 Crossing* project in the lobby. Staff will be available to answer questions on the plan amendment. The Public Comment portion will start at 6:00 p.m. Written comments will also be accepted.

For more information please refer to the Question & Answer document attached to this letter.

Sincerely,

Mayor Art Brooke
Metroplan Board President

30 Crossing, Our Region, and *Imagine Central Arkansas*

PUBLIC COMMENT SOLICITED ON TRANSPORTATION PLAN AMENDMENT

Metroplan, the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for central Arkansas, is soliciting public comments on a proposed amendment to the transportation element of its *Imagine Central Arkansas* long-range plan. A public hearing is scheduled for May 17 at 6:00 pm at the Ron Robinson Theater at the Central Arkansas Library complex located in the River Market in Little Rock, where you will be able to express your thoughts in person. Comments may also be emailed to Metroplan at comments@metroplan.org before May 30.

Background:

The Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department (AHTD) is considering a significant rebuild of the Interstate 30 corridor through the central business districts of Little Rock and North Little Rock. The project will also include a portion of Interstate 40 in North Little Rock, a total replacement of the I-30 Arkansas River Bridge, and possibly lane widenings and other capacity improvements along the route and at the various interstate interchanges in the 7.1 mile project, known as 30 Crossing.



AHTD now requests an amendment to *Imagine Central Arkansas* to ensure consistency of the plan and the emerging scope of the 30 Crossing project. The amendment would remove the words “Operational Improvements” and add the words “Capacity Improvements” to the project description. The term “Capacity Improvements” should be understood to mean **major widening** through many points in the project corridor.

Questions and Answers

Q I've already commented on the project. What's going on?

A From the time a project is conceived until it is ready for construction, a number of intervening steps must first occur. **This is true of all transportation projects, but especially true of 30 Crossing.**

Federal regulations require some of the actions to be handled by the AHTD or the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and other actions are the responsibility of Metroplan. The State and MPO operate cooperatively on parallel tracks. Here's how it works for the MPO:

Metroplan has a federally designated “local” role in this project. Under federal law, Metroplan, as the MPO, is required to have a 20-year, financially constrained, integrated transportation plan for the region. Federal rules require that all federally-funded transportation projects be consistent with the local regional plan. **The reasoning behind this regulation is to give metropolitan populations a significant voice in the way**

their region grows. Likewise, the local plans must include any project before federal funds can be spent on the project. Your local plan matters.

Prior to the FHWA giving its final approval to the project, the project must be listed on the financially constrained long-range metropolitan transportation plan and the short-range construction plan, called the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). **This solicitation for public comment is for the plan amendment language only.** An amendment to the TIP will be brought forward after the effected local governments in Little Rock, North Little Rock and Pulaski County have signed off on the design of the project.

Q What about *Imagine Central Arkansas*?

A The regional plan, named *Imagine Central Arkansas*, was approved by the Metroplan Board on December 17, 2014. It includes both a vision for the future of the region and a financially constrained twenty five year transportation plan. Included in the plan was a line item for “operational improvements” to the I-30 corridor and a policy to limit the number of interstate “through lanes” to three in any direction or six through lanes total. In August 2016, the Metroplan Board approved an exception to the plan’s six-through-lane policy for 30 Crossing based upon the analysis of options for addressing interchange congestion within the corridor, a priority within the plan. More information on *Imagine Central Arkansas* can be found at metroplan.org/content/long-range-plan.

Q I’ve heard a lot of discussions about the project. What exactly is 30 Crossing?

A AHTD is proposing to widen and reconstruct portions of I-40 and I-30, including the Arkansas River Bridge, in downtown North Little Rock and Little Rock (see map front page).

There are two basic options being considered by the AHTD:

- (1) 8 general purpose lanes
- (2) 6 through lanes with 2 lane collector-distributor lanes on each side (10+ lanes).

For each of those options **two different interchanges** are being considered for downtown Little Rock:

- (1) a Single Point Urban Interchange and
- (2) a Split-Diamond Interchange.

Those options are undergoing an Environmental Assessment (EA), which is to be completed during the Fall of 2017. Metroplan has requested that a hybrid variation of the eight-lane option be considered in the EA that fixes congestion at the North Terminal. For more detailed information on the project and its alternative designs, go to 30crossing.com.

Q What makes this project unique?

A Several factors make 30 Crossing unique:

- **scale**— The project proposal is to widen the freeway to eight or ten lanes. The Arkansas River Bridge will be expanded by four or six total lanes.
- **complexity**— The corridor is the backbone of the Central Arkansas Freeway network, connecting six freeways in a little over 6 miles. The corridor also includes key interchanges for access to the downtowns of Little Rock and North Little Rock.

- **cost**— 30 Crossing is estimated to cost more than \$630 million, the most expensive single project ever undertaken by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.
- **location**— 30 Crossing will go through the core of downtown Little Rock and North Little Rock and historic neighborhoods.
- **delivery method**— The project will be constructed under a design-build contract.

Q What is the proposed amendment language?



Following is the *Imagine Central Arkansas* amendment for 30 Crossing. Changes or additions to *Imagine Central Arkansas* are shown in red. The amendment is consistent with the Metroplan Board’s approval of a waiver of the region’s 6 through lane maximum policy, Metroplan requirements for defining an integrated Metropolitan Transportation System, and the request from AHTD.

Modification to Table 7-7

| LRMTP # | Project Number | Facility | From | To | Improvements | Cost (Millions) |
|---------|----------------|------------------|------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 41 | CA0602 | Interstate 30/40 | I-530 (South Terminal) | Hwy 67 | Capacity Improvements and Reconstruction (5) | \$631.7 |

(5) Following the selection of a single alternative from NEPA and at the request of AHTD, the Metroplan Board will consider a TIP amendment to reflect the final project. Approval of the amendment by the Metroplan Board will be required. *(Revised for TIP only)*

Addition to Section 7.5.1 Freeways

Illustrative Projects Linked with 30 Crossing (CA0602)

Three freeway segments have noticeable impacts on or will be impacted by the proposed 30 Crossing improvements. Improvements to these corridors would be necessary (given the modeling assumptions) to avoid forming bottlenecks, which will impact traffic operations and safety within the 30 Crossing corridor. These projects are listed as illustrative as there has been no financial commitment to their construction by the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department. Improvement projects would be subject to individual corridor and environmental studies.

Capacity Improvements

1. Interstate 30–I-530/I-440 (South Terminal) to 65th Street
2. Interstate 30–65th to I-430
 - *After widening to 65th
3. Interstate 630– I-30 to University
 - *Congestion impacts on I-630 are greater with 6+C/D Lane Alternatives

FHWA Definition of Illustrative Project

Illustrative project means an additional transportation project that may be included in a financial plan for a metropolitan transportation plan, TIP, or State TIP (STIP) if reasonable additional resources were to become available.

Q What do you mean by “capacity improvements”?

A “Capacity improvements” is the phrase used to describe a series of improvements proposed for the corridor. Capacity improvements for 30 Crossing should be understood to include major widening for most of the corridor. Other anticipated improvements include interchange reconfiguration, ramp modifications, frontage road reconfiguration, bridge replacement and widening, and the addition of auxiliary lanes throughout the corridor.

Q Will other projects be required? What are Illustrative Projects?

A As part of its analysis of the impacts on the region’s freeway network as a result of 30 Crossing, it is apparent that additional capacity improvements on adjacent freeway segments will be necessary in order for the 30 Crossing project to operate at optimal levels. While not a part of the 30 Crossing project, without these additional projects, congestion from bottlenecks on I-630 and I-30 west of the corridor would result in traffic backing into the 30 Crossing corridor, impacting traffic operations and safety. Consequently, those projects are listed in the proposed amendment language.

The list of projects is not an endorsement of those other improvement projects, but a recognition that the desired operational improvements in the 30 Crossing corridor can only be achieved with additional investments beyond this project. Because there is not a current commitment by the Arkansas Highway Commission to fund those additional projects, they are listed in a new section in the plan as illustrative projects.

Q What am I being asked to comment on?

A Do you agree the 30 Crossing corridor needs “capacity Improvements” up to and possibly including major widening? **Members of the public are being asked to comment on the plan amendment to add “Capacity Improvements” to the project descriptions for 30 Crossing within *Imagine Central Arkansas*.**

The amendment also identifies additional freeway segments that would have to be considered for additional construction if 30 Crossing is to operate with minimal congestion. These segments have been identified in the draft amendment and are part of what you are being asked to review.

Tell us whether you support the amendment, or do not support the amendment. If there are parts of the amendment that you like, or don’t like, let us know that, too. And feel free to tell us why you came to those conclusions!

Q Will approval of this amendment mean that the 30 Crossing project is approved?

A Not yet, but one step closer. The purpose of this amendment is to ensure consistency of the long-range plan (*Imagine Central Arkansas*) and the proposed alternatives, so that the project can move forward in the approval process. The project must also be amended into the CARTS TIP Agreed Upon List of Projects and the State TIP), and must receive environmental approval from the Federal Highway Administration.

Q Is this the last time to comment?

A No, this just approves adding “capacity improvements” up to and including major lane widening in this specific corridor. A specific design has not yet been selected for final approval. Two primary design options

are still be considered as well as two interchange alternatives for the project, all of which involve capacity improvements.

A final selected design must seek a “local” endorsement from Metroplan through an process called a “TIP amendment” and inclusion in the Agreed Upon List of Projects. The TIP is Metroplan’s Transportation Improvement Program which is a very specific four year transportation work program for the region. A final TIP amendment will be the point the local region approves a specific design for the corridor to submit to the Federal Highway Administration for final federal approval. The TIP amendment process must have an additional Public Comment period.

The public will have an opportunity to review the EA and comment directly to the FHWA prior to its approval.

Q How and when can I make public comments?

A A public comment period is required by federal regulations for any change in the regional plan.

A public hearing on the Plan Amendment is scheduled for May 17 at 6:00 PM at Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock, where you will be able to express your thoughts in person. All comments will be provided to the Regional Planning Advisory Council and Metroplan Board of Directors prior to each taking up the issue in June.

Public Hearing on the Plan Amendment— May 17

5:00 – 6:00 PM: drop-in session
(staff will be available for questions)
6:00 PM: presentation and public comments
Pulaski Technical College, Campus Center Building
(the clock tower building)
3000 West Scenic Drive, North Little Rock 72118

Metroplan is taking written comments through May 30, 2017

Submit your written comments to:
comments@metroplan.org

Send by mail or deliver in person to:
501 West Markham, Suite B
Little Rock, AR 72201

Who is Metroplan?

Metroplan is composed of your elected officials: the mayors and county judges from the four counties of the Little Rock MSA who make up the Board of Directors along with representatives of the state department of transportation and the transit operator. With these officials resides the authority to create and amend the regional plan. And they want to hear your concerns and opinions.

Disclaimer: By recommending the Proposed Amendment for public review and comment, the RPAC is not, at this time, endorsing its adoption. The RPAC will vote at its June meeting on whether or not to recommend its adoption by the Metroplan Board after a deliberate review of the submitted public comments.