October RAC Economic Vitality Table Notes
(Summary of Committee Members Discussion)

Summation: The group took a nuanced approach to the freeway question. Some believed they were the cause of our problems; some feel that they are the solution. Others felt that pursing modes, like transit, were fruitless efforts. Investments on the arterial network centered around maintenance and pedestrian flows. Philosophically, the debate fixated on cultural attitudes towards pedestrians and how they should be incorporated into the motorists’ world.

**Question 1: Are freeways a cause or symptom of our transportation problems?**

- The freeways are the cause, the symptoms followed.
- Widening leads to lower congestion. There was a little talk about how less-dense urban forms and highways are correlated.
- The region is too small, in population terms, to support transit.

**Question 2: How can we invest on the arterial network to accommodate motorists while mitigating impacts to... other transportation modes, like biking and walking? Downtowns? A community’s sense of place? Neighborhood connection (physical separation)?**

- It would be wise to set a goal for maintenance. Maintenance interpreted broadly, a redo would include upgrading pedestrian/bike facilities, improving striping, automated signals for the mobility-impaired, etc.
- Buttons on signals are a safety feature. The presence of more vehicles isn’t the real obstacle to pedestrian flows – look at the huge ped flows in NYC. The difference is that, in large cities, drivers are used to accommodating pedestrians. It’s a different mentality.
- The “different mentality” could be attributed to roads being engineered that way, i.e. for fast vehicle flows instead of multiple modes.
- Some questioned the level of need for maintenance for pedestrian facilities. Another reminded the group that there are cracked sidewalks everywhere, sometimes almost unusable in places where tree roots have warped the pavement. There are times when pedestrians are forced onto streets by poor-quality (or nonexistent) ped facilities.
- Advantages to 4-way stops over signals for pedestrian flows, especially in downtown areas. Even if traffic moves less fast, the traffic-calming effect of stop signs is better for pedestrians.
- A key question is: where are pedestrians going? The best way to mitigate pedestrian problems is to identify their needs and walking/biking habits.
- Public awareness: people don’t know to be more careful about pedestrians, and they aren’t aware that alternative modes could be more widely available.
- Companies and businesses could give incentives for alternative commuting modes, including providing showers at work for employees commuting by bike.
- The old management rule “if you can’t measure it you can’t manage it.” Emphasize the importance of getting better bike and ped data. Staff made the point that Metroplan hasn’t done a full local travel survey since 2004, a new one is probably needed.
- Gas tax money helps pay for transportation for cars. Joe Minocozzi talked at Metroplan, where he pointed out the need for tweaking the tax base.
• Plans to develop an improved highway between Conway and Mayflower were mentioned. Pedestrians need to be better-informed about safety, need to use reflective clothing.
  o Automobile interests used to air ads shaming “J-walking,” with the aim of discouraging pedestrians from even trying to cross roads, with the net effect that cars dominate landscapes.
• Newer roads in Saline County are well-provided with multi-use facilities.
• The kind of blinking red lights that draw attention to violations of ped safety were mentioned. There are no examples in our region at present.
• The idea of diagonal street-crossings came up. A four-way urban intersection should stop traffic from all directions, allowing pedestrians to cross diagonally if they like. This would be a big boost to the mobility-impaired population.
• Part of the pedestrian problem is that the number of cars on the road has increased exponentially in recent years. In Jonesboro ARDOT is working with a program in which people have apps that record their flows, including pedestrian flows.
• Metroplan should do more research and work on pedestrian flows.