

Regional Planning Advisory Council

Minutes of Wednesday, February 15, 2017

RPAC Members Attending:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Representing</u>
1. Becky Adams	Arkansas Department of Health (ADH)
2. Richard Brown	Pulaski County
3. Marcia Cook	City of Sherwood
4. Charles Cummings (Chair)	Freight/Goods Movement
5. Robin Freeman	Saline County
6. Becca Green	Rock Region Metro
7. Paul Hastings	City of Little Rock
8. Jeff Hathaway	Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRRCC)
9. Amy Heflin (Nonvoting)	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
10. Susan Inman	Pulaski County
11. John Lewandowski (Alt.)	Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas (BACA)
12. Bob Lyford	City of Little Rock
13. Buckley O'Mell (Alt.)	Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRRCC)
14. Esperanza Massana	Arkansas Economic Development Commission (EDC)
15. Carolyn Shearman (Alt.)	Sierra Club
16. Patrick Stair	Sierra Club
17. Jack Stowe	City of Maumelle
18. Tom Sutton	Bill & Hillary Clinton National Airport
19. Emmily Tiampati (Alt.)	Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department (AHTD)
20. Dan Weathersby	Pulaski County
21. Amy Whitehead	City of Conway

Guests:

1. Ben Browning	AHTD
2. Barry Haas	Resident (Little Rock)
3. Robert Markman	Resident (North Little Rock)
4. Noel Oman	<i>Arkansas Democrat-Gazette</i>
5. Kathy Wells	President, Coalition of Little Rock Neighborhoods (CLRN)
6. Keli Wylie	AHTD

Metroplan Staff:

1. Lynn Bell	Graphics Specialist
2. Casey Covington	CARTS Planning Director
3. Daniel Holland	Planner
4. Jonathan Lupton	Research Planner
5. Susan Markman	Transportation Planner
6. Tab Townsell	Executive Director

1. Call to Order and Announcements

Chairman Charles Cummings called the meeting to order at 11:35 AM. The Council met at 501 W. Markham Street, Little Rock.

Mr. Cummings introduced two new members to the Council: Mr. Richard Brown and Ms. Susan Inman. Both represent Pulaski County. Ms. Emmily Tiampati is also new to the Council, as the AHTD's alternate for Mr. Paul Simms.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Council considered the Minutes of June 15 and July 20.

MOTION by Mr. Stair, second by Mr. Lyford

"To accept the Minutes of November 6, 2016, as corrected to include the attendance of Mr. Eddie Long."

PASSED

3. RPAC Introductions

Beginning with this meeting, a regular agenda item is to ask two members to take about five minutes to introduce themselves to their colleagues on the Council.

Mr. Jack Stowe represents the City of Maumelle and has served on the RPAC, and formerly on the TAC, for more than 14 years. He that he was one of three people on the Council who cast a dissenting vote with regard to the I-30 crossing project. Although born in Texas, Mr. Stow is a long-time resident of central Arkansas. He is the Special Projects Manager of Maumelle, and noted that Maumelle is one of a very few planned "New Town" communities that has survived - along with Reston, Virginia and Woodlands, Texas. Both his work and interests have led him to be involved with walking trails and wetlands issues in and around the City of Maumelle. Mr. Stowe's hobbies include buying and selling collectibles.

Ms. Becca Green represents Rock Region METRO, where she is the Director of Public Engagement. Ms. Green and her husband use public transportation, both in central Arkansas and when they travel out of state. Ms. Green's love of travel and exploring big cities has led her to experience transit in most of America's big cities, and she has been able to bring some of the concepts back home to central Arkansas. With a background in marketing and communications, Ms. Green previously worked at Access, an agency that provides training and opportunities to young people with developmental challenges. One of her favorite parts of working at Rock Region METRO is that Ms. Green gets to see a lot of those young adults from Access using the bus of METRO Links to get to their vocational training or jobs.

4. Transit Update

Ms. Green presented an update on Rock Region METRO's efforts to implement its *Move Central Arkansas* long range plan. *Move Central Arkansas* was also recommended by the RPAC and adopted by the Metroplan Board into *Imagine Central Arkansas*.

After showing a brief video that highlighted bus transit's growing popularity in Pulaski County, Ms. Green stated that ongoing public engagement confirms that riders desire a

more robust transit service, with later hours of operation and shorter headways. Rock Region METRO is initiating changes that are no-cost or low-cost.

Rock Region METRO has recently completed a system-wide review of fares, stop enhancements, routes, and rail car payment method. Based on information gleaned from that extensive review, the agency is making system changes that respond to rider demands.

Mr. Cummings asked about the prospect of a dedicated funding source. **Ms. Green** replied that the agency is preparing to go out for another referendum on a quarter-cent sales tax. She added that Rock Region METRO learned from the failure of the previous attempt and that the prospect for approval is good.

5. 30 Crossing Project Update

Metroplan White Paper: 30 Crossing Plan and TIP Amendments

Mr. Townsell presented Metroplan's White Paper on upcoming 30 Crossing plan and TIP amendments. Mr. Townsell noted that the White Paper was researched and written by Mr. Jim McKenzie. (The White Paper from which Mr. Townsell's remarks were taken will be posted to the RPAC web page. Audio will be provided upon request.)

Mr. Townsell began by explaining the role of Metroplan. Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) were created by federal law in the 1960s, in response to increased opposition from citizens and local officials as state DOTs began construction of interstate highways through densely packed urban areas. An MPO is required to be designated for every Census Bureau-identified Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). In 1974, Governor Dale Bumpers designated Metroplan as the MPO for central Arkansas. As the MPO, Metroplan is required to develop two primary products: (1) a 20-year transportation plan (directed by the RPAC) that includes a finally constrained list of projects to be undertaken within the 20-year framework, and (2) a short-range (four-year) project implementation plan called a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The State is also required to develop a statewide TIP, or STIP, which must be consistent with the MPO TIP.

The 30 Crossing project is a major design-build-finance reconstruction and expansion project on I-40 from the US 67-167 interchange to the north terminal interchange with I-30 and then on I-30 through the south terminal interchange with I-440 and I-530. It is a complex corridor through the central business districts of North Little Rock and Little Rock.

The complexity and magnitude of the 30 Crossing project has generated much interest among the general public and intensive analysis among professionals at all levels. Currently under consideration are an eight-lane and a ten-lane project design. Further, there are two distinct interchange approaches in downtown Little Rock - a Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI) and a Split Diamond Interchange - for each main lane alternative. These alternatives are currently under review as part of the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Two remaining actions by Metroplan are needed in order for this project to move forward to construction. They are: (1) an amendment to the financially constrained project list in the long-range metropolitan transportation plan - the LRMTTP - called *Imagine Central Arkansas*; and (2) an amendment to the TIP. The plan amendment needs to be drafted to include language for 30 Crossing plus any other freeway segments that will need to be widened as a direct result, and the financially constrained plan will need to be redrafted to provide for those funds. Regarding the amendment, there are two possible approaches: (1) a detailed plan amendment that would limit the project to the locally preferred design alternative; or (2) a general plan amendment - "major widening" - that would not give the appearance that a design alternative had already been selected. The second amendment style is favored by the AHTD. If that more general amendment were approved by the Metroplan Board, it would likely be accompanied by a resolution expressing a preference for a given alternative.

Mr. Townsell emphasized that the preferred design is not necessarily the selected design. The Finding of No Significant Impact, or FONSI, or a Record of Decision (ROD) is the final federal action on the project planning. FHWA has advised that this will not happen until a TIP/STIP amendment is approved for the project. The TIP amendment is the last controlling action that the MPO can take on the project - and therefore, the last best chance for the local jurisdictions to have a veto on an unacceptable project design.

Following is a summary of comments.

- **Mr. Stair** stated that *Imagine Central Arkansas*' 20-year transportation plan must be financially constrained plan. He asked what would happen if Metroplan's analysis revealed some "enhancement" that would throw the plan out of financial constraint.
- **Mr. Townsell** explained that it could, but only if that project had to be included in the plan. For example, if it were determined that widening I-40 would be required to make the I-3- project function, but it could be put off until after the 20-year planning period, then the plan would still be financially constrained. It's not just the cost of the project, but when that project is scheduled.
- **Mr. Stair** noted that in such a case, the underlying assumptions of the entire project would be diminished.
- **Ms. Heflin** clarified that it is not the FHWA's role to dictate to Metroplan what projects should or should not be in the long-range transportation plan; however, whatever is evaluated in the NEPA process must be consistent with what is in the long-range transportation plan. For example, whatever

improvements are assumed in the modeling for the NEPA process, must be consistent with what is in the financially constrained plan.

Timeline for Amendment to *Imagine Central Arkansas*

Mr. Covington reviewed the timeline for considering amendment to the Plan. The timeline was developed by Metroplan staff with input from the AHTD, and is based upon AHTD providing requested information on micro-simulation modeling by mid-March. The timeline ensures that the process follows that defined in the CARTS Public Participation Plan and normal practices of Metroplan, and ensures adequate time for the RPAC and Metroplan Board of Directors to consider public comment. Additionally, the timeline ensures that impacts of the I-30 project on adjacent freeway segments is available for consideration by the Council, Metroplan Board, and general public, including any potential impact to the financially constrained plan.

The timeline depends in part on the ability of the State to get data to Metroplan staff. Staff anticipates receiving the data in mid-March.

- **Mr. Sutton** asked if the state is required to perform systems analysis. **Mr. Covington** replied that not the State does not perform analysis on the same level as the MPO. As part of the NEPA process, the State must consider some secondary impacts, but the financial requirement is not part of the analysis. The State must look at the corridor itself. Because the MPO's long-range plan must be financially constrained, the MPO has to decide if the impacts are significant enough to go on the LRMTTP.
- **Mr. Sutton** then asked if Metroplan uses the same modeling tools as the State. **Mr. Covington** replied that the State and MPO model at different levels, although they share information - much of the State's modeling is based on Metroplan models - and staff reviews and provide comments on a routine basis, modeling at the State level is on a very different scale of analysis.

Systems Analysis Review

Mr. Covington presented a detailed overview of the systems analysis for 30 Crossing. (The PowerPoint of this presentation will be posted on the RPAC webpage. Audio will be made available upon request.)

Phase 1 of the systems analysis was completed in 2015, and was a policy-oriented analysis. Specifically, it was to: (1) gauge the regional mobility impacts of various improvement alternatives considered within the I-30 central corridor; (2) identify freeway system bottlenecks resulting from or worsening as a result of the project (which is still in progress); (3) determine financial implications of the proposed improvements and any policy changes to the LRMTTP that will be required to accommodate the project and the other system improvements that will logically

result from it; and, (4) identify need for additional systems analysis or unanswered questions.

Mr. Covington explained that the concept of Level of Service (LOS) aims for a rank of "D" or "E". An LOS of "A" would indicate few cars and complete free flow of traffic, which would indicate that money had been wasted on expanding a highway to a level that was not needed. LOS "D" is the level at which speeds begin to decline and maneuverability within the main roadway is noticeably limited. The roadway at LOS "E" is at its highest operational level: operations are volatile but speeds may remain high. Metroplan's analysis focuses on LOS "E".

In a series of slides showing results of the 2003 *Area-wide Freeway Study*, Mr. Covington explained that the study was jointly funded by Metroplan and the AHTD. Metroplan funded the first phase, which was the Arkansas River crossing. Phase 2 was funded by AHTD and looked at the rest of the freeway system. The recommendations coming out of that study were eight- and ten-lane freeways throughout the central Arkansas core. (The exception was I-630, which was not recommended for widening because of the many right-of-way and easement constraints.) The study was accepted by Metroplan, but not adopted because of the inconsistencies between the study recommendations and the balanced network strategies that informed Metroplan's regional policies. Moving forward ten years and the introduction of the I-30 project, Metroplan staff revisited the study and decided that LOS "D" was no longer reasonable. In 2015, Metroplan performed analysis based on LOS "E". The question that was addressed in 2015, was what would it take to build our way out of congestion. The "\$4 Billion" figure that has been part of the I-30 conversation is based on the total build-out of the freeway system.

Following is a summary of RPAC comments on this portion of Mr. Covington's presentation.

- **Dr. Adams** asked if the studies consider other modes of transportation, modes of travel, policies in our *Imagine Central Arkansas* plan? **Mr. Covington** replied that the studies considered what is in the finally constrained plan. The financially constrained plan does include some arterials and transit, but does not include the full vision as articulated in the plan narrative. That vision is included in the Vision Plan, which is not financially constrained.
- **Ms. Green** commented that the study cited earlier in Mr. Covington's presentation did not show I-630 widened to accommodate traffic, because of the many right-of-way and easement issues. Why does this presentation show that section of I-630 wider than the study shows? **Mr. Covington** replied that his purpose was to address the sole issue of traffic congestion and what it take to relieve regional congestion. The right-of-way and

easement obstacles would still be a factor in developing an expansion project.

- **Mr. Sutton** asked if, although I-630 doesn't show a widening, would 30 Crossing be viable if I-630 is not also enhanced. **Mr. Covington** responded that, looking at the congestion map, a reasonable person could conclude that the I-30 project is the first step toward a eight- or ten-lane build-out of the freeway system. He added that another reasonable person could conclude that I-30 does not dictate a build-out as the ultimate congestion mitigation, that there are other measures that could be taken. If traffic backs from I-630 onto I-30, I-40 and Hwy 67 to McCain, as shown in the "six + four-lane" alternative, then AHTD will need to explain why they widening of I-630 is not necessary.

Take aways from the first phase of analysis include: (1) traffic operations are slightly improved; but (2) congestion outside the immediate corridor will impact operations within the project area before 2040; and (3) significant expenditures would be required to achieve a system-wide LOS "D" or "E" standard.

Phase Two of Metroplan's analysis is geared toward answering the question, What do we need to include in the Long-Range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (LRMTP)? Mr. Covington noted that while regulations require "Existing and proposed transportation facilities that should function as an integrated metropolitan transportation system . . ." need to be included in the LRMTP, including such projects in a long-range plan makes sense from a planning perspective.

Two additional questions addressed in this phase are: (1) What is in the plan amendment? and (2) Should the amendment be approved? To address these questions, Phase Two focuses on what is happening outside the corridor. These questions lead to additional questions, such as: (1) Should additional improvements be considered for the project to function as intended? (2) What constitutes an acceptable level of congestion? (3) What is the timeframe for those outside improvements? (4) How is congestion managed?

Again using a series slides depicting hourly and daily traffic volume at various times, Mr. Covington led the Council through likely impacts of project scenarios. Take-aways from the research conducted thus far include: (1) At completion of 30 Crossing or shortly thereafter, congestion is expected to occur on I-630 and I-30 leaving the corridor; (2) By 2040, this congestion is expected to reach several miles; (3) the impact will be different depending on whether 30 Crossing is built with eight lanes or ten lanes; (4) I-40 near Levy will pose longer-term concerns.

Mr. Covington concluded his presentation by reiterating that the next two months will be busy for both RPAC and staff. The question that is left to consider is, What

will be included in the amendment? And that gets to the heart of the matter, What am I willing to accept for congestion?

Following is a summary of the discussion that followed.

- **Ms. Whitehead** asked who would draft the amendment language. **Mr. Covington** replied that Metroplan staff would draft the amendment, with input from the RPAC, AHTD and FHWA. **Ms. Whitehead** further clarified that if a final design alternative is one that is not acceptable to the area, the Metroplan Board has the option of refusing to put the project on the TIP. **Mr. Covington** agreed that that was correct.
- **Ms. Heflin** referred to slides in the presentation that showed congestion times and locations. Those slides were based on two-hour peak period does not the traffic has not been given a chance to recover ("go back to green"); therefore, with the information in the slides, we don't really know how long it will take for traffic congestion to go back to an acceptable flow. As part of the additional modeling that is being done, the FHWA is looking at traffic recovery time for each of the alternatives.
- **Mr. Lyford** asked if either of the two cities - Little Rock or North Little Rock - will be providing information regarding possible impacts to their downtowns and local communities. **Mr. Covington** responded that staff has met with mayors and representatives from both cities and a statement from each city is anticipated. The cities will want to weigh in on the alternatives.
- **Mr. Sutton** followed up on Mr. Lyford's question with the comment that the dollar figures that are being discussed are highway construction dollars. Not taken into account are possible negative impacts to neighborhoods and downtown businesses, such as lower property values, reduced tax base, or related costs to building an interstate through an urban area. He noted that driving down I-630 and seeing the properties on either side of that highway is an example of the negative impacts a major roadway can have on small businesses and neighborhoods. **Mr. Covington** replied that Mr. Sutton was partially correct, in that the financially constrained plan only addresses cost of construction. Metroplan is required to develop an environmental piece for the document that could touch on those issues. He added that we probably won't be able to go to that level of analysis, but we can raise the points and acknowledge potential impacts. **Mr. Sutton** then observed that the actual costs of this project could be much higher than even the estimated build-out cost.
- **Mr. Browning** commented that the AHTD is continuing to work closely with Metroplan and that the AHTD appreciates the partnership. He noted that as Mr. Covington outlined in his presentation, State planning and MPO planning

differ in required elements and timing. One reason that South Terminal I-30 to 65th Street continues to be included in AHTD traffic modeling is that a project is already in the State's scheduled project list. Mr. Browning emphasized that the AHTD does not believe that "we can build our way out of congestion" and that is not a goal of the Department; however, the purpose and need of the project, which includes traffic mobility, must be satisfied.

- **Mr. Stair** called staff's attention to an error on the timeline, which incorrectly lists the May RPAC meeting date. **Ms. Markman** replied that the calendar will be corrected and posted on the RPAC website.
- **Dr. Adams** asked if the MPO is required to outline current transportation funding that is available for our region. **Mr. Covington** replied that yes, and that those numbers are based on historic levels of funding.
- **Mr. Lewandowsky** asked if the model considers Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or other premium transit.
- **Mr. Townsell** pointed out that "if we keep allowing land use to develop as it has for the past five or six decades, we will be right back here in a few years with more 'necessary' interstate widenings."
- **Mr. Cummings** summarized the day's discussion and repeated Mr. Covington's comment that at this point there are more questions than answers, and that both Council and staff will be very busy over the coming weeks. He urged the Council to continue to educate themselves on the issues surrounding 30 Crossing.

6. Upcoming RPAC Work

Ms. Markman reminded the group that while I-30 will continue to dominate the Council's deliberations over next months, staff will also begin work on tasks that are preparatory updating *Imagine Central Arkansas*. The Council will be presented with much information as work progresses.

7. Other Business

No other business was brought forward.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be at 11:30 AM, on Wednesday, March 15th. Confirmation and meeting material will be sent at least one week prior to the date.

9. Adjourn

With no further business brought forward, the meeting adjourned at 1:35 PM