

October RAC Livable Communities Table Notes

(Summary of Committee Members Discussion)

Summation: Freeways are a cause and symptom of our development patterns. There is no silver bullet, and it's a mistake to focus solely on "freeways" or "arterials" or some other segment. We must consider people over cars while planning and be open to context sensitive solutions on our facilities. The region must work together to address transportation in a holistic manner to devise a "cocktail of solutions." Funding should include maintenance and arterial funds with every expansion/widening project! The region needs to be in a position to be receptive to new/changing technology.

1. Are freeways the cause or symptom of our transportation problems?

- "Field of Dreams" effect – if you build it they will come. Wider freeways make more traffic.
- Freeways cost a lot of money to keep building. On the front end we don't consider the costs of constant widening.
- Planning encourages sprawl which makes the freeway system investments necessary. But the freeway encourages more sprawl. Cheap gas then allows us to continue this pattern instead of making other systems cheaper. The incentive is there to keep freeways growing.
- It seems that it is both a cause and a symptom. The original interstate was necessary to easily travel the region and country. This incentivized sprawling land development which subsequent widenings intended to address. Widenings then incentivized more sprawl. The pattern continues.
- The freeway creates convenience for autos so there isn't demand for transit or other modes. The freeway becomes a cause and symptom of incentivized driving.
- The freeway widenings are a result of planning in silos/ poor planning.
- The consensus response was that freeways were both good and bad.
- Facilitating travel encouraged sprawl. (It was noted that other social forces were also at work: white flight, education/school districts, changes in tax laws making it more profitable to build quick/cheap, real estate.) For example, 630 and 30 have proven socially divisive
- Another negative consequence is that people may move to another county but continue to work in the urban core. They want easy freeway access with minimal congestion, but it's largely residents of the urban core that will pay for those widenings.
- As people moved out of the urban core, density levels necessary to support alternative forms of travel (e.g., bus or BRT) decreased.
- Predominant feeling was that freeways were excellent for regional and interstate automotive mobility.
- The issue was that they had been mis-managed and often poorly located, either deliberately (to divide neighborhoods) or out of ignorance. Freeways should never have been located through downtowns.
- Continuing to widen freeways perpetuates bad design and bad decisions, resulting in a whole new set of bad consequences.

- Do freeways cause economic growth to stay in the central core instead of outlying suburbs?
- Freeway expansions physically divide communities.

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)?

- Public transit should increase on the existing arterial system without expansion.
- The RAN should be well connected inter- and intra-city by transit.
- Find a way to take more vehicles off the road.
- Make arterials more accessible for walking and biking
- Have good street lighting, street trees, roadside amenities, which will also help businesses. Then, make sure all of it is well maintained.
- Reallocate the arterial funds to different modes of transportation.
- Most arterials are ArDOT owned. ArDOT needs to be less concerned with moving cars and more concerned about multimodal mobility. The change starts with them.
- Downtown thoroughfares should be treated different. More greenspaces, trees, landscaped medians and things that make these areas more ped-bike friendly.
- Collaboration with ArDOT and partners needs to improve. Less "red tape" for what should be easy improvements.
- ArDOT should be more context sensitive with design and consider impacts at each location. They need to be more flexible.
- Metroplan Board must re-focus its priorities on the RAN and improving local street network. The buck stops with the Board.
- Reinvestment on arterial system is a sound policy but has not been fully implemented.
- Central Arkansas residents should be able to travel by car across their cities without getting on a freeway, or taking a maze of local streets, which were not designed to carry that kind of traffic. Arterials were designed to carry non-interstate/regional traffic.
- Drivers think of freeways as arterials. This is an issue that ArDOT needs to address – and ArDOT owns 70 percent of the arterials.
- Be careful in developing arterials: road widening can discourage other modes of travel (biking and walking) because of increased speeds.
- Main Streets and downtown areas should not prioritize automobile mobility; in fact, through-traffic should be encouraged to use the freeway. Other traffic should slow down by means of street diets and traffic calming.
- Some good examples were cited: LR's 12th Street project, SOMA.
- North Little Rock needs to copy of those techniques in Argenta. Especially problematic is the speed in which vehicles cross the Main Street bridge into Argenta.
- Propose to ArDOT proportionate investments in arterials with the goal of developing a more balanced network of freeways and arterials.

- Roads are missing the human element. We need more, easier pedestrian crossings, separated paths, on street parking, lighting, landscaping.
- Arterials are funneling people out of downtowns; through instead of within. One way streets are a problem for business.

3. Is major roadway widening inevitable, or might future work, shopping, and service trends change our transportation needs? If so how (on freeways, arterials)?

- How can we use demographic changes to entice people into embracing other modes. Some are too old to drive and younger generations like to live in urban environments.
- Regional bus system might make more sense than freeway expansion.
- We are planning in silos, we need to find better alternatives to how we fund projects.
- Why don't we encourage more to work online or state government can set up satellite offices in surrounding towns, and there will be less need to commute. How can we make it to where people don't have to drive for work?
- Incentivize transit by using subsidization or tax credits for workers using this method.
- The question was raised as to whether the State DOT is open to technologies that may radically change the way travel is addressed. As of now, ArDOT sets the agenda.
- The best we can do is be aware of new technologies and plan so that the region is in a position to be receptive to and adapt to changing opportunities and challenges.
- Don't think of "technology" as a silver bullet. It will take a multi-faceted approach to effect change on our transportation network.
- Perhaps better construction materials and other road and vehicle technologies could lead to decrease in maintenance costs.
- In any event, the region does not need to use roadway widening as the default "improvement" in the 21st century.