

RAC Livable Communities Committee Discussion

Summation: Accessibility and connectivity in the fullest sense (infrastructure, culture, community perceptions) are most important to livability. The way we develop our land will greatly impact transportation and livable outcomes. Transportation investments must consider people, not traffic, as the “goal post” of quality projects. We must consider a diverse population’s needs when investing in transportation so that everyone, young and old with varying abilities and economic standing, has an opportunity for a great quality of life. Regionalism is evasive, but can be fostered through multi-jurisdictional projects, like connected trails, and a “shared sense of fate.” Central Arkansas must buy in on policies to reinforce its regional aims.

Question 1: How can our transportation investments be used to best ensure a more livable region?

Key Discussion Points

1. Livability should be the “goal-post” when funding transportation investments.
2. Implementers must think beyond moving traffic and incorporate alternate transportation modes into planning and projects; project funding often fails to consider alternative modes.
3. Acknowledge the connection between land use and development and transportation. Have a comprehensive perspective when choosing projects. Consider compatible built environments.
4. Projects should be viewed within the context of the community/neighborhood; but projects should balance the communities needs with that of the region.
5. Walkability is key. ADA accessible, more connected sidewalks that link desirable destinations.
6. Consider transit realistically. Address transit stigma, build onto existing system, expand to BRT service, and provide connected system of sheltered transit stops via sidewalks.
7. A trademark trail system and connected community network would foster livability. Multi-jurisdictional projects could help break down silos and bring a region together because it can show everyone wins. Rails to trails is an opportunity.
8. Livability is a complete transportation system not one just built around cars.
9. Funding for other facets of transportation has been an issue and multimodal transportation is not being funded seriously enough.
10. Consider an aging populations transportation needs with trails, transit, and a system of parks/gathering places along these routes. “Aging in place,” and residents 8 to 80 should be able to access things without a car.
11. Consider the impacts of technology on transportation and mobility with a critical eye by looking at historical and predicted game changers.
12. Consider transportation’s environmental impact and strive for reduced waste in public transportation projects. Consider carbon-neutral communities.
13. At grade crossings in small communities are a safety issue

Question 2: How are issues of livability similar between urban, suburban and small communities? How are they different?

Similarities

1. People need and expect the same: services, amenities, sense of safety, educational and work opportunities in all communities. People want to gather with their communities. Place-making.
2. Accessibility is always a quality of life issue for all areas. Food, entertainment, jobs.
3. Mobility not just transportation, but economically is important to all residents in all places.
4. Communities across the spectrum fear change, which may affect livability.
5. Expectations for housing quality and availability is universal in Central Arkansas. Multi-family is often a point of contention for communities.
6. All communities are now concerned with walkability and active transportation

Differences

1. The desired “pace of life” makes livability relative in different sized areas. Maybe some places are not meant to have vibrant entertainment districts and economic centers, but rather serve as a bedroom community. Not all services/amenities would be appropriate for all communities.
2. Don’t try to make communities uniform.
3. On housing, small communities need more, suburban communities have a lack diverse options like denser and cheaper,
4. Suburbs are close to seeing the infrastructure failures that the urban centers have experiences
5. Small cities are looking to attract residents, but often struggle as to how to do that.
6. Suburban and small cities usually lack a grid system of streets. Could this be changed or mitigated with walkability or other connections?

Question 3: How can the region’s communities foster collaboration in regional decision making?

1. Communication is key. Identify and gather the key players from the development community, political leaders, along with the State Chamber.
2. Developing relationships possibly by creating a new council of cities.
3. Territorialism is a barrier to collaboration.
4. Our historical “white flight” pattern of development entrenched isolation as a value among several communities.
5. Our region needs to develop a “shared sense of fate.”
6. In some regard, policies, like zoning, should be uniform regionally so that developers cannot just go somewhere else to get away with poor developments.