



Small Cities Council Meeting Summary

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 | 9:00 AM
Metroplan | Pulaski County Regional Building
Approved January 26, 2022

Meeting PowerPoint slides are available at <https://metroplan.org/small-cities-council/>

SCC Members Attending:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Mayor Mike Kemp, Vice President | City of Shannon Hills |
| 2. Mayor Bernie Chamberlain | City of Austin |
| 3. Mayor Charles Gastineau | City of Ward |
| 4. Ms. Jennifer Hill | City of Haskell |
| 5. Mayor Randy Holland | City of Mayflower |
| 6. Mayor Butch House | City of England |
| 7. Mayor Allan Loring | City of Wrightsville |
| 8. Mayor Trae Reed | City of Lonoke |

Guests:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 9. Mr. Randall Green | Little Rock Air Force Base |
| 10. Mr. Danny Hester | City of Mayflower, Planning Commission |
| 11. Ms. Claire Jolly | Little Rock Air Force Base |
| 12. Mr. Mike Watson | Half Associates |

Metroplan Staff:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 13. Ms. Lynn Bell | Graphics Specialist |
| 14. Mr. Casey Covington | CARTS Study Director |
| 15. Ms. Bernadette Rhodes | Community Planner |
| 16. Ms. La'Kesha Stewart | Planner/Public Outreach |

1. Call to Order and Welcome

Mayor Kemp called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM. He welcomed attendees and asked if any special guests were in attendance. Ms. Rhodes introduced Mr. Hester, Mr. Watson, Mr. Green, and Ms. Jolly. She then asked all SCC members to introduce themselves.

2. Summary of Previous Meeting

Ms. Rhodes asked that the approval of the September 29, 2021 meeting summary be held until the January meeting. No members objected.

3. Infrastructure Bill Briefing

Metroplan Deputy Director/CARTS Study Director, Casey Covington, provided a briefing on how the new infrastructure bill will impact transportation in central Arkansas.

The bill was signed by the President this week and included federal transportation reauthorization, which is a process that Congress goes through every five years. Reauthorization sets transportation funding levels and planning goals for MPOs like Metroplan.

Mr. Covington credited AMPO, the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, for providing much of the content for the briefing.

The previous transportation bill, the FAST Act, was passed in 2015 and included \$305 billion for transportation. It was extended in October 2020. The reauthorization process began in late 2020/early 2021, with AMPO and other advocacy organizations collaborating with congressional committees to frame a new infrastructure bill. The bill passed both chambers of Congress on November 5 and was signed by President Biden on November 15, 2021.

Highlights:

- \$500 billion for transportation infrastructure
- Substantial funding increase, including in carbon reduction projects
- Large investment in bridges
- Electrical vehicle charging
- Grant opportunities

Funding impacts:

- Initial annual funding approx. 30% higher than in previous bill
- Funding will increase 2% per year over the life of the bill
- Increased funding for transit
- \$350 billion for highways over life of bill – Metroplan will receive \$80 million of that

Funding sources:

- National Highway Performance Program (ArDOT receives)
- Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) – 26% of total bill (Most goes to ArDOT; Metroplan receives suballocation)
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) – part of STBG funding (Metroplan will receive approx. \$1M/year). In this bill, 10% of total STBG allocation will be suballocated to TAP instead of a set dollar amount.
- Planning funding – approx. 0.8% of total bill; funds MPO operations
- Competitive grants: In addition to continuing existing grant programs, the infrastructure bill includes two new grants: \$12.5 billion for Bridge Investment Program and \$5 billion for a Safe Streets for All grant.

Metroplan's funding levels:

- 2021: \$12.5 million in STBG funds; \$731,000 in TAP funds
- 2022 (expected): \$15 million STBG; \$915,000+ TAP
- Highway Improvement Program (HIP): Separate appropriation, not part of infrastructure bill. 2022 allocation unknown.
- 59% of state's allocation will be suballocated to regional MPOs, vs. 50% in previous bill.

Mayor Reed asked whether the 5-year funding cycle had already begun. Mr. Covington confirmed that the bill timeline starts with the federal fiscal year 2022, which began on October 1, 2021.

Mayor Loring asked whether the transportation bill might be cut back or repealed by an incoming administration. Mr. Covington indicated that the bill goes through an appropriations process and is typically not the target of changes by incoming administrations.

Mayor Loring asked whether local streets would be eligible for federal funding. Mr. Covington advised that most federal funding must be spent on-system, meaning on state or federal highways. However, the bill includes a set-aside for off-system bridges and requires 20% of bridge funding to be spent on off-system bridges. Some grant opportunities will likely allow the inclusion of some city streets in the project. Ms. Rhodes indicated there is a state funding source, the State Aid City Street program, that assists cities with street maintenance. Mayor Loring stated, and Mr. Watson confirmed, that the State Aid program does not fund maintenance on dead-end streets. Mayor Loring stated that this restriction put small cities like Wrightsville at a disadvantage.

Mayor Kemp commented that he hopes the infrastructure funding can be used for Shannon Hills's and other small cities' bridge projects. He advised other cities to identify and focus on needs early and prepare materials to be able to apply for funding for "shovel ready" projects. He also advised that there are ways TAP funding can help with improvements to city streets. In some instances, drainage or other features need to be added to streets in order to accommodate sidewalks.

Mayor Reed inquired whether the "clean water" portion of the infrastructure bill funding could be used for drainage projects. Mr. Covington advised that if a transportation issue is addressed through the project, it could be eligible for Metroplan funding. There is a separate "clean water" pocket of funding included in the bill, but more information is needed on what types of projects it will fund.

Other components of the bill require MPOs to engage in more virtual community outreach, such as through social media and online platforms, and to coordinate more fully with housing authorities throughout the planning process.

Mr. Covington shared that AMPO took a leadership role in advocating for the inclusion of broadband access in the infrastructure bill, which is relevant to small cities. Metroplan will

consult with experts to determine how cities can benefit from the bill's investment in broadband. Mayor Kemp pointed out that cities should focus on making internet ubiquitous throughout the city, such as in public parks, event locations, and gathering places. He added that cities can put content controls on the internet access they provide in public places.

In closing, Mr. Covington brought up the recent issue of cost overruns among transportation projects previously funded by Metroplan. The issue will be discussed in the Executive Committee meeting and is expected to be on the Board's agenda in December. Mr. Covington will share any information passed out to the Executive Committee with the Small Cities Council.

4. Redistricting Check-In

Mayor Kemp asked if all cities who needed to redistrict had requested assistance from Metroplan.

Mayor Kemp and the mayors of Ward, Lonoke, and Austin confirmed that their new ward maps had been passed by City Council. Wrightsville is reviewing their map. Ms. Rhodes will follow up with Guy.

5. 2022 TAP Grants

Ms. Rhodes reminded attendees that Metroplan's call for TAP projects is out now, due January 5th. Mr. Covington and Ms. Rhodes are available to assist with the application process. Printed copies of the TAP application were provided to attendees. Mr. Covington advised that the application is also available as a fillable PDF.

Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-oriented projects are eligible. Cities are required to provide a 20% cash match. Metroplan's portion of the TAP funding is allocated solely to projects within central Arkansas. State-wide grants are available through ArDOT. Metroplan's funding levels range from \$50,000-\$100,000 for small cities.

Mayor Kemp asked whether this funding was focused on regional projects. Mr. Covington advised that the intent is to fund most regional projects through the STBG program and focus TAP funding on local projects, some of which may connect into the regional bike-ped network. Projects must serve a transportation purpose; purely recreational projects are not eligible.

ArDOT does not allow TAP funding to be used for engineering expenses. However, Metroplan does allow small city TAP applicants to request the inclusion of engineering expenses in their award amount. If one of Metroplan's on-call engineers is used, cities would be asked to pay 20% of the engineering cost up-front, and then Metroplan would cover the remaining 80% out of its STBG funding, without requiring the city to front the cost.

Mayor Gastineau inquired whether cities would be eligible for 80% reimbursement of engineering costs if they used their own engineer. Mr. Covington advised that cities would have to go through a federally approved selection process, which can take up to 9 months and could

set the project behind its timeline. Technically, those engineering costs could be eligible for reimbursement, however Metroplan's preference is to use its on-call engineers, which are familiar with federal design and funding requirements. If other engineers are used, cities will be 100% responsible for any delays caused by the engineer's designs.

Mayors Gastineau and Reed raised the issue of one engineer completing a conceptual, or 10%, design and cost estimate for the purposes of applying for TAP funding, and then a Metroplan on-call engineer completing the construction drawings. Cities may have the desire to continue with the same engineer who completed the conceptual design. Mr. Covington expressed understanding of the challenge. He emphasized that hiring an engineer for a federal project can be a lengthy process. In contrast, the firms on Metroplan's list have already gone through a selection process and can start designing a project within a matter of weeks. ArDOT reviews also proceed more quickly when the project engineer is familiar with state and federal transportation requirements.

Mayor Reed asked which engineers were on Metroplan's on-call list. Mr. Covington answered that they were McClelland, Halff Associates, Garver, and Crafton Tull. He encouraged cities to contact those engineers about assisting with the preparation of TAP and STBG applications.

6. Northwest Arkansas Study Tours

Ms. Rhodes asked which attendees have already considered sending representatives on a study tour. Lonoke has signed up one representative, and Shannon Hills intends to participate in a 2022 tour. Ms. Rhodes provided a summary of the tour, a 2-day tour mostly on the Razorback Greenway. The educational tour teaches participants how to advance bike infrastructure and culture and is geared towards city staff, officials, economic development, etc. Mayor Reed recommended the tour to any city considering participating in the Regional Greenway project.

Metroplan will contribute \$5,000 towards each 12-person tour. The remaining per person cost (approx. \$600 per person, incl. hotel) will be the city's/other partners' responsibility.

Mr. Townsell has been working with larger cities to put together entire 12-person tours by themselves and is now working with cities and counties to put together composite tours with combining several cities and counties, ideally from similar parts of the region. Cities are encouraged to contact Tab as soon as possible to reserve their spot.

7. Model UDO Update

Ms. Rhodes shared the most recent draft of the Metroplan Model Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) with attendees. The draft is 98% complete, and Metroplan is requesting that cities take the next two months to review the ordinance carefully and suggest clarifications and/or modifications. Input is requested from Mayors, Planning Commissioners, City Councilmembers, City staff, and stakeholders. Ms. Rhodes will collect notes at the January 26th Small Cities Council meeting.

Ms. Rhodes also pointed out the Appendix, which provides templates and approval checklists for various types of permit applications. These forms are customizable to each city's needs and

can be turned into a fillable PDF to make the application process easier for users.

She also shared that many items in the PDF version are hyperlinked, which makes it easy to navigate. It is anticipated that most users will view the UDO as a PDF versus as a printed copy.

8. Shareworthy

Ms. Rhodes pointed to the following links to articles about the infrastructure bill:

State's infrastructure bill share tops \$4B

<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/nov/09/arkansas-to-see-4-billion-for-roads-broadband/>

7 Ways the New Infrastructure Package Invests in Planning

<https://bit.ly/3wQjGeK>

9. Upcoming Meetings

Ms. Rhodes outlined future meeting dates:

- Small Cities Council Meeting Wednesday, January 26, 2022, 9:00 AM, tentatively in Metroplan conference room.
- Model UDO Workshop –
 - Immediately following this meeting in the Metroplan library.
 - No workshop in December. Please take time to review UDO and bring notes to January meeting.
 - The next workshop will be on Jan. 26 at 10:00 AM, immediately following the SCC meeting, tentatively in Metroplan library.
- Model UDO Workshops are also being held individually with cities' Planning Commissions and other stakeholders.

10. Announcements

Ms. Rhodes invited members to share announcements. Several mayors indicated they are currently focusing on budgets. Mayor Holland is busy with the Hwy. 89 overpass, which is currently under construction.

Mayor Gastineau asked if anyone was working on an ordinance about solar panels. Mayor Reed shared that Lonoke just passed one, and that he would share it with Mayor Gastineau and Ms. Rhodes. He gave Ms. Rhodes permission to share it with the entire SCC. Mayor Gastineau shared that solar panels are being installed on many homes, yet most cities have no permitting process, which raises concerns for fire departments, as the panels could present an electrical hazard when firefighters are ventilating a roof. Ms. Rhodes added that solar panel regulations are included in the UDO and will require a building permit.

11. Adjourn

Ms. Rhodes thanked the Small Cities Council members for their attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 AM.