

## METROPLAN'S HISTORY

Local political and business leaders created Metroplan in 1955, acting out of necessity and inspired by the principle that the metropolitan area was one community and that the problems and opportunities of each entity were common to all. Today, Metroplan is a voluntary membership organization open to any local government in the metropolitan area and supported by member dues and federal and state grants.

Originally formed as the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission of Pulaski County in 1955, Metroplan has served as the area's federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) since 1972. Its function as an MPO is to work with local governments, the state department of transportation, and local transit providers to determine transportation needs and funding priorities for federal transportation investments. Metroplan also provides general planning, mapping, and technical assistance to local governments.

Over the years, Metroplan helped plan such signature projects as Burns Park in North Little Rock, the open space design for the Pulaski County banks of the Arkansas River—which would become Riverfront Park, and the Big Dam Bridge. Metroplan also helped incorporate the Mid-Arkansas Water Alliance (MAWA) to secure long-term sources of high quality drinking water for the region. Metroplan is involved in a variety of efforts to safeguard and improve the air quality of the region including partnering with other organizations to administer Ozone Action Days, an effort to raise awareness about the health effects and means of reducing ground level ozone.

### METROPLAN MILESTONES:

#### 1950s:

- Metroplan began operations in 1955 by interlocal agreement as a voluntary association of local governments.
- Anniversaries of Metroplan and the Little Rock Air Force Base (LRAFB) are inexorably linked, as LRAFB was a large catalyst in the formation of Metroplan.
- Initial plans included Proposed Highway System (1956), Preliminary Development Plan for Pulaski County (1957), and Plan for Half Million People" (1957). Early park plans included A Preliminary Report on the Recreational Use of Lake Maumelle, Site Layouts for a Basic Recreational Plan on Lake Maumelle (1958) and A Plan for Burn Parks (1959).

#### 1960s:

- Major plans in the 1960s included the Industrial Growth Plan (1962); Comprehensive Development Plan, Pulaski County Metropolitan Area (1964); Adams Field Airport Plan, and Civil Defense Plan (1965); Pulaski Area

Transportation Study—Highway Transportation Plan and Implementation Program; and Recommendation that School Districts in Pulaski County Consolidate (1966), Master Plan Report: Water Supply and Distribution, and Transit Planning Study (1967); and the 1990 Comprehensive Development Plan, Pulaski/Saline Metropolitan Area (1968).

#### 1970s:

- In 1970, the Metropolitan Planning Area Commission of Pulaski County reorganized as a council of local governments and changed its name to Metroplan. Published Open Space Plan and Program in 1970.
- In 1971, partnered with Arkansas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to create a park/open space design for the Pulaski County banks of the Arkansas River, which would become Riverfront Park.
- Since 1972, Metroplan has been the area's designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).
- Metroplan became the trustee for Central Arkansas Transit (CAT) in 1972.
- Designated lead agency for water quality planning in 1977.
- Designated lead agency for air quality and waste disposal planning in 1978.

#### 1980s:

- Published Maumelle Corridor Control Access Plan in 1981.
- Proposed South loop on E-W border of Pulaski County in 1983.
- Completed Fourche Creek Urban Runoff Project and Lake Maumelle Clean Lakes Project in 1982.
- Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA) formally spun off in 1988.
- Metroplan became the administrative agent for Pulaski County 911 in 1989.
- Established public policy research program in 1989 publishing An Analysis of State General Revenue Turnback in Arkansas, Jail Overcrowding In Pulaski County: A Preliminary Assessment, Arkansas Local Government Tax Capacity, and Metropolitan Regional Solid Waste Study.

#### 1990s:

- In 1991, Congress passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).
- Also in 1991, Metroplan initiated its broadest reorganization since 1970—narrowing its focus to transportation and the implementation of ISTEA.
- Central Arkansas Regional Transportation Study (CARTS) replaced the Pulaski County Area Transportation Study (PATS) in 1991.

- Transportation Advisory Council (TAC) formed in 1991. Faulkner and Lonoke Counties joined Metroplan in 1991.
- In 1995, METRO 2020 long-range transportation plan adopted.
- In 1997, Metroplan partnered with three other organizations to administer Ozone Action Days.
- In 1998, Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century replaced ISTEA.

### 2000s:

- Published METRO 2025 in 2000.
- In 2000, Metroplan received the National Award for Outstanding Leadership in Metropolitan Transportation Planning from the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations.
- Metroplan became the host agency for Clean Cities in 2000.
- In 2001, held initial meeting of small and large water systems.
- Published CARTS Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Plan in 2002.
- In 2003, helped incorporate the Mid-Arkansas Water Alliance (MAWA) to secure long-term sources of high quality drinking water.
- Metroplan assisted CATA in planning River Rail trolley system, beginning routes in 2004.
- Metro 2030 published/adopted in 2005.
- SAFETEA-LU was passed by Congress in 2005. It expired in 2009.
- In 2007, Metroplan assisted with the planning and funding for the Big Dam Bridge and Two Rivers Park Bridge projects.
- Metroplan hosted the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) National Conference in 2007, setting a record for attendance.
- Metroplan won national awards for *Benton Planning Studies Report* and *Walkable Cabot* planning.
- In 2008, Metroplan created and published a bike map for Central Arkansas.
- Operation Bottleneck set public feedback record with more than 3,000 responses in 2008. The campaign won a PRSA PRISM Award in 2009.
- Metroplan established a Green Agenda program for the region in 2008. This received PR, social media and public participation awards in 2009 and 2010.
- In 2009, Metroplan coordinated American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) projects in central Arkansas.

### 2010s

- Since 2010, Metroplan has received numerous awards for planning and publications. See the complete list in the Appendix.
- In 2010, MAWA coordinated the signing of the Greer's

- Ferry reallocation project that secures high quality water supplies for decades to come.
- Metroplan created CARTS Infrastructure Exchange to stretch non-federal dollars in 2010.
- Metro 2030.2 published/adopted in 2010.
- In 2012, MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) replaced SAFETEA-LU.
- In 2014, completed the Conway to Little Rock Express Bus Feasibility Study.
- *Imagine Central Arkansas* published/adopted in 2014, received an APA Award in 2015.
- Published the Pedestrian/Bicyclist Crash Analysis in 2015.
- In December 2015, Congress passed the FAST Act (Fixing America's Surface Transportation).
- In 2016, Metroplan helped establish the Southwest Trail Task Force to coordinate regional efforts to build the trail.
- In 2017, Tab Townsell became the new Executive Director and Casey Covington was promoted to Deputy Director/CARTS Study Director.
- The *Central Arkansas 2050* long-range plan update was published/adopted in 2018.
- In 2018 Metroplan partnered with ARDOT on a study of the Highway 89 corridor connecting Hwy 67 (in Cabot) with I-40 (in Conway).
- The Small Cities Council was established in 2018.
- In 2019 Metroplan staff assisted the City of Benton with the *Moving Benton Forward* comprehensive plan.
- Also in 2019, Metroplan worked with the Census Bureau to modify census tract and block group boundaries based on population.
- In 2019 Metroplan produced *Horizon 2020: 25 Years of Planning—A Retrospective*, and hosted a panel discussion.

### 2020s

- In 2020 *Horizon 2020: 25 Years of Planning—A Retrospective* received two APA Awards in the categories of Unique Contribution to Planning and Achievement in Media or Journalism.
- Metroplan staff released a detailed analysis of the 2020 Census in 2021.
- Metroplan's *Multimodal Infrastructure Guidelines* were completed in 2021.
- The Connecting Central Arkansas Public Outreach Initiative received an APA Award in 2021.
- In 2021 the Little Rock Port Authority requested Metroplan's help taking a look at South Loop, a proposed road connection across southern Pulaski County.
- In 2021, the Metroplan Board committed \$55 m over 10 years to support the planning and construction of a Regional Greenway system. A consultant was hired to help identify the routes.
- The *Unified Development Ordinance* was adopted and won an Arkansas APA Award in 2022.