

# 2021 Metroplan Staff

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All photos are by Metroplan staff except where noted.

This report was funded in part through grants from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. The views and opinions of the authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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## Letter from Leadership

#### Dear Reader.

Perhaps you have heard of Complete Streets? This public policy initiative has gained popularity nationally for a few decades and has been adopted as a policy goal by the Federal Highway Administration. It commits cities to provide safe and efficient streets for all users and all types of transportation. This includes people who walk, bike, and ride transit—not just those who drive vehicles. This is a massive change from the way streets have traditionally been designed.

Since adopting regional street design standards in the mid-1990s, and continuing through its current transportation grant scoring criteria, Metroplan has long advocated active transportation consistent with Complete Streets. Metroplan has championed sidewalks for years before mandatory sidewalk requirements became common in the region. But now past is mere prelude.

At its February 2020 Board of Directors meeting, Metroplan committed half its future grant monies for the next ten years to developing and constructing a regional greenways bike/ped network extending across Central Arkansas. This will be a \$65 to \$75 million investment over a decade, putting Metroplan's money where its advocacy is. Aimed at all citizens, eight to eighty years of age, this investment will be awarded through competitive grants available to member jurisdictions.

This regional system will ultimately be 183 miles long in five major corridors. Trails will be 12 to 14 feet wide and separated from vehicular traffic by a horizontal or vertical barrier, or both. The network will be centered on the Arkansas River Trail.

In 2021, the consulting engineering firm Crafton Tull worked with Metroplan, spending a hard year and a half meeting with stakeholders, tromping through the region along creeks and streets, and developing best routes and alternates. Now, in the middle of 2022, they have a preliminary system out for public comment through the end of July. The Southwest Trail is one of the five corridors in this regional greenways system. Pulaski County is prepared to break ground on the Southwest Trail's first section this calendar year.

2022 has started out wonderfully with the preliminary greenway routes out for public comment moving to final acceptance by the Board of Directors in August. Metroplan hopes to have a grant call for engineering projects in the fall to be followed up by a construction call in the spring.

Better get your chain greased up and your hand brakes tightened. Buy new walking shoes. The Regional Greenways System is coming.



Judge Doug Erwin Lonoke County Metroplan President



Tab Townsell
Executive Director

Judge Doug Erwin, Lonoke County Metroplan President Tab Townsell
Executive Director

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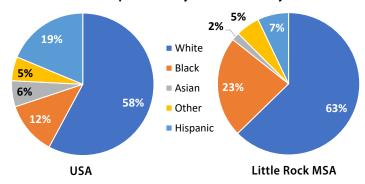
## Census 2020

### **Key Findings**

Census 2020 revealed population counts for cities and counties in Central Arkansas close to the numbers Metroplan anticipated. There were a few key findings:

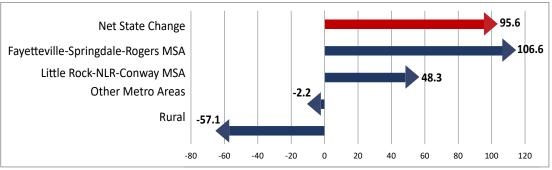
- The Central Arkansas region has 748,031 people, essentially three-quarters of a million.
- Little Rock population passed the 200,000 mark and did so by more than Metroplan anticipated.
- Total regional growth from 2010 to 2020 was about 48,000 people, the second-largest amount of population growth among Arkansas metropolitan regions.
- Populations of minority groups grew substantially, especially for Asians and persons of two or more races.

#### Percent Population by Race/Ethnicity 2020



Source: Census 2020.

#### Arkansas Population Change 2010–2020 (Thousands)

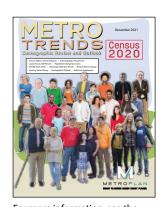


Source: Census 2020.

### Metroplan and the Census

Census 2020 figures came out during August 2021. The figures were released at the census block level via FTP download, which meant Metroplan staff had to quickly process the figures into population counts for its member city and county governments. Staffers assisted member cities with redistricting their ward boundaries in preparation for the 2022 election cycle. Although the deadlines were short, Metroplan quickly provided multiple redistricting alternatives for all member governments which requested them. Jonathan Lupton presented the Census findings to the Metroplan Board on August 25, 2021. Metroplan also

released a detailed analysis of local census results in its *Demographic Review and Outlook* 2021, which was released in December 2021. Press releases from this document yielded an interview with KUAR, the local NPR station, as well as articles citing Metroplan in *Arkansas Business* and the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.



For more information, see the December, 2021 *Demographic Review and Outlook* on the Metroplan website.

## Long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan Progress

Central Arkansas has been operating under the same vision and goals since its 1995 MTP, known as METRO 2020. That 2020 planning horizon has come and gone, and now the region is adjusting focus on a new vision and goals that reflect new realities. This is the task of the Connecting Central Arkansas Public Outreach Initiative.

Connecting Central Arkansas found, through public outreach and citizens advisory committees, five central themes to guide the upcoming transportation plan: 1) Active Neighborhoods and Placemaking; 2) Accessible Transportation; 3) Reliable, Resilient, and Safer Transportation and Environments; 4) Innovation in Transportation and Land Development;

5) Regional Collaboration and Identity.

Connecting Central Arkansas employed new outreach techniques to reach more diverse participants within the region. Metroplan's outreach methods included colorful videos to inform the public of the plan and the process, participating in established community events, hosting pop-ups, partnering with schools and organizations, forming a new inclusivity committee, and collecting feedback via social media.





Themes videos: https://tinyurl.com/2xyr39vt



The Connecting Central Arkansas Public Outreach Initiative Video was a team effort written, filmed and produced by Metroplan staff. https://tinyurl.com/3kuke2mn

### Connecting Central Arkansas Wins APA Award

#### **Visually Appealing Team Effort**

The Connecting Central Arkansas Public Outreach Initiative received the American Planning Association (APA), Arkansas Chapter Award in the category of Achievement in Media or Journalism.

Metroplan staff worked as a team to combine relevant information with visually appealing graphics and videos for the Connecting Central Arkansas Outreach Initiative. Within only a few weeks, staff created the initiative's logo as well as wrote, cast, and produced a quality informative video that has received praise from Board members and residents. Another video created inhouse used animation software to describe the Regional Themes

on social media and within the online survey. Staff worked vigorously to create colorful graphics and promotional materials.

Metroplan produced the following materials to support the Connecting Central Arkansas Outreach Initiative:

- Connecting Central Arkansas logo
- Connecting Central Arkansas video
- Themes video
- Online survey
- Social media/television
- Website



# Benchmarking Tours Prepare Region for Greenway Implementation

As Metroplan prepared to implement its Regional Greenways Plan, it recognized the benefit of touring the Razorback Greenway in nearby Northwest Arkansas. Metroplan worked with LaneShift, a planning, design, advocacy and education firm, to conduct a series of benchmarking tours of the Razorback Greenway. The Board funded two-day tours by small groups (12 persons or under), with open-air gatherings. These tours included plenty of "hands-on" biking and walking, to provide experiential knowledge of design techniques for a regional trail system.



Trails are transforming cities in Northwest Arkansas.



A few words before we go...

#### 2021 Participants

- Central Arkansas Regional Greenways Steering Committee
- City of Maumelle
- · City of Cabot
- · City of Sherwood

Additional cities will do benchmarking tours in 2022.



Learning on the trail beats sitting in chairs.



Cruising around Atalanta Lake.

Those who did the tours got to see how the Razorback Greenway has been worked seamlessly into the redesign and re-invigoration of four downtowns (Rogers, Bentonville, Springdale and Fayetteville). They saw how the Greenway is integrated with local freeways and streets, sometimes running parallel and sometimes gliding under them via culverts. Cities along the route are developing additional spur trails connecting to the Greenway. Some retail businesses have turned to face the trail, catering to bikers and walkers. These guided tours gave city officials and members of the Regional Greenways Steering Committee lessons that will bring world-class trail design to Central Arkansas.

#### WHAT PARTICIPANTS ARE SAYING

"It was invaluable for the council members and for staff to go. I've heard nothing but good reviews. It is not a recreational trip. You will have a busy itinerary and be out and about on a bike."

Mayor Caleb Norris, City of Maumelle

"The professionals at LaneShift gave you a great overall picture of what a biking system should look like in a community. I would highly recommend this tour to anyone. Council members, our Parks & Rec Director, planning commission members—they came out excited. They loved it. We became more of a team."

Mayor Ken Kincade, City of Cabot

"I had a great time and I left with a fresh perspective on the bike/ ped user experience."

Mayor Trae Reed, City of Lonoke

"It is a way to build a common understanding—a common path forward—and help convince your community to invest in these trail systems, because that's going to be required to get this regional trail built."

Tab Townsell, Metroplan Executive Director

# Regional Greenways

In 2021, Central Arkansas blazed a new path towards greater mobility for bikes and pedestrians with its Regional Greenways Plan. The greenways will be five trail corridors that span throughout the region, in five major directions (shown below). The plan will work with existing trails and will aim to make additional connections throughout the region, in addition to the five main corridors.

Metroplan, with consultant Crafton Tull, kicked off the effort in April 2021 with a Board-led steering committee. During a July workshop, a group of 70 stakeholders identified routes for further study. During the remainder of 2021 the consultant plotted the most promising routes, subject to review by the steering committee and Board. Work will continue through 2022.

By making better connections for walkers, bikers, parents pushing strollers, and the handicapped, the Regional Greenways Plan strives to make the Central Arkansas region more accessible and better connected for all its residents.



Stakeholders give their input.

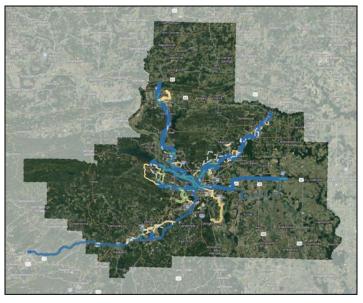
#### *Five future regional trail opportunities:*

- Central Beltway/West Trail Corridor—connecting Central Little Rock to West Little Rock
- Northwest Trail Corridor—connecting North Little Rock to Maumelle, Mayflower, Conway, and Greenbrier/Wooster
- Northeast Trail Corridor—connecting North Little Rock to Sherwood, Jacksonville, Cabot, Austin, and Ward
- East Trail Corridor—connecting North Little Rock to Lonoke
- Southwest Trail Corridor—a previously planned trail linking several communities southwest of Little Rock



Building a trail system around its users requires thoughtful public planning and discussion.

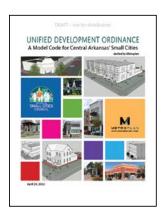




The plan is supported by a web site which includes both an interactive map and a survey for citizen input. As of March 2022, over 900 responses had been received. You can review the comments and inputs of other site visitors.

# Unified Development Ordinance

"The How:" Getting from Vision to Reality



Many cities' comprehensive plans have lofty goals. They strive to increase quality of life for citizens, economic vitality, safety for children, and convenience for the elderly.

These goals do not happen on their own. Cities must guide growth to turn their visions into reality. They must also mesh private developments into each city's system of streets, utility infrastructure, and public services. Strong, thoughtful, and flexible zoning and subdivision regulations can build great cities with high quality of life while minimizing cost and conflict.

During 2021, under direction from Metroplan's Board of Directors, staff drafted and illustrated a model Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which combines zoning and subdivision regulations into one "Planning Book" to help cities guide development. Metroplan communities are not required to adopt the UDO, but those that do may find it transformative in their quest for connectivity, safety, resiliency, equity, and an attractive public realm. The examples shown here give highlights of the UDO.



This chart is the first thing you see behind the UDO's front cover. It allows users to quickly find answers to their questions.

#### **70NFS**

Instead of zones like R-1, C-3, etc., the UDO uses zone names that are descriptive of their purpose and nature. For example:

#### **RESIDENTIAL ZONES**

- R-LD: Low-Density Residential
- R-NH: Neighborhood Residential
- R-FX: Flexible Residential
- R-MH: Manufactured Home Residential
- Residential Cluster Development

#### COMMERCIAL/MIXED-USE ZONES

- TC: Walkable Town Center
- NC: Neighborhood Center
- CC: Commercial Corridor

#### **INDUSTRIAL ZONES**

• IND: Industrial

#### ADDITIONAL ZONES

- AG: Agricultural
- CIV: Civic
- OS: Open Space
- PUD: Planned Unit Development

#### FLEXIBLE RESIDENTIAL

This zone provides developers and residents with housing choices and incorporates small-scale businesses like restaurants and small shops as conditional uses. Duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes are allowed by right, but any multi-family developments larger than 5 units must



meet design criteria to ensure they will complement the neighborhood.

#### **NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER**

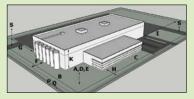
This zone is variable enough to allow both a downtown development style and a more suburban approach, while still adhering to best practices for connectivity and walkability. This zone can be layered behind a Walkable Town Center, stand alone as a small-town



commercial area, or create a neighborhood-serving commercial/mixed-use node located within easy access of homes.

#### **INDUSTRIAL ZONE**

This zone is reserved for intensive industries and those making products from raw materials. Industries located in this zone may produce external impacts which are not compatible with residential, commercial, or light industrial uses. Industrial sites are best suited to large flat



sites with access to rail and interstate or major highways.

#### **USE TABLE**

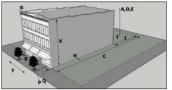
Article 3 (Uses) begins with a table summarizing allowable uses in each zone. For simplicity, the list uses broad categories instead of many individual uses (ex: "Retail and Service" instead of "Grocery Store," "Hair Salon," etc.). Each use is defined in detail in Article 7 (Definitions).

The use table has four possible designations. "Permitted" means the use is allowed by right in that zone. A "Not Permitted" use is not allowed and cannot be waived. "Conditional" uses require a Conditional Use Permit, and can impose certain requirements to make sure the use fits in with the neighborhood. "Permitted with Conditions" is a new approach in Central Arkansas and is described in more detail at right.

#### **DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS TABLE**

The UDO's Development Standards (Article 4) inform how lots can be built upon and address everything from setbacks to sidewalks, building frontages to fences. For example, the Commercial Corridor (CC) zone makes space for larger, big-box store developments with parking spaces, while the Walkable Town Center (TC) zone requires buildings to be built up to the sidewalk and favors on-street parking. A table at the beginning of Article 4 summarizes the development standards for each zone for easy reference and comparison. Each zone also has its own dedicated section in the Development Standards, complete with illustrations.





 $Walkable\,Town\,Center\,photo\,and\,diagram.$ 

#### Section 3.3. - Use Table

*Key:* P = Permitted; PC = Permitted with Special Conditions; C = Conditional; [-] = Not Permitted

	AG Agricultural	R-LD Low-Density Residential	R-NH Neighborl Residen
Commercial Uses			
Animal Day Care/Kennel			
Automobile Repair/Service		*	-
Bar, Tavern, and Night Club			-
Bank/Credit Union			
Business/Professional Association;	9	353	35.7
Club/Lodge; Social Organization	Р	Р	Р
Campground (RV or Tent)/Cabin R€	С		-
Cemetery	P	С	С
Church/Place of Worship	Р	Р	Р
Day Care Center, Child/Adult			
Farmers' Market/Flea Market	-		
Fitness/Recreation Center; Spa	-	(*)	
Food Truck Park		0.00	-
Funeral Home			-
Gas Station			
Hotel/Motel			
Ice Cream Truck	PC	PC	PC
Medical Facility (outpatient)			,
Microbrewery, Microdistillery, andy	-		-/

In some zones, uses must meet pre-defined requirements to ensure they fit into a zone's character. These uses are designated as "Permitted with Conditions" (PC). This approach creates predictability for business owners and provides concrete guidance to Planning Commissioners.

For example, food trucks and similar "Mobile Vendors" are Permitted

with Conditions in many zones, but must meet public health and safety requirements.

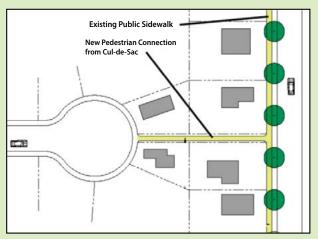


#### CONNECTIVITY

People benefit when neighborhoods are better connected. Easy access to neighboring streets, shopping centers, and public spaces creates a stronger social and economic fabric that is more resilient to challenges. You know a great community when you see one, but knowing how to actually require connectivity can be tricky. The UDO's Subdivision Standards (Article 5) provide measurable methods to implement an often vague concept, such as:

- Minimum number of access routes in and out of developments
- · Block length and perimeter limits
- Mid-block passages
- Minimum Connectivity Index

#### **Providing Multi-modal Connections from a Cul-de-Sac**



Connecting cul-de-sac heads with the greater sidewalk/trail network increases pedestrian connectivity. Source: Fayetteville NC UDO.

## Metroplan Funded Projects

On May 25, 2021 a groundbreaking was held for the long-awaited Mayflower Railroad Overpass. This nearly \$35 million project demonstrates what can be accomplished when multiple agencies work together to fund a larger project with ARDOT, Faulkner County, Mayflower and Metroplan all contributing financially.

This project will improve safety by providing a bridge over the railroad that can be used by emergency vehicles and residents. It will also be a catalyst for additional development along the newly aligned segment of Highway 89. The overpass is scheduled to be completed in Spring 2023.

#### MAYFLOWER RAILROAD OVERPASS

The overpass is a long awaited, much needed, and worthwhile project. The safety measures it will provide, by eliminating the before and after school traffic congestion, is phenomenal. It will also allow an area to be opened up for potential economic development, but most importantly it could mean the difference between life and death in emergency situations where seconds count. I want to express my deepest gratitude to ARDOT, Faulkner County, and Metroplan for their assistance in helping to make the overpass become a reality.

Mayor Randy Holland, City of Mayflower



L-R Metroplan Executive Director Tab Townsell; Arkansas State Highway Commissioner Marie Holder; U.S. Congressman French Hill; Faulkner County Judge Jim Baker; Mayflower Mayor Randy Holland; ARDOT Director Lorie Tudor; Arkansas State Senator Mark Johnson; Arkansas State Representative David Ray; State Representative Spencer Hawks; Metroplan Executive Director (retired) Jim Mckenzie; Justice of the Peace Sam Strain; Arkansas State Senator Jason Rapert.

The City of Bryant opened a new roundabout at the intersection of Bryant Parkway, Hilldale, and Hilltop Roads. This new roundabout improves access to the Parkway Elementary School, is safer than the previous stop intersection, and provides a direct

connection to the I-30 Interchange with Bryant Parkway. It is an example of the new funding structure for Metroplan STBG projects that emphasizes cost-effective intersection projects.

#### **BRYANT ROUNDABOUT**



Bryant's new roundabout connecting Bryant Parkway, Hilldale and Hilltop Roads. Photo credit: City of Bryant.

Three of Metroplan's Jump Start projects were nearing completion at the end of 2021. These projects focus on multi-modal improvements and connecting land use and transportation.

#### **LEVY JUMP START**



Brick pavers are used to identify and separate parallel parking from the travel lanes in Levy.

#### MARKHAM STREET JUMP START



The Markham Street Jump Start project in Conway incorporates cycle tracks, sidewalks, bioswales, and lighting into the street connection from Hendrix College to downtown Conway. Photo credit: City of Conway.

#### 12TH STREET JUMP START



New sidewalks, green buffer, and curbs along Pike and Cedar now connect and enhance aesthetics from 12<sup>th</sup> Street to I-630 and the UAMS complex.

#### ADAPTIVE SIGNAL CONTROL TECHNOLOGY CORRIDORS

After a long wait, three Adaptive Signal Control Technology projects were completed in 2021. This technology allows traffic signals along University Avenue (Little Rock), Maumelle Boulevard (North Little Rock and Maumelle), and Dave Ward Drive (Conway) to adjust traffic signal timing based on actual travel demand, resulting in less delay and moving traffic more quickly and smoothly.



Traffic signals on University Avenue use new technology to move traffic efficiently.

## STBG Recipients

The Surface Transportation Block Grant Program and Highway Improvement Program are federal-aid transportation programs, administered by the Federal Highway Administration, that provide funding for transportation improvements. Metroplan awards funding to qualifying projects based on applications from member jurisdictions and a rigorous review process. The 14 listed below were awarded during this current program cycle.

The list reflects the Metroplan Board's commitment to investments in the Central Arkansas Regional Greenways system. The projects also address several safety and congestion issues at intersections, as well as new Super Shelters for several Rock Region METRO bus stops.

#### 2021 STBG Program

Local Sponsor	Project	Federal Funds*	Phase
Pulaski County	Southwest Trail	\$3,000,000	Construction
Saline County	Southwest Trail	\$1,200,000	Construction
North Little Rock	Pike Avenue	\$3,000,000	PE and Construction
Bryant	Bryant Parkway	\$3,000,000	Construction
Benton	Southwest Trail	\$1,040,000	Construction
Sherwood	Gap Creek Signal	\$276,000	PE and Construction
Lonoke	Hwy 31 Overpass Multi-use Path	\$436,000	Construction
Conway	Salem Road Reconstruction	\$750,000	PE and ROW
Sherwood	Powerline Trail	\$750,000	PE and Phase 1 Const
Benton	Congo & Shenandoah Roundabout	\$1,184,000	Construction
Jacksonville	West Main Street Realignment	\$1,158,000	Construction
Little Rock	Jonesboro Children's Trail	\$750,000	PE and Construction
Shannon Hills	Shannon Hills Drive Bridge Replacement	\$200,000	PE
Rock Region METRO	Supershelters	\$256,000	Construction

#### Shock the Rock

In June 2021, Rock Region METRO won a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for five 40-foot battery electric buses (BEBs). With a value of \$4.9 million, this "Shock the Rock" grant will also provide battery-charging infrastructure, and will make Rock Region METRO the first transit agency in Arkansas to operate zero-emission public transit buses.

The buses, made by Proterra, will have a range of 345 miles per day, and will reduce Rock Region METRO's use of fossil fuels. The charging stations can be designed to charge buses on one side and multiple personal vehicles on the other. The new buses will go into service in the winter/spring of 2023.

With 5 new electric buses, and 31 compressed natural gas buses, Rock Region METRO will then have only 10 or fewer



Photo courtesy of Rock Region METRO.

diesel buses in service. With additional purchases, Rock Region METRO plans to phase out its last diesel buses by 2025.

### **Studies**

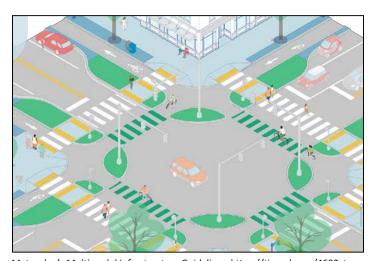
### Metroplan's New Multimodal Infrastructure Guidelines

com/4622ctps.

During 2021, Metroplan completed its Multimodal Infrastructure Guidelines. Originally proposed by Rock Region METRO, this document is a planning resource that helps Metroplan's member communities with designing roadways that are safe for active transportation while still moving traffic safely and smoothly.

The document provides options that help governments and private developers design high-quality streets for a better future, and they are encouraged to incorporate the standards into their own planning documents. The actual choices remain, of course, with each local government.

The guidelines identify seven major corridor types and provide detailed recommendations and tips for developing high-quality streets that prioritize all users. The document gives tips on improving safety and convenience for mobility-impaired persons, pedestrians, transit users, and bikes, and for managing interfaces to transit and vehicles via curbside management.



Metroplan's *Multimodal Infrastructure Guidelines*: https://tinyurl.com/4622ctps
If you have questions about items like transit access, pedestrian buffers, landscaping, raised crosswalks, EV charging, food trucks, and much more, give the guidelines a look at https://tinyurl.

### South Loop Study

During 2021, the Port of Little Rock requested Metroplan's help taking a new look at South Loop, a proposed road connection across southern Pulaski County. Today's project is looking at the eastern segment of the original South Loop proposal, connecting I-440 at the Little Rock Port with I-530 to the south and west. The new roadway might provide a rail-grade separation in the Port that would improve safety and convenience.

At the same time, having an entrance to the Little Rock Port from I-530 would provide an alternative route of access to the Port and assist with developing an industrial Super Site. The South Loop Study should begin in 2022.



### Studies, continued

### **East-West Connector Study**

The East-West Northern Pulaski Connector Study was jointly funded by Metroplan and ARDOT to evaluate potential routes to improve arterial connectivity between Interstate 40 and Highway 67/167 through northern Pulaski County. The lack of east-west routes in this area hinders mobility and causes higher freeway congestion on Highway 67/167 and Interstate 40, as well as increased collisions on alternative routes.

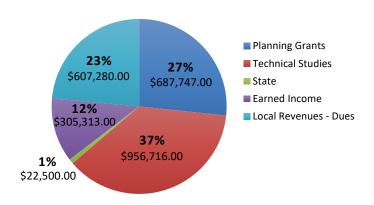
The study identified five arterial alternatives which could help improve mobility, reduce congestion on freeways, improve roadway safety, and help further additional goals of the Arkansas Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Preliminary cost estimates were made for each alternative, with evaluations on a variety of quantitative and qualitative criteria. The study recommends a more detailed feasibility analysis be conducted to further evaluate the identified routes. The four primary and one secondary alternative (E) which were evaluated in the study are shown on the map at right.



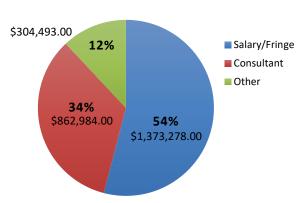
The map above shows possible alignments for the proposed East-West Connector, with separate letters for multiple alternatives.

# Metroplan 2021 Revenue and Expenditures

## REVENUE



## **EXPENSES**



Total Revenue \$2,579,556.00

Total Expenses \$2,540,755.00

Revenue over Expenses \$38,801.00

## 2021 Metroplan Board of Directors

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