

CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

July, 2009

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[RPC Joint Finance & Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)

July 8, 2009

RPC of Greater Birmingham
9:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

July 8, 2009

RPC of Greater Birmingham
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[APCA Steering Committee Meeting](#)

July 9, 2009

RPC of Greater Birmingham
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPC Board of Directors Meeting](#)

July 15, 2009

10:30am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)

July 15, 2009

RPC of Greater Birmingham
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Technical Committee Meeting](#)

July 22, 2009

RPC of Greater Birmingham
10:00am, 1st Floor Conf.

Letter from the Executive Director

Welcome to our July edition of Connections. Summer is less than two weeks old and we have already had three ozone alert days! It is now more important than ever to consider carpooling and vanpooling. Even though gas prices are low, these commuting options yield dividends not only in the wallet but also with air quality.



Also, this month the Regional Planning Commission was pleased to unveil our new visualization of the In-Town Transit Partnership Bus Rapid Transit. The video can be found on the RPC website. This project requires a long-range commitment, but the project can potentially be one of the most beneficial in our region for both stimulating economic development in downtown Birmingham and air quality in the area.

Last, but certainly not least this month we welcome Mike Kazorowski to our staff. He is a registered Professional Engineer and has an extensive background in managing Transportation Improvement Plans. Mike was previously employed by the Utah Department of Transportation and we extend him a warm welcome as we move toward a continually busy year.

Charles Ball

RPC Unveils New In-Town Transit Partnership Video



The RPC used the June Operation New Birmingham Breakfast Briefing for the unveiling of the new In-Town Transit Partnership video. RPC Executive Director Charles Ball

presented the video to the group of business and civic leaders.

Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Subcommittee Meeting](#)

July 23, 2009

RPC of Greater Birmingham
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

The video highlights a proposed transit system running down 18th street and connecting the Financial District with UAB and Five Points South. The system would incorporate Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), which would provide the same service as rail transit, but at a lower cost. BRT offers the flexibility of bus systems in that vehicles can run in mixed traffic as well as in their own special transit-only lanes. BRT vehicles would have designated stops along the route that would include automated next-bus information, maps and schedules.

The video also highlights the proposal of neighborhood connector routes that would provide access between the in-town transit route and outer lying communities. The proposal includes the 12 in-town transit buses, 20 neighborhood connector buses. The cost of the transit system is estimated at \$65 million with an additional \$6.5 million a year in maintenance. The RPC, through the Metropolitan Planning Organization will apply for 100% federal funds through the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) discretionary grant program.

Learn more about the [In-Town Transit Partnership](#) or see the video on the [RPC website](#).

TIP Projects Funded by the MPO



The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) met in June and discussed funding approval for 14 transportation projects within the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The projects will receive the majority of funding through the Recovery Act.

Projects include pavement rehab for I-65 in Hoover and I-59 near Alabama Adventure, a corridor study for elevating US-280, and funding for operations and administration of ClasTran. The Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority will also receive funds for new buses and paratransit vehicles.

For more information on the TIP, visit the [MPO website](#).

Legislators attend Transportation Citizens Committee

State Representatives Rod Scott (D), Patricia Todd (D) and Cam Ward (R) attended the June meeting of the Transportation Citizens Committee and discussed several transportation programs and initiatives. The representative touched on public and alternative transit issues, funding and transportation commissions. The meeting provided the citizens with an opportunity to inform the legislators of their needs and concerns. For more information on the Transportation Citizens Committee, visit the [MPO website](#).

Transportation Planner Joins RPC



The RPC welcomed a new transportation planner at the end of June. Mike "Kaz" Kazorowski joins the RPC from the Utah Department of Transportation where he coordinated multiple transportation plans during his 11 year tenure.

Kaz is a graduate of Florida A&M with a Civil Engineering degree. During his time in Utah, he coordinated the planning for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, as well as administered the Safe Routes to School Program and the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

His duties with the RPC will include management of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and coordination of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the Surface Transportation Program (STP), and Mobility Matters. Kaz will also be responsible for corridor and alternatives analysis planning under the Federal Transit Administration New Starts Program and Federal Highway Administration programs that integrate land use and transportation issues.

Employee Profile -- Lisa Williamson, Account Coordinator, VPSI



Each month, we look at the profile of an RPC employee. This month's profile is Lisa Williamson, Account Coordinator, VPSI.

Hometown: Birmingham, AL

Education: B.S. Double Major Psych/Sociology

How long have you been with the RPC?: 1 month and 7 days

Give a short overview of your job: I am an account coordinator with the CommuteSmart Vanpool program. My duties are maintaining up-to-date customer files, processing motor vehicle reports, responding to customer requests and processing monthly NTD reports.

What is your favor part of your job?: I work for a great company that provides an invaluable service to the community and environment.

Tell us one thing we don't know about you: One Schaeffer's Crawfish Boil, I was pulled up on the stage with the Neville Brothers during their act and I was given drum sticks and a drum to beat.

Finish this sentence: "Ten years from now, I hope to be...": Working at the same job with twice as many vans on the road!

Meet the Interns

Summer time means hot weather, the 4th of July, beach trips and interns running around the RPC office. This summer, seven interns are assisting the RPC and CAWACO staffs in multiple projects. Here's a look at each intern and the work they are doing this summer.

Rebecca Dobrinski is the Public Involvement/Marketing Intern for the RPC. Rebecca is assisting Cissy Edwards Crowe with preparing for meetings, sorting and organizing the e-mail contact list, and organizing the internal library. Her special projects have included editing, rewriting, and updating the Environmental Justice Report and working with Steve Ostaseski and Richard Amore on the adaptive reuse plans for Birmingham's abandoned schools. The school they are working on now is historic Robinson School in East Lake. Originally from Chicago, Rebecca graduated from UAB in 2008 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History with department honors and is simultaneously working on my Master of Arts in Historic Preservation at Savannah College of Art and Design and a second masters at UAB.

Carmen Mays is interning this summer for planners Darrell Howard and Marshall Farmer. Her tasks include Intelligent Transportation Systems research and assessment, GIS Index and Parcel Reorganizing, and assisting with In-town Transit Partnership promotion. Carmen is a Birmingham

native who graduated with a BA in Foreign Language and International Trade from UAH in 2006 and is currently pursuing an MPA focusing on Public Policy and Management. Her future goals include writing International Trade and Transportation Policy that is complementary and drives economic development.

Jamael Harris recently completed his internship with the RPC, assisting Steve Ostaseski in planning. Jamael's focus was in identifying retail locations and industrial parks throughout six counties, developing a classification system and point map using ESRI ArcGIS 9.3 of retail locations, as well as developing an MS Access database of all retail locations and leasing agents. Jamael graduated from Alabama A&M with a degree in Civil Engineering Technology and will begin pursuing an MBA at UAB this fall. The California native hopes to one day be a Senior Vice President of Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management (SCM) for a corporation.

Robert Ellis is assisting Tom Maxwell and Darrell Howard in planning this summer. Robert is currently pursuing a Civil Engineering degree with a Certificate in Urban and Regional Planning at Georgia Tech. The Sylacauga native's main project for the summer is creating a Bicycle Suitability Map for Jefferson and Shelby Counties. This map displays on-road bicycle networks and evaluates their quality from the perspective of a cyclist. The analysis takes in data, such as Traffic Counts, Posted Speed Limit, and Percent Truck Traffic. After graduating from Georgia Tech, Robert would like to become a transportation planner, with a focus in transit performance, sustainability, and engineering.

Lacey Genard is spending her summer as an intern for CAWACO assisting Francesca Gross, coordinator of the Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership. This is Lacey's second stint as an intern with CAWACO. Lacey and the other interns conduct weekly water testing at seven sites along Black Creek, which is a tributary of Five Mile Creek. Other field work during this internship includes fish sampling, searching for water quality issues such as sediment pollution in the Five Mile Creek watershed, creating trails with a GPS, and hiking through the woods throughout Jefferson County in search of historical coke ovens. Lacey has been working on a coke ovens booklet for Jefferson County that explores the history of coke ovens and the coal industry in the area. After graduating from Birmingham-Southern with a Bachelor's degree in Urban Environmental Studies, Lacey plans to attend an environmental graduate program with a concentration in biology.

Kelly Burns is also assisting CAWACO this summer as an intern. Kelly is a graduate of Samford University, where she received a degree in Biology with University Honors in May 2009. The Knoxville, TN native monitors water quality in the Five Mile Creek watershed, focusing specifically on Black Creek. She also works with the other two CAWACO interns to seine fish in various creeks, and locate and photograph coke ovens scattered across Jefferson County. Kelly enjoys environmental field work in Birmingham, and hopes to continue working in the area until she pursues a graduate education in botany next year.

Patrick Welch rounds out the CAWACO interns. Patrick will be a sophomore at Birmingham-Southern College in the fall, majoring in Urban Environmental Studies with a focus on policy. His main project this summer is putting together two interactive maps for the Five Mile website, one with historical points of interest and the other with trails and parks within the watershed. After finishing his undergraduate degree, Patrick would like to work with environmental policy and possibly attend law school.

CommuteSmart Update

Staying ahead of rising gas prices

Gas prices have risen for more than 50 straight days in a row, and there's no end in sight. The good news is that you can cut your commuting costs in half by carpooling. Want to eliminate commuting costs altogether? Try walking, biking or teleworking.

CommuteSmart will even pay you to try one of these commute alternatives. GetGreen pays commuters \$2 per day, up to \$120, to trying something besides driving alone. And Commuter Club rewards clean commuters with \$25 gift cards each quarter.

So not only will you not have to worry about the increasing price of gas, but you might even make a few bucks. Don't wait until we're paying \$4 per gallon again. Check out CommuteSmart.org today.

New interactive vanpool page

CommuteSmart is making it easier than ever to find the best vanpool for you and get started without any hassle. Click on the "Vanpool" button on the right side of our homepage for details.

Economic Development and Grants

Microlending program

RPC is pleased to present the launch of its microlending program! In order to fill the needs of our region's small businesses, RPC has established a small lending program geared towards filling funding needs of less than \$35,000. Eligible uses are working capital and the acquisition of materials, supplies, furniture, fixtures, or equipment. Maximum repayment term is six (6) years. Rates vary depending on loan size and applicant eligibility. *For more information, please email Yvonne Murray at ymurray@rpcgb.org.*

SBA has new recovery lending program

If your small business is stressed meeting expenses during these economic times, the U.S. Small Business Administration has a new loan program designed just for you. SBA's America's Recovery Capital Loan Program can provide up to \$35,000 in short-term relief for viable small businesses facing immediate financial hardship to help ride out the current uncertain economic times and return to profitability. Each small business is limited to one ARC loan. *For more information, please visit <http://www.sba.gov/recovery/arcloanprogram/index.html> or contact your local SBA representative at (205)290-7101.*

New Revolving Loan Fund recipient

RPC has recently made a loan from its Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to United Textiles of Bessemer for the acquisition of historic structure in the downtown district of Bessemer. United Textiles is a retail textile and home furnishing business that draws upon a customer base throughout the RPC region and generates annual sales of more than \$2 million. The company plans on creating four (4) new jobs over the next two years. *For more information on this, or any other RLF recipients, please contact Yvonne Murray.*

Blount County economic development

RPC would like to welcome Mrs. Cynthia Wingo as the new Executive Director of the Blount County Economic Development Alliance. Mrs. Wingo is the former economic development director of Bell-South and has a strong business and real estate background. Welcome, Cynthia, and we look forward to working with you!

UA's CBER to represent mid-year update

The University of Alabama's Center for Business and Economic Research will present its mid-year update on July 22, 2009 from 10:00am to 1:30pm at the Cahaba Grand Conference Center in Birmingham, Alabama. *For more information please contact CBER at (205)348-2944 or*

uacber@cba.ua.edu.

If you plan on applying for grants, register for Grants.gov today!

Grants.gov provides information on over 1,000 grants and more than \$500 billion in funding. This web site provides applicants and providers with a medium for transferring information through detailed grant postings and provision of electronic application submission. Additionally, registration for Grants.gov requires registration with Central Contractor Registration (CCR), providing an avenue for transfer of funds post-award. *For additional information, please visit Grants.gov. For any further questions, please contact Yvonne Murray at 205-264-8428 or ymurray@rpcgb.org*

Emergency Shelter Grants

Applications for Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) are now available! *For more information, visit*

Tony Hawk Foundation

This summer, the Tony Hawk Foundation will be accepting applications for funding assistance of up to \$25,000 for the construction of public skateparks. The deadline for applications is October 1, 2009. *For additional information, please visit www.tonyhawkfoundation.org/grant_application.asp*

For more information on any of the above grants, please contact Yvonne Murray at (205)264-8428 or ymurray@rpcgb.org.

SmartCode Corner

When considering implementation of the SmartCode, communities must decide which format they wish to pursue. Generally, they decide between one of three formats. A municipality will choose to develop an area-wide regulating plan and make the SmartCode mandatory. They may choose to make the SmartCode an optional parallel code and develop a jurisdiction-wide regulating map, not unlike the current zoning maps that are developed for communities around the State, and allow the SmartCode as an option in the mapped areas. Finally, they can adopt the SmartCode as a "floating zone" much like a PUD zone is used in most communities.

Regardless of the format choice, the community must calibrate the SmartCode for their local jurisdiction. The SmartCode is an excellent starting point but it must reflect local interests. Taking it verbatim without calibration is a bigger mistake than not doing it at all.

If you have SmartCode questions please contact Steve Ostaseski or Richard Amore at RPC. Steve may be reached by phone at 205.264.8421 or by email at smo@rpcgb.org. Richard may be reached by phone at 205.264.8447 or by email at ramore@rpcgb.org.

Community Updates

City of Calera updating Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations

The KPS Group conducted a successful meeting on downtown revitalization in Calera on June 16th 2009 to assist on the update of Calera's comprehensive plan and development regulations. The next public meeting will occur on Tuesday July 21st 2009. The update to the city's comprehensive plan and development regulations are funded by the RPC through the Building Communities Grant *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, RPC Senior Planner, ramore@rpcgb.org or Jason Fondren with the KPS Group, jfondren@kpsgroup.com.*

City of Graysville ACE Strategic Planning Session

The Alabama Communities of Excellence conducted a successful strategic planning session at Mountain View Golf Course on Friday June 12th. The Alabama Communities of Excellence program is working with the City of Graysville in creating a strategic plan for the city. *For additional information please contact Sidney Hoover, ACE Captain at shoover@edpa.org or Mayor Brewer with the City of Graysville.*

To see a complete list of community planning projects completed in 2009, visit the Community Planning section of the [RPC website](#).

CAWACO Update

Alabama Clean Water Partnership to receive state award

The Alabama Clean Water Partnership (ACWP) has been chosen to receive the Alabama Wildlife Federation's Water Conservationist of the Year award, to be presented in early August at the AWF's Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards Banquet. Cawaco Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc. is the sponsor of the Black Warrior and Cahaba River Clean Water Partnerships.

The award is a recognition of the results that can be obtained through effective partnerships. The purpose of ACWP is to bring interested citizens, governments, industries, regulatory agencies and others together in a neutral forum. The Partnership works to identify water related issues and challenges and draft a solution for improvement and conservation in a non-regulatory way. RPC and several RPC member governments participate in the Black Warrior and Cahaba River Clean Water Partnerships. Current projects include: Town Creek Stream Restoration (Jasper), Clean Sweep Program (Jefferson), Bankhead Lake Clean Up (Jefferson/Walker), and watershed education through newspaper inserts.

Visit the websites below for more information:

- [Alabama Clean Water Partnership](#)
- [Black Warrior Clean Water Partnership](#)
- [Cahaba River Clean Water Partnership](#)

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Find out more at www.rpcgb.org

