

CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

August, 2009

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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

August 12, 2009
RPC of Greater Birmingham
9:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

August 12, 2009
RPC of Greater Birmingham
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPC Board of Directors Meeting](#)

August 19, 2009
10:30am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)

August 19, 2009
RPC of Greater Birmingham
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Technical Committee Meeting](#)

August 26, 2009
RPC of Greater Birmingham
10:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Subcommittee Meeting](#)

August 27, 2009
RPC of Greater Birmingham
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

Letter from the Executive Director

During this time of year, we sometimes get the question, "What do I get for my RPC membership dues?" This is an excellent question that I would like to take this opportunity to address.



First, let me begin by reiterating that the RPC is a state-created entity comprised of member governments throughout the six-county region. The twelve regional councils were created namely to foster coordination and cooperation between governments within their regions and to facilitate the development of Alabama's portion of the interstate system. Our transportation coordination role was further solidified when the federally-mandated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) became housed at the RPC. The MPO process is the RPC's major program. Through it, we oversee and coordinate nearly \$77 million in transportation spending for the Birmingham Region. Dues are used to support these activities.

In addition to the MPO, the RPC is responsible for ensuring that the region maintains its designation as a Local Development District (LDD) by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) which ensures that the region remains eligible for ARC funding. The same is true for the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and its Economic Development District (EDD) designation. Each year, the RPC staff updates the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Local economic development projects must be included in the CEDS to be eligible for EDA funding. Dues are also used to support these activities.

The RPC operates numerous other transportation planning and economic development related programs such as our Building Communities Grants, Air Quality, Rideshare, and Revolving Loan Fund programs which are specifically geared to improving the quality of life for the citizens of our region.

And lastly, the RPC membership dues are used to leverage nearly \$10 million in federal and state funding. These funds are almost entirely spent within the region through normal operations and contracting of third-parties to complete large projects such as planning for the In-Town Transit Partnership.

To that end, even though the economic climate has affected us all, I hope that you will continue to view the Regional Planning Commission as a valued partner in your efforts to make your communities the best they can be.

Charles Ball

RPC Prepares for In-Town Transit Partnership Grant



The RPC has hired a consultant to prepare its grant application for the In-Town Transit Partnership (ITP). Christie Grier, a consultant with AECOM, will write the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) application which must be submitted by September 15th.

The grant application must show that the project will provide short-term and long-term economic development benefits, as well as job creation. Long-term economic benefits include:

- **State of Good Repair** -- improving the condition of existing transportation facilities and systems, with particular emphasis on projects that minimize life cycle costs.
- **Economic Competitiveness** -- contributing to the economic competitiveness over the long-term.
- **Livability** -- improving the quality of living and working environments and the experiences of people in this community.
- **Sustainability** -- improving energy efficiency, reducing dependence on oil, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and benefiting the environment.
- **Safety** -- improving the safety of transportation facilities and systems.

The grant would cover the cost of the transit system, estimated at \$65 million. Job creation will occur as a result of the ITP and the system will provide better connections to existing jobs. The grant application must also show the environmental benefits of the project, such as improved air quality. Notification of grant approval will occur in January, 2010 and the ITP must be completed by 2012. Businesses and organizations interested in supporting the grant for the ITP can submit a resolution of support. A sample letter of resolution can be found on the [RPC website](#) and submitted to the RPC office at 1731 First Avenue North, Suite 200, Birmingham, AL 35203, Attn. Darrell Howard.

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

Employee Profile -- Tom Maxwell, Senior Environmental Planner, RPC



Each month, we look at the profile of an RPC employee. This month's profile is Tom Maxwell, Senior Environmental Planner, RPC.

Hometown: Milledgeville, GA

Education: 1994 University of Alabama - Bachelor of Science in Commerce & Business Administration (Concentration: Finance)
2001 Samford University - Master of Science in Environmental Management

How long have you been with the RPC?: Over 7 years

Give a short overview of your job: I handle regional bicycle and pedestrian planning for Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), bicycle and pedestrian safety program management, facilitation and support for various regional bicycle, pedestrian, and greenway project initiatives, coordinate various "smart growth" related agency conferences, workshops, and presentations such as Walkable Communities, Safe Routes to School, Building Communities, etc. I also represent RPC's interests in water resource management, watershed protection, solid waste management, air quality, and public health.

What is your favor part of your job?: I most enjoy working with member government officials, citizens, and leaders in the private sector who are all striving to create a more sustainable future for their communities and our six county region.

Tell us one thing we don't know about you: I was the two-time (1986 - 1987) Boys Division National Water Ski Champion, the Georgia State Water Ski Champion (1986 - 1991), the University of Alabama Water Ski Team - Men's Collegiate National Champions (1990) and inducted into the Georgia Water Ski Hall of Fame (2009).

Finish this sentence: "Ten years from now, I hope to be...": a professional planner working and living in a safe, healthy, clean and economically vibrant region with my wife and two daughters.

Around the RPC in Pictures



The WRATT booth at the Green Building Focus Conference, July 28 & 29 at the BJCC.



Participants enjoying the EXPO at the Green Building Focus Conference.



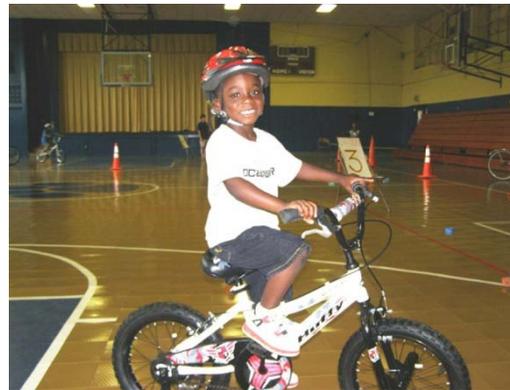
CommuteSmart's Sean Saffle demonstrating his bowling technique as part of the RPC employee bowling team.



RPC's Brian O'Dell going for the strike!



RPC's Tom Maxwell repairs bikes at the Bike Rodeo at Tarrant Elementary.



A student receives a free bike as part of the Bike Rodeo, which was organized by CAWACO and the City of Tarrant.

CommuteSmart Annual Report and Update

2008 CommuteSmart Annual Report

CommuteSmart presented its annual report for 2008 to the MPO in June. Below is a summary of the report:

Through our website and outreach events in 2008 we grew by 5,731 new applicants to the ride-matching database. As of December 2008, there are more than 9,443 commuters signed up in our ride-match database. That's a 114 percent increase over 2007. We also saw a large jump in Vehicle Miles Reductions due to our tracked clean commuters, up nearly 3 million miles to 7,310,492 miles reduced.

Our incentive programs continued to attract new clean commuters in the region. During 2008, the GetGreen program converted 1,172 commuters from a single occupancy vehicle to an approved clean commute mode. This program reduced 352,929 vehicle miles from the region's road system. These numbers were acquired by commuters submitting their monthly mode tracking logs to our office during their 90-day enrollment period. We had 1,269 commuters register for the Commute Club program last year and reduced 2,072,735 vehicle miles during their enrollment in the program.

We also provided 25 Emergency Ride Home (ERH) trips home to our clean commuters. The two most common occurrences were due to sick children and personal illness.

Last year we tracked 41,581 web hits to www.CommuteSmart.org. We have continued to improve the content with the addition of video clips from our media coverage, online mode tracking, a new Park & Ride page, our Green Living information page and a link to our new [Facebook page](#).

Tracked Publicity for the program has been positive for CommuteSmart, the region, and its programs and services. We had 119 media placements from 10/07 to 9/08 in print, broadcast and on the web. Our placements reached a total audience of 50.1 million people and an Advertising Equivalency Value of \$1.2 million.

July CommuteSmart Update

Over 600 Commuter Club members received \$25 gift cards for logging at least 20 clean commutes during the 2nd Quarter of 2009! So far this year, CommuteSmart incentive program members have reported a reduction of over 1.8 million miles from the area roadways by sharing a ride!

Summer is a great time to start sharing the ride to save money. The average commuter in our area would end up saving over \$1,500.00 annually if they started carpooling. Check out our cost calculator at: <http://www.commutersmart.org/birmingham/calculator.html> to see how much you could be saving if you started carpooling or vanpooling to work!

CommuteSmart continued outreach efforts by rewarded 76 carpoolers at a morning Try-It-Day for Alabama Power employees in July. [Contact us](#) to learn how you and your employer can get involved.

We also want to thank the nearly 1,400 commuters that responded to our online survey! We received valuable information about better ways to get our message out, and five randomly selected participants were sent \$25 Gas Cards for participating!

WRATT Foundation Announces Partnership with ENERGY STAR

The Waste Reduction and Technology Transfer (WRATT) Foundation has announced a fundamental commitment to protect the environment by becoming an ENERGY STAR Partner. WRATT's voluntary partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ENERGY STAR means it will be working toward helping clients improve the energy efficiency and performance of their facilities. WRATT believes that an organization-wide energy management approach will help clients enhance their financial health and aid in preserving the environment for future generations.

"The WRATT Foundation is very proud to become an ENERGY STAR Partner and working to promote energy efficiency and helping educate the public on saving money as well as protecting the environment," says Danny Patterson, President.

In partnership with ENERGY STAR, WRATT will help clients to:

- Measure and track the energy performance of their facilities at all locations.
- Set a goal to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings by 10% or more, in support of the ENERGY STAR Challenge.
- Encourage our staff and community to learn about the benefits of energy efficiency and to implement appropriate energy efficiency measures.

- Encourage municipalities, companies, and other organizations with whom WRATT works to join ENERGY STAR and take the ENERGY STAR Challenge.

WRATT is a partner with the Alabama Partners for Clean Air (APCA) which is working to implement voluntary strategies that improve air quality in Jefferson and Shelby counties.

Economic Development and Grants

Local Government Energy Loan Program

The Local Government Energy Loan Program (LGELP) provides low-cost revolving loans for energy efficiency projects undertaken by local governments and K-12 Public School Systems in Alabama. Participation in the program results in improvements that pay for themselves through lower utility bills. The interest rate is zero percent for a term up to ten years.

Through the program, municipal and county governments may borrow up to \$350,000 for energy assessments and energy conservation improvements or retrofits of buildings. Eligible schools may receive up to \$350,000 per campus or \$500,000 per school system. Find out more information by visiting: www.adeca.alabama.gov/C3/Local%20Government%20Energy%20Loan%20P/default.aspx

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.*

Emergency Shelter Grants

Applications for Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG) are now available! *For more information, visit www.adeca.alabama.gov/C1/ESG%20Manual/default.aspx.*

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

The development of SmartCode has been possible because of the contributions of the many professionals working in the field. A number of these folks are located right here in Alabama. One major contributor to the process is Chad Emerson from Montgomery, Alabama. Chad is an Associate Professor of Law at Faulkner University, Thomas Goode Jones School of Law in Montgomery. Professor Emerson's book "The SmartCode Solution to Sprawl (Environmental Law Institute Publishing 2007) is a must read for anyone contemplating a smart code alternative in their community.

Chad has developed a format for the Smart Code suitable for applications in smaller communities. It is known as "The Transect Code" compiled by Chad Emerson, SmartCode Education Partners and it is available from the Center for Applied Transects <http://transect.org/modules.html#smartcodes>.

RPC is utilizing this version of the SmartCode for member governments wishing to pursue a Smart Code alternative in their community.

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

Contract signed for Streetscape Plan for the 16th Street Corridor

In January 2000 the City of Birmingham completed a Neighborhood Improvement Plan for the Fountain Heights Neighborhood. The Fountain Heights Neighborhood and the City of Birmingham seek to further evolve the Neighborhood Improvement Plan by specifically studying the 16th Street Corridor. The Fountain Heights Neighborhood and the City of Birmingham have requested assistance from the RPC through the Building Communities Program to complete a corridor study and a conceptual streetscape plan for the 16th Street Corridor. The study will examine the 16th Street Corridor and offer context sensitive design solutions for various alternatives along the corridor in the Fountain Heights Neighborhood. *Please contact Richard Amore, senior planner with the RPC for further questions about the project at ramore@rpcgb.org.*

City of Calera updating Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations

The KPS Group conducted a successful meeting on plan implementation in Calera on July 21st 2009 to assist on the update of Calera's comprehensive plan and development regulations. The City of Calera's planning commission looks forward to adopting the comprehensive plan on Tuesday August 11th. 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 two day community assessment workshop with the City of Leeds on June 29th and 30th. The Alabama Communities of Excellence program is working with the City of Leeds in creating a strategic plan for the city. The Regional Planning Commission will be working with ACE Team and the City of Leeds as we develop a master plan for the city in the near future. *For additional information please contact Sidney Hoover, ACE Captain at shoover@edpa.org or Mayor Brewer with the City of Graysville.*

City of Jemison to Conclude Zoning Code Meetings

After a lot of time and effort the City of Jemison Planning Commission will conclude months of work on the updated zoning code for the city. There will be a public meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday August 25, 2009 at Jemison High School. The public is invited to attend. *For additional information please contact Steve Ostaseski at smo@rpcgb.org.*

City of Thorsby to Conclude Zoning Code Meetings

Like their neighbors in Jemison, the Town of Thorsby Planning Commission will conclude months of hard work on the updated zoning code for the city. There will be a public meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday August 18, 2009 at the Thorsby Town Hall annex. The public is invited to attend. *For additional information please contact Steve Ostaseski at smo@rpcgb.org.*

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

CAWACO Update

Strategic Plan for Implementation of the Five Mile Creek Trail

The RPC and CAWACO signed a partnership agreement for the purpose of developing a Strategic Plan for Implementation of the Five Mile Creek Trail Location Study. The Partnership realizes that the successful planning, construction, maintenance, and operation of linear facilities of this type are beyond the scope of an individual jurisdiction. Therefore, in cooperation with the Five Mile Creek Partnership, an implementation strategy will be developed, modeled after the PATH Foundation, a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization in Atlanta with a mission to develop a system of interlinking greenway trails for commuting and recreating. *For more information, contact Francesca Gross, Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership Coordinator, at fgross@rpcgb.org.*

Sustaining Alabama Forests within Growth and Development

The Alabama Forestry Commission, in conjunction with the RPC and CAWACO, is hosting a seminar addressing the challenges and constraints facing our land-use practices on Alabama's natural resources. The seminar will be held September 17th, 8:30AM - 3:45PM, at the RPC. More information on registration will be available in the September Connections.

CONNECTIONS is brought to you by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
Find out more at www.rpcgb.org

