

CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

February, 2010

In This Issue

RPCGB Announces RFP On U.S. 11
Alternatives Analysis

RPCGB Annual Meeting a Huge
Success!

Employee Profile

High-Speed Rail Grants For The
Region

HARPO Transportation Public
Participation Meetings Scheduled

Be Counted In The 2010 Census

SmartCode Corner

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[RPCGB Finance Committee Meeting](#)

February 3, 2010
RPCGB Office
9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)

February 10, 2010
RPCGB Office
9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

February 10, 2010
RPCGB Office
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)

February 17, 2010
RPCGB Office
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Board of Directors Meeting](#)

February 17, 2010
RPCGB Office
10:30am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

Letter from the Executive Director

On January 27th, the RPCGB successfully hosted its third annual conference. Our morning training sessions and luncheon were well-attended. We were particularly pleased with the number of newly elected officials in attendance from across the region. Our keynote speaker, the Honorable Mayor Joseph Riley of Charleston more than lived up our expectations. He spoke eloquently and passionately about the social and economic rewards of historic preservation and urban design, or "town-building" as Riley often calls it. Mayor Riley will be a tough act to follow! A video of his presentation will soon be available on our website.



And speaking of town-building, a recent stimulus grant announcement will have a significant impact on urban growth patterns and economic development in a number of states. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has announced grants totaling \$8.5 billion for high-speed passenger rail projects around the country. The biggest beneficiary will be the State of California which will receive \$2.5 billion down-payment for a proposed \$34 billion network that would connect its major cities. Florida will receive \$1.2 billion to connect Tampa and Orlando. However, unnoticed by most was Alabama's award of \$250,000 to study the re-establishment of passenger rail service between Birmingham and Mobile. Alabama will also benefit from the \$250,000 awarded to the State of Georgia to study the potential for high-speed rail between Atlanta and Birmingham. Not an enormous amount of money for us, but a definite step in the right direction.

Efforts to improve transportation options in our region will soon get a boost from two exciting RPCGB initiatives. The RPCGB is working with the planning/engineering firm Reynolds, Smith and Hills Inc. to formulate options for public transportation in the U.S. 280 corridor. The RPCGB is also accepting proposals from firms for a similar project in the U.S. 11/Bessemer Road corridor between Downtown Birmingham and Downtown Bessemer. Transit options such as bus rapid transit, commuter rail and light-rail service will be considered. In addition, the project will look at ways to exploit the enormous redevelopment potential of the seven cities and numerous neighborhoods

[Transportation Technical Committee Meeting](#)

February 24, 2010
RPCGB Office
10:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Subcommittee Meeting](#)

February 25, 2010
RPCGB Office
1:30pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

For meeting information, including postings of any meeting notices and cancellations please visit the [RPCGB website](#).

within the corridor. Proposals are due by March 1st.



RPCGB Announces RFP On U.S. 11 Alternatives Analysis

The RPCGB has announced the release of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the U.S. 11 Southwest Corridor Transit Alternatives Analysis. The RPCGB made the announcement on behalf of the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and in cooperation with the Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority (BJCTA). Proposals must be submitted to the RPCGB by March 1, 2010.

The U.S. 11 Southwest corridor was once a thriving retail, industrial, and residential corridor that has seen significant decline over the past 20 years. The U.S. 11 Southwest Corridor Transit Alternatives Analysis will identify options for land development/redevelopment centered on public transportation that could serve as revitalization tools to attract new housing and businesses to the corridor and improve existing and future travel in the area.

The study is intended to provide the RPCGB, Jefferson County, the Cities of Bessemer, Birmingham, Brighton, Fairfield, Hueytown, Midfield, and Lipscomb with agreed-upon public transportation alternatives that would include alternatives supporting recommendations for multi-modal travel, including a complete street approach and access management. In addition to public transportation alternatives, the study will examine land development/redevelopment scenarios along the corridor that support potential alternatives for transportation improvements, and influence the character of the transportation system as a whole.

Companies interested in submitting a proposal may download a full copy of the RFP located on the [MPO website](#).

RPCGB Annual Meeting a Huge Success!

Representatives from member governments throughout the six-county region met on January 27th at the The Club in Birmingham for the 2010 RPCGB Annual Meeting. The meeting was highlighted by four training sessions that looked at Complete Street Networks, a presentation on the Shelby County comprehensive plan, form based code zoning and grant writing. The keynote speaker for the meeting was Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. of Charleston, SC.

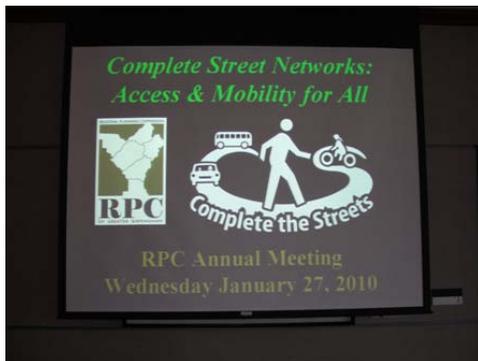
Mayor Riley gave an uplifting speech that focused on positive improvements made in the city of Charleston and the impact they have on the lives on its citizens. Meeting attendees were treated to many "before and after" images of buildings and parks in downtown Charleston, accompanied by many accounts of how the changes had benefited the area as a whole.

The meeting was also an opportunity to unveil the new RPCGB promotional video, "*Who is the RPCGB?*". The four minute video highlights the programs and initiatives of the RPCGB and is available for viewing on the homepage of the [RPCGB website](#).

Also at the meeting, the following individuals were elected to a two-year term on the RPCGB Board of Directors:

Mayor William Bell, City of Birmingham
Commissioner Bobby Humphries, Jefferson County
Commissioner Jim Carns, Jefferson County
Commissioner Robbie Hayes, Shelby County
Commissioner Stan Batemon, St. Clair County
Commissioner David Standridge, Blount County
Mr. Tim Westhoven, City of Hoover
Mr. Chester Jolly, City of Warrior
Mr. Ray Hamilton, Town of Vincent
Mayor Theoangelo Perkins, Town of Harpersville
Mayor Gary Richardson, City of Midfield
Mayor Doug Brewer, City of Graysville
Ms. Vanessa Hendricks, Chilton County

Highlights from the RPCGB Annual Meeting





Employee Profile -- Richard Amore, Senior Planner, RPCGB



Each month, we look at the profile of an RPCGB employee. This month's profile is Richard Amore, Senior Planner, RPCGB.

Hometown: Pensacola, Florida

Education: I have three degrees from the Auburn University - Bachelor of Science in Environmental Design, Master of Landscape Architecture and Master of Community Planning.

How long have you been with the RPCGB?: Almost two years

Give a short overview of your job: I assist local communities and neighborhoods in their planning and design initiatives. Specifically, I work with the local communities in our region developing comprehensive plans, zoning codes and subdivision regulations, neighborhood plans, corridor studies and numerous other planning and urban design activities. Additionally, I foster a sense of social and environmental stewardship in the projects I manage, the communities I engage and amongst my fellow colleagues at the RPCGB.

What is your favorite aspect of your job?: I enjoy working with the communities in our region, exploring with the residents the assets and challenges of their community, and collectively planning a greater vision for their community.

Tell us one thing we don't know about you: During the course of my graduate studies, I wandered through the streets of Old Havana exploring and discovering the vibrant culture and beautiful urban form that the Island of Cuba offers to the world that unfortunately very few Americans have yet to experience.

Finish this sentence: "Ten years from now, I hope to be..." I hope to continue cultivating my passion and conviction to the positive expression of a world that demands our respect, admiration and compassion.

High-Speed Rail Grants For The Region

High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program grants were awarded by the President on January 28, 2010 for two corridors affecting the Birmingham Area. The State of Alabama (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs) was awarded \$200,000 for the Birmingham-Montgomery-Mobile corridor. The Georgia Department of Transportation was awarded \$250,000 for the Atlanta-Birmingham corridor. These grants are for ridership, revenue and feasibility planning for high-speed passenger rail which could position the corridors for future capital grants. An equivalent local match is required. The RPCGB will be working with both grantees.

For further information about high-speed rail grants awarded around the country:

[Federal Railroad Administration website](#)

[Map of High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program](#)

Transportation Planning Update

TIP Modifications Adopted in January

Modifications were adopted in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) in January 2010. The following three new projects are funded with "Other Surface Transportation Program" funding.

- (1) Sidewalks along Ballpark Rd. from Bearden Rd. to US-31 in the City of Pelham.
- (2) Resurface CR-2133 (Deerfoot Parkway) from SR-7 (US-11) to I-59.
- (3) Widen and resurface CR-17 from approximately 85 feet north of CR-270 to 125 feet south of Lacey Ave. - includes bridge replacement at Beaverdam Creek

Crescent Corridor Intermodal Freight Project

On January 13, 2010 the MPO adopted a Resolution of Support to develop the Crescent Corridor Intermodal Freight Program from the Gulf Coast to the Atlantic, with the following conditions:

- (1) That the Interagency Air Group, composed of representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Highway Administration, the Alabama Department of Transportation, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, the Jefferson County Department of Health, and the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority, determine, through the results of a Technical Memorandum concerning the PM2.5 Air Quality Impact Analysis for the proposed Birmingham Regional Intermodal Facility, that emissions from the proposed Birmingham project do not cause or contribute to any new localized violations or increase the frequency or severity of air quality nonattainment.
- (2) That the Traffic Study accessing the proposed Norfolk Southern Railroad yard, for which funds were approved by the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization on October 14, 2009, adequately assesses the traffic impacts of the proposed intermodal facility and provides recommendations to mitigate impacts.
- (3) That the Environmental Document for the proposed project, which includes assessments of air, traffic and other environmental impacts, and is being coordinated by the Alabama Department of Transportation in an announced letter dated July 17, 2009, be approved by the appropriate state and federal agencies.

Newly Elected MPO Officers 2010-2011

The MPO elected new officers to serve a two year term beginning in January 2010. The new officers include:

Chairman: Mayor Doug Brewer, Jefferson County Municipalities - Graysville
Vice Chairman: Mayor Tom Henderson, Jefferson County Municipalities - Center Point
Secretary: Mr. Wayne Sullivan, Unincorporated Jefferson County

RPCGB Assumes Oversight of 5310 Grant

As of October 1, 2009, the RPCGB has assumed responsibilities for administrative oversight of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 grant. This grant provides assistance to ClasTran for transportation services for elderly and disabled individuals in the Jefferson and Shelby County urbanized areas. Local administration of this grant means a better understanding of area needs and more efficiency in service provision. We are excited about the future of ClasTran and a close working relationship. *For more information, contact Laurel Land at lland@rpcgb.org or 205.264.8473.*

Report Summarizes Study on Mobility Matters Project

A report titled "Refined Alternatives for Tier 2 Analysis" was recently completed and summarizes the analysis undertaken to date in the Mobility Matters Project. The study has completed a Tier 1 analysis, developed a Tier 2 evaluation process, and defined alternatives that will be evaluated in this Tier 2 evaluation process. The Tier 1 analysis evaluated 14 different transportation alternatives based on specific goals and objectives approved by the project steering committee. The types of alternatives studied include: high occupancy vehicle lanes, toll lanes, interchange modifications, express bus and other premium transit service. A handful of the 14 alternatives were eliminated in the Tier 1 analysis because they did not meet the goals and objectives of the project. The Tier 2 analysis will evaluate the remaining alternatives in more detail. Future technical memorandums and documents will summarize the findings of the Tier 2 evaluation process. More information, including the full report, can be found on the [I-65/US 31 Mobility Matters website](#).

HARPO Transportation Public Participation Meetings Scheduled

Mark your calendars to attend the Heart of Alabama Rural Planning Organization (HARPO) meetings. These meetings are to provide citizens and elected officials with progress updates on the transportation projects listed in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The RPCGB plans to begin examining future transportation goals and objectives for these rural counties during these meetings, so bring your big ideas!

- (1) **St. Clair County** - February 11, 8:30 a.m., St. Clair Economic Development Council, Jefferson State, 500 College Circle, Pell City
- (2) **Walker County** - February 16, 8:30 a.m., CHS Activity Center, 204 19th Street E., Jasper
- (3) **Chilton County** - February 18, 8:30 a.m., Clanton City Hall, 502 2nd Avenue North, Clanton
- (4) **Blount County** - February 23, 8:30 a.m., Frank Green Building, 415 5th Avenue East, Oneonta

CommuteSmart Update

CommuteSmart Participant Makes a Difference

Kari Nesbitt started taking an alternative commute to work out of convenience. "I live two blocks from where I work, it's so much easier to walk than to drive," said Nesbitt. When she found out

about the CommuteSmart program, she was eager to join and make extra money. But the more Kari focused on the world around her, the more she realized she could make a bigger difference by donating her Get Green check back to the community. Kari has decided to donate her check to the Shelby County Humane Society when she receives it after her first 90 days are over. Nesbitt is just one of the various citizens who are saving money and making a difference by participating in the CommuteSmart program. *To find out how you can save money and make a difference, visit the [CommuteSmart website](#).*

Alabama Partners for Clean Air Update

ACFC To Host Biofuel Workshop

Alabama Partners for Clean Air (APCA) partner, The Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition (ACFC), will host a workshop, "Biofuels...Moving Alabama Forward" on March 17th in Dothan. The workshop will offer insights from industry experts and leaders throughout the biofuels and alternative fuel industry. Hear discussions on timely topics such as: State & National perspectives on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), propane, biodiesel and ethanol; Alabama's current and potential biofuel feedstocks; Marketplace experiences from folks producing, selling and using biofuels and alternative fuels; Importance of fuel quality; potential incentives & financial benefits available; The Facts vs. Myths about alternative fuels and much more. *To register for the workshop, go to the [ACFC website](#).*

Economic Development and Loans

Counties Awarded \$1 Million to Start Loan Fund

Governor Riley recently awarded \$1 million for the start of the Regional Energy Efficiency Revolving Loan Fund for Bibb, Blount, Chilton, St. Clair and Walker Counties. The RPCGB assisted St. Clair County (the primary applicant) in the preparation of the application for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program and will act as the administrative agency for the loan fund. The funds will provide low-interest loans to assist local governments and businesses in implementing energy-saving improvements to facilities. An estimated 10-20 loans will be made from the initial fund capitalization.

Governor Riley awarded the grant as part of \$9.6 million in grants to be awarded under the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program. The program helps governments and nonprofit groups improve the energy efficiency of buildings and vehicles, reduce fossil fuel emissions and create or retain jobs. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is administering the award from funds made available to the state by the U.S. Department of Energy as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

For the full press release, please visit the [RPCGB website](#). For additional information, please contact Yvonne Murray at YMurray@rpcgb.org.

CEDS Meeting Scheduled for March

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) Committee will meet on Tuesday, March 9, 2010, at 10am in the 1st Floor Conference Room of the RPCGB offices. The meeting topic will be "Rail and Economic Development". *For questions, please contact Yvonne Murray at YMurray@rpcgb.org.*

RPCGB Provides Another Receivables Loan

The RPCGB recently made a receivables loan to BioGX Biological Genetics. BioGX is a biotech company located in the Innovation Depot in downtown Birmingham and provides molecular design and development services. For more information on BioGX, please visit their [website](#). *For more*

information on our receivables lending program or our other loan programs, please visit the [RPCGB Economic Development website](#) or contact Yvonne Murray at YMurray@rpcgb.org.

Bessemer Business Incubator Program Seeks Qualified Entrepreneurs

The Bessemer Business Incubation System (BBIS) is actively seeking qualified entrepreneurs who are either interested in or currently involved in their own small business to join the incubator program in Bessemer, Alabama. Tenants in the BBIS incubator qualify for the RPCGB Receivables Lending Program, Microlending Program, and the Revolving Loan Fund.

The BBIS works with businesses involved in the information technology, service, wholesale/distribution and light manufacturing industries and currently has office and production space available for lease. The office spaces range from 120 to 330 square feet and the manufacturing/warehouse space totals 3,600 square feet. Qualified entrepreneurs would also have access to conference rooms, VOiP phone system and high speed Internet services. The incubator also offers access to two small business loan programs.

Business incubation programs, such as the Bessemer Business Incubation System, catalyze the process of starting and growing companies by providing entrepreneurs with the expertise, networks and tools they need to make their ventures successful. Business incubators offer entrepreneurs access to shared services, equipment, building space and hands-on management assistance. The Bessemer incubator has graduated over 26 businesses with many remaining in the Bessemer area.

For more information or to arrange a private tour of the incubator facilities, please contact Mr. Devron A. Veasley at 205.481.2101 or bessemerincubator@yahoo.com

Be Counted In The 2010 Census

The logo for the 2010 United States Census. It features the words "United States" in a small, dark red font at the top. Below that, the word "Census" is written in a large, bold, dark red font. At the bottom, the year "2010" is written in a very large, bold, dark red font.

The 2010 Decennial Census is a mere eight weeks away and the stakes couldn't be higher for local municipalities. The results of the census will determine the amount of federal funding available to local governments for the following decade. Each year the federal government distributes more than \$400 billion to state, local and tribal governments based on census data. These funds support tangible benefits in every community by determining funding allocations for neighborhood improvements, public health, education, transportation and other planning projects. It determines Congressional reapportionment and is used to define legislative districts, city council districts, and school districts. It is often a requirement for grant projects and even economic development projects, site analysis, and business recruitment and retention efforts.

The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) has recently reported that each of the 10 largest federal assistance programs (many of them benefiting the low income, the disabled, and minority populations which are also the segments of the population most likely to be under-counted) in fiscal years 2008 and 2009 relied at least in part on the decennial census and related data - that is data that depends on the decennial census, or statistics derived from the data such as per capita income. For fiscal year 2008, this totaled about \$335 billion, representing 73 percent of total federal assistance. In fiscal year 2009, that amount increased to \$478 billion, representing about 84 percent of total federal assistance. This amount included nearly \$123 billion funded by the Recovery Act and about \$356 billion funded by other means.

It has been estimated that for each citizen not counted in the census, a community will lose out on an average of \$1,269.33 per person per year, or approximately \$10,000 per person for a decade. The 2010 Census begins on April 1st. Get the word out to your fellow neighbors and BE COUNTED!

Community Updates

16th Street Corridor Study and Conceptual Streetscape Plan

The RPCGB is evolving the draft of the 16th Street Study and Conceptual Streetscape Plan for Fountain Heights and will present the draft plan to the residents of Fountain Heights on Thursday, March 4th at 5:30pm in the first floor conference room at the RPCGB. The Fountain Heights Neighborhood Association and the City of Birmingham have requested assistance from the RPCGB through the Building Communities Program to complete this study. *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner with the RPCGB at ramore@rpcgb.org*

City of Leeds Master Plan

The RPCGB is moving forward with the planning process for the City of Leeds Master Plan. The RPCGB met with the several stakeholders in January, including the Leeds Planning Commission, the Leeds Arts Council, downtown merchants and the Leeds Area Chamber of Commerce to gather their input in the planning process. The RPCGB looks forward to kicking off the public involvement meetings in the coming months to gather input from the residents of Leeds. The City of Leeds has requested assistance from the RPCGB through the Building Communities Program to complete the Master Plan for the city. *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner with the RPCGB at ramore@rpcgb.org*

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

SmartCode Corner

Last month we discussed the issue of uncompleted streets in emerging subdivisions, and a departure from accepted procedures was offered for your consideration. This month the discussion centers on bonding of required improvements.

Most subdivision regulations require a "bond" from the developer for any required improvements that have not been installed prior to a request for a final plat approval. Accepted forms of bonds have been cash, certified or cashier's check, certificate of deposit, irrevocable letter of credit or a performance bond made by a surety company authorized to do business in the State of Alabama. Typical bond amounts have been 125% of the estimated cost of the unfinished improvements. Some 6 to 10 years in the future, if the subdivision is "built out" and the developer finishes installing the wearing layer of the roadway, then the bond and any interest accumulated are returned to the developer.

This model is not working well in this economy and is not the model to follow in the reset economy. The RPCGB is currently writing code and suggesting that municipalities secure a check, payable to the municipality, for 150% of the estimated cost of improvements. The municipality should then proceed to purchase a Certificate of Deposit in the city's name. There are stricter and more complicated methods available, but most would strain the resources of a small community.

This bonding style, coupled with revised roadway construction guidelines, should protect your future citizens and your municipal resources.

If you have SmartCode questions, please contact Steve Ostaseski, Richard Amore or Philip Amthor at the RPCGB. Steve may be reached by phone at 205.264.8422 or by email at smo@rpcgb.org. Richard may be reached by phone at 205.264.8447 or by email at ramore@rpcgb.org. Philip may

be reached by phone at 205.264.8421 or by email at pamthor@rpcgb.org

CAWACO Update

Construction Begins on Little Shades Creek Stream Restoration

The first week of February saw the beginning construction of the Little Shades Creek Stream Restoration Project. The project will improve water quality, improve fish habitat, reduce stream bank erosion, and reduce the loss of land along the stream bank. It will also support the enhancement of an existing wetland downstream of the project area which will further improve water quality.

Field Workshops will be offered for [Water Resources Managers, Designers, and Construction Professionals](#). These "hands-on" training workshops will focus on the design and construction techniques that are utilized during the project. The first workshop, Natural Channel Design for Urban Enhancement, is scheduled for February 11th. Field activities for this workshop include channel and floodplain grading; in-stream boulder and log structure placement for flow direction, grade control, and habitat enhancement; stream bank stabilization using root wads, erosion control matting, and vegetation; stormwater treatment and conveyance using bio-swales and bio-retention. Other workshops include: Urban Stream Enhancement, Vegetation Selection and Bioengineering on March 9th; and Stormwater Wetland Plants for Natural Filter Systems at a later date. A field tour of the project will be hosted by the Cahaba Clean Water Partnership February 9th at 2pm. *If you are interested in attending the field tour, send an email to cahabacwp@hotmail.com by February 8th.*

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

