

# CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the  
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

April, 2010

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[RPCGB Finance Committee Meeting](#)

Canceled

[RPCGB Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)

Canceled

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

April 14, 2010

RPCGB Office

1:30 pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Public Involvement Meeting](#)

April 21, 2010

RPCGB Office

Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)

Canceled

[RPCGB Board of Directors Meeting](#)

Canceled

[Transportation Technical Committee Meeting](#)

April 28, 2010

RPCGB Office

## Letter from the Executive Director

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham was recently honored with the "Outstanding Planning Award" from the Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association for the **Northern Beltline Intersection Roadways Plan** for the cities of Hueytown, Graysville and Clay. This planning exercise helped residents, property owners and business owners understand that congested, dysfunctional roads are not inevitable. They learned that



they had the power to shape the function and appearance of their road infrastructure and their communities. We hope to work with additional communities to develop similar plans.

In looking at how the RPCGB helps communities, I'm struck by the question of how did we as a collective community get to where we are with U.S. 280? Some might say that this is the \$64,000 question. I contend that the congestion on Hwy. 280 is the cumulative effect of hundreds or thousands of common but short-sighted decisions made over the past 40 years, by individuals, companies and communities. At the heart of these decisions is the issue of access management along this corridor.

Beginning in the 1970's, we, the collective community, built subdivisions and office parks filled with cul-de-sacs, loop roads and few if any interconnecting streets. In the process, we produced thousands of new homes and office jobs, a shining positive. But, at the same time, we created a road network that prevents traffic from being evenly distributed across neighborhoods and developments. The community lined U.S. 280 with strip shopping centers and a plethora of fast-food establishments, C-Stores and car washes to accommodate the throngs of new residents, workers and automobiles. But in doing so, we allowed countless driveway cuts directly onto the road, thereby forcing patrons to compete with thousands of other drivers trying to get from one establishment in a development to another next door.

Past widening projects have not been sustainable solutions to this problem, only serving to temporarily increase U.S. 280's carrying capacity. Lasting solutions will have to involve changes in the way we build both our road systems and our

10:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Subcommittee Meeting](#)

April 29, 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](#).

communities. Sustainable transportation solutions are precisely what will be explored as part of the new **U.S. 280 Corridor Transit Study** mentioned in this issue of *Connections*. Studies of this magnitude require public involvement to reach a successful solution, and the U.S. 280 Corridor Transit Study is no exception. The RPCGB will need participation from the public to guarantee that the voices of those most affected are heard in the course of finding a solution.



### RPCGB To Do Corridor Transit Study on U.S. 280

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) has announced plans for a **U.S. 280 Corridor Transit Study**. The study is in response to the rapid development of U.S. 280 over the past two decades and the need to identify public transportation alternatives to improve travel along the corridor. The study area includes the entirety of the U.S. 280 corridor in Jefferson and Shelby Counties, beginning at the intersection of I-20/59 in the City of Birmingham and terminating at the Shelby/Talladega County line.

The U.S. 280 Corridor Transit Study is designed to recognize the significance of this corridor to the region's travel and continued growth and development. Key segments of the corridor have been identified as some of the most congested in the Birmingham metropolitan planning area. The U.S. 280 Corridor Transit Study will identify options for land development/redevelopment as well as options to serve existing and future travel markets within the context of the Greater Birmingham area. Reynolds, Smith & Hills (RS&H) will act as the lead consulting firm on the study.

The study will provide the RPCGB, the Jefferson and Shelby County governments, and the respective jurisdictions located along the U.S. 280 corridor with agreed upon public transportation alternatives to improve travel in the corridor. This would include alternatives that augment, support, and complement previous recommendations to improve non-motorized travel, expand roadway capacity, and manage access to U.S. 280. The study should consider and build upon the preliminary recommendations identified in the Birmingham Regional Alternatives Analysis of 2004, the plan that developed the basis of the regional transit system plan.

"The RPCGB will evaluate which transit options, such as rail, bus rapid transit, park-and-ride and premium bus service are feasible to be operated in conjunction with various highway proposals such as the Alabama Department of Transportation elevated/toll facility," said Charles Ball, RPCGB executive director. "Active and early collaboration with community stakeholders is important in order that creative transportation solutions are developed that reflect the goals of the people who live, work and travel the corridor."

In addition to public transportation alternatives, the study will also provide land development/redevelopment scenarios along the U.S. 280 corridor as it changes character. Land use scenarios shall be supportive of the potential alternatives for transportation system improvements, influencing the character and responding to the needs of the transportation system. Additionally, the study will consider expanding roadway capacity in some key locations, making the corridor more bicycle and pedestrian-friendly, as well as improving safety and access. The study, scheduled for completion in June, 2011, will provide the opportunity for local planners and decision-

makers to work together to preserve the unique character of their communities, while improving transportation along the U.S. 280 corridor.

### RPCGB Plan Receives Award at APA Conference



The **Northern Beltline Intersecting Roadways Plan: A Transportation and Land Use Vision** received the Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) 2010 Outstanding Planning Award for a Project/Program/Tool in March. The plan was produced by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) and the award was presented to RPCGB Executive Director, Charles Ball, at a ceremony in Tuscaloosa.

The plan provides the cities of Clay, Graysville and Hueytown with a way to address future land use and transportation impacts by developing a Major Street Plan which identifies not only typical sections for each roadway but also multimodal design components for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit.

This innovative project used a context sensitive approach that includes the views of the community in the design of roadways at the local level. This was done in cooperation with public officials, citizens and the business community by initiating a process of planning for improvements to the local roadways that intersect the future Northern Beltline. The plan is a great resource for communities as they grow.

The information included in the plan can be applied to other interchange areas along the future Northern Beltline as well as interchange areas along interstates throughout the State of Alabama. Graysville and Hueytown have subsequently developed implementing development guidelines such as form based code and a tax increment finance district. More information on the plan can be located on the [RPCGB website](#).

### Public Involvement Meeting

#### Public Involvement Meeting

**Purpose:** To obtain public comments on the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan, Rebalanced FY 2008-2011 Transportation Improvement Program and Air Quality Conformity for Jefferson and Shelby Counties.

**Sponsored by:** Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) on behalf of the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

**Wednesday, April 21, 2010, 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.**

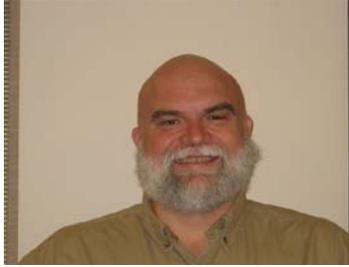
**Open House Format with Presentation at 12:30 p.m.**

**Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham**

**First Floor Conference Room, 1731 First Avenue North- Birmingham, AL**

Find more information on the [MPO website](#).

## Employee Profile -- Marshall Farmer, Senior GIS Analyst, RPCGB



*Each month, we look at the profile of an RPCGB employee. This month's profile is Marshall Farmer, Senior GIS Analyst.*

**Hometown:** Anderson, South Carolina

**Education:** BA History, Graduate Studies in City and Regional Planning.

**How long have you been with the RPCGB?:** 16 years

**Give a short overview of your job:** I work with Geographic Information Systems for the region and for local projects.

**What is your favorite aspect of your job?:** I love everything about maps, and how they can tell stories.

**Tell us one thing we don't know about you:** My wife and I are ballroom dancers.

**Finish this sentence: "Ten years from now, I hope to be..."** Still dancin'

## CommuteSmart Spotlight



Southern Company's Jessica Joyner loves to practice what she preaches. She serves as the CommuteSmart Employee Transportation Coordinator for her company, and she has been carpooling with her Husband for the past few years. Joyner says, "I carpool because it gives my family more time together." Joyner admits that they miss having their own cars but the savings and the extra two hours spent together makes the commute all worth while. Joyner continues to help the CommuteSmart Team develop new and innovative ways to promote our program to the Southern Company Family.

For more information on how you or your company can get involved, check out the [CommuteSmart website](#).

## Economic Development and Loans

### RLF Recapitalization

This month the RPCGB was awarded an additional \$200,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to recapitalize its revolving loan fund. These funds will be used to make loans of a goals size of \$50,000.

### EECBG RLF

With the assistance of the RPCGB staff, St. Clair County was able to secure \$1 million in Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funds for the establishment of a revolving loan fund (RLF) for Bibb, Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker counties. Loans will be made to local government entities and businesses for the retrofit or new construction of energy efficiency and conservation measures.

### Receivables Lending Program

In fall of 2009, the RPCGB established its Receivables Lending Program for local incubator tenants. This program provides quick, low-cost loans of up to \$25,000, to meet immediate receivables needs. The program has been very successful so far with over \$100,000, loaned out and paid back over the course of the past two months. Incubators currently being served are the Innovation Depot and the Bessemer Business Incubation System.

### Save the Date!

The RPCGB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee will host the *Toolbox for Successful Grants* workshop from 8:30 - 12:30 on Tuesday, June 15th. For more information, please contact Yvonne Murray at [YMurray@rpcgb.org](mailto:YMurray@rpcgb.org)

### **Recently Funded Projects in the Region**

- Hueytown: \$91k for energy efficient traffic signals
- Center Point: \$181k for energy upgrades to City Hall, ball park, and welcome center
- Homewood: \$195k for HVAC and light fixture efficiency improvements to library
- Alabama Energy Sector Partnership: \$6 million for green jobs training
- Pelham: \$100k for trail additions at Oak Mountain State Park
- Jemison: \$30k for playground
- Allgood: \$250k CDBG funds for water improvements
- Blount County: \$250k CDBG funds for water improvements
- Jasper: \$250k CDBG funds for senior center
- Regional Library at Warrior: \$85k in various cash contributions; \$550k in in-kind contributions

## **Be Counted In The 2010 Census**

### **US Census Boundary & Annexation Survey (BAS)**

The Census Bureau updates all governmental unit boundaries based on information collected through the annual Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS). As part of the BAS, governmental units are given the opportunity to review either maps or digital files each year to report boundary changes. This work occurs within the January to March timeframe. Cities/towns that didn't turn in any BAS materials have already missed the opportunity to get their boundaries adjusted for the next round of population estimates; however, it is not too late to submit your BAS for inclusion in the 2010 Census. The 2010 BAS will be used to tabulate the 2010 Census results correctly on your current legal boundaries. Incorrect boundaries could result in an undercount which could cost you funding over the next decade. The Census Bureau needs this BAS information no later than May 30th to have a city or town's boundaries correctly represented in the 2010 Census. If you have not done so, please complete your BAS as quickly as possible. For questions or additional information please visit the Census website at <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/bas/bashome.html>. Email can be sent to the Census Bureau at [geo.bas@census.gov](mailto:geo.bas@census.gov) or you can contact Brett Isom with the RPCGB at [bisom@rpcgb.org](mailto:bisom@rpcgb.org).

### **Current 2010 Census Response Rates:**

As of the end of March 2010, the national participation rate for 2010 Census response is 34%. Alabama is at 27% statewide with Lauderdale County leading at 35%. RPCGB's six counties are below:

<b>Blount County</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Chilton County</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Jefferson County</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>St. Clair County</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Shelby County</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Walker County</b>	<b>26%</b>

## HARPO Meetings Scheduled for April

### Heart of Alabama Rural Planning Organization (HARPO) Public Participation Meeting for Transportation Projects

**Purpose:** Review project progress since our last meeting. Discuss and refine our big ideas from the last meeting. Continue to examine future transportation goals and objectives for the county. How could a change in policies begin to shape transportation solutions?

**Sponsored by:** The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham on behalf of the Heart of Alabama Rural Planning Organization (HARPO)

**April 15, 2010, 8:30 a.m., Walker County, CHS Activity Center, 204 19th Street E, Jasper**

**April 20, 2010, 8:30 a.m., St. Clair County, Jefferson State Community College, Room 101, 500 College Circle, Pell City**

**April 22, 2010, 8:30 a.m., Blount County, Frank Green Building, Auditorium, 415 5th Avenue E, Oneonta**

**April 27, 2010, 8:30 a.m., Chilton County, Clanton City Hall, 502 2nd Avenue N, Enter on 6th Street, Clanton**

## Community Updates

### 16th Street Corridor Study and Conceptual Streetscape Plan

The RPCGB presented the draft plan of the 16th Street Corridor Study and Conceptual Streetscape Plan on March 4th to the residents of the Fountain Heights Neighborhood and the City of Birmingham. The residents of Fountain Heights are excited about the Corridor Plan and look forward to implementing the recommendations brought forth in the plan. The final plan will be presented to the Fountain Heights Neighborhood Association for adoption in April. The Fountain Heights Neighborhood Association and the City of Birmingham have requested assistance from the Regional Planning Commission 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](mailto:ramore@rpcgb.org)*

### City of Leeds Master Plan

The RPCGB is currently evolving the Community Assessment section of the City of Leeds Master Plan which includes an overview of the community, the environmental analysis, and existing development, and public infrastructure, demographic and socioeconomic conditions. The RPCGB met with several stakeholders in March, including the planning commission, city staff, and the Leeds Area Chamber of Commerce to gather their input in the planning process. The RPCGB is moving forward with stakeholder involvement during the month of April in guiding the future direction of the Master Plan for the City of Leeds. The RPCGB looks forward to kicking off the public involvement meetings in the coming months once the existing conditions analysis is completed. 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](mailto:ramore@rpcgb.org)*

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

## SmartCode Corner

We continue our conversation of trying to make everyday codes a little smarter. One consideration small or even large communities may consider is something called an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFOs). Most, if not all APFOs seek to achieve concurrency for schools and/or roads. In the case of transportation, concurrency means that transportation facilities must be available to handle the traffic of a proposed development at the municipality's determined level of service standards, the proposed development would not be approved without adequate facilities.

If standards are not in place at the time of development ("concurrent" with the development application), the municipality can disapprove the development. Some codes are written to allow a financial commitment on the part of the developer that the needed improvements will be made within a specified period after the development is approved. The municipality could make these commitments in its Capital Improvement Program, or the desired level of service could be achieved by agreement between the municipality and the developer.

*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](mailto:smo@rpcgb.org). Richard may be reached by phone at 205.264.8447 or by email at [ramore@rpcgb.org](mailto:ramore@rpcgb.org). Philip may be reached by phone at 205.264.8421 or by email at [pamthor@rpcgb.org](mailto:pamthor@rpcgb.org)*

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Find out more at [www.rpcgb.org](http://www.rpcgb.org)

