

# CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the  
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

July 2010

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### [APCA Steering Committee Meeting](#)

July 8, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
1:30 pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

### [RPCGB Finance Committee Meeting](#)

July 14, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

### [RPCGB Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)

July 14, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

### [Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

Canceled

### [RPCGB Board of Directors Meeting](#)

July 21, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
10:30 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

### [Transportation Citizens](#)

## Letter from the Executive Director

In February, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced stimulus grants totaling \$8.5 billion for high-speed passenger rail projects across the country. The biggest winner was the State of California which will receive \$2.5 billion in seed money for its proposed \$34 billion network that will connect its major cities. Florida will receive \$1.2 billion to connect Tampa and Orlando. North Carolina and Virginia will share over \$600 million for high-speed rail upgrades. However, unnoticed by most was the Georgia Department of Transportation's (GDOT) award of \$250,000 to determine the feasibility of high-speed passenger rail service between Birmingham and Atlanta. The total cost of the study is \$500,000.



Soon after this announcement, the RPCGB participated in a conference call with officials from GDOT's rail division. It was agreed that since the proposed study would benefit both states, the two entities would work together to raise the \$250,000 match. With a recent commitment by the Norfolk-Southern Company, the match is in place and I'm pleased to announce that the RPCGB will team up with GDOT and Norfolk Southern to produce this study for intercity high-speed passenger rail. This is an exciting endeavor that we hope will open doors to travelers between Birmingham and Atlanta, provide a boost to economic development in the region and demonstrate Alabama's and Birmingham's commitment to moving forward.

The Georgia Department of Transportation will contract with a transportation planning/engineering firm to (1) recommend rail top speeds and technologies that balance potential ridership and revenues with infrastructure and operating costs; (2) forecast ridership over at least a twenty-five year time horizon; (3) assess whether operating revenues might exceed operating costs and infrastructure maintenance costs; (4) compare this corridor's performance with similar rail corridors in other regions; and (5) determine other quantifiable economic impacts of high-speed rail corridor investments. The analysis will take 12 months beginning in July. This is the first step in a process that will hopefully lead to construction.

Alabama has come very late to this high-stakes competition.

[Committee Meeting](#)

July 21, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Technical Committee Meeting](#)

July 28, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
10:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Subcommittee Meeting](#)

July 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](#).

States like Florida, North Carolina and California began first steps like ours decades ago. They understood the positive impact this technology could have on urban growth patterns and economic development, and they planned accordingly. However, with the help of enlightened public and private partners, we are confident Alabama can eventually close the gap.



## RPCGB To Study Intercity High-Speed Rail



The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) announced in late June a planned feasibility study for intercity high-speed rail between Birmingham and Atlanta. The study is a public/private partnership between the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), RPCGB and Norfolk Southern. The RPCGB will work with GDOT as the lead state partners for the project.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has produced research that indicates that high-speed ground transportation (HSGT) systems, including high-speed rail (HSR), can be competitive alternatives to highway and domestic air travel in high-density travel markets and corridors in the United States. This study will build on the development work performed in the southeast corridor, specifically Washington, DC -- Charlotte, NC -- Atlanta, GA, and further develop high-speed rail opportunities on the federally designated high speed rail system by performing a feasibility assessment from Atlanta, GA to Birmingham, AL.

The train service to be studied for this corridor will have top speeds that are significantly faster than existing Amtrak services around the United States. The service may follow existing rail routes or employ a new straighter right-of-way and would likely have links at the end-point cities to connecting rail and air services.

The \$500,000 study will last 12 months, beginning July 1, 2010 and ending June 30, 2011. Funding for the study will be provided through the project partners and nearly \$8 billion allocated nationally from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in January 2010. The study will examine speed and technology, ridership, operating and maintenance costs, and economic impact.

## MPO Adopts 2035 Regional Transportation Plan

The elected officials of the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) adopted the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan for Jefferson and Shelby Counties in June, setting the stage for implementing a process to inform regional transportation decisions by considering mobility, accessibility, connectivity, economic vitality, the environment, social equity, safety, security and financial constraints.

The RPCGB recognizes the following individuals for their contributions in development of the updated plan:

- Mayor Doug Brewer, Graysville, MPO Chairman
- Mayor Tom Henderson, Center Point, MPO Vice-Chairman
- Wayne Sullivan, Jefferson County, MPO Secretary
- Ouida Fritschi, Homewood, Citizens Committee Chairman
- Doris Powell, Birmingham, Citizens Committee Vice-Chairman
- David Hunke, Shelby County, Technical Committee Chairman
- Greg Dawkins, Birmingham, Technical Committee Vice-Chairman

For more information on the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan, visit the [MPO website](#).

## Employee Profile -- Bill Foisy, Director of Planning, RPCGB



*Each month, we look at the profile of an RPCGB employee. This month's profile is Bill Foisy, Director of Planning.*

**Hometown:** Boston, as in one of those blue states.

**Education:** Business Degree, University of Georgia; Urban and Regional Planning Degree, University of Tennessee.

**How long have you been with the RPCGB?:** A lot longer than anyone else who is currently employed at the RPCGB.

**Give a short overview of your job:** Developing, funding and managing programs and projects that support the planning goals of our member governments.

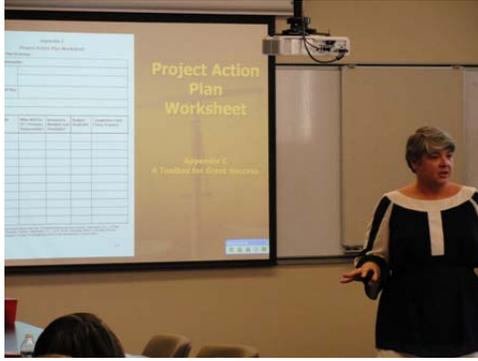
**What is your favorite aspect of your job?:** Delegating stress.

**Tell us one thing we don't know about you:** I am the alpha male in my neighborhood for lawn and landscaping; no weeds allowed.

**Finish this sentence: "Ten years from now, I hope to be..."** I "will be" entertaining guests in our recently purchased log cabin in Red Lodge, Montana; a town where the elevation is higher than the population.

## Photo Highlights at the RPCGB

Photo highlights from a grant writing seminar, the Transportation Citizens Committee meeting and the press conference hosted by the RPCGB for intercity high-speed passenger rail.



## CommuteSmart Spotlight



CommuteSmart would like to highlight one of our Gold Partners, Protective Life Corporation, for the great efforts of their employees who participate in our program. So far this year, Protective employees have taken **2613 alternative commutes**, decreased **Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) by 45,852 miles**, saved **\$11,004.58 in gas costs** and reduced **more than 18 tons of greenhouse gasses**.

Thank you Protective Life Corporation for participating in CommuteSmart! You are making a wonderful contribution to our mission of taking single-occupancy vehicles off the road, improving air quality and decreasing traffic congestion!

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

### **CommuteSmart Releases Annual Report**

CommuteSmart released its annual report earlier this year. Click [here](#) to view the successes of the program highlighted in this report.

### **APCA Launches Redesign of Website**

The Alabama Partners for Clean Air (APCA) launched the redesign of its website in late June. The new look allows users to get a better understanding of the mission of APCA and its individual partners. The front of the site works to promote one of the key initiatives of APCA, free emissions testing. Users can now easily locate a free emissions testing site that is convenient for their location. The website will also act as an information base during air quality alert days. Users will be able to find out the daily air quality level and on alert days, the website will inform users on ways to stay safe. Click [here](#) to view the redesigned APCA website.

### **Transportation Updates**

#### **Mobility Matters Update**

The RPCGB met with the local governments and the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority in the I-65 corridor to solicit input on the transit station locations and routes that will be analyzed in the I-65/US 31 Mobility Matters study. An abundance of support and positive feedback was received as well as some suggestions to improve the alternatives. The RPCGB and its consultant will incorporate the comments into the alternatives and begin analyzing the routes in more detail.



Example of a transit station

### **2010 Alabama/Deep South - Institute of Transportation Engineers Annual Meeting**

RPCGB's Mike Kaczorowski was asked by the Alabama/Deep South Sections of the Institute of Transportation Engineers to give a presentation on the U.S. 280 Corridor Transit Study at their annual meeting in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Mike presented the goals and objectives of the project as

well as the approach to the analysis. In attendance were transportation professionals from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia as well as Alabama. Find out more about the study on the [U.S. 280 Corridor Transit Study website](#).



### **Announcing - Public Transportation Planning Survey is Online!**

Visit the [MPO website](#) to complete the quick and easy survey about your needs and concerns with public transportation. At the end there is an optional section where you can tell your personal experience. We look forward to hearing from you.

### **Railroad Grade Crossing Meeting**

You Are Invited To A

### **Railroad Grade Crossing Meeting**

Hosted by the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and

Heart of Alabama Rural Planning Organization (HARPO)

Representatives from Norfolk Southern Corporation, CSX Corporation and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) come together to discuss grade crossing safety issues. Railroads serve many roles in our lives. They provide transportation solutions as well as concerns. They provide economic opportunities as well as challenges. They define our landscape in many ways. We are having this meeting to begin a dialog between the RPCGB's communities, the MPO and HARPO transportation planning teams, and the rail system. We want to understand both sides of the issues surrounding rail crossings, and to look for opportunities to build upon rail transportation. And as we look to the future, we hope to find ways to enhance the connections between railroads and our communities.

Date: Thursday, August 12, 2010

Time: 1:00 pm

Place: Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham  
First Floor Conference Room  
1731 1st Avenue North, Birmingham, AL 35203

For additional information contact Marshall Framer, [mfarmer@rpcgb.org](mailto:mfarmer@rpcgb.org) or 205-264-8450.

## Course Educates Cyclists on Traffic Skills

On Saturday June 19th, RPCGB's CommuteSmart program and the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) sponsored a free **Traffic Skills 101** training course to area cyclists. Dave Stone of Huntsville taught the course and is certified by the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) which developed the curriculum. The daylong program is designed to give cyclists the confidence they need to ride safely and legally in traffic or on a trail. The course covers bicycle safety checks, fixing a flat, on-bike skills and crash avoidance techniques and includes a student manual. Half of the training is conducted in a classroom setting and the other half involves field training.

In an effort to expand CommuteSmart's offerings, the RPCGB and MPO are currently working with Dave and area cyclists interested in becoming League Certified Instructors (LCIs). According to Tom Maxwell, Senior Environmental Planner, in order for CommuteSmart to offer more frequent LAB course offerings including Traffic Skills 101, we need to build local capacity by having a few local LCIs. Maxwell is currently working with Dave and three local cyclists who are all interested in becoming LCIs and will hopefully be able to support more frequent course offerings. Anyone interested in attending future LAB courses or potentially becoming an LCI should contact Tom Maxwell at [tmaxwell@rpcgb.org](mailto:tmaxwell@rpcgb.org) or 205-264-8445. For more information on the LAB courses and LCI certification visit: [www.bikeleague.org](http://www.bikeleague.org)

## RPCGB Planners Present at Your Town Alabama

Philip Amthor and Marshall Farmer completed the Your Town, Alabama, Designing Our Future workshop held at Camp McDowell near Nauvoo, Alabama June 2 - 4, 2010. This event was the 12-year anniversary of the Your Town Alabama workshops. Amthor and Farmer attended two and one-half days of interactive presentations and worked with a team to plan a hypothetical town. After attending this intensive workshop, many participants have returned to their communities to emphasize the importance of planning for long-term economic viability.

Presentations were made by James Schwartz, Editor-in-Chief - Preservation Magazine; State Geologist Nick Tew on Natural Resources; Mary Shell on Cultural Resources and Historic Preservation; Nisa Miranda on Economic Development; Paul Kennedy on Alabama Landscape; Elizabeth Barbaree-Tasker on Finding Resources. Case studies presented by Jim Jones and Martha Cato of Valley, and Mitzi Gates, Mayor of Linden. Amthor, Farmer, and 53 other civic and community leaders found plenty of technical advice, inspiration, and hands-on training from these experts and a host of others.

Your Town Alabama is a direct response to the uncertain future of Alabama's small town - a future increasingly threatened by large scale changes in our economy, population shifts, the impact of telecommunications and mass merchandising, and changes in land policy. In the face of these forces, communities have found themselves struggling to maintain their vitality and even their sense of identity. Whether the threat is sudden growth or stagnation, planning and design decisions can often make the difference between survival and decay, between healthy prosperity and decline.

The Your Town Alabama workshop format is an intensive engagement of citizen leaders and professionals and focuses on these critical planning and design decisions. The workshop is highly participatory, with lectures, case-study presentations and interactive group problem solving, including working on realistic issues in a hypothetical small town.

The Your Town Alabama workshop offers real hope to real communities. People who care about their community's appearance can begin learning more about how to protect it through these workshops. For more information about Your Town Alabama, please visit the [Your Town Alabama website](#).



Philip Amthor



Marshall Farmer

## Community Updates

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

The RPCGB, the City of Birmingham and the Fountain Heights Neighborhood Association have successfully completed the 16th Street Corridor Study and Conceptual Streetscape Plan. The RPCGB would like to thank the City of Birmingham, the Fountain Heights Neighborhood Association, and the residents of the Fountain Heights Neighborhood for making this plan a success. The final plan can be found at the [RPCGB website](#). 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 continues to move forward on the City of Leeds Master Plan 2010. The RPCGB met with several stakeholders during the month of June and is moving forward with the stakeholder involvement process during the month of July. The RPCGB has assembled a Master Plan advisory committee to assist in developing the vision, goals and objectives for the Leeds Master Plan. 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)*

### **City of Graysville Master Plan Update**

The RPCGB has begun work with the City of Graysville on updating their 2005 Comprehensive Policy Plan. The City of Graysville is participating in the Alabama Communities of Excellence program and seeks to update their master plan in accordance with the Alabama Communities of Excellence program. The RPCGB is currently developing the Community Assessment section of the City of Graysville's Master Plan which includes an overview of the community, the environmental analysis, existing development, public infrastructure, demographic and socioeconomic conditions. The City of Graysville has requested assistance from the RPCGB to complete the update to their city's master plan. *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner with the RPCGB at [ramore@rpcgb.org](mailto:ramore@rpcgb.org)*

## Quarterly Profile Report for the Region

In June, the RPCGB released the 3rd Quarter Profile Report for the region. The report contains selected demographic and economic estimates. Click [here](#) to view the entire report.

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

## Designing Pedestrian Facilities for Accessibility

You Are Invited To

### Designing Pedestrian Facilities for Accessibility

Hosted by the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and  
the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB)

Representatives from the Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD) and the Federal Highway Administration (Alabama Division Office) will conduct a full day interactive workshop providing an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and associated policies, rules and design guidelines for street crossings, sidewalks and shared use trails.

Date: Thursday, July 22, 2010

Time: 8:30 am - 4:00 pm

Place: Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham  
First Floor Conference Room  
1731 1st Avenue North, Birmingham, AL 35203

This free workshop includes lunch. Seating is limited. Registration will be handled on a first come first served basis. *Anyone interested in attending should contact Cissy Edwards, [mpo@rpcgb.org](mailto:mpo@rpcgb.org) or 205-264-8402 and advise her of any special needs. For general questions regarding the workshop contact Tom Maxwell, [tmaxwell@rpcgb.org](mailto:tmaxwell@rpcgb.org) or 205-264-8445.*

## SmartCode Corner

Where is the starting point in the implementation of the SmartCode? The first step is education. It is the education of citizens, developers and elected officials in the advantages and benefits of a Unified Development Code. The second step is a decision on the scale of the area selected for SmartCode implementation. Will the focus area be a regional sector plan, a defined neighborhood within the community or a set of walk sheds within the larger community? RPCGB has completed neighborhood form based codes for Graysville and the Highland Park neighborhoods in the City of Birmingham. These projects are excellent examples of defined neighborhood area application of form based code. RPCGB is currently calibrating a Smart Code for the City of Chelsea based on the SmartCode model developed by Chad Emerson, SmartCode Education Partners. Chad's version of the SmartCode incorporates most aspects of SmartCode v9.2 with less technical but legally sound language. The Chelsea Smart Code is using this model and it is calibrated for application within four walk sheds. Comprehensive planning work done at the scale necessary to support and calibrate the code should be the basis for all code development.

The comprehensive planning exercise can also use SmartCode principals. An ideal model is to begin the SmartCode process at the regional level and develop a sector plan. There are some excellent examples of completed regional plans following the SmartCode throughout the nation. In fact, Jefferson County Land Development has completed an excellent sector plan for the Shades

Creek Watershed. The Jefferson County work created an innovative concept they designated as 'PLANSECTS' which serves as a bridge between the SmartCode and traditional zoning.

Take a few minutes and watch the video produced by the Pawtucket Foundation and available on YouTube. This presentation focuses on the development of a regional sector plan based on the SmartCode. Please take a few moments and watch the [video](#). The next issue of CONNECTIONS will explore sector planning terms and application.

*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)*

## 2010 Census Update

The 2010 Census forms were mailed to selected households between March and April. Currently, the Census Bureau is conducting the Door-to-Door Follow-Up Phase, sending enumerators into the communities to collect information on households that did not receive a form in the mail. This phase will be complete in July. During the next several months, the Census Bureau will conduct four major quality assurance operations and other processes to ensure that the 2010 Census is an accurate and complete picture of everyone living across the nation. These efforts are an investment in the quality of the census that will impact your community for the next 10 years and consist of the following phases:

The Coverage Follow-Up Operation (through August 2010) will consist of phone calls to households who responded to the 2010 Census in order to clarify any answers from the questionnaire.

The Vacant Delete Check (through August 2010) will follow-up with housing units that were classified as vacant or nonexistent during the non-response follow-up operation. A census taker, different from the one who made the original classification, will visit the housing unit to confirm the classification. If they determine the classification was wrong, they will collect the census information for the housing unit and any "Census Day" residents. During this operation, they also will visit and enumerate addresses that were added to their master address list too late to include them in the Form Delivery and Mailback phase or in the Door-to-Door Followup phase.

The Field Verification Phase (through September 2010) will send census workers to verify whether an address exists and to confirm its geographic location, if it does not match an address in the Census address file. These addresses were submitted by households who provided their census information without an identification number linked back to the address file. For example, the households may have submitted a Be Counted form or provided their census information over the phone. This operation will also resolve suspected duplicate addresses contained within the same block.

The Data Capturing and Processing Phase (through December 2010) is the final data tabulation phase in order to provide state population totals necessary for apportionment.

As mandated by law, the national and state population counts must be delivered to the President of the United States by December 31, 2010. These data are used for congressional apportionment. Some states will likely gain (or lose) seats in the U.S. House of Representatives based on the 2010 Census count. By March 31, 2011, the Census Bureau will release more detailed data to help states redraw congressional, state, and local legislative district boundaries, in a process called "redistricting." Redistricting plans must be approved by the Department of Justice before elections.

*For additional information regarding these 2010 Census operational phases, data release time lines or redistricting needs, please contact Brett Isom at [bisom@rpcgb.org](mailto:bisom@rpcgb.org) or call 251-8139.*

CONNECTIONS is brought to you by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham  
Find out more at [www.rpcgb.org](http://www.rpcgb.org)

