

CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

August 2010

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[RPCGB Finance Committee Meeting](#)

August 4, 2010
RPCGB Office
9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)

August 11, 2010
RPCGB Office
9:00 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)

August 11, 2010
RPCGB Office
1:30 pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Board of Directors Meeting](#)

August 18, 2010
RPCGB Office
10:30 am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)

August 18, 2010

Letter from the Executive Director

In recent editions of Connections, we have written extensively about plans for high-tech modes of passenger transportation to include the proposed In-Town Transit Bus Rapid Transit project, proposed high-occupancy vehicle lanes on I-65 South, and high-speed passenger rail service from Birmingham to Atlanta. However, we often forget that, in the beginning in Birmingham, there were the freight railroads.



The Birmingham region probably owes more of its existence to railroads than most communities. I recently came across an excellent summation of this on Wikipedia which states, "***Much like Pittsburgh, Birmingham's major industries were iron and steel production, plus a major component of the railroading industry, where rails and railroad cars were both manufactured in Birmingham. In the field of railroading, the two primary hubs of railroading in the Deep South were Atlanta, Georgia and Birmingham, beginning in the 1860's and continuing through to the present day.***" Yes, railroads have undeniably helped define us as a region. Now, because of the growing boom in freight transportation, local railroads are positioning themselves to become even larger players in our transportation and economic future.

On August 10th, Norfolk Southern Corporation will pay tribute to our great railroading and future by operating a special train for invited guests from Birmingham to Tuscaloosa. The train will travel over a segment of rail first opened by the Alabama Great Southern Railway in 1871, which was also the year Birmingham was incorporated. During the 126-mile round trip, Norfolk Southern representatives will be available to discuss the benefits the railroad provides to the region - most notably its proposed Crescent Corridor initiative creating a high-speed intermodal rail network between the Gulf Coast and the Northeast and the planned Birmingham Regional Intermodal Facility in McCalla.

In December 2009, CSX Railroad opened its 25-acre Central Alabama Intermodal Container Transfer Facility in Bessemer. The facility is located in the Interstate Industrial Park and next to the enormous former Pullman-Standard rail car factory. Although the Bessemer hub was built to initially supply

RPCGB Office
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Transportation Technical
Committee Meeting](#)

August 25, 2010
RPCGB Office
10:00am, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[Metropolitan Planning
Organization Subcommittee
Meeting](#)

August 26, 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](#).

the Mercedes-Benz plant in Vance, CSX has plans to serve other businesses in our region, and eventually other markets both within and beyond the State of Alabama. Opportunities also exist for other railroads to develop similar facilities.

Because of the anticipated future growth in freight volume, it is important for cities, states and regions to ensure that existing freight bottlenecks are removed and new bottlenecks are prevented. We must also make sure that new freight-related jobs are accessible to our workforce, and that new housing and affordable workforce housing is available near the new jobs. To get this particular train moving, the RPCGB is developing a freight component of the Long-Range Regional Transportation Plan and at the same time preparing an application for Federal Transit Administration TIGER II stimulus funds. These funds would allow us to develop an action plan to protect and enhance nearby communities, while developing freight infrastructure and using the existing CSX intermodal facility and the proposed Crescent Corridor facility and similar future investments to leverage more local jobs. Applications must be submitted by August 23rd, and award announcements will be made this fall. Stay tuned for more details on this grant and other freight-related details in future Connections.



RPCGB To Host Freight Meetings

On August 12, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham will host a Railroad Grade Crossing meeting in its first floor conference room. Participants from the Alabama Department of Transportation, Norfolk-Southern, CSX and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway will be in attendance. The meeting will focus on Federal Railroad Administration and railway company policies, improvements to grade crossings, and planning and funding for grade separation. The meeting begins at 1pm and is open to the public.

Earlier in the day, the RPCGB will host an inaugural stakeholders' meeting to discuss the future of freight in the region. Companies with working knowledge of freight movements in the Birmingham area will be invited to participate. At that time, the RPCGB is seeking to engage members of the economic development community and the freight community to help us to include freight considerations in transportation planning activities. Over time, interviewing of individual stakeholders will be conducted to help identify goals and policies to include in the Transportation Improvement Plan and the next Regional Transportation Plan.

RPCGB Files Application for TIGER II Grant

The RPCGB has filed a preliminary application for TIGER II and HUD Community Challenge Planning Grants. The application is for funding to develop a comprehensive plan that revolves around the construction of a rail/freight inter-modal facility (freight village) in the McCalla area of Jefferson County. The plan will link employment opportunities, mixed-use development, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development in order to provide for sustainable and livable

communities. Look for more information on developments with these grants in future issues of Connections.

Workshop Provides Overview of ADA Policies

RPCGB Hosts Designing Pedestrian Facilities for Accessibility Workshop

The RPCGB hosted a Designing Pedestrian Facilities for Accessibility Workshop on July 22, 2010. Presenters were Mr. Graham Sisson representing the Governor's Office on Disability (GOOD) and Mr. Clint Andrews with the Federal Highway Administration (Alabama Division Office). The presenters conducted 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.



Graham Sisson (left) leads a discussion during workshop



Workshop participants receiving ADA overview

Employee Profile -- Amos Wright, Intern, RPCGB



Each month, we look at the profile of an RPCGB employee. This month's profile is Amos Wright, RPCGB Intern.

Hometown: Birmingham, AL

Education: Double B.A. in philosophy and English from U.A.B. Currently at work on a M.A. in English from U.A.B. with a thesis concerning the urban history and development of Birmingham, and hoping to pursue a master's degree in Urban Planning in the spring of 2011.

How long have you been with the RPCGB?: Four months

Give a short overview of your job: Researched and composed reports on the brownfields of Jefferson County, form-based codes, bike-ped planning, sociology of autocentric developments, urban theory, and comprehensive economic development strategy for the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Under the direction of Tom Maxwell, collaborated with Patrick Welch (CAWACO intern) in the creation of an Active Transportation Map from various GIS layers. Researched and composed Implementation Strategies for the RPCGB. Performed data collection for Bike Suitability Analysis and the Max Bus system.

What is your favorite aspect of your job?: Biking to work

Tell us one thing we don't know about you: I went swimming in Walden Pond.

Finish this sentence: "Ten years from now, I hope to be..." retired.

Economic Development Update

Loan Funding Available for Energy Efficiency and Conservation Projects

Local governments and businesses in Bibb, Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker Counties are now

eligible to apply for low-cost loans to fund energy efficiency and conservation projects. Projects may be retrofits, equipment acquisition, or new construction. Rates and terms vary. For more information, please contact Yvonne Murray at YMurray@rpcgb.org.

Murray Accepted to Leadership ICMA

The RPCGB would like to congratulate economic development specialist, Yvonne Murray, on her recent acceptance to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Leadership ICMA Class of 2012. Leadership ICMA is a competitive two-year program that helps participants cultivate their leadership competencies for the successful management of local governments. The program provides credit towards credentialing as an ICMA Credentialed Manager. There are approximately 1200 Credentialed Managers in ICMA and only 3 in the State of Alabama and Murray will be one of the youngest participants in the country to complete the program.

CommuteSmart Spotlight

CommuteSmart Launches Updated Website

The CommuteSmart Team is excited to announce the launch of our revised [website](#)! The main focus of the site is to provide information and services to those interested in taking an alternative commute, while reducing traffic congestion and improving air quality in Jefferson and Shelby counties. The website revisions allow for a more user-friendly experience, provide more accurate program information and promote our partnering companies. Participants will find it easier to log their alternative commutes and new visitors will find it more convenient to find potential carpool matches.

JCCEO Honors CommuteSmart Outreach Coordinator

Jeni Hoseney, Outreach Coordinator, was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity (JCCEO) for participating in the 2010 Health and Literacy Fair. JCCEO thanked Ms. Hoseney for her work with the JCCEO to promote the CommuteSmart program. CommuteSmart added JCCEO as a partner this year in order to educate their staff and participants on taking an alternative commute to work and on the benefits of our program. *If your company is interested in being a CommuteSmart partner, go to our [website](#) to find out more information.*

Alabama Partners for Clean Air Update



During the July meeting of the Alabama Partners for Clean Air (APCA) Steering Committee, Valton Johnson of the Johnson Group gave an update on the urban outreach project. In September of 2009, the RPCGB contracted with the Johnson Group to educate the neighborhood associations in and around Birmingham on air quality.

Over the last ten months, Mr. Johnson spoke to over 1,000 residents within 88 neighborhoods to educate citizens on air quality initiatives. The message spoke to the necessity of having clean air and how the communities can help make an impact in improved air quality. Mr. Johnson communicated the plan to mitigate bad air and asked each to share what they learned from the message with a neighbor. They were encouraged to take the bus, carpool, and vanpool, combine errands into one trip and walk when the weather permits on short trips. Mr. Johnson also mentioned that biking riding could do two things for them, get them where they needed to go and provide exercise. Citizens were also asked to be mindful about not idling in school drop off zones as this creates hazards for the students and staff. Citizens should turn off their vehicles and avoid idling at drive-thrus, the post office and while trains are crossing.

Citizens were asked to keep vehicles well maintained and to get an emissions test. Statistics relating to hours lost on jobs because of asthmatic problems were shared and how ozone causes serious problems for youth and the elderly. *To learn more about the importance of good air quality, please visit the [APCA website](#).*

Transportation Updates

TCC Looking for New Members

On July 21, 2010 the Transportation Citizens Committee (TCC) of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) welcomed two new members. Ms. Joanne Adcock of Morris and Mr. Nichalaus Sims of Birmingham will serve four year terms representing the East / Northeast and West / Southwest areas of Jefferson County.

The TCC is the citizens component of the MPO and is responsible for making recommendations regarding documents and materials necessary for the MPO annual endorsements including the Unified Planning Work Program, Long-Range Transportation Plan, Transportation Improvement Program, Transportation Control Measures of the State Implementation Plan (Air Quality) and Public Involvement Summary Documentation reports.

The TCC also makes recommendations to the MPO regarding the elements of the urban transportation planning process necessary to meet the requirements for certification as well as assisting the RPCGB in the development of specific program solutions to area-wide needs as identified through community research and public meetings.

The TCC is a self appointing group that is currently seeking new members. There are 20 vacancies in the following areas:

City of Birmingham	5 Vacancies
South / Southeast Jeff. Co.	1 Vacancy
West / Southwest Jeff. Co.	5 Vacancies
East / Northeast Jeff. Co.	1 Vacancy
North / Northwest Jeff. Co.	2 Vacancies
Shelby County	6 Vacancies

If you know of anyone that is passionate about transportation and air quality issues and would be interested in serving on the TCC or for more general information, please contact Cynthia Barton at (205) 264-8412 or cbarton@rpcgb.org.

WANTED: Consumer Representative for ClasTran Board

ClasTran is a nonprofit agency that provides curb-to-curb transportation services in Jefferson and Shelby Counties. There is currently an opening for a consumer to serve as a member of the board. The board meets on the fourth Friday of every month. *If you are interested, please contact John Tally at (205) 325-8787 or 877-826-7876.*

The Future of Planning Public Transportation

You Are Invited To

THE FUTURE OF PLANNING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Hosted by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB)

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham would like to **receive your comments and ideas for the future of public transportation in your community**. Please join us at one of the following one-hour meetings:

Blount County: August 26 at 1:00 p.m. at Frank Green Bldg, 415 5th Ave E, Oneonta

Chilton County: August 24 at 9:00 a.m. at Clanton City Hall, 502 2nd Ave N, Clanton

Jefferson County: August 31 at 9:00 a.m. at RPCGB, 1731 1st Ave N, Birmingham

St. Clair County: August 26 at 10:00 a.m. at Courthouse Annex, 165 5th Ave, Ashville

Shelby County: September 2 at 9:00 a.m. at 1123 County Services Dr, Pelham

Walker County: August 17 at 9:00 a.m. at CHS Activity Center, 204 19th St E, Jasper

Comments will be considered for incorporation into the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan.

For questions contact Laurel Land at 205-264-8473 or l.land@rpcgb.org.

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

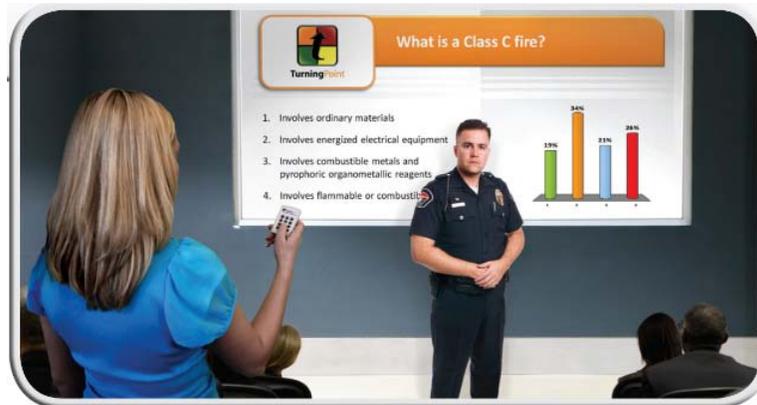
Time: 1:00 pm

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

For additional information contact Marshall Farmer, mfarmer@rpcgb.org or 205-264-8450.

New Public Involvement Tool Coming to the RPCGB

The RPCGB is in the process of obtaining an **Audience Response System (ARS)** to assist in collecting valuable input during our public involvement meetings. An Audience Response System is an instant survey polling software used in conjunction with a PowerPoint slide presentation. A USB receiver / base station retrieves the data provided by an audience using wireless hand-held devices and stores this information on the presenter's computer for analysis. An Audience Response System will allow the RPCGB to improve its public involvement in the planning process by providing instant and accurate feedback from the audience, collecting valuable input from the public and assisting our planning team to create better plans with documented support. *For additional information, please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner at ramore@rpcgb.org.*



Planner Highlighted on National Website

RPCGB community planner, Philip Amthor, was highlighted in the Practicing Architecture section of The American Institute of Architects (AIA) website in July. Below is an excerpt from the article:

Phil Amthor graduated from Auburn with a BArch in 2006, but quickly came to the conclusion that the best way to influence parts of the built environment that haven't been given the design attention they deserve was outside of architecture. So he stayed in school to get a Masters degree in city planning, which he finished in 2008. Now he's a regional city planner for his hometown of Birmingham.

Amthor grew up in a typical suburb and realized that, though it was where a vast swath of Americans spend most of their lives, these collections of subdivisions, strip malls, and gas stations are rarely acknowledged by designers of any kind. "The people who built my suburb were developers," Amthor says. Architecture, especially in academia, he says, was not dealing with suburban conditions.

Amthor is fascinated by the social science aspects of city planning (economics, population trends, capital flow in and out of a region), and now he works on long-term master planning developments for local municipalities. The goal is to create communities that are more compact, pedestrian-scaled, and feature multi-nucleic nodes of urban development. Accomplishing this requires political engagement to change the regulatory structure of how cities and neighborhoods are built, and Amthor says this kind of interaction is often missing from design professions. "To think about the political process in architecture school is a really foreign thing, but design needs to be political," he says.

His advice for architects that aren't able to design buildings: design legislation instead.

Check out the full article on the [AIA website](#).

Community Updates

City of Leeds Master Plan

The RPCGB continues to move forward on the City of Leeds Master Plan 2010. The RPCGB met with stakeholders during the month of July and is moving forward with the stakeholder involvement process during the next couple of months. The RPCGB has assembled a Master Plan advisory committee to assist in developing the vision, goals and objectives for the Leeds Master Plan. The advisory committee will conduct a kick-off meeting in August 2010. 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*

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*

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

Mobility Device Securement Workshop

You Are Invited To

MOBILITY DEVICE SECUREMENT WORKSHOP

Hosted by the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB)

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham will be hosting a course sponsored by the National Transit Institute (NTI). This two-day workshop will address wheelchair tie-down challenges, present and demonstrate problem-solving skills for securing powered mobility devices, and allow participants to practice these skills. The workshop will include:

- Discussion of federal requirements regarding securement and seat belt use
- Pre-trip preparation tasks
- Identification of mobility device securement equipment
- Determination of effective strap securement locations on powered mobility devices

- Explanation of the use and placement of seat belts and shoulder belts
- Recognizing how proper body mechanics and exercise reduce the risk of on-the-job injuries

Date: August 19-20, 2010

Time: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

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

For registration visit the [NTI website](#). For questions contact Laurel Land at 205-264-8473 or lland@rpcgb.org

SmartCode Corner

Last month we asked the question concerning the starting point in the implementation of the SmartCode? The answer is that the most important step is education. To assist in the process of your education RPCGB in partnership with Jefferson County Development Services, United Way and the Jefferson County Health Department is bring a **Building Communities/Smart Growth Planning Conference** to Birmingham in October 2010. The agenda is in development and speakers are committed. Please save October 7 and 8 on your calendar. Be on the lookout for additional information on the RPCGB website and through our Facebook page. We look forward to seeing you in October.

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

Five Mile Creek Greenway Strategic Planning

Board members from the Five Mile Creek Greenway District visited two trails built on railroad beds - rail trails -- this summer. In June, the District toured the Chief Ladiga Trail beginning with the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission in Anniston. The board saw parts of the 32-mile trail from Anniston to the Georgia state line and spoke with local leaders along the trail about their experiences with design, implementation, security and maintenance of the trail. The Chief Ladiga Trail is Alabama's first extended rail trail project and connects to Atlanta by way of the Silver Comet trail. The Chief Ladiga Trail crosses 2 counties - Calhoun and Cleburne - and 4 municipalities - Piedmont, Jacksonville, Weaver and Anniston.

In July the board visited the Georgia side of the rail trail - the Silver Comet. They met with Ed McBrayer, executive director of the PATH Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit that develops greenways in Georgia and most recently the Atlanta Belt Line Trail. The newest section of the Belt Line Trail overcame trail building challenges with new techniques including tree 'bridges' to protect existing trees, and stream bank trail construction in a flood zone.



Ed Hawkins and Laura Horton explore the Atlanta Belt Line Trail

The Five Mile Creek Greenway District is a new capitol improvement cooperative district formed to acquire a 17-mile rail trail in the Five Mile Creek Watershed in northwest Jefferson County. The field trips were great opportunities to see how a rail trail can enhance the quality of life for its citizens. *To find out more about these projects, please visit the [Five Mile Creek Greenway District website](#).*

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

