

# CONNECTIONS

A newsletter from the  
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

September 2010

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RPCGB To Host Freight Meetings

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[RPCGB Program Budget Committee Meeting](#)  
Canceled

[Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting](#)  
September 8, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
1:30 pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[APCA Steering Committee Meeting](#)  
September 9, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
1:30 pm, 1st Floor Conf. Room

[RPCGB Board of Directors Meeting](#)  
September 15, 2010  
Canceled

[Transportation Citizens Committee Meeting](#)  
September 15, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
Noon, 1st Floor Conf. Room

## RPCGB Holds Discussion Series

The RPCGB held an in-house discussion series August 2-6. Several of the RPCGB staff presented their research interests ranging from an analysis of suburbanization in the Birmingham area to a graduate school project on Havana, Cuba. The presentations and discussions were geared toward tying ongoing RPCGB projects to broader areas of planning research. The one-week series prompted interest from many RPCGB staff to present their own work and ideas. Similar events are planned for the coming months and the public will be invited to attend. Below are a few photographic highlights from the series.



Philip Amthor gives an analysis of suburbanization



RPCGB staff listen to the presentations

## RPCGB Budget Adopted

The RPCGB Fiscal Year 2011 budget was officially adopted by the Board of Directors on August 18, 2010. The budget is predominantly federally funded for transportation, economic development and community development programs which are provided by the Federal Highway

[Transportation  
Technical Committee  
Meeting](#)

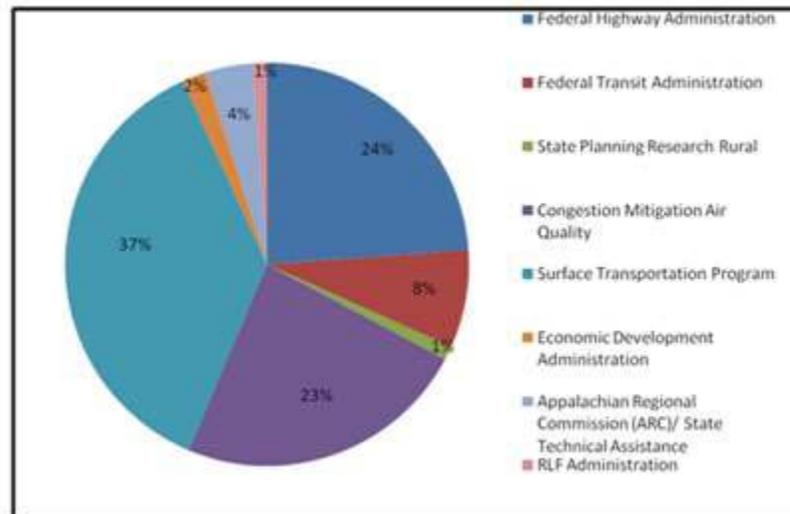
September 22, 2010  
RPCGB Office  
10:00am, 1st Floor  
Conf. Room

[Metropolitan  
Planning  
Organization  
Subcommittee  
Meeting](#)

September 23, 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](#).

Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Authority (FTA), Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ), State Planning Research (SPR) Rural, Surface Transportation Program (STP), Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Other funding sources include the Alabama Technical Assistance, contractual services and member government annual dues. The annual dues are primarily used to leverage the federal and state programs. The total budget is \$5,632,741.



### Staff Attends Norfolk Southern Train Trip

On August 10, several RPCGB staff members participated in a train trip provided by Norfolk Southern. Norfolk Southern operated a special train for invited guests from Birmingham to Tuscaloosa to highlight Jefferson County's freight rail past, present, and future. The 126-mile round trip traveled over a segment first opened by the Alabama Great Southern Railway in 1871. NS representatives discussed the benefits that railroad provides to the region - most notably the Crescent Corridor initiative creating a high-speed rail network between the Gulf Coast and the Northeast and the planned Birmingham Regional Intermodal Facility in McCalla. Below are a few photographic highlights from the trip.



A view of the train before boarding



Riders enjoying the view out of the observation car



A view of Birmingham from the caboose



Passing a Norfolk Southern freight train



RPCGB Director of Planning, Bill Foisy, enjoying lunch



A view of Railroad Park in downtown Birmingham

## RPCGB Hosts NTI Training

### Securement Training a Success

On August 19-20, 2010, the RPCGB hosted the National Transit Institute's Advanced Mobility Device Securement, which provided hands-on training for the proper way to secure various mobility devices, such as wheelchairs, motorized wheelchairs, scooters, etc. Twenty-one people attended with participants coming from as far as North Carolina. The RPCGB was happy to facilitate training for an issue that affects every transportation provider. Below are a few photographic highlights of the training.

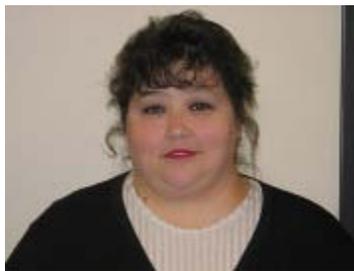


Training participant secures a motorized wheelchair



Participants secure a wheelchair to a demo lift

### Employee Profile -- Cynthia Barton, Office Manager, RPCGB



*Each month, we look at the profile of an RPCGB employee. This month's profile is Cynthia Barton, RPCGB Office Manager.*

**Hometown:** I currently reside in Gardendale, AL, but I was born in Nuremberg, West Germany, when it was still divided.

**Education:** Took coursework towards a degree in Business Administration - 90% complete.

**How long have you been with the RPCGB?:** I have been working with the RPCGB for 11 years, but employed by the RPCGB for 10 years.

**Give a short overview of your job:** I am the Office Manager as well as a staff person for the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). I am responsible for taking minutes at MPO related meetings, assisting with public involvement meetings, and coordination of the Semi-Annual Unified Planning Work Program. As Office Manager, I am responsible for the general maintenance and upkeep of the office and equipment as well as serving as the Safety Coordinator and Workman's Comp Officer. I also assist our staff as needed in day-to-day tasks.

**What is your favorite aspect of your job?:** I love working with the multitude of people that I come in contact with on a daily basis. I enjoy being taught from those who can teach.

**Tell us one thing we don't know about you:** I was a competition roller skater and clog dancer when I was younger.

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

### Economic Development Update

#### CEDS Document Now Available

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) update document is now available for public comment. The document provides an update of economic development activity in the region. The full CEDs document and the 2010 update can be found electronically on the [RPCGB website](http://rpcgb.org) or in print at the RPCGB office front desk. *For additional information, please contact Yvonne Murray at [ymurray@rpcgb.org](mailto:ymurray@rpcgb.org) or (205)251-8139.*

#### 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](mailto:YMurray@rpcgb.org).

### CommuteSmart Spotlight

#### Base Technologies named as CommuteSmart's New Rideshare Database

After a several month Request for Proposal (RFP) process and five vendors bidding on the CommuteSmart programs rideshare database, Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB), on behalf of Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), announced the selection of Base Technologies as the new vendor. The purpose of the rideshare database is to provide web-based ridematching and data management for use by the statewide CommuteSmart programs. "It was an extensive process from proposals and webinar demonstrations to scorecards and a selection committee," says Lindsey Gray, Program Manager for CommuteSmart Birmingham. "The CommuteSmart team is excited to introduce the new user-friendly features of the database to commuters and partners." The public launch of the new system is projected for October 1, 2010.



### **CommuteSmart Assists Alagasco to Secure LEED Credit**

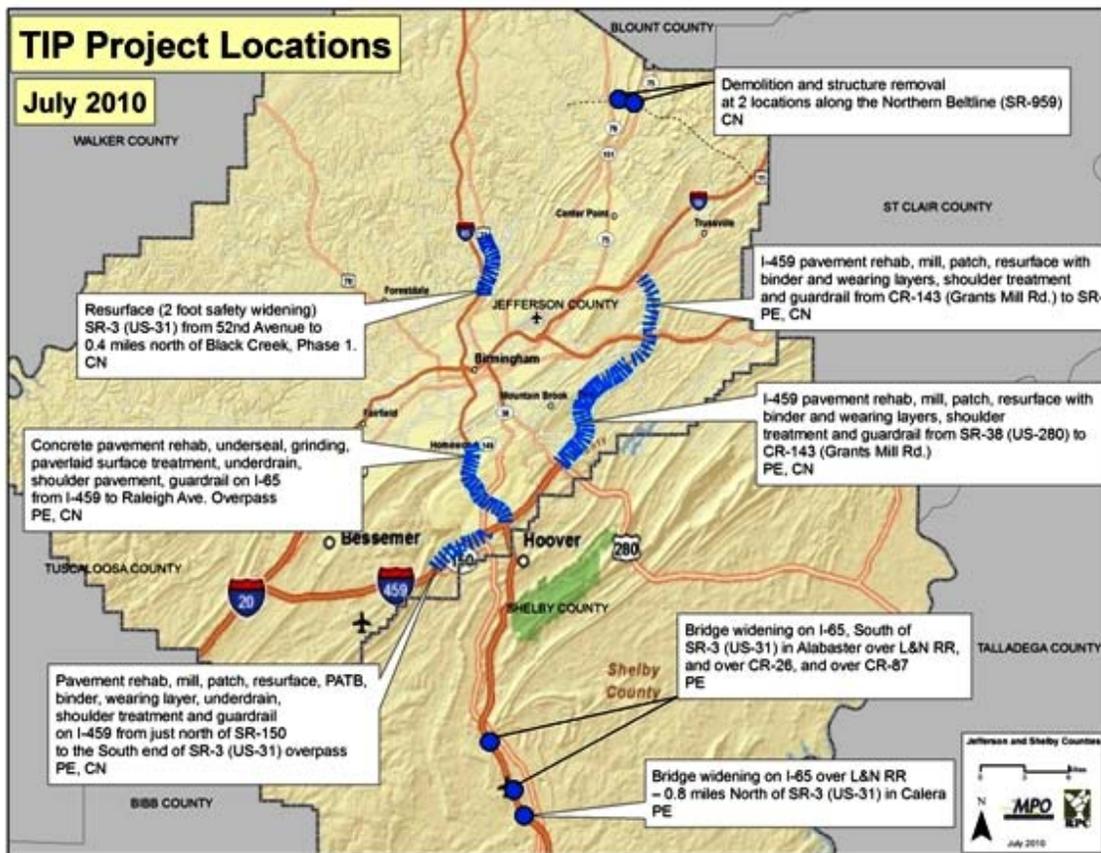
In November 2009, Alagasco reached out to CommuteSmart to assist with pursuing Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) credits for the 5,500 square foot renovation project at the Midtown Business Center (now called Midtown Business and Technology Center). This location serves as the primary commercial office for Alagasco's Birmingham operations, and its meeting facilities have been a popular location for numerous civic activities.

On August 31st, Alagasco informed CommuteSmart that the Innovation & Design (ID) Credit for the Transportation Management Plan, in which CommuteSmart assisted, was approved. ID credits are awarded for exceptional performance above the requirements set by the LEED Green Building Rating System and/or innovative performance in green building categories not specifically addressed by LEED. LEED ID Credits are evaluated for each project and are not guaranteed credits, unless proof can be given to qualify. Since 2005, CommuteSmart and Alagasco have partnered to promote alternative transportation options and incentives for Alagasco employees participating in carpooling, walking, biking or taking transit to work.

"We are excited to assist Alagasco with their efforts in the LEED certification of this building," says Lindsey Gray, Program Manager for CommuteSmart. "CommuteSmart and Alagasco's longstanding partnership demonstrates a commitment to the environment and responsible use of energy."

This renovation project is scheduled to be completed in October 2010.





## RFP for JARC/New Freedom

### Request for Projects

## JARC/New Freedom

The RPCGB released a Request for Projects on September 3, 2010 for projects that improve access to transportation services, employment, and employment-related activities for welfare recipients and eligible low-income individuals (JARC) and/or for projects that provide additional tools to overcome existing transportation barriers facing Americans with disabilities (New Freedom). Applications can only be received from private nonprofit organizations, state or local governments, or operators of public transportation services.

This request is in accordance with the Federal Transit Administration's requirement for funding based on a competitive selection process. As such, priority will be given to proposals that fill an identified gap in service. Applications are due no later than noon, October 4, 2010. *Detailed information and an application can be found on the [MPO website](#).*

## RPCGB Hosts Railroad Grade Crossing Meeting

Trains are a crucial element in all levels of our economy. The City of Birmingham was founded

because it was at the intersection of two planned railroads and railroads came to service the iron industry that sprang from the natural resources here in the Jones Valley. Trains are also huge pieces of steel that can stretch across the landscape for a mile or more. The necessity of moving goods from production to use sometimes causes conflicts with cars, buses, bikes, and pedestrians.

Representatives from CSX Transportation and Norfolk Southern Railroads came to the offices of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham on August 12th to participate in a meeting about railroad grade crossings. Issues at railroad grade crossings are two-fold. Safety at these crossings is the first consideration. Railroad grade crossings are places where thousands of tons of steel frequently come close to human beings. Finding ways for the general public and trains to operate in close proximity is vital to maintaining safety at these crossings.

The other issue for railroad grade crossings is the length of trains. Trains are put together at various locations in the Birmingham area. While trains are being assembled, they may move just a few car lengths back and forth to position their cars. These slight movements can tie up automobile traffic along their length, causing general frustration with the public.

For blocked crossings, grade crossings are supposed to have contact information posted on a pole, equipment housing, or other permanent structure at the crossing. This sign should have the name of the railroad, and a phone number for that company's railroad crossing office.

Problems at railroad grade crossings are complex and solutions do not happen overnight. The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham will continue to work with our communities to identify locations and reach solutions to these problems.

To report blocked grade crossings, use these numbers:

BNSF Railroad: 1-800-832-5452

CSX Railroad: 1-800-232-0144

Norfolk Southern Railroad: 1-800-453-2530

## Community Updates

### City of Leeds Master Plan

The RPCGB continues to move forward on the City of Leeds Master Plan 2010. The Leeds Master Plan Advisory Committee met on August 3, 2010 to discuss the assets and issues in the City of Leeds. The RPCGB looks forward to conducting a public involvement meeting on Thursday September 30th at 6pm at the Leeds High School Auditorium. 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 is updating the City of Graysville's 2005 Comprehensive Policy Plan. The City of Graysville 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, environmental analysis, existing development, public infrastructure, and demographic and socioeconomic conditions. The City of Graysville has requested assistance from the RPCGB to complete the update. *For additional information please contact Richard Amore, Senior Planner with the RPCGB at [ramore@rpcgb.org](mailto:ramore@rpcgb.org).*

### Save the Date

2010 Building Communities Conference

*Coordinating Transportation and the Built Environment for Sustainable Growth*  
October 7-8, 2010,  
McWane Science Center, Birmingham  
Registration will be available on the [RPCGB website](#) after September 7th.

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

## Trees and Development Workshop

Save the date!

### Trees and Development Workshop

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham and CAWACO RC+D will be offering a Trees and Development Workshop on Tuesday, January 11, 2011. James Urban, FASLA will be the key note speaker and several other state experts will be sharing their knowledge of trees and development. Registration for the workshop will begin in mid-October 2010.

Date: January 11, 2011

Place: Birmingham Botanical Gardens

*Please contact Richard Amore, [ramore@rpcgb.org](mailto:ramore@rpcgb.org) or Heidi Richards, [heidi.richards@al.usda.gov](mailto:heidi.richards@al.usda.gov) for more information.*

## SmartCode Corner

We will take a small departure this month from our usual discussion of the SmartCode. There have been some recent changes in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (2009) that affect the size of lettering on street signs. Lettering on post-mounted street name signs should be composed of initial upper-case letters at least 6 inches in height and lowercase letters at least 4.5 inches in height. This is the control when your subdivision street intersects a higher speed collector or greater.

For local roads (residential streets) with speed limits of 25 mph or less, the lettering on post-mounted street name signs may be composed of initial upper-case letters at least 4 inches in height and lower-case letters at least 3 inches in height. Street name signs may also be placed above a regulatory or STOP or YIELD sign with no required vertical separation between signs.

How about those decorative signs, the ones with black backgrounds and white letters? The code is clear. An alternative background color, other than the normal guide sign color of green, may be used for street name signs where the highway agency determines this is necessary to assist in determining jurisdictional authority for roads. Unless this is the case in your jurisdiction, you are safe with green background and white letters. The font should be the FHWA Series fonts developed to address specific issues relating to highway typeface design by creating a complete, standardized set of typefaces for uniform application throughout the United States.

*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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