

AHTD Request for Waiver of Six Through Lane Freeway Policy

The Metroplan policy on Freeways is found in the CARTS Roadway Design Standards and Implementation Procedures last adopted on August 30, 2006 and is quoted below:

Policy on Freeways and Expressways

The Metroplan Board has adopted the following policy with regard to Freeways and Expressways in the CARTS area:

The metropolitan freeway system should be built to six through lanes. It is the Metroplan Board's intent that demand over that capacity be met with a robust regional arterial network and public transit.

If the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department sees the need to widen metropolitan freeways beyond six through lanes, it should consult with the Metroplan Board for its concurrence. Prior to planning for widening beyond six through lanes, the Department is expected to do a thorough analysis of alternative methods of meeting travel demand in the corridor with improved arterials and public transit. A thorough analysis of the impact of the induced traffic demand on local roadways as a result of the widening beyond six through lanes would also be required. The Metroplan Board may also consider conducting an independent analysis of widening proposals over six through lanes for its use and benefit.

There are several parts to the current policy statement:

First, the Board expresses its desire that the metropolitan freeway system be built-out to six through lanes.

Secondly, the Board expresses its intent that demand above that be met with a robust regional arterial network and public transit.

Thirdly, it provides for a process to grant exceptions to this policy if AHTD sees the need to widen beyond the six through lanes. Think of them as a series of prerequisites for granting an exception to the policy:

- The Department should consult the Metroplan Board for its concurrence.
- The Department is expected to do a thorough analysis of alternative methods of meeting travel demand in the corridor with improved arterials and public transit.
- The Department is expected to conduct a thorough analysis of the impact of induced traffic demand on local roadways as a result of widening beyond six through lanes.

Finally, the Metroplan Board reserves the right to conduct an independent analysis of widening proposals over six through lanes for its own use and benefit.

Has AHTD met the prerequisites for requesting an exception or waiver of the six lane policy for the 30 Crossing project?

(1) AHTD has consulted with Metroplan staff and those directly affected local governments from the beginning of the Planning Environmental Linkages process to present day. By virtue of Director Bennett's letter of June 17, 2016, AHTD is formally seeking the concurrence of the Metroplan Board in the waiver request.

(2) The PEL process considered and eliminated arterial improvements, including a new arterial bridge, and a variety of transit improvement options for the corridor. There is a wide range of opinion as to the adequacy of that consideration in the PEL, but there is no doubt that the Department went through a formal and documented process of alternative consideration.

(3) The Department, both as part of the PEL and in the NEPA process has actively explored and modeled various options of getting traffic on to and off of I-30 in downtown Little Rock and North Little Rock. Extensive public outreach has been conducted and significant changes to the original concept have been made in response to citizens, stakeholder groups and elected officials. That process is ongoing and at this time has not been finalized. It may be appropriate at this time to ask the affected local governments if they are satisfied with the solutions presented to date or are satisfied that an acceptable solution is within reach .

An independent study conducted by Metroplan staff on the system impacts of the proposed project is underway. A preliminary analysis has been completed and staff is awaiting additional information from the NEPA process to finalize that analysis and present it to the RPAC and Board for consideration.

Other Policy or Plan Objectives to be Considered

Chapter 7 of *Imagine Central Arkansas* contains the Long-Range Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Section 7.1 identifies Freeway Interchange Improvements and Bridge Replacement as two of several priorities. Section 7.5.1 more specifically deals with Freeways priorities. Interchange Improvements are one of the key areas mentioned. Specifically I-30 from I-40 to I-440/530 is prioritized for operational improvements.

The Test

In testing the six lane cap in this corridor, AHTD and Metroplan staff conceptualized what it would take to (1) replace the I-30 bridge, (2) make operational improvements to remove the bottlenecks at the system interchanges and along the corridor (for example, the use of auxiliary lanes between interchanges), (3) adjust the local road network access points to current design standards and (4) maintain the six through lane cap to the maximum extent possible consistent with the previous objectives. The operational characteristics of that conceptual design are to be modeled and the results presented for consideration.

Findings

If, after reviewing the I-30 corridor from the north terminal interchange to the south terminal interchange, the RPAC finds that, in order to reasonably meet the objectives for it identified in *Imagine Central Arkansas*, the complexity of the corridor requires significantly more imagination and flexibility than strict adherence to the six through lane freeway cap allows, then it may be appropriate to recommend a waiver of the six lane cap to allow creative solutions to be explored.

In this instance and at this time, a recommendation to grant a waiver of the Freeway Design policy is explicitly not an endorsement of any roadway design proposals being considered in the NEPA process for the 30 Crossing project. There remains significant concern about the system impacts of a significant widening in this corridor and those impacts' effect on the financially constrained long range transportation plan, which have yet to be determined.

Waiver Language

The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department requests an exception to the CARTS Roadway Design Policy on Freeways that limits through lanes to six for a section of I-30 between the north terminal interchange with I-40 and the south terminal interchange with I-440 and I-530.

Within this 6 mile stretch of roadway are three major system interchanges, a major river crossing and the major local access interchanges for the central business districts in Little Rock and North Little Rock. This stretch of interstate also carries the highest volume of traffic in the state. Because of the complexity of the corridor and the close proximity of major merge and weave movements, it is believed that improving the operations and safety in the corridor cannot be accomplished strictly adhering to the six through lane policy. A waiver of that policy for this corridor (I-30 north terminal to south terminal) will allow the flexibility and creativity needed to, at a minimum,

address the operational and safety improvements and resolve the interchange bottlenecks as envisioned in *Imagine Central Arkansas*.