

# Regional Planning Advisory Council

Minutes of Wednesday, July 20, 2016

## RPAC Members Attending:

Name	Representing
1. Kay Kelley Arnold	City of Little Rock
2. Marcia Cook	City of Sherwood
3. Charles Cummings (Chair)	Freight/Goods Movement
4. Alex DePriest	City of Little Rock
5. Lawrence Finn	Pulaski County
6. Coreen Frasier	Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas (BACA)
7. Robin Freeman	Saline County
8. Becca Green	Rock Region Metro
9. Sybil Hampton	City of Little Rock
10. Jeff Hathaway	Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce
11. Antonio Johnson (Alt.)	Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department (AHTD)
12. Kathleen Lambert (Alt.)	Rock Region METRO
13. Eddie Long	City of Cabot
14. Buckley O'Mell (Alt.)	Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRRCC)
15. Corey Parks (Alt.)	City of Conway
16. Dan Roda	City of Little Rock
17. Paul Simms	AHTD
18. Patrick Stair	Sierra Club
19. Jack Stowe	City of Maumelle
20. Tom Sutton	Bill & Hillary Clinton National Airport
21. Brad Walker	City of Little Rock
22. Jay Whisker (Alt.)	City of Jacksonville
23. Amy Whitehead	City of Conway
24. Mechelle Winslow	Arkansas Dept. of Health (ADH)

## Guests:

1. David Beck	Resident
2. Jennifer Bethes	Resident (Little Rock)
3. Joseph Brejclir	Resident (North Little Rock)
4. Ben Browning	AHTD
5. Jay Chesshir	LRRCC
6. Thomas Dickinson	McGeorge
7. Chris East	Studio Main
8. Ellen Fennell	Resident (Little Rock)
9. Tom Fennell	Resident (Little Rock)
10. Marsha Guffey	Resident (Bryant)
11. Lucas Hargraves	Hargraves Consulting
12. John Hedrick	Resident (Little Rock)
13. Jerry Holder	Garver
14. Jessie Jones	AHTD
15. Rohn Muse	Forest Hill Neighborhood Association
16. Noel Oman	Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

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| 17. Leslie Peacock   | <i>Arkansas Times</i>                                    |
| 18. Dale Pekar       | Resident (Little Rock)                                   |
| 19. Mary Carol Poole | Paschall Strategic                                       |
| 20. Jarod Varner     | Executive Director, Rock Region METRO                    |
| 21. Kathy Wells      | President, Coalition of Little Rock Neighborhoods (CLRN) |
| 22. Carl Willis      | Resident   |
| 23. Trey Willis      | Resident   |
| 24. Keli Wylie       | AHTD   |

**Metroplan Staff:**

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|--------------------|---|
| 1. Lynn Bell       | Graphics Specialist                         |
| 2. Casey Covington | CARTS Planning Director                     |
| 3. Susan Dollar    | Transportation Planner/Title VI Coordinator |
| 4. Jonathan Lupton | Research Planner                            |
| 5. Richard Magee   | Deputy Director                             |
| 6. Jim McKenzie    | Executive Director                          |
| 7. Allen Skaggs    |   |

**1. Call to Order and Announcements**

Chairman Charles Cummings called the meeting to order at 11:30 AM. The Council met at 501 W. Markham Street, Little Rock.

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minutes of June 15 will be available at the August RPAC meeting.

**3. Presentations by Jim McKenzie and Casey Covington**

Presentation by Mr. McKenzie. The AHTD is requesting an exception to the six lane freeway build-out policy, in order to construct the I-30 Crossing as a six-plus lane facility. Mr. McKenzie presented background information on the policy and on the process for the I-30 Crossing project. Following is a summary of his presentation.

The Metroplan policy on freeways is found in the CARTS Roadway Design Standards and Implementation Procedures last adopted on August 30, 2006.

In testing the six lane cap in this corridor, Metroplan and the AHTD staff conceptualized what it would take to (1) replace the I-30 bridge; (2) make operational improvements to remove bottlenecks at the system interchanges and along the corridor (for example, by using 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, while still being consistent with the previous objectives.

Mr. McKenzie emphasized that a recommendation to grant an exception to the six-through-lane freeway policy is explicitly not an endorsement of any roadway design proposals currently 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.

Presentation by Mr. Covington. In a detailed presentation, Mr. Covington stepped the Council through a visual depiction of what a six-lane enhanced alternative design might look like on the ground. Mr. Covington made the point that there are many possible alternatives, and that he has developed one alternative for comparison and discussion. [Note: Because each slide image required a detailed description, the PowerPoint of this presentation is attached to and hereby incorporated into these Minutes.]

#### **4. Presentation by Ben Browning of AHTD**

Mr. Browning presented a detailed argument for a waiver of the six-lane policy. He pointed out that the I-30 corridor is unique in a number of ways:

- It connects six interstates and freeways;
- serves both regional travel and local access;
- carries more traffic than any other interstate in Arkansas; and,
- is the "backbone" of the Little Rock regional freeway network.

Referring to the Purpose and Need statement developed by the Department in coordination with project partners, for approaching this corridor, Mr. Browning used a series of slides to depict each Purpose and Need and concluded that keeping to six lanes would not adequately meet all five of the articulated needs: (1) address traffic congestion by improving mobility on I-30 and I-40; (2) improve travel safety within and across the I-30 corridor; (3) address structural and functional roadway deficiencies by improving roadway conditions and functional ratings; (4) improve navigational safety on the Arkansas River Bridge by eliminating or improving inadequate design features; and (5) address the structural and functional deficiencies on the bridge itself.

Mr. Browning summarized his case for the exception to six-lanes with the following:

- Distances between major interchanges are not sufficient to effectively drop lanes.
- Minor interchanges that are located between the major interchanges prevent lane drops.
- The river crossing with major interchanges on either side further complicates dropping lanes.
- The high number of interchanges and short distances between them make the corridor a series of interchanges, rather than a through corridor.

Mr. Browning further stated that traffic maintenance during construction is more challenging when capacity is not increased. Maintaining two or more lanes of traffic through the construction period would only be possible by using expensive temporary widenings. The River Bridge would have to be completely off-set from the existing facility in order to be constructed.

Mr. Browning concluded his presentation by stating that the addition of collector-distributor (CD) lanes would: (1) help transition traffic from Interstate to city grid; (2) segregate merging traffic from through travel; (3) reduce last-second lane changes to exits; and (4) improve local access over the river.

**Mr. Browning's PowerPoint is attached to and hereby incorporated into these Minutes.**

## **5. Council Discussion and Public Comments**

The Council had a number of questions and comments about the presentations. Following is a summary of those remarks.

**Ms. Green:** Is there a philosophical argument to made that it can be beneficial to having merging traffic with through traffic, because it slows traffic at critical interchange areas. I would think that sometimes, slowing traffic - for example, through downtown areas - can be a good thing.

**Mr. Covington:** First, I want to be clear that what I just presented in terms of a six-lane enhanced option did not fix every problem in the corridor. Congestion will have to be managed in this corridor. The question is, can you do that under a strict 6 lane policy or do you need a little flexibility to improve traffic flow? I personally feel - and I think Jim feels this way, as well - that there is probably more innovation needed in this corridor. I showed you a six-lane enhanced alternative, Ben showed you a six-lane alternative, Richard could tell you what his six-lane alternative would look like, and none of them will be exactly the same alternative. Based upon our discussion, I think that additional innovation needs to be put into this corridor.

I think that the alternative I presented, particularly on the southern end and downtown Little Rock, has some merit. But as you get into North Little Rock, there are some issues and there are also some issues in Little Rock, and speed is one of those issues. Where you have issues, is in places where there is greater speed differential.

**Dr. Hampton:** When you're driving on I-30 going north, and you want to go on I-40 to US 67 it does appear to me there is danger. The traffic I-40 West is zipping along and cars wanting to merge on I-40 from I-30 must cross into that traffic. I haven't heard any discussion about that

**Mr. Covington:** We hear about a lot of problems in that area, and we fully support corrective actions to improve the traffic flow. What really is an issue in the mornings is that I-40 traffic is unimpeded. If you look at traffic on I-30 going into downtown, that traffic is impeded. That is a situation like I described earlier, with severe speed differentials that can contribute to hazardous merging.

**Mr. Roda:** As to the specific request before us, what exactly is a through lane? Is it staff's belief and is it the Highway Department's contention, that collector-distributor lanes, as presented in the alternatives, are or are not considered through lanes?

**Mr. Covington:** I don't think there is one answer to that question. I think that is one reason why AHTD made the request, in recognition of the fact that reasonable people can look at this corridor and consider it differently. Other corridors - for example, the study of I-30 going into Benton - if there is a third or fourth lane proposed from south terminal to Bryant that is clearly a through lane. What constitutes a through lanes in this corridor, versus an auxiliary lanes, versus a collector-distributor lane versus a merge lane is not as clear, and I don't think I can specifically answer that question; it is a question that Council members will have to consider. However, if you look at the number of lanes proposed, and count those lanes, there are more than three lanes in each direction in a lot of the corridor.

**Mr. Browning:** I'll add to that. I agree completely with Casey. It depends on how you view it. As we have made the case, this is really a string of interchanges because they do not go all the way through. The Highway Department is requesting a waiver because we understand that not everybody sees it that way, and a waiver seems like a procedurally clean way to address it. That way we can all be on the same page, moving forward.

**Mr. Roda:** Thank you. I appreciate that explanation from both of you. My comment to my fellow RPAC members is that I think the request should be denied, and not just because I am opposed to the project. Even though I don't like the project, I do appreciate the dialog we have going with the Highway Department now and some of the revisions that have been made to date.

My concern now is that the question before us has not been presented fairly and I don't think the data have been presented fairly either. Our meeting notice asked if the complexity of the corridor requires significantly more flexibility and imagination than strict adherence to the six-through-lane freeway cap policy. I think this is flawed, because of course the corridor is unique - and it runs right through the middle of our city. This alone means it is unique, but it does not justify a waiver of the policy.

Jim, when you spoke you set out the qualifications the steps we must go through in this process. I disagree with the conclusion that these have all been met. I don't

think the Highway Department has done a thorough analysis of alternatives. We've discussed it here, but I don't think it's been discussed adequately elsewhere. I don't think reasonable alternatives have been presented, other than those that require adding lanes through the middle of the city. More importantly, I don't think the AHTD has performed a thorough analysis of the induced traffic demand. I'm sorry that I cannot recall the name of the individual, but a Highway Department representative told a roomful of people at a public meeting that there was no such thing as induced demand. There is.

Even if it was considered internally within the Department, those details were not made available to the public. Fortunately, we the public, do have the benefit of some reports that were put together by other people - Metroplan's own data (which Casey presented to us last Fall), and I report issued by a firm that was hired by a citizens' group, to name two sources. Both report showed that the project would result in significant negative effects because of induced traffic demand. Traffic would back up on the freeways and our downtown arterials to University and beyond. We were also told by Casey last Fall, that the AHTD estimated the cost of building out the entire interstate system to accommodate the added traffic, would be \$200 million or more. We should be talking about that as part of our discussion.

Finally, we know there are significant negative, degenerative effects that freeways have when they run through major cities. Here in Little Rock, we made this mistake with I-630 and the neighborhoods in and around downtown are just now, all these years later, beginning to stitch themselves back together. I would strongly advocate against allowing the six lanes to be widened, and allowing these past mistakes to be doubled down on.

**Ms. Fraiser:** I appreciate your hard work on both sides. Nothing has been mentioned about the use of I-530 and I-430. Coming from Pine Bluff through Little Rock, I would take I-530 to 67/167 and bypass the entire downtown area. That is an alternative that is better than driving smack through two cities. Same holds true for I-430. I think six lanes can handle the local traffic in downtown Little Rock and North Little Rock. I think we need to consider these. Larger cities than Little Rock have taken this loop approach.

### **Public Comments**

The Chairman then invited members of the public who wished to comment to take three or four minutes to express their concerns or questions. Following is a summary of those comments.

**Mr. Trey Willis:** I found the presentation really informative and a lot of hard work has obviously gone into this but the phrase outside the box was used in the presentation. The more I thought about this, the more I wondered, why are they trying to put so much traffic in this one area? It was a mistake fifty-odd years ago when the decision was made to put the freeway through the city and now we are in

a position to see what other cities have done and how better decisions have positively affected city centers and regenerated interest in downtown living. I've been through many cities that have ring-around [loop] roads. Interstates make transit simple and easy. Move the interstate and take it away from the city center Re-label the ring roads (I-430 East and West) as interstates. I know we have engineers who can re-do the roads. This is a big issue in the cities They've proven The I-30 Crossing no reason to. Necessity is the mother of invention and if can't find a way to keep this capped at six lanes, not just in Little Rock but in Arkansas, then someone will find an imaginative way to improve the road and keep the six lane cap. They might not do it today, not in this session but in the future well think of something. Speed is a huge issue when you're in a city center. I've been in I-30 traffic, bumper to bumper, and yes it's a hassle but I've felt perfectly safe. Faster traffic is not necessarily safer traffic.

Another issue is connectivity and public transport. Urban center are all connected. There's no issue that is not somehow connected to another. You can't widen one section of road without then needing to widen another section. I come from a place where public transport is excellent. Bus service could be vastly improved to the betterment of downtown connectivity. It is not a fluid process now.

So, don't just think about widening lanes. Think about a multitude of solutions that would connect Little Rock, North Little Rock, and all of Arkansas.

**Mr. John Hendrick:** Last night I commented to FHWA and FTA regarding the region's transportation planning process. Since those comments are appropriate to the question you have before you, I have modified them slightly for this forum.

I moved to Little Rock a little over a year ago after retiring from a 50 year career in transportation, in private and public sectors, at the local, regional and state department of transportation levels. With no ties to Little Rock, my wife and I moved here for Little Rock's ambiance and amenities. With my interest in transportation, I have been actively observing the region's transportation planning.

Rock Region METRO has a good plan for the future and is led by able staff. Unfortunately, its plan for dedicated funding failed at the polls, but it will be back. I thank FTA for its support of Rock Region METRO and Metroplan for its cooperation and support.

Metroplan has a well vetted regional transportation, *Imagine Central Arkansas*, that is a comprehensive, multimodal plan embodying the principles of 3-C - Comprehensive, Cooperative, and Continuing. Metroplan staff does an admirable job and keeps the public informed. Having served on the advisory councils of three MPOs, including that of Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, I can state that Metroplan's RPAC consists of individuals that do their homework and actively participate in the meetings. Metroplan is serving the region well.

I've been watching this for about a year now. It is clear to me that the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department is intent on cramming down its minimum of 10 lanes on the 30 Crossing project. Other options were rejected out of hand or dismissed with half-truths. A Chester Street bridge option was suggested by many, but dismissed because it is not a State highway. Other suggestions are dismissed on the grounds that they were considered and rejected in the PEL process. But the AHTD's PEL process was not comprehensive. Each option, be it transit, a new bridge or route, was considered in isolation; the Highway Department did not take a comprehensive approach to consider what combination of options would deliver the best value for nearly \$700 million. While separate consultants hired by the City of Little Rock, a citizens' group, as well as Metroplan and individual citizens, have shown major flaws in the Highway Department's analysis. More questions are raised than answered.

The Highway Department asks that a major component of the region's comprehensive transportation plan be thrown out just 12 days prior to the Board meeting on June 29, at which they want the policy amendment. The shortness of the request hardly leaves enough time for public consideration. AHTD's approach is, "our way of the highway" - or more like, "our way is the highway".

I respectfully request that the RPAC recommend denying the AHTD's request for a waiver to the You have a good plan base on the 3C standard of comprehensive, cooperative and continuing planning. Stick with the plan. Given the flaws in the AHTD's analysis and its disregard for the process, I pray that the FHWA will require a complete Environmental Impact Statement for the 30 Crossing project.

One last thing. From Mr. Browning's eloquent presentation, a key he mentioned was this whole 30 crossing corridor is one big interchange. If that's the case, then why don't we redefine/rebrand I-440 to take it up to I-40 and then 67; and then look at the boulevard concept to make the whole corridor perform that one big interchange function in a safe and efficient manner?

**Mr. Dale Pekar:** I agree with many of the previous comments. The thing that really set me off was when I read the letter from the Arkansas State Highway Commission, which basically advised Metroplan that if Metroplan does not agree to go along with one of the eight- or ten-lane alternatives , then the AHTD will do nothing over the next ten to 20 or 25 years to improve this corridor, to improve this collection of interchanges. As the State itself pointed out, the "Purpose and Needs" speaks to many of these needs: re-establishing connectivity on the frontage roads in North Little Rock, rebuilding the bridge. A host of other things, which are identified in the PEL, Level 3 screening document, can be accomplished within the six lane alternative. And for the Highway Commission to say, "You have to give us eight lanes, or ten lanes, or we're walking out of here" is reprehensible. The June 17 letter is really an insult to the people of central Arkansas.

The errors that were made in this thing [the economic analysis] are incredible. There's basic math errors. They don't even have the costs and benefits aligned. The benefits are shown to start in the year 2020, and the construction won't be finished until after 2020. They don't have the discounting set up correctly. And, in order to show the benefits that they do show, they are assuming that work will have to be completed outside the study area. You can't do that. If you are going to include those benefits from work outside the study area, then you have to include those costs. It's a classic violation of NEPA principles. They further compounded this problem because they've assumed improvements will be made outside the study area in their "build" alternatives, but assumed no improvements outside the study area in the "no build" alternative. What sense does this make? It's a clear violation of the NEPA process. The no-build alternative must represent the most likely conditions; if improvements are going to happen in the three ten-lane alternatives, then it must be shown to happen in the no-build alternative. Furthermore, another problem in the economic analysis is that they've said that, "if we build this thing our road maintenance costs will go down by \$17 million a year". Seventeen million dollar a year. If you look at the Highway Commission's biannual reports, they've never spent even four million dollars in federal, State and county money in Pulaski County in any given year, since 2003.

There are many, many errors in the economic analysis. So to say that the PEL process has already evaluated these things, is just wrong. I won't try to go through the different mathematical errors contained in the economic analysis, but we are not meeting the NEPA requirements, and we're not meeting the various analysis process requirements set forth by the federal government.

Thank you.

**Ms. Kathy Wells:** I am president of the Coalition of Little Rock Neighborhoods. I appreciate the chance to address you today. I'd like you to widen the focus yet again. We've ended up with a great deal of detail, but the very largest issue before you today on this waiver request is this: the State has broken the "do right" rule, the basic contract with citizens on how we perform work and spend public money in our democracy and in our system of fair treatment. This waiver request at the last minute, before other analysis has been completed, which you refer to in your own staff document today, should lead you to the conclusion that this should be rejected as premature. Let the analysis be completed; then let this come back. Clearly, a piece of paper and a policy on a page does not prevent anybody from thinking very large and very wide. The opponents [to the 30 Crossing project] have brought in professionals to analyze it and who have stated that this entire project if built as proposed so far, would fail. That's a very serious consideration. Yes, the officials need to come along and do their own analysis, but with that very respectable professional judgment [of the private engineers brought on by opponents of the project] before you, doing anything to advance the official proposals should be

withheld until further information is concluded. In particular, the references to completion of the NEPA process are of great concern to us. This is not only rushed in before public comment was analyzed - I have a letter to you that you should shortly receive, and which details that aspect - but you've got the very real question that this enormous project, building the third widest bridge in the United States, if completed as proposed would be constructed without the scrutiny of an Environmental Impact Statement, as things stand today.

The Coalition would urge you to (1) reject this request for waiver as premature, to wait upon further analysis, and, (2) to insist that analysis be the more thorough and more detailed Environmental Impact Statement.

Thank you for your attention.

**Mr. Tom Fennell:** I've studied this issue for a number of months. I will keep my comment brief.

I appreciate all the effort that every member of this Council has made to try to do what the best thing for Little Rock and this region.

The Highway Department's motivation is to do what it does best, which is to develop interstate systems, expand freeways, do exit ramps, and on ramps. But what if this is not the best solution for our area? What if this is not our best future? What if our best future is more like the progressive cities across the country and Europe? And that is to provide just exactly what Imagine Central Arkansas proposes, which is to beef up our arterial system, additional bridge crossing - now, think about that: if we had a bridge crossing west of Broadway. What's the benefit for us? The benefit to us is economic development. A through freeway does not do anything for local property values adjacent to the freeway. No one wants to be next to the freeway.

Arterials and new bridge crossings create so many more economic opportunities for Little Rock and for North Little Rock. But how do we get there? A boulevard would be an incredible addition to Little Rock, would put Little Rock on the world map as one of the most progressive cities, and would increase our economic value exponentially. But we're not even considering that. All we're considering is doing our old technology and road design on a freeway that was ill-conceived to begin with. It would be much better used as a boulevard, even an eight-lane boulevard. The traffic consultant that we hired ourselves said these additional bridge crossing and a boulevard through the I-630 interchange actually performs better in 20 years than a 10 or 12-lane expanded freeway.

We submitted those data, the report, to the Highway Department and it has yet to respond.

This is the time for you all to step up and tell the policy board that this is not the time to consider this waiver. We have too much information and too many alternatives for the City of Little Rock and our region to consider before we approve this waiver.

I know this may all be moot. The policy board may approve whatever the Highway Department wants, because they're going to get their road and bridge funds. Part of this process is broken. It's up to you all to send a clear message that Little Rock wants to be a better city than this.

Thank you.

**Dr. Marsha Guffey:** One of the reasons why I get so upset about this issue is that what we build is permanent. If we build something and we're wrong, we've screw-up all of central Arkansas for generations. Every piece of this process should go slowly, deliberately, and make sure we are absolutely certain about what we're doing before we pull the trigger on it. A waiver on the policy at this time would be premature.

Think of the Pandora's Box that it would open, if we allow a waiver in this instance. Casey mentioned four lanes in Bryant. I've driven in Atlanta I have to go to If we keep adding lanes, As I look around central Arkansas, I see more and more concrete - short-term, temporary storage for more cars, but it's not solving the bigger picture. Let's look at this in a different way. Some nice alternatives have been offered, but the exploration of those alternatives has been blocked at every turn. There's not a person out there who doesn't think that building a bridge at Chester Street is a good idea. Intuitively, doesn't it make sense not to funnel all the traffic down one corridor? It doesn't make sense, it's ridiculous. And so we continue to funnel traffic one spot and refuse to look at other options. The boulevard alternative is worth exploring, because most of the traffic is not through traffic.

While I understand that for definitional reasons of what would/would not be considered a through lane in the tight I-30 corridor it would be nice for the highway department to have a waiver from the six lane policy, I think it is too early to grant the waiver. I think much more study on various options is needed and more widespread agreement is needed that the best option has been identified for the waiver to be granted. I am definitely opposed to abolition of the policy altogether.

**Mr. Cummings:** I thank all of you for your interest in this project, and for your comments today, and for your continued participation in this process. We can wait until all the public comment is in and has been evaluated. The RPAC then has three options: (1) We can recommend approval of the waiver; (2) we can recommend that the Board disapprove the waiver; or, (3) we make a recommendation to change the specifics of the request for waiver.

**Mr. Stair:** I've been on the TAC and RPAC since 2002. I will give five reasons (out of so many) why I think that the 6-lane cap needs to stay.

First: The METRO 2020 regional plan, adopted in 1995, first spoke of a 6-lane cross-section. Since then, this restriction has been expanded and strengthened, and for over 20 years now there has been a clear, consistent, and broadly supported effort to limit the size of the roadway cross-sections to six through lanes; and even though the plan does allow for the Metroplan board to grant an exemption for specific projects, it should be very clear that such an exemption is to be a last resort, after all other options have been removed. I don't believe that we have yet come to this stage, and so I don't believe we should remove the 6-lane cap.

Second: One of a number of reasons why we haven't reached that stage, in my opinion, is because not all the necessary studies have been done. The CARTS Roadway Design Standards and Implementation Procedures, adopted August, 2006, states: "If the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department sees the need to widen metropolitan freeways beyond six through lanes ... 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."

In the AHTD "Know the Facts" document provided at the April 26 meeting, in answering the question of whether widening I-30 will require all connecting freeways to be reconstructed at an estimated cost of \$4 billion, the AHTD states, "It is therefore improper to assume widening of a highway corridor prior to the completion of a corridor study." Given that we are dealing with the potential for upwards of \$4 billion of additional expenditures, and that what we build here could last for 20-40 years, I think we need to do that study. We should not remove the 6-lane cap until that study is completed and shows expansion to be essential.

Third: For decades Little Rock and North Little Rock have had their downtowns split by the I-30 barrier. The results are obvious and depressing. I find it appalling that the AHTD is suggesting that we increase that barrier. And the barrier will definitely be increased with the 8- and 10-lane alternatives –visually, psychologically, and physically expanding it for decades to come. Therefore, we should not remove the 6-lane cap ever.

Fourth: The only 6-lane alternative we now have is the "no build" option. I would dearly love to see as much effort as has been put into the 8- and 10-lane designs put into designing what many call an "improved 6-lane" option. In addition to replacing the bridge, perhaps this alternative would involve wider shoulders in the corridor, improved on- and off-ramps, and innovative flyovers at critical junctions (such as I-30 / I-40). There is considerable engineering expertise at the AHTD, and much thought has provided notable improvements in the earliest designs. I would not be surprised to find that an honest and equally determined effort could come up with

some very good designs that require only six lanes. Until an improved 6-lane option is thoroughly studied, I do not think we should remove the 6-lane cap.

Fifth: The AHTD, by threatening to withhold funds, and by alluding to some time crunch, is using what I consider to be age-old salesman tactics, trying to rush the unwary buyer into making a rash decision. This advisory council, and the Metroplan Board, should take these practices as a bright warning sign, and clearly and strongly re-affirm the 6-lane cap.

We have the time. The bridge isn't about to fall down. So why can't we thoroughly investigate an improved 6-lane alternative, and do comprehensive system-wide modeling to see the full effects of all these options?

It is very sad, actually, that the AHTD hasn't taken the 6-lane cap to heart, and applied engineering expertise and creativity to the project to produce an enhanced, improved six-lane corridor that increases safety and throughput, and that could be a national example of how to improve a transportation system without relying on the tired old paradigm of expansion and more lanes. What could we get with better on- and off-ramps, wider shoulders, and a marvelously placed flyover or two on a rebuilt 6-lane system? Perhaps something we could all be really, really proud of.

**Ms. Green:** Will the Board vote on this without the RPAC's input?

**Mr. Cummings:** The Board will not vote on this until after the public comment period has ended. As the RPAC, we make recommendations to the Board, which will be at the August meeting.

**Mr. Covington:** The Metroplan Board meets on the last Wednesday of the month. August has five Wednesdays, so the meeting date will be one week after the RPAC's meeting. The RPAC meeting has been pushed back one week, to the 24<sup>th</sup>, to allow for the public comment period to be completed in time for your consideration. The Board will meet on Wednesday, the 31<sup>st</sup>.

**Mr. Hathaway:** I've listened to the comments from the Council members and from the public, and I respect them all. I've thought a lot about our purpose here today. I realize that I have not been a vocal Council member. I'm in the real estate business here in Little Rock and the chairman of the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce. It's clear from everything we've heard today that my viewpoint is probably in the distinct minority and may be very unpopular, but I do respect everyone's opinion and want my opinion to put in the record, as well.

I actually think the requested waiver is appropriate. I've listened to Casey, Jim and Ben's presentations today. I also read every word of Mr. Bennett's letter, several times, and I think it states the case very well. This is a uniquely complex corridor and I do think it requires the flexibility and the innovation that a waiver for this project

would allow. Therefore, I urge my fellow Council members to recommend that the Board approve the requested waiver for this project.

A few quick thoughts: I ask everybody to think about freeways and business. There were some comments today that indicated that freeways were bad for business. I've been in the real estate business for almost 35 years and to hear someone say that businesses don't want to locate by freeways is just not accurate. It's very inaccurate. If you look at downtown Little Rock, well, there's a freeway there now. I heard someone say that it's depressing. It is not a drying-up downtown. There is active development going on now.

**Dr. Hampton:** I have been really appreciative of the time we've taken and the presentations that have been made by all sides. My concern has been process. I am really very troubled when a major public entity, namely, the AHTD, began this process with full knowledge of what was going on at Metroplan. This is the sticking point for me. What we have been doing to develop the long-range plans and to pull the *Imagine Central Arkansas* plan together - and very successfully - was very public, very transparent. I am troubled that with all of that information, there was not the level of cooperation in developing the proposal for the I-3 Crossing. I believe that is egregious, and I believe that is the type of disregard for citizen participation that is more indicative of how people handle private money rather than for the process of how we use federal and State funds. This is public money. I respect the process. Those of us who have been coming to the RPAC table, who are committed to this process, and in making sure the people in this community begin to believe that their input into these processes will be valued.

We know that we do not have a vote, but we do have a voice, and I believe there is something in which this entire process has unfolded that diminishes opportunity for, and respect for, citizens. Certainly business people have a voice, because they have a tremendous amount of influence at the Department. My considered opinion is that we should delay taking any vote until there has been public comment, because that is way the Council has been working that has been to seek public comment and to use public comment as we deliberate our decisions.

**Mr. Cummings:** There is a saying, "Never get the cart before the horse." We're being asked to provide a waiver, but the Highway Department has still not made a decision as to what it will do with that waiver. How wide, how long will it be? I have a big problem with that. It seems you would come to this Council and say, "This is what I want to build. Now I'd like a waiver so that I can build it." At what point in time are we going to learn whether this is going to be a six lane enhanced, or a 14-lane monstrosity going through the heart of the city.

**Mr. Browning:** That's a great question, and before I answer it I'd like to address an earlier question about the letter that came through the Department. As you're aware, there were two requests. One was for a complete repeal of the six-lane

policy; the other request, if repeal was not possible, was to provide a waiver for this project. Some people have asked why we did that - were we trying to circumvent the process, were we trying to put pressure on the Metroplan Board to take immediate action? Absolutely incorrect. The intent of the letter was to ask the Board to address it at its next meeting, meaning they could start the process. We were never asking them to bypass their process. We recognize that there is an established process and we were asking them engage in that process, which they very respectfully did. I got together with Casey and Jim very quickly after that meeting, because the Board did begin the process.

We asked for the repeal, first, because we thought there needed to be a discussion about that. Although the policy has been in place for awhile, it seemed like it was just continued from plan update to plan update without a very robust discussion happening. So, we just wanted to bring up that discussion, going forward. Working with Jim and Casey, they both said it would be an excellent question for discussion at the next update. And the reason we asked for that first, is that were it to be repealed right away, there would be no need to request a waiver. Jim and Casey say it's about a year-and-a-half process and so that wouldn't make sense for this project. So, our next step is to request a waiver.

We respect the process. We in no way want to circumvent the process. We want to work with Metroplan, we want to work with RPAC. We feel that we are doing that.

Back to your question. We have delayed bringing the request forward because we wanted to make sure that the process and NEPA had gotten to the point where we had some pretty well developed alternatives. When we started the PEL, we had over 40 different possible alternatives and we went through a very in-depth screening process to refine those different alternatives and find the one that would accomplish what we needed in the corridor. We didn't feel until public meeting #6 in April, that we had come to the point where we had established alternatives, where we had a lot of information we could present to the public and get comments back. We got great comments, over 1400 comments and a lot of good input.

At that point, we decided we there was enough of an established idea of what would be proposed for the corridor, and since there were two alternatives that would require a waiver of the six lane policy, we determined that the best thing would be to start the process - not to get a decision immediately, but to start the process of getting a waiver. As you can see, there are several steps to be taken. And then that would allow the alternatives to be considered, to be considered equally. Right now, if there's not that initiated process, there is a little bit of that uncertainty. As a question was asked before, if through lanes are not being added, is an exception really needed? And that's a discussion. That adds some complexity. Some people would say there is no need, because this is just a series of interchanges. That adds some uncertainty. Some people say there is [a need to request a waiver.] That needs to be considered. Let's have that discussion of a waiver at this point, with those

alternatives, then we can finally move forward in the NEPA process. That's why we moved forward as we did.

**Mr. Cummings:** So you still don't know.

**Mr. Browning:** Right. The NEPA process is going to refine that, and so we still evaluate them, and the NEPA process will determine a preferred alternative.

**Mr. Cummings:** To follow up on why Sybil said: RPAC is made up of many different jurisdictions, that staff has put together over the years, that represent central Arkansas very effectively. Everything that we've done - and I've been through this process ever since the first plan was developed under the ISTEPA legislation - everything that we've done all these years, has been driven by public comment. The six lane cap is in there because of public comment. And I would really like for us to wait until the next month's meeting to see exactly what the public comments are, before we put this to a vote. That is my personal opinion. The public is very, very important in what we do. It's important that we protect that relationship with the public as we go forward. When we develop the next version of the plan, we may to rewrite significant portions of the plan to account for or address the removal of the six lane cap policy. That cap is interwoven throughout the whole plan, and that's the reason Ben was mentioning the year-and-a-half it would take to rewrite the plan - it's not going to be an easy process, and we are going to need public input to do that effectively.

The floor is still open for discussion. We have a few more minutes and certainly do not want to cut off discussion. We will entertain a motion at any time, to do one of three things: recommend that the Board approve the waiver request; recommend that the Board deny the waiver request; or we can put the vote off until our August 24<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Mr. Covington:** I want to make it clear that the State did ask for the removal of the six-lane policy. That does not mean that it will be removed; it simply means that during the next plan update that is another discussion that our community has to have. There has been absolutely no decision made on that, other than to have the discussion as part of the next update. The public of central Arkansas deserve to have that conversation and we expect a vocal participation.

**Mr. Roda:** The Highway Department does have a member on this Council and we certainly could have discussed this as we were evaluating the last plan, or any prior plan.

Moving on, even though everybody here knows my position, I am persuaded by what Charles and Sybil have said. I agree that we are a body that is responsive to the public. I think we are obligated to let that public comment period occur and then

reconvene and review those comments before we give the request an up-or-down vote.

**MOTION** by Mr. Roda, second by Mr. Sutton

"To table the request for approval of a waiver to the six-lane policy, until such time as the public comment period has been concluded and comments analyzed."

**Discussion:** The public comment period will run from July 24<sup>th</sup> through close of business day on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. Ms. White and Mr. Stair asked if the RPAC will have time to review the results of the public comments, prior to the next RPAC meeting. Mr. Stair also expressed concern that the Metroplan Board may elect to take action on the AHTD's request before the August RPAC meeting. Both Mr. Covington and Mr. Cummings assured the Council that it will receive an interim report of the public comment received up to about a week before the August 24<sup>th</sup> RPAC meeting.

**PASSED**

The chairman encouraged Council members to spread the word about the public comment period, and to share information about the six lane policy and the requested waiver. The more participation we have, the better the process will work.

#### **6. Other Business and Next Meeting**

Mr. Cummings announced that Mr. Antonio Johnson, an RPAC member representing the AHTD, has accepted a job with the Federal Highway Administration and will be moving out of state within the next week. On behalf of the RPAC members, Mr. Cummings thanked Mr. Johnson for his work on the Council and his dedication to good transportation planning and public engagement, and wished him and his family much good luck.

The next meeting will be at 11:30 AM, on Wednesday, August 24<sup>th</sup>. This is the fourth Wednesday, not the usual third Wednesday meeting day.

#### **7. Adjourn**

With no further business brought forward, the Chairman asked for motion to adjourn.

**MOTION** by Ms. Freasier, second by Ms. Green

"To adjourn."

**Council adjourned at 1:22 PM.**