

Regional Planning Advisory Council

Tuesday, March 26, 2013

Minutes

Members & Alternates Attending:

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| 1. Becky Adams | Arkansas Department of Health |
| 2. Mary Beth Bowman | City of North Little Rock |
| 3. Sam Chaffin | City of Benton |
| 4. Marcia Cook | City of Sherwood |
| 5. Kelly Coughlin (Alt.) | City of Sherwood |
| 6. Charles Cummings (Chairman) | Trucking & Freight |
| 7. Gary DalPorto (Nonvoting) | Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) |
| 8. Tom Easterly | Saline County |
| 9. Coreen Frasier | BACA |
| 10. Robin Freeman | Saline County |
| 11. Sybil Hampton | City of Little Rock |
| 12. Paul Hastings | City of Little Rock |
| 13. Scott Hunter | Faulkner County |
| 14. Steve Mitchell | AR State Highway & Transportation Dept (AHTD) |
| 15. Marcus Montgomery (Alt.) | Pulaski Technical College (PTC) |
| 16. Tim Ragsdale | Disabilities Community |
| 17. Dan Roda | City of Little Rock |
| 18. Patrick Stair | Sierra Club |
| 19. Jack Stowe | City of Maumelle |
| 20. Tom Sutton | Clinton National Airport |
| 21. Regina Taylor | GSCC |
| 22. Mary Louise Williams | Pulaski County |

Consultants:

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| 1. Kevin Tilbury | Gresham Smith & Partners (GS&P) |
| 2. Lindsay Puckett | GS&P |

Metroplan Staff Present:

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| 1. Lynn Bell | Graphics Specialist |
| 2. Susan Dollar | Transportation Planner |
| 3. Casey Covington | CARTS Study Director |
| 4. Nelson Galeano | Engineer |
| 5. Jonathan Lupton | Research Planner |
| 6. Richard Magee | Deputy Director |
| 7. Jim McKenzie | Executive Director |
| 8. Kelly Volin | Planner |
| 9. Judy Watts | Public Outreach Coordinator |

1. Call to Order

RPAC Chairman Charles Cummings called the meeting to order at 12:00 noon. The meeting was held in the Jeffrey Hawkins Conference Room, 501 W. Markham Street, Little Rock.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Council considered the minutes of December 6, 2012. Two small corrections were noted:

MOTION by Mary Louise Williams, second by Marcia Cook
"To approve the Minutes of December 6, 2012, as corrected."
PASSED

3. Summary of Round 2 Outreach

Kevin Tilbury summarized the results of the second round of public outreach. Round 2 outreach strategies included a mix of social media and in-person events. Hosted visits, hometown visits and speaker's bureau events attracted a number of people who might not be interested in using online tools or social media. Online ads and e-blasts were also used to good effect.

4. Choose Your Future Tool Results

The backbone of the second round of public outreach was an online interactive tool, called Choose Your Future, where participants identified their top priorities for central Arkansas. Participants' choices were made more meaningful by the immediate depiction of the potential impacts of those decisions.

Mr. Tilbury reviewed the results in detail. The overall findings included the following:

1. Respondents placed high priority on parks, the environment, convenience, and transportation choice.
2. Providing options for transit, walking and biking were preferred over building new roads.
3. Premium transit, especially light rail, was popular.
4. Respondents preferred maintaining and improving existing roads over building new roads.
5. Respondents made the connection between transportation and development.

Patrick Stair suggested that the number of responses be broken out by county. If one county is over-represented, perhaps responses could be weighted. Mr. Tilbury replied that 67 percent of responses came from Pulaski County. It is typical to receive more responses from urban areas than from rural areas. Mr. Stair advised that that information should be included in the presentation of outreach results.

Mr. Cummings said that he was surprised to see such a strong preference for light rail. He asked the consultant team if they have experienced similar responses from other areas. Mr. Tilbury replied that a preference for premium transit is a growing trend, and especially strong in central Arkansas. Conway responses were among the highest in expressing a desire for light rail.

Scott Hunter expressed skepticism regarding the commitment to premium transit such as light rail, asking “Who will pay for it?” Mr. Tilbury replied that cost will be significant, but is a separate question from the willingness to commit. Mr. Hunter suggested that incremental changes aimed at changing attitudes toward travel would be helpful. He specifically suggested that more efforts should be put toward promoting car pooling.

Tom Easterly was also concerned about cost, asking if associated costs were included in the online tool. Mr. Tilbury pointed out that the impacts of each decision were shown as part of the online exercise. The next step in plan development will be to identify costs and funds. Mr. Easterly commented that for many people, big projects such as light rail are appealing in concept but not “in the real world”.

5. Proposed Approach for *Imagine Central Arkansas* Scenarios

Mr. Cummings asked Mr. Tilbury to explain the concept of “scenario development” for the benefit of those RPAC members who were new to the planning process.

The second round of public outreach confirmed the vision expressed in METRO 2030.2, and in earlier plans—all the way back to METRO 2020, which was developed in the 1990s. The vision plan laid out in METRO 2030.2 balances highway investments with a shift toward robust regional transit, bicycle and pedestrian networks that together frame a more compact, mixed-use development pattern.

Rather than invest more time and money into a new analysis of alternatives that have already been examined in earlier iterations of the regional plan, *Imagine Central Arkansas* proposes to instead focus on implementing the vision. This approach is composed of two elements: (1) alternative implementation scenarios; and (2) analysis of major external influences.

Developing alternative scenarios would entail looking at not *what* choices would be made, but *when* implementation would occur. Each scenario would revolve around a different time frame—“steady as you go”, accelerated, and aggressive implementation.

Mr. Cummings then asked for discussion for the RPAC. Following is a summary of comments.

- Coreen Frasier pointed out that *Imagine Central Arkansas* will look 30 or more years into the future, and there are a number of variables to

consider. By way of example, Ms. Frasier noted that the price of fuel will continue to climb, and the economy may take dramatic shifts up and down. She stated that we must be able to anticipate and adapt to change, because we will no longer have a choice.

- Mr. Stair clarified that instead of goals, the proposed scenarios would focus on *method* of implementation. Mr. Tilbury concurred with that statement.
- Mr. Hunter emphasized the need to first change the mind-set of central Arkansans, particularly those who reside outside of the Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway urban core. Mr. Hunter cited the poor ridership of Central Arkansas Transit buses (CATA) as an example of how most people are reluctant to give up their cars.
- Mr. Stair disagreed with several of Mr. Hunter's assertions. It is not the RPAC's role to function as a social engineering agent, but rather to provide the kind of infrastructure that can lead to more options. He also noted that bus systems—CATA included—enjoy increased ridership during periods of economic turndown and higher gas prices.
- Kelly Coughlin agreed that the issue was that of providing the options so the people will the ability to choose.
- Mr. Cummings said that he was in favor of this new approach because Why reinvent the wheel? He noted that Imagine Central Arkansas has gotten better public participation than previous efforts, and the opinions expressed have not changed.
- Marcus Montgomery agreed with Ms. Coughlin and Mr. Stair, and added that people who are leery of travel modes other than personal vehicles have often not been exposed to a robust transit system. Mr. Montgomery concluded by saying that he was for speedier implementation of the vision expressed in this and earlier plans.
- Mr. Cummings said that public attitudes can change according to changing conditions. For example, his son recently moved to the Atlanta area. Until then, he had never used transit and did not think it would be a preferred option. Within a few months, however, Mr. Cummings' son was gladly using the transit system.
- Regina Taylor noted that caring for the environment ranked very high among the Imagine Central Arkansas participants. Ms. Taylor suggested that promoting transit options as good environmental stewardship would resonate with the public.
- Mr. Hunter pointed out that there is not a roadway loop around Little Rock-North Little Rock. Constructing a light rail network would require

“starting from scratch”. He again expressed concern about the cost of any such project.

- Ms. Coughlin stated that projects called for in the 2030 plan, which had been developed by the TAC, have been implemented; steps toward fulfilling the vision have been made, albeit baby steps. Ms. Coughlin emphasized that businesses have chosen to locate in this area based in part on the forward-thinking vision provided in these regional plans. She stated that these victories may not be adequately publicized. At a minimum, the elected officials on the Metroplan Board of Directors should be regularly informed of new and positive changes taking place, and “we should be connecting the dots” between those advances and the vision expressed in our regional plan.
- Dan Roda remarked that plans are always constrained by a number of political and demographic factors.
- Steve Mitchell stated that the method proposed by Mr. Tilbury is a reasonable approach. Mr. Mitchell further stated that no plan can anticipate everything that may happen, and that this method permits fine-tuning and adjustments.
- Ms. Frasier challenged RPAC members to visit the bus transfer center between the hours of 7:00 and 8:00 pm during the workweek. (The last buses run at 8:00 pm.) She said that during that time, “you will see lots of people” riding the bus.
- Mr. Easterly noted that CATA costs about \$1 million per year and that farebox accounts for about ten percent of the revenue.
- Tim Ragsdale stated that there is a perceived idea that transit won’t work for them, in part because of inexperience with riding buses. He noted that most people who ride buses are going to work, and if it were not for bus service they might not be able to get to their jobs. Additionally, people with disabilities often must use the bus or transit system to go about their daily business. Mr. Ragsdale suggested that a cost-benefit analysis would reveal that the benefits of maintaining a bus system would out-distance the cost.

MOTION by Sam Chaffin, second by Patrick Stair

“To authorize the consultants to pursue the approach to future scenarios, as proposed.”

PASSED (voice vote, no nays)

Mr. Tilbury then explained the second element of the approach to scenario development, analysis of major external influences. A few of the many factors that could be considered: changing vehicle technology and vehicle ownership; demographics; and climate change and adaptation.

Mr. Cummings opened the topic to discussion. Following is a summary of the comments.

- Mr. Stair stated that “we should definitely” examine external factors. He suggested that financial influences should be particularly scrutinized. For example, fuel-efficient cars, increased walkability, improved roadway efficiency and new technologies such as car trains, while good, will almost certainly impact revenues derived from gas taxes.
- Mr. Hunter said that freight always pays higher taxes than private car owners, “and trucks aren’t going away.” Mr. Hunter also expressed ambivalence about the approach to analyzing external factors, and concern that revenue sources might not be given the weight that it should. Mr. Cummings responded to Mr. Hunter by pointing out that plans are revisited at least every five years, and either tweaked or significantly updated, as needed.
- Robin Freeman said that we should be open to many possibilities. She noted that schools, including UCA, are now requiring students to use iPads. The consequence may well be that textbooks will be bought online and downloaded, and therefore fewer traditional books will be shipped and trucked across the country.
- Sybil Hampton commented that this process “forces us to be problem-solvers”. She urged the Council not to be “stuck in fear” or in what may have happened in the past. She suggested that scenarios permit a thoughtful evaluation, as opposed to merely reacting to events. Dr. Hampton added that we should be thinking about costs of projects in terms of investments, and cited wise use of bus and other transit as an example of investing in the region’s economic vitality.
- Mr. Easterly pointed out that the RPAC has already voted to move ahead with the proposed approach. The RPAC will monitor the process and direct adjustments as necessary.
- Jack Stowe remarked that he participated in the 2030 plan. He said, “We argued over the details, but when it was said and done, our plan was pretty good.” He noted that the current process backs up the 2030 research.
- Mr. Hunter was uncomfortable with the participation of Faulkner and Saline counties. He stated that those counties should have equal representation. Mr. Stowe replied that all were asked to “come to the table” and all are welcome to participate in the process.

- Paul Hastings commented that he has lived in Little Rock for almost 70 years. His businesses employ more than 250 people, who drive to work from all parts of central Arkansas. Mr. Hastings offered two points: (1) agreeing with Mr. Hunter that attitudinal issues will keep people from using transit; and (2) transit usage is not practical as it is currently available.
- Mary Beth Bowman stated that technology makes a difference, just as Mr. Tilbury's example of cell phones suggests. We may not be able to accurately predict what or how changing technology will impact the region, but we do know that change will happen and we should anticipate impacts.
- Mr. Hunter reiterated that there is a need to involve people in the outlying areas of Faulkner and Saline counties. He said that opinions in those areas regarding transit would likely be different from those of people living in the urban core. He noted that CATA's service does not pay for itself. Mr. Mitchell responded that "no transit system is self-supporting" but there are other reasons for developing and maintain a bus or other transit service.
- Dr. Hampton spoke of the need for the Council to conduct business on a "level of trust". She stated that this is a complicated and many-faceted process. Although we each represent our own city, county or interest group, we should also think about the entire region—urban, suburban and rural areas. She said, "This is a regional plan." Dr. Hampton further stated that it is more important to work together toward an understanding of regional needs and how people want to live. A high quality of life is desirable no matter where people live, although the specifics of that quality can vary from place to place.

Before adjourning, the Council watched a video depicting a proposed light rail service along the I-630 corridor. Several members commented that the video was well-done.

6. Other Business and Next Meeting

Mr. Cummings announced that a letter would be mailed within the next few days to RPAC members regarding the critical importance of their commitment to participating in the *Imagine Central Arkansas* process.

Two meetings are scheduled in April: Thursday, April 11, and Tuesday, April 30. Additional information will be forthcoming, but mark your calendars now.

7. Adjourn

With no further business brought forward, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at about 1:30 p.m.