



Planning for
Greater Akron

The AMATS Quarterly

THE JOURNAL OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING FOR THE GREATER AKRON AREA

January-February-March 2010

Volume 33, Issue 1

Inside

Economy, Gas
Prices Take Toll
on Area Traffic
Volumes

.....page 2.

Good for Kent,
Good for the
Region

.....page 3.

3C Corridor to
Link Cleveland,
Columbus, Dayton
and Cincinnati

.....pages 4 & 5.

Community Focus:
Kent

.....page 7.

A 'Gateway' to Kent's future

A major piece of the city of Kent's plan to transform its downtown fell into place in late January. The Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) received \$20 million in a federal TIGER grant to build its new downtown Kent Transit Center – a state-of-the art multi-modal facility.

The center will serve as the transportation hub of Kent's Central Gateway project, which is a cooperative \$100 million effort to reinvent its downtown. The project will connect downtown with nearby Kent State University (KSU).

The transit center will be located in Kent's Erie Street and Haymaker Parkway area. The center will be home to 10 bus bays that will serve local and express bus routes operated by PARTA. With its location on The PORTAGE Hike & Bike Trail, the center will include bike and pedestrian facilities and will be an eco-friendly building using geothermal energy for heating and cooling.

As envisioned, the Kent Central Gateway project will include a nearby 120 room hotel, a conference center, new office and retail complexes and a new Portage County Courthouse. Upon completion, the redevelopment is expected to create 1,000 new jobs and improve connectivity between the city's downtown and the KSU campus.



CENTERING ON KENT: Construction will soon begin on the new Kent Transit Center, shown above, thanks to a \$20 million federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant. The center is a key element of the the Kent Gateway Project to reinvent the city's downtown area.

Economy, gas prices take toll on area traffic volumes

The volume of traffic in the Greater Akron area continues to drop, according to findings compiled by AMATS during its 2009 traffic counting season.

Transportation Engineer Dave Pulay says that the agency suspects that a combination of factors, chiefly high gas prices and rising unemployment, have contributed to this decline.

Traffic count data and the identification of trends are important for short-range and long-range transportation planning. Between the months of May and October, the agency conducts counts regarding the volume of traffic on the area's roadways and intersections.

These traffic counts are used by the agency in many of its analyses and in the evaluation of new projects. This data is not only used by AMATS, but it's also useful to consultants, developers, engineering firms and real estate professionals in the private sector.

After conducting 299 counts at various roadway segments and at 16 intersections, the agency determined that 2009 was part of a trend of declining traffic volumes that AMATS first identified nearly eight years ago.

The agency found that overall count volumes were down 15 percent compared to the previous count. Pulay notes that the sharpest drops occurred during 2008 and 2009.

The 2008 drop was recorded by the agency about the same time as when the price of gas peaked at \$4.06 a gallon in the Greater Akron area. The 2009 drop occurred about the same time as when the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell to 6,600 in May.

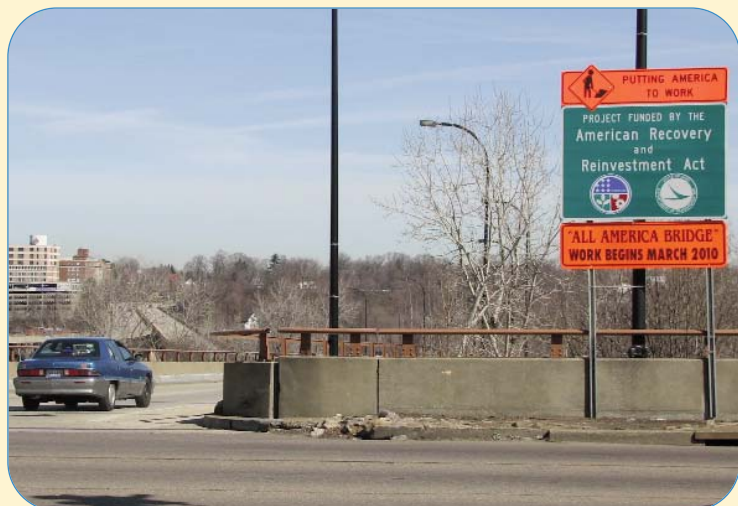
"That's about the time that the economy started to falter," Pulay says. He adds that another contributing factor may have been unemployment, which averaged around 9.5 percent in the area last year.

Whether traffic volumes will continue this trend in the coming years is difficult to predict, Pulay says.

The agency doesn't believe that the trend of the last several years is an aberration and may continue through the 2010 season. Whether it continues depends largely on economic conditions: If the economy deteriorates further, the trend could accelerate; if the economy improves, it could reverse course.

NEW ALL-AMERICA BRIDGE ON HORIZON:

Work began in late March on the more than \$6 million rehabilitation of Akron's All-America Bridge ("Y-Bridge") spanning the Little Cuyahoga River in Akron. The project is being built with federal stimulus funds that the city received last year and will include new safety fencing and LED lighting.



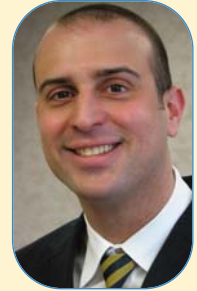
Good for Kent, good for the region

by Jason Segedy

As AMATS Director for the past two years, I have been energized by the significant planning challenges and opportunities faced by our region, our state, and our nation. The uncertain economic climate, volatile fuel prices, and the downturn in the real estate market have caused public officials, business leaders, and households to begin to question the long-term sustainability of our economy, our transportation system, and our land use patterns.

“The Kent Central Gateway project shows what can be accomplished when public officials, business leaders, and the public all get behind a creative vision”

**- Jason Segedy,
AMATS Director -**



There is a growing feeling that the post-World War II model for planning our built environment is in need of a significant overhaul. We are not yet at the stage, however, where a consensus has been established as to what the new model of development should be. The challenging policy question that public officials must grapple with remains “How do we go about creating healthy and vibrant urban places where people want to live, work, and play?”

I believe that one exciting answer to this complex question is the Kent Central Gateway project. From its inception, this redevelopment effort has been a model for institutional collaboration between the city of Kent, Kent State University (KSU), and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA).

The wonderful thing about this project is that it has the potential to comprehensively transform the urban landscape and transportation system in downtown Kent. It would make Kent into a city which looks better, works better, and feels better.

The project will consist of a KSU hotel and conference center; new retail, residential, office, and commercial space; and an extension of the Esplanade, a multi-purpose bicycle and pedestrian facility that will link KSU to downtown Kent.

The linchpin of the project is a multi-modal transit center that will serve as a transfer point for local and express bus services operated by PARTA, and eventually, a long-distance carrier, such as Greyhound. It will also include a new parking garage and bicycle facilities that can be used by Kent residents and KSU students.

I found it personally very gratifying to learn that PARTA would be receiving a \$20 million federal grant to construct the Kent Central Gateway multi-modal facility. The project will be a catalyst for further redevelopment of downtown Kent, and for building on previous successes like Acorn Alley, which is a new pedestrian-friendly retail area that I had the pleasure of strolling through several months ago.

Projects like this are not only great for the community in which they are located, but they are important for the well-being of the entire region. The Kent Central Gateway project shows what can be accomplished when public officials, business leaders, and the public all get behind a creative vision for integrating land use planning and transportation infrastructure.

3C Corridor to link Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati

Rail service between several Ohio cities could be en route to begin by late 2012 thanks to \$400 million in federal economic stimulus funds.

The funds will be used to construct a 265-mile passenger rail line known as the "3C Corridor" that would link Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati (See **3C CORRIDOR, Page 5**). Ohio's share of funding was part of an \$8 billion investment program announced by the U.S Department of Transportation in late January.

In April 2009, the Obama administration released a long-term plan for high-speed rail. Applicants, including Ohio, submitted over \$55 billion in project proposals for the \$8 billion awarded in January. Funding will be used to lay the groundwork for 13 new high-speed rail corridors across the country (See **NEW HIGH-SPEED RAIL CORRIDORS, Page 5**).

Other than projects in California and Florida, most of the federal government's initial outlay will not be used for high-speed rail projects that travel at speeds approaching 200 miles per hour, but rather for improvements designed to make existing lines faster. Trains on the 3C Corridor are expected to travel up to 79 mph.

The 3C Corridor is the first phase of a planned network of passenger rail corridors connecting Ohio and neighboring states. Expected to be operated by Amtrak, the 3C Corridor will share existing track with private sector freight railroads and will work around the schedules of freight haulers.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) has indicated that the system will need ongoing public support to operate.

The new service is expected to offer four daily round trips. Preliminary estimates for fares posted on ODOT's web site are \$20 for a three-hour one-way trip between Cleveland and Columbus and \$18 for a three-hour one-way trip between Cincinnati to Columbus. Akron and Canton are not destinations on the 3C Corridor.

The department and the Ohio Rail Development Commission are working with local communities to establish "last mile" connections for travelers at stations. Transit systems on the route have indicated their intent to coordinate local transit service with rail service. Other connections could include links to urban passenger rail systems, airports, taxis, rental cars and bike trails. Where such connections are not available, the department and commission are encouraging their development.

Before the first train rolls on the 3C Corridor, the seven-member Ohio Controlling Board must vote on whether to use the \$400 million in stimulus funds for its construction. The board provides legislative oversight over certain capital and operating expenditures by state agencies and has the authority to approve appropriations for capital construction projects.

In mid-March, ODOT submitted a request to the board to use \$25 million in stimulus funds to begin final environmental study, engineering and detailed design work related to the corridor. The board has not yet made a decision regarding this initial outlay of funds.

State and National Passenger Rail Proposals

3C Corridor



New High-Speed Rail Corridors



Project Updates

The following table lists transportation projects that have been awarded between December 4, 2009 and March 29, 2010.

PROJECT	ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATES	CONTRACTOR	AMOUNT
State Route 305 - Construction of curb and gutters with storm sewers on state Route 305 in Hiram .	08/2010	Mr. Excavator, Inc. - Kirtland -	\$130,549
State Route 619 / Arlington Road - Reconstruction of state Route 619 (East Turkeyfoot Lake Road)-Arlington Road intersection in Green . Project includes relocation of Jarvis Road, new turn lanes and signal improvements.	10/2011	Wenger Excavating, Inc. - Dalton -	\$5,411,627
State Route 261 - Resurfacing of state Route 261 (Vernon Odom Boulevard) in Akron .	08/2010	Karvo Paving Co. - Cuyahoga Falls -	\$298,278
Interstate 76 - Bridge rehabilitation on I-76 in Rootstown Township .	10/2010	The Ruhlin Company - Sharon Center -	\$1,751,697
State Route 82 - Bridge replacement on state Route 82 spanning Eagle Creek in Garrettsville .	10/2010	BOG Construction - Berlin Center -	\$1,296,777

BRIDGE TO SOMEWHERE:

Crews resumed work on the new Mill Street bridge in Akron, shown at right, in March. The new bridge, which connects Summit and College streets and spans the Conrail and CSX Corporation rail lines, is expected to be completed by spring 2011.



Community Focus: Kent

Community Focus presents information about communities within the Greater Akron area.

Founded - 1805 (The area was originally settled as two separate villages: Franklin - later Franklin Mills - and Carthage.)

Population - 27,983 (2008 U.S. Census Bureau estimate)

Area - 5,561 acres **Policy Committee Member** - City Manager David Ruller

History - In the 1820s and early 1830s, plans were made for the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal, which would connect Pittsburgh and Cleveland via Akron. An industrial and business region was established along the Cuyahoga River in what is now downtown Kent. Much of the canal bed is still visible in downtown Kent, including the historic lock and arch dam.

In 1863, a local businessman by the name of Marvin Kent was influential in bringing the Atlantic and Great Western Railroad through the village. The railroad reinvented the village as an important stop on the east-west line between St. Louis and New York City. The village of Franklin Mills was officially renamed in Kent's honor in 1867.

Transportation Challenges - Kent Superintendent of Engineering/Deputy Service Director Jim Bowling says that the city faces many challenges owing to its nature as a university community. "The city sees an influx of Kent State University (KSU) students every semester that is almost as large as the population of Kent. This causes unique traffic problems as new students are learning the streets around the city each and every year," Bowling says.

Other challenges facing the city are in specific locations, such as the state Route 43/Fairchild Avenue/Crain Avenue intersection. Bowling notes that the intersection ranked as the most congested in the AMATS 2006 *Existing Highway Congestion Study*. "The Crain Avenue Bridge Project should alleviate these concerns. It is anticipated to be completed in 2012," Bowling says. Since 2008, AMATS has provided nearly \$6 million in Surface Transportation Program funds for this project and committed \$3 million in federal economic stimulus funds in March 2009.

Additional trouble spots for Kent include Summit Street and a section of state Route 261. Extending through the KSU campus, Summit Street becomes heavily congested and has many high-crash intersections. Bowling adds that state Route 261 has a short section of four-lane divided highway that has severe crashes at every intersection.

Bowling notes that while the Haymaker Parkway project solved vehicular problems between state Route 43 and Willow Street, it has divided the downtown area from KSU. "With its limited access fence and lack of sidewalk connectivity, the parkway inhibits students and residents walking from KSU to downtown Kent," he continues, "We hope to provide the infrastructure necessary to allow for real transportation alternatives other than the automobile. This would include integrating bicycle and pedestrian facilities into the current transportation network."

Web site - www.kentohio.org



Dates to Remember

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Committee</u>	<u>Location</u>
May 13	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Stow Safety Building
May 13	7:00 p.m.	CIC	Silver Lake Village Hall
May 19	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Martin University Center The University of Akron

Persons with disabilities needing assistance are asked to contact Billy Soule, Assistant to the Mayor for Community Relations, 166 S. High Street, Room 503, Akron, Ohio 44308, (voice) 330-375-2189, (TDD) 330-375-2345, at least seven (7) days in advance.

The AMATS Quarterly is published by the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, 806 CitiCenter, 146 S. High St., Akron, Ohio 44308-1423. Editorial comments are welcome.

Director - Jason Segedy

Editor/writer - Kerry Prater

Phone - 330-375-2436 / Fax - 330-375-2275 / E-Mail - amats@akronohio.gov

Please visit our web site at: www.amatsplanning.org

Publication of *The AMATS Quarterly* is financed primarily by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, the Ohio Department of Transportation and the counties of and the municipalities within Summit and Portage counties and the Chippewa Township area of Wayne County.

The AMATS Quarterly
 c/o The Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study
 806 CitiCenter Office Building
 146 S. High St.
 Akron, Ohio 44308-1423