

2010 Annual Report



Planning for Greater Akron
The Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study

Special Publication

Annual Report 2010

Reviewing 2010, Looking to the Future by Chairman Bollas

As I look back on 2010, it occurs to me that we are entering a new decade. This new decade will present its own unique set of challenges for transportation planners and policy makers. But, based on what the agency accomplished in 2010, I'm confident that AMATS and the Greater Akron area will meet these challenges head on. It was the year that the agency took the first step in addressing the interrelated issues of land use and transportation planning. The completion of *Connecting Communities* marks the beginning of a more cohesive planning approach.



BOLLAS

During the year, the AMATS Policy Committee took the unprecedented step of passing a resolution urging federal policy makers to address the funding crisis confronting the nation's Highway Trust Fund. The resolution urges the federal government to approve a 10 cent increase in the federal gasoline tax as a means to fund the nation's transportation needs. The area had other notable accomplishments as well. The agency completed a comprehensive planning study of the effects of commercial sprawl in the Rothrock Road/Montrose area. The Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority was the first recipient in the nation to receive a \$20 million federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant for its new downtown Kent Transit Center.

Late in the year, Northeast Ohio received a \$4.25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Transportation to develop a cooperative regional sustainability plan.

I truly enjoyed my term as Policy Committee chairman during 2010. Working with the AMATS Staff of professionals provided me with valuable insights on the many challenging - and sometimes intertwined - issues facing our region. I am particularly proud of the fact that, during my term, the committee initiated discussions to revise the AMATS *Funding Policy Guidelines* to give communities greater flexibility in the use of state and non-federal funding sources to meet their local share requirements for projects. (The committee officially adopted these much-needed revisions in early 2011.)

The people of the Greater Akron area can be proud of this agency's accomplishments during a year that brought many changes. These pages show that AMATS is ready for the future.

Al Bollas
Mayor of New Franklin
2010 AMATS Policy Committee Chairman

Planning

Connecting Communities

In September, the Greater Akron area took a significant step in regional coordination with the completion of *Connecting Communities – A Guide to Integrating Land Use and Transportation*.

Connecting Communities represents AMATS' first comprehensive attempt to address the consequences of sprawl and create more vibrant livable communities. The guide provides a new planning framework with the goal to improve coordination between land use and transportation planning in the area. Its framework increases transportation choices and encourages development that supports a more effective transportation system.



AMATS, together with a working group of representatives from urban, suburban and rural communities, began crafting the guide under its *Connecting Communities* Initiative in the summer of 2009. The initiative was a large-scale effort by the agency to incorporate ideas from throughout the region by inventorying zoning, parcel sizes, watershed plans, sidewalks, and parking lots.

The guide is intended to be used by AMATS and other public and private entities in targeting investments and spurring regional cooperation. Many of its recommendations and strategies are specific to the agency while many are aimed at local communities and organizations. One result of the guide and its recommendations is the development of a new pilot planning grant program. Communities may use these grants to develop transportation plans consistent with the initiative.

The eight recommendations of *Connecting Communities* are summarized below.

Connecting Communities recommends that:

- Pedestrian planning and facilities be improved through targeted investments.
- Bicycle planning and facilities be improved through targeted investments.
- Public transportation systems be enhanced to meet the needs of current users and attract new users.
- “Complete streets” principles be incorporated into land use and transportation decisions.
- Land use policies be implemented that improve community cohesion and reduce urban sprawl.
- Environmental planning be integrated into land use and transportation planning.
- Interagency coordination on regional planning be improved.
- A planning grant program be created to implement *Connecting Communities*.
(This recommendation was accomplished in 2010.)

Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program

AMATS launched a new grant program in late 2010 as a result of *Connecting Communities*. The program provides \$100,000 worth of grants to help communities develop transportation plans that focus on livability practices identified in *Connecting Communities*. Under the program, the agency accepts applications for planning studies, such as corridor or transit-oriented development plans.

Response to the program's initial round of funding was enthusiastic. The agency received 17 grant applications from communities throughout the Greater Akron area. In December, the agency announced that the program's first recipients were the village of Richfield and the joint applicants of the city of Akron and METRO, the transit authority serving Summit County. Richfield will use its grant money to craft its *Crossroad of Commerce & Community Study*, a comprehensive land use plan for the area surrounding the intersection of Interstates 77 and 271. Akron and METRO will use their grant money to develop the *Downtown Akron Connectivity Study* to improve connectivity, accessibility and mobility between Akron's neighborhoods and districts located in the downtown area.

Rothrock Road/Montrose Planning Study

In September, the agency completed a comprehensive analysis of the impacts on traffic and land use in the Montrose area if a proposed move of the Wal-Mart and Sam's Club stores from Fairlawn to Copley Township were to occur. The analysis represented the first time that the agency became involved in an issue related to commercial sprawl within the Greater Akron area.



The analysis found that, if the proposed development takes place, it will have a substantial impact on the surrounding area's traffic and land use and would require additional improvements to the surrounding transportation system at an estimated cost of about \$7 million. However, the analysis recommended that a comprehensive traffic study be conducted to determine more accurate costs.

In its review of the issue, the Summit County Engineer's office utilized the agency's analysis and an impact study prepared by URS Consultants on behalf of Levey & Company – the developer of the proposed Copley Township site. The office presented its review to the Copley Township Trustees in mid-December. The debate surrounding this issue is expected to continue throughout 2011.

Sustainable Communities Grant

In October, AMATS was part of a 21-member Northeast Ohio consortium that sought and received a \$4.25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - one of 45 grants to be awarded across the nation. The consortium has three years to develop a regional plan for sustainability for the 12 counties of Northeast Ohio. This region's grant application was a joint effort of AMATS, the region's three other metropolitan planning organizations and several other local governments and philanthropic organizations.

The upcoming plan must identify integrated planning strategies for housing, land use, transportation, community development, infrastructure and economic development. The consortium is in the process of transitioning from an entity that applied for funding to a non-profit organization that will develop a meaningful program of action.

Engineering

Transportation Improvement Program

AMATS is responsible for the Greater Akron area's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which consists of more than 130 highway, public transit, and bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects totaling \$547 million over four years. Of this total, the agency manages 60 projects that receive \$79.8 million in funding.

In 2010, \$89.1 million in federal funds were expended on area highway and public transit projects. Of this total, \$56.2 million was for highway projects and more than \$28.2 million for transit projects. Another \$4.3 million was spent on bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects. During the year, the 14 projects that received more than \$14 million in federal funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 began construction.

Among the stimulus-funded projects completed during 2010 were:

- The **Crain Avenue bridge** replacement in **Kent**.
- The second phase of the **Seasons Road Interchange** in **Cuyahoga Falls** and **Stow**.
- The widening of **state Route 43** to four lanes in **Aurora**.

Other notable non-stimulus projects completed during the year were:

- The "**Six Corners**" **roundabout** at the Northeast Avenue-Howe Road-Munroe Road intersection in **Tallmadge**.
- Improvements to Martha Avenue related to the **Goodyear Redevelopment Project** in **Akron**.
- Seven major AMATS-funded resurfacing projects.



AMATS administers several funding programs that provide federal dollars for eligible highway and public transit projects.

In March, the agency selected 29 projects to receive \$28 million in federal funds (See **PROJECTS, Page 5**). Among the projects selected were an intersection improvement at state Routes 14 and 59 and Newton Falls Road in Ravenna Township and a project to construct a roundabout at the intersection of Smith and Riverview roads in Akron. These projects are expected to reduce the number of crashes at these intersections.

While the bulk of the funds will be used to maintain existing roads, a significant share is committed to the area's network of bike trails. The agency's commitment to bikeways stems from *Connecting Communities*, the AMATS initiative to promote regional connectivity and alternatives to the automobile. One of the projects benefiting from this effort is the upcoming esplanade at the Kent Central Gateway (See **FIRST, Page 7**) linking the downtown area and Kent State University with The PORTAGE Hike & Bike Trail. Other bikeways that received funding included the final piece of the Towpath Trail in Summit County and the new Freedom Secondary Trail in Akron and Tallmadge.

Projects Selected to Receive Funding in 2010

Project	Limits	Community	Total Funding*
The PORTAGE-KSU Gateway	State Route 59 to Lincoln Street / The Portage Extension	Kent	\$700,000
State Route 59 Sidewalks	State Route 59, from West Franklin Township Corporate Line to Rhodes Road	Franklin Township	\$168,000
Towpath Trail-Park East	From Thornton Street to Bartges Street	Akron	\$700,000
Freedom Secondary Rail Trail- Northside	From Northside Train Station to Southwest Avenue	Akron and Tallmadge	\$700,000
Northside Train Station Connector	Beech Street Trail Head to Northside Train Station	Akron	\$700,000
Crain Avenue resurfacing	From Willow Street to Elmwood Drive	Kent	\$150,000
Randolph Road resurfacing	From Cleveland Avenue to East Mogadore Corporate Line	Mogadore	\$212,000
Sandy Lake Road resurfacing	From Meloy Road to Lakewood Road	Rootstown Township	\$519,000
East Summit Street resurfacing	East of Loop Road to west of state Route 261	Kent	\$277,000
Chamberlin Road resurfacing	From state Route 82 to Ravenna Road	Twinsburg	\$456,000
Eastern Road resurfacing	From state Route 585 to Cleveland- Massillon Road	Barberton, Chippewa Township and Norton	\$576,000
Norton Road resurfacing	From state Route 91 to Stow Road	Hudson and Stow	\$251,000
Portage Trail resurfacing	From 13th Street to Fourth Street	Cuyahoga Falls	\$240,000
State Road resurfacing	From Quick Road to Seasons Road	Cuyahoga Falls	\$320,000
Stow Road resurfacing	From Norton Road to state Route 303	Hudson	\$800,000
State Route 14 intersection improvements	Intersection of state Route 14 with state Route 59-Newton Falls Road	Ravenna Township	\$3,000,000
State Road reconstruction	From Bath Road to Steels Corners Road	Cuyahoga Falls	\$6,000,000
State Route 91 (Darrow Road) intersection improvements	From Fishcreek Road to Norton Road	Stow	\$640,000
State Route 91-Prospect Street intersection improvements	Intersection of state Route 91 with Prospect Street	Hudson	\$560,000
State Routes 93 and 619 intersection improvements	Intersection of state Routes 93 and 619	New Franklin	\$1,280,000
State Route 261 (Tallmadge Avenue) intersection realignment	Intersection of state Route 261 with Dayton Street	Akron	\$1,000,000
State Route 261 (Tallmadge Avenue) reconstruction	From state Route 8 to Home Avenue	Akron	\$4,328,000
Arlington Road reconstruction	From Green North Corporate Line to Akron South Corporate Line	Coventry and Springfield townships	\$1,040,000
West Exchange Street/Cedar Street signal improvements	From Delia Avenue to Bowery Street	Akron	\$2,400,000
Howe Avenue intersection improvements	Intersection of Howe Avenue and Main Street	Cuyahoga Falls	\$822,000
METRO bus purchases	Purchase of four 40-foot Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses	Summit County	\$1,440,000
Smith Road roundabout construction	Construction of roundabout at intersection of Smith and Riverview roads	Akron	\$139,000
State Route 18 (East Market Street) signal improvements	From Goodkirk Street to Firestation 2 and Goodkirk Street and Fountain Street from Exchange Street to Perkins Avenue	Akron	\$568,000
State Route 162 (Copley Road/Maple Street) signal improvements	From Collier Road to Glendale Avenue	Akron	\$2,100,000

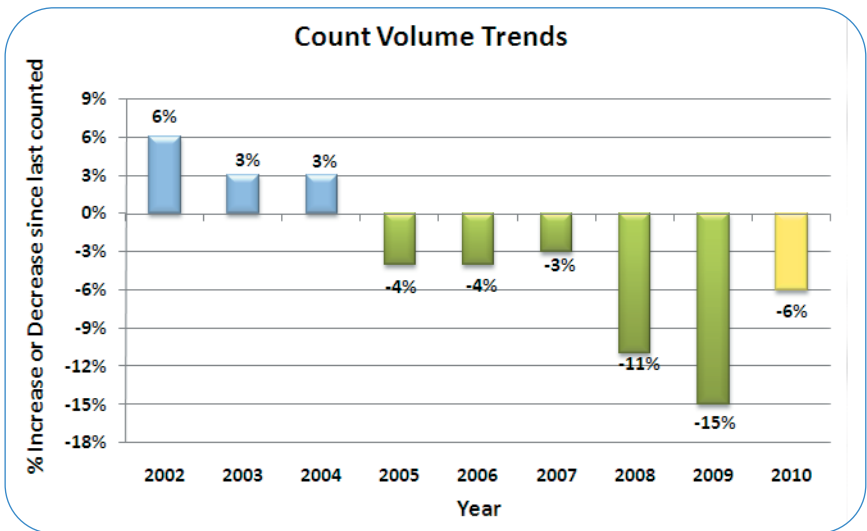
* Rounded to nearest thousand.

Traffic Counting Program

Traffic count data and the identification of trends are important for short-range and long-range transportation planning. During the summer, the agency compiles data regarding the volume of traffic on the area's roadways and intersections for use in many of its analyses and the evaluation of new projects.

According to findings compiled by the agency during the 2010 traffic counting season, the volume of traffic in the Greater Akron area continues its downward trend, but that trend appears to be slowing.

After conducting 320 counts at various roadway segments and at 17 intersections, the agency found that overall county volumes were down 6 percent compared to the previous year's count. While 2010 represents the fifth consecutive year for declining traffic volumes, it is also the first time in two years that the agency has not recorded a double-digit decrease in traffic volumes.



Traffic Crashes 2007-2009

The agency compiles crash analyses to plan and fund effective roadway safety improvements. In August, AMATS completed its analysis of crashes on roads and intersections using records provided by the Ohio Department of Public Safety between 2007 and 2009. The analysis identifies high-crash locations throughout the Greater Akron area.



The most recent analysis is the latest evidence of a downward trend in traffic crashes in the area.

Between 2002 and 2004, the area recorded more than 68,200 crashes. Since that time, area crashes have dropped by 25 percent to slightly more than 54,500 between 2007 and 2009. Every three-year analysis conducted by AMATS since 2002 has recorded declines in crashes – the most recent analysis shows a more than 4 percent decline from the 2006-2008 analysis. Interestingly, the rate of decline appears to have accelerated in the last several years. Agency officials suspect that the decline is due to a combination of factors such as people driving less in a weak economy and various safety improvements throughout the region.

First of its Kind

In March, the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) became the first recipient in the country to receive a federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant. PARTA will use its \$20 million TIGER grant to build the Kent Central Gateway, the transportation hub of a cooperative \$100 million effort to reinvent the city's downtown. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood was among the attendees during grant signing ceremonies for the center in July (See photo and graphic.)



CONNECTIVITY IN KENT: PARTA officials expect the Kent Central Gateway, shown at left, to be open by October 2012. The new \$26 million transit center will link downtown Kent to Kent State University and 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 pedestrian and bike facilities and will be an eco-friendly building using geothermal energy for heating and cooling.

LAHOOD VISITS PARTA: U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, seated left, first row, was on hand for the July TIGER grant signing ceremonies for the Kent Central Gateway. From left, first row, LaHood, Rhonda Reed, Federal Transit Administration Region V deputy director and John Drew, PARTA general manager. In the second row, from left, are Lester Lefton, KSU president; Stephen Colecchi, KSU board member; Congressman Tim Ryan; Eric Czetli, Ohio Department of Transportation District 4 deputy director; Bryan Smith, PARTA planning director; and Wayne Wilson, Kent City Council president pro tem.



Other Achievements

Supporting Gas Tax Increase

In September, the AMATS Policy Committee took the extraordinary step of approving a resolution stating its support for a 10 cent per gallon increase in the federal gasoline tax. The resolution urges Congress to increase the tax as a stopgap measure to fund the bankrupt federal Highway Trust Fund. First proposed by AMATS Director Jason Segedy in May, approval came after four months of debate and culminated in a 15-12 vote in support of the measure.

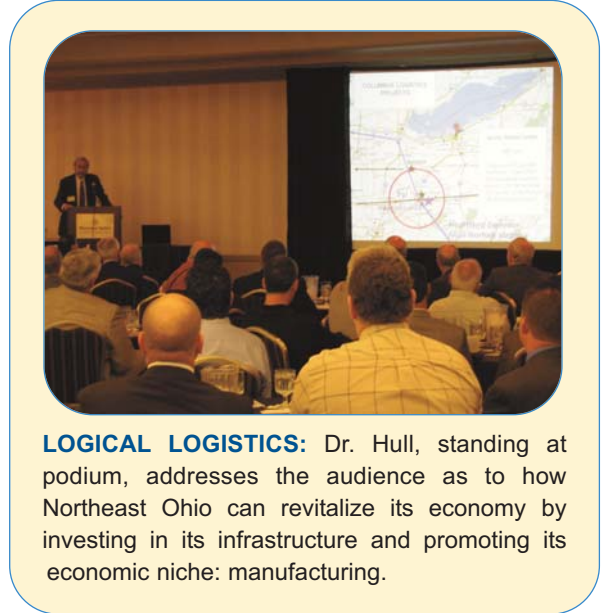
The current federal gasoline tax of 18.4 cents per gallon has not been increased since 1993. Because the tax is not indexed to inflation, its actual purchasing power has declined significantly. Meanwhile, the costs of meeting the nation's transportation and infrastructure needs continue to increase.

In passing the resolution, the committee recognized that an increase in revenue is necessary to fund the nation's transportation infrastructure.

Annual Meeting

The AMATS 2010 Annual Meeting drew over 120 attendees from across Northeast Ohio when it convened at the Sheraton Suites in early October. Keeping in the spirit of the agency's *Connecting Communities*, the meeting's twin themes were how to promote regional connectivity and the pursuit of smart economic development principles.

The day's events included comments from Congressman Stephen LaTourette of Ohio's 14th District regarding federal transportation priorities. The meeting included a panel discussion featuring Marvin Hayes, director of the governor's office of Urban Development and Infrastructure, Cuyahoga Falls Mayor Don Robart and Kent City Manager Dave Ruller as panelists. The panel discussed approaches to sustainable development while promoting economic growth.



LOGICAL LOGISTICS: Dr. Hull, standing at podium, addresses the audience as to how Northeast Ohio can revitalize its economy by investing in its infrastructure and promoting its economic niche: manufacturing.

The meeting's keynote speaker was Dr. Bradley Hull, an associate professor and Reid chair with the department of management, marketing and logistics at the John M. and Mary Jo Boler School of Business at John Carroll University. Dr. Hull said that Northeast Ohio has tremendous opportunities to revitalize its economy if it is willing to invest in its infrastructure for water, rail and truck transportation and utilize its resources, such as its pipeline network, its airports, Lake Erie and the Ohio River.

New Web Site

In August, AMATS unveiled its new web site – amatsplanning.org. The agency decided that it was time for a revamp of its online portal after more than 10 years of using the same format. Created by 427 Design based in Akron, the site presents visitors with a host of new features and informative content. The overall look of the site is at once retro and modern with art that promotes the region and highlights significant area landmarks.

The new site has pages devoted to such topics as *Connecting Communities* – the agency's first effort to address the issues of land use and sprawl – and key planning products such as the Transportation Improvement Program and *Transportation Outlook*. Visitors can now easily access the agency's listing of funded projects and find up-to-date information about improvements in their communities. Interactive maps detail the region's demographic trends while offering in-depth analysis. Traffic counting data that is linked to Google maps is also available.

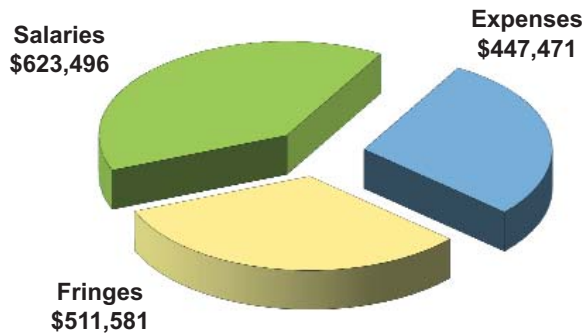
OhioRideshare

The OhioRideshare Program, Northeast Ohio's free online carpool matching service sponsored by AMATS, saw another yearly increase in program registrants. The program ended the year with 2,698 total users in Portage, Stark, Summit, Tuscarawas and Wayne counties, an increase of nearly 24 percent from the year before. 2010 represents the second consecutive year of double-digit growth in registrants with the program.

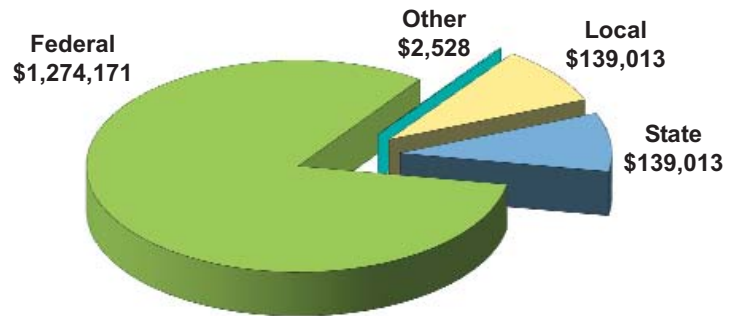


AMATS Financial Data for Fiscal Year 2010

Expenditures by Type



Revenues by Type



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