

@AMATS

THE GREATER AKRON AREA'S TRANSPORTATION JOURNAL

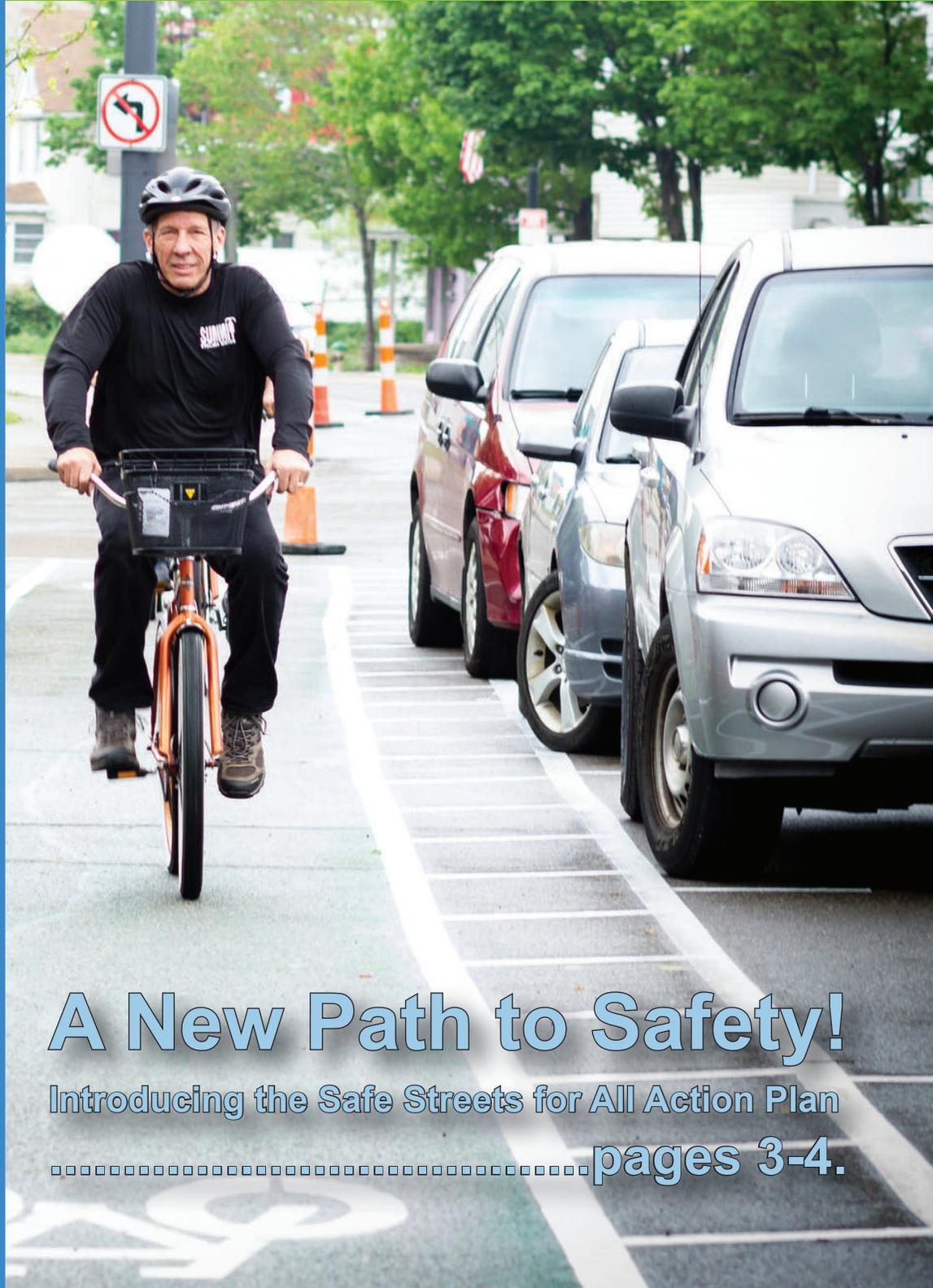
January - June 2023

Volume 12, Issue 1



COVER:

Above, AMATS Policy Committee Chairman and Green Mayor Gerard Neugebauer, seated at left, and Agency Director Curtis Baker, at right, listen to a briefing regarding the new four-year schedule of projects from TIP Coordinator David Pulay, standing at podium. For more about the new Transportation Improvement Program, turn to **page 2.**



A New Path to Safety!

Introducing the Safe Streets for All Action Plan

.....pages 3-4.

AMATS approves new four-year slate of regional transportation investments

The Greater Akron area has a new four-year, multimillion-dollar Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). During its May 18 meeting, the AMATS Policy Committee greenlit the area’s newest four-year TIP of regional infrastructure improvements.

Spanning Fiscal Years 2024 through 2027, the new \$938.5 million TIP includes approximately \$523.1 million for highway projects, more than \$399.4 million for public transit needs, and \$16 million for bike and pedestrian projects throughout Portage and Summit counties and a portion of northeastern Wayne County.

TIP Coordinator David Pulay notes that a significant portion of the program – \$721.2 million or about 77 percent of the program - is devoted to maintenance-type projects for the Greater Akron area’s highway and public transportation systems rather than costly expansions of existing transportation networks.

“Capacity projects to add travel lanes on highways are among the most expensive to build. That’s why they only account for about 15 percent of this latest program. As an agency, we want our region’s available funding to be invested in communities based on need given today’s fiscal realities,” Pulay says.

While much of the highway portion of the program consists of resurfacings, among the larger projects scheduled in the TIP are a more than \$132 million, six-lane widening of Interstate 77 in Bath and Richfield townships and a \$10.7

million reconstruction project on Wooster Road West in Barberton.

Other notable improvements include a more than \$19.1 million reconstruction of East Main Street (state Route 59) in Kent and a \$2.9 million reconstruction of the intersection of state Routes 14 and 43 in Streetsboro. A nearly \$41 million improvement project on state Route 21 in Chippewa Township is also in the program.

The area’s transit operators, METRO of Summit County and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority, will receive \$64 million and nearly \$14 million respectively in federal funds for various capital projects over the next four years. These projects include vehicle replacements, facility maintenance, and bus stop improvements.

The region’s cyclists and hikers will find some good news in the new TIP. The Phase 4 construction of a portion of the Freedom Trail in Akron will receive \$700,000 in federal Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TASA) Program funds. Another \$700,000 TASA grant will be used to build a connection on the Stow Hike & Bike Trail linking the communities of Cuyahoga Falls, Silver Lake, and Stow.

Additional TASA funds are also scheduled for engineering and construction for a portion of the Heartland Trail in Chippewa Township. For more about the TIP, click [here](#).



PULAY



The SS4A Action Plan forges a new path to regional safety

The *Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Action Plan* for the Greater Akron Area marks the beginning of a concentrated regional effort to improve safety on area highways, streets, and roadways.

Developed by AMATS and approved by the agency's Policy Committee in May, the *SS4A Action Plan* details various proposed infrastructure investments and policy strategies to promote safe travel throughout Portage and Summit counties and the northeastern portion of Wayne County.



STEWART

AMATS Planning Administrator Matt Stewart explains that areas and communities must have an approved action plan before seeking funding from the newly created federal SS4A Grant Program. The program funds planning, infrastructure, behavioral, and operational initiatives to prevent deaths and serious injuries among pedestrians, cyclists, public transportation users, and motorists on the nation's roadways.

Stewart says that the members of the AMATS Policy Committee agreed that the agency should be the lead body in crafting a regional action plan rather than individual communities creating their own plans in a piecemeal fashion. "We hope that our cooperative planning approach leads to area projects landing funding through the SS4A program," he adds. The plan's recommendations were partly based on the findings of two comprehensive surveys conducted by the agency (See [SURVEYS, Page 4](#)).

The recommendations of the *SS4A Action Plan* are divided into three sections: project recommendations, strategy recommendations, and transit-related recommendations. Project recommendations are grouped into short-term, mid-term, and long-term scheduling timeframes and consist of various federally recognized proven safety countermeasures. Countermeasures include roadway departure signs and markings to indicate lane edges and alignment changes to help drivers navigate. Speed management changes, intersection improvements, and bike and pedestrian projects are among the other viable countermeasures identified in the plan.

The plan's strategy recommendations urge regional policymakers to consider enforcement, education, and engagement approaches in their oversight of the area's transportation networks based on seven areas of concern. These areas are speed, distracted driving, impairment, seat belts, motorcycles, railway crossings, and bike and pedestrian issues.

The plan's transit-related recommendations chiefly concern the Greater Akron area's transit authorities – the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority and METRO of Summit County – and urge continued and increased support and coordination for area transit services among all levels of transportation planning. Bus rapid transit service within Akron and surrounding communities, improved pedestrian access to transit stops, and various enhancements to stops, shelters and related facilities are among the recommendations.

The plan's short-term project recommendations may become reality soon as they are scheduled to be completed between now and Fiscal Year 2027. These recommendations include reconstruction and sidewalk improvements on Darrow Road in Stow, intersection upgrades on Valley View Road in Northfield Center Township, and significant improvements on state Route 59 (East Main Street) in Kent. "More roundabouts, road diets, and better sidewalks and crosswalks will be appearing throughout our region in the coming years," Stewart predicts. To view the *SS4A Action Plan*, please click [here](#).



Safe Streets for All surveys show that the public prefers...

The Greater Akron area is closer to a safer future with the completion of two AMATS-sponsored online surveys in February. The interlinked surveys polled respondents on two separate safety-related topics: One survey asked respondents to explain how they make transportation-related decisions while travelling in the AMATS region while the other survey asked respondents to identify safety-related issues unique to their local communities.

Between late November and mid-January, the agency collected 301 online survey responses through its website – amatsplanning.org. Survey findings show that there is broad-based public support for investment in active transportation modes such as bike lanes, sidewalks, and shared-use paths throughout the region's existing transportation network. Among the more surprising findings was that adding capacity to area roadways to accommodate vehicular traffic was ranked dead last among possible safety strategies, according to AMATS Planning Administrator Matt Stewart.

“Adding capacity seems to be out of style. This is a surprising change from 10 to 15 years ago,” Stewart observes. In contrast to capacity improvements, roundabouts are one infrastructure investment that appear to be gaining support with the public within the AMATS area. Nearly 60 percent of poll respondents indicated that they view roundabouts as safer than traditional intersections.

Attitudes regarding cycling and public transit are revealing too. A mere 12 percent of cyclists responding indicated that they felt safe biking throughout the Greater Akron area. In contrast, a whopping 65 percent of cyclists responding indicated that they do not feel safe cycling in the area. An impressive 83 percent of cyclists responding indicated that they would make greater use of the network if there were more safe places to do so.

With regards to public transit, 62 percent of respondents indicated that transit stops are well located throughout the region yet 73 percent said that they would rely on transit more often if service was more convenient. “This doesn't mean that service is inconvenient in the Greater Akron area. It just reflects the reality that buses can't be everywhere and that there are constraints,” Stewart adds.

Notably, 87 percent of respondents agreed that distracted driving is a growing problem in the region.

AMATS also identified 130 location-specific concerns through its dual surveys. Akron, particularly portions of the city's eastern, northwestern, Highland Square, and Kenmore neighborhoods, were cited by respondents as specific areas of concern with regards to safety.

The agency used the survey data to craft the *Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Action Plan* for Portage and Summit counties and northeastern Wayne County (See [SS4A ACTION PLAN, Page 3](#)). The *SS4A Action Plan* was approved by the agency in May. AMATS had to have an adopted action plan for the Greater Akron area before seeking implementation grant funding from the federal SS4A Grant Program. Developing and approving a plan – without using SS4A funds – allows the region to prepare a list of potential projects that will be eligible for future assistance from the grant program.

Although the focus of the multibillion-dollar SS4A Program is to prevent fatalities and serious injuries on the nation's roadways, the program promotes safety as a multimodal consideration that encompasses motor vehicle, public transit, cycling, and pedestrian travel. AMATS also considered equity and environmental justice issues in its surveys and in the preparation of its action plan. “A central component of this is understanding equity. We want to ensure that all users are being considered, especially those of traditionally disadvantaged populations,” Stewart adds.

Survey findings are summarized in *Chapter 3 - Stakeholder and Public Engagement* and complete survey results are available in *Appendix A - Public Engagement* of the *SS4A Action Plan*. To view the plan, please click [here](#).



Greater Akron area traffic slowly healing from COVID as of last December

People just aren't travelling as much in the Greater Akron area post-pandemic as they used to. After sifting through the most recent vehicle miles travelled (VMT) data available from *Streetlight Insight*, AMATS has found that the levels of VMT during all days of the week haven't returned to pre-pandemic levels yet.

StreetLight Insight is a cloud-based, on-demand mobility analytics platform used by the agency for traffic analysis and transportation planning within the Greater Akron area. The platform compiles statistical data and information regarding the travel patterns of vehicle operators, cyclists, and pedestrians through mobile devices such as phones and laptops.

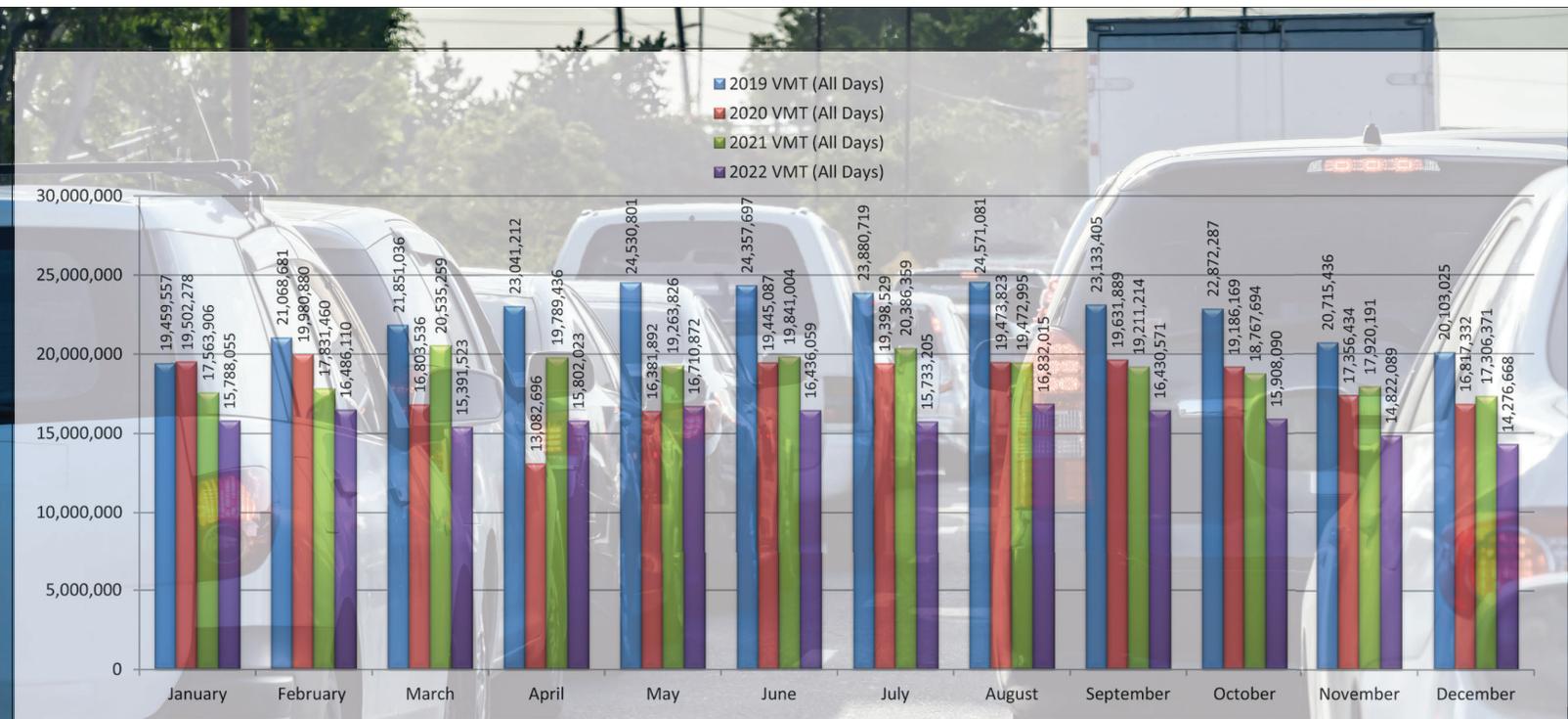
AMATS Engineer David Pulay says that the agency accesses this data to identify potential trends stemming from the COVID-19 Pandemic and subsequent lockdown, which began in March 2020. For the purposes of the agency's most recent analysis, weekly VMT data was accessed for a four-year period spanning January 2019 and December 2022 and categorized into monthly totals. "In our comparison of the data, we found that the month of April was full of surprises," Pulay says.

April 2020 was when the full impacts of the nationwide lockdown began to take hold in the AMATS region. Perhaps not surprisingly, VMT dropped from a high of slightly more than 23 million VMTs in April 2019 to a low of slightly more than 13 million VMTs in April 2020. By April 2021, with the easing of pandemic restrictions, VMT began to climb again to nearly 19.8 million VMTs. "What astonished us, is that by April 2022, VMT not only dropped below 19 million miles, but even below 16 million miles, to slightly more than 15.8 million," Pulay notes.

Agency officials further determined that VMT totals during most of the months recorded for 2022 stayed in the 15 million to 17 million VMT range. Interestingly, most months in 2022 posted significantly lower totals below those recorded for the same months during the depths of the pandemic two years earlier.

Pulay says that AMATS officials speculate that rising gas prices and many people still working from home might be factors causing the lower VMTs. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the retail price for a gallon of gas in Ohio was \$1.44 in April 2020. Two years later, the average price per gallon in April was \$3.78 before climbing still higher and peaking at \$4.89 in June. Gas prices eased in the months following June before dropping to slightly more than \$3 a gallon in December, but there was no commensurate VMT increase during the remainder of the year.

Pulay notes that the agency hasn't analyzed VMT totals for the months since December 2022, which was the most recent month available. It is possible that VMT totals have started an upward trajectory notwithstanding high gas prices. The chart below details weekly VMT totals by month from 2019 through 2022.



Project Updates

The following table lists significant projects that were awarded between Nov. 8, 2022 and May, 30, 2023.

PROJECT	ESTIMATED COMPLETION	AMOUNT
State Route 8 - Replacement of a bridge on state Route 8 spanning the Cuyahoga River Valley, between Glenwood and Perkins avenues, with two new bridges in Akron. Project includes a minor realignment of state Route 8 with an added auxiliary lane in each direction between Glenwood and Perkins avenues.	6/30/2028	\$157,585,747
Portage Trail Extension - Construction of a two-way, left-turn lane on Portage Trail Extension West, between Albertson Parkway and State Road, in Cuyahoga Falls. Project includes resurfacing a portion of Portage Trail Extension West, from Northampton Road to Albertson Parkway, and traffic signal upgrades at the intersection of Northampton and Valley roads. A 10 feet wide multi-use path will be added on the south side of Portage Trail, from Albertson Parkway to State Road, and a new sidewalk on the north side from Cedar Hill Road to State Road.	11/1/2024	\$5,917,411
Wooster Road/State Street Intersection - Reconstruction of the concrete pavement at the Wooster Road/State Street intersection in Barberton.	9/30/2024	\$2,961,921
Interstate 77 - Replacement of bridges on I-77 spanning state Route 21 in Copley Township.	8/30/2024	\$13,371,659
Silica Sand Road - Replacement of Silica Sand Road truss bridge spanning Eagle Creek in Garrettsville.	7/31/2024	\$1,084,460
East Exchange Street - Reconstruction of East Exchange Street, between Broadway and Fountain Street, in Akron. Project will include "Complete Street" components for increased multi-modal use.	12/29/2023	\$10,808,268
Swartz Road - Resurfacing of Swartz Road, from South Main Street to Glenmount Avenue, in Coventry Township.	11/30/2023	\$1,028,025
Eastern Road - Resurfacing of Eastern Road, from state Route 21 to Cleveland-Massillon Road, in Norton.	10/31/2023	\$614,959
Cannon Road - Resurfacing of Cannon Road, from Ravenna Road to Liberty Road, in Twinsburg.	10/31/2023	\$408,007
Raber Road - Construction of a 10 feet wide multi-purpose trail along the south side of Raber Road, from Troon Drive to Mayfair Road, in Green.	10/31/2023	\$1,159,687
Rubber City Heritage Trail - Segment B - Construction of a hike and bike trail along an abandoned rail line, between Third Avenue and Exchange Street, in Akron.	10/31/2023	\$2,361,385
East Sanitarium Road - Resurfacing of East Sanitarium Road, from just east of Seneca Avenue to just west of Frye Drive, in the Village of Lakemore.	10/31/2023	\$167,020
Terex Road - Resurfacing of Terex Road, from Londonairy Boulevard to Barlow Road, in Hudson.	10/31/2023	\$659,588
White Pond Drive - Resurfacing of White Pond Drive, from Copley Road to the Akron South Corporate Limit, in Copley Township.	10/31/2023	\$1,325,482
Cleveland-Massillon Road - Resurfacing of Cleveland-Massillon Road, from Interstate 76 to the Norton North Corporate Limit, in Norton.	10/30/2023	\$867,867
State Route 21 - Resurfacing of state Route 21 and repair of three bridges, from Norton Corporate Limit to south of Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad line, in Copley Township.	10/15/2023	\$3,678,332

[Continued Next Page](#)

Continued from Page 6

PROJECT	ESTIMATED COMPLETION	AMOUNT
Cleveland-Massillon Road Phase 1 - Resurfacing of Cleveland-Massillon Road, from Grill Road to Eastern Road, in New Franklin.	10/2/2023	\$619,712
State Route 14 - Construction of southbound climbing lane on state Route 14, between Price and Lake Rockwell roads, in Shalersville Township. Existing northbound climbing lane to be removed and replaced with left turn lanes at intersections.	9/30/2023	\$1,326,861
Christman Road - Replacement of Christman Road bridge over Nimisila Reservoir in Green.	9/30/2023	\$1,181,236
Pressler Road - Replacement of Pressler Road bridge over Tuscarawas River in Coventry Township.	9/30/2023	\$932,942
US 224 - Intersection improvements on US 224 at New Milford and Waterloo roads in Randolph Township. Project will reduce US 224 to a standard two-lane road, realign the southern portion of Waterloo Road, and create a cul-de-sac on the northern portion of Waterloo Road.	9/15/2023	\$1,956,528
Fourth Street - Resurfacing of Fourth Street, from West Lake Road to Norton Avenue, in Barberton.	8/31/2023	\$665,009
Valley View Road - Resurfacing of Valley View Road, from the Hudson Corporate Limit to Twinsburg Road, in Macedonia.	8/31/2023	\$295,056
State Routes 5, 14, 183 and 225 - Resurfacing of various sections of state Routes 5, 14, 183, and 225 in Atwater, Deerfield, and Edinburg townships. Project includes nine minor bridge rehabilitations.	8/30/2023	\$4,918,412
West Ohio Avenue - Resurfacing of West Ohio Avenue, between Metzger Avenue and Main Street, in Rittman.	7/1/2023	\$627,850

RODEO ROUNDUP!

The Copley Police Department hosted its 2023 Annual Bike Rodeo on June 3 at the Home Depot store in Fairlawn. The rodeo encourages safe bike riding skills for elementary-aged children. During the event, children may bike through an obstacle course, learn about traffic signals, and visit stations for giveaways, such as stickers and free bike helmets.

AMATS operated a display that gave away bike bells, LED bike lights, water bottles, and copies of the new agency-published *Bike Map*. Eddy's Bike Shop employees conducted bike safety inspections while Home Depot provided free hot dogs, chips, and drinks. The accompanying slideshow presents a few scenes from the day.



Dates to Remember

Date	Time	Committee/Event	Location
August 3	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
August 3	6:30 p.m.	CIC	Virtual Meeting
August 10	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom C
September 4	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Labor Day
September 13	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom C
September 14	6:30 p.m.	CIC	Virtual Meeting
September 21	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom C
October 6	8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.	Annual Meeting	To Be Determined
October 9	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Columbus Day
November 10	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Veterans Day
November 23-24	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Thanksgiving
December 7	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom C
December 7	6:30 p.m.	CIC	Virtual Meeting
December 14	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom C
December 25	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Christmas

AMATS and the City of Akron are committed to ensuring that individuals with disabilities are able to fully participate in public programs, services, and activities. Anyone who is in need of an accommodation from any City department is invited to contact Tammy Tucker, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) for the City of Akron, 166 South High Street, Akron, Ohio 44308, (voice) 330-375-2319 as soon as possible. If you require TDD phone service, call Ohio Relay at 800-750-0750 and they will assist in contacting the DEI Director at (330) 375-2319.

@AMATS is published by the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, 1 Cascade Plaza, Suite 1300, Akron, Ohio 44308

Editorial comments are welcome.

Director - Curtis Baker

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

This report was prepared by the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Ohio Department of Transportation, and the Village, City and County governments of Portage and Summit Counties and a portion of Wayne County. The contents of this report reflect the views of AMATS, which is responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official view and policies of the Ohio and/or U.S. Department of Transportation. This report does not constitute a standard, specification or regulation.