

**EAST ALABAMA RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION
MEETING MINUTES
DISTRICT POLICY COMMITTEE & TECHNICAL ADVISORY
COMMITTEE for the CENTRAL DISTRICT
November 18, 2010
East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission – Anniston**

Policy Committee Members in Attendance:

Mayor Steve Baswell, Town of Ohatchee
Mr. Bill Curtis, EARPDC
Mayor Anna Berry, City of Heflin
Mayor Charles Merkel, Town of Oak Grove

Technical Advisory Committee Members in Attendance:

Mr. William D. McDaniel, ALDOT 4th Division
Mr. DeJarvis Leonard, ALDOT
Mr. Mark Welsh, Calhoun County

Other Attendees:

Mr. Jack Plunk, Calhoun Area MPO
Ms. Stacey Browning, EARPDC

Mayor Anna Berry, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at approximately 1:10 p.m.

Under “Old Business,” Mayor Berry asked if there were any changes to the minutes from the previous meeting on July 15, 2010. After determining that there were no changes, she asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mayor Charles Merkel made a motion, and Mayor Steve Baswell seconded. The minutes were approved.

There was no other old business, so Mayor Merkel moved on to “New Business.” Ms. Browning mentioned that she attended the National Rural Transportation Peer Learning Conference in St. Louis, but the only real takeaway from the conference was that no reauthorization bill should be expected anytime this year. Mr. DeJarvis Leonard mentioned that AASHTO had asked Congress to extend SAFETEA LU for three years in order to allow time for a new bill to be created. He said that the general idea is that the government cannot keep spending more than it is bringing in. Mr. William McDaniel mentioned that he had attended a conference where the consensus was that transportation officials do not want to be in a position where money is coming from the General Fund instead of the Transportation Fund. He is not sure if anything will happen in the next year or not other than extension of the current bill with a partisan split in Congress. Mr. Leonard mentioned that he would like to see a copy of the report put together by the task force of previous DOT Secretaries.

Mayor Merkel mentioned that he was surprised that the Alabama roads bill had not passed. Mayor Berry mentioned that she is on the League of Municipalities, and they had first been in support of it. Then Bronner came out against it, and the League went to a neutral stance. Mayor Baswell said that his problem with that bill was that it had based the funding on population instead of road mileage. He believes criteria other than population should have been used. Mayor Berry mentioned that it would have been difficult for ALDOT to prioritize projects. Mr. Leonard mentioned that the bill would have tied ALDOT's hands on many things.

Ms. Stacey Browning gave a staff report on the HUD Regional Planning Grant recently awarded to the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission. She provided a handout with the abstract of the project, included with these minutes. The grant will fund the creation of a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development for the ten county region of East Alabama, utilizing the six livability principles established by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (HUD, DOT, and EPA) as a foundation. Ms. Browning described the consortium created for the project, consisting of EARPDC, a few nonprofit organizations, the Anniston-Oxford MPO, the Gadsden MPO, and the RPO. The Plan will seek to integrate the existing plans in the region, such as the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan, the CEDS, and the MPO's transportation plans. During the planning process, a variety of studies will be conducted on livability issues throughout the region. Housing, land use, environment, transportation, and economy studies will all be undertaken.

Mr. Leonard asked a question about if this funding was only for planning. Ms. Browning explained that this HUD grant would only be for planning, but that it would open the door for implementation funding in the future. Ms. Browning answered that yes, this particular grant is only for the creation of a plan. Mayor Berry asked about specific plans for counties and communities. Ms. Browning mentioned that some communities will be more ready than others to implement livable strategies, and this will be determined by a readiness survey that will be developed in the planning process.

Mayor Berry then moved on to ALDOT Update on Road Projects. Mr. McDaniel provided a handout, attached to these minutes, that details projects in counties and cities and on state and US routes. There are many projects on the handout because of stimulus projects being completed. Mr. McDaniel mentioned that many projects on this handout were categorized as punchlist items. He said that this is because there has been a problem getting materials for striping. Projects are delayed until this material is available. Mr. McDaniel mentioned that Iron Mountain Road is very near complete, and should be finished very soon. The road will be open before the Eastern Bypass. The City of Anniston will be responsible for putting up route markers. The project is labeled as Rocky Hollow Road on maps. There was some more discussion on the Eastern Bypass and Iron Mountain Road. Mr. Mark Welsh mentioned that he had instructed the temporary guard rail to be put up today on Iron Mountain Road.

Mr. McDaniel mentioned that both sidewalk projects at JSU are complete. These are TE projects. He discussed a project in Heflin on a streetscape that is under design.

They are working with the consultant and the district to get permits. In Talladega County, there are two ST projects in the city of Lincoln that are underway. The City of Talladega received money as part of a Honda agreement, which they are using to replace a bridge and do some resurfacing. These are both close to complete.

Mr. McDaniel moved on to state and US routes. There is an error on the handout. The access management project in Calhoun County is stated as being let with the I20 project, but has not been let yet. There was signal work let at the same time as the I20 project. Mr. Leonard mentioned that they are waiting on some environmental work for the access management project. Mr. Leonard mentioned that the bypass should be open after Thanksgiving, or definitely by the end of the year. Mayor Baswell asked if the bypass will relieve congestion on Quinard. Mr. Leonard answered that it will provide faster access to McClellan. People can come through the Fort to get to 21. It should help traffic some. It is believed that the bypass will also help attract industry. Mr. McDaniel mentioned that the old fort has a great deal of potential. Mayor Berry said that everyone hopes it will be redeveloped right. She said that for employment reasons, it will be good for everyone.

Mayor Merkel mentioned that he had been driving through Talladega, and the bypass has started. He is excited that work has begun. Mr. Leonard mentioned that it will take about 12 months to complete. Mr. Leonard mentioned that work had been delayed because they found an old dump. Mayor Merkel asked a question about the AL 21 project, if ALDOT is going to use the two lane portion for the four lane project. Mr. Leonard responded that they will, and they are going out to ride that project tomorrow. Mr. Leonard said that this project should be let in the spring.

Mr. McDaniel mentioned that in Cleburne County, there will be three projects underway at once on I20. The plans for the project from AL 9 to the Georgia line should be finished by the first of the year. Funding is driving this project, because it is a \$80-100 million project. There is a chance that there could be over 30 miles of projects going on on I20 at the same time. Mr. McDaniel that eventually there will be a basically brand new facility from Georgia to Anniston. Mr. Leonard mentioned that they will be moving traffic on I20 to the shoulder within a few weeks. They will begin work on the outside, and then move traffic to one side to begin work on the other. Mr. Bill Curtis asked if there would be an additional lane from Georgia to Leon Smith Parkway. Mr. Leonard responded that this is the goal, but there will be a gap between exit 188 and AL 46. The next project will be to add an additional lane from Eastaboga to the Coosa River.

Mr. Jack Plunk asked if the speed on I20 will eventually go back up to 70 MPH. Mr. Leonard answered that it will. Mayor Berry mentioned that Heflin's volunteer fire department responds to the wrecks on I20, and they have really noticed a difference with the speed limit being 55 MPH. It has saved Heflin a good deal of money. Mr. Leonard mentioned that 50% of the traffic on this stretch of I20 is trucks. Mr. Plunk said that this portion of the interstate has the highest truck mix of any route in Alabama. There was some discussion about rail freight and the impact the new container facility in Birmingham will have on truck traffic on I20.

Mr. Welsh asked a question about the bridges north of Piedmont on 278. Mr. Leonard said that this project is about 75% on plans and is scheduled for a 2011 letting.

Mayor Berry moved on to Other New Business. Determining that there was none, she moved on to Open Discussion and Announcements. Ms. Browning mentioned that the next meeting date is set for February 17, 2011. She provided a handout with the next year's meeting dates. The meeting was then adjourned.