

**EAST ALABAMA RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION  
MEETING MINUTES  
DISTRICT POLICY COMMITTEE & TECHNICAL ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE for the CENTRAL DISTRICT  
January 15, 2009 - 1:00 p.m.  
East Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission – Anniston**

Members in Attendance:

Mayor Anna Berry, City of Heflin  
Mayor Charles Merkel, Town of Oak Grove  
Mayor Steve Baswell, Town of Ohatchee  
Mayor Brian York, City of Talladega (represented by Mr. Chris Stone)  
Mr. Michael Hosch, Calhoun County Highway Department  
Mr. DeJarvis Leonard, ALDOT 4<sup>th</sup> Division  
Mr. Bill Curtis, East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission

Other Attendees:

Mr. Chris Stone, City of Talladega  
Mr. Eric English, ALDOT 4<sup>th</sup> Division, District 4  
Mr. Shannon Jones, ALDOT 4<sup>th</sup> Division, District 2  
Mr. Jack Plunk, Calhoun County MPO  
Ms. Dawn Landholm, East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission

Mayor Anna Berry, acting as Chairwoman, called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00 p.m.

Under “Old Business”, Mayor Berry asked if there were any corrections to the minutes from the previous meeting. Mr. Eric English asked that his name be corrected in the attendance section. Mr. English then moved that the minutes be adopted as amended. Mr. Charles Merkel seconded the motion, which was passed by a unanimous vote of the committee.

Under “Old Business”, Ms. Dawn Landholm stated that Mr. Patrick Hall, who had been the Rural Planning Organization’s Program Facilitator, had accepted a position with the City of Chattanooga’s Metropolitan Planning Organization. He departed shortly before Thanksgiving, and the East Alabama Regional Commission is currently seeking his replacement.

Under “New Business”, Mayor Berry stated that she would like to discuss the federal stimulus package under “Open Discussion and Announcements.”

Ms. Dawn Landholm gave the staff report. She has spoken with Mayor Lew Watson, of Lincoln, who chairs this Committee. He had stated over the telephone that he probably will resign as chairman, although he has not given his formal resignation yet. Once he does formally resign, the Committee will need to elect a new chair.

Mr. DeJarvis Leonard, of ALDOT's 4<sup>th</sup> Division, gave an update on ALDOT's projects in Calhoun, Clay, Cleburne, and Talladega Counties. Mr. Leonard stated that ALDOT has three major projects underway in Calhoun County: the Anniston Eastern Bypass; Interstate 20; and access into the Anniston Army Depot. Projects in the other three counties consist primarily of resurfacing. Ms. Landholm noted that Mr. Chris Stone, the City of Talladega's new Community Development Director, is present today and requested an update on the AL Highway 21 bypass. Mr. Leonard stated that the Talladega Bypass was submitted for stimulus funding and is scheduled to be let later in 2009. Mayor Charles Merkel asked if widening AL Highway 21 between Talladega and Munford also was submitted for stimulus funding.

Mr. Leonard asked Mayor Berry if he should discuss the stimulus package projects now or wait until the open discussion. Mayor Berry stated that he could discuss his portion of that issue now. Mr. Leonard explained that the federal government has not issued any rules or regulations about the stimulus funding at this time. To prepare for the eventual rule-making, ALDOT is compiling different project lists. One list contains projects that can be "shovel ready" in 90 to 120 days. A second list contains projects that can be "shovel ready" in 120 to 180 days. Segments of the AL Highway 21 project that could meet the timing requirements are the section from Sylacauga to Winterboro, AL Highway 275, and the northern section of the Talladega Bypass. The section of AL Highway 21 from Kelly Creek to the existing four-lane north of Munford may or may not fall within the time limits due to environmental and design issues. The stimulus funds give a boost to this project, as inflation has made its cost more than double during the past five years.

Ms. Landholm noted that Ohatchee's new Mayor, Mr. Steve Baswell, is present and asked if any projects are planned for AL Highway 77. Mr. Leonard stated that a resurfacing project is underway, and there have been requests for additional lanes. ALDOT may be able to initiate a PE project to determine where turn lanes and acceleration/deceleration lanes may be needed if sufficient funds become available. The project on AL Highway 200 between AL Highway 21 and US Highway 278 in Piedmont is far enough along to be eligible for stimulus funds. No projects in Clay or Cleburne Counties were submitted for stimulus funding consideration.

Mayor Baswell asked if ALDOT has any plans to improve safety for drivers getting on AL Highway 77 at the Interstate 20 exit. Mr. Leonard stated that ALDOT intends to add acceleration and deceleration lanes for traffic entering and exiting AL Highway 77 from the Interstate. The agency will study the affects of those improvements before conducting another analysis of whether the interchange needs to be signalized.

There were no motions or resolutions or other new business.

Under “Special Programs”, Ms. Landholm explained that she had distributed the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for Calhoun, Clay, Cleburne, and Talladega Counties to begin a project she would like the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) to undertake. A copy of that handout is attached to these minutes. Although the RPO cannot allocate funds for road projects, it can let the State know which road projects are badly needed but not listed in the STIP or in the State’s Long Range Transportation Plan. RPOs in the State of Kentucky had performed a similar project, known as an “unprogrammed needs assessment”, and the Kentucky DOT gave them more input into the STIP process. Kentucky’s RPOs still do not get to determine which projects get funded, but the State does take the RPOs’ project prioritization lists into consideration when formulating its STIP.

No meeting attendees wished to be heard on matters not included in the agenda.

Under “Open Discussion and Announcements”, Mayor Berry asked if anyone knows about the Town of Edwardsville’s \$375 million stimulus funding submission. Reporters had contacted Mayor Berry because they could not find contacts in Edwardsville who knew about the project. Talladega Springs also had some involvement in the proposal. Discussion ensued about projects that the newspaper articles had mentioned. Mayor Berry mentioned that the proposal has been withdrawn.

Mayor Berry asked what types of projects other communities have submitted. Mayor Merkel stated that Oak Grove submitted about \$197,000 worth of projects: one road widening, two road resurfacings, and sewer extensions. All the projects are “shovel ready”. Mayor Merkel had attended the Talladega County Economic Development Authority meeting in Sylacauga, and the EDA had submitted a bridge to connect Fayetteville in southern Talladega County to Shelby County to aid economic development in southern Talladega County. The bridge has been proposed previously but has failed to move forward due to lack of support from Shelby County. Mr. Bill Curtis informed the Committee that the East Alabama Commission had compiled an inventory of projects from its member governments. Staff submitted the inventory to ALDOT and to the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). He explained that, although the federal government has not finalized the stimulus package, the State agencies want to have an inventory ready for the eventual funding announcement. Mr. Curtis anticipates the federal funding will pass through the usual federal agencies (Economic Development Administration, Appalachian Regional Commission, HUD, USDA) and the usual State agencies (ALDOT, ADECA), with a relaxation of some of the requirements so the funds can be distributed more quickly. Mr. Curtis also informed the Committee that there may be a second round of stimulus funding in 2010.

Discussion ensued about assistance available to help communities that have no “shovel ready” projects prepare for next year’s round of stimulus funding. Ms. Landholm explained that the East Alabama Commission’s grant writing staff can help with that task at no charge to member governments. Also, local governments should check their files

for projects they previously had submitted for grant funding but that were not funded. The cost projections will need to be updated, but the preliminary plans should still be good.

East Alabama Commission staff member Robin Caler joined the meeting to discuss the stimulus funding. She said the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) has detailed information about the stimulus package on its website. The website address is [www.nado.org/legaffair/stim09.pdf](http://www.nado.org/legaffair/stim09.pdf). Types of projects that will be considered for funding include energy efficiency improvements, transportation, economic development, schools, and community development. Commission staff also distributed an e-mail from NADO and a Stimulus Update published by the National Association of Regional Councils, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Merkel asked about training on grant writing. Mayor Berry stated that ADECA has produced a book entitled *The Grant Writing Toolbox*, which explains the basics. Mr. Curtis reminded the Committee that East Alabama Commission staff write grants for member governments; however, Commission staff cannot perform the preliminary engineering. Engineering firms often are willing to perform the preliminary engineering for a reasonable price, with the anticipation that they will be selected as the engineering firm for the project when it is funded. Mayor Berry stated that the East Alabama Commission's Senior Service Director, Randy Frost, has standardized plans for senior centers. Mr. Curtis added that the Federal Emergency Management Agency may have plans for shelters and safe rooms and probably will have extra funds for that purpose.

Mr. Jack Plunk, East Alabama Commission Transportation Planner and Calhoun Area Metropolitan Planning Organization facilitator, informed the Committee about a Federal Highway Administration technical training session. The training will address such issues as Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, emergency response, federal funding, and access management. The training date has not yet been established.

Ms. Landholm announced that the next meeting of the East Alabama Rural Planning Organization's District Policy Committee and Technical Advisory Committee for the Central District is scheduled for Thursday, April 16, 2009 at 1:00 p.m. in the EARPDC board room.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.