

**EAST ALABAMA RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION  
MEETING MINUTES  
DISTRICT POLICY COMMITTEE & TECHNICAL ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE for the NORTHERN DISTRICT  
January 8, 2009 - 1:00 p.m.  
Etowah County Courthouse – Gadsden**

Members in Attendance:

Mr. Perry Gwin, Etowah County Commission  
Mayor Autry Works, Town of Walnut Grove  
Mr. Corey Chambers, Cherokee County Highway Department  
Mr. Tim Graves, Etowah County Engineering Department  
Mr. Curtis Vincent, ALDOT 1<sup>st</sup> Division  
Mr. Bill Curtis, East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission

Other Attendees:

Ms. Dawn Landholm, East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission

Mr. Perry Gwin, acting as Chairman, called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00 p.m.

Under “Old Business”, Mr. Gwin asked if there were any corrections to the minutes from the previous meeting. Mayor Autry Works moved that the minutes be adopted as presented. Mr Cory Chambers seconded the motion, which was passed by a unanimous vote of the committee.

There was no other old business.

Under “New Business”, Mr. Gwin stated that he had no report.

Ms. Dawn Landholm gave the staff report. 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.

Mr. Gwin asked about officer elections. Ms. Landholm responded that it may be best to continue with the present officers and hold elections at the first meeting of the 2009-2010 fiscal year, since this is the second of this year’s four meetings.

Mr. Curtis Vincent, of ALDOT’s 1<sup>st</sup> Division, gave an update on ALDOT’s projects in Etowah and Cherokee Counties. The extension of Interstate 759 is still under environmental review. The State has acquired the right-of-way and completed plans for SR 77 between Steele Station Road and Interstate 59. Hopefully, that project will receive funding from the federal

stimulus package. The grade and drain project on US 411 between Gadsden and Turkeytown is 30% to 40% complete. The project should be completed by the end of the 2009 calendar year. Division 1 staff had considered submitting the base and pave project on US 411 for stimulus funding but did not, as that portion of the project will not begin until after the grade and drain project is complete. Division 1 staff also considered submitting US 411 from Turkeytown to Cherokee County Road 20 for stimulus funding, as the right-of-way has been acquired; however, a Phase II archeological study needs to be undertaken and Army Corps of Engineer permits need to be renewed before that project will be “shovel ready.”

Mr. Gwin noted that the Moon Road bridge replacement project is scheduled for 2010 in the State’s Transportation Improvement Program but is a 2011 project in the Gadsden-Etowah County Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) Transportation Improvement Program. Mr. Vincent stated that the MPO moved the project from 2010 to 2011; that change just is not reflected in the State’s program yet. He explained that projects are costing more than the original estimates due first to the high oil prices and now to the recession. Several projects have been moved to later fiscal years. Ms. Landholm commented that she will ask to be placed on the MPO’s mailing list, so she can provide RPO members with more current information.

Mr. Chambers asked if the US 411 project from Turkeytown to Cherokee County Road 20 is still expected to be completed on-schedule. Mr. Vincent replied that, to the best of his knowledge, construction should begin in 2013. However, the stimulus funding could expedite some projects, which would cause other projects to move up in the timeline. Further discussion ensued about anticipated stimulus funding, particularly about the portion that may be available to counties.

Mr. Vincent noted that the State Transportation Improvement Program map shows segments of the Atlanta-to-Memphis highway. That project is on indefinite hold. Discussion ensued about the reasons for the delays and on the road’s routing.

There were no motions or resolutions.

Under “other new business”, Ms. Landholm stated that, although the meeting announcement was just addressed to the District Policy Committee, this is the first joint meeting of the District Policy Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee. The new staff member will be tasked with updating the appointments to both Committees. The Northern District’s appointments to the Regional Policy Committee are still valid, as Mr. Gwin, Judge Salter, Mayor Works, and Mayor Baker had been selected to serve on that Committee. Mayor Baker will continue to be Mayor until the courts settle the Town of Cedar Bluff’s election dispute.

Under “Special Programs”, Ms. Landholm explained that she had distributed the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for Etowah and Cherokee 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.

Mr. Gwin and Mr. Tim Graves mentioned the need for additional access to the Lookout Mountain plateau. Ms. Landholm asked the Committee members to think of not just highway projects but also bridges, safety projects, and other modes of transportation. Discussion ensued about how public transit is not fiscally feasible in rural areas but is needed to prevent elderly people who live in rural areas from becoming isolated from needed services.

Under "Persons wishing to be heard on matters not included in the agenda", Mr. Bill Curtis gave an update on the latest information about the federal stimulus package. Only about half of the funding has been released for this year's stimulus package. The second half of the funding should be released fairly soon; however, it could take as long as six months before projects can be bid. The federal departments that will be distributing the funds will need to create regulations, accept applications, award applications, and go through environmental review. There is speculation that there will be a second round of stimulus funding next fiscal year, as it will take more than one year for the nation to pull out of the recession. Mr. Vincent noted that there are many details that still need to be worked out at the federal level. Additional discussion ensued about preparing for this year's and next year's stimulus funding.

Under "Open Discussion and Announcements", Ms. Landholm announced that the next meeting of the East Alabama Rural Planning Organization's District Policy Committee for the Northern District is scheduled for Thursday, May 14, 2009 at 1:30 p.m. at the Cherokee County Administrative Center in Centre.

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