



# AMATS

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Cover Photo by METRO

## 2016 AMATS Annual Meeting looks to Ohio's 2017 political scene

The event may have been billed as the 2016 AMATS Annual Meeting, but 2017 was on the mind of many attendees thanks to the day's featured speaker, Dr. Alison Goebel, the interim director of the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC), an outcome-oriented, statewide non-profit organization that promotes revitalization and sustainable redevelopment in Ohio. Speaking to a morning audience of 165 gathered in the Sheraton Suites Akron Cuyahoga Falls banquet hall, Dr. Goebel described what GOPC officials expect the state's political landscape will look like in the coming year.

Debates concerning taxes, infrastructure spending, urban revitalization, and quality of life issues are all on Ohio's horizon, according to Goebel. The next session of the Ohio General Assembly that commences in January will not only grapple with Gov. John Kasich's final operating budget, which will likely contain some of the governor's long-sought signature policy reforms, but also a new state transportation budget bill for the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT).



GOEBEL

How the debate proceeds on these issues may be impacted by changes in the ideological composition of the Ohio General Assembly, with possible further rightward shifts in the Republican caucuses in the state House and Senate chambers as more moderate Republicans may lose seats in Democratic-leaning districts during the November election. (*EDITOR'S NOTE:* Republicans gained one additional seat each in the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate in the Nov. 8 election.) Interestingly, Goebel observed that these changes may actually result in more bipartisanship around select issues as House Speaker Clifford A. Rosenberger and Senate President Keith Faber - while conservative - are not as right-leaning as some of their colleagues and will likely want to work with the governor on some of his signature issues. After outlining the Buckeye State's potential political landscape, Goebel then identified policy areas that GOPC officials expect will be debated by the incoming General Assembly. The fight surrounding taxes may expand to other fronts beyond the governor's stated goals of reducing the state's income tax and increasing the shale gas tax. There are proposals in Columbus to eliminate the sales tax on managed care organizations (MCOs) as a way to address the state's anticipated \$1.1 billion shortfall, according to Goebel.

Fiscal matters won't be the only issues facing state leaders next year. Quality of life issues such as water and clean energy standards are increasingly important priorities for many legislators and policy advocacy groups such as the GOPC and will likely be debated on the statehouse floor next year. Goebel added that the center's priorities for the coming year include seeking transit funding increases from ODOT through the use of flexible funding sources, the General Revenue Fund, or other dedicated funding sources. The center will also be participating in the MCO tax debate as transit agencies receive a portion of the revenue from this tax for their use and would be impacted if this tax is eliminated. To view Goebel's address, please click [here](#).

Goebel's presentation was followed by a panel discussion regarding recent planning successes in the city of Barberton. The city was a recipient of a \$50,000 planning grant from the AMATS Connecting Communities Program in 2013. Barberton used its grant to develop its *North-South Bicycle Infrastructure Master Plan* with the aim of fostering greater connectivity between its north and south ends. The plan resulted in a one-mile bicycle infrastructure loop known as the "Magic Mile" in the core of downtown Barberton, connecting the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail to Lake Anna. Other successes include the passage in 2013 of Issue 8, a 0.25 percent income tax increase to be used solely for road improvements throughout the city. The issue passed

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with 54 percent of the vote and is estimated to raise about \$1.3 million a year. The panel featured Barberton Mayor William Judge, Neighborhood Development Services (NDS) Executive Director Dave Vaughan and Barberton Community Foundation (BCF) Vice President of Community Impact Debby Rolland and was moderated by Alex Pesta, a principal consultant with City Architecture.

A major boost to the efforts of these three groups to revitalize downtown came in 2013, when the AMATS Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program selected Barberton as one of the region's two recipients of a \$50,000 planning grant. The program helps communities craft plans and studies that promote vibrant, livable communities. Ideas to reinvent downtown Barberton eventually made their way into Barberton's *North-South Bicycle Infrastructure Master Plan*, which was prepared by City Architecture and released in late 2014. Pesta praised AMATS as a planning resource to Barberton and City Architecture as development of the city's plan progressed. He noted that the agency's approach to identifying workable strategies through "truth-testing" events such as 2013's Barberton Bike-N-Brainstorm yielded a treasure trove of useful data to the consultant. To view the panel discussion, please click [here](#).

Curtis Baker, the agency's interim director, recounted the events of 2016, which has been a record year for AMATS with more than \$24 million in projects awarded making it one of the agency's strongest years ever. Baker noted that significant progress was made on several major projects throughout the Greater Akron area. Work is progressing on Akron's major Central Interchange improvement project and on portions of Interstates 76 and 77 and state Route 8. Construction is expected to begin soon on a \$20 million project on Akron's state Route 59 Innerbelt, which will open up more than 20 acres for development while removing a troublesome intersection at Main, Howard and Perkins streets.

Baker cited other improvement projects throughout the region as prime examples of the "complete street" principles that the agency has been actively encouraging, most notably the \$16 million Summit Street improvement project in Kent and the \$5 million Main Street project in Hudson. Both projects will improve pedestrian access and safety while making the experience of walking in those districts more enjoyable, according to Baker. Noting that while funds are desperately needed for all of the Greater Akron area's roadways, Baker concluded his presentation by stating that the agency's number one priority will continue to be preserving the existing system while advancing projects that will help improve safety, livability, connectivity and congestion. To view Baker's presentation, please click [here](#).

**IT'S MAGIC:**

The Annual Meeting included a panel discussion regarding Barberton's recent planning successes, such as the reconstruction of the Robinson Avenue Bridge, the Art Center on Tusc (ACoT) and the Lake 8 Movies Theatre. From left are BCF Vice President, Debby Rolland, Mayor William Judge and City Architecture's Alex Pesta.



## AMATS presents seven ways to better transit service

Public transportation in the Greater Akron area is good, but could be better, according to the new *Transit Plan* prepared by AMATS. Approved in December, the plan presents seven recommendations to improve the region's transit service.

The new *Transit Plan* was developed by the agency in cooperation with METRO in Summit County and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) in Portage County. Its recommendations are aimed at improving the region's current systems, which - as the plan notes - provide "very good coverage within their respective urbanized areas," but that improvements in frequency and route connections could increase ridership. The plan's seven recommendations are that the Greater Akron area and its transit authorities should:



Photo by PARTA

- 1. Consider a reduction or eliminate service on low-ridership lines.** The plan suggests that METRO and PARTA focus their assets on areas in which they will be most cost effective as limited funding is available for public transit services.
- 2. Continue support for NEORide,** the council of governments formed by METRO, PARTA and the Stark Area Regional Transit Authority in Stark County, to expand cross-county transit service and coordinate elderly and disabled transportation.
- 3. Establish transit-oriented development and design codes** at key transit nodes or stops that are near high population and job centers and close to other popular destinations and neighborhoods.
- 4. Increase service frequency and capacity** in nine key transit corridors that have been identified as warranting new or expanded service. Each of these corridors connects densely populated communities and contains demographic groups that are likely to use public transit.
- 5. Provide new fixed-route service to close gaps in transit service.** The Greater Akron area's transit service has not kept pace with the outward migration of the region's population to its suburban areas some of which may be suitable for fixed-route service.
- 6. Increase the frequency and extend the operating hours of existing cross-county services.** METRO and PARTA operate popular services from Akron and Kent to Cleveland, which are aimed almost exclusively at first-shift, Monday-through-Friday commuters. The plan recommends that the transit authorities increase the number of daily round trips and extend hours of operation for these services.
- 7. Increase hours of operation on existing services.** The plan recommends that METRO and PARTA increase service frequency on a number of fixed-routes, especially in the evenings, starting with key transit corridors.

To view the *Transit Plan*, click [here](#). The plan will be a key component of the agency's update of the area's Regional Transportation Plan scheduled for next year. The Regional Transportation Plan identifies long-term transportation needs in the Greater Akron area and matches anticipated funding to recommended projects. Highway, bicycle and pedestrian needs will be additional key elements of the Regional Transportation Plan.

## Community Focus: Windham

*Community Focus* presents information about communities within the Greater Akron area. The Village of Windham has been a member of AMATS since February 1970.

**Founded** – The area was originally named “Strongsbury” in 1810. Around 1820, the name was changed to “Windham,” after Windham, Connecticut.

**Population** – 2,209 (2010 U.S. Census Bureau)

**Area** – 2.06 square miles

**Policy Committee Member** – Mayor Deborah Blewitt

**History** – In 1810, 16 men formed the Becket Land Company and purchased 14,000 acres from Caleb Strong. Windham Township was surveyed in Range 6 of the Western Reserve. The Village of Windham was incorporated in 1892 and - on Oct. 12, 1993 - the village officially withdrew from the township.

In 1940, the United States Department of the Army reserved 21,418 acres in eastern Portage County, which became known as the Ravenna Arsenal. Windham was chosen to provide housing to many of the arsenal’s 14,000 new employees and lost a large portion of the village to the arsenal. Mayor Blewitt notes that the land that was taken from Windham limited the village’s ability to expand resulting in the loss of several businesses, including Paul’s Lumber Mill.

The 1950 Census shows that the 1,100 percent increase in Windham’s population was the largest out of any village in the United States. The military housing built in 1942 was supposed to be torn down at the end of the war, but the government instead sold the housing to an outside company.

In the 2010 Census, Windham had the highest percentage of poverty in Portage County with nearly 24 percent. Since 1950, Windham’s population has been on a steady decline because of the lack of new growth due primarily to the loss of land taken from the village by the federal government, according to Blewitt.

**Transportation Challenges** – The largest village in Portage County, Windham is centrally located between Youngstown to the east and Akron to the west. Windham is also a short distance from two Ohio Turnpike (Interstate 80) exchanges. Although there is no Ohio Turnpike interchange in the village or township, turnpike exits are 15 miles west of state Route 44 and seven miles east of state Route 5. State Route 303 runs through the middle of Windham. Blewitt says that the challenge for Windham is to draw more vehicular traffic so that businesses will find the village to be an attractive investment opportunity.

Windham is in the process of demolishing the World War II-era housing and replacing it with new construction. Blewitt says that Windham faces the challenge of revitalizing the village by offering young people affordable, modern housing and business investment opportunities.

**Web site** – [windhamvillage.com](http://windhamvillage.com)



## Project Updates

The following table lists significant projects that were awarded between June 23, 2016 and November 1, 2016.

PROJECT	ESTIMATED COMPLETION	AMOUNT
<b>Hiram Hike and Bike Trail (North)</b> - Construction of a multi-use trail for pedestrian use and to provide bicycle access between Hiram College and state Route 305 in the Village of Hiram. Project will provide parking access and bike racks at various trailhead locations.	07/31/2017	\$559,215
<b>Steels Corners Road</b> - Resurfacing of Steels Corners Road, from State Road to Wyndham Ridge Drive, in Cuyahoga Falls. Project includes restriping pavement markings and replacement of traffic loops.	09/30/2016	\$344,088
<b>Van Buren Avenue</b> - Resurfacing of North Van Buren Avenue, from Robinson Avenue to Fairview Avenue, and resurfacing of Fairview Avenue, from Norton Avenue/Coventry Road to Fifth Street NE (state Route 619), in Barberton.	11/03/2016	\$593,786

## Connecting a region - Several communities land AMATS planning grants

In July, the AMATS Connecting Communities Program awarded study grants totaling \$115,200 to the communities of Kent - in cooperation with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) - Hudson, Twinsburg and Green.

The finalists selected present opportunities for the Greater Akron area to pursue "complete street" principles, which encourage safe, convenient and comfortable travel for all users. Study summaries appear below:

- **Kent & ODOT State Route 261 Re-visioning the Corridor...Planning the Future** - This study will identify the best use of excess capacity and right-of-way along 220 feet of state Route 261. The study will propose vibrant areas and address traffic safety problems along the corridor. Kent and ODOT will receive \$44,400 from AMATS to compile this study.

- **Hudson's Preliminary Design for Veterans Trail - Downtown Phase** - This study will determine

acceptable routing between the currently funded sections of Hudson's Veterans Trail. The vision for this trail segment includes developing recreational and transportation alternatives while linking First and Main streets to the adjacent Downtown Phase II development. Hudson will receive \$19,000 from AMATS to compile this study.

- **Twinsburg's First Mile/Last Mile Community Connections Plan** - This study will identify links between existing trails and alternatives for extension of these connections to various destinations. Twinsburg will receive \$23,000 from AMATS to compile this study.

- **Green Master Connectivity Plan** - This study will provide a framework for making decisions about how to provide connectivity in Green. The city will integrate study recommendations supported by the community into its future land use and transportation plans. Green will receive \$28,800 from AMATS to compile this study.

## In Transition News - Curtis Baker is the new director of AMATS

After serving for 11 months as the agency's interim director, Curtis Baker was named director of AMATS on Dec. 1. Baker has been serving as interim director since Jan. 4 and was unanimously endorsed by the AMATS Policy Committee for the directorship in March.



**BAKER**

Baker, who has been employed by the agency for more than 10 years, was the agency's planning administrator when he was elevated to the directorship with the departure of Jason Segedy who was tapped by Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan to be the city's planning director. Baker will be responsible for oversight of the agency, which is responsible for regional transportation planning in Portage and Summit counties and a portion of Wayne County. Currently, AMATS has a budget of roughly \$1.4 million for planning purposes and a \$9 million-a-year infrastructure program.

In addition to his five years as agency planning administrator, Baker sits on the Summit County Transportation Improvement District Board and the Akron Regional Air Quality Management District Advisory Committee. He is a former chair of the Ohio Association of Regional Council's Transportation Committee and holds a master's degree in city and regional planning from The Ohio State University and a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership from Miami University.

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## 2016 Bike Plan gets things rolling for the region's bike network

The Greater Akron area's bicycle network got a much-needed push in July when the AMATS Policy Committee approved the *2016 Bike Plan*. The plan's approval guarantees that cycling will be a major component of the upcoming Regional Transportation Plan scheduled for completion next year.



Currently, the area has over 108 miles of shared-use paths or "trails" and 35 miles of bike lanes on its roadways. Building on AMATS' previous plan from four years ago, the *2016 Bike Plan* not only presents specific improvements to complete the region's trail network, but offers eight general recommendations to area policymakers to consider as they pursue cycling improvements. Policymakers are encouraged to:

1. Consider creating local bike plans.
2. Prioritize school areas and Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) School Travel Plans.
3. Place special emphasis on multi-modal areas.
4. Consider bicycle improvements and road diets during resurfacing projects.
5. Incorporate high-quality bicycle facility design.
6. Create a "minimum grid," which would establish a fully connected grid of protected bike infrastructure on busy streets and bicycle boulevards through neighborhood streets.
7. Consider becoming a Bicycle Friendly Community as awarded by The League of American Bicyclists.
8. Consider creating individual community-level Bicycle Advisory Committees.

These recommendations were created through discussions with local communities, area park districts, data analysis and AMATS Bike-N-Brainstorm events. To view the complete *2016 Bike Plan*, please click [here](#).

## Dates to Remember

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Committee/Event</u>	<u>Location</u>
January 2	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - New Years Day
January 16	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Martin L. King Day
January 19	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
January 26	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
February 2	6:30 p.m.	CIC	Akron-Summit County Public Library
February 20	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Presidents' Day
March 16	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
March 23	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
May 18	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
May 25	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
May 29	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Memorial Day
June 8	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
July 4	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - July 4th Holiday
July 20	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
July 27	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
September 4	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Labor Day
September 7	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
September 14	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
September 21	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
October 6	8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.	Annual Meeting	Sheraton Suites Akron Cuyahoga Falls
October 9	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Columbus Day
November 10	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Veterans Day
November 16	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
November 23-24	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Thanksgiving
December 7	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
December 14	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
December 25	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Christmas Day

Persons with disabilities needing assistance are asked to contact Billy Soule, Assistant to the Mayor for Community Relations, 166 S. High Street, Room 200, Akron, Ohio 44308, (voice) 330-375-2189, (TDD) 330-375-2345, at least seven (7) days in advance.

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