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Talking transformative projects at the AMATS Annual Meeting

The 2017 AMATS Annual Meeting helped attendees to make new connections - not only in person - but also of the planning variety. The agency is promoting connectivity strategies in transportation planning throughout the Greater Akron area. Connectivity provides access for pedestrians and cyclists as well as motor vehicles.

This year's meeting emphasized that theme with a panel discussion devoted to three multi-million dollar projects that are transforming the Greater Akron area - Akron's Innerbelt Project, Kent's Summit Street Project, and Cuyahoga Falls' Front Street Project. Panelists included Akron Design Division Manager Mike Teodecki, Kent Superintendent of Engineering/Deputy Service Director Jim Bowling, and Cuyahoga Falls Planning Director Fred Guerra.

The panelists discussed the histories of these projects and how they will put connectivity principles into action upon completion.

Akron's Innerbelt project will reconstruct Rand and Dart avenues, close the north part of state Route 59, and re-route traffic from Exchange to Main street. (See **'RIGHT-SIZING', Page 7**) Development of the more than \$19 million Innerbelt Project didn't happen overnight, Teodecki told attendees. Its genesis harkens back to May 2001 when Akron officials began asking what to do with a highway that was originally built to accommodate 100,000 vehicles per day in a link to Kent that was never realized.

After determining that 87 percent of the nearly 18,000 vehicles per day that actually used the Innerbelt were travelling to downtown Akron, city officials decided that a more sensible approach to the Innerbelt would be to improve access to downtown for those travelers rather than rebuild a massive piece of aging highway infrastructure.

Teodecki said that Akron sorted through numerous ideas and studies about what to do with the Innerbelt over many years before seeking funding from a mix of sources, including AMATS, which eventually programmed \$5 million in Surface Transportation Program funds

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GETTING STARTED: AMATS Policy Committee Chairman and Streetsboro Mayor Glenn M. Broska, at podium, welcomed attendees to the 2017 AMATS Annual Meeting.



PANEL TALK: Kent Superintendent of Engineering Jim Bowling, second from left, described the challenges that the city of Kent faced in pursuing its Summit Street Project.



RUST BELT REVIVAL: Dave Cieslewicz, the executive director of Wisconsin Bike Fed, at podium, shared bike planning strategies that have worked in the Badger State.

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for the project. He said that one of the biggest challenges facing Akron was explaining the project to users of the Innerbelt and how they would be impacted.

Akron used a multi-pronged approach that included a new web site - driveakron.com - and quarterly informational meetings in cooperation with Downtown Akron Partnership to keep the public informed regarding the project's progress. The city also dispatched engineering and planning teams to answer questions from local business owners. Teodecki said that Akron's efforts helped identify the best mix of office, business, greenspace, roads, bike, and pedestrian facilities necessary to help downtown Akron grow while complementing the existing downtown. These efforts have resulted in a project that will eventually free up 31 acres of land for other uses while improving pedestrian, cycle and motor vehicle access to downtown.

Similarly, Cuyahoga Falls launched its \$13 million Front Street Development Project to make its downtown more accessible. The project will remove a failed pedestrian mall constructed in 1978 and open the area to limited vehicular traffic while providing safe, convenient pedestrian and cycle access. Guerra noted that some of Cuyahoga Falls' biggest challenges were physical landmarks such as a clock tower and the north-end water fountain, which are popular with many residents. A complicating factor was that some of these landmarks are located in the former Front Street right-of-way, which made them too difficult and too expensive to relocate.



FUTURE OF FRONT STREET: This artist's concept depicts what Cuyahoga Falls' Front Street will be like upon completion in 2018.

"We knew that the final design had to be really functional. That was our biggest hurdle. It had to be able to promote economic growth, mixed-use developments and general placemaking," Guerra said. The Front Street Development Project will provide access to businesses by providing on-street parking and will include pedestrian and cycling amenities such as bike racks, hanging baskets and street art.

In Kent, Bowling noted that connectivity practices, such as narrower lanes and roundabouts, offered congestion-reduction and safety benefits for Kent. Summit Street was the most congested road in Summit and Portage counties after state Route 8 became a highway, Bowling observed. The one-mile stretch of road also had 23 percent of all pedestrian accidents and five of the 15 worst crash intersections.

The Summit Street situation was so troublesome that, at one point, Kent State University (KSU) considered closing the roadway in a master plan released in 1996. Bowling recounted that the public reaction to this proposal was overwhelmingly negative, especially as the street was the only east-west roadway between state Routes 59 and 261 within a two-and-a-half mile area. A stakeholders group was formed in 2002 that included the city and KSU. Using public outreach, this group explored ways to improve Summit Street. AMATS also played a role in making the \$17 million Summit Street project a reality by programming \$6 million in Congestion Mitigation Air Quality funds and \$700,000 in Transportation Alternatives Program funds for its development.

Dave Cieslewicz, the executive director of Wisconsin Bike Fed, was the day's keynote speaker. A former Madison mayor, Cieslewicz discussed planning strategies to promote pedestrian and bicycling usage in Rust Belt communities. He noted the similarities between a project in Milwaukee to remove a stub-end freeway that occupied about 25 acres and the Akron Innerbelt. "They went from an area worth about \$24 million in value to an area worth about \$380 million in value over about a decade and there are projects teed up to increase that by another \$780 million," Cieslewicz continued, "So you can see what the potential is for the Innerbelt."

Community Focus: Macedonia

Community Focus presents information about communities within the Greater Akron area. Located in north-central Summit County, the city of Macedonia has been a member of AMATS since February 1970.

Founded – In the early 1800s, a young man named Henry Woods came across a stream that he named Indian Run.

Population – 11,188 (2010 U.S. Census Bureau)

Area – 9.75 square miles

Policy Committee Member – Mayor Joseph Migliorini

History – A Northfield man named Abraham Cranmer purchased 90 acres of property near Indian Run at the intersection of what would become Jenkins and North Bedford roads. Cranmer built his home there in 1824, which was the first log house in this new settlement. Other settlers arrived in the area, which was originally known as “The Corners.” By 1835, there was an inn for travelers on the stage coach line between Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Gradually, the area was blessed with a new name, “Macedonia,” thanks in part to theology students from Hudson’s Western Reserve College who were asked to deliver Sunday sermons in the growing community.

Transportation Challenges – Several major roadways in the Greater Akron area extend through Macedonia. Interstate 271 bisects the city in a north-south direction and Interstate 480 runs in an east-west direction through its northern area. State Route 82 (East Aurora Road) extends in an east-west direction and intersects state Route 8 and I-271. Macedonia Commons Boulevard is a newer roadway that provides access to I-271 while linking state Routes 8 and 82 through the Macedonia Commons commercial and entertainment business district.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) recently completed the state Route 82 widening project, from Crow Drive to Shepard Road. This project consisted of the installation of a third (left-turn) lane and bicycle lanes in both directions. City officials have indicated that the installation of a sidewalk would benefit the community by providing pedestrian access to the Macedonia City Hall, the Macedonia Recreation Center and several residential subdivisions.

ODOT also recently completed the I-271 widening project and associated northbound entrance ramp from state Route 82. This project has improved traffic flow through the “Town Center” district. The city is currently pursuing the installation of an access road between Golden Link Boulevard and state Route 8. Macedonia officials believe that this will improve traffic patterns for The Crossings at Golden Link shopping center and for the state Route 8-state Route 82 intersection. The city is faced with low levels of service for the Highland Road-Valley View Road and the Shepard Road-Ravenna Road intersections. City officials are considering improvements to both intersections.

In the spring election, Macedonia voters approved a permanent income tax increase of which 0.25 percent is earmarked for “road improvements.” It is anticipated that this new tax structure will provide Macedonia with approximately \$1 million per year. The city is currently reconstructing or repaving nine local roads, along with other preventative maintenance measures, using the earmarked tax money. Paving of many more local roads will continue over the next couple of years.

Web site – www.macedonia.oh.us



Six AMATS projects net nearly \$13 million

A roundabout in Fairlawn and new Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses are among the six Greater Akron area projects that will receive nearly \$13 million in Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) Program funds.

The CMAQ Program provides federal funds to surface transportation projects and other related efforts that improve air quality and provide congestion relief. In Ohio, the program is administered by a statewide CMAQ Program Committee comprised of representatives from the state's eight largest metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) with populations over 200,000, which includes AMATS. This year, the committee received 87 project applications seeking over \$300 million. After an extensive screening process, the committee recently selected approximately \$165 million in projects across the Buckeye State.

Six Greater Akron area projects were selected by the committee to receive funding. Details about these projects are provided in the table below:

Project Description	Location/ Sponsor	Year	Total CMAQ Funds
Roundabout construction on Cleveland-Massillon Road.	Fairlawn	2021	\$3,263,015
Purchase of CNG Buses by METRO.	Summit County	2023	\$1,560,000
Purchase of CNG Buses by PARTA.	Portage County	2022	\$920,000
New turn lane on state Route 91 South.	Hudson	2022	\$2,500,000
Improvements at Copley Road (state Route 162) and Cleveland-Massillon Road intersection.	Copley Township	2019	\$400,000
New turn lane on state Route 43.	Streetsboro	2023	\$4,159,432

GROWING FLEETS:

The Greater Akron area's two transit authorities, METRO of Summit County and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority, will be adding more CNG-powered vehicles, like the one shown at right, to their fleets in 2023 and 2022 respectively. The bus purchases are among six area projects that will receive CMAQ funds.



Project Updates

The following table lists significant projects that were awarded between April 25, 2017 to September 12, 2017.

PROJECT	ESTIMATED COMPLETION	AMOUNT
The PORTAGE - Construction of the Tannery Park Segment of The PORTAGE Hike and Bike Trail, from state Route 59 to Erie Street, in Kent.	08/06/2018	\$1,052,347
Cleveland-Massillon Road - Resurfacing of Cleveland-Massillon Road, from the Barberton South Corporate Line to 31st Street, in Barberton. Project includes intersection improvements at Wooster Road North and Hopocan Avenue.	10/15/2017	\$209,995
Center Road - Resurfacing of Center Road, from Eastview Drive to South Main Street, in New Franklin.	10/27/2017	\$686,818
Olde Eight Road - Phase 2 of resurfacing of Olde Eight Road, from state Route 303 to Boston Mills Road, in Boston Heights.	09/30/2017	\$631,542

July’s Barberton Switching Gears Conference a ‘magical’ event

Barberton High School was the site of a successful July 26 Switching Gears Conference co-hosted by AMATS, the city of Barberton, and the Barberton Community Foundation.

With the support of AMATS, Barberton has embarked on an ambitious effort to promote pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to its downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. The conference was just the latest in the Magic City’s success stories.

The day’s events included presentations by Barberton Mayor William Judge, Jason Roberts of The Better Block Foundation, and Charles Marohn of Strong Towns.



PURPLE POWER: Attendees had their choice of a walk, shown above, or a bike ride through Barberton’s “Magic Mile” corridor to witness firsthand how the city is applying connectivity principles.

Mayor Judge described the city’s achievements in the promotion of connectivity in the wake of its AMATS-funded *North-South Bicycle Infrastructure Master Plan*. The Better Block Foundation empowers communities to reactivate built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. Strong Towns is a media organization that challenges Americans to rethink how cities are built.

To view a YouTube video feature recapping the day’s events, please click [here](#).

‘Right-sizing’ a Roadway

Work continued on Akron’s \$19 million Innerbelt Project throughout the fall. These pictures taken in early October show the progress that construction crews are making.

Akron officials say that the city began reassessing what to do with its Innerbelt back in 2001. The stretch of state Route 59 was originally intended to handle over 100,000 cars per day as a link between Akron and Kent, but the final portion was never built. Akron decided that it was time to “right-size” the portion of roadway and use it to revitalize its downtown.

The project will improve access for travelers to downtown while promoting a mix of connectivity strategies for motor vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. AMATS was one of the earliest funding sources for the project when it committed \$5 million in Surface Transportation Projects in January 2014.



Dates to Remember

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Committee/Event</u>	<u>Location</u>
January 1	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - New Years Day
January 15	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Martin L. King Day
January 18	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
January 18	6:30 p.m.	CIC	Akron-Summit County Public Library
January 25	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
February 19	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Presidents' Day
March 1	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
March 1	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
March 8	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
May 3	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
May 3	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
May 10	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
May 28	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Memorial Day
June 7	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
June 7	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
June 14	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
July 4	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - July 4th Holiday
September 3	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Labor Day
September 13	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
September 13	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
September 20	1:30 p.m.	Policy	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
October 5	8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.	Annual Meeting	Sheraton Suites Akron Cuyahoga Falls
October 8	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Columbus Day
November 12	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Veterans Day
November 22-23	*	*	AMATS Offices Closed - Thanksgiving
December 6	1:30 p.m.	TAC	Hilton Garden Inn, Ballroom A
December 6	6:30 p.m.	CIC	To Be Determined
December 13	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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