

2012 Annual Report



Planning for Greater Akron
The Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study



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Special Publication

Annual Report 2012

Reflecting on 2012 by Chairman Bica

I had the opportunity to chair the AMATS Policy Committee during what turned out to be an eventful year - 2012. During that time, the committee grappled with a host of planning issues, many of which revolved around the same basic question: How do we make the best use out of the Greater Akron area's diminishing funding resources?



BICA

That question confronted the committee early in the year when, in January, the Policy Committee had the opportunity to select projects for funding. After carefully weighing the merits of each project application, the committee decided that new projects should emphasize preservation of the area's transportation system. The committee determined that it was in the best interests of the Greater Akron area to make more efficient use of what we have now and re-invest in the existing system rather than spend a lot of money on costly expansions.

The result was that the agency approved nearly \$50 million in federal transportation funds for 46 projects. Among the significant projects selected by the committee to receive funding were \$2 million for the East Exchange Street Signal Coordination Project in Akron, \$1.5 million for the reconstruction of Tallmadge Avenue in Akron and \$1.6 million for a new Compressed Natural Gas Fueling Station for the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority. The agency also invested \$2.5 million for four new bike trail projects as part of its ongoing commitment to promote regional connectivity.

At almost the same time, the committee began the long journey to 2035 with the appointment of a 15-member Plan Update Subcommittee. This body is responsible for guiding the development of the area's long-range regional transportation plan, *Transportation Outlook 2035*. The subcommittee members began a frank discussion as to what the Greater Akron area's transportation needs will likely be and what principles and strategies should be pursued to meet those needs. By year's end, the subcommittee and the full Policy Committee approved several documents integral to the development of the plan. These documents included the comprehensive *Regional Pedestrian Plan* and the *2012 Bike Plan*, items that demonstrate the agency's commitment to connectivity and "complete-street" principles.

There were other notable successes during the year. The agency's various cycling initiatives led to the unveiling of *Switching-Gears.org*, a web site devoted to the needs of the Greater Akron area's cycling community, and the publication of a *Bike User Map*, which rates the area's major roads by level of difficulty for cyclists. The agency's Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program concluded a second successful year with studies by 2012 grant recipients, the Village of Boston Heights and Ravenna, making significant progress toward completion.

I can say with all certainty that the committee members and Staff addressed each issue that confronted them to the best of their abilities during 2012. The result of their diligence and hard work is that the agency is well positioned to meet the new looming challenges that 2013 and the coming years will bring.

Joseph Bica, Jr.
Ravenna Mayor
2012 AMATS Policy Committee Chairman

Planning

Transportation Outlook 2035

In 2012, AMATS began work on *Transportation Outlook 2035* - the Greater Akron area's upcoming long-range regional transportation plan - by completing numerous reports integral to the development of the plan. *Transportation Outlook 2035* focuses on building a transportation system that meets the needs of the Greater Akron area between now and 2035 and presents highway, public transportation, bicycle and pedestrian recommendations. In January, the agency appointed the 15-member 2035 Plan Update Subcommittee. The subcommittee is responsible for guiding the development of the new plan and assisting the agency Staff by reviewing and commenting on documents and other products related to the plan update. Many of the recommendations, strategies and projects identified in these products will be considered for inclusion in the final plan.

2012 Highway Preservation Needs Report – Completed in July, this report recognizes that maintaining and preserving the existing highway system should be a priority of the area's transportation planning process. The report describes the existing highway system, highway resurfacing and replacement needs, and bridge maintenance and replacement needs.

The report estimates that the total cost for the preservation of AMATS' existing highway system through the life of *Transportation Outlook 2035* is approximately \$2.5 billion, valued in 2012 dollars. This total was determined by adding the estimated costs of pavement resurfacing (\$947.8 million), pavement replacement (\$134.4 million) and bridge preservation (\$1.4 billion).



2012 Congestion Management Process Report – Finalized in July, this report identifies existing and projected future congestion on the area's freeways, arterials and intersections.

The report finds that traffic congestion in the Greater Akron area has improved in the last several years due to a combination of a sluggish economy, rising gas prices and hundreds of millions of local, state and federal dollars spent on transportation projects over the past decade. The report also finds that - while area traffic levels will likely increase between now and 2035 as economic growth returns - new congestion problems shouldn't.

Twenty-five improvements that target only the most vital congestion locations in the Greater Akron area are recommended in the report. These recommendations reflect the agency's "fix-it-first" policy to pursue needed investments in the area's existing transportation system rather than costly expansions.



2012 Transit Plan – Approved in July, this plan presents nine recommendations to improve the Greater Akron area's transit service between now and 2035. Among its key recommendations are: that existing service from lines with low ridership or growth potential be shifted to areas showing strong demand; that municipalities should implement transit-oriented development, especially within identified key transit corridors; and that improvements be made to current transit levels of service, particularly in the evening hours, to better serve existing ridership and attract new riders.

Unique to this latest transit plan is the identification of nine key transit corridors, where it is recommended that existing service be expanded upon, or - if service is non-existent - that it be added when feasible. The plan identifies key areas within these corridors for the potential implementation of transit-oriented development. These areas could be greatly enhanced through new transit, bike and pedestrian amenities and the use of "complete-street" design principles.

Regional Pedestrian Plan – Adopted in September, this plan evaluates the current pedestrian environment and facilities, identifies current needs, and anticipates pedestrian needs through the year 2035.

The plan identifies nearly 250 specific sidewalk and crosswalk gaps and issues a mix of 15 regional-level and municipality-level recommendations to improve the area’s pedestrian environment. Among the recommendations contained in the report are: that communities consider pedestrian improvements during resurfacing projects; that large parking lots such as those found at shopping malls, retail centers, and office parks, incorporate pedestrian amenities; and that traffic calming techniques and sidewalk widenings be pursued in areas with high levels of pedestrian travel.



The plan states that funding for future pedestrian improvements could come from six eligible project-type categories established by the new federal Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program. The plan urges AMATS to develop a regional, incentive-based “complete-street” policy. Under such a policy, the agency should partner with member communities applying for transportation funding to determine how new street projects could best accommodate the needs of all potential users.

Freight Plan 2012 – Finalized in December, this plan identifies the freight transportation systems that exist in the Greater Akron area. This plan also addresses the factors and trends that affect the multiple modes of traffic and flow of freight and the procedures used for planning and programming the area’s freight-related projects. The projects and strategies recommended in this report will be considered during the development of *Transportation Outlook 2035*.



Highway system improvements are identified in the plan as the area’s greatest need regarding freight movement. Freight movement, by way of trucks, is heavily concentrated on the area’s freeways and major state routes. Highway improvements, most notably for the Central Interchange, will help improve the efficiency of freight movement on the area’s roadways, according to the plan.

The needs of the area’s rail freight transport system are also addressed in the plan. Among the rail recommendations are calls for improvements to the CSX Lambert-to-Warwick section near Clinton and the NS Cleveland to Pennsylvania Line that passes through Macedonia, Hudson and Ravenna on its way to Alliance. Other recommendations include possible improvements to rail lines owned by METRO RTA to make them available to local industry and the preservation of out-of-service rail lines for future rail use or conversion to bike and pedestrian trails.

With a recognition that the needs of the area’s highway and rail systems occasionally overlap, the plan recommends grade separations to reduce delays and eliminate conflicts between trains and automobiles, most notably at the Stow Road crossing of the Norfolk-Southern Line in Hudson and the North Main Street (state Route 91) crossing of the CSX Line in Munroe Falls.

Cycling Initiatives

In 2012, AMATS continued to build on the momentum of its various cycling initiatives. Thanks to the agency’s efforts and the collaboration of various partners, the Greater Akron area continues to move toward the completion of a regional bike network.

The year began with the AMATS Policy Committee approving nearly \$2.5 million to develop two trails in Portage County and two in Summit County in January. The approval of the trails was part of the committee’s decision to approve 46 projects totaling nearly \$50 million in federal transportation funds.

The four trails are:

- **The PORTAGE Hike & Bike Trail** – Kent will construct a new segment of The PORTAGE spanning from the city of Kent’s John Brown Tannery Park along state Route 59 to Erie Street. This trail segment will include on-street portions. This project will receive **\$700,000**.
- **Confluence Connector Trail** – Metro Parks Serving Summit County will construct a feeder trail for the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail spanning from Manchester Road to Warner Road in Akron and Coventry Township. This project will receive **\$700,000**.
- **Liberty Road Trail** – Twinsburg will construct a multipurpose trail spanning from Post Road to the city of Solon. This project will receive **\$374,000**.
- **Headwaters Trail Hiram Extension** – The Village of Hiram will construct a trail connecting Hiram College to state Route 305. This project will receive **\$700,000**.

The agency is encouraging the development of bike-oriented facilities as part of its push to improve regional connectivity. The four projects offer a snapshot of how the area’s bikeway network is evolving. With the completion of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail through Summit County and the development of a regional trail network well underway, the area is gradually shifting its focus to a complementary on-road network that supports cycling as a viable daily transportation alternative.

Other key accomplishments by the agency as part of this focus were the creation of the *2012 Bike Plan*, the launch of *Switching-Gears.org* and the publication of the *AMATS Bike User Map*.



MOVING ALONG MARKET – Cycling enthusiasts geared up to participate in the agency’s Market Street Bike-N-Brainstorm in May. AMATS hosted the event to learn what the public thinks should be done to improve Akron’s Market Street corridor for bike traffic.

2012 Bike Plan – Approved in March, the *2012 Bike Plan* marks an important shift for AMATS and the Greater Akron area. In addition to being a key component of the area’s regional transportation plan, the plan is the agency’s first step in creating an integrated bicycle network that includes on-road facilities, as well as recreation trails. An aim of the plan is to promote cycling as a viable transportation option by encouraging the pursuit of safe, accessible and efficient bike routes and facilities. The plan is a guide for enhancing the existing bicycle network by inventorying the current system, envisioning what it could be, and utilizing the tools to get there.

The *2012 Bike Plan* recommends the completion of 13 off-road regional bike trails with the recognition that, as these trails are completed, connections between them and to residential areas will likely increase in importance and should be considered for funding. The plan also identifies 63 priority corridors for on-road bicycle improvements with the intention of ultimately establishing a regional bike network.

A particular point of pride for agency officials regarding the plan is the degree of active participation by the area’s cycling community in its development. The plan’s recommendations weren’t crafted solely by agency personnel acting alone, but through an ambitious community outreach to the region’s cyclists. This outreach began in February with two well-attended public meetings in the cities of Kent and Hudson during which the draft plan was presented to the public for comment. In May, the agency hosted the Market Street Bike-N-Brainstorm, a first-of-its-kind event in the Greater Akron area, in which attendees cycled along Akron’s Market Street and then shared their opinions as to how the corridor could be improved for cyclists.

Switching-Gears.org – In March, AMATS unveiled *Switching-Gears.org*, a web site devoted to cyclists in the Greater Akron area. The agency started considering a site soon after work began on the *2012 Bike Plan*. Developed by 427 Design in Akron, the site presents a unique opportunity for AMATS to foster public dialogue, not only with the area’s cycling community, but the entire Greater Akron area. Visitors can learn about cycling and help shape public policy by sharing their insights as to how AMATS can improve the area’s roads and trails to make them more bike and pedestrian friendly.



Bike User Map – The AMATS *Bike User Map* made its debut in March. The map is an exceptional source of information that rates major roads in Portage and Summit counties for cyclists by varying levels of difficulty from “Easy/Beginner” to “Very Difficult/Expert.” The map includes safety tips and contact information for area bicycle clubs and groups and a contact list of public agencies who are key players in the area’s growing bikeway network. AMATS distributed about 8,000 copies of the map through a mix of area events, bike shops and requests received via *Switching-Gears.org*. The map has been so successful since its roll-out that agency officials plan to improve upon it in future editions using feedback that they have received from the public.



Bike and Pedestrian Counts – The agency uses data collected from bike and pedestrian counts for use in planning the area’s still-developing bike network and related pedestrian improvements that promote regional connectivity. 2012 marked the first complete season that AMATS compiled bike and pedestrian counts at key locations throughout the area. During May, July and September, the agency conducted 292 bicycle counts and 3,548 pedestrian counts at various locations in Akron, The University of Akron and Kent State University.

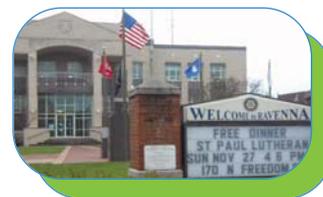
Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program

The AMATS Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program completed a successful sophomore year. The program helps communities strike a balance between their land use decisions and transportation investments by providing two \$50,000 grants for the development of plans and studies that promote vibrant, livable communities. 2012 grant recipients – the Village of Boston Heights and the city of Ravenna – made significant progress on their respective studies during the year.

Boston Heights is developing a comprehensive land use and transportation plan that will include a development strategy for the village’s state Route 8 corridor. The plan will analyze all aspects of traffic – vehicular, transit, bicycle and pedestrian – and offer traffic management strategies. The plan will also address how to connect the village’s residential, commercial and municipal areas, including potential pedestrian and bicycle access to the nearby Cuyahoga Valley National Park, the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail, and the Metro Parks Bike & Hike Trail.



Ravenna - in concert with the townships of Ravenna and Rootstown – is compiling its *Safe Alternatives: Less Traffic (SALT)*, a study of the state Route 44/Prospect Street Corridor, which extends through central Portage County. The study will present options to promote transit use and safe pedestrian and bicycle traffic within this five-mile, heavily travelled corridor.



Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium (NEOSCC)

The NEOSCC is a three-year planning program funded largely by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that will develop a regional vision for the 12 counties of Northeast Ohio. As the consortium entered its second year, AMATS Director Jason Segedy was elected to serve as the chair of the NEOSCC Board of Directors in January. During his term, the consortium achieved significant goals including the completion of its *Conditions and Trends (C+T) Platform* and an approach to develop the *Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision and Framework*.



Engineering

Transportation Improvement Program

AMATS is responsible for preparing and maintaining the Greater Akron area's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a four-year program of over 200 highway, public transit, and bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects that are scheduled to receive \$431.2 million in federal funds. Of this total, the agency provides \$94.8 million in funding for 111 projects.

In 2012, \$55.7 million in federal funds were expended on area highway and public transit projects. Of this total, \$52.9 million was for highway projects and more than \$16.7 million for transit projects. Another \$2.8 million was spent on bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects.

In January, AMATS selected 46 area projects to receive nearly \$50 million in federal transportation funds. Following a comprehensive review, the agency determined that a significant amount of additional funding would be available for area improvement projects in fiscal years 2016 and 2017 and sought applications from project sponsors. After weighing each application's merits under set criteria, the agency's Policy Committee decided which projects should receive funding.

The new projects tend to emphasize preservation of the area's transportation system instead of costly expansions. This is part of the agency's approach to invest existing resources wisely now rather than spend a lot of money for perceived problems later. Among the significant projects approved by the committee were:

- **\$2 million** for the **East Exchange Street Signal Coordination Project** in **Akron**.
- **\$1.5 million** for the reconstruction of **Tallmadge Avenue** in **Akron**.
- More than **\$1.3 million** for Phase 1 of the **West Side Traffic Signal Improvement Project** in **Ravenna**.
- **\$1.6 million** for a new **Compressed Natural Gas Fueling Station** for the **Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA)**.

The projects also demonstrated the agency's commitment to bolster regional connectivity through the promotion of bike and pedestrian projects. The Policy Committee approved nearly \$2.5 million to develop two trails in Portage County and two in Summit County.



2009-2011 Traffic Crash Report

AMATS released its *2009-2011 Traffic Crash Report* in July. The agency identified 115 high-crash roadway sections and 259 high-crash intersections in the Greater Akron area. The agency bases its reports on crash records provided by the Ohio Department of Public Safety and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). AMATS uses this information to identify needed projects throughout the area while communities rely on the report when applying for Highway Safety Program funds through ODOT.



The latest report found that the downward trend in the number of area crashes of the last several years is leveling off. Overall crashes in Portage and Summit counties only increased by less than 3 percent – from slightly more than 16,450 in 2009 to slightly more than 17,000 in 2011. Although crashes ticked up slightly last year, the area still had 6,000 fewer crashes when compared to the peak year of 2002.

Agency officials suspect that the number of crashes on the area's roadways and intersections is being held down because of much-needed safety improvements such as the new state Route 8 project in northern Summit County and several new area "roundabouts." Stepped up law enforcement and education campaigns, especially those aimed at younger drivers, are also helping keep the area's crash totals low. Other findings of the analysis are that:

- Akron is home to five of the 10 highest ranked high-crash roadway sections and five of the highest ranked high-crash intersections in the Greater Akron area. Runner up Cuyahoga Falls had two in each category.
- In Portage County, the highest ranked high-crash roadway section is located on state Route 59 in Franklin Township and the highest ranked high-crash intersection is located at state Routes 14 and 43 in Streetsboro.
- Rear-end crashes are the most common type of accident and account for roughly 35 percent of all crashes in the Greater Akron area.
- Out of 490 pedestrian-related crashes, 85 percent resulted in an injury and 4 percent in a fatality. Out of total pedestrian-related crashes, 12 percent involved children age 12 and under.
- Out of 325 bicycle-related crashes, 78 percent resulted in an injury and less than 1 percent resulted in a fatality. Out of total bicycle-related crashes, 21 percent involved children age 12 and under.

Engineering Activities

Traffic Counting Program

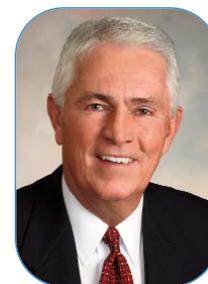
On-Road Counts – The collection of traffic count data is integral to sound transportation planning. During the summer, the agency compiles data regarding traffic volumes on Greater Akron area roadways and intersections for use in many of its analyses and the evaluation of new projects. In 2012, the agency conducted 247 counts at various roadway segments and at two intersections.

According to findings compiled by the agency during the 2012 traffic counting season, the volume of traffic in the Greater Akron area posted a slight decline of about 1.4 percent compared to the previous year's count. 2012 marks the seventh consecutive year for decreasing traffic volumes in the Greater Akron area, but it also marks the third consecutive year that the area has not witnessed a double-digit drop in volumes.

Outreach

Annual Meeting

The 2012 AMATS Annual Meeting in October drew more than 150 attendees to the Sheraton Suites in Cuyahoga Falls. The day's events included a panel discussion regarding the estimated \$100 million redevelopment of downtown Kent, a feature presentation by Ohio Department of Transportation Director Jerry Wray, and three informational workshops hosted by AMATS staff.



WRAY

Meeting attendees had the unique opportunity to hear directly from PARTA Planning Director Bryan Smith, Kent City Manager Dave Ruller, Dr. Ron Burbick and KSU's Dr. Stephen Storck as to how their interrelated needs for transit and pedestrian access and improved parking in downtown Kent meshed and complemented each other. PARTA's new multi-modal transit center, the \$20 million federal TIGER grant that made the center's construction possible, the Kent State University Esplanade, and Dr. Burbick's Acorn Alley and Acorn Corner projects were all topics of discussion between the panelists and audience members.

The meeting's featured speaker was ODOT Director Wray. The director described the challenges that the department faces in balancing the state's many transportation needs with current funding realities. Wray said that the department is meeting its challenges through innovative project delivery systems and various cost-cutting initiatives, which have freed more than \$400 million for ODOT's major/new capital improvement program since 2011.

Public Participation Plan

In September, AMATS approved a new *Public Participation Plan* following a comprehensive review of its public involvement efforts. The new plan builds on the momentum of the agency's ongoing outreach initiatives and allows AMATS to pursue new methods to encourage civic dialogue. Some of these new methods were given trial runs by agency personnel during the preparation of other reports.

The new plan embraces the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and grants agency personnel greater discretion in how to seek public insight through innovative means and informal settings. One example of this new approach was the Market Street Bike-N-Brainstorm during development of the *2012 Bike Plan*. The plan also fosters greater transparency during the transportation planning process and freshens many of the agency's traditional methods to seek public comment. For example, comment forms regarding draft reports and products are now available through the agency web site for submittal by email rather than only as hard copies at meeting and office locations. To join AMATS in its outreach efforts, visit the agency web site at amatsplanning.org or visit us at facebook.com/AMATSPPlanning and at twitter.com/amatsplanning.

New Members

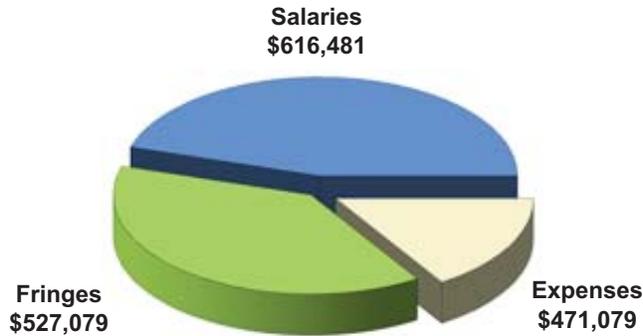
In July, the membership of the AMATS Policy Committee increased by one member to 45 when the Village of Lakemore in southeastern Summit County rejoined the committee after a hiatus of more than two decades. Village officials felt that the time was right for the community to rejoin the committee as an active participant in the regional transportation planning process.



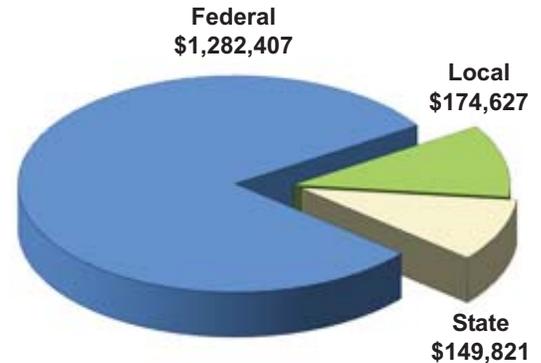
Also in July, the Ohio Turnpike Commission (OTC) joined the AMATS Technical Advisory Committee. Agency and commission officials agreed that OTC representation on the committee was appropriate given the importance of the Ohio Turnpike to the Greater Akron area's transportation system. The Ohio Turnpike extends 34 miles through 10 communities in the northern portion of the Greater Akron area and connects to state Routes 8, 14 and 44, U.S. 21, and Interstates 77 and 480.

AMATS Financial Data for Fiscal Year 2012

Expenditures by Type



Revenues by Type



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Vice Chairwoman -

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NORTON - Mayor Mike Zita

ODOT - Mr. Anthony M. Urankar

PARTA - Mr. Rick Bissler

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PORTAGE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS -

Ms. Tommie Jo Marsilio

PORTAGE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS -

Mr. Christopher Smeiles

PORTAGE COUNTY ENGINEER -

Mr. Michael Marozzi

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REMINDERVILLE - Mayor Sam K. Alonso

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- Mayor James R. Beal

SUMMIT COUNTY ENGINEER -

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- Mr. Russell M. Pry

SUMMIT COUNTY - Ms. Connie Krauss

SUMMIT COUNTY - Mr. Dennis Tubbs

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TWINSBURG - Mayor Katherine A. Procop

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