2017 Annual Report

The Yearly Chronicle of the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study
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An Extraordinary Year by Chairman Broska

2017 marked my second and final year as chair of the Policy Committee of the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS). I am astounded by the agency's many accomplishments during what turned out to be an extraordinarily productive year in terms of regional planning for the Great Akron area.

Two of AMATS' most important accomplishments were the twin approvals of a new four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and a new long-range Transportation Outlook 2040. Both items are integral to the area's ongoing transportation planning process.

The latest TIP is the Greater Akron area's four-year program of highway, public transportation, bike and pedestrian projects scheduled to receive federal funding between fiscal years 2018 and 2021. The program includes more than $686.5 million in highway and public transportation projects, including nearly $7 million for bike and pedestrian projects. Among the notable projects in the TIP is the $142 million project to replace the Cuyahoga River Valley Bridge on state Route 8 and a nearly $54 million pavement replacement project on state Route 8 in the cities of Hudson and Stow.

Transportation Outlook 2040 recommends over $5.6 billion in highway infrastructure investments, a total that includes over $4.3 billion for preservation of the existing system over the next 23 years. The new plan includes investment of over $2 billion in the region’s public transportation system and recommends $33 million in bicycle and pedestrian improvements. It is also the first AMATS regional transportation plan to address emerging technologies such as self-driving cars, connected vehicles and smart sensors.

Other significant achievements during the year include completion of the Congestion Management Process Report, the 2013-2015 Traffic Crash Report and updates of the AMATS Funding Policy Guidelines and regional Bike Map.

I'm amazed that - even with all of the aforementioned work and reports completed by the agency - that there was still time to host unique public outreach events such as July's Barberton Switching-Gears Conference and October's Annual Meeting. As chairman, I should have realized that's what AMATS does: Take an extraordinary resource and use it for extraordinary regional planning. I'm certain that you'll find the pages of this report to be interesting as well as informative.

Glenn M. Broska
2017 AMATS Policy Committee Chairman
Planning

2017 was a solid year of achievement for AMATS in terms of regional transportation planning. In January, the agency completed the *Congestion Management Process Report*, a significant component of the new *Transportation Outlook 2040*, which itself was completed in May. The agency also had successes in its efforts to promote connectivity principles through its Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program.

**Congestion Management Process (CMP) Report**

The *CMP Report* identifies existing and projected future congestion on regional freeways, arterials and intersections. The report also examines public transit levels of service availability, freight needs, and the impact that crashes have on congestion. It identifies demand and supply-side strategies to manage regional congestion.

This report includes 33 specific location recommendations and various transit, freight, and system-wide recommendations based on congestion and safety. These recommendations run the gamut of interchange reconstructions, extensive widenings, and various capacity and operational improvements. Although the majority of the recommendations involve improvements to area roadways, the *CMP Report* identifies enhanced public transit service as a potentially effective solution in many of our region’s most densely populated and traveled corridors.

The report's recommendations were considered for inclusion in *Transportation Outlook 2040* based on fiscal constraint and greatest congestion relief. The *CMP Report* is available by clicking [here](#).
In May, AMATS completed *Transportation Outlook 2040*, the long-range plan that identifies regional transportation needs and presents recommendations for highway, public transportation, bike and pedestrian projects that should be pursued over the next 23 years in the Greater Akron area. The plan recommends over $5.6 billion in highway infrastructure investments, a total that includes over $4.3 billion for preservation of the existing system. The plan includes investment of over $2 billion in the region’s public transportation system and recommends $33 million in bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

The plan represents a continuation of the agency's emphasis on preserving the region's existing transportation systems rather than costly expansions, but there is also a recognition of new realities within its pages. It is the first long-range plan that addresses emerging transportation technologies such as self-driving cars, connected vehicles and smart sensors. *Transportation Outlook 2040* also promotes smart regional land use strategies and development patterns, the integration of all transportation modes within the system, and the pursuit of increased mobility for all persons.

To view *Transportation Outlook 2040*, please click [here](#).

**A DOUBLE HEADER!**
The AMATS Policy Committee, shown at right, approved a new long-range *Transportation Outlook 2040* and a new four-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) during the same meeting in May.
Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program

2017 was another successful year for the AMATS Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program. The program helps communities strike a balance between their land use decisions and transportation investments by providing financial grants for the development of plans and studies that promote vibrant, livable communities. The year saw significant accomplishments by 2016 grant recipients - the city of Hudson, the study partners of Kent and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), and the cities of Green and Twinsburg.

**Hudson** - In November, OHM Advisors completed the *Downtown Hudson Trail & Greenway Concept Plan* on behalf of the city of Hudson. The plan identifies the best potential route through downtown Hudson to link the northern and southern portions of the Hudson Veterans Trail. The existing trail connections provide access for the downtown area to the Summit Metro Parks’ Hike and Bike Trail, but are not joined.

The plan’s Project Team - which included AMATS - assessed existing conditions, evaluated alternatives, and developed a route to connect downtown to the two trail ends. The plan’s identified route has a northern terminus located near the Owen Brown Street/Morse Road intersection. The route extends south to cross and then follows along the south side of West Streetsboro Street (state Route 303). The trail continues south along Main Street (state Route 91) and has a southern terminus at Veterans Way Park. The route promotes connectivity between Hudson’s First and Main Street Retail Area, a proposed development and other core downtown amenities. Hudson received $19,000 from AMATS to compile this study.

**Kent and ODOT** - In March, AMATS entered into a contract with the GPD Group (GPD) to conduct the *State Route 261 Re-visioning the Corridor... Planning the Future* study on behalf of Kent and the department. This study will identify the best use of excess capacity and right-of-way along state Route 261. It will also propose vibrant areas along the corridor and how to address area traffic safety problems.

During the spring, Kent and ODOT established a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for the study that includes over 20 members from Kent and the townships of Brimfield and Franklin. In May, study officials hosted two kick-off meetings with the CAC, one of which included a bike ride along the corridor. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce issues and needs. The CAC later hosted a third meeting to review study sections and discuss potential solutions. There were also regular meetings of key study stakeholders that included township and Kent State University officials. Kent and ODOT received $44,400 from AMATS to compile this study.

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Green - In March, AMATS selected Environmental Design Group (EDG) to prepare the Green Master Connectivity Plan, and, in August, both parties entered into a contract. When completed, the plan will provide a framework for Green in identifying and prioritizing where and how bicycle and pedestrian connections should be pursued as development and transportation projects occur. Another significant milestone in the plan's development occurred in June when Green released its community-wide connectivity survey. The survey sought input about existing and potential connections that would serve walkers, runners, and cyclists. Organizers also hosted a kick-off meeting in September. Green received $28,800 from AMATS to compile this study.

Twinsburg - In July, AMATS selected City Architecture to prepare Twinsburg's First Mile/Last Mile Community Connections Plan with the parties entering a contract in November. The plan will identify alternatives for critical connections between existing trails and how to link these connections with important community destinations within Twinsburg and its central area. As one of the initial steps in compiling the plan, City Architecture and Twinsburg officials hosted an October walking/bus tour of the existing city trail network. Twinsburg received $23,000 from AMATS to compile this study.

MAKING MAGIC
Barberton High School was the site of the July 26 Switching Gears Conference co-hosted by AMATS, the city of Barberton, and the Barberton Community Foundation. The conference included presentations by Barberton Mayor William Judge, Jason Roberts of The Better Block Foundation, and Charles Marohn of Strong Towns. To view a YouTube feature recapping the day’s events, please click here.

MAPPING IT OUT
In June, AMATS released a new regional Bike Map from its Switching Gears Program. Copies of the map are available at the AMATS office, area bike shops and connectivity-related events. To request a map, please visit Switching-Gears.org.

IMAGES FROM A REVISIONING
Development of the city of Kent and the Ohio Department of Transportation’s State Route 261 Re-visionsing the Corridor... Planning the Future study got underway in 2017. In May, study officials hosted two kick-off meetings, shown above, one of which included a bike ride along the corridor.
Engineering

The entire Greater Akron area benefitted from AMATS' regional engineering activities and programs during 2017 from the outset of the year. In January, the agency released its 2013-2015 Traffic Crash Report. In May, the AMATS Policy Committee approved a new multi-year, multi-million program of transportation projects with its adoption of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). That same month, the agency approved significant revisions to the AMATS Funding Policy Guidelines. In addition to these accomplishments, the agency continued its regular traffic count and data collection programs.

2013-2015 Traffic Crash Report

In January, AMATS released its 2013-2015 Traffic Crash Report. According to this latest three-year report, the number of traffic crashes on Greater Akron area roadways and intersections increased again between 2013 and 2015. This upward trend is a continuation of one that began in 2009, when area crashes hit their low point, and is similar to overall trends across Ohio and the nation.

In compiling the report, the agency identified 175 high-crash roadway sections and 308 high-crash intersections in the region. The report shows year-over-year increases in total area crashes. There were 18,639 crashes in 2015, which was 780 or 4.3 percent more than in 2014. This increase came on top of 17,859 total crashes in 2014, which was 623 or 3.6 percent more than in 2013. Sadly, area crash fatalities also increased by eight deaths from a low of 39 in 2014 to 47 in 2015. These findings are based on the agency's analysis of nearly 54,000 motor vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian-related crash records for the area provided by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). High-crash locations identified in the report may be used by communities as a starting point when seeking federal Highway Safety Program funds through ODOT for safety improvement projects.

The 2013-2015 Crash Report marks two firsts for AMATS: It is the agency's first crash report to be prepared using Geographic Information System (GIS) information and it is the first that will be used to meet new federal performance measures. GIS software allows the agency to pinpoint the location of crashes and count how many occurred near crash segments and intersections. Agency officials believe that the report will help the region meet new federal performance measures. Under these measures, metropolitan planning organizations such as AMATS must set targets to reduce fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads. While exact measures have not yet been determined for the Greater Akron area, they will probably be similar to those that will be set for the entire state by ODOT.

The 2013-2015 Crash Report is available by clicking here.
Transportation Improvement Program

In May, the AMATS Policy Committee approved a new Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) of highway, public transportation, bike and pedestrian projects scheduled to receive federal funding from fiscal year 2018 through 2021. The program includes more than $686.5 million in highway and public transportation projects, including nearly $7 million for bike and pedestrian projects. The program – like the long-range Transportation Outlook 2040 – emphasizes maintenance of the area’s existing system, but does include a number of notable improvements.

Among the much-needed projects is the $142 million Cuyahoga River Valley Bridge replacement on state Route 8, which is one of the largest in the latest TIP. Significant modifications to the Central Interchange and new sidewalks in Montrose that will help the area become more pedestrian friendly are also included in the program’s pages. Other notable projects are:

- A nearly $54 million pavement replacement project on state Route 8, from Graham Road to just north of state Route 303, in the cities of Hudson and Stow.
- The $20.1 million Main Street Corridor improvement project in Akron including the State Street Bridge Reconstruction.
- A nearly $10 million interchange improvement project at Tallmadge and Mogadore roads and Interstate 76 in Brimfield Township.
- A nearly $7.5 million project to upgrade signals with fiber optics throughout Streetsboro.

To view the TIP, please click [here](#).
In May, after an extensive year-long review, the AMATS Policy Committee acted on the recommendations of its Funding Policy Subcommittee and approved a host of changes to the AMATS Funding Policy Guidelines. These changes will improve equitability and flexibility in the awarding of funding to project applicants.

In a move to promote fairness in the awarding of funding amongst the region's communities, the committee agreed to changes in the guidelines' equitable distribution criteria used in the project selection process. The new criteria establishes a point distribution system for project applications to the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG), Resurfacing, and Transportation Alternatives Set Aside (TASA) funding programs that is less arbitrary in the awarding of points. These changes create new opportunities for score differentiation through additional categories for applicants. The committee also approved changes that grant additional points to priority projects that are seeking both STBG and Resurfacing funds.

Another measure to promote equitability is aimed at giving the region's smaller communities a greater voice. The Policy Committee agreed to add representatives of communities smaller than 20,000 in population to the Technical Advisory Committee Transportation Improvement Program (TAC TIP) Subcommittee. The Policy Committee chairperson may now appoint representatives to the subcommittee from cities with a population between 10,000 and 20,000 and from cities with a population between 5,000 and 10,000.

In another TAC TIP Subcommittee-related move, but this one aimed at promoting funding flexibility, the Policy Committee granted the subcommittee the ability to consider project applications in the TIP deemed most appropriate by the agency staff and the subcommittee.

In the pursuit of fiscal responsibility, the Policy Committee agreed that projects which have already received federal funds through AMATS are no longer eligible to apply for additional funds through the agency's normal application cycle. If additional project funding is necessary, a request must be made to the agency staff for review by the TAC TIP Subcommittee, TAC and Policy Committee, with the Policy Committee making the final decision.

Another guideline change commits the agency to conducting new traffic counts in locations where communities believe that substantial traffic increases have occurred. This change was prompted by questions regarding how count data is used in the selection of resurfacing projects and the ability of project sponsors to challenge data if more recent counts are available.

The AMATS Funding Policy Guidelines are available by clicking here.
Traffic Count Program

The collection of traffic count data is integral to sound transportation planning. The agency compiles data regarding traffic volumes on Greater Akron area roadways and intersections and - more recently - bicycle and pedestrian networks. The agency uses this data in many of its analyses and to evaluate new projects.

Motor Vehicle Counts

In 2017, the agency conducted 506 counts at various roadway segments. This total represents a significant increase in the number of counts conducted from 2016 when the agency conducted 197 counts. This is due largely to the agency’s transition from using mechanical counters that used hoses fastened to roadway surfaces to a radar-based counting system from Houston Radar.

Bike and Pedestrian Counts

Bicycle and pedestrian counting is an increasingly important aspect of regional transportation planning. This count data helps target the location for future bicycle and pedestrian facilities in areas where land use and development are likely to promote frequent use. The data also helps determine trends in biking and walking by measuring the benefits of these investments.

2017 was the first year that AMATS utilized a MioVision-brand camera to identify bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Previously, counts were completed manually at locations. Tracking bicycle and pedestrian counts by camera allows for improved documentation and more efficient data collection by storing the videos for reference and access at any time.

In 2017, AMATS completed bicycle and pedestrian counts in 14 locations with 11 in the Akron area, one in Kent near Kent State University, and two in Barberton near the city’s Magic Mile trail section. The locations were prioritized based on demographics and land use in mostly urban settings, proximity to retail, business and university areas. Locations were also chosen where bike lanes already exist in order to develop exposure rates.

The highest volumes of bicycle and pedestrian activity were in downtown Akron around mid-day from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. where the agency recorded 26 bicycle counts and 737 pedestrian counts during the year. Akron’s Main and Market streets had the highest pedestrian counts, but totals at the same locations and times decreased about 30 percent from 374 in 2015 to 286 in 2017. In contrast, bike counts in downtown Akron increased from 10 in 2015 to 26 in 2017.
Public Outreach

Certification Review

AMATS hosted a March 14 meeting in downtown Akron as part of its four-year federal certification review as the Greater Akron area’s metropolitan planning organization. The public was invited to share their thoughts regarding the agency with Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration officials.

In May, federal officials informed AMATS that the agency’s planning process was certified for another four years. The agency also received a commendation for its innovative public outreach efforts, such as its Bike-N-Brainstorm and Better Block events. The agency was urged to change its data collection and analyses of roadway systems - a process which AMATS had already started. To view a YouTube feature about AMATS’ certification review, please click here.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Attendees share their insights as to how AMATS is performing in its role as the Greater Akron area’s metropolitan planning organization with federal officials during a March meeting.
Annual Meeting

October's 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.

The 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 beginnings of the histories of these projects and how they will put connectivity principles into action upon completion. AMATS played significant roles in making these projects a reality. The agency programmed $5 million in Surface Transportation Program funds for the Akron Innerbelt Project and $6 million in Congestion Mitigation Air Quality funds and $700,000 in Transportation Alternatives Program funds for the Summit Street Project. The agency also participated in the Front Street Project Steering Committee.

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.

To view a feature re-capping the 2017 AMATS Annual Meeting, please click here.
AMATS Financial Data for Fiscal Year 2017

Revenues by Type

- Federal: $983,935
- Local: $151,155
- State: $110,566
- Other: $9,850

Expenses by Type

- Salaries: $472,354
- Fringes: $409,643
- Other: $9,850
- Expenses: $381,535
2017 Policy Committee Members

Chairman -
Mayor Glenn Broska

Vice Chairwoman -
Mayor Bobbie Beshara

AKRON - Mayor Dan Horrigan
AURORA - Mayor Ann Womer Benjamin
BARBERTON - Mayor William B. Judge, Jr.
BOSTON HEIGHTS - Mayor Bill Goney
CLINTON - Mayor Al Knack
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HUDSON - City Manager Jane Howington
KENT – City Manager David Ruller
LAKEMORE – Mayor Rick Justice
MACEDONIA - Mayor Joseph Migliorini
MANTUA - Mayor Linda S. Clark
METRO – Heather Heslop Licata
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NEW FRANKLIN - Mayor Al Bollas
NORTHFIELD – Mayor Jesse J. Nehez
NORTON - Mayor Mike Zita
ODOT - Tony Urankar
PARTA – Rick Bissler
PENINSULA - Mayor Douglas G. Mayer
PORTAGE COUNTY - Commissioner Sabrina Christian-Bennett
PORTAGE COUNTY – Commissioner Maureen Frederick
PORTAGE COUNTY - Commissioner Vicki Kline
PORTAGE COUNTY - Engineer Michael Marozzi
RAVENNA - Mayor Frank Seman
REMINDERVILLE - Mayor Sam K. Alonso
RICHFIELD - Mayor Bobbie Beshara
SILVER LAKE - Mayor Bernie Hovey
STOW - Mayor Sara L. Kline
STREETSBORO - Mayor Glenn Broska
SUGAR BUSH KNOLLS - Mayor John Guidubaldi
SUMMIT COUNTY - Engineer Alan Brubaker
SUMMIT COUNTY - Executive Ilene Shapiro
SUMMIT COUNTY - Connie Krauss
SUMMIT COUNTY - Carissa Signore
TALLMADGE - Mayor David G. Kline
TWINSBURG - Mayor Ted Yates
WAYNE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS - Dominic Oliverio
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AMATS Staff

Director
Curtis Baker
Director

Engineering
Niki Blunk
Planning Aide
David Pulay, P.E.
Transportation Engineer

Administrative
Eugene Paczelt
Transportation Engineer

Martha Chandler
Account Clerk

Amy Prater, P.E.
Transportation Engineer

Planning
Seth Bush
GIS Coordinator

Phyllis Jividen
Transportation Planner

Heather Davis Reidl
Mobility Planner

Kerry Prater
Public Information Coordinator

Jeffrey Gardner
Transportation Planner
The AMATS 2017 Annual Report is published by the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study, 806 CitiCenter, 146 S. High St., Akron, Ohio 44308-1423. Editorial comments are welcome.

Director - Curtis Baker  Editor/writer - Kerry Prater  Phone - 330-375-2436 / Fax - 330-375-2275

E-Mail - amats@akronohio.gov  Please visit our web site at: www.amatsplanning.org

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The contents of this report reflect the views of AMATS, which is responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official view and policies of the Ohio and/or U.S. Department of Transportation. This report does not constitute a standard, specification or regulation.