

2013 Annual Report



Planning for Greater Akron
The Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study



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Special Publication

Annual Report 2013

Looking back, looking forward by Chairwoman Krauss

2013 was an eventful year for AMATS. As chairwoman of the Policy Committee during that time, I am pleased to report that the agency met each of its challenges head-on and will continue its mission of quality transportation planning for the Greater Akron area well into the future.

Completing a new four-year \$667 million Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and an update of the long-range regional transportation plan, *Transportation Outlook 2035*, in the opening months of 2013 were significant achievements. Approved in mid-May by the AMATS Policy Committee, both documents emphasize preservation of the area's existing transportation system rather than expansion. Both chart a prudent fiscal course for a region facing shrinking transportation funding resources.



KRAUSS

2013 was also a record year for project funding through the agency with over \$27 million going to local governments for such endeavors as the Kent Esplanade, State Road and 25 area resurfacings.

The agency also confronted looming issues in state funding policies by becoming a proactive member of the new statewide Congestion Management Air Quality Program Committee. This committee was formed to address policy changes by the Kasich administration in how the state allocates its federal air quality funds.

Other significant accomplishments were the completion of the *2010-2012 Traffic Crash Report* and initiating development of a Regional Pavement Condition Data Collection System. AMATS' Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program marked a third successful year with the awarding of two \$50,000 planning grants to the city of Barberton for its *North-South Community Connection Plan* and Bath and Copley townships for their *Montrose: North/South East/West* study.

One early result of the grant to the townships is the agency's *Build a Better Montrose Survey*, which invites those that shop, work, and do business in Montrose to answer specific questions regarding the area's walkability, signage, aesthetics and parking. The survey's results will be used by the townships as they develop their study.

Even a relatively routine procedure became a point of pride for the agency. AMATS must be re-certified by the federal government every four years as the area's metropolitan planning organization. Upon completion of the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration's joint review in July - the agency not only earned re-certification - but garnered praise for its administration of the area's transportation planning process and a commendation for its Bike-N-Brainstorm events. On the subject of Bike-N-Brainstorms, the agency hosted three in 2013 in the cities of Kent, Green and Barberton. In all, more than 170 cyclists participated in these events and shared their insights with agency personnel as to how to improve cycling within these communities.

The year passed was one of significant accomplishments. The years ahead hold unique challenges. If 2013 is an indicator, the agency is positioning itself and the Greater Akron area to meet those challenges from positions of strength.

Connie Krauss
2013 AMATS Policy Committee Chairwoman

Planning

Transportation Outlook 2035

In May, AMATS completed *Transportation Outlook 2035* - the Greater Akron area's long-range regional transportation 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.

The Plan recommends over \$4.3 billion in highway investments – including over \$2.5 billion for system preservation – over the next 22 years. The Plan also recommends more than \$1.7 billion in public transportation investments and \$30 million in bicycle and pedestrian improvements during the same period.

Transportation Outlook 2035 reflects the recognition by agency leaders that maintaining the area's existing roadways is AMATS' priority along with promoting alternatives to driving while increasing safety. The Plan promotes regional connectivity and alternatives to driving through transit, bike and pedestrian strategies.

The Plan includes recommendations to increase the frequency of service and extend hours of operation along key transit routes for METRO of Summit County and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) in Portage County. There are also joint recommendations for METRO and PARTA to pursue a Stow-Kent Transfer Facility and a Cross County Service Feasibility Study. It also marks the first time that AMATS has recommended funding for stand-alone sidewalk projects and on-road bike improvements rather than recreational trails.

Although *Transportation Outlook 2035* emphasizes maintenance of the area's existing transportation system, it is not void of recommendations for major improvement projects in the Greater Akron area. The Plan recommends that nearly \$200 million be used to reconfigure portions of the Central Interchange and another \$97 million be used to reconfigure the Main Street/Broadway Interchange, both of which are in Akron.

Cycling Initiatives

In 2013, AMATS hosted three well-attended Bike-N-Brainstorms in the cities of Kent, Green and Barberton. A Bike-N-Brainstorm is a group bike ride along key corridors so that cyclists may experience firsthand what it's like to bike there. At the end of their ride, group members participate in a brainstorming session with agency personnel to share their ideas as to what can be done to improve bike travel within the area.

The Kent Bike-N-Brainstorm began April 20 at the new Kent Central Gateway in downtown Kent. Sixty-two



Photo by Robert A. Walker

attendees traveled a 5-mile route through various parts of Kent. Among the issues identified by participants during the subsequent brainstorming session were the need for improved signage, more bike lanes, and keeping bike lanes free of debris. The city of Kent, the Kent State University and PARTA partnered with AMATS in hosting this event.

The Green Bike-N-Brainstorm kicked off on the morning of June 22 at the Nimisila Reservoir. A group of about 40 participants traveled their choice of a 3-mile family friendly route along Green’s Christman Road or an 8-mile route throughout the city of Green. Issues identified during the brainstorming session were the need for wider berms, improved signage and more bike lanes. The city of Green and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources partnered with AMATS in hosting this event.



Participants in the Barberton Bike-N-Brainstorm met at the Snyder Avenue Trailhead (Wolf Creek Trailhead) and rode along a nearly 10-mile route through various parts of the city including along the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail and through downtown. The city of Barberton, the Barberton Community Foundation, Neighborhood Development Services, Inc., R-D Bike Shop, ManorCare and SourceCare helped organize the final ride of 2013. Among the issues identified by cyclists during the Barberton brainstorming session were the need for repaved roads, bike lanes or widened berms,



improved signage and enthusiasm for an upcoming connector bridge. The city was awarded \$224,000 from the Barberton Community Foundation for the construction of the connector, which will span the Tuscarawas River, from the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail into downtown Barberton near the Robinson Avenue Bridge.

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. 2013 marked the second season that AMATS compiled bike and pedestrian counts at key locations. During the months of January, April, May, July, August, September and October, the agency conducted 24 bicycle counts and pedestrian counts throughout the Greater Akron area.

The top three count dates, locations and totals for bicyclists included:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Total</u>
July 13	State Route 303 & Akron-Peninsula Road (Peninsula)	141
July 11	East Exchange Street & South Portage Path (Akron)	45
July 6	West Market Street & Portage Path (Akron)	40

The top three count dates, locations and totals for pedestrians included:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Total</u>
April 16	Sumner & East Exchange streets (UA campus)	1,362
April 16	Grant & East Exchange streets (UA campus)	1,050
Oct. 2	Campus Center Drive & Summit Street (KSU campus)	1,025

Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program

The AMATS Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program capped off a successful third year. The program helps communities coordinate 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.

Since its launch, the program has awarded several grants totaling \$200,000 to communities and organizations such as Akron, Boston Heights, Ravenna, Richfield and METRO. In May, AMATS announced that Barberton and Bath and Copley townships would receive the latest round of grants.



Barberton will use its grant for its *North-South Community Connection Plan*, which will foster greater connectivity between its north and south ends. The study will identify potential improvements to connect downtown Barberton to other parts of the city. Light and heavy industries are sandwiched between Van Buren Avenue and 2nd Street and barriers such as the Tuscarawas River and the Ohio & Erie Canal hinder mobility between the city's north end - which contains its downtown, residential, commercial, and Lake Anna recreational areas - and its south end, which is home to large residential developments and additional recreational areas, including the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.



Bath and Copley townships are developing the *Montrose: North/South East/West* study, which will encompass a 3.25 mile suburban area bounded by Bath Township to the north and Copley Township to the south and includes the heavily traveled roadways of Interstate 77, state Route 18, Springside Drive, Montrose West Avenue, and Cleveland-Massillon, Rothrock and Crystal Lake roads. The study will consider bicycle and pedestrian access improvements throughout the area and transit and vehicle access improvements to nearby retail and parking locations. Other topics to be addressed by the study include possible aesthetic improvements, signage blight and the interrelated issues of sustainability and environmental impacts.

In September, AMATS and the townships undertook the *Build a Better Montrose Survey*, which invited those that shop, work, and do business in Montrose to answer specific questions regarding the area's walkability, signage, aesthetics and parking. In mid-December, the agency released findings from the then-ongoing survey, which at the time had generated nearly 700 responses. Key survey findings were that:

- 82 percent of survey participants visit Montrose at least once a week; two-thirds visit even more frequently.
- 80 percent of respondents indicated that dangerous traffic deters walking and bicycling in the Montrose area. Nearly two-thirds indicated that the absence of sidewalks and/or safe crosswalks prevents them from walking.
- Pedestrians and cyclists are reluctant to cross State Route 18 (Medina Road). The most frequently suggested improvements to surmount this obstacle were a pedestrian bridge or tunnel (60.4 percent) or crosswalks with signals to temporarily stop traffic (42.8 percent).
- 64.1 percent of participants were not familiar with the transit options available to the area.
- Most (63.7 percent) felt that the available parking was sufficient for the area.
- Nearly half (46 percent) found the area aesthetically unappealing, and that improvements such as additional landscaping (76.9 percent), well-designed sidewalks and crosswalks (70.1 percent) and additional outdoor patio dining options (62.1 percent) would enhance the overall appeal of the area.

Overall, these findings confirm that there are many challenges to overcome to improve all modes of transportation, connectivity between places, and the overall aesthetic appeal of the Montrose area. The survey's results will be used by Bath and Copley townships as they develop their study.

Meanwhile, 2012 grant recipients – the Village of Boston Heights and the city of Ravenna – concluded their studies.

Boston Heights developed a comprehensive land use and transportation plan that includes a development strategy for the village's state Route 8 corridor. The plan analyzed all aspects of traffic – vehicular, transit, bicycle and pedestrian – and offers traffic management strategies. The plan also addresses 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 – finished its *Safe Alternatives: Less Traffic (SALT)*, a study of the state Route 44/Prospect Street Corridor, which extends through central Portage County. The study presents 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. AMATS is a founding member of the NEOSCC Board. As it concluded its third year, the consortium released nine recommendations in December. Among the NEOSCC's recommendations were that the region should:



- Focus new residential and commercial development on sites within established communities.
- Develop a robust network of regional job centers connected by multimodal transportation corridors within and between counties.
- Pursue the remediation, assembly, marketing, and redevelopment of abandoned properties at both the local and regional levels.
- Encourage a higher frequency of mixed-use development and a range of diverse, affordable housing options.
- Enhance and coordinate the region's rail and bus services.
- Enhance walking and cycling as transportation options to increase regional mobility and improve public health.
- Preserve our natural areas for future generations, provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and develop a regional approach to protecting air, water, and soil quality.
- Support sustainable agriculture and the local food system in Northeast Ohio.
- Increase the collaboration among the region's government agencies to expand information sharing and find more cost-effective means to provide essential services.

The Vibrant NEO 2040 Vision documents are available by clicking [here](#).

OPEN HOUSES:

In early August, the NEOSCC hosted a series of Open Houses, which presented "What If" scenarios for Northeast Ohio's future as part of its Vibrant NEO 2040 process. Together, these events, like the one in Kent, shown at right, drew more than 1,100 attendees.



Engineering

Transportation Improvement Program

In May, the AMATS Policy Committee approved the *Transportation Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2014 and 2017* (TIP), the Greater Akron area's new four-year program of highway, public transportation, and bike and pedestrian projects.



The latest TIP charts a prudent fiscal course for a region facing shrinking transportation funding resources. The program represents a \$667 million investment in the area's highway, public transportation, and bike and pedestrian infrastructure over the next four years. Nearly \$429 million in the program is devoted to the area's highways while another nearly \$230 million will go for public transportation. More than \$8 million will fund a host of bicycle and pedestrian projects.

Seventy-seven percent of the new TIP is devoted to maintaining and operating the Greater Akron area's existing transportation system. The program reflects AMATS' commitment to preserve the area's existing transportation system rather than pursue costly and – increasingly – unnecessary expansions that add highway capacity.

Key strategies of this approach are the pursuit of more maintenance and operational projects and the promotion of regional connectivity. The TIP is grounded in the fiscal reality that - unless new sources of transportation funding are found by local, state and federal policy makers - the Greater Akron area must use its existing resources as efficiently as possible.

The program's many maintenance and operational projects are vital to the continued smooth operation of the area's highways and transit systems. Notable projects in the TIP include:

- An **\$8 million** intersection improvement project on **state Route 14** at state Route 59/Newton Falls Road in **Ravenna Township**.
- A nearly **\$7 million** reconstruction project on **Frost Road**, from Interstate 480 to state Route 43, in **Streetsboro**.
- Operational improvements for **31st Street** in **Barberton** and **Canton Road** in **Springfield Township** and the **Village of Lakemore**.

While the latest TIP definitely reflects a shift in funding priorities, a number of expansion improvements do appear in the four-year program. Among the most significant improvement projects are:

- The more than **\$137 million** project to widen **Interstate 76** to six lanes in **Barberton** and **Norton**.
- A nearly **\$103 million** project to improve access at the **I-76/Interstate 77 (Main Street/Broadway) Interchange** in **Akron**.

- A more than **\$12 million** project to improve **East Summit Street** in **Kent**.
- Phase 1 of a more than **\$9 million** project to improve and widen a portion of **Cleveland-Massillon Road** in **Norton**.

The new TIP also reflects the agency's commitment to improve regional connectivity through various bike and pedestrian improvement projects such as:

- More than **\$1 million** for a segment of **The PORTAGE Hike & Bike Trail** in **Kent**.
- The **Hiram Extension**, a trail connecting to the Headwaters Hike & Bike Trail, and **new sidewalks** at various locations in the **Village of Hiram**.
- A **bike lane** to be constructed as part of a more than \$6 million reconstruction project along **state Route 82 (Aurora Road)** in the cities of **Macedonia** and **Twinsburg**.



TWO FOR TWO: In mid-April, AMATS hosted two public engagement meetings - one in Akron, shown above and at left, and another in Kent. The meetings allowed the public to share their insights on both the draft TIP and *Transportation Outlook 2035*. These comments were used by the agency in developing final versions of both items.

Engineering Activities

2010-2012 Traffic Crash Report

The agency released its *2010-2012 Traffic Crash Report* in July. The agency identified 123 high-crash roadway sections and 263 high-crash intersections in the Greater Akron area. AMATS prepares its reports based on crash records provided by the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

The analysis finds that the number of crashes on area roadways and intersections remains stable. AMATS found that there were 50,573 crashes in Portage and Summit counties between 2010 and 2012, which is nearly the same as 2009 and 2011. Similarly, the number of injuries and fatalities remains largely unchanged.



Photo by Akron Police Dept.

The agency has documented an overall leveling off in crashes on the area's roadways and intersections over the last several years with the total number of crashes hovering in a range of 16,000 to 17,000 per year. Agency officials believe that the completion of much-needed safety projects throughout the Greater Akron area are contributing to the improving crash totals. Other findings of the analysis are that:

- Alcohol was a factor in 4 percent of all area crashes, but was a factor in 44 percent of all fatal crashes.
- The area's intersections account for 46 percent of total crashes during the three-year period.
- Out of 481 pedestrian-related crashes during the three-year period, 86 percent resulted in an injury and 3 percent in a fatality. Out of these total crashes, 12 percent involved children age 12 and under.
- Out of 331 bicycle-related crashes, 78 percent resulted in an injury and one of them in a fatality. Twenty-one percent of these total crashes involved children age 12 and under.

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 2013, the agency conducted 229 counts at various roadway segments and at three intersections.

According to findings compiled by the agency during the 2013 traffic counting season, traffic remains stable in some of the area's older central business districts such as Akron and Barberton and has increased slightly in newer suburban areas such as Green and Twinsburg.

Outreach

Annual Meeting

With its themes of regional collaboration, cooperation and shared services, the AMATS Annual Meeting drew nearly 160 people to the Sheraton Suites in Cuyahoga Falls in October. Among the day's events were a presentation by Ohio Controlling Board President Randy Cole and a panel discussion regarding shared service strategies.



COLE

The term “shared services” encompasses a collaborative strategy for optimizing staff, equipment and facilities and other public resources across jurisdictions to improve operational efficiencies and service delivery. In his presentation entitled *Beyond Boundaries – A Shared Services Action Plan for Ohio Schools and Governments*, Cole described how local governments can utilize new strategies and technologies to use public dollars effectively.

Sharing of services and other resources were discussed at length during the panel discussion. Moderated by Cole, the five-member panel had a frank discussion regarding the fiscal challenges facing local and state governments. Panelists included Tallmadge Administration Director Tom Pascarella, Streetsboro Mayor Glenn Broska, ODOT Highway Management Administrator Dave Ray, and Hudson Public Works Director Frank Comeriato.

Pdfs and videos of annual meeting presentations and the panel discussion are available for viewing in their entirety on the AMATS web site at amatsplanning.org and on YouTube at [AMATSPPlanning](https://www.youtube.com/AMATSPPlanning).

New Member

In July, the city of Rittman joined AMATS as a full voting member of the agency's Policy Committee. By doing so, Rittman became the second community and the third entity to join AMATS in a year. (The Village of Lakemore in Summit County joined the Policy Committee and the Ohio Turnpike Commission joined the Technical Advisory Committee in 2012.)



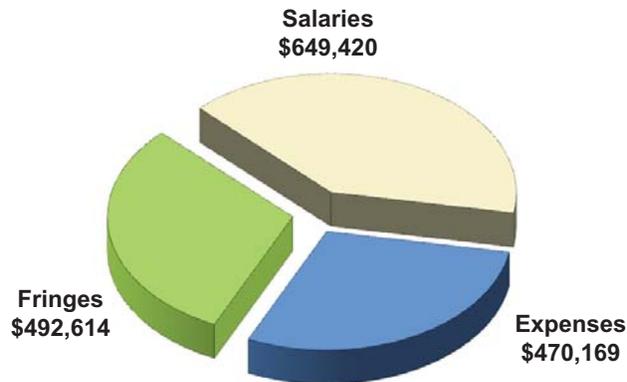
Located in northeastern Wayne County and southeastern Medina County, Rittman is bisected by state Route 57, which runs through the city and connects it to Interstate 76 in the north and state Route 585 in the south. Rittman City Manager Larry Boggs said that city leaders decided that joining AMATS made sense for the community given its growing ties to the Greater Akron area.

Rittman is working to restore a major “brownfield” site, which was the location of Rittman Paperboard. The nearly 300-acre site will eventually be renovated into a new industrial park with two different and separate rail spur capabilities. Boggs has indicated that planning and preparing for this new park's infrastructure will be the main goal and priority of the city in the next several years.

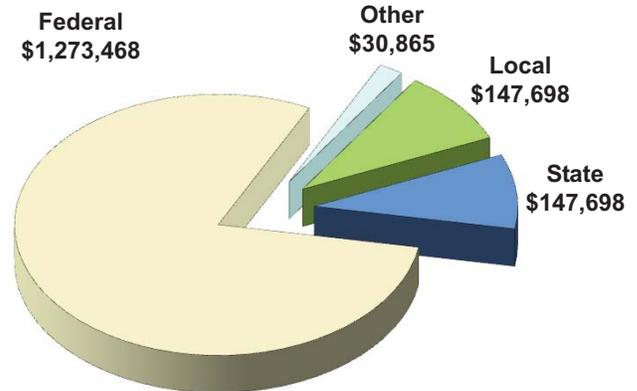
To view a video feature regarding Rittman, click [here](#).

AMATS Financial Data for Fiscal Year 2013

Expenditures by Type



Revenues by Type



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