A Harbinger Year by Chairman Roberts

To say that 2015 was an eventful year for AMATS would surely be an understatement. It would be best described as 12 months of frenetic activity by the Policy Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, Citizens Involvement Committee and the AMATS professional staff that was punctuated by many accomplishments on behalf of the Greater Akron area. I had the honor of serving as the 2015 chairman of the AMATS Policy Committee and was a firsthand witness to the dedication of the agency to provide quality transportation planning for the region. This report chronicles AMATS’ many achievements during the year and what a year it was.

It was a year that saw the completion of the Transportation Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2016 through 2019 (TIP), the 2040 Planning Data Forecast and the 2015 Pedestrian Plan. Each item has a significant role in transportation planning in the Greater Akron area. The TIP is the area’s new four-year program of highway, public transportation, and bike and pedestrian projects and represents a $720 million investment in the region’s infrastructure. The latest program continues AMATS’ emphasis on preservation of its existing transportation system rather than costly expansions.

The 2040 Planning Data Forecast provides detailed analysis of the region’s employment and population trends through the year 2040. The 2015 Pedestrian Plan takes additional key steps forward to promote regional walkability and connectivity and builds on the plan approved by the agency three years ago. The forecast and the plan will be key inputs used by AMATS to prepare the area’s upcoming Regional Transportation Plan.

The agency marked significant accomplishments in other fields during the course of the year as well. The completion of the agency’s new Public Participation Plan - also known as 3P - heralded a new, more proactive community outreach approach by AMATS. The 3P reflects the realities of a changing society and harnesses the power of today’s social media while building on the success of agency innovations such as Bike-N-Brainstorm and Better Block events.

These are just some of AMATS’ achievements during the year. There are still more documented in the pages of this report. The common factor in all of these events is how thoroughly and professionally that the agency addressed each issue during the course of 2015. The year may well be remembered as a harbinger of how adroitly that the agency confronted the many looming challenges that faced the Greater Akron area in the years that followed it. As you read this report, I think that you will agree with the prediction that the agency and the region are well positioned to meet these as-yet-unknown challenges.

Gene Roberts
2015 AMATS Policy Committee Chairman
Planning

Road Diet Analysis

In May, AMATS completed its Road Diet Analysis, which identifies potential locations where road capacity far exceeds current volumes of daily traffic. A road diet reduces the number of travel lanes on a roadway and then adjusts or reassigns the space for other uses and travel modes.

The analysis found that many locations throughout the Greater Akron area are overbuilt due to being constructed when population and employment were greater than the present day. The result is that these locations' capacities now far exceed their current traffic volumes.

Among the reasons that AMATS compiled the analysis is the growing demand from cyclists for bike lanes and safety concerns for automobiles and pedestrians that make a road diet a practical option. A road diet is a useful low-cost tool to improve safety and integrate multiple modes of travel. The most common road-diet reconfiguration is the conversion of a four-lane roadway into a three-lane roadway made up of two through lanes and a center two-way left-turn lane. Remaining space can be allocated for other uses. Other benefits include:

- Fewer crashes, particularly rear-end and left-turn crashes, through the use of a dedicated left-turn lane.
- Fewer lanes for pedestrians and cyclists to cross and more opportunities to install pedestrian refuge islands in the center of roadways.
- More curbside bicycle lanes.
- Traffic calming and reduced speeds that decrease the number and severity of crashes.
- New on-street parking or transit stops.
- A more community-focused, mixed-use environment in neighborhoods.

A temporary example of a road diet occurred during the weekend of May 16-17. Shown at right, Better Block Akron and Open Streets Akron, together with other event organizers including AMATS, transformed the Temple Square block of North Main Street near Cuyahoga Falls Avenue in Akron. Organizers reduced the number of lanes along North Main Street from four to two while adding on-street parking, bike paths, “pop-up” businesses and activities. For more about the AMATS Road Diet Analysis, please click here.
Planning Data Forecast

In May, AMATS completed its 2040 Planning Data Forecast, a key component in the development of the Greater Akron area’s upcoming long-range regional transportation plan.

The forecast projects 35 variables within the region, each of which has a direct impact on local traffic. These variables include population, households, population under the age of 18, vehicles, workers, employment, public school and private school enrollments, and median household income.

Changes are on the horizon for the region in terms of its population and employment levels. Overall, the forecast projects that the region is expected to experience a slight increase in population - 2.4 percent - between now and 2040. Likewise, the region’s employment is expected to see moderate growth - 7.6 percent - over this same period. Summit and Portage counties are expected to hold to these same trends with each experiencing increases in both population and employment.

The forecast predicts that population growth should be the strongest in the northern portion of Summit County - 11.5 percent - and Northwest Portage County - 16.1 percent - through 2040. Employment growth is expected to be the strongest in Southern Summit County - 33.9 percent - and Southwest Portage County - 10.9 percent. Generally, employment growth is expected throughout all, but the easternmost subareas comprising the AMATS region.

The geographic area of the Wayne County portion of the AMATS region has doubled since previous versions of the forecast with the inclusion of the city of Rittman and neighboring Milton Township in 2010. The Wayne County portion of the region should expect slight population growth of 3.1 percent and moderate employment growth of 4.6 percent during the period.

To learn more about the 2040 Planning Data Forecast, please click here.

MAPPING IT OUT

The agency posted a new interactive Traffic Count Map on the AMATS web site in March and Bike and Pedestrian Crash maps in December.

The new user-friendly versions contain traffic count totals and crash locations for the entire Greater Akron area and can be easily navigated. Users can view entire maps and click on specific areas for closer views. The Traffic Count map can be viewed by clicking here. Bike and Pedestrian Crash maps can be viewed by clicking here.
2015 Pedestrian Plan

In December, AMATS approved the 2015 Pedestrian Plan another significant step by the Greater Akron area towards regional connectivity. The plan provides a bold vision as to what sort of pedestrian networks that the area should pursue in the coming years.

The 2015 Pedestrian Plan identifies safety, connectivity and vibrancy as three areas of improvement for the region's pedestrian systems and suggests various strategies for communities to consider during project planning. Many of the strategies are based on "complete street" principles, which emphasize the importance of safe access for all users, not just automobiles, and the promotion of pedestrian-friendly concepts.

A significant update from the agency's first plan from 2012, the 2015 Pedestrian Plan goes beyond urging communities to consider installing a few feet of sidewalks and curb ramps in limited locales. The new plan recommends the pursuit of such planning practices as road diets, mixing land uses and vibrant streetscapes. AMATS has prepared a unique planning resource for communities that they can use to develop pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. Existing examples of the practices espoused in the new plan can be found in Cuyahoga Falls' Portage Crossing and Kent's Acorn Alley areas. The plan will be used as an input in the development of the Greater Akron area's upcoming regional transportation plan. To learn more about the 2015 Pedestrian Plan, please click here.

Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program

The AMATS Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program marked a successful fourth 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. 2015 was a year of significant accomplishments for the program's 2013 recipients.

The Montrose Multi-Modal Connectivity Plan was finalized by Bath and Copley townships and the city of Fairlawn in February. The plan recommends proposals to improve pedestrian, bicycle, transit and vehicle access within a heavily traveled suburban area bounded by Bath Township to the north and Copley Township to the south. The plan recommends various improvements along state Route 18, adding and widening sidewalks and trails, improving signage and road striping for cycling, and developing roundabouts.

Elements of the city of Barberton's North-South Bicycle Infrastructure Master Plan became a reality in 2015. In August, the city unveiled signage for the Medical Mutual Magic Mile, which connects the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail to downtown, and a scenic mural on the Lake 8 Movies Theatre. Both are shown at right and were funded by the grant program. To learn more about Connecting Communities, please click here.
Cycling and Pedestrian Initiatives

Bike-N-Brainstorms

2015 was a record year for AMATS’ Bike-N-Brainstorm (B-N-B) events with the agency organizing four in cooperation with the sponsoring communities of Kent, Hudson, the Village of Mantua and Springfield Township. A B-N-B is an active public meeting, which includes a bike ride and brainstorming session to receive feedback on improving biking in a local community. B-N-Bs serve as a public outreach tool by engaging bicyclists in a chosen bike route to improve biking conditions in a local community.

A total of 114 cyclists participated in these events throughout the Greater Akron area. Feedback gathered from these events by AMATS will be used to develop the upcoming 2016 Bike Plan, an input in the preparation of the next regional transportation plan.

Pedestrian Counts

The agency uses data collected from pedestrian counts for use in planning pedestrian improvements that promote regional connectivity. 2015 marked the second season that AMATS compiled pedestrian counts at key locations. During the months of March, July and September, the agency conducted six pedestrian counts throughout the Greater Akron area. The top three count dates, locations and totals for pedestrians were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 17, 2015</td>
<td>Exchange Street &amp; Main Street (Akron)</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18, 2015</td>
<td>Cascade Plaza and Main Street (Akron)</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2, 2015</td>
<td>High Street and Exchange Street (Akron)</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jane’s Walk ‘15

Together with the Downtown Akron Partnership, AMATS hosted its second-annual series of Jane’s Walk tours in early May. Jane’s Walk is an international festival of free, volunteer-led urban walks that honor the legacy and ideas of urban activist and writer, Jane Jacobs. The walks allow people to learn about their communities from a pedestrian perspective. AMATS hosts the tours for the purpose of promoting a more pedestrian-friendly environment in the Greater Akron area.

Fifteen walks were scheduled throughout the Greater Akron area with more than 420 participants. Nine different neighborhoods were represented throughout the Akron area with a wide diversity of themes. Among the locales for the walks were downtown Akron, Firestone Park, Highland Square, Kenmore, south Akron, and the Portage Lakes area. The walks touched on a variety of themes such as infrastructure, dance, art, history, housing, parks, improved access and new development. The Art and Culture Walk walking tour, shown above, began at Summit ArtSpace on Summit Street and wound its way along Market Street, to the Northside District, in downtown Akron.
Engineering

Transportation Improvement Program

In May, the AMATS Policy Committee unanimously approved the Transportation Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2016 and 2019 (TIP) – the latest four-year program of highway, public transportation, and bike and pedestrian projects for the Greater Akron area. The TIP represents a $720 million investment in the area’s highway, public transportation, and bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Nearly $424 million in the program is devoted to the area’s highways while another nearly $291 million will go for public transportation. More than $4.8 million will fund a host of bicycle and pedestrian projects.

The latest TIP is grounded in the fiscal reality that - unless new sources of transportation funding are found by local, state and federal policy makers - the region must use its existing resources as efficiently as possible. Like the last several programs, the new TIP continues the area's emphasis on preservation of its existing transportation system rather than costly new expansion projects.

Of the program's total funding, $444 million or 62 percent is devoted to preservation projects while nearly $224 million or 31 percent will be used for operational improvements throughout the area. Only about $51 million will be used for projects that add capacity to the area's transportation system. The TIP includes several road diet and multi-modal-type projects that will help the area make more efficient use of its existing system of roadways. Some of the most significant types of these projects include Kent's East Summit Street and Akron's Tallmadge Avenue (state Route 261).

The new program is not completely void of significant improvement projects. The state Route 59/Innerbelt re-routing, the reconstruction and widening of Interstate 76, and improvements to the I-76/77 Main Street/Broadway Interchange are also scheduled to receive funding during the four-year program. Other significant projects include:

- A more than $15 million improvement project on East Summit Street in Kent.
- More than $9 million for the State Street Bridge replacement project in Akron.
- Nearly $7 million to reconstruct Frost Road in Streetsboro.
- More than $5 million for the construction of a diamond interchange on Tallmadge Road in Brimfield Township.
- More than $1 million for Phase 3 of Summit Metro Parks' Freedom Trail in Akron.
- More than $1.3 million for Phase 1 of the Veterans Trail in Hudson.

A complete listing of projects is available on the TIP page of the AMATS web site and by clicking here.
Engineering Activities

2012-2014 Crash Report

In September, the agency released the 2012-2014 Crash Report. The three-year report found that the number of traffic crashes on Greater Akron area roadways, intersections and freeways increased slightly between 2012 and 2014. This upward trend is a continuation of one that began in 2009, when area crashes hit their low point.

The agency identified slightly less than 53,000 motor vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian-related crashes in the Greater Akron area during the period using Ohio Department of Public Safety records. While the number of crashes actually decreased by nearly 3 percent between 2012 and 2013 with 17,738 crashes and 17,236 crashes respectively, the area experienced a significant jump to 17,859 crashes in 2014 - an increase of nearly 4 percent from 2013.

AMATS found that the area’s crash totals have been trending up since hitting their nadir in 2009 when slightly more than 16,400 crashes occurred. There has also been a corresponding increase in the number of vehicle miles travelled throughout the area meaning that more people are commuting and traveling. Agency officials suspect that this increase in vehicle miles travelled may be due to the easing of gas prices in the last few years.

Interestingly, despite the uptick in area crashes since 2009, the number of crash-related fatalities in the area has remained relatively constant and appears to be easing. There were only 39 fatalities in 2014 which matches the recent low of 2009. The most recent peak was 46 fatalities in 2011, but the number of fatalities has been receding since then and remains well below the record high of 68 fatalities reached in 2007.

AMATS uses this information to identify needed projects throughout the Greater Akron area. Communities rely on the report when applying for Highway Safety Program funds through the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). For the 2012-2014 Crash Report, the agency identified 124 high-crash roadway sections and 275 high-crash intersections in the region. The analysis of freeway crashes was done by ODOT. The department only considers the top 50 rural and 50 urban locations across the state for further study. Six AMATS-area freeway locations appeared on ODOT’s top 50 lists with two being located on the Ohio Turnpike. Among the findings of the analysis are:

- Akron is home to four of the 10 highest ranked high-crash roadway sections and eight of the highest ranked high-crash intersections in the Greater Akron area.
- In Portage County, the highest ranked high-crash intersection remains state Routes 14/303 and 43 in Streetsboro.
- There were 339 bicycle-related crashes during the period with 275 or 81 percent resulting in an injury and two in a fatality.
There were 464 pedestrian-related crashes during the period with 409 or 88 percent resulting in an injury and 10 in a fatality.

In comparison to bicycle and pedestrian-related crashes, 26 percent of all vehicular-related crashes resulted in an injury.

Most bicycle-related crashes - 66 percent - and most pedestrian-related crashes - 42 percent - occur at intersections.

The 9 to 18 year-old age range was involved in the most bicycle-related crashes accounting for 126 or 37 percent of all such crashes in the area.

Pedestrian crashes occur most often in the afternoon hours with the peak time being between 5 and 6 p.m.

The 2012-2014 Crash Report and reports dating back to 2005 are available on the agency’s web site by clicking here.

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 2015, the agency conducted 207 counts at various roadway segments and at four intersections.

According to findings compiled by the agency during the 2015 traffic counting season, there has been a 5 percent increase in total Average Daily Traffic since 2010.

A HAWK’S PERCH - A HAWK or High intensity Activated Crosswalk perched on the Freedom Trail in Akron in late June. Partially funded by AMATS, Akron officials decided to pursue a HAWK signal at the Brittain Road crossing, shown at right, while planning their portion of the trail. The signal allows cyclists and pedestrians to cross the busy roadway safely by activating a signal that pauses traffic.
Outreach

Public Participation Plan - "3P"

In March, AMATS took a new direction in its public outreach efforts with the adoption of its Public Participation Plan also known as "3P." With 3P, AMATS seeks to foster an environment where the public feels that its insights not only matter, but are encouraged and welcomed. 3P is intended to appeal to as many different interested people through a mix of opportunities and strategies both digital and personal.

The 3P builds upon the use of agency-sponsored web sites - amatsplanning.org and Switching-Gears.org - and social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Social media has fast become one of AMATS’ most utilized tools for public outreach as it allows agency personnel to interact with the public regarding transportation-related topics in a timely manner.

Through the 3P, AMATS fully adopts the new innovative public empowerment strategies that it has been experimenting with in recent years. These strategies challenge the public beyond mere dialogue by urging them to tackle transportation issues directly through participation in unique events. Following a group endeavor, participants share their ideas and insights gained through firsthand experience as to what can be done to improve accessibility and livability in a particular locale. Examples of such events used by the agency are:

- **Active Transportation Conferences** - AMATS hosts daylong conferences with featured speakers and breakout sessions dedicated to transportation-related topics designed to provoke discussions between policymakers and the public.

- **Better Block** - Better Block events help the public experience something new in their neighborhoods by letting them see it, live it and - perhaps most importantly – participate in actually creating it within a given area. An event could entail setting up new temporary bike lanes; it could be makeshift street art or furniture; it could be a coffee shop or art gallery for a brief period of time.

- **Bike-N-Brainstorms** - These events embark on a group bike ride along key corridors as an alternative way to get feedback about on-road biking. At the end of their ride, group members participate in a brainstorming session with agency personnel and local officials to share their ideas as to what can be done to improve bike travel within the area.

- **Jane’s Walk** - These events provide opportunities for people to engage in city planning by meeting and exploring cities through short walking tours. During these tours, participants discuss what can be done to make areas more pedestrian friendly.
The 3P also seeks the involvement of low-income and minority groups in the planning process for the Greater Akron area. The agency actively pursues opportunities to collaborate on the development of transportation-related programs and projects with representatives of these populations using a mix of outreach strategies involving advertisements, community groups, press releases, social media and other available means. Events such as Better Block and Bike-N-Brainstorms present valuable opportunities for the agency and members of these populations to coordinate, network and share ideas.

In addition, the 3P recognizes the growth in the region's Asian and Hispanic populations, which have unique interests and needs that will contribute to and influence the area's transportation policies and systems. The 3P strives to foster a dialogue between AMATS with these and other diverse communities through outreach to various organizations including:

- the Akron Urban League
- Asian Services in Action, Inc.
- the International Institute of Akron
- the Ohio Latino Affairs Commission
- and other community and neighborhood groups.

**Annual Meeting**

More than 150 people attended the Oct. 16, 2015 AMATS Annual Meeting at the Sheraton Suites Akron Cuyahoga Falls. Summit County Public Health Assistant Director of Community Health James Hardy was the day's featured speaker. Hardy told his audience that physical environment combined with behavioral choices are two of the greatest influences as to whether individuals will lead healthy lives.

Physical barriers and poor choices have led to an obesity epidemic and related problems such as diabetes across the U.S. over the last 20 years. "We have a diabetes epidemic right here in our region now that we are trying to grapple with," Hardy warned. For the public, it's not merely a matter of deciding to be healthier, Hardy explained. It's about living in areas, where they are able to access goods and services that help them to live healthier. The physical environment of neighborhoods can be an asset or a barrier to a healthier lifestyle. Hardy praised AMATS for its recognition that transportation planning can impact the choices that people make regarding their health.

Locally, Summit County Public Health has undertaken its "Health In All Policies" movement which urges the consideration of the health impacts in governmental decisions, including planning. The AMATS Road Diet Analysis, the area's Safe Routes to School Programs and Better Block events are among the county's success stories in promoting the consideration of health in public policy, Hardy said.

Other speakers during the annual meeting included AMATS Planning Administrator Curtis Baker who recapped AMATS' accomplishments in 2015, which he described as an incredibly productive year for the agency in which it explored new ideas and challenged the status quo in regional transportation planning.
AMATS Financial Data for Fiscal Year 2015

Expenditures by Type

- Salaries $661,541
- Fringes $520,071
- Expenses $478,445

Revenues by Type

- Federal $1,313,177
- Other $16,146
- Local $153,557
- State $150,779

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Vice Chairman - Mayor Glenn Broska

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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.