

2016 Annual Report



Planning for Greater Akron
The Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study



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Special Publication

Annual Report 2016

A Smooth Transition by Chairman Broska

2016 was a unique year of accomplishment for AMATS and the entire Greater Akron area. Despite a change in agency directors at the outset of the year, the work of the area's metropolitan planning organization continued unabated. What could have been a difficult transitional year for the region's transportation planning process was instead a year of marked achievements.



BROSKA

The year was a high water mark of sorts for funding of transportation projects in our region. For the first time in its 54-year history, AMATS programmed nearly \$35 million for various highway, bike and pedestrian projects. Also, the construction contracts for a number of regionally significant improvement projects were sold during the year including more than \$6 million for the East Summit Street project in Kent and \$5 million for re-routing the state Route 59 Innerbelt in Akron. Other notable projects include nearly \$4 million for the reconstruction of North Avenue in Tallmadge and nearly \$3 million in improvements to the Norton Road intersection and resurfacing of state Route 91 in Stow.

In 2016, the agency also prepared key items necessary to the development of the area's next long-range regional transportation plan which is due this year. The *Existing Congestion Study 2015*, the *2016 Freight Plan*, the *2016 Bike Plan*, the *Highway Preservation Needs Report*, the *2040 Financial Resources Forecast* and the *Regional Public Transit Plan* - all necessary components of the upcoming *2040 Transportation Outlook* - were completed during the year.

In July, the AMATS Connecting Communities Program awarded study grants totaling \$115,200 to the communities of Kent - in cooperation with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) - Hudson, Twinsburg and Green. The year also saw "complete street" principles put into action through projects such as the Summit Street improvement in Kent and the Main Street project in Hudson. The agency also hosted a number of unique pedestrian-oriented events during the year such as May's Third Annual Jane's Walk. In August, the AMATS Citizens Involvement Committee - our agency's forum for public dialogue - hosted a walking tour with city leaders through the city of Barberton's downtown "Magic Mile" area.

As I reflect on the year just passed, I sometimes find it strange that - despite being around since 1962 - AMATS is still a relatively unknown entity to many inhabitants of the Greater Akron area. Maybe that's a testament to how effectively the agency meets its mission of providing quality transportation planning for a region with nearly 726,000 inhabitants. Many of us take the sheer ease of traveling from place to place on our area's highways, transit systems, trails and sidewalks for granted with little thought as to how they are planned, funded or maintained. As chairman of the AMATS Policy Committee for another term in 2017, it is my hope that our residents and businesses continue to enjoy and benefit from the convenience of our region's transportation systems. I know that we at AMATS will try our best to make it so.

Glenn M. Broska
Mayor, City of Streetsboro
AMATS Policy Committee Chairman

Planning

Throughout 2016, AMATS completed key components of the upcoming *Transportation Outlook 2040*, the next long-range regional transportation plan for the Greater Akron area. These components are described in the summaries below.

Existing Congestion Study 2015

In January, AMATS completed the *Existing Congestion Study 2015*, which quantifies the level of existing traffic congestion on the approximately 540 miles of roadways and 34 intersections comprising the AMATS Congestion Management Roadway Network. This data allows the agency to plan effectively for the future and will be used to develop *Transportation Outlook 2040*.



The study found that the level of service on freeway sections, freeway weaving sections, and arterials improved in most areas throughout the region due to reduced traffic volumes and recent roadway improvements since the last study was conducted in 2010. There was little change within the intersection analyses. To view the AMATS *Existing Congestion Study 2015*, please click [here](#).

2016 Freight Plan

In May, AMATS completed its *2016 Freight Plan*, an analysis of the Greater Akron area's existing freight system. The plan identifies the area's various transportation systems that are used to move freight into, out of, and within the region. The plan identifies freight movement issues and recommends broad strategies and specific projects to improve the movement of freight throughout the area's transportation network. Many of the plan's recommendations are eligible for inclusion in *Transportation Outlook 2040*.



The plan identifies improvements to the highway system as the region's highest freight-oriented priority need. Major corridors for truck-freight movement in the AMATS area include state Route 8 and Interstates 76, 77, 80, 271 and 480. The plan also includes recommendations to improve the region's rail lines. Addressing safety and congestion issues at railroad crossings through grade separation projects and considering public/private partnerships with rail companies to improve freight service are among the plan's rail recommendations. To view the *2016 Freight Plan*, please click [here](#).

2016 Bike Plan

In July, AMATS approved the *2016 Bike Plan*, which identifies and evaluates bikeway needs to improve the region's bicycle network. The plan contains an analysis of the region's existing bike facilities and makes recommendations that are eligible for inclusion in *Transportation Outlook 2040*.

The Greater Akron area currently has over 108 miles of shared-use paths (trails) and 35 miles of bike lanes. The plan examines the existing system, safety data and programming to create recommendations to promote cycling in the region.

Along with specific improvements to complete the region's trail network, the plan offers general recommendations to area policymakers to consider as they pursue cycling improvements. The plan encourages policymakers to: consider creating local bike plans; emphasize multi-modal areas during planning; and consider bicycle improvements and road diets during resurfacing projects. To view the *2016 Bike Plan*, please click [here](#).



Highway Preservation Needs Report

In July, AMATS approved the *Highway Preservation Needs Report*. The report describes the highway system in the Greater Akron area and estimates the required cost needed to maintain and preserve it in an acceptable condition. Pavement resurfacing and replacement and bridge preservation needs are evaluated in the report.

The report will be used to determine the portion of anticipated federal funding that should be reserved for highway projects to ensure maintenance and preservation of the existing highway system over the life of *Transportation Outlook 2040*. The total estimated cost for highway preservation for the Greater Akron area between now and 2040 is approximately \$3.2 billion, valued in 2016 dollars. To view the *Highway Preservation Needs Report*, please click [here](#).



2040 Financial Resources Forecast

In September, AMATS approved the *2040 Financial Resources Forecast*, which projects funding levels expected for transportation investments to be available within the AMATS area between now and 2040. These projections will be used to develop the region's financially constrained *Transportation Outlook 2040* that must prioritize transportation needs based on the projected availability of funds.

The forecast projects that total funding between now and 2040 will be slightly less than \$7.3 billion, which includes slightly more than \$5.1 billion for highways and approximately slightly less than \$2.2 billion for transit. To view the *2040 Financial Resources Forecast*, please click [here](#).

Regional Public Transit Plan

In December, AMATS approved the *Regional Public Transit Plan*, which contains an analysis of the region's existing transit system and makes recommendations that are eligible for inclusion in the upcoming *Transportation Outlook 2040*. The plan's purpose is to achieve a balance in the Greater Akron area between strengthening the existing system to provide better service to current transit riders and expanding to key areas to satisfy new needs.

The plan was developed by the agency in cooperation with METRO in Summit County and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) in Portage County. Its recommendations are aimed at improving ridership of the region's current systems through improvements in frequency and route connections. Among the plan's seven recommendations are that the Greater Akron area and its transit authorities should consider reductions or eliminate service on low-ridership lines; provide new fixed-route service to close gaps in transit service; and improve the operating hours of existing cross-county services. To view the *Regional Public Transit Plan*, please click [here](#).



A MAGICAL TOUR -

On Aug. 3, 2016, the AMATS Citizens Involvement Committee (CIC) hosted a unique meeting in Barberton. This CIC meeting included a walking tour, shown at right, of Barberton's Medical Mutual "Magic Mile" - which connects the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail to downtown. The Magic Mile was originally proposed in Barberton's *North-South Bicycle Infrastructure Master Plan*, which was funded by the AMATS Connecting Communities Program in 2013.



Planning Activities

Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program

The AMATS Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program capped off a successful fifth year, but not without a few changes. In the spring, the agency's Connecting Communities Task Force - which screens project applications to the program on behalf of the AMATS Policy Committee - gave the go-ahead to several significant changes to the program's application and scoring criteria. These changes are intended to encourage communities to provide greater commitments to more focused projects.

Communities are now required to approve and submit legislation committing themselves to their respective projects. In terms of scoring, points are now awarded on a sliding scale for matching funds that communities commit to projects. Additional points are offered as incentives to communities that seek fewer grant dollars. Anticipated level of use to gauge the impacts of projects is another criterion that was approved by the task force.

In July, the AMATS Connecting Communities Program awarded study grants totaling \$115,200 to the communities of Kent - in cooperation with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) - Hudson, Twinsburg and Green. The finalists selected present opportunities for the Greater Akron area to pursue "complete street" principles, which encourage safe, convenient and comfortable travel for all users. Study summaries appear below:

- **Kent & ODOT State Route 261 Re-visioning the Corridor...Planning the Future** - This study will identify the best use of excess capacity and right-of-way along 220 feet of state Route 261. The study will propose vibrant areas and address traffic safety problems along the corridor. Kent and ODOT will receive \$44,400 from AMATS to compile this study.
- **Hudson's Preliminary Design for Veterans Trail – Downtown Phase** - This study will determine acceptable routing between the currently funded sections of Hudson's Veterans Trail. The vision for this trail segment includes developing recreational and transportation alternatives while linking First and Main streets to the adjacent Downtown Phase II development. Hudson will receive \$19,000 from AMATS to compile this study.
- **Twinsburg's First Mile/Last Mile Community Connections Plan** - This study will identify links between existing trails and alternatives for extension of these connections to various destinations. Twinsburg will receive \$23,000 from AMATS to compile this study.
- **Green Master Connectivity Plan** - This study will provide a framework for making decisions about how to provide connectivity in Green. The city will integrate study recommendations supported by the community into its future land use and transportation plans. Green will receive \$28,800 from AMATS to compile this study.

Cycling and Pedestrian Initiatives

Bike Racks

In May, city of Akron work crews installed 17 artistic bike racks throughout downtown Akron. The racks reflect their surroundings, such as ballplayers and baseballs outside of Canal Park, shown at right, and music notes near BLU Jazz+.

Crafted by local artist, John Communale, the racks were possible thanks to the efforts of AMATS, Akron, the Downtown Akron Partnership, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The racks encourage bike travel throughout the downtown area. To view our YouTube feature, *Biking with Character*, please click [here](#).



Jane's Walk '16

AMATS and Downtown Akron Partnership (DAP) hosted the Greater Akron area's Third Annual Jane's Walk on May 6-8, 2016 as the events marked their Tenth Anniversary worldwide.

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. One of the 2016 walks was a lunchtime tour with city of Akron Engineering Bureau officials, shown below, regarding Akron Waterways Renewed projects including the Ohio Canal Interceptor Tunnel.



Photo by Tim Fitzwater



Photo by Kimberly Beckett - DAP

Engineering

Transportation Improvement Program

In January, the AMATS Policy Committee approved 22 new projects totaling nearly \$26 million in additional project funding for inclusion in the *Transportation Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2016 through 2019* (TIP). Committee approval ended a thorough selection process that began in early fall 2015 when the agency began sifting through 119 applications from project sponsors throughout the Greater Akron area.



The Policy Committee approved \$13.9 million in federal Surface Transportation Program funds for seven improvement projects to reconstruct and improve some of the area's most vital roadways. Funding will not only be used for more traditional projects such as turn lane and intersection improvements, but also for non-traditional "complete street" projects starting with Akron's East Exchange Street, which will include signal improvements, new bike lanes and various pedestrian amenities.



Area bike and pedestrian projects also received a significant boost from AMATS through the Transportation Alternatives Program with \$2.4 million going to five projects throughout Portage and Summit counties. Among the projects that got a boost was the Brady's Leap segment of The PORTAGE Hike and Bike Trail in Kent with the agency committing \$700,000 for construction. The committee also approved nearly \$3.8 million for seven resurfacing projects including a total of \$1.6 million for the resurfacing of Center Road in New Franklin.



AMATS also committed nearly \$5.6 million in federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality funds for the construction of new roundabouts in the cities of Green and Fairlawn and the purchase of two Compressed Natural Gas-powered buses for the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority. Other notable projects to receive funding included:

- More than **\$2.7 million** for the **reconstruction of Howe Avenue in Cuyahoga Falls.**
- **\$700,000** for **Phase 1** of the **resurfacing of West Steels Corners Road in Cuyahoga Falls.**
- **\$700,000** for the **Freedom Trail-The PORTAGE Hike and Bike Trail Connector in Tallmadge.**

Committee approval of these projects represented a continuation of the agency's "fix-it-first" approach to project funding, which emphasizes preserving the area's existing transportation system while pursuing new efficiency strategies as a means to stretch the area's federal transportation funding. A complete listing of projects is available on the AMATS web site by clicking [here](#).

A Record Year

2016 was a record year for funding of transportation projects by AMATS in the Greater Akron area. For the first time in its 54-year history, the agency programmed nearly \$35 million for various highway, bike and pedestrian projects throughout the region.

The record funding level was accomplished through the agency's pursuit of two strategies: The "over-programming" of projects in the region's four-year TIP and trading funds with other metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in Ohio that were not fully utilizing all of their funds. Over-programming allows the agency to obtain funding for additional projects beyond its available funding. This strategy helps AMATS bring projects to the attention of the state and federal governments by including them in the TIP. If funds become available, then the region has a better chance of securing them for such projects.

The region also reaped the benefits of nearly \$7.5 million in trades that AMATS made with several of its sister MPOs across Ohio in recent years, which were lean ones for many agencies in terms of project funding. These funding trades will support projects in the Greater Akron area.

The result of this funding influx was that the agency was able to fund 36 projects throughout the region. Much of the nearly \$35 million in funding went to highway projects with the largest portion being dedicated to preserving and maintaining the region's existing system of roadways. A number of significant projects benefitted from this funding. The East Summit Street project in Kent received more than \$6 million and a project to re-route the state Route 59 Innerbelt in Akron received \$5 million. There are also sidewalk projects in Akron and the Village of Hiram that received funding. A complete listing of 2016 projects is available by clicking [here](#).

Engineering Activities

Traffic Counting Program

The AMATS Traffic Counting Program entered a new era in data collection in June. Traffic count data collected by the agency is used to prepare area congestion and accident studies and to identify locations that need transportation improvements. Until recently, the program relied largely on mechanical counters that used hoses fastened to roadway surfaces to record vehicles passing through locations. Occasionally, these counters were damaged through vandalism or other circumstances. Placement of these counters was time consuming and posed risks to agency personnel as crews installed these devices while rerouting traffic.

That began to change in May when the agency tried a new radar-based counting system from Houston Radar. The firm provided AMATS with one free device to test on a trial basis. The devices, which resemble white boxes, are placed on nearby poles or other mounts, shown above at right, and use radar detection to record passing traffic automatically. Agency officials were pleased with the results of the initial trial device and eventually purchased 14 devices by the time June arrived.



The devices can be used year-round and installed, operated and removed by a single person. The old mechanical counters with their hoses were always at risk of being damaged by snow plows during the winter, which limited AMATS traffic counting seasons. Their ease of installation also means less risk to agency personnel on the area's roadways. Count data can now also be collected on handheld tablets using Bluetooth wireless technology.

The AMATS Traffic Counting Program closed out 2016 with another technological change whose full impact won't come into focus until this year - literally. In December, the agency acquired a Miovision-brand camera to video record traffic flow at various locations throughout the region. Along with vehicle count data, the camera will allow the agency to conduct bike and pedestrian counts.

Traffic 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 in the evaluation of new projects. In 2016, the agency conducted 197 counts at various roadway segments. According to findings compiled by the agency during the 2016 traffic counting season, there has been a 2 percent increase in total Average Daily Traffic since 2010.

Safety Program

The AMATS Safety Program marked a technological achievement of its own during the course of the year. The *2013-2015 Crash Report* - which was largely prepared during 2016 - marked the first such report to be prepared by AMATS using Geographic Information System (GIS) information. GIS software allows the agency to pinpoint the location of crashes and count how many occurred near crash segments and intersections.

New Director

After serving for 11 months as the agency's interim director, Curtis Baker was named director of AMATS in December. Baker had been serving as interim director since early January and was unanimously endorsed by the AMATS Policy Committee for the directorship in March.

Baker, who has been employed by AMATS for more than 10 years, was the agency's planning administrator when he was elevated to the directorship with the departure of Jason Segedy as director. Baker is responsible for oversight of the agency, which has a budget of roughly \$1.4 million for planning purposes and a \$9 million-a-year infrastructure program.



BAKER

Baker also sits on the Summit County Transportation Improvement District Board and the Akron Regional Air Quality Management District Advisory Committee. He is a former chair of the Ohio Association of Regional Council's Transportation Committee and holds a master's degree in city and regional planning from The Ohio State University and a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership from Miami University.

Outreach

Annual Meeting

An audience of 165 gathered in the Sheraton Suites Akron Cuyahoga Falls to attend the 2016 AMATS Annual Meeting on Oct. 7. Dr. Alison Goebel, the interim director of the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC), was the day's featured speaker. Dr. Goebel described what GOPC officials expect the state's political landscape will look like in 2017.

Debates concerning taxes, infrastructure spending, urban revitalization, and quality of life issues are all on Ohio's horizon, according to Goebel. The Ohio General Assembly will also grapple with Gov. John Kasich's final operating budget and a new state transportation budget bill for the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT).



CALL TO ORDER: AMATS Policy Committee Chairman and Streetsboro Mayor Glenn Broska welcomed attendees to the 2016 AMATS Annual Meeting.

After outlining the Buckeye State's potential political landscape, Goebel added that the center's priorities for the coming year include seeking transit funding increases from ODOT through the use of flexible funding sources, the General Revenue Fund, or other dedicated funding sources. To view Goebel's address, please click [here](#).

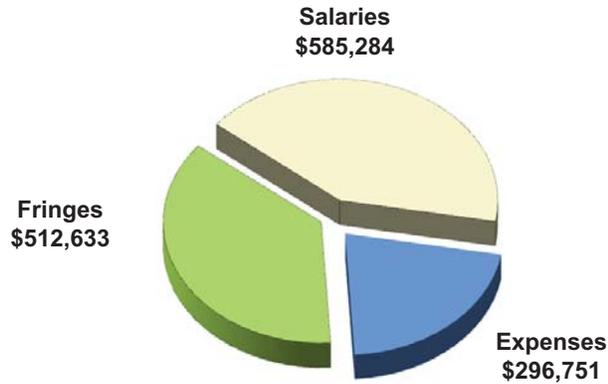
Goebel's presentation was followed by a panel discussion regarding recent planning successes in the city of Barberton. The panel featured Barberton Mayor William Judge, Neighborhood Development Services (NDS) Executive Director Dave Vaughan and Barberton Community Foundation (BCF) Vice President of Community Impact Debby Rolland and was moderated by Alex Pesta, a principal consultant with City Architecture.

Barberton was a recipient of a \$50,000 planning grant from the AMATS Connecting Communities Program in 2013. Barberton used its grant to develop its *North-South Bicycle Infrastructure Master Plan* with the aim of fostering greater connectivity between its north and south ends. The plan resulted in a one-mile bicycle infrastructure loop known as the "Magic Mile" in the core of downtown Barberton, connecting the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail to Lake Anna. Other successes include the passage in 2013 of Issue 8, a 0.25 percent income tax increase to be used solely for road improvements throughout the city. The issue passed with 54 percent of the vote and is estimated to raise about \$1.3 million a year.

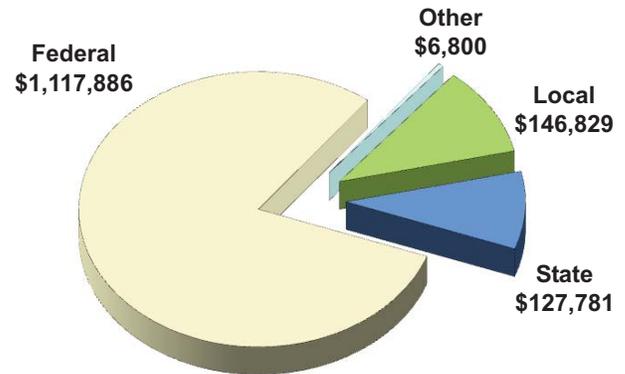
A major boost to revitalize downtown Barberton came in 2013, when the AMATS Connecting Communities Planning Grant Program selected the city as one of the region's two recipients of a \$50,000 planning grant. The program helps communities craft plans and studies that promote vibrant, livable communities. Ideas to reinvent downtown Barberton eventually made their way into the city's *North-South Bicycle Infrastructure Master Plan*, which was prepared by City Architecture and released in late 2014. To view the panel discussion, please click [here](#).

AMATS Financial Data for Fiscal Year 2016

Expenditures by Type



Revenues by Type



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PORTAGE COUNTY -

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Please visit our web site at: www.amatsplanning.org

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