



NASHVILLE AREA

Metropolitan Planning Organization

Good News for Middle Tenn. Transportation Efforts: Obama Administration Releases Major Policy Change Proposal

Nashville Area MPO Better Positioned to Invest in Options that Support Livability

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 14, 2010

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.— The Middle Tennessee region could soon be much better positioned to pay for transportation projects that support a higher quality-of-life, due to a dramatic change in existing federal policy announced yesterday by U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. The Obama administration has just proposed new funding guidelines for major transit projects, with a focus on livability issues such as economic development and environmental benefits – in addition to cost/time savings, which were the primary criteria under the Bush administration.

For Middle Tennessee, this means that the Nashville Area MPO would have the ability to more boldly advance a forward-thinking, strategic vision: to recommend projects for federal funding that emphasize environmental, community, and economic benefits – not just cost-effectiveness tests that are limited to how much transportation projects shorten commute times, thereby potentially escalating suburban sprawl and traffic congestion in urban areas of medium density, like that of greater Nashville.

A prime example of transportation planning to support livability is the MPO's Northeast Corridor Mobility Study, launched in 2007 with an eye toward anticipated improvements in federal policy, as announced yesterday by Sec. LaHood. The Northeast study – a comprehensive planning effort for a 30-mile segment northeast of Nashville – focuses on transportation strategies that would better support the community between downtown Nashville and Gallatin, providing a fresh approach to understanding how transportation and land use decisions affect one other – and, ultimately, economic development.

“The Northeast Corridor Study has been a critical first step toward realistic evaluation of pioneering regional transportation opportunities – including passenger rail and bus rapid transit,” said Michael Skipper, executive director of the Nashville Area MPO. “We are extremely pleased to receive news of Sec. LaHood’s long-awaited announcement on these changes to how projects will be selected for federal grants. For many years, urban American areas of our scope and size have been limited in our ability to compete for funds that would encourage smart, sustainable growth by increasing density and developing a transit-friendly environment. With these proposed changes in policy, we’ll be much better able to plan for a future that supports a high quality-of-life for the people who live and work here.”

As part of the proposed changes, the Federal Transit Authority would immediately rescind budget restrictions issued by the Bush Administration that focused on how much a project shortened commute times in comparison to its cost.

“We’ll finally be able to make the case for investing in popular streetcar projects and other transit systems that people want – and that our old ways of doing business didn’t value enough,” said LaHood during yesterday’s announcement.

By comparison, the Nashville Area MPO’s 2007 Southeast Corridor Study was conducted under the previous administration’s policy, which barred funding for any major transit capital projects that did not meet a minimum rating (\$24) on a cost-effectiveness index, measuring *only* how much a project would cost per total hours saved daily by an estimated number of riders. The MPO’s 2007 study recommended transportation options limited to incremental

additions to MTA (bus) and RTA (Music City Star) service to meet the pressing needs of transit demand in the corridor, building ridership in the short-term, until investment policies could be shifted to focus on transit corridors and transit-oriented development patterns.

“This new approach will help us do a much better job of aligning our priorities and values with our transit investments,” said Federal Transportation Authority Administrator Peter Rogoff. “No longer will we ignore the many benefits that accrue to our environment and our communities when we build or expand rail and bus rapid transit systems.”

For more information on both the Nashville Area MPO’s 2009-10 Northeast and 2007 Southeast Corridor Studies, full project reports are available online at www.nashvillempo.org/northeast, and www.nashvillempo.org/southeast.

About the Nashville Area MPO:

The Nashville Area MPO is the federally-designated transportation planning agency for over 2800 sq. mi. and more than 1.5 million people throughout Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson, Wilson, and parts of Maury and Robertson counties. Serving as a regional partnership among the U.S. DOT, Tennessee DOT, local elected leadership, local planning and public works directors, the business community, and citizens across the five-plus county planning area, the MPO leads in the development of the region’s long-range transportation plan and short-range Transportation Improvement Program, and contributes to ongoing conversations about issues such as land use, economic development, climate change and the environment, safety and security, and health. To learn more, visit NashvilleMPO.org.

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