



NASHVILLE AREA

Metropolitan Planning Organization

MEDIA RELEASE

Middle Tennessee Mayors, Nashville Area MPO Kick Off Major Update to Region's Long-Range Transportation Plan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—At a joint meeting of the Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus and the newly-formed Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee today, Nashville Mayor Karl Dean announced details on a critical period in 2010 for public and municipal involvement in multi-billion dollar transportation investments for a growing Cumberland region.

Today marks the official public launch of the MPO's "Call for Projects" – meaning, ideas for regional transportation solutions that are likely to be selected by the MPO for inclusion in its 2035 update to the **Regional Transportation Plan**. As the MPO may require local grant recipients to abide by certain policies in order to receive federal transportation dollars, this year's plan update will mark a *significant* policy shift from previous years in how projects are evaluated, over the course of the next 25 years. Transportation investments will be scored based, in part, on new, forward-thinking criteria that factor in their potential to support livability, economic development, environmental conservation, and other socio-cultural considerations.

"Establishing a long-term vision for transportation in the region is the next critical step in making regional mass transit a reality for Middle Tennessee," said Nashville Mayor Karl Dean and chair of the MPO. "We need everyone's involvement. This shouldn't just be a business plan or a government plan. It should be a true regional collaboration that represents what everyone in our communities want for transportation. This is a plan that will impact our region for decades to come. I encourage citizens across Middle Tennessee to contact the Nashville Area MPO or your local mayor and get involved in this process."

To help facilitate involvement in the 2035 plan update –gathering comments and other data about people's perceptions, good or bad, of transportation options on the table for investment– the Nashville Area MPO is offering members of the public the opportunity to complete a **comprehensive survey** that focuses on quality-of-life, transit, and other growth issues, online at NashvilleMPO.org.

The Nashville Area MPO is currently in the midst of a major update to its multi-billion dollar regional transportation plan that would include a vast scope of federally-funded transportation projects in the metropolitan area. The MPO may set aside money for projects that support significant policy initiatives such as transit – including what would be new options for Middle Tennessee like passenger rail or Bus Rapid Transit– as well as communities that are friendlier to bicycle and pedestrian mobility. The plan can depict an innovative vision for transportation in the region, but ultimately must establish a path to realistic financial feasibility.

"Middle Tennessee is expected to grow by close to another million people within the next couple of decades. That growth will present significant challenges to communities across our region," said Michael Skipper, director of the Nashville Area MPO. "We must be thinking now about how those people will commute or use our transportation system to carry out their daily activities."

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 federal policy announced in mid-January by U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. The Obama administration 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 progressive, 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. The MPO’s study of the Northeast Corridor –a 30-mile segment between downtown Nashville and Gallatin– represents its chief first step toward a realistic evaluation of pioneering regional transportation opportunities – including passenger rail and bus rapid transit.

Locally, Mayor Karl Dean formed the Nashville Livability Project last fall after receiving a report on the impact that retiring Baby Boomers and other aging Nashvillians will have on the city over the next two decades. In Davidson County alone, 31,000 people over age 65 will live here by the year 2018, and more than 13,000 will be over 75 years old. Meaning, in the coming years, many people living in the greater-Nashville region will be either unable or unwilling to drive, so that mobility choices will need to include convenient, safe alternatives to the automobile.

In 2009, the Tennessee General Assembly passed critical legislation favoring regional transportation solutions to help local communities deal with mounting challenges created by congestion and urban sprawl, fueled onward by economic development. The legislation allows for the creation or expansion of regional transportation authorities in Tennessee's large urban areas, as well as the opportunity for those entities to select a **dedicated regional revenue source** from a menu of funding options, subject to voter approval or approval by local governing bodies, in order to expand transit services, and to support existing and future state and federal investments.

“This recent shift in U.S. DOT policy enables us to get serious about facilitating the identification of an appropriate local source for dedicated funding,” said Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee Chairman Charles Bone of Sumner County. “There’s an increasing sense that the political will exists to set us on a course for some pretty major changes to business-as-usual in the transportation scene. If we want to remain competitive for jobs to come here, as opposed to other U.S. cities that compete with us for business relocation and expansion, these investments need to be a top priority.” Initially formed by the Mayors Caucus and comprised of public and private sector volunteers, the mission of the Transit Alliance is to develop a plan for funding public transit in Middle Tennessee.

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.

About the Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus

The Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus was formed in July of 2009 in order to provide leadership on important issues facing a growing region. Gallatin Mayor Jo Ann Graves is the inaugural chair of the Caucus – an organization that serves as an opportunity for city and county mayors to build important working relationships with one another. Several Caucus mayors serve on the MPO Board, which has the authority to select projects for federal funding.

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