

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Vision**

Jonesboro, the neighboring towns, and Craighead County are in a time of change. The area's population has grown significantly in the past 20 years and will continue to grow in the years ahead. Economic growth is also expected over the long term as the area's economy diversifies. Growth offers positive opportunities, but also creates a range of challenges for the area, including the development of a transportation system that will meet community and regional needs.

The Jonesboro Area Transportation Study (JATS) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has developed the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan to be responsive to the challenges of anticipated growth and economic changes. The plan assesses the affects of major planned transportation investments. These investments include widening of several major arterial streets in the area, constructing railroad overpasses, constructing an interchange, creating a sidewalk construction program for the City of Jonesboro, and implementing the proposed transit service.

The planning process sought to integrate local and regional planning initiatives. Emphasis has been placed on innovative community involvement, inter-governmental partnerships in the planning area, and a multi-disciplinary approach. A greater emphasis has been placed on the role of local transportation networks, planned land use, and identified natural, historic, and economic resources.

The plan has been developed in accordance with the federal requirements for MPO Long Range Transportation Plans. The MPO has worked diligently to satisfy federal requirements with a focus on addressing broader community priorities.

### **Plan Scope**

The 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is a policy document. It outlines goals, objectives, and policies for all surface transportation modes: streets and highways, railroads and trucking, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. Also, the plan has developed the policies to meet the aviation needs of the region.

The plan identifies the short-range and long-range needs in transportation investments for the improvement of roadways and public transit in the region. The MPO intends to develop plans for bicycle and pedestrian facilities along with the funding needed to implement the plans at a later date.

The Jonesboro MPO is fortunate to be designated as "attainment" for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). As such, the plan does not have to comply with the conformity requirements of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.

### **The Vision:**

**Develop and maintain a safe, efficient, and environmentally compatible transportation system that provides convenient choices for accessing destinations throughout the Jonesboro Metropolitan Area by a well-integrated transportation system that includes public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle networks.**

## **Study Area**

The MPO was designated in 2003 to develop a comprehensive long range transportation plan for the MPO Study Area which includes the Cities of Jonesboro, Brookland, Bay and Bono, and the unincorporated areas of Craighead County that are expected to become urbanized in the next twenty years. The metropolitan area includes 245 square miles and a population of 69,000. The Study Area Map (page 1-7) shows the physical extent of the Jonesboro MPO.

The horizon year for the plan is the year 2030. Special consideration was given to the various community plans and major studies to better integrate the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan. These include:

1. Jonesboro Arkansas Comprehensive Plan.
2. City of Brookland Comprehensive Plan
3. City of Bay Comprehensive Plan
4. Feasibility Study for the Jonesboro Northern Bypass
5. Southwest Jonesboro Transportation Study
6. Feasibility Study for the Construction of Rail Spur and Team Track Transloading Facility in Jonesboro
7. North East Arkansas Transportation (NEAT) Transit Feasibility Study

## **Policy Committee**

The Policy Committee is at the top of the organization and provides policy guidance and approves the work of the Technical Advisory Committee. The Policy Committee is comprised of ten voting members. They include the mayor and two council members from the City of Jonesboro, mayors of the Cities of Brookland, Bono, and Bay, the Craighead County Judge and a Craighead County Quorum Court member, and two members from the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

## **Technical Advisory Committee**

The Technical Advisory Committee consists of members of departments and agencies involved in transportation planning. The Technical Advisory Committee meets monthly to address specific development topics including updating the long-range planning process, involvement at public information meetings, developing goals and objectives, and alternatives analysis. The group identified key issues and assessed public input to provide insight into the analysis of this information. The Technical Advisory Committee also identified ways to integrate the findings of relevant plans and studies listed above into the LRTP.

**The Technical Advisory Committee reviews and analyzes technical information to assist the Policy Committee in making transportation planning decisions.**

## **Public Involvement**

The goal of the MPO is to foster two-way communication and trust between the MPO and its customers. The MPO feels that local contribution to transportation planning is vital for the metropolitan area. The citizens of this area deserve the advantages of better transportation planning that cannot be done without involving the public at a very early stage.

Round 1 of the Public Involvement listed below is the "pre-LRTP" outreach effort to inform the elected officials and the citizens of the need of an MPO and its responsibilities in relation to transportation planning requirements of the region. The focus of this effort was to educate the citizens regarding how the MPO interacts with federal, state, and local governments, and the citizens to perform its transportation planning responsibilities.

The second and third rounds of public involvement listed below were specific efforts to translate the citizens' and the elected officials' vision for transportation into a viable Long Range Transportation Plan. All public comments received, along with the results of the numerous public meetings are compiled and summarized in an appendix to this document. A complete record of these public comments and opinions is also available in both summary and complete form at the MPO Section of [www.jonesborisgreat.com](http://www.jonesborisgreat.com).

### **Round 1 Public Involvement**

The first round of public involvement, which spanned over a year, began with organizing the Committees meetings of the MPO. The Technical Advisory Committee meets on the First Tuesday of each month. The Policy Committee meets on the Third Tuesday in February, May, August, and November. The meetings are "Public Meetings" as defined by the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act. The notices and agendas of these meetings are e-mailed to local media: Jonesboro Sun newspaper; ASU Radio, and KAIT-8 TV station. In addition, a "News Release" is faxed to several other media agencies. The citizens are welcomed to these meetings and are encouraged to speak on any matter related to transportation planning.

The committees reviewed and approved the Bylaws and Public Involvement Procedures for the administration of the MPO. In addition, the committees reviewed and approved the PowerPoint presentations: Get to know your MPO, Why this Community needs a Long Range Transportation Plan, the Goals of the Long Range Transportation Plan, and Ten Principals of Access Management. The MPO also e-mailed its newsletter, Metro-Mobility News, to several individuals and interest groups in the region.

In order to establish and maintain information exchange with the business community, the MPO made two presentations to the Streets and Highways Committee of the Jonesboro Regional Chambers of Commerce. The MPO also provided copies of its Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the Public Survey Questionnaire, and other flyers and brochures for distribution to anyone interested in transportation planning activities of the MPO.

In addition, the MPO has established e-mail links with the transit providers for the elderly and disabled and interested citizens for comments on MPO plans and exchange of information.

### **Round 2 Public Involvement**

Round 2 of the Public Involvement for the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan started with the KAIT-8 TV Evening News on August 26, 2004. In the news segment on the MPO, the station requested the citizens to participate in the transportation planning effort by suggesting projects that should be included in the long range transportation plan. The MPO Staff received a number of comments and suggestions.

Since August 26, 2004, the staff has e-mailed and provided the questionnaire and other information to anyone who e-mailed the MPO or visited the office. The MPO has received many

completed questionnaires.

On February 2, 2005, the Jonesboro Sun published an article asking the citizens "to suggest changes or improvements to current street network" by requesting maps from the MPO. In response to this article, the MPO distributed several maps. Interviews with cities, county, and area leaders rounded out the effort. Once the information was compiled, the MPO staff identified a wide variety of views. Several key themes emerged. These include a broad base of support for:

1. The development of sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities.
2. Initiation of a public transportation service.
3. A focus on quality maintenance of roadways and other infrastructure.
4. A focus on improved traffic operations, including installation of turn-lanes and coordinated traffic signal systems.
5. Strategic roadway widening and extensions primarily to address bottlenecks, safety issues, and system connection needs.
6. The development of connected bicycle facility and trail systems.
7. Enhanced street connectivity.
8. Efforts to preserve and enhance community character.

### **Round 3 Public Involvement**

The third round of public involvement involved three public forums held at Huntington Building, Parker Park, and Allen Park. Several people participated in these sessions. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, discuss, and share their concerns with the MPO staff. Comments were recorded through written comment forms with space for open ended comments as well as questions about various plan elements. Discussion included local and project related concerns. Written comments were generally supportive of the various plan elements. These comments are included in the appendix labeled Public Comments on the draft plan.



*Pictures of Public Forums*

### **Final Public Meeting and Document Review Period**

The public review period on the proposed plan began on June 7, 2005 and concluded on September 27, 2005. The proposed plan document was available at city halls, the county court, and on the MPO website with instructions for making public comments.

A final public involvement meeting was held September 27, 2005 as the special Policy Committee meeting in the Transportation Conference Room, City of Jonesboro, 519 West Washington Avenue. A presentation provided an overview of the plan document, and a range of plan materials were displayed for public review and comment. Input was gathered through general comment forms. Comments received during the document review period are listed

along with the MPO responses in the appendix labeled Public Comments on the draft plan.

### **Analysis**

The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) and the City of Jonesboro Information System Department provided mapping assistance. The MPO staff assessed the existing and future population and street conditions. The staff analyzed roadway system deficiencies based on the projection of traffic volumes by the year 2030. These maps and other explanatory material were presented for discussion during the third round of public involvement in April through June 2005.

### **Financial Plan**

In accordance with federal transportation regulations, the LRTP must be fiscally constrained. The plan must demonstrate that the transportation projects indicated in the plan can be implemented based on reasonable future-year funding expectations. This includes the use of traditional public and private funding available through the federal, state, and local governments expected budget allocations. The purpose of a financial plan is in part to ensure that adequate funding exists to support the future transportation needs of the area and to inventory any potential shortfalls.

### **Seven Planning Factors**

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) requires all MPOs to consider seven broad planning factors in the development of the transportation plans and programs. These seven factors are listed below:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
2. Increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
3. Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight.
4. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve the overall quality of life.
5. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system for people and freight.
6. Promote efficient systems management and operations.
7. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

These seven planning factors played a significant role in the development of the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan. They influenced the development of each of the Plan's elements. When considering the economic vitality of the area, it became apparent that the Plan needed to provide improved access to underdeveloped areas where land use plans have targeted growth or redevelopment. The Plan also consistently seeks to improve safety and security for all modes. This was primarily accomplished through design recommendations, transit amenities and

provisions that promote a defined pedestrian and bicycle realm as a part of the transportation system. The movement of freight was another significant consideration, especially when identifying future highway needs and developing strategies intended to improve access to the airport. Transportation connectivity also played a significant role in the planning process. The Plan considered ways to improve the integration and transition between transportation modes. The plan is focused on improving system-wide connectivity. Finally, preservation of the existing transportation system could be considered the cornerstone of the plan. The use of technology, land use strategies, and access management tools combine to prolong the performance of the system, thereby lessening the need for extensive expansions to the planned system.

## **Key Findings**

The Jonesboro Metropolitan Area is in a time of change. Future population and economic growth are expected, as is continuing economic restructuring and diversification. Major transportation investments will change future traffic patterns in ways that can not yet be fully anticipated. The transportation planning environment is therefore a dynamic one.

The 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan document represents transportation needs, priorities, and resources as they currently stand. As the time passes, transportation system conditions will change, as will the understanding of the area's needs, priorities, and resources. Future transportation plan updates will reflect these changes, but they will also build upon public involvement, the technical analysis, and the intergovernmental coordination of the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan efforts.

## **The Result: A Transportation Planning Guide**

The Jonesboro Area MPO 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan is intended to serve as a tool for guiding the implementation of the future transportation system in the area. Much additional work remains to be done to implement most of the plan's recommended strategies – but the plan can serve as a guidepost along the way. This document summarizes the planning process and details for each of the plan's various elements including:

1. Existing Conditions (Chapter 2)
2. Trends and Forecasts (Chapter 3)
3. Goals and Priorities (Chapter 4)
4. Streets and Highways (Chapter 5)
5. Bikeways and Walkways (Chapter 6)
6. Transit (Chapter 7)
7. Freight (Chapter 8)
8. Aviation (Chapter 9)
9. Recreational Travel and Tourism (Chapter 10)
10. Intelligent Transportation System (Chapter 11)
11. Environmental Justice (Chapter 12)
12. Planning Factors (Chapter 13)
13. Financial Plan and Project List (Chapter 14)