

MINUTES

SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, TECHNOLOGY & LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Tuesday, April 24, 2012

The Senate Interim Committee on Transportation, Technology and Legislative Affairs and the House Interim Committee on Public Transportation met jointly at 10:30 a.m., Tuesday, April 24, 2012, Genesis Incubation Center, 700 West Research Center Boulevard, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Committee members in attendance: Senator Bill Sample; Representatives Jonathan Barnett, Chair; Lori Benedict, John Catlett, Josh Johnston, Loy Mauch, David Meeks, Betty Overbey, Leslee Milam Post, Gary Stubblefield, and Tommy Thompson. Non-Voting Committee members in attendance: Representative Les “Skip” Carnine.

City, County and Local Affairs Committee members in attendance: Senators Bill Sample and Eddie Joe Williams; Representatives Nate Bell, David L. Branscum, Josh Johnston, Betty Overbey, Leslee Milam Post, Tommy Thompson and Charolette Wagner, Chair.

Other legislators in attendance: Senator Cecile Bledsoe; Representatives Duncan Baird, Gary Deffenbaugh, Debra Hobbs, James McLean and Uvalde Lindsey.

The meeting was called to order by Representative Jonathan Barnett, Chair, House Committee on Public Transportation.

Update on Regional Mobility Authorities in Theory and Practice (Attachments 1 & 2)

Mr. Mike Malone, Executive Director, Northwest Arkansas Council, was recognized and stated that the Northwest Arkansas Council was formed in 1990 to promote and advance Northwest Arkansas as a region and as a whole.

Act 389 of 2007 allows regions to establish Regional Mobility Authorities (RMAs) to help address transportation needs throughout the state. RMAs are regional governmental agencies that can be formed among contiguous counties to build, operate, maintain, expand or fund transportation projects.

In March 2008, Washington and Benton Counties approved the creation of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority (NWA RMA). Since that time, 14 cities in the region have joined as members. RMAs are not intended to be a substitute for current state and federal funding. Under state law, any locally generated sources of funding for RMA projects must be approved by voters. RMAs may choose to work on projects in partnership with other public agencies, but may also receive projects transferred from another public agency.

Mr. Malone addressed the following legislative and policy recommendations for RMAs:

1. start-up funding for incentives to regions to set them up and help fledgling organizations get off the ground
2. partnering agreements from the state to accomplish big-ticket projects
3. clarification of bond-related language recommended by bond experts

Representative Stubblefield asked when the last feasibility study was done in regard to toll roads. Mr. Malone said the last major toll study was done in 2003-2004 when a national consulting engineering firm was hired. The firm considered the Bella Vista Bypass, Fort Smith via Ft. Chaffee, North Little Rock through the North Belt Loop, and Jonesboro as possibilities. Two projects were deemed feasible: the North Belt Loop and the Bella Vista Bypass. Money has not been available to start any new projects.

Razorback Greenway Trail: Public/Private Partnership (Attachment 3)

Representative Barnett recognized Mr. Chuck Flink, President, Alta/Greenways, and Mr. Rob Brothers, Home Region Program Director, Walton Family Foundation. Mr. Brothers stated he assists the Walton Foundation throughout the state of Arkansas. The Walton Foundation has been involved in trail building, principally in Bentonville and Rogers, since the early 1990's. Dollars already spent and dollars committed to trails for the next two years is approximately \$27 million. Early in 2009, the Foundation began to envision a more regional two-county trail system. In 2010, Mr. Chuck Flink assisted the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission in successfully applying for and receiving a \$15 million federal grant.

Mr. Flink cited the following economic benefits of Greenways:

- generates revenues and jobs
- helps reduce the cost of public services
- adds value to the American landscape and improves the value of surrounding property
- offers an excellent return on investment

Tourism in Arkansas generates \$5.4 billion in economic impact and employs 58,336 persons. Salaries and wages from tourism is \$1 billion. Tourism in Northwest Arkansas is over \$690 million.

Mr. Flink stated the National Association of Realtors and the National Homebuilders Association report that residential properties realize a 10%-20% gain in value the closer they are located to a green space. The way in which communities manage natural resources matters to the business community. The Walton Family Foundation is financially supporting the development of a 2-county, 6-city regional greenway, the Razorback Regional Greenway. The Razorback Greenway was one of the 42 TIGER II funded projects in the nation.

Trails provide health benefits which:

- reduce obesity, premature death and arthritis pain
- increase physical activity
- control hypertension
- protect against developing non-insulin dependent diabetes
- improve symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety
- prevent osteoporosis

Innovative Transportation Research at the University of Arkansas (Attachment 4)

Kevin Hall, Ph.D., P.E., head of the Civil Engineering Department, University of Arkansas (UA), was recognized. Mr. Hall addressed transportation research related to people, projects and products. The transportation research program at UA is looking for ways to improve materials, design, construction, maintenance and rehabilitation, both in the physical product and the techniques used.

Projects of Transportation Research at UA include:

- Practical Recommendations for Evaluation and Mitigation of Soil Liquefaction in Arkansas
- Characterization of Ground Deformations Using Satellite and Ground Base Radar
- Pavement Design, Maintenance and Rehabilitation in the Fayetteville Shale Play
- Structural Health Monitoring

Mr. Hall said one product presently being explored is roller compacted concrete, which is concrete pavement applied through an asphalt paver that lasts longer and is stronger than traditional asphalt. Testing has been done on a super strength concrete on Highway 67 (overpass by McCain Mall). The concrete was poured at midnight and the bridge was ready for traffic by the next morning at 6:00 a.m. Mr. Hall said funds from the AHTD and the federal government constitute a large investment in research. One goal is to produce products that people can use. The Best Practices Guide includes information for constructing long lasting longitudinal joints in asphalt pavements.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.