

<u>Others Present</u>	<u>Representing</u>	<u>Present</u>
Allan Black, P.E.	Chatham County	x
Keith Melton	GDOT – Atlanta	x
Beth Kinstler	Magnolia Park resident	x
Ardis Wood	Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods	x
Susu Cox	Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods	x
Jack Knops	Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods	x
Chris Blaine	DeRenne property owner	x
Sammie Kenty	DeRenne resident	x
Melissa Bates	Hampstead owner	x
Radney Simpson	GDOT-Atlanta	x
Teresa Scott	GDOT-Jesup	x
Marianne Heimes	Island Citizens for Logical Growth	x
Kari McCallister	Low Country Council of Gov'ts	x
Diane Schleicher	Tybee Island	x
Billy Jones	City of Savannah	x
Clint Murphy	CAC	x
Helen Stone	County Commissioner	x
Mike Weiner, P.E.	City of Savannah	x
Thomas Thomson, P.E., AICP	MPC Executive Director	x
Wykoda Wang	MPO Staff	x
Mark Wilkes, P.E., AICP	MPO Staff	x
Jane Love	MPO Staff	x
Barbara Settzo	MPO Staff	x

Call to Order

Mr. Pete Liakakis called the June 28, 2006 Policy Committee Meeting to order and immediately entertained a motion to approve the minutes from the April 26, 2006 Policy Committee meeting. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes from the April 26, 2006 Policy Committee meeting.

PC Action: the motion to approve the minutes of the April 26, 2006 Policy Committee meeting carried with none opposed.

I. Approval of Agenda

The Committee took no action to formally approve or alter the agenda. They proceeded with the meeting.

Mr. Tom Thomson reviewed the materials that were distributed to the committee members, pointing out which materials were new. Handouts included a revised UPWP, updates for the TIP, and additional materials for information only.

Mr. Liakakis recognized Ms. Helen Stone as County Commissioner for District 1.

II. Committee Reports (verbal)

A. Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation

In the absence of Chairman Tom Lamar, Ms. Jane Love reported on the June 21, 2006 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation (ACAT). She stated that the committee had endorsed all the agenda action items, formed a nominating committee to present a slate of officers at the next meeting for a vote, and formed a committee to make up a list of necessary curb cuts with the intention of passing this list on to Mr. Jeff Felser who is an ACAT member and city Alderman.

B. Citizens Advisory Committee

Chairman Lee Mundell reported on the June 22, 2006 meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The committee continued the evaluation of its effectiveness. They plan to elect officers at the next meeting. Mr. Mundell noted that the problems that the committee was concerned about 5 years ago when he became Chairman are still here. He recognized that the process moves slowly. At the meeting last week, the CAC endorsed the proposed FY 2007-2009 TIP which was the only action item before the committee.

C. Technical Coordinating Committee

Mr. Mark Wilkes reported on the June 22, 2006 meeting of the Technical Coordinating Committee. The committee had endorsed the UPWP amendment, the draft TIP, and the request to authorize a detailed study to amend the Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP. The committee had tabled a LRTP amendment regarding the wording for transportation enhancement projects.

III. Action Items

A. Approval of the April 26, 2006 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Action was taken at the beginning of the meeting.

B. Approval of the FY 2007 Unified Planning Work Program Amendments

Mr. Wilkes reported that after adopting the final UPWP, the MPO found out that Section 5303 funding for transit planning was increased from \$64,000 to \$83,367. There was also an additional \$100,000 of L230 funds. These amendments incorporate these funding changes into this UPWP.

It was moved and seconded to approve the amendments to the FY2007 Unified Planning Work Program.

PC ACTION: the motion to approve the amendments to the FY2007 Unified Planning Work Program carried with none opposed.

C. Approval of the draft FY 2007-2009 TIP

Ms. Wykoda Wang presented the draft FY 2007-2009 TIP to the committee. She concentrated on the priority establishment. Three tiers of highway priority projects have been established as per the decision from the April meeting. Top Priority projects are those that have construction programmed in the FY 2006-2008 TIP. First Priority projects are those that have significant regional impact. Second Priority projects have high cost/benefit ratios. Transit priorities are also included, as provided by Chatham Area Transit. Ms. Wang proceeded to review each project in each tier, noting which projects were unchanged and which were delayed or advanced.

Mr. Thomson interjected to review Mr. Michael Brown's three concerns from the April meeting which Ms. Wang is addressing in this presentation: 1. What impact will the new TIP have on projects in the current TIP? 2. How did the MPO evaluate each project regarding safety, particularly for hurricane evacuation? 3. Are transit priorities consistent with transit projects?

Ms. Wang stated that there are 22 priority highway projects, of which 8 have been delayed, mostly due to production schedule. Three of these eight projects have been delayed for both funding and production reasons. There are 4 projects that have been advanced due to available funding.

Mr. Liakakis spoke about the urgency of the Diamond Causeway project in light of hurricane evacuation. Mr. Matthew Fowler confirmed that as the project is ready to go to construction, funding will be moved in for it. Right now environmental plans and right-of-way issues are being met. In the meantime, the department is looking into interim measures for evacuating people safely from the island.

Mr. Thomson noted that priority projects are not being delayed because of funding. He believes the program is fairly stable.

Mr. Russ Abolt questioned GDOT on the status of the Diamond Causeway widening on the east side (the island side). Plans were submitted and as of last week there was no news. The county is ready and wants to get that going. Where is GDOT? Mr. Liakakis commented that the county had explained to the state that the county would take on this part of the project and be reimbursed by the state. The state was in agreement.

Mr. Jason Buelterman asked about the draw bridge on Islands Expressway and the construction on the west side of the bridge. Mr. Abolt stated that the contractor has agreed to cease work and secure the bridge in the case of evacuation. In a few years this bridge

will be replaced with a high-level bridge.

Mr. James Hungerpillar questioned the delay of the Abercorn widening and the acceleration of Phase V of Truman Pkwy. He believes this is the reverse of what it should be. Mr. Thomson responded that GDOT is revisiting the Abercorn/SR204 project to devise a better plan. When the plan is improved, the funding will be put back in. Mr. Fowler confirmed. Mr. Hungerpillar asked if it was fair to say that Abercorn will be widened before Phase V. Mr. Fowler couldn't promise it. At present it looks like Phase V will begin first. Mr. Thomson commented that the Truman construction likely will take longer than the widening of Abercorn so there is time to catch up if the Truman project should begin first. It is the intention of the MPO and GDOT to get the two projects lined up to make it work.

Ms. Wang returned to her presentation by answering the concern Mr. Brown had about safety and security. She explained the evaluation and scoring process used for each project. CEMA wants to encourage people to evacuate west, so they have not designated major north-south corridors, such as the Truman Pkwy or I-95, as hurricane evacuation routes.

In response to the question of transit priorities being addressed by transit projects, Ms. Wang reported that the priorities and the projects are very consistent.

All committee members have received updates in today's packet. Ms. Wang reviewed each change included in the materials.

All advisory committees have endorsed this document. She is requesting that the TIP be adopted.

It was moved and seconded to approve the FY2007-2009 TIP with the understanding that all the comments relative to key projects be part of this action.

PC ACTION: the motion to approve the FY 2007-2009 TIP, with the understanding that all the comments relative to key projects be part of this action, was carried with none opposed.

D. Review request to amend the MPO Bikeway Plan and 2030 LRTP to include Back River Bridge Bikeway

Mr. Wilkes reviewed the LRTP amendment procedure to clarify that approval of this action item actually would be an authorization for MPO staff to conduct a more detailed study of the proposal. Staff would then present their findings to the Policy Committee at a future meeting in which the Committee would vote on amending the MPO Bikeway Plan and 2030 LRTP.

Ms. Kari McCallister, of Lowcountry Council of Governments, presented a slide presentation. Her presentation highlighted the proposed route of the entire trail through

coastal Georgia with emphasis on the link that the Back River Bridge provides between Georgia and South Carolina. She noted the significant economic impact of the tourist dollars on this area. The design for the future replacement of the Back River Bridge already includes breakdown lanes. Making the new Back River Bridge part of the bikeway would involve installing signage on the bridge and planning for bike access to and from the bridge at Hutchinson Island.

Mr. Abolt wants the group to be sure to include the Bamboo Farm and the Litchfield tract of land on the trail route. Ms. McCallister agreed to pass this on to Ms. Hickson.

It was moved and seconded to direct the MPO staff to review and study the amendment to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP to include the Back River Bridge Bikeway.

PC ACTION: the motion to direct the MPO staff to review the amendment to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP to include the Back River Bridge Bikeway carried with none opposed.

IV. Status Reports

A. Connecting Savannah Follow Up Activities

Mr. Thomson gave a brief report noting that the Connecting Savannah process has entered the next phase on the DeRenne Ave congestion issue. As mentioned in the report at the April meeting, the city had advertised requests for proposals for the East DeRenne and the West DeRenne/Hampstead Connector projects. They subsequently received four proposals for the East DeRenne project and two for the West DeRenne/Hampstead project. Contracts will be in place in September. After that, when the team is ready, then they will move to citizen involvement and concept developments.

B. Benton Blvd Transportation Issues

Mr. Thomson referenced the letter and attachments distributed to the members. This issue was raised by Representative Buddy Carter to address the congestion that occurs at I-95 and SR 21. Five meetings with interested parties have taken place. It was determined that the right-of-way likely will need to be purchased, even where some has been reserved. Opportunities for federal and state funding are severely limited because the project is not in the LRTP. It is not in the LRTP because it has been seen as a developer project. However, the City of Port Wentworth did not make any related requirements for the developers building in this area. The best short-term approach is to use current SPLOST funding and seek additional SPLOST funding. This would cover engineering and right-of-way acquisitions for as long as the money lasts. This could be supplemented by GDOT local program assistance funding. If this project is going to get done in the short-run it will need to be a locally funded project. This was communicated to Mr. Carter by letter.

Mr. Liakakis asked if the developers were planning residential and/or commercial development. The response was that some will be residential and some will be commercial.

Mr. Eric Winger asked if this request was to help commuters or to alleviate the truck traffic. If the port activity is the issue, the truck traffic will only be compounded by the imminent arrival of Ikea and Target warehouses.

Mr. Fowler pointed out that the GDOT truck study includes this area – both present use and future projected out to 2035.

Mr. Liakakis asked that more specific information about who uses this corridor, i.e. Effingham commuters, Chatham residents, and/or commercial business, be available at the next meeting. He also suggested inviting State Representative Carter to the meeting.

V. Agency Reports (verbal)

A. GDOT

Ms. Scott asked if anyone had any questions for her. She referenced the status report on GDOT projects in Chatham County that had been distributed to the members. Mr. Abolt asked about the status of the Middleground Rd. project. Mr. Black reported that there is a significant change order approved for APAC within the last month which will allow for the project to be finished but will extend it out about two years. Mr. Liakakis mentioned the problem with the underground piping. He reminded GDOT and any authority involved that APAC needs to be closely monitored to prevent a repeat of the Stephenson Ave project delays. Once monitored, the project got finished, but not until then. He said that the Middleground Rd. area looks awful right now.

Mr. Buelterman reported that Tybee Island is concerned about the pedestrian safety for those crossing Butler Ave. to get to the beach. He would like to see some improvements. Ms. Scott said she would forward this request.

B. Chatham County

Mr. Black gave a brief status report:

- Truman Parkway Phase V consultant is making progress. Landscaping and lighting issues are being addressed, but he feels it is moving forward. Right of way acquisition is slow but moving.
- White Bluff Rd. - project design is on hold.
- Jimmy DeLoach Parkway Phase II – consultant has submitted a change order for modifications to bring it up to standard from 1993.
- Whitfield Rd. – working on approval of the revised concept report. Meeting today.
- Bay St. – ready to resubmit the revised draft.

Mr. Hungerpillar questioned the lighting on Phase V of the Truman. Mr. Black confirmed that the lighting had to do with the interchanges and intersections. Mr. Hungerpillar asked if the issue of litter had been addressed. Mr. Black does not anticipate a problem with litter.

C. City of Savannah

Mr. Mike Weiner gave an update on the City's Traffic Engineering Improvement Projects:

- Henry/Anderson traffic signals are operational. Work on wheelchair ramps and crosswalks is still underway.
- Gwinnett St. reconstruction – contract is being finalized. Right of way acquisition has begun.
- Widening of Gwinnett from I-16 to Stiles – concept report approved. Next stage is to complete and approve the environmental report.
- LaRoche widening – the tree situation has been evaluated.
- Sharp curve on Anderson west of Skidaway Rd. – This is a new project. A consultant has been engaged and has developed 4 concepts for review. When this is finalized, public input will be sought from the residents.
- DeRenne Corridor – 4 proposals for the east portion and 2 proposals for the west portion had been received. These are under review and will move into negotiations and have a contract for the city council.

Mr. Liakakis asked about the synchronization of the lights on the Henry/Anderson project. Mr. Weiner reported that it is operational, but some fiber optic work remains to be finished, and some tweaking is being done.

D. Chatham Area Transit Authority

Mr. John Broderick, reporting in the absence of Mr. Carl Palmer, stated that they have started receiving delivery of the new replacement buses. They should be on the street shortly.

Mr. Lee Mundell asked about the transit center. Mr. Broderick reported that they are still working on it. CAT is working with the Savannah Development & Renewal Authority (SDRA) steering committee to have the site of the transit center be included in the Downtown Master Plan. SDRA is helping CAT find a site for the transit center. CAT is looking at several sites not previously considered.

E. Georgia Ports Authority

Mr. Randy Weitman thanked Chatham County for including the Georgia Ports Authority in their recent presentation to the State. It is important that the ports be seen as more than a local issue. Target should be in business by the end of this year and Ikea shortly after. With awareness of the resulting freight traffic, they are working with GDOT on the Interstate access and truck studies in an effort to improve traffic conditions for everyone.

VI. Public Comments

Rev. Sammie Kenty came forward to speak to the Policy Committee as follows:

I read a lot of your comments on DeRenne and the Hampstead connection. I wish that you would take into consideration the residents from DeRenne to Hampstead. I live in that area. We have a very nice community there. Building highways, putting a highway through, buying homes, and putting residents out of homes – it doesn't sound to well. I wish you could take into consideration opening up Mildred Street and paving it so it can get some of the traffic off of DeRenne Avenue, and into Hampstead and into Hunter, instead of moving people out of the neighborhood. We have a lot of single parents who live in that area, who have already bought their homes. Widows, retirees. Given, I'm retired, and I bought a home in that area to make it my home. And now they're talking about buying homes there. They'll put people out. Where will we go? A lot of people won't be able to afford homes, comparable to the home they have, because if you move from there to somewhere else, you are talking about \$200,000 or \$300,000 homes, which they can't afford to purchase. So I hope that you all will reconsider that. And we have several projects that we'd like to look at, but we're talking about this one first, because the first project that we talked about – they didn't have enough money to do that. So using Mildred Street, opening it up and repaving it, will cost less money. See how that would work. And let people keep their homes. Don't build highways and put people out of homes.

Susu Cox, past President of Fairway Oaks Neighborhood Association, participant of Connecting Savannah, and a member of Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods, read the following letter to the Policy Committee:

To the members of the MPO and the MPC,

Last year, I and other Chatham County citizens participated in the Connecting Savannah process. This initiative was to include the community in decisions regarding transportation in Savannah. The group met over many months and reached consensus on several solutions for the traffic in certain areas. We did not reach consensus to support six-lane widening of DeRenne Avenue. While we did support the Hampstead Connector, we were given incorrect information about the number of homes which would be removed to widen Hampstead. We also supported signal retiming and the ambulance preemption devices be installed. The signal timing has been completed by DOT, but there has been no apparent progress on the ambulance preemption.

On June 22, 2005, the MPO held a public hearing on the Connecting Savannah Action Plan. You were told at the hearing by consultant Linda Carpenter of Wilbur

Smith, referring to the surveys (comment cards) collected, that, "The lowest percentages, but still 80% support, was for the DeRenne six-lane widening and the Truman Parkway Extension and the second bridge" (p. 12 MPO Meeting Minutes of 6/22/05). At the end of the meeting, Rick Winger again referred to the 80% of the surveys when making his motion to go forward with the Action Plan (p. 56 MPO Meeting Minutes 6/22/05).

The validity of these surveys (comment cards) should be questioned. After personally reviewing the surveys twice, it is apparent that some questions must be asked.

- There were only 285 surveys
- Did anyone verify the validity of the names on the surveys?
- It was obvious that approximately 175 surveys were copied with the questions already answered and then names simply filled in on the front. How can these be valid?
- 80% of 285 is 228. Were 228 people to make this decision? Were there really even 228 people since so many comment cards were copied with questions already answered?
- Did those who signed surveys even live in Savannah?
- Did anyone check that the survey information was valid since many included no name or just a first name?

Those surveys should have been thoroughly evaluated and analyzed before basing such an important vote on them. This vote could result in the demolition of over 100 homes in some of Savannah's most established, well kept neighborhoods. Interestingly, our neighborhood collected 220 signatures from our residents alone opposing the sidening of DeRenne. These petitions were delivered to MPC June 2005.

At the public hearing, the MPO members listened to numerous citizens who were opposed to the widening of Hampstead and DeRenne. Those in attendance were overwhelmingly opposed to going forward with the Action Plan. However, the MPO unanimously voted to move forward with the Connecting Savannah Action Plan at the June 22, 2005, public hearing, in spite of this opposition and these unanswered questions.

Due to the concern over these issues, some neighborhoods joined together to reate an organization called Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods. We are an action group formed to help neighborhoods by joining them in their efforts to preserve the quality of life in their area. Many of us participated in Connecting Savannah and sincerely hoped it would be a valid and meaningful process. Many now feel we were simply used to give the appearance of community support to a plan that the administration at MPC knew most residents would oppose.

On behalf of Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods, and as a participant in Connecting Savannah, I respectfully request the following:

1. The Connecting Savannah comment cards be examined by an independent party and their validity verified. The results of this examination should be shared with your members and all those who were regular Connecting Savannah participants.
2. An itemized status update of each recommendation in the Connecting Savannah Action Plan as approved at the June 22, 2005, MPO meeting.
3. That Connecting Savannah participants be reconvened as soon as possible as the participants requested at their last meeting (p. 7 MPO Meeting Minutes of 6/22/05).

We believe neighborhoods in Savannah and their residents hav value and should have a voice. The members of Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods will continue to help residents by actively supporting their preservation efforts.

I look forward to your response, and I thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Susu Cox
Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods

Ardis Wood, member of Ardsley Park Neighborhood Association, member of Lee-Olin Heights Neighborhood Association, and a member of Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods, read the following information to the Policy Committee:

Our continued effort to widen roads is like major surgery – deeply invasive and extremely expensive, so we’ve been researching the latest thinking on the best transportation practices. One of the most respected urban planners of today is Ed McMahon of the Urban Land Institute, who spoke in Savannah a few months ago. Did any of you hear him? Well, I want you to know hat he said about transportation:

“Georgia Department of Transportation needs to get a little religion. They keep doing the same tying and expect things to change, which Einstein said was the definition of insanity. Currently they want to widen Interstate 75 to 23 lanes in Atlanta, which would make it the widest road in the history of the world! If you don’t do anything else but widen roads to fight congestion, it’s a little like letting out your belt to fight obesity. The problem is, we build roads to CHASE development. We need to start coordinating transportation WITH development, and we are going to be forced to do that the way gas prices are going. In Europe, gas is already over \$6 a gallan. NEVERTHELESS, while Americans spend 20% of their income on transportation (that’s one out of every five dollars!), Europeans spend only 7% because they have far more transportation choices and don’t have to use their cars all the time. Germans love their cars, but their highways are not crowded because they have one of the greatest transit systems in the world. You can take a train from any major German city to any other German city 30 times a day at 180 miles per

hour! When you arrive, you have a variety of options – buses, subways, taxis, trolleys, and bikes. At a typical traffic light, there will be 7 cars and 200 bicycles.

Bike trails are on both sides of every road in Denmark so people ride bikes because they can, and because gas is over \$6 a gallon. Simply widening roads to 23 lanes is fighting LAST year's war. We need to start thinking about the NEXT war. We need to think about global climate change. So I hope G.D.O.T. starts to think about some of the other alternatives."

I asked Mr. McMahon who was the best transportation consultant in the country. His answer – Walter Kalish. So I read up on him. Here is one quote from his work: "The long-standing conventional approach to traffic congestion – adding more capacity – has not only failed to stem traffic congestion, but has actually accelerated the rate of growth in congestion, while degrading the travel experience and quality of communities of most Americans."

I think his consulting service would be a good investment, as would that of Mr. McMahon's. Chatham County deserves the best.

My challenge to you is this. Before you widen one more road, first really prove that it will help more people over the long haul without hurting the community. Be like the people from Missouri, insist on their motto: "Show me"!

I'd like to hand you some of my research and hope you will consider it as you deliberate about moving people in the future. Thank you.

Beth Kinstler, President of Magnolia Park Neighborhood Association, and a founding member of Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods, addressed the Policy Committee as follows:

In February of this year, from approximately 6:45 AM until 8:15 AM, three members of Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods counted cars traveling west at or near the intersection of DeRenne Avenue and Montgomery Street. We didn't count commercial vehicles, including trucks, vans, or any other vehicle that was obviously commercially used. The results were eye-opening. Our count revealed that over 87% of all cars, coming in from the west onto the ramp, were single occupancy vehicles. Fifty percent of those were from out of town. And many of them were people going to work.

This is a study that could have easily been done by CUTS and the MPC, but was never done. Why not? These people coming from out of town don't pay taxes in Chatham County. Many of those cars turned on Montgomery Street, heading into Hunter. We noticed that an earlier turn-off, Mildred Street, had been blocked with a concrete barrier, prohibiting travel to Hunter from that point. We are talking about spending, in the final analysis, probably about \$50 million dollars for road widening

that is not necessarily needed, in the process destroying over a hundred homes. The alternatives are sensible, safe, appropriate, easily implemented, and a lot cheaper. They consist of some of the following: open and pave Mildred Street to vehicular traffic again; encourage ride-sharing to the major employers in the area, and enlist their help as good, corporate citizens; build park and ride lots in outlying communities and counties; increase public transportation to Port Wentworth, Pooler, and Garden City.

I will conclude by telling you that, as president of my neighborhood organization, I can tell you unequivocally, there is no one in my community, which consists of 420 homes and at least that many adults, who wishes to widen DeRenne, even though the widening stops at Truman. We understand that it won't ever stop if it continues, and we know that we're next. And I will also point out that every single one of those communities that you wish to bulldoze, or at least partially bulldoze, really qualifies for inclusion in the Historic National Trust District. Most of our homes are over 50 years old. So we think you need to rethink this situation and go back to the drawing board. Thank you.

Helen Stone, County Commissioner, District 1, came forward to speak as follows:

Mr. Chairman and members of your committee, as the representative for District 1, and hearing some of the citizens today, I would request that maybe we take a step back and ask for some better communication and involvement with some of these residents. We are certainly not an advocate of taking homes where we don't need to, but certainly this process needs to be reviewed, and I would just ask that maybe the lines of communication be strengthened here so that we can come up with some other solutions, or maybe some better solutions, and if nothing else, better communication. So that's what I'm hearing from my constituents on this project, and I thank you.

VII. Adjournment

There being no other business to come before the Board, the June 28, 2006 Policy Committee meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

Mark Wilkes, P. E., AICP
Director of Transportation Planning