



Planning for Greater Akron

Greater Akron's Climate Change Experience

July 19, 2011

Overview

- Climate change as part of the planning process
- Support for a climate change discussion
- How AMATS responded
- What are we doing now?



Climate change as part of the planning process

- In 2009, AMATS was preparing a draft of our 2030 LRTP
- Plan contained no language on climate change
- Public meetings were conducted to get feedback on our plan



Climate for change

AMATS has crafted a solid transportation plan for the next two decades. Now it should go further by citing the reality of global warming

The Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) issued in January its outlook for the next two decades. The report sets transportation priorities for Summit and Portage counties, as required by federal law. The organization invited public comment, the deadline arriving last week. The hope is the policy committee, made up largely of mayors and county officials, will follow the advice of those who have been arguing for the inclusion of language that brings into focus the mounting challenge of climate change.

Those pushing for the inclusion of language covering climate change point, correctly, to the potential for additional freeze-and-thaw cycles or an extended construction season. It may be that a carbon-impact study will be required eventually of transportation projects. Put another way, by citing climate change, the report would start to reshape thinking. It would make plain that addressing the challenge must be part of transportation planning.

The proposals for altering the report are hardly radical. In the preface, the report discusses an "uncertain future" making planning more difficult. Surely, climate change belongs among those uncertainties. In the section discussing future trends, the report highlights population and employment, not to mention land use. Why not noodle the potential of climate change to affect fuel pricing, development patterns and public transportation?

Or include its role in air quality? The report addresses the need to mitigate the impact of noise, water and wildlife. Why not a place for climate change?

Again, AMATS isn't required in any way to make room for global warming. Yet other states and communities across the country have taken the lead. The Federal Highway Administration issued a report last summer about integrating climate change into transportation planning. The U.S. Conference of Mayors has endorsed the Climate Protection Agreement, more than 900 mayors, including Don Plusquellic of Akron, calling for reductions in carbon-dioxide emissions 7 percent below 1990 levels. Now AMATS has an opportunity to do its part.

“by citing climate change, the report would start to reshape thinking. It would make plain that addressing the challenge must be part of transportation planning.”

Analysts show that in Northeast Ohio transportation, the region's population is growing, and it does make, then, to craft a plan looking at 2050 without a change? And other such metropolitan planning organizations are under no regulatory obligation to include climate change in their reports. The report calls for sound choices for spending \$2.8 billion on highway projects and more than \$1 billion on transit work, from widening the Akron Expressway to making improvements at Batley's Busy Corners in Cuyahoga Falls. It rightly places emphasis on "fixing it first." It includes \$105 million for bicycling and pedestrian projects.

The expectation isn't that the report should devise an elaborate and detailed plan for reducing the region's carbon footprint. Rather, the policy committee would do well to acknowledge that in the coming decades, the region increasingly will have to deal with climate change in its transportation planning.

Support for a Discussion

- AMATS received a number of public comments regarding climate change
- Policy committee members received personal letters from concerned citizens
- Comments ranged in scope, rhetoric, and opinion
- It was clear to the policy committee that climate change had to be considered



How AMATS responded

- The policy committee directed the staff to include the discussion of climate change in the LRTP
- There was no debate on the science of climate change



CLIMATE CHANGE TEXT

AMATS recognizes the growing public concern regarding the issues of carbon dioxide emissions (CO₂) and climate change. Currently, AMATS is not required to model CO₂ emissions from transportation sources, and no prevalent methodology exists for accurate modeling. Over the next several years it is likely that the federal government will enact stricter standards and regulations regarding CO₂. AMATS is working closely with the Ohio Department of Transportation, Akron Regional Air Quality Management District (ARAQMD), the Ohio EPA and the USEPA to prepare for possible changes in air quality standards and their resulting impacts on the regional transportation planning process.

While Transportation Outlook does not directly quantify greenhouse gas emissions, many recommendations included in the Plan do help reduce CO₂. Transit recommendations including better service, new cleaner buses, and park and ride lots will aid in reducing CO₂ emissions. AMATS also continues to operate the OhioRideshare Program, which promotes carpooling to reduce the number of vehicles on the road.

AMATS also supports smart growth management principles as an effective way of reducing carbon emissions. Land use planning for the last 60 years has focused on separating land uses and decreasing development densities. More recently on the national level, some focus has returned to developments which incorporate different land uses in the same vicinity. The advantage of this is that people are not required to use an automobile for every trip because the development's layout encourages walking, biking and transit. Smart growth principles can reduce vehicle miles traveled, conserve energy and in turn reduce carbon emissions. AMATS supports local communities using smart growth management in future developments.



What are we doing now?

- The Connecting Communities Initiative
 - Promotes active transportation integrated with smart land use



What are we doing now?

- Switching-Gears.org
 - New bike website that will promote biking as an environmentally friendly way to commute
- OhioRideshare
 - Carpool, bikepool, emissions calculator

