

## 2010: foundations put in place for mass transit in Middle Tennessee...

**D**iscussion of mass transit across Middle Tennessee reached a new level in 2010. The year began with Mayors Caucus of Middle Tennessee providing a solid framework for regional consideration of mass transit. The Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee became a foundation for this framework when Vanderbilt University's commitment of significant financial resources was followed by other contributions from institutions and businesses. The Transit Alliance Board hired an Executive Director and mass transit conversations across the ten counties of Middle Tennessee occurred at an ever-increasing rate. In most cases, these conversations fit within the public involvement process surrounding the Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) "2035 Long Range Transportation Plan." This Plan incorporated, for the first time, a "bold vision for mass transit" in our region together with a concurrent emphasis on "active transportation" investments. The year ended when the MPO Executive Board, made up of Middle Tennessee Mayors and state officials, formally adopted this plan at its December 15 meeting.



**Sumner County Mayors at the Sumner County Community Conversation**

As Tommy Bragg, Mayor of Murfreesboro, said when interviewed for the Transit Alliance film "Middle Tennessee: On The Move," **"...if we start now, I think we will look back in 10, 15 or 20 years and find out how the year 2010 was a great year to start and that we needed to that now..."**

## 2011:...now the work begins...

**I**f 2010 was a year of laying foundations, 2011 will be the year when the hard work of creating mass transit solutions truly begins. In January, the Board of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) will make a decision about restructuring itself under new state legislation that allows regional transportation authorities to be more actively involved in meeting regional transportation needs. This is a critical step. While the 2035 Transportation Plan was properly a product of the Nashville MPO, the MPO has no authority nor mission to carry long-range plans into reality. That role will fall to transit agencies (like the Metropolitan Transit Authority in Nashville) or to regional transportation authorities as permitted under state law (like the RTA.) and to the counties and cities of our region.

The need for this new structure is very obvious when we consider the pioneering steps towards mass transit that are already underway. **Specifically, in 2011, eight critical actions will require careful management and oversight:**

1. The MTA in Nashville will formally commence an intense analysis of the potential for mass transit along the Broadway-West End Corridor. Options will include a modern urban streetcar line.
2. Decisions will be made about options for mass transit along the NE Corridor, stretching from Gallatin to Nashville. Options will include bus rapid transit (BRT) and light rail as well as continuation of existing express bus services.
3. Decisions will be made about rethinking the initial "shelving" of decision-making along the region's most congested corridor, the Southeast Corridor from Murfreesboro to Nashville. Options will include additional intensive analysis of solutions such as light rail and bus rapid transit (BRT).
4. As TDOT undertakes the widening of I-65 in Williamson County south of Franklin, decisions will be made about new options for accommodation of mass transit along the entire I-65 Corridor from Spring Hill to Nashville.
5. Decisions will be made about expanding more traditional forms of mass transit to both Robertson and Dickson Counties. Options will include express bus services as well as vanpools.
6. Decisions will be made about proceeding with a more detailed analysis of the potential for commuter rail or other forms of mass transit between Clarksville, Ashland City and Nashville.
7. Decisions will be made about continuing and possibly upgrading the commuter rail service now provided by the Music City Star between Lebanon and Nashville. Options include more frequent service and possibly new stations.
8. Ongoing decisions will be made by the MTA, Clarksville Transit, Murfreesboro's "Rover," Franklin Transit and other public transportation agencies about their service areas and routes. The need to coordinate these decisions into a regional context will grow dramatically as other mass transit decisions are made.

Who makes these decisions and how they weave together into a truly regional pattern of benefit to all of Middle Tennessee is a key issue to be addressed during

**continued on page 2**

# Middle Tennessee's "2035 Transportation Plan" adopted

**O**n December 15th, 2010, the Executive Board of the Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) unanimously adopted the Middle Tennessee region's "2035 Long Range Transportation Plan."

It would be easy to simply say that the MPO Board had met

its Federal requirement to adopt such a plan. In fact, the Board did much more than just adopt a plan. For the first time in our region, the MPO adopted a plan that embraces all the components of regional transportation: roads, transit and "active transportation" such as walking and biking. The plan will guide state and local transportation funding decisions over the next 25 years. In doing so, it makes it clear that a balance between transportation modes is a top priority.

Specifically for transit, the plan incorporates a "Bold New Vision" for mass transit across all ten counties of Middle Tennessee. That vision includes corridors with new modes of transit such as bus rapid transit (BRT) or light rail. The vision also includes new forms of circulation within areas already served by more traditional transit, such as downtown Nashville, Clarksville, Murfreesboro, Franklin, Lebanon, Gallatin and other population centers.

In preparation for the vote on the plan, a series of "Community Conversations" were held across the region. The Transit Alliance worked closely with the MPO staff to support these discussions, including "live video streaming" of each of the meetings. Michael Skipper, Executive Director of the MPO, and his staff did a great job in facilitating these meetings just as they did in preparing the draft plan. At every one of the meetings, the elected mayors of the host counties and cities welcomed the public and actively participated in the discussion. This set a new precedent for mixing public officials and the public-at-large in the discussions that lead to the adoption of a plan that will guide our transportation investments in the future.

Transit Alliance Board members participated in each of the Community Conversations. In fact, two breakfast meetings were held prior to the meetings in Rutherford and Williamson counties. These provided opportunities for in-depth discussions between the mayors of the host counties and cities with Board members as well as RTA and MTA staff.



**RTA Board members as Mayor Karl Dean signs the 2035 Plan after adoption by the MPO Executive Board**



# UPDATE

0004 | January 5, 2011  
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## 2011...now the work begins...

**continued from page 1**

2011. The region cannot even begin to think about seeking new sources of dedicated funding unless it is clear that there is a truly regional plan and that there is clearly an institution that is responsible for making these decisions with the highest levels of confidence and trust from the public who, at the end of the day, must provide the sources of these funds.

The Transit Alliance stands ready to participate in each of these key decision-making arenas. Just as the role of the private sector will be critical in the ultimate discussions of funding and new sources of dedicated revenues, it is also critical in the determination of new mass transit solutions that these revenues will support.

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**Wilson County Community Conversation**



**Williamson County Mayor Rogers Anderson and Transit Alliance Board member Mike Agee at Williamson County Conversation**



**Franklin Mayor John Schroer opens the Williamson County Conversation**



**Rutherford County Mayor Ernest Burgess at Rutherford County Conversation**



**Nashville Mayor Karl Dean at Davidson County Conversation**

# MTA West End/Broadway Corridor study

Earlier in 2010, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) at the direction of Mayor Karl Dean, made the decision to actively pursue the development of recommendations for some form of mass transit along the West End/Broadway corridor of Nashville. This corridor, stretching from the Cumberland River at the foot of Broadway west to the St. Thomas Hospital/White Bridge Road area has long been viewed as



an ideal candidate for mass transit, including possibly modern urban street cars. The MTA sought proposals for the study from national and international engineering firms with extensive experience with urban mass transit. Four such firms made presentations to a review committee established by the MTA. On this committee were representatives from Metro Planning, Metro Public Works, the MPO and the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee.

Hearing the presentations was an enlightening and encouraging experience for all present. Clearly, the West End/Broadway corridor was seen by each firm as not only a strong candidate for several forms of mass transit from an engineering perspective but also as an area that would experience tremendous economic growth once it was connected with frequent and efficient mass transit along its length. The “activity centers” of Lower Broadway, the new Convention Center, Midtown, Vanderbilt University, the Centennial Park area, the I-440 interchange, the residential areas of West End, and the St. Thomas and Belle Meade shopping area were seen as “ready-made” candidates for mass transit solutions.

It is anticipated that the MTA Board will award a contract to one of the proposing



0004 | January 5, 2011  
www.thetransitalliance.org



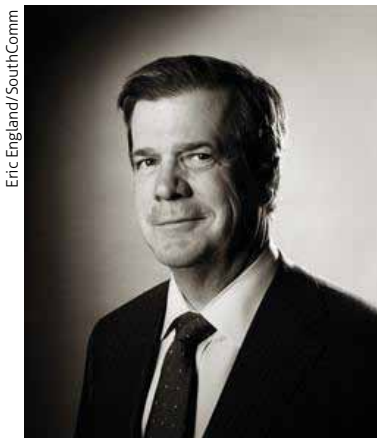
firms at its January meeting. If this happens, the study will take about a year to complete. There will be extensive public involvement in the process, including participation by the Transit Alliance. Stay tuned!

## Candid thoughts from Mayor Karl Dean

The *Nashville City Paper* published an extensive interview with Nashville Mayor Karl Dean in its December 27-29 edition. In that interview, Mayor Dean responded to questions about his advocacy of mass transit in Middle Tennessee. His remarks underscored the importance of establishing a widely understood vision for mass transit across the region prior to beginning discussions of the dedicated revenues that will be required to turn that vision into reality.

*Q: “You and other elected officials recently signed the Metropolitan Planning Organization’s 2035 Regional Transportation Plan. You’ve talked about taking mass transit more seriously. It all boils down to finding a dedicated funding source. Is this the year that happens?”*

**A: Before you go into a discussion about dedicated funding, you have to have a plan, or a vision as to how this would all unfold, in order to get people to buy in. You don’t do transit for the sake of transit — because you like trains and you like buses. You do it because when you have a good transit system, your economy works better, people’s costs and their own family budgeting. It gives young people more choices when they move into a city. All those things are good for the city and good for our region. That’s why you do it. But to get there, and talk about the funding aspect, you’ve got to have the plan first. A serious plan. And one you communicate to the public. That’s the process we’re going through.**



Mayor Karl Dean

*Q: You’ve talked primarily about light rail. When is this a possibility?*

**A: Well, we’re going through the process now of doing a streetcar study on West End-Broadway. I don’t know what the results of that will be, but that is an ongoing, real project that may happen. The work we’ve done on Gallatin Road with Bus Rapid Transit—it’s sort of**

**“Bus Rapid Transit light.” But I think the bus stops are better. They have real-time information on them. They’re more comfortable. The buses are better. They’re more comfortable. They make fewer stops. That needs to become more sophisticated. If light rail is a solution, as you move to it, you need to continually make improvements in the transit system. And within Nashville itself—not just regionally—we need to do it as a city. People need to be able to move around the city better than they can right now. It is an ongoing challenge, but I’m excited about working at it. —City Paper Interview with Joey Garrison, December 29, 2010**

# What do the “rankings” tell us about ourselves?

One of the primary reasons that mass transit is being discussed more and more frequently across Middle Tennessee is the growing concern about traffic congestion on our streets and highways. So the natural question is “how congested are we?” Anyone stuck in traffic has an easy answer to the question... “we have too much congestion!” Recently, a new study was released that surprisingly ranked Nashville and the Middle Tennessee region as having the “worst commutes” of any region in the country. Historically, studies had typically ranked our region about 30th or so in the actual time spent in traffic delays caused by congestion. The new study, published by “CEO’s For Cities” and titled “Driven Apart,” looked at more than just congestion-caused time delays. It looked at how much time motorists in our region actually spend in their cars during peak commuting times. This approach took into account not only congestion, but how far we drive every day. As Michael Skipper, Executive Director of the Nashville MPO commented in a Tennessean article, **“how we build our communities, more so than our roads, is influencing the amount of time we spend in our cars.”**

Joe Cortright, Senior Advisor to “CEO’s For Cities”, made the significance of this ranking very clear: **“...Nashville has the longest commute times of any of the 50 largest metropolitan areas of the country...the average resident of one of these**

**(U.S.) metros spends about 200 hours per year traveling in these rush hours; in contrast, the typical Nashville resident spends more than 280 hours.”** Cortright continues, **“While traffic delays seem to be the most acute in urban centers, the real determinant of commute times is the increasing distance we travel. The problem is most acute in cities with sprawling, low density development patterns. And Nashville has the longest average peak-period travel distance of any large U.S. metro: more than 25 miles per trip.”** He concludes, **“The key to reducing the amount of time we spend stuck in traffic is to build our communities in such a way that we can take shorter trips and have realistic alternatives to traveling by car. The places that do well on our travel-time measure tend to have dense, vibrant urban cores, good mass transit systems and a lot of “mixed use” neighborhoods where shops, housing and other destinations are closer to one another rather than being widely separated.”**

While mass transit is a key part of any solution to reduce time and energy spent in commuting every day across our region, it is clear that long-term solutions will need to include careful consideration of how we develop our land and infrastructure to support the kind of development patterns that reduce our dependence on long daily drives.

## New TDOT Commissioner...

On January 4th, 2011, Governor-Elect Bill Haslam appointed Franklin Mayor John Schroer as his new TDOT Commissioner. Mayor Schroer has been an active participant in regional discussions with the Transit Alliance and has served as treasurer of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA.) His leadership at TDOT and in the Governor’s Cabinet will be extremely important as the discussion of mass transit in Middle Tennessee moves from a broad vision to specific actions. This is a very significant appointment for our region and for our state.

## Additional thoughts...

One of the strongest supporters of the work of the Transit Alliance has been the Greater Nashville Association of Realtors (GNAR). In an “end of the year” interview with the *Tennessean*, outgoing GNAR president, Lucy Smith, underscored the importance of regionalism and cited the Transit Alliance as one of the signs of new regional awareness across Middle Tennessee:

**“We have a pervasive spirit of cooperation that is dramatically different from what has been the case in the past. The Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus, the Middle Tennessee Transit Alliance and other organizations are having success creating meaningful dialogue to find solutions to the challenges we all face.”**

—*Tennessean*, December 31, 2010



# UPDATE

0004 | January 5, 2011  
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## Staying in touch with the Transit Alliance

**M**any of you reading this edition of the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee “Update” may have received it after “friending” the Transit Alliance on the website, [www.thetransitalliance.org](http://www.thetransitalliance.org). Others may have kept up with the Transit Alliance through our Facebook or Twitter links. These are all a part of our efforts to make communications about not only the Transit Alliance but about the future of mass transit in Middle Tennessee as easy as possible. The website will be the “hub” of these communications. As you refer others to the work of the Transit Alliance, please encourage them to start with our website and then find the most convenient tool for staying involved!

