



# Federal Highway Administration Scenario Planning

## Peer Workshop

### Birmingham, Alabama

### July 28, 2011

## **FHWA Scenario Planning Workshop**

**Location:** Birmingham, Alabama

**Date:** July 28, 2011

**Workshop Sponsor:** Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

**Host Agency:** Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB)

**Event Planning and Documentation:** U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe Center)

**Workshop Attendees:** See [Appendix D](#)

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## I. Executive Summary

This report summarizes a scenario planning peer workshop that FHWA sponsored in Birmingham, Alabama, on July 28, 2011. The workshop was hosted by the RPCGB, the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Greater Birmingham, Alabama, region.

The workshop introduced scenario planning to elected officials, planners, and representatives of local government, transportation agencies, nonprofits, advocacy groups, and other organizations from across the Greater Birmingham region. Sixty-five participants attended, representing a variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations. See [Appendix C](#) for the workshop agenda. [Appendix D](#) includes a complete list of attendees.

RPCGB serves 1.1 million people in six counties in central Alabama. RPCGB is preparing to update the region's long-range transportation plan and would like to use scenario planning to help address regional transportation problems and coordinate future development and transportation improvements throughout the region. RPCGB requested the FHWA-sponsored scenario planning workshop to learn how Pittsburgh, a region comparable to Birmingham in size and socioeconomic characteristics, successfully used scenario planning to address planning challenges. Additionally, RPCGB sought to convene stakeholders to solicit feedback on how the Greater Birmingham region could utilize scenario planning.

During the workshop, FHWA Headquarters and FHWA Resource Center staff provided an overview of scenario planning and resources available to support the process. Participants from RPCGB and the Birmingham Business Alliance discussed trends occurring in the region. Peer speakers from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), the MPO for the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania region, presented on their experiences with scenario planning (SPC also discussed its use of INDEX scenario planning software at a technical session for RPCGB staff held on July 27, 2011, at RPCGB's offices).

The workshop represented the first tri-agency scenario planning workshop conducted as part of the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities (Partnership). The Partnership is an initiative led by the USDOT, US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). During the workshop, staff from USDOT's Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST), HUD, and EPA discussed the Partnership's current efforts and offered information about resources available to Birmingham. The Partnership supports Federal livability principles by coordinating work in communities across the Nation. Finally, workshop participants engaged in several breakout sessions during which they discussed how scenario planning could be implemented in the Greater Birmingham region.

RPCGB intends to use scenario planning to help develop an integrated regional transportation plan in the near future. Post-workshop evaluations collected from participants showed that the event allowed attendees to obtain a greater understanding of scenario planning, its key steps, and some of the benefits realized by agencies implementing the process. Moreover, participants believed that a scenario planning process could help Greater Birmingham address transportation and land use issues through building consensus among diverse stakeholder groups.

## II. Introduction

RPCGB is the MPO for two counties and 48 communities, including the City of Birmingham. It is the regional planning organization (RPO) for four counties and 36 communities. Combined, RPCGB's jurisdiction includes six counties and 84 communities within Central Alabama (see Figures 1 and 2). The City of Birmingham, the region's cultural, economic, and political hub, is the most populous city in Alabama. Suburban development surrounds Birmingham and small towns are located throughout the entire Greater Birmingham region. There is also a significant amount of rural land where parks, farming, forestry, and mining activities are located.

RPCGB is preparing to update the metropolitan planning area's long-range transportation plan (LRTP), integrating it with an area-wide land use plan and individual transportation plans for rural communities. The organization would like to use scenario planning as an approach to help focus its efforts. Several challenges exist that RPCGB believes will affect its efforts. For example, the region is experiencing current and future funding constraints, difficulty articulating shared regional goals, abandonment and decline of some areas despite job and population growth in other areas, the decline of the manufacturing industry, and the rise of both the logistics and biomedical industries.

During the workshop, representatives from RPCGB sought to convene local stakeholders to inform them about scenario planning process steps and to learn from SPC's scenario planning experiences. RPCGB also sought to obtain initial feedback on how the agency could involve stakeholders in a regional scenario planning effort.



Figure 1: Map of counties and major highways in Greater Birmingham (map courtesy of RPCGB).



Figure 2: Greater Birmingham within Alabama (map from [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)).

## III. Summary of Presentations

### Federal Perspective on Scenario Planning

*Fred Bowers, FHWA Headquarters*

*Rae Keasler, FHWA Headquarters*

*Alisa Fine, Volpe Center*

*Jim Thorne, FHWA Resource Center*

FHWA and Volpe Center staff introduced the scenario planning process and described how it can be used to guide regional development.

Scenario planning provides a framework for developing a shared vision for the future by analyzing various forces that affect transportation and testing future alternatives to see how well they meet community or regional needs. The approach helps a community identify priorities, envision its ideal “future self,” and evaluate what combination of policies, strategies, or actions could best realize the desired future state. Scenario planning practitioners can assess scenarios using qualitative or quantitative approaches. A key feature of the approach is extensive public involvement to solicit feedback on current trends, scenarios, and analyses. MPOs interested in conducting scenario planning can use State Planning and Research, Federal metropolitan planning, Federal Surface Transportation Program, and National Highway System funds.

FHWA supports scenario planning practitioners by sponsoring webinars and workshops and by providing assistance through the [FHWA scenario planning website](#).

FHWA also supports practitioners through the [FHWA Scenario Planning Guidebook](#). The guidebook outlines a six-phase framework that guides practitioners to implement a complete scenario planning process (see Figure 3). The six phases offer a non-prescriptive approach that agencies can tailor to meet their needs. Each phase focuses on a different component of scenario planning, including getting started, establishing goals and aspirations, developing and assessing scenarios, and implementing an action plan. These phases provided a point of departure for SPC’s discussion of its scenario planning effort.

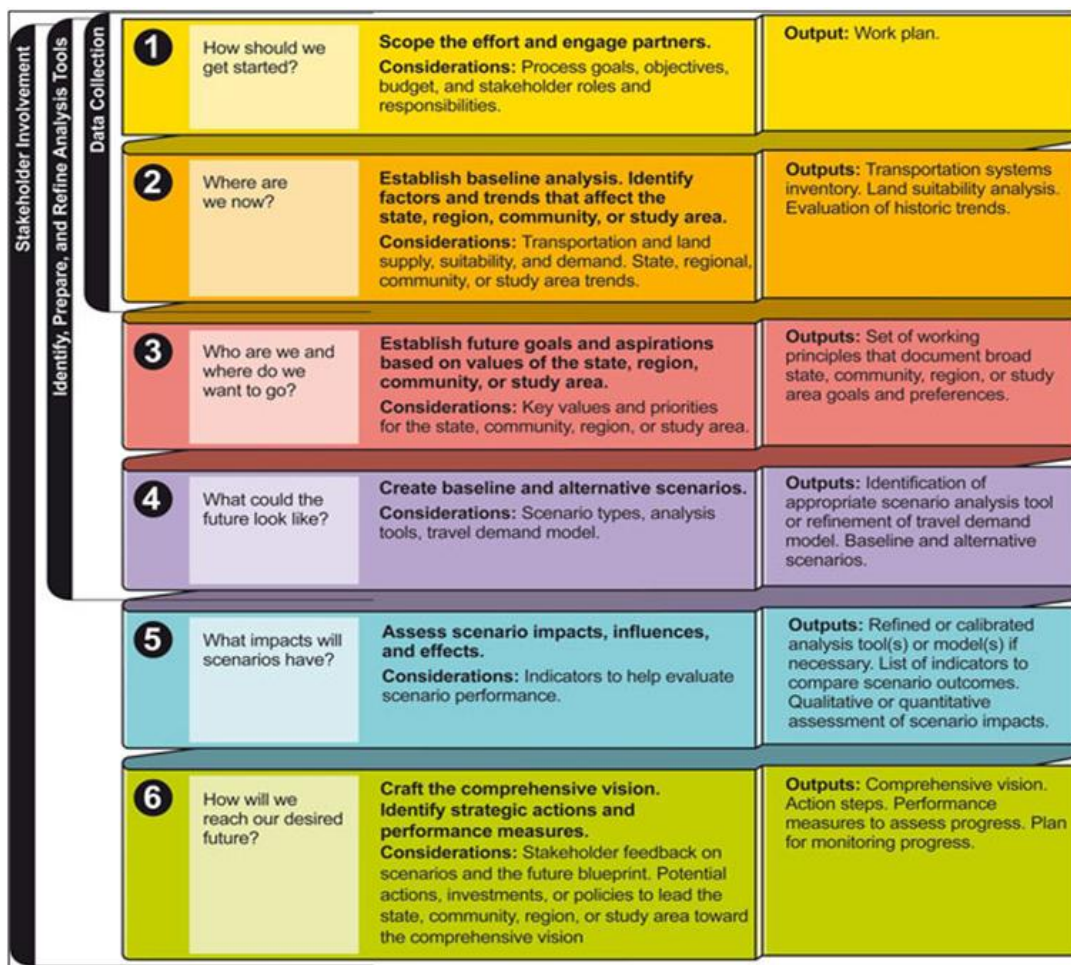


Figure 3: Scenario Planning process steps (graphic courtesy of FHWA).

Mr. Thorne presented several scenario planning case studies relevant to Birmingham that illustrate how the approach can address different types of issues and provide a range of benefits. These benefits include:

- Engaging the community in the planning process;
- Educating decision-makers and the public on issues associated with the interaction of land use and transportation decisions;
- Facilitating a more robust planning process to consider the interaction among transportation, land use, environmental issues, economic development, and public health;
- Offering a means to explore the “what ifs” of an unknown future; and
- Providing an approach to facilitate communication and collaboration across a range of disciplines and interest areas.

Examples of case studies are presented below:

- [Chittenden County MPO](#) (CCMPO), the MPO for the Burlington, Vermont region provides an example of how agencies can use public participation techniques as part of scenario planning. As an element of developing their Vision 2060 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, CCMPO assessed alternatives for land use patterns and transportation investments and engaged public stakeholders in a “chips” exercise. As part of this exercise, CCMPO provided scenario planning participants with chips representing anticipated development types and amounts; participants then distributed these chips on a map according to their development preferences. The exercise helped engage the community in thinking about the future and the consequences of different development patterns
- [Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission](#) (DVRPC), the MPO for the Greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, region, illustrates how scenarios can help communities assess the impacts of current and anticipated trends. DVRPC used a scenario planning approach to inform its transportation planning process. The agency initially created 12 scenarios that explored a range of issues associated with development patterns, demographics, and economic considerations. These initial scenarios were considered in a more qualitative manner. DVRPC then narrowed the initial scenarios and conducted a more quantitative assessment of five scenarios. The agency considered which of these scenarios was best for the region, most likely to happen, the worst case, and what could the region do to prepare for the worst case possibility. The goal of the process was not to develop a final plan but to use insights and knowledge gained through the exercise to inform development of the plan.
- [Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization \(MTPo\) for the Gainesville Urbanized Area](#), the MPO for north-central Florida, illustrates how scenario planning can be used to engage decision-makers in addressing issues associated with better integration of land use and transportation. MTPo used scenario planning to develop its 2025 LRTP in 2005. The MPO developed four scenarios that portrayed a range of possible land development forms. One continued current trends; and others looked at more focused development in core areas, corridors, or activity centers. The public was asked to visualize what the region’s future might look like in 20 years and what they would change in the present. The agency then evaluated scenarios using a few key indicators.
- [Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study](#) (BMTS), the MPO for the Binghamton, New York, region, provides an example of a scenario planning effort conducted in a low-growth region. BMTS conducted a two-year scenario planning exercise in the mid-2000s. The effort sought to assess policies that encouraged development along the city’s edges and policies that would support Binghamton’s core district, which was losing population and businesses. Through a series of workshops and visioning exercises, BMTS found that the community preferred a scenario that supported development in Binghamton’s core district. Ultimately, BMTS updated the

L RTP to focus transportation investment in core areas and associated policies that would address concerns and opportunities raised during the study process.

- [Capital District Transportation Committee](#) (CDTC), the MPO for the Albany, New York region, demonstrates the use of scenario planning to link regional goals, priorities, and outcomes. CDTC used a scenario planning approach to consider trends and guided development patterns as well as low- and high-growth scenarios. CDTC has developed a “linkages” program that connects local development efforts with implementation of the regional transportation plan. Through this program, a local agency can obtain technical assistance and funding to better integrate the proposed development or policy changes, provided they support principles and policies in the regional transportation plan such as street connectivity, town center and corridor development, and mixed-use growth.

### **Land Use, Economic, and Transportation Trends in the Greater Birmingham Region**

*Brett Isom, RPCGB*

*Mike Shattuck, Birmingham Business Alliance*

Mr. Isom presented on current demographic and other trends affecting the Greater Birmingham region. There is overall population growth across Greater Birmingham; however, some communities within the region are growing quickly and others are declining in population. The fastest population growth is occurring to the south and to the northeast of the City of Birmingham, generally following major Interstate (I) highway corridors such as Interstate I-59 and I-65. Despite this growth, there are large areas that are underutilized and present opportunities for redevelopment. The region is characterized by generally low housing density due to extensive suburban and rural development patterns.

Mr. Shattuck discussed business and industrial trends in the region. Greater Birmingham is the westernmost region in the Piedmont-Atlantic megaregion (defined as a clustered network of cities) and is the most economically productive region in Alabama. Although growing more slowly than other cities in the megaregion, Birmingham remains the economic center of Alabama and provides 33 percent of the State's gross domestic product.

Mr. Shattuck identified financial services, healthcare services, and trade and distribution as the region's key industries. All of these industries are concentrated in Birmingham. Emerging sectors include biomedical and biotech research, arts, and entertainment and tourism, all of which are particularly concentrated in downtown Birmingham. However, districts surrounding highway interchanges are also receiving new commercial and industrial development. A standard suburban-to-urban commuting trend prevails. However, RPCGB staff reported that there is a growing reverse commute from urban areas to suburban industrial and office parks as well as an emerging suburb-to-suburb commute.

### **Scenario Planning in Southwestern Pennsylvania**

*Lew Villotti, SPC*

Mr. Villotti noted that there are many similarities between SPC's and RPCGB's regions. In fact, Birmingham is

#### **Greater Birmingham facts**

- 6 counties, 4,744 square miles
- 1.1 million residents
- 9 colleges and universities, 43,000 students total
- 2.55 persons/household
- 36,000 companies
- \$47,000 median annual income
- 489,500 jobs

#### **Key economic sectors**

- Finance
- Healthcare
- Trade and distribution

#### **Southwestern Pennsylvania facts**

- 11 counties, 7,112 square miles
- 2.6 million residents
- 30 colleges and universities, 150,000 students
- 2.38 persons/household
- 114,000 companies
- 1 percent annual population growth by 2035

#### **Key economic sectors**

- Healthcare
- Retail
- Government



colloquially known as the “Pittsburgh of the South.” Although Southwestern Pennsylvania is geographically larger and has a larger population, the region is addressing some of the same economic issues that are affecting Greater Birmingham. Both regions have strong industrial pasts but have been affected by the decline in this sector over the latter half of the last century. Additionally, both regions are experiencing loss of tax revenue and population in some areas and growth in others.

Workshop participants believed that SPC provided a very relevant model for the Greater Birmingham region. Because scenario planning was successful in southwestern Pennsylvania, participants believed that the process could also support Greater Birmingham’s goals.

SPC used a scenario planning process to develop the [2035 TDP for Southwestern Pennsylvania](#). The plan integrated the region’s LRTP and its comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS).<sup>1</sup> The scenario planning effort took three and a half years, a length of time that Mr. Villotti attributed to difficulty finding information about appropriate scenario planning software and scenario planning process steps. By engaging in scenario planning, SPC sought to encourage public buy-in to and enthusiasm for the transportation planning process. During prior efforts to complete the *2035 Transportation and Development Plan (TDP)*, the public had expressed mistrust in the process and a concern that the process was not transparent.

Before implementing its scenario planning effort, SPC identified best practices to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. SPC drew on FHWA and academic research on scenario planning (particularly research conducted by Keith Bartholomew, Assistant Professor in the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Utah)<sup>2</sup> to improve the quality of the process.

#### Getting Started with Scenario Planning

SPC initiated its scenario planning effort by setting up basic ground rules. The agency decided from the start to:

- Be inclusive of all stakeholders;
- Be transparent and interactive with the public; and
- Value every community, group, and aspect of southwestern Pennsylvania.

To address these guidelines, SPC framed scenario planning as a conversation with the region and used public feedback as the main input to develop scenarios, regional priorities, and the final regional vision. For example, SPC ensured that public materials associated with the scenario planning effort were easy to understand, interesting, and interactive.<sup>3</sup> SPC branded scenario planning as “Project Region,” a name it believed was easy to remember, and invited technical experts, 400 registered partner organizations, the public, and other stakeholders to help SPC gather necessary information.

#### **Lessons Learned: Getting Started with Scenario Planning**

- Have clear goals and a commitment to scenario planning from the start of the project.
- Public participation is key to scenario planning.
- Keep the number of scenarios manageable: more than four or five scenarios can be overwhelming.
- GIS-based analysis tools, such as INDEX, can facilitate scenario evaluation and help the public better understand scenarios.

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<sup>1</sup> As an MPO, SPC is required to produce a LRTP to guide transportation investments if the region is to receive Federal transportation funding. Many MPOs also produce CEDS, which help a region retain or attract businesses. CEDS are required if a region is to receive Economic Development Administration funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

<sup>2</sup> Additional information on Dr. Bartholomew’s scenario planning research is available on the FHWA scenario planning website at [www.fhwa.dot.gov/Planning/scenplan/resources.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/Planning/scenplan/resources.htm).

<sup>3</sup> More information on Project Region is available at <http://www.projectregion.org/>

Drawing from this feedback and existing planning documents from SPC, counties, and municipalities, SPC created several hundred scenarios and then used public involvement and internal analyses to refine these into four draft scenarios, as described below:

- **Trend Scenario** – Current trends continue with scattered investment across the region. Density is medium to low. Highways are the prime factor in new development.
- **Dispersed/Fringe Scenario** – Suburban development accelerates. Infrastructure investments encourage low-density development with segregated uses in locations far from the urban core that are easily accessible by new highways but difficult to reach by transit. This scenario is an amplified version of the current trend.
- **Compact/Infill/Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Scenario** – Regional infrastructure investment focuses on maximizing use on existing developed land by redeveloping low-density areas and remediating industrial land for commercial and residential development. This scenario maximizes pedestrian and transit accessibility.
- **Corridor/Cluster Scenario** – Growth is highly focused around existing and newly built transportation corridors, both passenger highways and transit and industrial railways and waterways. This scenario maximizes mobility and requires some new development.

SPC used INDEX, a geographic information systems (GIS)-based software, to create maps showing where development would occur under each scenario.<sup>4</sup> The tool helped SPC compile large amounts of data on housing, transportation, economics, environmental quality, zoning, and other variables and view how different scenarios might affect these variables. SPC then scored scenarios according to a set of indicators such as quantity of land developed in acres, percentage of houses within walking radius of transit, cost of infrastructure, and development density.

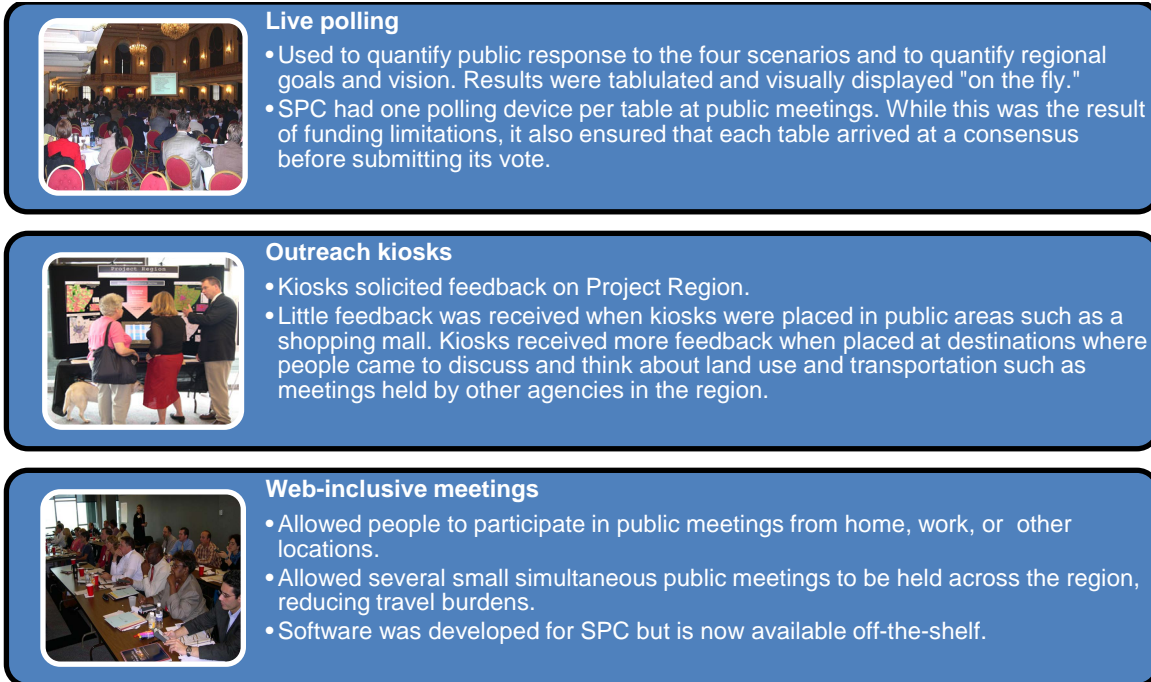
In addition to public feedback, other inputs to scenarios included existing planning documents, mapping data, census data, public comments, and consultations with major stakeholders. Every policy statement in the *2035 TDP* was linked back to county and municipality planning documents to facilitate local acceptance and implementation of the regional plan.

### Outreach Strategy

As part of its outreach strategy for Project Region, SPC implemented a series of innovative public workshops and other events. The agency conducted 10 workshops attended by over 800 participants. The purpose of the workshops was to inform the public about Project Region, build consensus on a regional vision, and solicit public input on what scenario best matched the regional vision. Figure 4 provides details on additional technologies and techniques that SPC used to support public participation. Some technologies were developed specifically for the project; however, Mr. Villotti noted that most of the hardware and software that SPC previously utilized is now available off-the-shelf and is cheaper and easier to use.

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<sup>4</sup> INDEX is produced by Criterion as a plug-in to ESRI's ArcGIS. Additional information on INDEX is available at <http://www.crit.com/>.



**Figure 4: Technologies used by SPC to enhance public participation and involvement (all images courtesy of SPC).**

SPC believed that there was some mistrust among the SPC region’s residents. To address this, SPC tried to foster a regional perspective during workshops and public events by helping residents understand that they relied on other parts of the region to live, work, and engage in recreational activities. For example, SPC asked rural residents where they would go if they needed a medical operation, urban residents where they would go to enjoy nature, and suburban residents where they work.

SPC also sought to avoid using terms such as “sustainability” that might have multiple meanings and were controversial in the region. To assist the public in neutrally assessing scenarios, SPC considered using numbers or letters to identify scenario alternatives (e.g., “Scenario 1”) rather than text labels (e.g., “Infill Scenario”); however, the agency ultimately determined that the public would respond better to labeled scenarios.

Live electronic polling allowed the public to evaluate scenarios “on the fly.” The public expressed the most interest in the compact/infill/TOD and the corridor/cluster scenarios. These were merged to create a regional vision scenario, which focused on improving existing developed areas and maximizing use along existing transportation corridors.

- Lessons Learned: Outreach**
- Schedule meetings around the region and allow online access to maximize participation.
  - Begin meetings by helping people recognize they stand on common ground with others.
  - Provide an opportunity for qualitative feedback.
  - Use neutral labels for scenarios.
  - Avoid controversial terms to describe scenarios or goals of the effort.

## Outcomes and Implementation

The regional vision scenario was adopted into the *2035 TDP*. The TDP is now used to guide economic development and transportation decisions in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Smaller communities that cannot afford extensive planning staff or complex studies also refer to the *2035 TDP* as a de facto planning code.

Unlike previous transportation and economic plans, the *2035 TDP* can help compare and quantify the impacts of proposed development or infrastructure with the regional vision. If a proposed project is in line with the regional vision scenario, SPC supports the project with business development programs, low-cost loans and financing, export assistance, procurement assistance, and other services. A project that does not advance the regional vision scenario can still proceed, but must do so without SPC's support.

### Benefits and Challenges

Overall, SPC believed that its use of scenario planning helped:

- Encourage public acceptance and buy-in to transportation planning;
- Develop a document that could be used to “test” proposed projects for the region; and
- Provide extensive detail on a regional vision yet remain flexible to changing public input.

SPC encountered several challenges in implementing scenario planning. For example, SPC had difficulty identifying a sufficient number of staff to assist with the scenario planning effort. Additionally, when starting the effort, the agency was not able to obtain sufficient information about scenario planning process steps, and guidance about how to choose appropriate software and analysis tools. New Federal scenario planning resources, including the FHWA scenario planning website and the *Scenario Planning Guidebook*, have since helped address these challenges. SPC believed that future scenario planning efforts will significantly benefit from these and other resources.

Combining scenarios using INDEX was not difficult; however, technical issues sometimes manifested themselves and required extensive time to identify and address. However, SPC believed that new improvements to the software would help mitigate any technical challenges.

### **Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities**

*Lilly Shoup, USDOT OST*

*Rachel Kirby, HUD*

*Anne Keller, Ph.D., EPA Region 4*

The [Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities](#) is an initiative led by USDOT, HUD, and EPA to promote health, environmental and quality of life improvements by making improvements to the built environment.<sup>5</sup> The Partnership coordinates funding, policy development, and professional capacity development among the three agencies and their partners to support six Federal livability principles:

- Provide more transportation choices;
- Promote equitable, affordable housing;
- Enhance economic competitiveness;
- Support existing communities;

### **Lessons Learned: Outcomes and Implementation**

- Use existing resources to minimize cost and maximize effectiveness.
- Be prepared for extensive time demands on existing staff; consider whether to hire contractors to support staff efforts.
- Consider whether incentives and disincentives exist for projects that enhance or detract from the final regional vision scenario. If none exist, assess whether these can be created and by whom.

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<sup>5</sup> Additional information on the Partnership is available at [www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/partnership/](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/partnership/).

- Coordinate and leverage Federal policies and investment; and
- Value communities and neighborhoods.

Representatives from USDOT OST, HUD, and EPA attended the workshop to discuss the Partnership, their agencies' work, and funding that might be available to support livable and sustainable efforts in the Greater Birmingham region, including scenario planning efforts that address livability and sustainability topics. Additional details on the Partnership's funding resources are located in [Appendix B](#). Details on USDOT, HUD, and EPA's presentations are provided below.

Ms. Shoup presented on USDOT's policies and work on sustainable communities. She identified resources that could assist the Greater Birmingham region to use scenario planning to guide the region's transportation and economic vision, and fund projects consistent with a preferred scenario. USDOT's role in the Sustainable Communities Partnership focuses on providing sustainable and livable transportation options. Examples include grants to support transit, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements along with projects to improve safety on roadways.

"The Partnership for Sustainable Communities works to coordinate [F]ederal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution."

- [www.sustainablecommunities.gov](http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov)

Ms. Kirby presented on HUD's efforts to create sustainable communities. HUD does not mandate building locations but instead encourages redevelopment and infill rather than new development in outlying areas. HUD's role in the Sustainable Communities Partnership focuses on promoting housing locations and characteristics that support the Federal livability principles.

Dr. Keller presented on the EPA's efforts to create sustainable communities. EPA's role in the Sustainable Communities Partnership focuses on promoting environmental quality through land cleanup and reuse, runoff prevention programs, air quality initiatives, programs that support environmental justice for underserved communities, and efforts to improve energy efficiency. EPA has funded over 30 projects across Region 4 as part of the Partnership.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. Summary of Group Discussions

Workshop participants had several opportunities during two small group breakout sessions to discuss speakers' presentations and how lessons learned could be applied to the Greater Birmingham region. Highlights from these small group discussions are outlined on the next page. The complete list of responses is included in [Appendix A](#).



Workshop participants during a discussion session (image courtesy of RPCGB).

<sup>6</sup> Region 4 includes the southeastern U.S., including Greater Birmingham and all of Alabama.

The first breakout session focused how Greater Birmingham could apply lessons learned from Southwestern Pennsylvania. Participants at each table discussed three pre-documented questions and then reported on their discussions to the whole group. The following were common themes and ideas that recurred across tables:

- **What ideas from SPC's presentation were most relevant to Greater Birmingham?**
  - Involve all stakeholders in the process;
  - Hold innovative public meetings and conduct interactive outreach such as through the use of electronic polling and community involvement activities; and
  - Be willing and technically able to change scenarios as the process unfolds.
  
- **What concepts can guide RPCGB's scenario planning/regional transportation plan process?**
  - Regional decisions should prioritize enhancing quality of life;
  - The Birmingham region should provide diverse places for diverse people; and
  - There is a need for regional identity if regional planning is to be successful.
  
- **What expectations do you have for RPCGB's scenario planning/regional transportation plan process?**
  - Make sure that public meetings are genuine, interesting, and participatory. Raise the public's expectations and then exceed them;
  - Keep lines of communication open with regional stakeholders; and
  - Be on time and on budget. The scenario planning effort should not take such a long time that Greater Birmingham has significantly changed as a region between the start and end of the process.

The second breakout session focused on how scenario planning might work if applied to Greater Birmingham. Participants at each table discussed a series of questions and then reported on their discussions to the whole group. The following were common themes and ideas that participants raised:

- **What would a successful scenario planning process look like for Greater Birmingham?**
  - A useful document that is easy to implement (the best case is that it is adopted as law by individual jurisdictions in Greater Birmingham);
  - Innovating and engaging public meetings held at venues across the region; and
  - Stakeholders, government representatives, and the public understand the process of scenario planning.
  
- **What are the key issues that should be addressed by a scenario planning effort?**
  - Maintaining and improving existing infrastructure with static or declining funding;
  - Lack of partnerships and shared identity between urban, suburban, and rural areas; and
  - Improving quality of life across the region.
  
- **Who would be the key stakeholders and local champions for a scenario planning effort?**
  - Developers, realtors, and other private interests;
  - Elected officials from all levels of government, including state and Federal government; and
  - Advocates and community leaders from across the region.
  
- **What resources does Birmingham have now for scenario planning?**
  - Data;
  - Technology, including modeling systems and electronic polling equipment;
  - Skilled staff at local government agencies;
  - Local contractors;
  - Interested locals; and
  - A need for regional planning and time to plan before economic recovery.

- **What resources does Birmingham need for scenario planning?**
  - Cooperation, particularly from the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and landowners;
  - Funding;
  - Champions to help initiate and continue the process;
  - Additional data;
  - Scope and a set of goals for the effort; and
  - Commitment from stakeholders.
  
- **What do you think are the most beneficial aspects of scenario planning for Greater Birmingham?**
  - Getting everybody “on the same page” to identify shared interests;
  - Increasing regionalism for all areas of Greater Birmingham; and
  - Producing a regional vision to unite residents, communities, and industries.
  
- **What might be some challenges of scenario planning for Greater Birmingham?**
  - Lack of certainty or predictability of transportation funding at all levels; and
  - Previous local long-range plans have lacked strength.

## V. Conclusion

The workshop successfully conveyed critical concepts of scenario planning to participants and disseminated lessons learned from a similar effort in a comparable region. Participants had opportunities to hear from several Federal staff involved in the Partnership to learn more about what Federal resources are available to assist the Greater Birmingham region with implementing scenario planning. Participants were also able to discuss what they learned and how they believed scenario planning could be applied to the region.

Evaluation forms collected from participants after the workshop indicated that they learned a significant amount from the speakers, each other, and from Federal staff. In fact, participants believed that the Partnership session was one of the most useful of the workshop. Overall, participants expressed satisfaction with the content and structure of the workshop and demonstrated enthusiasm for scenario planning.

“This was a very informative and useful workshop. These techniques will help us to move Birmingham forward [and make] smarter investments in transportation.”

- Birmingham workshop participant

RPCGB intends to continue the momentum from the workshop by using scenario planning to complete the next update of its regional transportation plan. The agency believes that a scenario planning effort could help the Greater Birmingham region and its residents move forward to identify and reach a preferred future.

## Appendix A: Small Group Discussion Questions and Responses

This appendix provides a record of responses received during two small-group discussions held during the workshop. The first discussion helped attendees connect scenario planning to the Birmingham region and identify components from SPC's experiences that would be particularly relevant for the region. The second discussion provided an opportunity for participants to consider in detail how scenario planning could work in the region.

### Discussion One

What are the top three ideas most relevant to the greater Birmingham region that you learned from SPC's presentation?

- The actual process, including live polling.
- Financing the plan. There is a need to be proactive in soliciting private and non-profit funding.
- Community involvement. Everyone needs to participate.
- End results should guide project selection process.
- Involve stakeholders early and often, especially through web-based participation.
- Final scenario can be a hybrid and a guideline. SPC merged two early scenarios.
- Need to be flexible to change.
- Collect the voice of the community.
- Choose relevant stakeholders.
- Obtain input from outlying counties.
- Foster regional participation to engage all residents.
- Use electronic polling.
- Use non-jargon and non-polarizing words.
- Get full engagement from the USDOT and private partners.
- Encourage consensus in small groups at meetings.
- Transit should be a regional issue, not just an issue for the core.
- Transit is a divisive social and racial issue for the Birmingham region.
- Bring all partners, advocates, and critics to the table.
- Determine where you want to focus the investment of all public dollars.
- Straw polls can help foster accountability.
- Encourage large-scale public participation.
- SPC and RPCGB share many similar characteristics.
- Show the cumulative impacts of projects.
- Involve policy-makers in the process.
- How to combine opposing solutions into a compromise.
- Baselines and current conditions need to be known.

What values might guide future transportation planning in the greater Birmingham region?

- Recognize and promote existing neighborhoods within Birmingham and surrounding communities.
- Support and use existing developed areas and infrastructure before expanding.
- Community gateways can help create a sense of place.
- Improve inclusiveness and equity of access to services.
- Improve safety in all of its forms.
- Evaluate existing communities, perhaps Pittsburgh, to provide a benchmark.

What are your expectations from RPCGB's regional plan development process?

- Ensure genuine outreach to the community.
- Maintain transparency.
- Have original, interesting public meetings.
- Be open and honest, inclusive, fair, objective, and informative.



- Finish on time and on budget.
- Raise the public's expectations and then exceed them.
- Build trust with and between stakeholders.
- Develop a realistic, implementable plan from the start.
- Talk to the private sector.
- Be transparent, well researched, and make sure conversations are documented.
- Keep an objective and non-biased perspective.
- The tough, institutional issues surrounding transit in greater Birmingham should be on the table from day one of the process.
- Don't think of transportation modes as separate; be multimodal instead of having modal-allegiance.
- Keep everybody on the same page at the same time and ensure coordination.

## Discussion Two

What would a successful scenario planning/regional transportation plan process in the greater Birmingham region look like for this group?

Recurring themes from tables:

- Ensure the final plan is easy to consult and understand and that it is a useful tool to guide transportation and development.
- The final plan should include genuine public input gathered at highly attended meetings across the region.
- The planning process should be fast and cost effective. The plan should not bankrupt RPCGB, and it should be produced quickly so that Greater Birmingham has not changed between the start of the process and publication of the plan.

All responses:

- Produce a useful plan to guide policy-makers.
- Best case: the plan should be adopted as law by each jurisdiction.
- The plan has to have teeth.
- Problem is that elected officials move out with the elections.
- Highlight the good things that planning can bring.
- Identify real needs in the planning process.
- Inclusiveness should be a metric of success.
- Focus on planning strategies rather than the planning process.
- Avoid discussing specific projects during scenario planning, this can create unneeded controversy.
- Determine how the public sector will be involved.
- Genuine participation in the plan, buy-in from stakeholders and attendance at meetings.
- Incorporate positive and negative feedback.
- Diversity of stakeholders is a sign of success.
- Funding should not be a problem.
- Supplement existing staff with contractors or staff from other agencies.
- Take advantage of multiple venues across the region.
- Ensure a high level of participation from the public.
- Electronic polling to get a sense of the room.
- Need buy-in from ALDOT.
- Stakeholder support and understanding of the process, not just the ideas.
- GIS is a powerful tool.
- The final product should be conclusive.
- Timely completion and implementation of the plan.
- Obtain buy-in from all.

What issues should be brought together in the scenario planning process (e.g., economic development, fuel prices, disaster recovery, water conservation)?

- Address regional topography, which can create natural limits and barriers.
- Consider infrastructure costs, including maintenance and construction.
- Consider and address local geopolitics. There are local issues created by borders.
- Regional problems need regional funding.
- Lack of transit and the need for geographic coverage.
- Poor relationships between urban areas, suburbs, small towns, and rural areas.
- Cultural, economic, geographic, political, and jurisdictional concerns.
- Safety issues.
- Negative perception of density by many.
- Socioeconomic issues.
- Questions about where people can make a smart housing choice that is also a good investment.
- Quality of life, including access to good schools, etc.
- Fear and mistrust of gentrification brought about by making improvements.
- Assessment of existing infrastructure to guide investment.
- Redevelopment versus new development. Redevelopment can better utilize existing infrastructure.
- Changing demographics and an aging population.
- Include the young in the scenario planning process. They will have to live with the results longer.
- Congestion management.
- Access to healthcare and food.
- Fiscal sustainability.

As the Greater Birmingham region moves forward with scenario planning, who should be involved? Who would be the core stakeholders and local champions?

- Academia.
- Agriculture, forestry, mining.
- Airport.
- Alabama Roadbuilders Association.
- ALDOT.
- Daily transportation users.
- Developers.
- Planning commission.
- School superintendents.
- Utilities; e.g., gas, water, telecom, sewer.
- Environmentalists.
- Elected officials.
- Employers.
- Freight community.
- Media.
- Neighborhood groups.
- Public housing authorities.
- Students.
- Social service agencies.
- State and Federal Government.
- Transit riders and commuters.
- Transit authority.
- Realtors.
- Road builders and contractors.
- Residents.
- Religious community.
- Younger people.

Based on what you know about scenario planning so far, what resources do we already have for scenario planning and what resources would we need?

What we have:

- Data.
- Technology.
- Modeling tools to use data.
- Electronic poll equipment.
- Staff.
- Contractors to supplement staff time.
- Interested locals.
- Knowledge.
- Need for regional planning.
- Time to plan. It is cost-effective to plan during a recession. This would facilitate implementing a plan when the economy picks up.

What we need:

- Cooperation, especially from landowners and ALDOT.
- Funding.
- Champions to help initiate and guide the process.
- A point person to represent the process.
- More data collection.
- A scope and set of goals.
- Commitment from stakeholders.
- Inventory of existing processes and plans.

What about scenario planning do you think would be most useful to the greater Birmingham region, and what about it might be challenging?

- Simply getting everybody into a room to talk about shared values and concerns will be very useful.
- Helping this group articulate their shared regional vision would help Greater Birmingham.
- Fostering genuine regionalism will also be useful.
- The certainty or predictability of transportation funding from Federal and State sources would be useful.
- The precedent of weak long-range plans could hinder the process.
- Getting started will be a challenge.
- Finding common ground between diverse people representing diverse interests and lifestyles will be challenging.

## Appendix B: Sustainable Communities Funding Opportunities

### USDOT

- [The FHWA Transportation and System and Community Preservation Grant program](#). Although earmark based in the past, these grants are now competitive and points based. They provide funding to smaller projects that meet sustainable community principles.
- The [Federal Transit Administration Livability Grant](#) program provides funding to help communities use transit to meet sustainable community principles. It mixes money from the Bus and Facilities Program and the Alternatives Analysis program.
- The [Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery \(TIGER\)](#) program provides larger grant awards to fund projects that use transportation to meet broad national objectives, including livability. TIGER grants are highly competitive and have a strong performance management and accountability focus.

### HUD

- [Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants](#) have \$70 million available to support regional planning efforts that focus on creating or enhancing sustainable communities. Of this funding, \$17.5 million has gone to smaller regions with fewer than 500,000 residents. The minimum amount of an individual grant is \$500,000; and the maximum amount is \$5 million. It requires a 20 percent local match, but higher matches are more competitive.
- [Community Challenge Planning Grants](#) have \$30 million available to help the planning departments of municipalities, counties, and MPOs update their plans, especially toward reducing barriers to sustainable development. Examples could be amending or replacing master plans, reforming zoning codes to allow mixed-use development, and modifying building codes to allow lower parking minimums or increase a building's height.
- The [Capacity Building for Sustainable Communities Grant Program](#) has \$5.65 million available toward the professional side of creating and enhancing sustainable communities. This money can be used to hire experts and contractors or to fund professional development for staff.

### EPA

- The [Brownfields and Land Revitalization Program](#) helps remove environmental contaminants from land in order to reduce environmental risks to nearby people and the ecosystem. In a livable communities context, this program can help to make industrial or ex-industrial areas safer for sustainable mixed-use development.
- The [Climate Showcase Communities Program](#) helps local and Tribal governments plan and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation projects. Such projects include increasing energy efficiency, implementing smart growth planning policies, and reducing landfill waste. The EPA does not anticipate offering more funding for this program.
- The [Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program](#) awards governments time with consultants and technical experts to receive help with local policy reform or help running the public participatory process.
- The [Sustainable Communities Building Blocks](#) program provides smaller awards for targeted technical assistance such as providing complete streets, scoring water quality, and implementing smart growth policy, pedestrian policy, and others listed on the program webpage.
- The [Greening America's Capitals](#) project is a pilot program to help three to five state capital cities per year with technical assistance reforming local land use policy, and planning parks and waterways. The intention is that these projects act as models to encourage state legislatures and individual communities within the states to adopt sustainable community principles.

## Appendix C: Workshop Agenda

### 7:45-8:15 Check-in and Registration

### 8:15-8:30 Welcome and Introduction

Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) Executive Director Charles Ball, RPCGB Board of Directors' Chairwoman and City of Birmingham Councilor Valerie Abbott, and the Birmingham metropolitan planning organization Board of Directors' Chairman and Mayor of the City of Graysville Doug Brewer will welcome participants to the workshop, provide an overview of its purpose and goals, and introduce the workshop's speakers. Darrell Howard, Principal Transportation Planner at RPCGB, will provide an overview of the day's agenda.

### 8:30-9:00 A Federal Perspective on Scenario Planning

FHWA Headquarters, FHWA Resource Center, and U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Volpe Center staff will provide an overview of the FHWA concept of scenario planning, its defining features, and some anticipated benefits of the process. Staff will introduce the *FHWA Scenario Planning Guidebook* and provide an overview of the Guidebook's six phases, explaining how today's workshop fits into this framework. Finally, FHWA Resource Center staff will share relevant examples of how others around the country have implemented scenario planning.

### 9:00-9:30 Land Use, Economic, and Transportation Trends in the Greater Birmingham Region

RPCGB staff and staff from the Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce will present on land use, economic, and transportation trends in the greater Birmingham region. The presentation will focus on the region's growth patterns (residential and commercial), employment trends, emerging activity centers, and their relationship to transportation system investments. The presentation will also highlight future growth trends given past patterns, economic conditions that create new uncertainties, changing trends, and strategies to help future jobs development. Finally, RPCGB staff will reference how these patterns connect to national trends.

### 9:30-9:45 Question and Answer / Morning Break 1

### 9:45-10:45 Peer Presentation 1: Getting Started with Scenario Planning

Two peer speakers from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC)—Planning and Development Director Lew Villotti and Information Systems Director Kirk Brethauer—will present on SPC's scenario planning process. During this presentation, SPC speakers will focus on the early phases of SPC's scenario planning process. They will provide information on the goals and objectives of the process, SPC's initial steps to get started, its work to engage the public and build on a regional visioning process, and lessons learned from these efforts. Connections will be made between SPC's scenario planning effort and the FHWA *Guidebook's* six phases.

### 10:45-11:00 Morning Break 2

### 11:00-11:45 Peer Presentation Part 2: Scenario Planning Outcomes and Implementation

SPC speakers will focus on the later phases of SPC's scenario planning process. The speakers will provide information on how SPC developed scenarios with public input, created scenario indicators, and analyzed and assessed scenario outcomes using INDEX software. They will also share information on implementation and outcomes that have resulted from the scenario planning efforts.

### 11:45-1:15 Working Lunch (buffet lunch provided)

Participants will gather in small groups to consider connections between SPC's scenario planning effort and the greater Birmingham region. Following the small group discussions, participants will report on key points discussed. FHWA Resource Center staff will facilitate this session and help highlight key themes emerging from the discussions.

**1:15-1:45 Overview of Partnership for Sustainable Communities and other Federal Initiatives**

Staff from the Office of the Secretary of Transportation in the USDOT, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development will present on the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities and provide information on other Federal initiatives that could assist the greater Birmingham region as it moves forward to conduct a scenario planning process. Speakers will share examples of success resulting from the Partnership and provide details on how Federal coordination can benefit the greater Birmingham region.

**1:45-2:00 Afternoon Break**

**2:00-3:00 How Scenario Planning Might Work in the Greater Birmingham Region**

Participants will gather in small groups to explore potential next steps to moving forward with scenario planning in the greater Birmingham region. They will discuss what resources might be available to support the effort and what issues should be addressed. Throughout the small group discussions, participants will report on key points discussed. FHWA Resource Center staff will facilitate this session.

**3:00-3:30 Facilitated Question and Answer / Wrap-Up**

Participants will have an opportunity to ask questions about the previous sessions, including the breakout sessions. FHWA Resource Center staff will facilitate this session and will provide a brief summary of key points and highlights discussed during the workshop. RPCGB staff will also share their observations on the day and may identify potential next steps for the region.

## Appendix D: Workshop Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization/Agency</b>
<b>Alicia Rudolph</b>	Volkert & Associates
<b>Alisa Fine</b>	USDOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
<b>Andy Mayo</b>	City of Birmingham
<b>Anne Keller</b>	US Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4
<b>Brett Isom</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Brian Davis</b>	Alabama Department of Transportation
<b>Bryan Fair</b>	Alabama Department of Transportation
<b>Chris Hatcher</b>	Operation New Birmingham
<b>Dan Dahlke</b>	St. Clair County
<b>Darrell Howard</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Dave Harris</b>	Federal Highway Administration, Alabama Division
<b>David Fleming</b>	Main Street Birmingham, Inc.
<b>David Hunke</b>	Shelby County
<b>David Standridge</b>	Blount County Commission
<b>Dawn Landholm</b>	East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission
<b>Donald Wilborn</b>	City of Birmingham
<b>Doug Brewer</b>	City of Graysville
<b>Doug Hale</b>	City of Birmingham
<b>Dr. Frederick Hamilton</b>	Jefferson County
<b>Evan Williams</b>	Jefferson County
<b>Francesca Gross</b>	CAWACO
<b>Fred Bowers</b>	Federal Highway Administration
<b>Gary Richardson</b>	City of Bessemer
<b>George Henry</b>	City of Alabaster
<b>Greg Sheek</b>	Economic Development Partnership of Alabama
<b>Greg Wingo</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Harry He</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Honorable Theoangelo Perkins</b>	Town of Harpersville
<b>Jabo Wagonner</b>	State of Alabama
<b>Jason Fondren</b>	KPS Group
<b>Jeff Pruitt</b>	Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments
<b>Jim Hansen</b>	RBC Bank
<b>Jim Thorne</b>	Federal Highway Administration Resource Center
<b>Joe Knight</b>	Jefferson County Commission
<b>Jonathan Frazier</b>	USDOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center
<b>Keith Johnston</b>	Southern Environmental Law Center
<b>Ken Byrum</b>	City of Hueytown

<b>Kirk Brethauer</b>	Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
<b>Laurel Land</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Lew Villotti</b>	Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
<b>Lilly Shoup</b>	USDOT Office of the Secretary of Transportation
<b>Marshall Farmer</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Martin Edwards-Clark</b>	Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority
<b>Mike Shattuck</b>	Birmingham Business Alliance
<b>Myla Choy</b>	Birmingham Business Alliance
<b>Nan Baldwin</b>	Birmingham Business Alliance
<b>Oscar Berry</b>	US Congresswoman Terri Sewell, AL-7
<b>Patrick Murphy</b>	Birmingham Business Alliance
<b>Rachel Kirby</b>	US Department of Housing and Urban Development
<b>Rae Keasler</b>	Federal Highway Administration
<b>Representative Patricia Todd</b>	State of Alabama
<b>Robert Jilla</b>	Alabama Department of Transportation
<b>Ryan Parker</b>	Jefferson County Department of Health
<b>Sadie Swyne</b>	Conservation Alabama
<b>Scott Cothron, P.E</b>	Sain Engineering
<b>Scott Tillman</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Selena Rodgers</b>	SARCOR, LLC
<b>Senator Linda Coleman</b>	State of Alabama
<b>Sheila Chaffin</b>	Shelby County
<b>Stan Batemon</b>	St. Clair County Commission
<b>Steve Ostaseski</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
<b>Theoangelo Perkins</b>	Town of Harpersville
<b>Thomas Henderson</b>	City of Center Point
<b>Tim Westhoven</b>	City of Hoover
<b>Tom Magee</b>	City of Birmingham
<b>Valerie Abbott</b>	City of Birmingham
<b>Vanessa Hendricks</b>	Chilton County Commission
<b>Virginia Williams</b>	City of Birmingham
<b>Waymon Pitts</b>	Blount County Commission
<b>Yvonne Murray</b>	Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham