

WARNER ROBINS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY (WRATS)

2040 LRTP

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

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Introduction

As part of public outreach and involvement for the 2040 WRATS Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), a series of stakeholder interviews were conducted between early January and March 2015. This document summarizes what we heard from stakeholders about transportation and development issues in the Warner Robins Region.

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders were contacted from a list compiled by WRATS of agency representatives with unique and divergent perspectives on transportation and development issues in the Warner Robins region. Stakeholders represent agencies involved in the business and civic communities, minority communities, educational and cultural institutions, transportation professionals, major employers, and governmental entities including the military. Stakeholders were also selected to get a good geographic distribution reflective of various communities in the Warner Robins Region.

Stakeholders

Robins AFB/78 th CES	Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Hispanic Ministry
Middle Georgia Regional Commission	Central Georgia Technical College
Robins Regional Chamber of Commerce	Middle Georgia State College-Warner Robins
Perry Chamber of Commerce	Georgia Military College-Warner Robins
Houston County Development Authority	Fort Valley State University-Warner Robins
Warner Robins Redevelopment Agency	City of Warner Robins-Safety
Downtown Development Authority	Houston County NAACP
21 st Century Partnership	Byron Main Street/Downtown Development Authority
Perry-Houston County Airport	100 Black Men of Macon-Middle Georgia
Houston Healthcare	True Light Transportation
Latin American Association of Middle Georgia	

Each potential Stakeholder was contacted at least twice by email and called at least once if they did not respond to the emails or there were reasons to believe that the email address was incorrect or the email was not delivered correctly. From the list of 21 potential stakeholders, 10 stakeholders provided either detailed interviews or responses to a questionnaire meant to elicit their opinion on regional transportation and development issues. The questionnaire is shown below. All stakeholders were informed that, whatever their response to individual questions, what we really wanted was their perspective on what transportation issues were important to consider in the development of the WRATS 2040 LRTP. Stakeholders were assured of the anonymity of their response as a means to get unbiased answers.

Stakeholder Questionnaire

**WRATS 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan
Stakeholder Interview Questions**

**Name/Org –
Date/Time –**

1. How would you rate the existing transportation system in WR? (i.e. Good/Fair/Poor/Other/Don't Know)
 - a) Safety/Accidents
 - b) Peak hour traffic congestion
 - c) Maintenance
 - d) Bicycle System
 - e) Walkability/Pedestrian Systems
 - f) Truck Traffic and Commercial freight service (truck/rail)
 - g) Traffic Operations (i.e. traffic signal timing/coordination/access management)
 - h) Transit System

2. What changes do you see happening in WR over the next 20-25 years? What changes to the transportation system are needed?

3. Which 3 issues are most important to address in the 2040 LRTP? i.e.
 - a) Maintenance/repair of existing transportation infrastructure
 - b) New roads or added capacity on roads
 - c) Improved safety
 - d) Improved road operations and traffic signal timing
 - e) Developing a transit system
 - f) Additional bicycle and pedestrian facilities
 - g) Truck routing and access
 - h) Improved road signage, wayfinding and directions

4. Are there particular projects or types of projects that you think need emphasis? i.e. safety, transit, road maintenance, road capacity, bicycle, pedestrian, freight?

5. Are there particular corridors or areas that need transportation improvements?

6. Who do you think needs to be engaged in the LRTP planning process?

7. Do you think funding is adequate for maintenance and improvements to the transportation system? (yes/no) If not, how do you think additional funds should be raised and by whom i.e. sales tax, fuel tax, fees, at the state level, or at the local level?

8. What types of transportation improvements do you see as being most beneficial to the economy and retention/creation of jobs?

9. What types of transportation improvements do you see as being most beneficial to the region's quality of life

10. What other issues/factors do we need to take into consideration in the long-range transportation plan?

Rating the Existing WR Region Transportation System

Most stakeholders rated the overall transportation system in the Warner Robins region as good or fair to good with some notable exceptions. The table below presents responses to the question about various aspects of the region’s transportation system. Each tick mark in the table represents an individual stakeholder rating.

Existing Transportation System Evaluation						
Aspect	Rating					Notes/Remarks
	Good	Fair	Poor	Other	Don't Know	
Safety/Accidents						
Peak Hour Traffic Congestion						exceptions, major east-west routes are bad in PM
Maintenance						potholes on Watson
Bicycle System						dangerous
Pedestrian System						gaps
Truck Traffic and Freight Service						certain areas getting worse, expect SR-96 to get worse
Traffic Operations						Centerville commercial area on Watson is bad
Transit System						"What transit system?"

Most frequently noted as positive transportation system aspects were maintenance, safety and movement of trucks and freight through the transportation network. Those aspects with the most negative ratings were transit – where often it was noted that there is essentially no transit in the Warner Robins Region, the pedestrian system/walkability, and the bicycle system. Although traffic operations had generally positive ratings many people noted that there were problems in specific areas at certain times of the day, mostly in the evening peak hour and associated with shift changes at RAFB. The comments for peak hour traffic congestion noted that most problems are on east-west facilities and to some extent with traffic associated with RAFB. Locations noted with congestion problems tended to be the primary east-west roads of Watson Boulevard/SR-247 Connector, Russell Parkway, and SR-96 in addition to SR-247 in the vicinity of base gates. These are generally the same locations where people noted problems with traffic operations.

Changes Expected in WR over the Next 20 – 25 Years

All stakeholders expect continued population and employment growth in the region with some noting that these prospects are largely tied to RAFB and continuing missions there. Most stakeholders expect growth to move to the west and south from the current urban limits with an element of continued sprawl and reliance on autos. Some stakeholders noted increased development along SR-96. Several noted that there is momentum to redevelop W.R. downtown as more mixed-use with higher density, emphasizing walkability, and that such development would be marketable. A few noted that W.R. and Houston County are trying to get in front of development and place or reserve infrastructure to avoid problems with growth later. Most stakeholders expect traffic to increase and see an increasing need for a transit system, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Although most stakeholders see a need for transit for some populations currently, and a mid to long term need to develop a broader public transit system, some seemed to question how the system would be paid for and operated, and how many transit users there would actually be. Several stakeholders noted that development of bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be tied to development of green space, parks, and recreational areas. A few stakeholders felt that bike facilities or mixed-use trails to RAFB would be heavily used, and that the Wellston Trail should be extended.

Which 3 Issues are Most Important to Address in the 2040 LRTP

Most stakeholders chose developing a transit system and new roads or added capacity on roads as their first or second priority. Improved operations and safety of roads and additional bicycle and pedestrian facilities tended to be a third priority. Maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure was a first priority of one stakeholder and a second or third priority of a couple of other stakeholders. No one considered truck routing and access or improved signage and access to be among their top three priorities for the LRTP.

Particular Projects or types of Projects that Need Emphasis

Most stakeholders gave similar answers to the question about which projects or types of projects need emphasis – transit, road capacity/widening, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Particular Corridors or Areas that Need Transportation Improvements

Nearly all stakeholders indicated that the primary east-west road corridors -- Watson Boulevard/SR-247 Connector, Russell Parkway, and SR-96 need improvement. Having a circulator transit system in the Warner Robins CBD that provides service to RAFB gate area was mentioned. Redevelopment of the Warner Robins downtown as a mixed-use walkable higher density area was mentioned.

Who Do You think needs to be engaged in the LRTP Planning Process

Most stakeholders felt that businesses, tax payers and residents need to be involved in the LRTP process. RAFB was mentioned specifically by several. City and County elected officials were mentioned as important to the process and ultimate acceptance of the plan. Several stakeholders mentioned that schools and/or colleges need to be involved in LRTP development.

Funding Adequacy for Maintenance and Improvements to the Transportation System and How Should Funds be Raised

Most stakeholders think that current transportation funding is adequate but that over the long term it will need to be increased. Quite a few mentioned the Houston County SPLOST as a successful transportation funding mechanism. A few stakeholders said funds need to be increased from all sources. Many expressed preference for local funding mechanisms such as SPLOST because it is familiar, and has been viewed as successful and transparent. Several said that the State needs to provide additional resources for transportation funding.

Transportation Improvements Most Beneficial to the Economy and Retention/Creation of Jobs

Most stakeholders indicated that new and wider roads and transportation operations improvements were likely the most beneficial to the region's economy and creation or retention of jobs. Some noted that improvements that facilitate truck movements and freight are increasingly important to the region with a few noting the anticipated increase in freight associated with the expansion of the port in Savannah and the tie to I-16 and I-75 through the region via SR-96. A few noted that whatever transportation improvements were needed to keep RAFB viable and expanding were probably the most important. One stakeholder noted the possibility of joint civilian/military operations at RAFB to facilitate industrial development and associated freight movement. At least one stakeholder expressed that development of a transit system was important to the economy and job creation.

Transportation Improvements Seen as Being Most Beneficial to the Region's Quality of Life

Most stakeholders viewed development of additional bicycle and pedestrian facilities and transit as important to improving the region's quality of life. A number noted that bicycle and pedestrian facilities were important for personal health and could be tied to increased green space and recreational opportunities. A number of stakeholders noted the

importance of transit to lower income residents seeking jobs, and the young and elderly who are less able to drive or to desire to drive. One stakeholder felt that bicycles should be prohibited on Watson Boulevard and Russell Parkway.

Other Issues/Factors to Take Into Consideration in the Long-Range Transportation Plan

- Support improvements at the Watson Boulevard and Russell Parkway gates to RAFB
- Support downtown Warner Robins redesign/redevelopment
- Support continued industrial development and the movement of freight and trucks
- Need to follow development plans and strategies linked to the economy
- Consider designing and building a traffic management center
- Look at state funds to ensure that all funds collected for transportation are spent on transportation projects
- Examine the impacts of MPO decisions on surrounding communities and be sure to coordinate on projects
- While making transportation improvements also look at lighting to ensure visibility and safety
- Need to look at medical and social service mobility needs

Conclusions:

In general there was much consensus from stakeholders on which transportation issues are most important to the Warner Robins Region with some divergence of opinion on their ranking of importance. Most stakeholders chose development of a transit system, new or wider roads, and more pedestrian and bicycle facilities as their top priorities.

Most stakeholders view the region as having continued growth outward particularly to the west and south with concomitant vehicle traffic and need for new or wider roads to accommodate this development. Stakeholders recognize the importance of RAFB to the regional economy and consider improvements to the transportation system to support missions at the base as critical. Many stakeholders specifically mentioned improvements to the major east-west roads of Watson Boulevard/SR-247 Connector, Russell Parkway, and SR-96 in addition to SR-247 in the vicinity of base gates. Traffic operations at specific locations on these routes during the P.M. peak were frequently mentioned as a current problem that's likely to get worse as the region grows. There was a general recognition of the need to support current and future industrial development and the movement of freight by truck.

Stakeholders view development of a transit system as important for mobility of area residents, particularly those who cannot drive or cannot afford to drive, and for economic development. Stakeholders also felt that development of transit, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities were important to the regions quality of life. Several stakeholders noted a desire to redesign or redevelop downtown Warner Robins as a denser walkable mixed-use area with higher density housing options and vibrant commercial development.

Most stakeholders think that there will be a need for additional funds for transportation as the region grows with many indicating a preference for local funding programs such as the Houston County SPLOST which is viewed as known, transparent, and successful. Several stakeholders expressed a desire for additional state funding.

Stakeholders felt that it is important to engage the community in the LRTP planning process, particularly business owners, employers, taxpayers and local elected officials. Several stakeholders specifically noted the importance of including RAFB due to its dominance as an area employer and the importance of its mission to the regional economy.