

**South Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO)  
Policy Committee Meeting Minutes  
February 22nd, 2007, 10:00 a.m.  
SARPC Boardroom**

**Present**

Mayor Charles Murphy - Robertsdale  
Mr. Chris Black - Atmore  
Mr. Joe Ruffer – Mobile County  
Commissioner Larry White – Escambia County  
James Foster – Mobile County  
Mr. Bill Couch – ALDOT  
Mr. Chris Azubuike – ALDOT  
Mr. Jackie Glasgow – ALDOT  
Mr. Russell J. Wimberly – SARPC  
Mr. Chris Miller - SARPC  
Mr. Kevin Harrison – SARPC  
Mrs. April Delchamps – SARPC  
Mr. Tom Piper – SARPC

Mr. Piper called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m., February 22, 2007. As this was the first meeting of the RPO and no officers had yet been appointed, it was agreed that Mr. Piper would officiate the meeting. Piper then asked for everyone to introduce themselves. Then he proceeded to the first item on the agenda at which point Joe Ruffer asked that he first give a description of the purpose of the RPO.

Piper stated that the RPO is an advisory organization made up of the elected and appointed officials from the rural areas that are responsible for transportation. The purpose of the RPO is to give rural area officials a stronger, united voice and greater influence in regards to the transportation planning efforts of the Alabama Department of Transportation. An RPO will speed up the consultation process.

In response to a question from Commissioner White about if the process was tied with federal legislation, Mr. Couch from the Alabama Department of Transportation responded that SAFETEA-LU requires that the state get rural areas involved in the transportation planning process because the rural areas need to know what the state is doing. However, the state does not say how to get the rural areas involved. Mr. Couch went on to say that a pilot program in West Alabama patterned their RPO after the MPO and it seemed to work well.

Mr. Wimberly stated that the RPO process wouldn't fall under the Open Meetings Act, but thinks that the RPO should be advertised just like the MPO because the more the information that is out there, the better off we are.

Mr. Ruffer asked about the type of money and if the priorities set by the RPOs only had to do with state routes or did it include the county routes also.

Mr. Couch stated that it is involving everything. He went on to explain that each county will still get the \$500,000 to do their projects, but being involved in an RPO though there is no additional money, they will receive more information on the state plans and there is a possibility of getting smaller projects funded. Mr. Couch used the example of the West Alabama RPO in which they identified some smaller projects and because they are a part of the RPO they knew who to go through to get small projects funded by doing some Safety projects. He then went on to explain that the direction of the government is to give smaller areas the same per capita money as given to the MPOs, but because smaller areas have no matching funds they are unable to spend the money. He also pointed out the RPO has to be outside of the MPO so the urban area of Mobile is not included in the RPO.

To clarify, Mr. Couch pointed out that the RPO will not set projects for the state, but the body together has more power than an individual government.

In response to the question if the county commission would lose any type of control over the money allotted to them, Mr. Couch responded that the Commission will not lose any type of control and the counties will still get their allotment. The RPO is a consultation and priority setting process. He further explained this by saying if you go with one body after identifying priorities that everyone agrees on, lot better chance of getting those priorities funded. I'm not saying that you are going to dictate to state what projects they do, State comes up with projects with consultation with local elected officials and all, but what I am saying is this body has more power than one individual. Have to do process, whether this way or going to each county individually

Mr. Wimberly stated that the biggest advantage of an RPO is rather than going as individual city or county, you have come together as one body that agrees on the priorities and you go as one body to Montgomery, stand a better chance of funding project going as one body instead of individually.

Mr. Wimberly then stated that there have been two outcomes with the Tuscaloosa (West Alabama) model on having RPOs. Instead of being 1 out of 67 counties, the RPO will be one of twelve going to the state with projects. Also, it develops a methodology of sharing information across county lines and municipal lines. For example, Mobile County can educate Baldwin County on how the Pay as You Go program works.

Mr. Piper asked Mr. Couch correct me if I am wrong but as far as pots of money and where they can be used Safety money can be used anywhere? But all the other pots of money have to be on a functionally classified road?

Mr. Couch replied that money on roads and bridges for federal money has to be classified as a collector or above. He went on to say that in the counties, FHWA does not recognize minor collectors and counties are trying to upgrade to major collector.

There were no further questions or discussion about the RPO process.

After this discussion, Mr. Piper stated that the second item on the agenda was to select the voting

members; However, bylaws needed to be discussed first. Mr. Piper explained that the purpose of the bylaws is once a project is identified, a governing body will need to approve of the list. Voting membership is needed to pass resolutions, etc.

Mr. Piper stated that the draft bylaws had been mailed but there were a few changes to be made.

The draft bylaws stated that the voting membership would be one county commissioner from each county; one mayor from the cities of each county appointed by the mayors from that county and the bylaws also included a voting member from the MOWA and Poarch Creek Indians. However, to give each county equal representation, they should also be represented by their county commission.

Mr. Ruffer stated that the Mobile County Commission may not be interested in individually showing up. The Mobile County Commission is going to appoint him as their representative.

Mr. Harrison said that we have alternates so they can designate you as their alternate to be voting member for the county.

Mr. Couch stated that most of Mobile is in the urban area so Mobile County would be representing the area outside of the urban area.

It was decided that the total voting members of the RPO will be eight. There will be one member representing each county commission, one mayor from each county who would represent the mayors of their county, a member from ALDOT 9<sup>th</sup> Division and a member from SARPC.

Mr. Harrison pointed out that even though all the mayors and commissioners are not recognized as voting members they are still a part of policy committee of the RPO.

Mr. Wimberly asked Mayor Murphy if the mayors would have a problem with that process of mayors electing a representative.

Mayor Murphy stated that he did not especially since there are thirteen municipalities in Baldwin County and that the Mayors Association should be able to come up with a consensus on who to appoint.

The three mayors from Mobile County which are in the RPO – Dauphin Island, Citronelle, and Mt. Vernon – should be able to get together and decide which one will serve.

Mr. Piper stated that he would make changes to bylaws and they can be adopted at the next meeting. He then stated that he would like to select the voting members. Escambia County had already elected their voting member and Mobile County Commission appointed Mr. Joe Ruffer. Baldwin County Commission was not represented at the meeting although someone thought it was because of a workshop.

Two cities were represented; Mayor Murphy from Robertsdale in Baldwin County and Mr. Black

from Atmore in Escambia County. Mr. Piper asked if they were to be the voting members.

Mayor Murphy stated that he needed to go back to the Mayors Association. He would contact Mayor Small who is the chairmen and they would appoint someone.

Mr. Wimberly asked that Mayor Small send a letter on behalf of the Mayors Association as to who they wanted to appoint. He also asked that Escambia County do the same thing.

Someone suggested following up with David Brewer in Baldwin County because he was put in charge of following the RPO process.

The next item on the agenda was to discuss the Public Involvement Process and how to advertise for meetings, etc. The Public Involvement Process was basically the same as the MPO. Comments were asked for.

Mr. Harrison stated that the 45 day announcement period may be a little long.

There was some discussion that the RPO had no requirements, but because RPO is under ALDOT funding, the RPO should follow their requirement of a 45 day notice for changing public involvement procedures. Two weeks was suggested on all other announcements.

Mr. Ruffer wanted to discuss Article 6 on bylaws. He stated that it reads like the RPO will appoint TCC members, but each entity should appoint its own members. Mr. Piper stated that he will clarify that section by the next meeting.

Mr. Piper then pointed out the list of projects that ALDOT currently has in system – broken down by county. Mobile County includes projects in both the rural and urban area – ½ in both areas.

Mr. Piper stated that if you think of a project, you can look at the list and see if it is on there. The list that he handed out included projects from 2007 – 2052, but the financing of the projects is only for the first four years.

Mr. Couch explained that under SAFETEA-LU, projects are only financed for 4 years, but the state requires a five year plan. The fifth year is not financially constrained. The Legislative Transportation Committee approves the plan every year.

The question was asked if anyone could get the information on the list of projects. After some discussion, Mr. Piper stated that the information was public information on the website that anyone could get.

Mr. Couch pointed out that projects beyond the first four years doesn't mean anything.

The question was asked if the joint highway commission was still involved.

Mr. Couch replied that ALDOT does the plan and they approve it. The Transportation

Committee is the official entity to approve things on the list.

Mr. Piper explained the process of moving things in and out of the list. If something moves into the plan then something has to be moved out.

The RPO will be identifying needs that the state may not have been addressed by what is currently going on. The final product of the RPO will be a plan for the three counties which will include the state projects but might also include projects that are not identified in the state projects like possibly safety projects at rural intersections and stuff like that.

Mr. Piper said that they next thing is to elect a chairperson.

Several comments were made that it is too early and that more representation is needed.

The next step will be to meet within each of the counties – try to get all mayors, commissioners, and technical folks to sit down and talk about what projects need to be done when. After that another policy committee meeting will be held and a meeting to adopt the bylaws.

Mr. Couch raised a concern about Baldwin County. He stated that they approached the department a year or two ago about developing their own RPO. They were told that the state couldn't have 67 RPOs. That is the reason the state went with the Regional Planning Commissions to establish the RPOs. SARPC is the standing agency for whole region and represents all of the area. Some didn't agree with that. Didn't think that they would get representation, but this is the way that we elected to get rural areas involved in planning process. If they don't want to be involved with this body then we will have to go out to them individually and try to get them involved just like in Lee and Russell County.

Mr. Wimberly stated the he talked with commissioners and staff recently. He approached them with the idea that the RPO brings people together and is a forum for information sharing. He went on to say that the RPO doesn't preclude individual counties from doing what they want to do or need to do in talking with ALDOT. The RPO provides a consultation process that brings people together and shares information. Baldwin County seemed very supportive of the RPO process. All we have to do is follow up with David Brewer.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

**SIGNED:**

  
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**Chairman, RPO**

**ATTEST:**

  
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