

**West Alabama
Rural Planning Organization (RPO)**

**Public Involvement Plan
2020**



Developed by the West Alabama Regional Commission

Adopted: February 14, 2020

West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO)

Public Involvement Plan - 2020

This document is posted at
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Date adopted: February 14, 2020

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West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Members

Policy Committee

Voting

Sammy Holdsambeck, Bibb County Commission Representative
Mike Freeman, Fayette County Commission Representative
Tennyson Smith, Greene County Commission Representative
Arthur Crawford, Hale County Commission Representative
Jeff Long, Lamar County Commission Representative
Mark Gray, Pickens County Commission Representative
James D. Brown, West Central Region Engineer, Alabama Department of Transportation
Dennis Stripling, Executive Director, West Alabama Regional Commission
Bobbie White, Bibb County Mayors Representative
Ray Nelson, Fayette County Mayors Representative
Raymond Steele, Greene County Mayors Representative
Tony Lester, Hale County Mayors Representative
Stanley Allred, Lamar County Mayors Representative
Craig Patterson, Pickens County Mayors Representative

Non-Voting

Mark D. Bartlett, Federal Highway Administration
D.E. Phillips, Jr., Local Transportation Engineer, ALDOT
Debbie Handley, Technical Coordinating Committee Chairman
Al Elbert, Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee Chairman
Rob Robertson, Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Chairman

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)

Voting

Jeff McKinney, Bibb County Engineer
Fayette County Engineer
Willie Branch, Greene County Engineer
Jason Sturdivant, Hale County Engineer
Josh Knight, Lamar County Engineer
Clint Terry, Pickens County Engineer
Brad Darden, ALDOT West Central Region Pre-Construction Engineer
Michael Hora, ALDOT Bureau of Local Transportation
Debbie Handley, Fayette and Lamar County Transit Provider
Bobby Armstead, Greene and Hale County Transit Provider
Patricia McCafferty, Pickens County Transit Provider
Shannon Taylor, Airport Representative
Vontra Giles, Federal Highway Administration
James Garner, Railroad Representative
George Newman, Trucking Representative
Representative, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Representative
David Norris, West Alabama Regional Commission

Non-Voting

Representative from each municipality in the study area
Scott Anders, Tuscaloosa County Engineer
Shannon Taylor, Fayette City Engineer
Russell Lawrence, Tuscaloosa County Parking and Transit Authority
Brian Latham, District 51 (Fayette/Lamar) Administrator, ALDOT West Central Region
Jonathan Anderson, District 53 (Pickens/Greene) Administrator, ALDOT West Central Region
James Kyzar, District 54 (Bibb/Chilton) Administrator, ALDOT West Central Region
Talbert Essary, District 55 (Hale/Perry) Administrator, ALDOT West Central Region
Chris Bedwell, District 56 (Greene/Sumter) Administrator, ALDOT West Central Region

West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Members (Continued)

Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC)

Bibb County

County Appointments

Joanne Craighead

John Downs

Municipal Appointments

Jerry C. Pow

Freddie Shoults

Fayette County

County Appointments

Sue Bridgeman

Allen Dunavant

Municipal Appointments

Wanda Deavours

Bobbie Kemp-Driver

Greene County

County Appointments

Brenda Burke

Judy Jarvis

Municipal Appointments

Julia D. Fuller

Iris Sermon

Hale County

County Appointments

Willie Smith

William Thomas

Municipal Appointments

Jerry Elkins

Austin Long

Lamar County

County Appointments

Wayne Baines

Al Elbert

Municipal Appointments

Wayne Christian

Lane Gilliam

Pickens County

County Appointments

Joan Owens

Municipal Appointments

Marva Gipson

Rusty Tate

Prepared by the
West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC)
Staff to the RPO

**Resolution
RPO 2020-1**

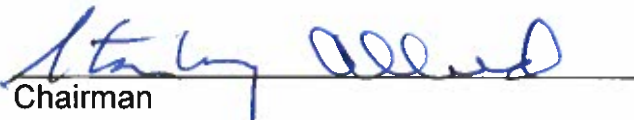
**West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO)
Adopting the Public Involvement Plan - 2020**

WHEREAS, the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO), in consultation with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), is responsible for the non-metropolitan cooperative transportation planning process for the West Alabama counties of Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens, as established in amended 23 USC 134 and 135 (as amended by the FAST Act, Sections 1201 and 1202, December 4, 2015) and 23 CFR 450.200 et al; and

WHEREAS, the Public Involvement Plan is compliant with the relevant laws, regulations, and Executive Orders set forth in United States Code (USC) and Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) as provided in Section 1.2 of this document; and

WHEREAS, the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization have recommended that the Policy Committee adopt the 2020 update of the Plan; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, this 14th day of February 2020, that the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization Policy Committee does hereby adopt the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization Public Involvement Plan - 2020.


Chairman

Attest:


Process Coordinator

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is to ensure that the transportation planning process encourages active public participation. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) is the authorized entity that was established to conduct the transportation planning process in West Alabama. The process serves as the official cooperative planning effort by the Alabama Department of Transportation in the rural counties of west Alabama (Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens). The PIP describes how the RPO incorporates the public into the process.

1.2 Federal Requirements

The following is a summary of the relevant federal laws, regulations, and executive orders that direct state departments of transportation regarding public participation matters. Currently, the RPOs in Alabama function as part of the formal local government cooperative planning process for the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT). The Local Transportation Bureau at ALDOT prepared this text and, the RPO staff modified it to address RPO functions.

Title 23 USC 134 and 135 – USC stands for United State Code. 23 USC 134 is a codification of the law establishing planning policy and delineating State responsibilities in the transportation planning process.

Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) - This is the most recent transportation legislation signed into law by President Obama on December 4, 2015. This law amended, modified, and added to the existing 23 USC 134 and 135. The language specific to the metropolitan transportation planning participation process is found in Section 1201.

23 CFR 450 – CFR stands for Code of Federal Regulations. 23 CFR 450 is the FHWA/FTA interpretation of 23 USC 134 and 135, providing specific requirements and actions for the state implementing agency, the DOT.

Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 USC 2000d, et seq. 42 USC 2000d prohibits exclusion from participation in any federal program on the basis of race, color, or national origin. This is the seminal or shaping expression of the law.

23 USC 324 – This is the law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, adding to the landmark significance of 2000d. This requirement is found in 23 CFR 450.334(1).

29 USC 794 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973) - This is the law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of a disability, and in terms of access to the transportation planning process.

Executive Order 12898 – Executive Orders by the President as the head of the Executive Branch typically carry the weight of law, although this is not true unless the Order has been given discretionary power through an Act of Congress, or a

later act gives congressional weight to the Order. Significant orders by Presidents in the past affect the ability segments of the population to gain access, and in this case, access to the planning process. Order 12898, often called “Environmental Justice,” ... requires federal agencies to identify “disproportionately high and adverse human and health environmental effects of its programs on minority populations and low-income populations...” and prohibits actions that would adversely affect a disproportionately high number among these populations.

1.3 RPO Organizational Structure

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) is composed of three committees. The Policy Committee is the official decision-making body of the process. The Policy Committee is served by two advisory committees, the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC). A more detailed description of the RPO can be found in Appendix B.

1.4 RPO Study Area

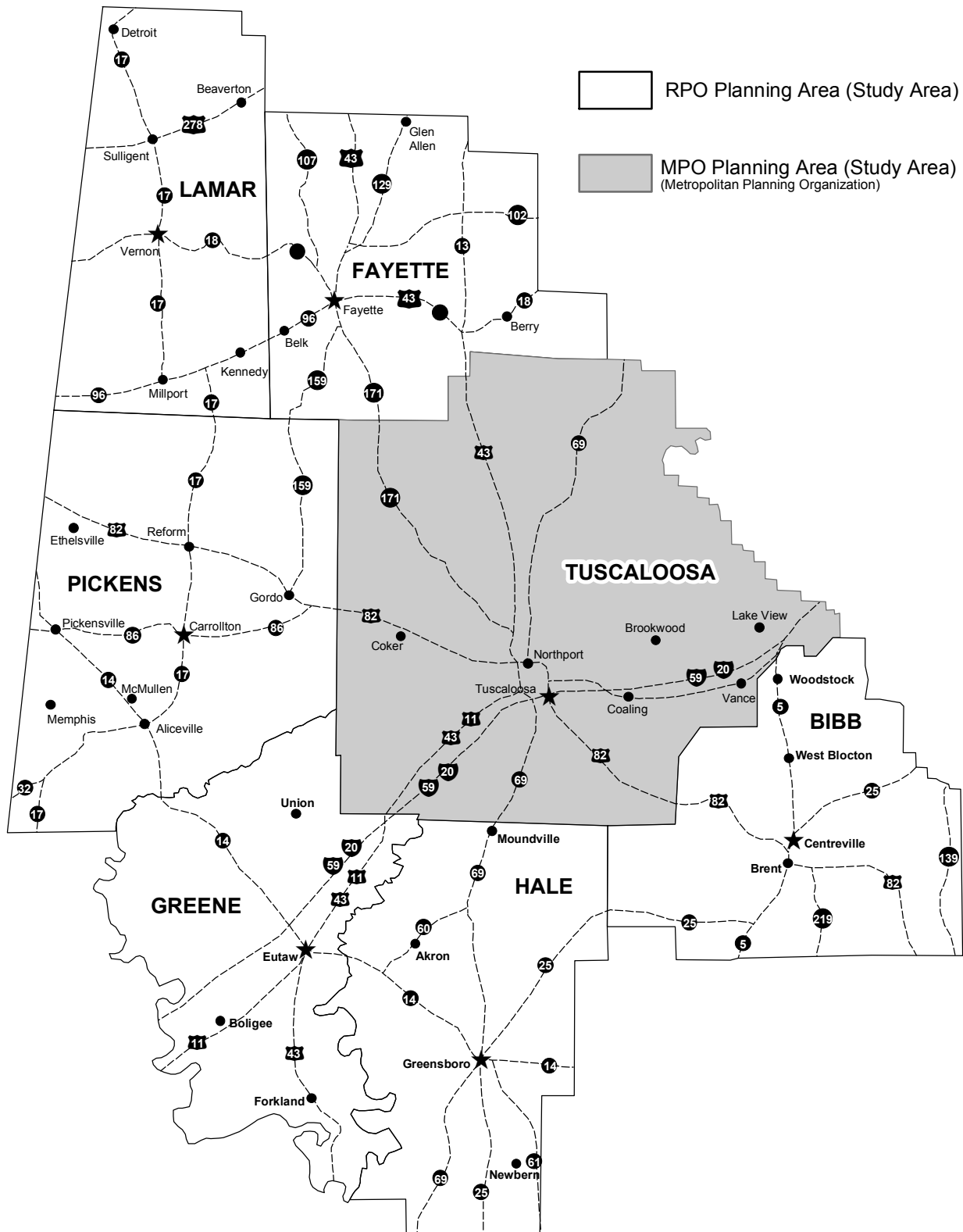
The RPO study area includes the six rural counties served by the West Alabama Regional Commission: Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens. Tuscaloosa is not included in the study area because it is already served by a transportation planning process governed by the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. Tuscaloosa County does have non-voting representatives on the RPO Policy and TCC. Figure 1 depicts the study area.

1.5 Public Involvement During the Development of the PIP

The public participated in the three-month development of the PIP. The RPO Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) reviewed and commented on the plan at two sets of meetings. The PIP was placed on the WARC website in October 2019. The draft PIP was distributed at the RPO committee meetings during this time. The RPO committees are open to the public, and the public is encouraged to attend and participate in any discussion. The meetings are also advertised by news releases, which were often published in the local newspapers. In addition to these participation opportunities, six public meetings were held in the six RPO counties. The public had 91 days to comment on the draft PIP. Items from the public involvement activities are included in Appendix C.

West Alabama Rural Planning Organization Planning Area

Figure 1



Source: US Census TIGER
WARC



2.0 Public Participation Process

2.1 Vision Statement

The vision of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization is to have a community that understands the transportation planning process and actively participates in the process.

2.2 Goals

I. Open Process

The goal of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization is to have an open planning process that encourages early and continued public participation.

II. Information Access

The goal of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization is to provide complete and timely information regarding the plans, programs, procedures, policies, and technical data produced or used during the planning process to interested parties and the general public.

III. Notice of Activities

The goal of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization is to provide timely and adequate public notice of hearings, meetings, document reviews, and document availability.

IV. Public Input and Organization Response

The goal of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization is to demonstrate consideration and recognition of public input and to provide appropriate responses to public input.

V. Inclusive Process

The goal of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization is to encourage participation in the planning process by traditionally underserved populations; low-income groups, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the elderly; and to consider the needs of these groups when developing programs and plans.

2.3 Strategies

A. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will maintain a citizens advisory committee. The committee will serve as one of the standing committees of the transportation planning process. (The standing committees are the Policy Committee, the Technical Coordinating Committee, and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee.) Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V

B. All meetings of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will be open to the public in accordance with the Alabama Open Meetings Act (2005-40) and will provide non-committee members an opportunity to participate in the planning process. The meetings will be held at convenient and accessible locations and times. Generally, the Policy Committee meets on the second Friday of the second month of each quarter at 10:30 a.m., the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) meets on the second Thursday of the second month of each

quarter at 2:00 p.m., and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) meets during the last two weeks of the first month of each quarter. The times for the CTAC meetings vary from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The exception to this schedule occurs in the first quarter of the fiscal year. During this quarter, the RPO holds a combination meeting with all of the committees coming together on in early to mid-November at 10:30 a.m. This meeting and all of the Policy and TCC meetings are held at the West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC) office, 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport. The CTAC meetings are held in each rural county during the second, third, and fourth quarters. Goals Addressed: I, IV, V

C. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will provide a notice for all meetings of the standing committees of the transportation planning process. The notice will include the agenda, date, time, and location of the meeting. The notice will be provided at least two weeks prior to the meetings. The notice will be provided to local media representatives and groups that address the needs of low-income groups, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. The notice will request that interested individuals, who need special accommodations, notify the West Alabama Regional Commission at least two days prior to the date of the meeting so necessary arrangements can be made. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will follow all of the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The notice will also be posted on the Internet. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, V

D. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will do the following, as a means of seeking out and considering the needs of the traditionally underserved (low-income individuals, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the elderly):

- a. Provide a notice to meetings of the standing committee of the transportation planning process to groups that address the needs of the traditionally underserved;
- b. Provide a notice to public meetings related to the Long-Range Transportation Plan to groups that address the needs of the traditionally underserved;
- c. Upon request, provide transportation planning process meeting notices to any individual or group;
- d. Allow anyone to participate in all transportation planning process meetings;
- e. Follow all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act while conducting the transportation planning process;
- f. If feasible and appropriate, modify the transportation planning process and any plan, program, or document developed as part of the process to meet the needs of the traditionally underserved;
- g. If warranted, provide an interpreter for those with limited English proficiency;
- h. Offer translation of our website and documents on our website to other languages;
- i. Upon request, make presentations to groups representing traditionally underserved populations;

- j. Provide transportation planning process information at community events;
- k. Hold extended public review periods for the Long-Range Transportation Plan that allow anyone to review the documents in public places, including the WARC office, and on the internet and allow comments to be submitted in person, by e-mail, by postal mail, and by FAX;
- l. Make the RPO staff available to discuss any transportation planning document or the planning process with any group or individual;

Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V

E. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will consider all legitimate inquiries and comments regarding transportation planning activities. When warranted, a written response will be provided. All public inquiries and comments received regarding the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan will be included in the final document with the corresponding responses provided by the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization. Goals Addressed: I, IV, V

F. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will maintain a record of public involvement. The record will document the public involvement activities of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization for one year. Goals Addressed: I, II, IV

G. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will make available to the general public and government agencies all documents and appropriate technical data produced for the transportation planning process. The documents and technical data, as appropriate and feasible, will be available in paper copy, digital copy, and on the Internet. Goals Addressed: I, II, IV, V

H. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will provide public notification of the Long-Range Transportation Plan development. The notification will be provided at least two weeks prior to any scheduled meetings or reviews. The draft document will be available for public review and comment for at least 45 days prior to final adoption. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V

I. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will hold a public meeting for the Draft Long-Range Transportation Plan prior to the final adoption of the document. Notification will be provided at least two weeks prior to the meeting. The meetings will be held at convenient and accessible locations and times. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V

J. If a Long-Range Transportation Plan varies significantly from the version that was initially made available for public comment, the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will hold an additional public meeting prior to the final adoption of the document. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V

- K. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will use visualization techniques, as appropriate and feasible, to describe the Long-Range Transportation Plan. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V
- L. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization, when appropriate and feasible, will coordinate public involvement activities with statewide transportation planning public involvement and cooperative planning processes conducted by the Alabama Department of Transportation. Goals Addressed: I, II, III
- M. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will encourage the publication of news articles on the transportation planning process. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, V
- N. The staff of the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will be available for speaking engagements concerning the transportation planning process. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V
- O. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will publish the Public Involvement Plan and any amendments to the Plan. The public will be given a 45-day period to provide written comments prior to final document approval. Goals Addressed: I, II, III, IV, V
- P. The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will review the Public Involvement Plan at least every five years. Goals Addressed: I, II, IV

3.0 RPO Products and Corresponding Public Participation Techniques

3.1 Work Program (WP)

The purpose of the Work Program (WP) is to describe the work that will be performed by the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (WARPO) for a given fiscal year. The WP represents the budget and work tasks necessary to accomplish and maintain the transportation planning process within the study area. The WP is developed to coordinate transportation and related planning activities for a cooperative, continuing, and comprehensive planning process. The primary objective of the WP is the development of an integrated planning program that considers the planning activities of each modal group and coordinates these activities to produce a total transportation plan serving all segments of the population.

The public has an opportunity to provide input in the development of the WP during the April/May and July/August RPO committee meetings. The public is allowed to participate in discussions held at the committee meetings. News releases that provide the meeting details and agenda are distributed at least two weeks prior to the committee meetings. The news releases are sent to the local media, special interest groups, and interested individuals. The draft WP, the meeting schedule, and meeting agenda are also posted on the WARC website.

3.2 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

This Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is part of the formal cooperative planning process developed in west Alabama through the RPO. This LRTP serves as a record of the cooperative planning process between the local officials and the ALDOT as related to long-range transportation needs. The purpose of the LRTP is to document the long-range transportation needs of West Alabama, as identified by the elected and appointed officials in the area. The LRTP is intended to help local governments address and prioritize their transportation needs. The LRTP also helps ALDOT develop the statewide LRTP and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and schedule the construction of transportation projects based on their limited budget. However, the RPO LRTP is strictly advisory. No funds have been set aside to undertake any of the strategies or projects included in the plan.

The LRTP is developed over two years. During those two years, the RPO has eight sets of committee meetings. All meetings of the RPO committees are preceded by news releases indicating the time, date, place of the meeting, and agenda. The news releases are sent to local media contacts, organizations that assist elderly and disabled individuals, community organizations, transit providers, and groups that have contact with minority and low-income people. Over 200 news releases are sent for each series of RPO committee meetings. The newspapers in the region frequently carry articles or reprint the news releases.

Any person who attends any of the RPO committee meetings is allowed to participate. A non-committee member may participate during any discussion. In addition, non-members are recognized during every meeting and given the opportunity to speak on items not on the agenda.

The new releases that are sent indicate that if a person needs special assistance to attend the meeting, they may contact the West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC) 48 hours prior to the meeting.

The RPO provides an additional opportunity for public participation by holding six public meetings regarding the LRTP. A news release is provided prior to the meeting. The draft LRTP is also placed on the West Alabama Regional Commission website.

4.0 Roles and Relationships

4.1 RPO Staff

The RPO staff consists of three transportation planners at the West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC). As of October 2019, the time these three spend conducting RPO work equals a 0.52 fulltime equivalent employee. The RPO staff handles all of the daily RPO work, organizes and conducts all of the RPO meetings, and prepares all of the RPO documents. The RPO does not have a designated public information officer but instead divides the public involvement work between the three staff members. The following work tasks are the public participation activities conducted by the RPO staff.

1. Prepare the Public Involvement Plan
2. Track public participation in the RPO process
3. Maintain RPO public participation records
4. Maintain RPO mail/email databases for committee members; media contacts; organizations that work with low-income, minorities, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens; and the general public (by request)
5. Conduct RPO committee meetings, including the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC)
6. Conduct RPO public meetings related to documents and programs
7. Ensure RPO meetings follow the bylaws, Public Involvement Plan strategies, and ADA requirements
8. Prepare responses to public input
9. Publish RPO documents (paper and Internet)
10. Maintain the RPO sections of the WARC website
11. Make public presentations regarding the RPO process
12. Prepare news releases
13. Prepare legal ads
14. Coordinate RPO public participation activities with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT)
15. Encourage the publication of RPO newspaper articles

4.2 RPO Committees

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) is composed of three committees. The Policy Committee is the official decision-making body of the process. The Policy Committee is served by two advisory committees, the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC). A more detailed description of the RPO can be found in Appendix B.

The RPO committee meetings are an important part of the public participation process. The meetings are held every quarter and are scheduled months in advance. The meetings are advertised through bulletin board postings, news releases, mailed and e-mailed notices, and internet postings. Many of the local newspapers publish the RPO meeting schedules. In addition, groups that work with low-income, minorities, persons with disabilities, and low-income citizens receive meeting notices. All RPO committee meetings are open to the public, and anyone who attends an RPO meeting is allowed to participate in committee discussions.

The Policy Committee consists of 16 members, with 14 of these being elected officials. These officials appoint the members to the CTAC. They also monitor the attendance of CTAC members and make changes when necessary. Another important public participation function of the Policy Committee is to respond to CTAC recommendations and questions.

Engineers, planners, and transit providers make up the bulk of the TCC membership. The primary public participation function of the TCC is responding to CTAC recommendations and questions. The responses provided by the ALDOT members of the TCC have proven to be very popular and have improved the image of ALDOT among CTAC members and the general public.

The CTAC is composed of 24 local citizens, four members from each of the six RPO counties. The CTAC was established as a formal, institutionalized means to include public participation in the RPO process. Three sets of the CTAC meetings are held in each RPO county. This provides local citizens the opportunity to attend an RPO meeting without leaving their home county. The additional meetings (eighteen per year) also provide multiple opportunities for public participation.

Having the CTAC ensures that all actions of the RPO are reviewed by the public. The CTAC reviews all documents, programs, and actions before the TCC and Policy Committee take action. The CTAC may offer recommendations for change that the other committees must consider. The CTAC has the option to suggest adjustments to any aspect of the process at any time.

4.3 Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

The Tuscaloosa Area MPO manages the federally mandated transportation planning process in Tuscaloosa County. The staff of the MPO, just like the RPO, is housed at the West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC). The MPO and RPO have non-voting members on the others' TCC and Policy Committee. The staff also provides a report on MPO and RPO activities at each committee meeting. These three connections ensure that the organizations are coordinated, and it provides additional public participation opportunities for the RPO since the MPO committee meetings are also open to the public.

4.4 Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT)

Two different sections of ALDOT work with the RPO. The ALDOT Local Transportation Bureau, located at the ALDOT central office in Montgomery, provides general oversight of the RPO program. The Local Transportation Bureau prepares the RPO agreements, reviews RPO documents, processes the RPO invoices, and ensures that the RPO addresses all of the federal cooperation requirements. The Local Transportation Bureau also is responsible for developing the State TIP (STIP) and Long-Range Transportation Plan. The process to develop these documents involves coordinating the required public involvement activities with the RPOs in the state. The Local Transportation Bureau has a voting member on the RPO Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC).

The second section of ALDOT involved with the RPO is the ALDOT West Central Region. ALDOT has divided the 67 Alabama counties into five regions. The West

Central Region is responsible for 13 counties in west Alabama, including the six West Alabama RPO counties. The West Central Region has a voting member on the TCC and the Policy Committee. The RPO also placed five district administrators on the TCC as non-voting members. The district administrators are responsible for the maintenance and operations of the federal and state highways in two counties and often work directly with the local government officials in these counties. The West Central Region members on the RPO committee add technical expertise to the RPO process. Regarding public participation, the West Central Region often responds to CTAC requests for information and CTAC safety observations. They also hold public hearings/meetings for individual federal-funded highway projects.

4.5 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

The FHWA and FTA are not directly involved with RPO public participation activities. Each of these agencies has a voting member on the TCC. The agencies do not directly monitor the RPO program. However, they do review the ALDOT local government cooperation efforts, which include the Alabama RPO programs. FHWA has a division office in Montgomery. The FTA division office is located in Atlanta.

5.0 Record of Public Involvement (RPI)

The West Alabama RPO produces the Record of Public Involvement (RPI) annually. The RPI documents the public involvement activities from the previous fiscal year. The RPI is available in a bound paper version, a CD copy, and on the West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC) website. The RPI contains 10 sections: Review of the Public Involvement Plan; RPO News Releases; RPO Legal Ads; Newspaper Articles and Notices; RPO News Release Mailing List; Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee Minutes; Items from RPO Public Meetings and Reviews; RPO Website; RPO Staff Public Speaking; and Public Comments, Correspondence, and RPO Responses. Each section is described below.

5.1 Review of the Public Involvement Plan

At the end of each fiscal year, the RPO staff collects the data used as performance measures in the PIP. Within the RPI, this information is listed with each performance measure. The review highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the public participation process, allowing the RPO committees and staff to adjust the strategies as needed.

5.2 RPO News Releases

Before each set of RPO committee meetings and before each RPO public meeting, the RPO mails and e-mails news releases to local media contacts, special interest groups, committee members, and anyone who has requested an RPO meeting notice. The news releases provide the meeting dates, times, locations, and agendas. The news releases also contain information related to special meeting accommodations requests. The releases are sent between two and three weeks before the first meeting date. The RPI includes all of the news releases that were sent during the previous fiscal year.

5.3 RPO Legal Ads

When the RPO holds public meetings regarding draft transportation plan documents, legal ads are placed in the 12 regional newspapers. The ads provide a brief description of the document, the times and dates of the public meeting, and the locations. The ads also list contact information and a deadline to comment on the document. If any legal ads are published in a given fiscal year, the proof-of-publication will be included in the RPI.

5.4 Newspaper Articles and Notices

The regional newspapers often publish the RPO committee and public meeting notices. In most cases, the articles include the same information as the news release. Occasionally the newspapers publish an original story on the RPO process. This section of the RPI will include a scanned copy of these articles with the newspaper name, publication date, and page number.

5.5 RPO News Release Mailing List

The RPO staff maintains a news release database. The staff updates the database as needed throughout the year. Anyone who requests to be notified of RPO committee or public meetings is added to the list. The list includes all local media contacts, RPO TCC, and Policy Committee members, and special interest groups. At the end of the

fiscal year, the RPO staff prints the list for inclusion in the RPI. The printed list is sorted by different categories and then by agency or name.

5.6 Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) Minutes

The RPI includes the minutes from the RPO CTAC meetings held during the previous fiscal year. The CTAC holds a combination meeting every November in Northport and holds meetings in each of the six rural counties during the other three quarters of the year. This is a total of 19 meetings. The minutes are sorted by the fiscal year quarter and then by county.

5.7 Items from RPO Public Meetings and Reviews

If the RPO holds a public meeting or review for a transportation planning document, the items distributed and collected at the meetings are included in this section of the RPI. This information is also included as an appendix in the planning document. Sign-in sheets, handouts, and slide presentations are typically items.

5.8 RPO Website

The WARC website has dedicated space for the RPO program. The RPO staff tracks website activity on a monthly basis and summarizes the results in a spreadsheet. The website includes basic information about the RPO and all of the RPO documents. The summary spreadsheet is included in the RPI.

5.9 RPO Staff Public Speaking

If the RPO staff makes a public speech, not associated with an RPO committee or public meeting, the basic descriptive information is listed in this section of the RPI. The RPO staff is sometimes asked to speak at government and civic meetings. For example, in fiscal year 2009, the staff spoke at a Greensboro City Council meeting, a University of Alabama planning class, and a WARC board meeting.

5.10 Public Comments, Correspondence, and RPO Responses

Any written or transcribed public comments received during an RPO document review and any public comment regarding the RPO process are included in this section of the RPI. This section also includes the official response from the RPO. Every comment has a corresponding RPO response. Informational requests (either in person, by telephone, by FAX, and by e-mail) regarding the RPO is tracked in a spreadsheet and reported in the annual Public Involvement Plan Review (5.1).

6.0 Effectiveness of the Public Participation Process

6.1 Performance Objectives

The RPO chose not to set unrealistic objectives. The RPO understands that they have limited control over the number of people who participate in the planning process. No matter what the RPO staff and committees do, they cannot realistically expect to see an increase in public involvement, e.g., more public attendance, more comments received, etc. The RPO cannot control these numbers. They can only control their actions, i.e., the RPO staff and committees. Therefore, the RPO performance objectives are to maximize the participation opportunities, to make the process as accessible and friendly as possible, and to minimize complaints regarding the process. The performance measures in the next section were chosen with these ideas and objectives in mind.

6.2 Performance Measures

1. What was the attendance percentage of the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee? Strategy Measured: A
2. How many citizens who were not committee members or transportation agency employees attended standing committee meetings? What was the ratio of citizens to members and employees? Strategy Measured: B
3. What was the ratio of standing committee meetings to meeting notices provided? Strategy Measured: C
4. How many standing committee meeting notices were posted in the local newspapers? Strategy Measured: C
5. Was the mailing list updated annually or more frequently? Strategy Measured: C, D
6. What was the ratio of requests for special meeting accommodations to special arrangements made? Strategy Measured: D
7. How many persons with disabilities attended standing committee meetings? What percentage of meeting attendees were persons with disabilities? Strategy Measured: D
8. How many complaints regarding the transportation planning process were received? Strategy Measured: E
9. What was the ratio of inquiries or comments to responses? Strategy Measured: E
10. Was the record of public involvement produced? Strategy Measured: F
11. How many documents were produced? Strategy Measured: G

12. How many documents were available on the web site? Strategy Measured: G
13. How many requests for information were received (in-person, by telephone, and by mail)? Strategy Measured: G
14. How many documents were distributed? Strategy Measured: G
15. Was public notice regarding long-range plan development provided? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the public notice efforts? Strategy Measured: H
16. Were long-range plan draft documents available? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the availability of these documents? Strategy Measured: H
17. Were public meetings held for the Long-Range Transportation Plan prior to adoption? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the public meetings? Strategy Measured: I
18. Was notification of the public meetings for the Long-Range Transportation Plan provided at least two weeks prior to the meetings? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the public meetings notification? Strategy Measured: I
19. Were the Long-Range Transportation Plan public meetings held at convenient times and accessible locations? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the time or location of the public meetings? Strategy Measured: I
20. If the Long-Range Transportation Plan varied significantly from the version that was initially available for public comment, was an additional public meeting held? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the public meetings? Strategy Measured: J
21. Were visualization techniques used to describe the Long-Range Transportation Plan? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the visualization techniques? Strategy Measured: K
22. Were West Alabama Rural Planning Organization public involvement activities coordinated with the Alabama Department of Transportation planning and cooperative planning processes? Were there any complaints or requests for change related to the coordination efforts? Strategy Measured: L
23. How many newspaper articles were published on the transportation planning process in the local newspapers? Strategy Measured: M
24. How many speeches or presentations did the staff provide? Strategy Measured: N

25. Was the Public Involvement Plan produced/updated? Strategy Measured: O

26. Did the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization provide 45 days for public comment before adopting the Public Involvement Plan or any amendments? Strategy Measured: O

27. How frequently was the Public Involvement Plan reviewed? Strategy Measured: P

6.3 Data Collection for the Performance Measures

The RPO staff tracks the various inputs used by the performance measures throughout the year. The RPO staff adds items to several sections of the Record of Public Involvement (RPI) as the items become available, e.g., news releases, legal ads, and newspaper articles. In September and October of each year, the staff compiles the data and answers each performance measure question. The responses to the performance measure questions become the first section of the RPI. If any problems are noted, the staff takes the necessary actions to correct the issue.

6.4 Continuing Assessment

The RPO staff checks the results of the performance review annually. If complaints regarding the process are submitted, the RPO takes the necessary action to correct the problem before the end of the year. The RPO is scheduled to update the Public Involvement Plan (PIP) at least every five years. This provides another opportunity to review past participation efforts and to make adjustments if needed.

Appendix A

Transportation Planning Terms and Acronyms

Transportation Planning Acronyms and Terms

5th Division - Alabama Department of Transportation 5th Division, office located in Tuscaloosa, includes nine counties in West Alabama, Replaced with West Central Region in 2014

AAA - Area Agency on Aging, West Alabama AAA

AADT - Average Annual Daily Traffic count

ACS - American Community Survey; U.S. Census Bureau product; replacement for the decennial long-form data

ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act

ADAP - Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program

ADT - Average Daily Traffic count

ALDOT - Alabama Department of Transportation

ARC - Appalachian Regional Commission

ARC - Formerly the Association for Retarded Citizens, now known as The Arc

Bicycle / Pedestrian Scale Development - Development that consists of a mix of land uses (residential, commercial, public) in close proximity, where one could comfortably walk or ride a bicycle from their origin (e.g., residence, place of employment) to a destination (e.g., place of employment, store, government facility, park)

BPC - Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee

BR - Bridge funding program; also BRON

CA - Capital funds (transit)

CAC - Citizens Advisory Committee; now known as CTAC

Capacity Project - (Road) a project that adds through lanes to an existing road or builds a new road; (Transit) a project that adds new routes or expands demand response/para-transit fleet

CFR - Code of Federal Regulations

CN - Construction - the final phase of a transportation project, the actual building of the project

CTAC - Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee

DOT - Department of Transportation

DPI or DPIP - Innovative/Special funding program, applies to projects specifically named in federal legislation

EPA - Environmental Protection Agency

ESWA - Easter Seals West Alabama

FAST Act - Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (PL 114-94)

FHWA - Federal Highway Administration

FOCUS - Focus on Senior Citizens

FTA - Federal Transit Administration

Functional Classification System - a system to distinguish roads according to the type of service provided

GHG - Greenhouse Gas

GIS - Geographic Information System - a computer system that links cartographic images with databases and allows the user to create new maps and databases through various means, including overlay and query operations

ISTEA - Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991

ITS - Intelligent Transportation System

JARC - Job Access and Reverse Commute - Federal Transit Administration Section 5316 funding program

LAP - Language Access Plan, sometimes referred to as a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan

LEP - Limited English Proficiency

LEP Plan - Limited English Proficiency Plan - outlines how the MPO and RPO integrates people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) into the transportation planning process - sometimes referred to as a Language Access Plan (LAP)

LOC - Local funding

Long-Range Transportation Plan - outlines projects that will be required to meet the needs of an area over an extended period, usually 20 years, revised every four to five years

L RTP - Long-Range Transportation Plan

LVOE - Level of Effort

MAP-21 - Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (Public Law 112-141)

MPO - Metropolitan Planning Organization, Tuscaloosa Area MPO

MPO-Portal - web-based software used to manage and integrate the TIP and STIP processes and databases; replaced TELUS

MO - Maintenance and Operation, same as federal O&M and TSMO, ALDOT preference

MO Project - Maintenance and Operation project, same as federal O&M project and TSMO project, ALDOT preference

NAAQS - National Ambient Air Quality Standards

New Freedom - Federal Transit Administration Section 5317 funding program

NHS - National Highway System, a transportation funding category, only projects on designated NHS routes can use these funds; also NHSP

O&M - operations and management, same as MO and TSMO

O&M Project - a project that improves the operation and/or management of a transportation system; examples include turn lanes, traffic signal optimization, ITS center, same as MO Project and TSMO Project

OP - Operating funds (transit)

PARA - Parks and Recreation Authority

PE - Preliminary Engineering - the first phase of most transportation projects, the study and design of the project

PL - Metropolitan Planning Funds

Public Forum - designated time during RPO and MPO meetings in which the public or interested parties may address the Policy Committee or Advisory Committees

Public Hearing - hearings to formally present information and gather public input for projects and plans - The Tuscaloosa Area MPO and West Alabama RPO do not hold public hearings. The Alabama Department of Transportation and local governments conduct public hearings for specific projects.

Public Meeting - meetings held by the Tuscaloosa Area MPO and West Alabama RPO to review draft transportation planning documents - The Tuscaloosa Area MPO holds public meetings for the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and the Public Involvement Plan (PIP).

Public Review - public reviews allow anyone to examine and comment on draft documents during a specified period of time - The Tuscaloosa Area MPO and West Alabama RPO holds public reviews for the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Public Involvement Plan (PIP), and Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. During the review period, draft documents are available on the internet, the West Alabama Regional Commission, and the Transit Authority. The review period extends from the date the MPO or RPO adopts the draft document for public review until the MPO or RPO adopts the final document, generally two months.

ROW - Right of Way - a phase of transportation projects, the purchase of right of way

RPO - Rural Planning Organization, West Alabama RPO

RW - Right of Way - a phase of transportation projects, the purchase of right of way

SAFETEA-LU - Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users - (Pub. L. 109-59, August 10, 2005)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on the disability

Section 5303 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for technical studies

Section 5307 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for urban area transit capital and operating expenses, see Section 5339

Section 5309 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for capital transit improvements

Section 5310 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for elderly and disabled transit capital assistance

Section 5311 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for rural area transit capital and operating expenses

Section 5316 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for job access and reverse commute transit, also known as JARC

Section 5317 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for new Americans with Disabilities Act transit assistance, also known as New Freedoms

Section 5339 - Federal Transit Administration funding program for bus and bus facilities; replaced Section 5309 in MAP-21, eligible to 5307 recipients

SHSP - Strategic Highway Safety Plan

SPR - State Planning and Research funds

ST - State funding

STP - Surface Transportation Program

STAA - Surface Transportation Any Area funding category, represents funds that may be used anywhere in the state, ALDOT has the authority to allocate these funds

STIP - State Transportation Improvement Program

STOA - Surface Transportation Other Area funding category, represents funds that are used in Urban Areas with populations less than 200,000

STP - Surface Transportation Program, a transportation funding category, Urban Areas are allocated an amount of funds annually based on a specific per capita dollar amount

TAP - Transportation Alternatives Program

TARC - Tuscaloosa Association of Retarded Citizens, also known as The ARC

TAZ - Transportation Analysis Zone - districts used for computer traffic modeling

TCC - Technical Coordinating Committee

TCPTA - Tuscaloosa County Parking and Transit Authority, also known as Tuscaloosa Metro Transit, Tuscaloosa Trolley, the Authority

TDOT - Tuscaloosa Department of Transportation

TEA-21 - Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century

TIP - Transportation Improvement Program - a list of funded MPO projects slated to begin over a four-year period, revised every four years

Title VI - Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 USC 2000d* (Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs)

TMA - Transportation Management Area, area designated by the Secretary of Transportation, having an urbanized area population of over 200,000

TR - Transit project

Transportation Enhancement (TE) Funds - Under pre-MAP-21 legislation, ten percent of all Surface Transportation Program funds allocated to a state are required to be spent on enhancement projects. Eligible projects include, but are not limited to, acquisition of historic sites and construction of pedestrian or bicycle facilities

TSMO - Transportation System Management and Operations, same as MO and O&M

TSMO Project - a project that improves the operation and/or management of a transportation system; examples include turn lanes, traffic signal optimization, ITS center, same as MO Project and O&M Project

UCP - United Cerebral Palsy

UMTA - Urban Mass Transit Administration; now known as FTA

UPWP - Unified Planning Work Program - a set of tasks that the WARC staff is committed to perform over a fiscal year, revised annually

Urban Area Boundary - boundary surrounding a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area, established by the MPO with ALDOT and FHWA approval

UT - Utility Construction - a phase of transportation projects, the relocation of utilities

WAPDC - West Alabama Planning and Development Council; now known as West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC)

WARC - West Alabama Regional Commission

WARPO - West Alabama Rural Planning Organization

West Central Region - Alabama Department of Transportation Region, office located in Tuscaloosa County, includes 14 counties in West Alabama, Replaced the 5th Division in 2014

Appendix B

RPO Description

Introduction

The following is a summary of the West Alabama Rural Transportation Planning Process and includes relevant background information. A Rural Planning Organization (RPO) functions somewhat like a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and provides structure for the process. An important distinction between an MPO and the RPO is that all RPO recommendations and documents are only advisory at this time. The RPO serves as a formal link between the ALDOT and local governments and provides additional opportunities for the rural areas to communicate with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT).

Organization

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) is composed of three committees. The Policy Committee is the official decision-making body of the process. The Policy Committee is served by two advisory committees: the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC).

Study Area

The study area includes the six rural counties served by the West Alabama Regional Commission: Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens. Tuscaloosa is not part of the study area because it is already served by a transportation planning process governed by the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Tuscaloosa County MPO has nonvoting representatives on the RPO Policy and TCC.

Agreement

The first step in any transportation planning process is the development of an agreement. The agreement legally delineates the concerned governmental entities, defines the duties of each entity, and outlines the organizational structure. The agreement is between the West Alabama Regional Commission and the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT).

Laws and Regulations

The laws requiring Departments of Transportation to develop nonmetropolitan cooperative processes are found in Title 23, U.S. Code (USC) 135 and 505. Title 23 was amended by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) for Statewide and Nonmetropolitan Transportation Planning and Programing in Section 1202 and funding features in Section 3016. The actions are duplicated for public transit in Title 49, U.S. Code Sections 5304, and the formula funding features are in 5338.

The rules regarding the nonmetropolitan cooperative process are published in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs) as Title 23, Part 450. The Code was superseded or amended by the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Sections 1202 and 20006, July 2012, and the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) Section 1202, December 2015. These regulations require States to consider the concerns of local elected officials when carrying out statewide transportation planning, to develop a process to cooperate with nonmetropolitan local officials regarding transportation issues and to work with nonmetropolitan officials when developing the statewide transportation plan and the statewide transportation improvement program (STIP).

Products of the Transportation Planning Process

Work Program

The Work Program (WP) represents the budget and work tasks necessary to accomplish and maintain the transportation planning process within the study area. The WP is developed to coordinate transportation and related planning activities for a cooperative, continuing, and comprehensive planning process. The primary objective of the WP is the development of an integrated planning program that considers the planning activities of each modal group and coordinates these activities to produce a transportation plan that serves all segments of the population.

Safety Program

The RPO collects a list of safety observations at the quarterly committee meetings. In general, the safety observations are low-cost projects that have the potential to reduce traffic crashes. The observations are forwarded to the county engineers, the ALDOT West Central Region District Engineers, the ALDOT West Central Region Engineer, and other relevant agencies. At the end of each fiscal year, the quarterly safety observations are compiled into a final report. The final report will describe any action taken to address the suggestion. The report will also be provided to the appropriate departments and agencies.

Long-Range Transportation Plan

The RPO adopted the original long-range transportation plan in 2006 and revised it in 2011 and 2016. The plan established goals, strategies, and a region-wide transportation vision. The plan includes a prioritized project list for each county and a prioritized list of regional projects. The purpose of the plan is to document the long-range transportation needs of West Alabama, as identified by the elected and appointed officials in the area. The plan is intended to help local governments address and prioritize transportation needs. The plan should also help ALDOT develop the statewide plan and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and schedule the construction of transportation projects based on their limited budget. However, the plan is strictly advisory. No funds have been set aside to undertake any of the strategies or projects included in the plan.

Rural Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP)

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) allows state-designated Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) to develop a Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) has chosen not to re-designate the current Alabama RPOs as RTPOs. However, ALDOT has decided to allow the RPOs to develop nonbinding Rural TIPs.

Committees

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) manages the West Alabama Rural Transportation Planning Process. The RPO is composed of three committees. The Policy Committee is the official decision-making body of the process. The Policy Committee is served by two advisory committees: the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC). These committees meet four times a year; January/February, April/May, July/August and have one Combined Committee meeting in November.

Policy Committee

The Policy Committee serves as the official decision-making body for the West Alabama Rural Transportation Planning Process. In this capacity, the Policy Committee determines the content of documents and recommendations provided to the Alabama Department of Transportation. The responsibilities of the Policy Committee include providing overall guidance to the planning process, review and approval of all process plans and programs, and appointing TCC and CTAC members.

The Policy Committee is composed of nineteen members, fourteen voting and five nonvoting. Each county commission in the six rural west Alabama counties has a voting representative on the Policy Committee. In addition, the mayors from each rural county choose a voting representative to serve on the Policy Committee. The ALDOT West Central Region Engineer and the Executive Director of the WARC are the other two voting members. The five nonvoting members are Federal Highway Administration Division Administrator, the ALDOT Local Transportation Engineer, the chairman of the RPO TCC, the chairman of the RPO CTAC, and the chairman of the Tuscaloosa Area MPO Policy Committee.

Technical Coordinating Committee

The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) provides technical support to the Policy Committee. The TCC reviews RPO documents, studies, reports, plans, and programs and provides the Policy Committee with recommendations concerning these items. The TCC members evaluate the planning process products from a technical perspective, making sure that all relevant concerns are addressed, including local planning issues, engineering details, environmental questions, and future growth, among many others. The TCC also has the ability to make alternative recommendations for any of the products.

The TCC coordinates the work of the various departments and agencies involved in the transportation planning process. The local governments, the State DOT, and selected other transportation interests are represented on the TCC. The TCC members share information and data that builds and improves the planning processes and products.

Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee

The Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) is made up of twenty-four citizens from the West Alabama area. The county commission and the mayoral representatives on the Policy Committee each appoint two members to the CTAC. Each county has four representatives on the CTAC.

The CTAC was established to provide active public participation in the transportation planning process. The CTAC provides the RPO with a standing committee of citizens who have a good knowledge of the planning process and can pass on public concerns related to transportation in a structured fashion. The CTAC reviews RPO documents, studies, reports, plans, and programs and provides the Policy Committee with recommendations concerning these items.

The CTAC also informs the Policy Committee of public concerns related to transportation projects and issues.

The CTAC is scheduled to meet four times a year. The full CTAC meets once a year, usually in the first quarter of the fiscal year, in conjunction with the TCC and Policy committees. For the other three meetings, the CTAC holds six subcommittee meetings in each of the rural counties. Each subcommittee is composed of the four representatives from the respective county. This method of meeting provides local residents a better opportunity to participate in the planning process.

The CTAC is just one of the strategies included in the public involvement plan adopted by the RPO. The plan describes the RPO public participation goals and lists strategies to encourage public participation in the transportation planning process. The RPO staff reviews participation performance measures annually to judge the effectiveness of the plan.

Appendix C

Public Participation Items



NEWS RELEASE

For Additional Information Contact:
David Norris
West Alabama Regional Commission
4200 Highway 69 North, Suite 1
P.O. Box 509
Northport, AL 35476-0509
(205) 333-2990 * FAX (205) 333-2713

October 25, 2019

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) will hold a meeting on Friday, November 15, 2019, 10:30 a.m. at the West Alabama Regional Commission located at 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport, Alabama. This will be a combined meeting of all RPO committees: Policy Committee, Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC).

The committees will discuss the following: (1) the draft *West Alabama RPO Public Involvement Plan 2020* (PIP) and (2) traffic count brochures. In addition, Blair Perry, P.E. from Gresham Smith will make a presentation on roundabouts.

The RPO serves as a transportation planning process for the rural areas of west Alabama and provides a formal link between the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the local governments. The counties served by the RPO include Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens. The RPO provides government officials and citizens in these counties an opportunity to advise the ALDOT on road, bridge, transit service, and other transportation projects. All of the RPO meetings are open to the public. Anyone requiring special assistance should contact the WARC at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. For **special assistance**, call the WARC at (205) 333-2990.



NEWS RELEASE

For Additional Information Contact:
David Norris
West Alabama Regional Commission
4200 Highway 69 North
P.O. Box 509
Northport, AL 35476-0509
(205) 333-2990 * FAX (205) 333-2713

December 31, 2019

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) will hold the following meetings:

1. Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC)
 - A. Bibb County - January 27, 2020, 6:00 p.m. - Brent City Hall, 22 1st Street, Brent, AL
 - B. Fayette County - January 28, 2020, 5:00 p.m. - Fayette County Commission Chamber, 103 1st Avenue NW, Fayette, AL
 - C. Greene County - January 30, 2020, 11:00 a.m. - James C. Poole Library, 219 Prairie Avenue, Eutaw, AL
 - D. Hale County - January 21, 2020, 2019, 5:00 p.m. - Moundville Library, 279 Market Street, Moundville, AL
 - E. Lamar County - January 23, 2020, 6:00 p.m. - Lamar County Commission Records Room, 44690 Highway 17, Vernon, AL
 - F. Pickens County - January 30, 2020, 9:00 a.m. - Pickens County Commission, 20 Phoenix Ave, Carrollton, AL
2. Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), February 13, 2020, 10:00 a.m. - West Alabama Regional Commission, 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport, AL
3. RPO Policy Committee, February 14, 2020, 10:30 a.m. - West Alabama Regional Commission, 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport, AL

The committees will discuss the draft *West Alabama RPO Public Involvement Plan 2020* (PIP), crash reports, traffic counts, and the election of officers at the meetings. The meeting packets are posted on the WARC website (<https://www.warc.info/rpo-meetings/>), and the documents are available at (<https://www.warc.info/rpo-documents>). In addition, Jesse Norris from the University of Alabama Center for Advanced Public Safety will make a presentation on the Critical Analysis Reporting Environment (CARE) program at the Policy Committee meeting.

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All of the meetings are open to the public. Anyone requiring special assistance should contact the WARC at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. For **special assistance** call the WARC at (205) 333-2990.

poisoning, said CPSC Acting Chairman Robert Adler. "I encourage everyone to check and change the batteries in their smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Doing this can save you and your family in a fire or CO emergency."

Why is this important?

CPSC estimates that in 2016, there were nearly 352,000 residential structure fires, resulting in about 2,410 deaths, 10,370 in-

juries, and property damage from consumer product incidents cost the nation more than \$1 trillion annually. CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical or mechanical hazard. CPSC's work to ensure the safety of consumer products - such as toys, cribs, power tools, cigarette lighters and household chemicals - contributed to a decline in the rate of deaths and injuries associated with consumer products over the past 40 years.

A smoke alarm should be on every level of your home, inside each bedroom, and outside sleeping areas. CO alarms should also be placed on every level of your home, and outside sleeping areas. Batteries should be replaced in alarms, unless the alarms have sealed 10-year battery smoke alarms. Your smoke alarms are more than

"change the time to en-

Deaths, injuries, and property damage from consumer product incidents cost the nation more than \$1 trillion annually. CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical or mechanical hazard. CPSC's work to ensure the safety of consumer products - such as toys, cribs, power tools, cigarette lighters and household chemicals - contributed to a decline in the rate of deaths and injuries associated with consumer products over the past 40 years.

Federal law bars any per-

2112 or teletypewriter at 301-595-7054 for the hearing impaired.

CPSC Consumer Information Hotline

Contact us at this toll-free number if you have questions about a recall:

800-638-2772 (TTY 301-595-7054)

Times: 8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. ET; Messages can be left anytime

Call to get product safety and other agency information and to report unsafe products.

Greene County Democrat
10/30/2019
Page 8

West Alabama Rural Planning Organization will hold meeting on November 15, 2019

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) will hold a meeting on Friday, November 15, 2019, 10:30 a.m. at the West Alabama Regional Commission located at 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport, Alabama. This will be a combined meeting of all RPO committees: Policy Committee, Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), and the Citizens

Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC).

The committees will discuss the following: (1) the draft West Alabama RPO Public Involvement Plan 2020 (PIP) and (2) traffic count brochures. In addition, Blair Perry, P.E. from Gresham Smith will make a presentation on roundabouts.

The RPO serves as a transportation planning process for the rural areas of west Alabama and provides a formal link between the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the local governments. The counties served by the RPO include Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens. The RPO provides government officials and citizens in these counties an

opportunity to advise the ALDOT on road, bridge, transit service, and other transportation projects. All of the RPO meetings are open to the public. Anyone requiring special assistance should contact the WARC at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. For special assistance, call the WARC at (205) 333-2990.

The University of Alabama

Free
Computer/Phone Tutoring at
Eutaw Public Housing Authority
Fall 2019
Nov. 8, Nov. 15
Time 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Choose what you want to learn:
Computer for Beginners;
Social Media; Microsoft Excel,
Word or Power Point; Phone/Tablet Skills.
You will be tutored by trained and knowledgeable University undergraduate or graduate student on University computers. Computer for Beginners covers basic skills, such as Internet Explorer, web searches, email, Goggle Docs, navigating Windows, and file maintenance. We provide computers, materials, software and tutors at no charge.

To reserve space, text or call
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13 ALABAMA PROPERTIES

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re stories of "ul" scares of There were ght. Outside telling him that someone was in the house. I was still in between dream and reality, and I really believed someone was in the house. and grandchildren stories, just as our parents and grandparents told us. Happy Halloween everyone!

West Alabama RPO to hold meeting

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) will hold a meeting at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 15 at the West Alabama Regional Commission office, located at 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport.

This will be a combined meeting of all RPO committees: Policy Committee, Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), and the

Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC).

The committees will discuss the following: The draft West Alabama RPO Public Involvement Plan 2020 (PIP) and traffic count brochures. In addition, Blair Perry, P.E. from Gresham Smith will make a presentation on roundabouts.

The RPO serves as a

transportation planning process for the rural areas of west Alabama, and provides a formal link between the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the local governments.

The counties served by the RPO include Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens. The RPO provides government officials and citizens in these counties an opportu-

nity to advise the ALDOT on road, bridge, transit service, and other transportation projects.

All of the RPO meetings are open to the public. Anyone requiring special assistance should contact the WARC at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

For special assistance, call the WARC at (205) 333-2990.

Ivey announces grant to fight drugs

Governor Kay Ivey announced more than \$1.4 million in grants are being awarded to continue the fight to reduce illegal drug use in the state by arresting those who buy or sell illegal drugs or falsely obtain prescription drugs.

Funds will be distributed to the seven regional offices of the Alabama Drug Enforcement Task Force under the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA).

ALEA receives separate funding to help administer the task force. The task force offices were formed in Jan. 2018 and are made

up of officers in local law enforcement agencies.

"We must combat the illegal and illegally obtained drugs that rob so many people of productive lives and that destroy families," Governor Ivey said. "I am pleased to support this task force, and I am grateful to the men and women who risk their lives to take drugs off our streets."

In its second year, the statewide drug task force has been involved in 991 drug cases resulting in 606 arrests. Agents have seized 508 pounds of marijuana, 228 pounds of methamphetamine and 11 pounds

of heroin and opioids along with other drugs and more than 200 firearms.

The task force is made up of 93 law enforcement officers representing 46 state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies.

The seven regional drug task force offices each received \$204,100 in grant funding. Each regional office covers eight to 12 counties, although officers have powers in other jurisdictions. Funds will be used to cover overtime and operational expenses and equipment purchases.

The Alabama Depart-

ment of Economic and Community Affairs is administering the grants from funds made available to the state from the U.S. Justice Department.

"ADECA values its partnerships with ALEA and the regional drug task forces who are making a difference in our communities," ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell said.

ADECA administers an array of programs supporting law enforcement and traffic safety, economic development, energy conservation, water resource management and recreation development.

Alabama's right to vote
by the Abramoff
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C-5

PEOPLE & PLACES

AROUND TOWN

Wednesday

Northport Farmers Market: 6 a.m.-noon at 4150 Fifth St., Northport.

The Empowered Educator, Leverage that Affirms the Whole Child: 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at Residence Inn by Marriott Tuscaloosa, 211 Rice Mine Road. Cost: \$85. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com.

Goat Yoga Bham-Gentle Flow Yoga for Beginners: 10:30-11:30 a.m. at Goat Yoga Bham, 1441 County Road 277, Helena. Cost is \$20. For information: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/goat-yoga-bham-gentle-flow-yoga-for-beginners-tickets-75711734837>.

Fourth Annual Student Investment Luncheon and Auction: 11 a.m. at Shelton State Community College, 9500 Old Greensboro Road. The event raises money for scholarships. Group and individual sponsorship options are available for

purchase. To purchase tickets, visit www.sheltonstate.edu/student-investment-luncheon. For more information, contact Shannon Chandler at 205-391-2360 or schandler@sheltonstate.edu.

The "Board" Meeting Happy Hour Social: 5-6:30 p.m. at the home of Allison and James Leitner, 6811 Elaina Lane. Young Leaders Society will meet with the United Way of West Alabama's board of directors. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com.

MixedFit Dance Class: 6-7 p.m. at Eat My Beats, 4755 Jug Factory Road. The class combines explosive dance movements with bootcamp toning. Cost is \$7. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com.

"Love, Loss and What I Wore": 7:30 p.m. at Historic Drish House, 2300 17th St. Tickets cost \$8. Call 205-391-2277 for tickets from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Thursday

"Love, Loss and What I Wore": 7:30 p.m. at Historic Drish House, 2300 17th St. Tickets are \$8. Call 205-391-2277 for tickets 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Thursday Dance: 6:45-9:30 p.m. at Northport Community Center, 2100 Park St., Northport. Live music with Country Gold Band. Cost is \$5.

Friday

West Alabama Rural Planning Organization: 10:30 a.m. at West Alabama Regional Commission, 4200 Alabama Highway 69 North, Northport. Combined committee meeting will include discussion of the public involvement plan, traffic count brochures and roundabouts. For special assistance, call 205-333-2990.

"Love, Loss and What I Wore": 7:30 p.m. at Historic Drish House, 2300 17th St. Tickets are \$8. Call 205-391-2277 for tickets

Send us your events



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from 9 a.m.-noon.

Friday Dance: 6:45-9:45 p.m. at Northport Community Center, 2100 Park St., Northport. Live music by Keith Porter and the Over the Hill Band. Cost is \$5.

Country Music Live: 7-10 p.m. at Old Fayette Community Center, Sixth Street South, Fayette. Featuring Judy Moore and the Good Time Band. Call 205-393-8386.

Shareholders set to vote on GateHouse-Gannett deal

New Media's \$1.2 billion purchase of Gannett would create nation's largest newspaper chain

By Bob Sechler
GateHouse Media

The newspaper industry mega deal in which GateHouse Media's parent company plans to buy USA Today parent Gannett Co., combining the two largest

"Scale matters in the digital space, are much stronger together, with a viable path for growth for our shareholders, our employees and for sustaining journalism."

New Media's chairman and CEO, Michael Reed

conference call. The two chains "are much stronger together, with a viable path for growth for our shareholders, our employees and for

Through a spokeswoman, he declined a request for an interview prior to the shareholder votes.

(for the combined companies) once they have bought time? That is the question that is looming for them and for readers."

He said he doesn't think the architects of the combination have one.

Lunzer, of the NewsGuild, agreed, calling the deal "a callous piece of financialization" that will create short-term profits at the expense of journalism.

PEOPLE & PLACES

AROUND TOWN

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Christmas Market: 9 a.m.-6 p.m. at East McFarland Baptist Church, 6007 McFarland Blvd. East. Proceeds will benefit Samaritan's Purse Shoebox Ministry.

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Country Music Live: 7-10 p.m. at Old Fayette Community Center, Sixth Street, South, Fayette. Featuring Judy Moore

and the Good Time Band. Call 205-393-8386.

Saturday

Northport Farmers Market: 6 a.m.-noon at 4150 Fifth St., Northport.

Tuscaloosa Farmers Market: 7 a.m.-noon at Tuscaloosa River Market, 1900 Jack Warner Parkway.

Taylorville United Methodist Church: 640 Bear Creek Road. Fall craft bazaar from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Featuring hand-stitched items, jewelry, fall decor, vintage gifts, recycled wine bottle art, painted wood, quilted items and more. Pancake and sausage breakfast for \$5. There will be a coffee bar and a bake sale.

Wagner's 11th Annual Turkey Trot: A family-friendly 2-mile run/walk to be held at Wagner's Run/Walk in Tuscaloosa's Midtown Village at 8 a.m. The event features a flat course and a ton of prizes, giveaways and food. Registration is \$30 per person or \$35 per family. The event raises money to fight food insecurity. For more information, go to the Wagner's Run/Walk page on Facebook.

Fairy Tale Friends Breakfast with the Berenstain Bears: 8 a.m.-9:30 a.m. and 10-11:30 a.m. at The Cypress Inn Pavilion, 501 Rice Mine Road N. Kids can wear their favorite princess or Marvel character costume and get photographs and autographs from characters like Cinderella and Spider-Man. Cost is \$30.

Children younger than 1 year old will be admitted free. A silent auction will be held to benefit Operation Credit Union Christmas. For more information, go to www.alabamaone.org/fairy tale.

Hero Workout: 8:30 a.m.-noon at Tuscaloosa Police-Firing Range, 2201 New Watermelon Road, Tuscaloosa. Cost is \$5 to \$10. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com. The hero workout will honor Investigator Dornell Cousette of Tuscaloosa Police Department and raise money to support his family.

Glowing Up Ain't Easy: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at Beulah Baptist Church, 3100 25th St. Registration for the women's empowerment conference costs \$10. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com.

4 the Girls: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at CrossFit NorthRidge, 300 McFarland Blvd. Suite No. 1 in Northport. The workout is CrossFit NorthRidge's annual breast cancer event.

Christmas Market: 9 a.m.-6 p.m. at East McFarland Baptist Church, 6007 McFarland Blvd. East. Proceeds will benefit Samaritan's Purse Shoebox Ministry.

Blush and Brushes, Beards, Brews and Blue Edition: 4-7 p.m. at the Brick and Spoon, 2318 Fourth St. The evening of food, fun and entertainment will honor the memory of fallen Tuscaloosa Police Investigator Dornell Cousette. General admission is \$25. Presented by iMakeUpMe

Send us your events



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Beauty and Skin Care. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com.

Southern Gospel Concert: 6 p.m. at Berry Civic Center, 30 School Ave., Berry. Featuring Trusting Grace of Bessemer and the Busby Family of Berry. Free. This is the last singing in 2019.

Alabama Festival of Ballet: 6-8:30 p.m. at University of Alabama's Morgan Auditorium, 428 Colonial Drive. The festival will feature performances by dance companies from the Alabama Ballet, the Montgomery Ballet, Troy University, University of Alabama, Alabama State and more. Tickets cost \$15 for adults and \$9 for students and seniors. For more information, go to www.eventbrite.com.

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Chinese, other students flee Hong Kong as violence worsens

Greta Thunberg hitches

PEOPLE & PLACES

AROUND TOWN

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Sunday

Carolwood Free Will Baptist Church: 12191 Graceland Road, Northport. Church anniversary service at 10:30 a.m. The group Spoken For will be the guest singers. Lunch will be served afterward. Call 205-339-1893.

"Courage Is Creativity" Opening Reception: 2-3:30 p.m. in the Junior League Gallery at Bama Theatre, 600 Greensboro Ave. Free. Art exhibit by Paul Bryant High School and Tuscaloosa Fine Arts Academy Students.

"Love, Loss and What I Wore":

Send us your events



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2300 17th St. Tickets cost \$8. Call 205-391-2277 for tickets.

Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church: 128 39th St. E. Annual choir day program at 3 p.m. Call 205-826-0466 or 205-391-0029.

Porter St. Paul CME Church: 913 Bridge Ave., Northport. Tuscaloosa District Missionary Program at 3 p.m. Guest speaker will be the Rev. John I. Samuel Jr., pastor of Emory Chapel CME Church in Aliceville. Special music by the Porter St. Paul Hallelujah Choir. Attire color is royal blue.

Celebration of Praise and Thanksgiving: 3 p.m. at Weeping Mary Baptist Church, 2701 20th St. Doors open at 2 p.m. Free entry with canned good donations accepted. The celebration will include the church's praise team and choir with guests Men of Prayze, T.L. Davis Jr. and the Beulah Baptist Music Ministry.

Bailey Tabernacle CME Church: 1117 23rd St. The Tuskegee University Golden Voices Choir in concert at 4 p.m. The concert is part of the annual Sacrificial Feast Sunday. Fellowship dinner afterward in the W. C. and Kay Rice-Jones Education Building. Donations raised at the free event will help support the ministries at Bailey Taber-

with wire. At the base, use two concrete blocks per group of three trees as an anchor. Bundles can be placed upright or on their sides. If making an upright bundle, tie a float to the tops

"Small mammals can find escape routes in small piles better than in large ones," he said. "Also, large piles tend to attract skunks, raccoons, opossums and coyotes."

Greensboro Watchman
1/1/2020
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MAKE THEM MORE EFFECTIVE, ETC.

West Alabama Rural Planning Organization to meet in Jan.

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) will hold the following meetings:

1. Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC)

A. Bibb County - January 27, 2020, 6:00 p.m. - Brent City Hall, 22 1st Street, Brent, AL

B. Fayette County - January 28, 2020, 5:00 p.m. - Fayette County Commission Chamber, 103 1st Avenue NW, Fayette, AL

C. Greene County - January 30, 2020, 11:00 a.m. - James C. Poole Library, 219 Prairie Avenue, Eutaw, AL

D. Hale County - January 21, 2020, 2019, 5:00 p.m. - Moundville Library, 279 Market Street, Moundville, AL

E. Lamar County - January 23, 2020, 6:00 p.m. - Lamar County Commission Chamber, 44690 Highway 17, Vernon, AL

F. Pickens County - January 30, 2020, 9:00 a.m. - Pickens County Commission, 20 Phoenix Ave, Carrollton, AL

2. Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), February 13, 2020, 10:00 a.m. - West Alabama Regional Commission, 4200 Highway 69 North, Northport, AL

3. RPO Policy Committee, February 14, 2020, 10:30 a.m. - West Alabama Regional Commission,

4200 Highway 69 North, Northport, AL

The committees will discuss the draft West Alabama RPO Public Involvement Plan 2020 (PIP), crash reports, traffic counts, and the election of officers at the meetings. The meeting packets are posted on the WARC website (<https://www.warc.info/rpo-meetings/>), and the documents are available at (<https://www.warc.info/rpo-documents>). In addition, Jesse Norris from the University of Alabama Center for Advanced Public Safety will make a presentation on the Critical Analysis Reporting Environment (CARE) program at the Policy Committee meeting.

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All of the meetings are open to the public. Anyone requiring special assistance should contact the WARC at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. For special assistance call the WARC at (205) 333-2990.

He always kept a special place in his heart for Alabama. He and his family would return every summer. After retirement, he would come down for months at a time, where he would spend time at the family home surrounded by his close friends Delois Mickens, Frank Shaw, Jr., Thomas Burrell, and Willie Mickens.

He met and married the former Rosanna Jeffries, and to this union a son was born, Richard, Jr.

He is preceded in death by his wife; son, Richard, Jr.; three sisters; and five brothers.

Survivors include a devoted niece and nephew who served as his caregivers, Doris Gibbons and Cephas Swain of Cleveland; a special niece who he took as a daughter, Irene Banks of Newbern; a daughter-in-law, Sharon Pratcher of Cleveland; a sister-in-law, Bernice (Nehemiah) Martin of Dallas; and a brother-in-law, Wash (Mildred) Jeffries of Cleveland. His legacy will also be carried on by the children of his late siblings, Eliza Lyles, Mattie Pratcher, Willie Pratcher, and Thornton Pratcher, as well as a

granddaughter, DeAnna Benison and Demetrius Benison, Jr.; a sister, Magdeline White of Greensboro; two brothers, Abraham Lewis of Tuscaloosa and Emanuel Lewis of Greensboro; an aunt, Marie White of Greensboro; a brother-in-law, James King of Chicago; and a host of nieces, nephews, other relatives, and friends.

Funeral services were held Saturday, Dec. 21 at Union Grove Baptist Church with Pastor Lester O. Walker officiating and Washington and Paige Mortuary directing. Pallbearers were Malcolm Small, Abraham Lewis, Ezell McAlpine, Antonio Lewis, Lamar White, Demetrius Benison, Mike Coleman, Christopher White, Jr., Charles Peterson, Clifton Lewis, and the Class of 1971. Flowers bearers were Shaquita Coleman, Empris Small, Shavontae Rainer, Emariel Small, Shakeira Banks, Jammie King, Krislyn White, Le'Ariel White, and the Class of 1971. Interment followed at the church cemetery.



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She leaves to cherish her memory husband of 59 years, Willard Roberts; sons, Darryl Roberts (wife, Angela),

Ava Nell Nix, 91 of Hamilton, passed away Saturday December 28, 2019, at the North Ms Medical Center in Hamilton. Visitation will be Monday December 30. 2:00

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, December 19, 2019 – MONTGOMERY – Secretary of State John H. Merrill warns the business community of a misleading letter from the "AL Certificate Service" being circulated across the state.

After receiving numerous constituency con-

Defusing Anxiety & Negativity in 2020: Why Gratitude Is Key

By Frank Kilpatrick

We all want to feel happy and productive. But here's the Catch 22: the things we do to try to feel that way—working long hours, rushing kids from one activity to the other, and meeting all of life's obligations—can leave us feeling stressed, anxious, and even resentful. (And that's not counting the complications that spring up.) We may find ourselves thinking: What's the point of all this hard work if I can't enjoy my life?

Thankfully, we can feel contentment (and yes, happiness!) even when life is at its most chaotic. It comes not from trying to control your circumstances (which isn't always possible) but from shifting how you look at them.

I love the saying "Gratitude doesn't change things for you, it changes you for things." When we can learn to come from a place of gratitude, we see things differently. There's a mindset shift that brings peace. My new Gratitude Musical/Visual meditation series, (available on YouTube at www.YouTube.com/c/GratitudeVideo) helps listeners tap into that mindset.

In other words, instead of dreading a tough project at work, we feel gratitude for our job. Instead of feeling stressed about taking our aging mother to the doctor, we're grateful to be able to spend the afternoon with her.

My colleagues—Grammy-winner Alex Wand and composer/vocalist Rayko—and I are on a mission to fill the world with gratitude. Our meditation series—which combines "microtonal" music, vocals, visuals, and on-screen lyrical messages in a unique way that keeps your attention—is designed to help train the brain for gratitude and peace. This focus stems from our work on the Stay Alive video/podcast documentary and is a central part of

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Dear EarthTalk: There are so many eco-labels out there these days. How can I tell which ones are valid and not just "greenwashing"?

— Penny Rasmussen, Calumet, MN

With countless products now available labelled as "eco-friendly," "safe for

Greene County Democrat

1/8/2020

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These Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee plants are grown under natural shade created by native tree species on this Guatemalan coffee farm. Credit: Charlie Watson, FlickrCC.

And even the legitimate labels vary a lot in meaning. Truly valid ecolabels are awarded by independent third parties, not the companies who sell products on which they're featured.

These days many companies are using misleading nonsense labels on products to create an impression of environmental friendliness, a practice known as "greenwashing."

Third parties, on the other hand, require that products meet certain specific criteria before granting the right to display their eco-label. When we know they are trustworthy, eco-labels can serve as a potent means for altering consumer behavior in a way that benefits the environment.

There are some common eco-labels that we can

eco-label seen often on coffee, fruits, tea, paper or furniture is "Rainforest Alliance Certified," a designation for foods and building materials sustainably sourced from tropical rainforests. The non-profit Rainforest Alliance runs this program in part by vetting producers throughout the tropics.

If you like to know the products you buy are sourced sustainably by workers who were not exploited and were paid a living wage, look for the "Fair Trade Certified" label. Almost a million

and have not been genetically modified. You can rest assured that any "Certified Organic" animal products you consume have not been treated with antibiotics or growth hormones and were fed organic feed and allowed access to the outdoors. And any products labeled "Made with Organic Ingredients" contain at least 70 percent organic ingredients.

Some other trustworthy labels include: LEED, GreenSeal, FSC-Certified, Salmon-Safe, WaterSense and Non-GMO Project

The West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) will hold

the following meetings:

1. Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC)
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Pickens. The RPO provides government officials and citizens in these counties an opportunity to voice the ALDOT on road bridge, and transit projects. All of the meetings open to the public. Any requiring special assistance should contact the WARC at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. For special assistance call the WARC at (205) 333-2990.

Rep. James E. Clyburn

"This is an important step toward providing American consumers more accessible and affordable prescription drugs," Congressman Clyburn said. "In the United States our drug prices are nearly four times higher than in similar countries, and this legislation will provide real price reductions that will put significant money back in the pocket of consumers."

Negotiating lower prescription drug prices has added benefit of cost savings to American taxpayers

Soleimani



gets EXCLUSIVE on-camera reactions to House Democrats impeachment announcement, the release of the IG report, and other breaking stories coming out moments before the interviews. Stephanie Grisham, White House Press Secretary,

Owens, Diamond and Silk, Anthony Scaramucci, Mike Lindell, Dan Crenshaw, and nearly 20 other Local, State, and National political figures. 2020 begins Brilyn's third year running The Truth Gazette, originally starting in 2017.

COUNCIL, Jump from Page 1

der of business being departmental business from the Northport Police Department, with the council approving ABC licenses for Eagle Food Mart, LLC and BSAC Inc. In approving these licenses, Hogg announced that Fifth and Handle Liquor and Cigars would be opening next to the Publix at the Shops of Bristol Park in February, with a cigar room being added to the business in the coming months.

Two Northport residents, John Freeman and James Washington, were signed to speak during the council's allotted time for public comment.

Freeman had previously attended city council meetings, asking the council to pay for a bill for the Green Village mobile home park as well as a ticket he had received for overgrown grass in the area. Council president Jay Logan explained that the handwritten invoice that had been brought in was invalid and the city would not be paying the requested amount.

"The city is not going to pay that bill, it's not even a valid invoice," Logan said. "The city doesn't



Photos by Aaron Bonner
Northport resident John Freeman addressed the council, requesting the council to pay for a bill he had previously brought to the council.

still being looked into, with engineering staff assessing the situation to find a way to address traffic and speeding issues in the area.

With no further citizens signed to speak, the council made a motion to go into a 15-minute long executive session to discuss further retail development. No further action was taken following the session.

The Northport City Council meets the first and third Monday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at Northport City Hall, with a pre-meeting held at 5 p.m.

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that traffic in the area had been recorded and was

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the Florida Department of Transportation for the next six years, designing and overseeing the construction that I grew up in, which helped shape who I am today. Therefore, I would like to give back to the community as the republican candidate for the Fayette County District 6 County Commissioner.

Governor Ivey awards assistance with energy bills

ALEA reports 22 holiday traffic deaths

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's (ALEA) Troopers investigated 22 traffic deaths during the 2019 Christmas - New Year's holiday travel period, from 12:01 a.m. Friday, Dec. 20, 2019 to midnight Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2020.

Although there were four zero-traffic fatality days - including Christmas Day and New Year's Eve - 22 individuals lost their lives on Alabama roadways during the 13-day travel period. Among those killed was a four-year-old, who died in an Etowah

equipped with seat belts, 14 of them were not using seat belts or restraints. Four of those killed were using seat belts, and seat-belt usage is unknown for two of the individuals killed.

Crashes occurred in Baldwin, Barbour, Cullman, Dallas, Elmore, Etowah, Henry, Lamar, Mobile, Pickens, Randolph, Russell and Tuscaloosa counties.

During the 2018 Christmas-New Year's holiday travel period, a 17-day period from 12:01 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 16, 2018, to midnight Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2019, Troopers investigated 21 traffic deaths.

Please note these totals are only for fatal traffic crashes troopers investigated. Statewide numbers are not available.

Governor Kay Ivey has awarded grants totaling \$46.2 million to assist low-income families in Alabama with energy bills.

The grants will enable 21 community service agencies throughout the state to provide emergency funding to help low-income families heat their houses this winter.

"Many low-income families in Alabama are forced to weigh between staying warm in their homes or having food and prescription medicine," Ivey said. "These grants will help many elderly, disabled and families with children not have to make those choices. I am pleased to provide this assistance to help those most in need."

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is administering the grants from funds made available by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

LIHEAP helps eligible low-income households afford the energy required to heat their houses. Residents apply for assistance through local community service agencies who determine eligibility based on income, family size and available resources.

"Governor Ivey understands the crucial importance of this funding for helping qualified families heat their homes during cold weather," ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell said. "ADECA is pleased to join with the governor to make these funds available as we enter what are typically the coldest months of the year in Alabama."

Below is a list of the community service agencies receiving grants, their service areas and grant amounts:

Community Action Agency of Northwest Alabama Inc. (Colbert, Franklin and Lauderdale) - \$1.25 million.

Community Action Partnership of Huntsville/Madison and Limestone Counties Inc. (Madison and Limestone) - \$2.77 million.

Community Action Agency of Northeast Alabama Inc. (Blount, Cherokee, DeKalb, Jackson, Marshall and St. Clair) - \$3.54 million.

Community Action Partnership of North Alabama Inc. (Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan) - \$2.3 million.

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as we enter what are typically the coldest months of the year in Alabama."

Community Services Programs of West Alabama Inc. (Bibb, Choctaw, Dallas, Fayette, Greene, Lamar, Perry, Sumter and Tuscaloosa) - \$5.42 million.

Pickens County Community Action Committee and Community Development Corp. Inc. (Pickens) - \$368,550.

ADECA administers a wide range of programs that support law enforcement, victim services, economic development, water resource management, energy conservation and recreation.

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OBITUARIES

DONALD RAY CONNER

ALICEVILLE - Donald Ray Conner died in Birmingham. Services were held at 11 a.m. Saturday, December 28, 2019, at Cedar Grove Baptist Church, County Rd. 1, Aliceville. Lavender's Funeral Service directed. Visitation was held 2 - 6 p.m. Friday, at the funeral home. The body lay in state one hour prior to the service.



Rev. Gary Crum officiating. Burial followed at Sunset Memorial Gardens in Machesney Park, Illinois. Visitation was held from noon-6 p.m. Friday,

January 3, 2020 at Carter's Funeral Service. Carter's Funeral Service of Columbus was in charge of arrangements. Mrs. Ketton was born Nov. 6, 1930, in Ethelsville, to the late Johnny Walter Sharp and Janie Sharp. She was formerly employed as a housekeeper with Rockford Memorial Hospital and a member of El Bethel M.B. Church. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Abe Ketton; and siblings, Mollie Mayhew, Johnnie B. Sharp, Willie George Sharp, Corine Bradley, Cutee Jones, Walter Frank Sharp and Jessie T. Sharp. She is survived by her children, Johnny Earl Ketton and Kenneth P. Ketton, both of Rockford, Rufus L. Ketton, Minnie M. Redmond and Martha K. Crosby, all of Ethelsville, Henry W. Ketton of Montgomery, Maxine Latham of Clementon, New Jersey, and Manuel J. Ketton of Hesperia, California; and 28

iceville High School without missing a day of school since first grade. He joined the Alabama National Guard, and then attended Officer Candidate School in the U.S. Army at Fort Benning, Georgia. After serving 43 years in the Alabama National Guard, he retired with the rank of Colonel. He graduated from Livingston University with a BS in Secondary Education. He achieved a Master's degree in Counseling and Guidance and an EDS in Administration and Counseling from the University of Alabama. As an educator for 54 years, he held positions as Principal at Carrollton High School, Director at Ladow Area Vocational Center in Pickens County, Assistant Principal at New Hope High School in Lowndes County and Director of Lowndes County Career Technology Program. Percy's influence with young people reached into his church where he taught Sunday School for 15 years, in addition to service in many other positions. He was always looking for ways to encourage young people in their education and life choices. Percy was the first president of the Aliceville Museum. His strong support in the early years was crucial in the establishment and survival of the museum. The

January 4, 2020 at 1 p.m. at Dowdle Funeral Home, with James Godsey and Lynn Godsey officiating. Burial followed at Bethlehem Cemetery in Reform. Visitation was one hour prior to services at the funeral home. Dowdle Funeral Home of Millport was in charge of arrangements. Mrs. Merchant was born to the late Thomas and Mary Evelyn Cunningham. She was formerly employed as a cook with local restaurants. She is survived by her sons, Justin Merchant and Tyler Merchant; and five grandchildren. Pallbearers were Keith Swedenburg, Terry Rhudy, Andy Duncan, T.J. Rhudy, Dennis Dwyer and Lloyd Hardin.

Stephanie Elizabeth
probation officer
Georgia for 30 y
Martha "Kay" (K
They were marrie
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In lieu of flowers,
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ily Support, 1121
Suite 103 Omaha
wwfs.org)

MITTIE LEE "Kate" DEGRAFFENREID

ALICEVILLE - Mittie Lee "Kate" Degraffenreid died Saturday, December 21, 2019. Services were held at 11 a.m. Friday, December 27, 2019, New Salem Baptist Church, 364 New Salem Road, Aliceville, with Rev. Dr. Herman Peters officiating. Interment followed in the church cemetery. Lavender's Funeral Service directed.

VIOLET RUTH HOLLIS

VERNON, AL - Violet Ruth Hollis, age 98, died Friday, January 3, 2020 at Generation of Vernon. Funeral services



MARTHA ANN COLLEY

FAYETTE - Martha Ann Colley, age 85, of Fayette, Ala., died December 31, 2019, at UAB Hospital. A private service was held. Arrangements handled by Norwood-Wyatt Chapel Funeral Home.



SAMUEL STEPHEN CRAWFORD

CARROLLTON - Samuel Stephen



Gordo, Ala., died in Tuscaloosa Co held at 11:00 a.m 27 2019 at Ste

Appendix D

Title VI Program

West Alabama

Rural Planning Organization

Prepared by the West Alabama Regional Commission under the guidance of the West Alabama
Rural Planning Organization

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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this program is to describe how the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) ensures compliance with Title VI (Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Act states the following:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (Section 601).

The Act applies to all recipients and sub-recipients of federal funds. The RPO is a sub-recipient under the Alabama Department of Transportation. The RPO Title VI Program is divided into nine sections and includes six supplemental items.

2.0 Title VI Notice

The RPO is required to maintain a Title VI notice. The notice explains Title VI and informs the public that the RPO complies with the requirements of Title VI. The RPO Title VI Notice is included as Supplemental Item 1. The Notice is posted in the lobby of the West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC), next to the reception desk. The RPO staff is housed at WARC. In addition, the notice can be found in the RPO area of the WARC website (<https://www.warc.info/rpo-title-vi>).

3.0 Title VI Complaint Procedure and Form

The RPO developed a Title VI Complaint Procedure that explains how to file a complaint against the RPO. The procedure includes a Complaint Form, that when completed, will provide the information necessary to conduct an initial investigation into the complaint. The procedure and form are included as Supplemental Item 2.

4.0 Title VI Investigations, Complaints, or Lawsuits Filed

The RPO is required to keep a record of Title VI investigations, complaints, and lawsuits filed against the RPO. As of February 14, 2020, the RPO has never had a Title VI investigation, complaint, or lawsuit. The RPO developed a spreadsheet to track these items if ever needed. The spreadsheet is included as Supplemental Items 3.

5.0 Public Participation Plan

The RPO is required to maintain a public participation plan. The plan includes strategies that are intended to engage minority and limited English proficient populations as well as low-income individuals, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The strategies include the following:

- a. Provide a notice to meetings of the standing committee of the transportation planning process to groups that address the needs of the traditionally underserved;
- b. Provide a notice to public meetings related to the Long-Range Transportation Plan to groups that address the needs of the traditionally underserved;
- c. Upon request, provide transportation planning process meeting notices to any individual or group;
- d. Allow anyone to participate in all transportation planning process meetings;
- e. Follow all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act while conducting the transportation planning process;

- f. If feasible and appropriate, modify the transportation planning process and any plan, program, or document developed as part of the process to meet the needs of the traditionally underserved;
- g. If warranted, provide an interpreter for those with limited English proficiency;
- h. offer translation of our website and documents on our website to other languages;
- i. Upon request, make presentations to groups representing traditionally underserved populations;
- j. Provide transportation planning process information at community events;
- k. Hold extended public review periods for the Long-Range Transportation Plan that allow anyone to review the documents in public places, including the WARC office, and on the internet and allow comments to be submitted in person, by e-mail, by postal mail, and by FAX;
- l. Make the RPO staff available to discuss any transportation planning document or the planning process with any group or individual;

The RPO has conducted or offered most of these activities over the past several years. In some cases, the activity has never been requested. The RPO public participation plan is posted at (<https://www.warc.info/rpo-documents>). Past public involvement work is documented annually in the RPO Record of Public Involvement, also posted on the WARC website.

6.0 Limited English Proficiency Plan

The RPO developed a Limited English Proficiency LEP Plan based on Title VI requirements. The LEP Plan details how the RPO will work with limited English proficiency people who want to be involved in the transportation planning process. The RPO LEP Plan is included as Supplemental Item 4.

7.0 RPO Committee Membership

The RPO is composed of four committees; a Policy Committee and three advisory committees. The membership of the Policy Committee is determined by adopted bylaws and includes representatives from the six rural counties in west Alabama, the West Alabama Regional Commission, and the Alabama Department of Transportation.

The three advisory committees include the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC), and the Transit Coordination Committee. The TCC membership is determined by the Policy Committee and is based on position held. The members on this committee are generally engineers, planners, and transportation representatives. The CTAC members are selected by the elected officials on the Policy Committee.

The transit committee has an open membership policy. Anyone can join the committee and have voting privileges. The majority of the members on this committee belong to agencies that provide transit service or purchase transit service for their clients. This committee also serves the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and represents seven counties. The transit committee is not one of the RPO standing committees and only meets as needed. A table that depicts the racial composition of these committees is included as Supplemental Item 5.

The RPO encourages participation from all groups of the community, including minorities. The committee meetings are open to the public and anyone who attends is offered a chance to address the committees. The meetings are advertised through news releases that are sent to all local media sources; and agencies that work with minorities, low-income individuals, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. The news releases are also sent to anyone who requests to be added to the distribution list.

The committee meetings are held on different days, at different times, and at handicap accessible buildings. The public also has the opportunity to submit comments about agenda items prior to committee meetings.

8.0 Demographic Profile

The study area of the West Alabama RPO includes six rural counties in west Alabama (Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens). Based on the 2010 Census, this area had a population of 99,271. Of this number, 35,403 (36%) were minorities. African Americans represented 95% of the minority population. Asian Americans and Native Americans represented 1% of the minority total. Latino Americans, from any race, made up 1% of the population.

The 2010 Census identified 91 block groups in the RPO study area. In 2010, there were 38 block groups that had a concentration of minority population that was 36% or greater. Most of these block groups were located in Greene, Hale, and Pickens County. Bibb and Fayette County each contained two the block groups. Lamar County did not have a block group with a 36% or greater minority population.

The 2011-2015 American Community Survey estimated that there were 1,750 people in west Alabama that did not speak English at home. Of this group, 1,310 spoke Spanish at home. The other most common non-English languages spoken at home were German (156), Arabic (53), Urdu (52), and French (34). Of those that spoke Spanish at home, 547 were estimated to speak English less than very well.

9.0 Identification and Consideration of Mobility Needs of Minority Populations

The West Alabama RPO depends on all of the transportation planning process participants to identify transportation needs. The local governments that are represented on the RPO committees identify the needs within their community. The local governments are divided into districts within the cities and counties. There are numerous minority commissioners and city council members in west Alabama.

The Alabama Department of Transportation identifies needs based on their management programs, including bridge, pavement, and safety. The various transit agencies in the area use their fleet management programs to determine their needs. The RPO staff provides the RPO committees with information prior to final plan and program approval, including social factors, environmental concerns, and socioeconomic projections.

All of the RPO meetings are open to the public, and the public is encouraged to attend and participate in the meetings. News releases advertising the meetings are widely distributed, including to minority groups and individuals. The RPO provides a written response to all public comments submitted during document reviews. All comments and responses are added to final documents as appendices. In the past, the RPO has revised documents based on public comments. The RPO considers all identified needs, numerous social factors, and public input before funding decisions are made.

10.0 Demographic Maps, Charts, and Analysis as Related to Public Transportation

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to provide a map that displays the percent of minority and non-minority population by Census tracts or block groups. FTA does not hold RPOs to the same standards as MPOs. However, the West Alabama RPO chose to develop the block group map. The map is included as Supplemental Item 6.

Supplemental Item 1

Title VI Notice

Notifying the Public of Rights Under Title VI West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO)

- The RPO operates its programs and services without regard to race, color, and national origin in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Any person who believes she or he has been aggrieved by any unlawful discriminatory practice under Title VI may file a complaint with the RPO.
- For more information on the RPO civil rights program, and the procedures to file a complaint, contact 205-333-2990, extension 213; email david.norris@westal.org; or visit the RPO office at 4200 Highway 69 North, Suite 1, Northport, AL. For more information, visit <https://www.warc.info/rpo-title-vi>.
- A complaint may be directly filed with the Federal Transit Administration at the Office of Civil Rights, Attention: Title VI Program Coordinator, East Building, 5th Floor-TCR, 1200 New Jersey Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20590
- If information is needed in another language, please write to Title VI Request, West Alabama RPO, P.O. Box 509, Northport, AL 35473 or e-mail david.norris@westal.org with the subject line "Interpreter".
 - Si se necesita información en otro idioma, por favor escriba a "Title VI Request", West Alabama RPO, P.O. Box 509, Northport, AL 35473 o por e-mail david.norris@westal.org con el asunto "Interpreter".

The RPO Title VI notice is posted on the West Alabama Regional Commission website at <https://www.warc.info/rpo-title-vi> and a bulletin board in the lobby of the West Alabama Regional Commission (4200 Highway 69 North, Suite 1, Northport, AL).

Supplemental Item 2

Title VI Complaint Procedure
West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO)

Any person who believes they have been discriminated against on the basis of race, color, or national origin by the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (hereinafter referred to as “the RPO”) may file a Title VI complaint by completing and submitting the RPO Title VI Complaint Form.

- The RPO investigates complaints received no more than 180 days after the alleged incident.
- The RPO will process complaints that are complete.
- Once the complaint is received, the RPO will review it to determine if they have jurisdiction.
- The complainant will receive an acknowledgement letter informing the complainant whether the complaint will be investigated by the RPO.
- The RPO has 30 days to investigate the complaint.
- If more information is needed to resolve the case, the RPO may contact the complainant.
 - The complainant has 15 business days from the date of the letter to send requested information to the investigator assigned to the case.
 - If the investigator is not contacted by the complainant or does not receive the additional information within 15 business days, the RPO can administratively close the case.
- A case can be administratively closed also if the complainant no longer wishes to pursue their case.
- After the investigator reviews the complaint, the investigator will issue one of two letters to the complainant: a closure letter or a letter of finding (LOF). A closure letter summarizes the allegations and states that there was not a Title VI violation and that the case will be closed. A letter of finding summarizes the allegations and the interviews regarding the alleged incident, and explains whether any disciplinary action, additional training of the staff member, or other action will occur.
- If the complainant wishes to appeal the decision, the complainant has 15 days after the date of the letter or the letter of finding to do so.
- A person may also file a complaint directly with the Federal Transit Administration, at FTA Office of Civil Rights, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20590.

Part 4

Have you previously filed a Title VI complaint with the RPO? Yes No (Circle One)

Part 5

Have you filed this complaint with any other Federal, State, or local agency, or with any Federal or State court? Yes No (Circle One)

If yes, list all agencies and courts; include the contact person, agency name, address, and telephone number.

Part 6

Name of agency complaint is against: _____

Contact person: _____

Title: _____

Telephone number: _____

Please attach any written materials or other information that you think is relevant to your complaint.

Signature

Date

Please submit this form to:
Title VI Complaint
West Alabama RPO
P.O. Box 509
Northport, AL 35476-0509

Supplemental Item 3

	Date (Month, Day, Year)	Summary (Include basis of complaint: race, color, or national origin)	Status	Action(s) Taken
Investigations				
1.				
2.				
3.				
Lawsuits				
1.				
2.				
3.				
Complaints				
1.				
2.				
3.				

Supplemental Item 4

**Limited English
Proficiency (LEP) Plan**

**West Alabama
Rural Planning Organization**

Prepared by the West Alabama Regional Commission under the guidance of the
West Alabama Rural Planning Organization

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to document how the West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) integrates people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) into the transportation planning process. The RPO is the official decision-making body of the west Alabama transportation planning process. This plan includes an assessment of the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population and how the RPO will address the potential needs of this population.

1.2 Laws and Regulations

Entities that receive federal funding must follow Section 601 of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d. The Act states that no person shall "... on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." To strengthen Title VI, Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, was issued on August 11, 2000. The order requires federal agencies that distribute financial assistance to non-federal entities to publish guidance detailing how the non-federal entities can provide meaningful access to LEP persons. The U.S. Department of Transportation released their LEP guidance on December 14, 2005.

1.3 Public Involvement

The West Alabama RPO Policy Committee adopted the LEP Plan at their February 14, 2020 meeting. Prior to this, the availability of the draft plan was advertised through news releases to the local media; and agencies and groups that work with minorities, low income people, persons with disabilities, and elderly individuals. The draft plan was published on the West Alabama Regional Commission website in October 2020 and was also available at the RPO office. The draft plan was discussed at two sets of RPO committee meetings held in November 2019 and January-February 2020. The RPO accepted comments on the plan from November 15, 2019 through February 13, 2020. Comments could have been submitted in person at the RPO or Transit Authority offices and by postal mail, e-mail, fax, and telephone. No comments were received.

2.0 Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Assessment

The U.S. Department of Justice, in their *Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons*, published a four-factor assessment to determine if a federal funding recipient is obligated to provide LEP services. The four factors are:

- (1) The number or proportion of LEP persons served or encountered in the eligible service population
- (2) The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program
- (3) The nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program
- (4) The resources available to the recipient and costs

The Department of Justice indicated that the analysis is intended to balance meaningful access for LEP people against imposing undue burdens on small local governments.

2.1 The Number or Proportion of LEP Persons Served or Encountered in the Eligible Service Population

The RPO study area includes the six rural counties in west Alabama (Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, and Pickens). Based on the 2011-2015 American Community Survey, there are 92,114 people in these west Alabama counties who are five years and older. Of this group 90,364 (98.10%) speak only English. The other most common languages spoken at home are Spanish 1,310 (1.42%), German 156 (0.17%), Arabic 53 (0.06%), Urdu 52 (0.06%), and French 34 (0.04%). The following table provides the estimates for each of these languages and the estimates of people who speak English less than very well.

Language Spoken at Home	Estimated Number	Estimated Number Who Speak English Less Than Very Well
Spanish	1,310	547
German	156	20
Arabic	53	0
Urdu	52	24
French	34	4

2011-2015 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, B16001

2.2 The Frequency of Contact with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) People

Over the past 15 years the RPO staff has not had any contact with anyone who did not speak English very well. Over that same period, no individual or group has requested the RPO to provide an interpreter or to translate a document. Future interaction with LEP people is expected to be infrequent and unpredictable.

2.3 The Importance of the Program to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) People

The RPO plans how federal transportation funds are used in west Alabama. Therefore, the work performed by the RPO affects every resident. However, the RPO does not provide direct, immediate, vital, or emergency service; such as medical treatment, meals, or shelter. Involvement in the RPO transportation planning process is voluntary.

2.4 Resources Available to the RPO Recipient and the Costs of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Services

The RPO has about 0.52 full-time equivalent employee. Less than 1.5 percent of the RPO annual work program budget is available for non-staff related charges. The cost to provide interpretation and translation service vary greatly depending on the frequency and volume of work as well as the methods used.

Despite its financial limitations, the RPO is committed to maintaining an open and inclusive planning process that allows LEP people to participate. The RPO, working within its budget, will implement the most cost-effective methods for interpretation and translation work based on requests and expected demand.

3.0 Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Program

3.1 Identification of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) People

In the six counties represented on the RPO, approximately two percent of the population do not speak English at home. Spanish is by far the largest language group, representing about one percent of the population. The other language groups in the top five (German, Arabic, Urdu, and French) make up less

than one percent of the population. The RPO will use the U.S. Census Bureau *Language Identification Flashcard* document at RPO committee and public meetings, and with walk-in requests. The document will be used to identify LEP individuals. Identified LEP people will be given the option to be added to the RPO news release mailing list. Encounters with LEP people will be tracked in a spreadsheet that will be updated after each event. The spreadsheet will list the type of service provided and any other relevant information. This spreadsheet is available upon request.

3.2 Language Assistance Measures

3.2.1 Types of Language Services Available

The RPO will provide interpreters and translation service as their budget allows. The RPO will use free websites and programs whenever possible to translate correspondence and documents. In-person or telephone interpreters will be utilized as needed. If volunteer interpreters are not available, the RPO will pay interpreters as their budget permits.

3.2.2 Sources of Interpretation and Translation Services

The RPO staff will maintain a list of local interpreters (volunteer and for-pay) and a list of acceptable telephone interpretation companies. The staff will also maintain a list of websites and programs that translate text and documents. The RPO staff will refer to the lists as needed. The lists are available upon request.

3.2.3 Responses to LEP Callers

The RPO staff will refer LEP callers to the RPO website where instructions will be available to translate the website to their language. On the website will also be directions to request free language support from the RPO.

3.2.4 Responses to Written Communication from LEP People

The RPO staff will use free translation websites and programs to respond to written communication from LEP people. If the translation websites and programs fail to translate correctly, the RPO staff will consult with local or telephone interpreters to ensure proper communication.

3.2.5 Responses to In-Person contact with LEP People

The RPO will use the U.S. Census Bureau *Language Identification Flashcard* document at RPO committee and public meetings, and with walk-in requests. The RPO staff will use interpretation services (telephone or local) or a free online written translation website to determine the needs of the LEP individual and to explain the transportation planning process or to respond to any questions. Any comments provided by the LEP individual will be documented and provided to the RPO committees for their review and action.

3.2.6 Determining Competency of Interpreters and Translation Services

After an interpretation or translation service is provided, the RPO staff will ask the LEP individual if they understood the interchange and if they require additional or a different language service. If additional service is required, the RPO will change interpretation or translation providers. When feasible, the RPO will use certified interpreters and translation services.

3.3 Staff Training

The RPO staff will review the LEP Plan every year to ensure that they understand their responsibilities. During the annual review, the staff will verify the contact lists (interpretation and translation services).

3.4 Notices to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) People

The RPO will do the following to notify LEP people of the availability of language services:

- Post a sign at the reception desk in Spanish
- Add a statement to the RPO website in Spanish
- Add a statement to the title page of all major RPO documents in Spanish
- Add the information to all RPO presentations

3.5 Monitoring and Updating the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan

The RPO staff will monitor the RPOs interaction with LEP people. If problems with the LEP Plan are discovered, the RPO staff will recommend that the document be amended. The RPO Policy Committee can amend the plan after the public is given an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed amendment. The RPO will update the LEP Plan every five years.

The update will involve the following elements:

- Verification of the LEP population in the RPO study area
- Count of past encounters with LEP people
- Determination of any changes to RPO activities that might affect LEP people
- Research of new sources and methods of interpretation and translation services
- Verification of current sources and methods of interpretation and translation services
- Reviewing past interaction with LEP people to determine if changes are warranted
- Staff review of LEP plan responsibilities

Supplemental Item 5

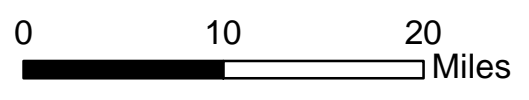
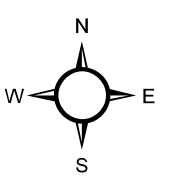
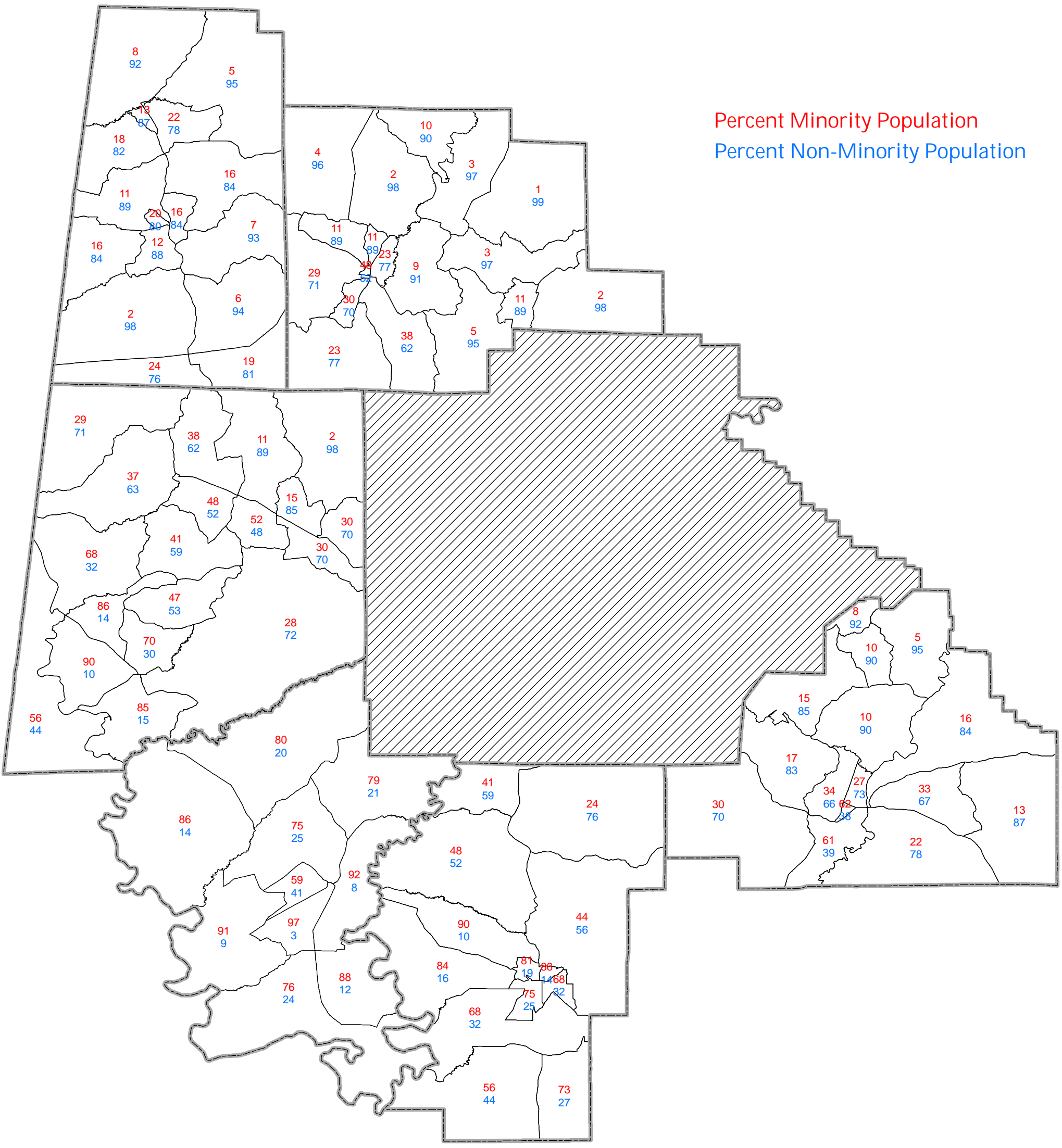
West Alabama RPO Committee Membership as of 10/8/2019

Body	Population	Caucasian American	African American	Asian American	Native American	Latino American (Of Any Race)	Notes
RPO Study Area	99,271	64%	34%	0.17%	0.21%	1.32%	2010 Census
Policy Committee	14	71%	29%	0%	0%	0%	Membership is set by agreement between local governments and ALDOT; 12 of the 14 positions are elected officials.
Technical Coordinating Committee	17	82%	18%	0%	0%	0%	Membership is based on position held
Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee	24	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%	Members appointed by the elected officials on the Policy Committee; Two vacancies
Transit Coordination Committee	26	73%	27%	0%	0%	0%	There is no set membership for this committee. Anyone can join the committee and have voting privileges. Most members are agencies that provide transit service or purchase service for their clients. This committee also serves the Tuscaloosa MPO and covers seven counties. Numbers represent FY2019 attendance.

Supplemental Item 6

West Alabama

Percent Minority and Non-Minority Population



Source: 2010 US Census Bureau