



# Transportation Friday

An electronic newsletter concerning regional transportation issues

Friday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

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The Steering Committee for the Mobile County Major Road Plan met earlier this week – See *MPO Updates*. Washington continues to debate the proposed Infrastructure Bill – In *Legislative Updates* while the *Just for Fun* may explain just what's slowing things down. Governor Ivy announces \$41 million in Coastal Conservation Projects *In the News*.

Have a great weekend!

Check out [ALGO Traffic](#) before you travel!

[www.mobilempo.org](http://www.mobilempo.org)



Check us out on FACEBOOK; SARPC Transportation Video, this is what we do [HERE](#)

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- [Area Agency on Aging](#)
- [Employment and Economic Development](#)

Anthony Johnson, Monica Williamson, Tom Piper, and Kevin Harrison, PTP

## Mobile MPO Updates

### Update on Phase One of the I-10 Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project

Recently, ALDOT presented to the Mobile MPO and the Eastern Shore MPO an update on Phase One of the I-10 Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project at Five Rivers Resource Center in Spanish Fort. This meeting was the second of many updates that ALDOT will provide to both MPOs.

When the Mobile MPO and Eastern Shore MPO both met separately on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, both MPOs amended each Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to include Phase One of the I-10 Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project. Both MPOs passed the amendments unanimously. Both the Mobile and Eastern Shore LRTPs included funding for Phase One to be a toll on heavy trucks, with the potential for voluntary vehicular tolls. All legacy routes would remain free.

It was recognized by the Mobile MPO and ESMPO Chairman, that there needed to be more communication between the two MPOs concerning this project, and more transparency from all those involved. The next meeting will likely be in November or early December.

South Alabama Regional Planning Commission has created a web site that will house the Joint MPO updates from ALDOT on the I-10 Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project [HERE](#)

### Mobile Area Major Road Plan

The Steering Committee met this week to talk about next steps in the planning process. Some topics discussed included identifying which municipalities have complete Streets requirements, and how to best go about identifying underground utilities and stormwater systems. The consultant and MPO Staff will be setting up individual meetings with leaders from each municipalities in the coming weeks to discuss the plan.

The Plan is for better integration and connectivity of land use and transportation planning, to ensure existing and future on-system corridors are managed and/or preserved as part of the long-range comprehensive planning efforts and as development occurs. A complete Major Road Plan to include regulatory components, current practices, case studies, and guidance for Mobile County and Municipalities within Mobile County. The Plan will include methods and tools for acquiring and preserving right-of-way in the context of expediting the environmental clearance process and review how corridors are prioritized, designated, and adopted for management or preservation. This will require coordination with all planning jurisdictions in Mobile County.

### Phase One of the I-10 Mobile River Bridge and Bayway project are added to LRTP and TIP

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, a letter was submitted to ALDOT from both the Eastern Shore MPO and the Mobile MPO, requesting that ALDOT investigate the possibilities of building the project in less than the three phases.

ALDOT has agreed to provide formal updates to both MPO's every two months. The first Update was held July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at Five Rivers, and the second update was on September 20<sup>th</sup>, at Five Rivers at 2:00PM in the Theater. The slide presentation can be found [HERE](#). The Mobile MPO will house all of the slide presentations from these ALDOT Updates at [www.mobilempo.org](http://www.mobilempo.org).

The next step is that ALDOT will authorize the Preliminary Engineering (PE) that was approved as part of the project, and begin a Toll and Revenue Study to further hone in on potential tolling revenues. These tolling revenues will not be from just trucks, but voluntary vehicles willing to pay the toll as well; all legacy routes will remain free.

Moving forward, at a minimum, we have a way to build a bridge. The federal government, federal legislature, and new administration are currently developing numerous bills that potentially may help us move past this “at a minimum” scenario.

[HERE](#) is the Amendment with update Section 1.7 that summarizes the public comments.

[HERE](#) is APPENDIX A with all of the comments we received prior to deadline

[HERE](#) is a National Geographic article on Africatown that was presented as information.

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## 100 % Funding for Resurfacing of Local Roads Through the Mobile MPO with CRRSAA

### LINK TO MAP [HERE](#)

In accordance with the Highway Infrastructure Program Funds Pursuant to the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSAA) dated January 15, 2021 from the Federal Highway Administration, the Mobile Transportation Management Area (TMA) through the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is apportioned \$3,193,942 (FY 2021). In consultation with the State of Alabama, it is the intention of the Mobile MPO to use the Mobile TMA apportioned CRRSAA funding (\$3,193,942) for a one time resurfacing program. This funding can be 100% federal funding with no matching requirements; this presents a rare opportunity for the Mobile MPO.

The cities of Creola, Satsuma, Saraland, Chickasaw, Prichard, Semmes and Bayou la Batre have provided a prioritized list of roads that need to be resurfaced within their jurisdiction. The PE projects (design projects) were sent to FHWA for fund authorization.

Neel Shafer received the Notice To Proceed earlier this week on the following seven Projects listed below:

CRSAMB-4921(251)	<b>\$27,420.00</b>
CRSAMB-4921(252)	<b>\$32,285.00</b>
CRSAMB-4921(253)	<b>\$31,456.00</b>
CRSAMB-4921(254)	<b>\$65,000.00</b>
CRSAMB-4921(255)	<b>\$53,492.00</b>
CRSAMB-4921(256)	<b>\$31,124.00</b>
CRSAMB-4921(257)	<b>\$37,828.00</b>

Soon, the cities will begin to see activities in terms of some survey work, geotechnical work, etc.. on the streets proposed for resurfacing. Also, Neel Shafer will soon begin the process of reaching out and working with the cities to provide the necessary documents required for the federal funds to be spent. This include documents such as the ROW certification, encroachment notices, etc...

As of now, due to the scope of these projects, the proposed letting date is sometime late spring/early summer in 2022, assuming no issues with the city certifications, etc.

Please call Kevin Harrison 706-4635 if there are any questions.

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## [FY 2020-2023 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM \(TIP\) NOW ONLINE](#)

The TIP represents a four year program (2020-2023) for improvements in the various transportation systems located within the Mobile study area as identified in the Mobile MPO’s Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the twenty-five year plan for the Mobile Urban area. The LRTP establishes the transportation programs that are needed to meet travel demand by the study year and study area. LRTP projects that become funded are moved into the TIP and submitted to the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), where they are programmed into the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). For MPO projects, TIP project selection is based on priorities established by MPO member governments and the availability of funds through the Surface Transportation Attributable program. For other projects, ALDOT has discretion of project funding based on availability of funds from various types of funding categories. Most often, projects in the TIP are derived from the LRTP. The TIP guides ALDOT in its annual allocation of funds for transportation improvements and becomes a part of the STIP.

ArcGIS Online is now being utilized by MPO staff to map all federally funded surface transportation projects within our area. Check it out [HERE](#).

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## Recent Scheduling Changes This Week for Mobile MPO

No Changes this week.

## South Alabama RPO Updates

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The South Alabama Rural Planning Organization met recently using the GoToMeeting app.

One item on the [agenda](#) was to amend the [Fiscal Year 2021 Work Program](#) to include assisting ALDOT by facilitating the public involvement process for ALDOT’s draft Public Involvement Plan for Statewide Transportation Planning.

The purpose of the plan is to implement effective ways for ALDOT to gather information from the public about their transportation needs. The plan is available on ALDOT's website. All comments must be received on or before October 4, 2021.

ALDOT's Draft PIP is posted here:

<https://www.dot.state.al.us/news/publicinvolvement.html>.

Other items on the [agenda](#) included:

- Approve the [minutes of the previous RPO meeting](#)
- Review and Adopt the [Fiscal Year 2022 Work Program](#) which includes a new task of assisting ALDOT by hosting public meetings for the Statewide Long Range Transportation Process
- Amend the [RPO's Public Involvement Procedures](#) to include online virtual meetings when necessary
- Amend the [Annual Transportation Plan List of Projects](#)

RPO Staff is working to finalizing the RPO Transportation Plan. We're also building an online interactive map of all of the RPO projects. Once it's complete we will send out a link to all the RPO members and they'll be able to reference it for grant applications and the like.

## Projects in Region Let November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### MOBILE COUNTY

- for constructing the Bridge Replacement (Grading, Drainage, Pavement, and Retaining Walls) on Glenwood Road over SR-42 (US-98) west of Semmes. Length 0.529 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$7,788,506 to \$9,519,286
- for constructing the Base and Pave on SR-42 (US-98) (Eastbound Lanes) from the Mississippi State Line to 0.500 mile east of the intersection of Glenwood Road to include the Westbound Lanes to station 187+29.290 west of Semmes. Length 8.654 mi. The Bracket Estimate on this project is from \$25,940,951 to \$31,705,606 .

### BALDWIN COUNTY

None at this time

### ESCAMBIA COUNTY

None at this time

[What's Under Construction? Project Status](#)

## Legislative Updates

### Sam Graves & Bipartisan Committee Leaders Introduce the SPEED Recovery Act for Faster Disaster Recovery

October 20, 2021

Washington, D.C. - Bipartisan legislation to help expedite disaster recovery efforts, particularly in small and rural areas, was introduced today by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Ranking Member Sam Graves (R-MO) in the House of Representatives. Joining Graves as co-leads on the bill are Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Peter DeFazio (D-OR); Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management Subcommittee Ranking Member Daniel Webster (R-FL); and Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management Subcommittee Chair Dina Titus (D-NV).

The Small Project Efficient and Effective Disaster (SPEED) Recovery Act updates the threshold for what qualifies as a "small project" under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (or the Stafford Act). This update will allow more recovery projects to proceed under simplified procedures and in turn streamline the process and paperwork for many projects, reduce administrative burdens, and provide more certainty in the recovery process for communities.

"By far, most disaster recovery projects in the United States are relatively small, and there's no need to force individuals trying to recover and rebuild to navigate the same procedures as larger, more complex projects," said Graves. "The SPEED Recovery Act cuts red tape for smaller projects and will speed recovery in many of our communities, especially rural communities, that have been hit by disasters."

"After disaster strikes, local communities need the federal government to act as a partner in helping them recover and rebuild," said DeFazio. "This bipartisan legislation will help make sure that FEMA isn't a hindrance to these efforts and that states, Tribal, territorial, and local governments can be reimbursed more quickly for projects that will help communities get back on their feet."

"Florida is no stranger to hurricanes and extreme weather," said Webster. "Too often disaster recovery assistance for devastated communities is mired behind reams of bureaucracy and administrative paperwork. This bill streamlines the process to provide Floridians, particularly our rural communities with small projects, with speedier disaster recovery assistance."

"The impacts of global climate change are being felt with increasingly more dangerous and expensive storms, wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters," said Titus. "Already this year we've experienced eighteen separate climate and weather disasters costing \$1 billion. This legislation will improve the timely delivery of critical Public Assistance resources to help those communities affected by disaster build back quickly."

The SPEED Recovery Act is also supported by the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), and the Big City Emergency Managers (BCEM). In a joint statement of support, the groups said, "This type of modernization to disaster response and recovery programs will allow us as emergency managers to more swiftly move projects for disaster survivors and expedite the road toward recovery. As we work individually and with one another to build

resilience nationwide, tools such as the SPEED Recovery Act will simplify and streamline FEMA programs when survivors need them most.”

#### Background Information

Historically, the number of disaster projects that qualified as small projects with simplified procedures accounted for 95% of such projects. However, because the threshold for a “small project” has not kept pace with inflation and modern construction costs, a much larger percentage of projects (nearly 25% of all recovery projects) now fall outside of the scope of a “small project.” This has added unnecessary paperwork and burdens for both communities and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The SPEED Recovery Act will give communities more control in the rebuilding process for smaller projects, and it will once again ensure that approximately 95% of projects qualify as “small projects.” Notably, while “small projects” constitute a large percentage of total projects, they only represent about 10% of federal disaster funding costs, and the bill’s proposed adjustment represents minimal risk to the taxpayer. FEMA will then be able to focus more of its staff and time on addressing larger, more complex projects. The simplified procedures for small projects were established over three decades ago, but the cost threshold in law for what qualifies as a “small project” has only been updated once since then. This bill will update the threshold to \$1 million and allow small rural communities to recover more efficiently from a disaster.

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management have jurisdiction over the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and federal disaster programs. [Click here to read the bill.](#)

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## Biden’s Port Czar Urges Congress to Act on Infrastructure Bills

By Keith Laing and Josh Wingrove

October 21, 2021

The White House’s point person on ports is urging Congress to wrap negotiations on a \$550 billion bipartisan infrastructure bill and roughly \$2 trillion tax and spending measure to help address a supply-chain crunch that has delayed goods for millions of consumers.

John Porcari, port envoy to the White House’s Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force, said the \$550 billion infrastructure bill that is being considered by Congress would help ease backlogs.

“The bipartisan infrastructure bill for the first time ever provided significant funding for the land side of ports,” he said Thursday in an interview. Money would be doled out to fund railway and track grading improvements and highway enhancements to accommodate more trucks, he said.

The separate, so-called human infrastructure bill that is being debated would also help “in making it easier for employers in the supply chain to stay in that chain.”

The port of Los Angeles moved last week to 24-hour operations at the urging of the Biden administration, joining the nearby Port of Long Beach, which began around the clock in September. In a White House meeting last week, executives from Walmart Inc., FedEx Corp. and other companies central to the supply chain pledged to expand operations to clear a nationwide cargo logjam.

#### Los Angeles Port

Porcari said White House got involved in trying to broker an agreement to keep the ports open longer because the supply chain involves disparate private companies that are often regulated by different federal agencies.

“We are making progress,” he said. “This is a series of private sector businesses that often have not communicated well with other each other in the past and so there’s very little information sharing, there’s very little in the way of real time data and the entire goods movement chain is only as good as the weakest link.”

“There were strains in the supply chain before the pandemic, but the pandemic has really laid bare the problems,” he said.

Porcari said the White House thought it was important to start its outreach with the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports because they process 40% of the nation’s cargo container traffic.

“Objectively, they have the congestion,” he said.

Porcari said the White House is pivotal in bringing together the disparate federal agencies that oversee portions of the supply chain in pursuit of a “whole of government” approach to solving the shipping backlog.

He said the White House is considering trying to broker similar agreements with other ports if necessary.

“We’re talking to ports all over the country,” he said. “We’re encouraging them to be innovative.”

Porcari said the White House has heard positive feedback from the companies it has brought to together to discuss the supply chain issues thus far.

“To a person, the CEOs we’ve been talking to acknowledge this is long overdue but they didn’t know where to start and they didn’t want to be the one to stick their necks out on it,” he said.

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## Infrastructure Bill Live Updates: Democrats Return to Capitol for Showdown Over Multi-trillion Dollar Funding Packages

BY EWAN QUAYLE

10/18/21

Congressional lawmakers returned to Capitol Hill this week to enter a final battle over two key multi-trillion-dollar spending bills to boost infrastructure and secure President Biden’s “Build Back Better” plan.

The Democratic-controlled House and Senate will have only 10 legislative days to meet the October 31 deadline to pass both the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill and a spending bill known as the Build Back Better Act - originally projected to cost around \$3.5 trillion but is likely to be cut down to \$2.2 trillion (or perhaps even lower) to get wider support - amid a standoff between progressives and moderates in the party over the scope and final price tag.

Among the major investments, the “hard infrastructure” bill includes funding for roads and highways, bridges, broadband development, water support, and airport projects, while the “human” spending bill provides funding to fight climate change, Medicare expansion, and free two-year community college.

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## Democratic insistence on linking infrastructure and budget bills has been costly for Biden

Oct. 21, 2021

By Chuck Todd, Mark Murray and Ben Kamisar

WASHINGTON — More than 70 days ago, the U.S. Senate handed President Biden his biggest bipartisan victory yet — an infrastructure bill providing \$550 billion in new spending, and \$1 trillion overall, for highways, transit, water and broadband.

“This historic investment in infrastructure is what I believe you, the American people, want — what you’ve been asking for for a long, long time. This bill shows that we can work together,” Biden said on Aug. 10.

But since then, the bill has languished in the House, as progressives demanded that it not become law before the more expensive, and far more partisan, human infrastructure bill — for child care, universal pre-K, health care and climate spending.

All as a leverage play.

But with that second bill’s compromise price tag now down from \$3.5 trillion to as low as \$1.75 trillion, with a key climate provision now apparently jettisoned, and with Sen. Krysten Sinema, D-Ariz., balking at higher taxes for corporations and the wealthy to pay for it all, we have to ask:

Has delaying that bipartisan victory on hard infrastructure been worth it?

Did it really strengthen progressives’ hands in the negotiations?

Or has it ensured that the last two months have been as much about congressional process as policy?

As we’ve said before, one of the important realities in this entire debate is the Democrats enjoy the narrowest of majorities in the Senate and House — which always was going to give Sens. Sinema and Joe Manchin, D-W.V., outsized roles in these negotiations.

“Lyndon Baines Johnson won election in 1964 with a 155-seat majority in the House and 69 Democratic senators. And in 1965, they passed 70 major pieces of legislation,” conservative writer John Podhoretz told one of us on “Meet the Press” last Sunday.

“If you go to the Johnson Library, there are 70 pens lined up. That’s the Great Society. Joe Biden has a majority of, nobody even knows. Is it three? Is it five? Is it four, in the House, and a 50-50 Senate.”

The other important reality for Democrats is that failure isn’t an option; Democrats need to pass something — on hard infrastructure, as well as on climate, education and health care.

The question we have this morning, however, is whether this dual-track process has been worth it.

A day after touting both legislative bills — hard infrastructure and human infrastructure — in his hometown of Scranton, Pa., President Biden participates tonight in a CNN town hall in Baltimore to discuss these measures.

The televised event begins at 8:00 p.m. ET.

## Funding Opportunities

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### **U.S. Department of Transportation Announces the Availability of \$2.2 Billion in American Rescue Plan Funding to Help Transit Agencies with Additional Service Needs** *DEADLINE November 8, 2021*

Tuesday, September 7, 2021

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Transit Administration (FTA) today announced a [Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#) for \$2.2 billion in competitive grant funding for transit systems demonstrating additional pandemic-associated needs. Funding is provided by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which was signed into law by President Biden on March 11, 2021.

[Additional Assistance Funding](#) may be awarded to transit systems demonstrating additional assistance is needed to cover operating expenses related to maintaining day-to-day operations, cleaning and sanitization, combating the spread of pathogens on transit systems and maintaining critical staffing levels.

"As public transit systems continue to recover from the devastating financial and public health impacts of COVID, they must have the resources they need to keep trains and buses running, especially in heavily transit-dependent communities," said U.S. Transportation Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg. "The funding opportunity we are announcing today will help connect people to jobs, services and opportunities, while supporting crucial health and safety measures for the traveling public and our nation’s dedicated transit workforce."

FTA will review applications based on the level of financial need, including projections of future financial need to maintain service as a percentage of the 2018 operating costs. Funding that is requested by an eligible applicant must not have been replaced by funding made available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) of 2021, and other ARP funding.

"The Additional Assistance Funding will support transit agencies demonstrating a continuing need for assistance in maintaining daily operations," said FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez. "Public transportation connects people to jobs, education and vital services, and this program will help transit agencies continue to provide critical transit services in communities that need it most."

The NOFO will be placed on public inspection at the Federal Register on Wednesday, September 8, and published on Thursday, September 9. An unpublished version of [the NOFO can be viewed here](#). Applications must be submitted electronically through the [Grants.gov](#) website by 11:59 PM ET November 8, 2021.

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## Opportunity Zones

EDA's Opportunity Zone Web Page

EDA now has an [EDA Opportunity Zone Web page](#) for economic development stakeholders and others to use as a resource to further help foster job creation and attract private investment to support development in economically distressed areas across the United States.

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### [Section 5307, 5310, and 5311: Using Non-DOT Funds for Local Match](#)

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [Administration for Community Living](#) (ACL) has worked with the [National Aging and Disability Transportation Center](#) to clarify the ability of grantees to use Older Americans Act Title IIIB Supportive Services Funds to match Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs. These FTA programs include Urbanized Area Formula Grants (Section 5307), Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and People with Disabilities (Section 5310), and Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311). This information has been publicized [HERE](#)

To stay up to date on all of the many grants that are available visit [www.grants.gov](#).

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## Just For Fun (THIS IS SATIRE, AND JUST FOR FUN)

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### Nervous Biden Rushes Past Intimidating Circle Of Senators Smoking Weed On Capitol Steps



WASHINGTON—Clutching his briefcase and keeping his eyes averted as he approached, President Joe Biden rushed past an intimidating circle of senators smoking weed on the Capitol steps, sources confirmed Friday. "Excuse me, folks, just trying to get through here," said the commander-in-chief, reportedly holding his breath as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) blew smoke in his direction and laughingly offered him a toke from a lit joint. "Oh, uh, no thanks, haha. I'm running late. Plus, uh, I heard that stuff can make you go crazy." At press time, a hyperventilating Biden was reportedly lying on the floor of the Oval Office trying to come down from a contact high.

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## In the News

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### Ivey announces \$41 million in coastal conservation, water projects

Updated: Oct. 15, 2021

By Lawrence Specker

Shortly after announcing \$41 million in conservation- and recreation-oriented projects for southwest Alabama on Friday, Gov. Kay Ivey blew out candles on a birthday cake. But Spanish Fort Mayor Mike McMillan chose a slightly different metaphor for the day's announcement.

"I know your decisions were not easy ones," he said. "I know that pie was only so big, and you had to slice it, so that had to be a hard thing to do."

The pie in question is revenue allocated under the federal Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, or GOMESA, which shares out revenue from offshore oil and gas leases. Ivey visited the 5 Rivers Delta Center in Spanish Fort on Friday to announce the latest rounds of grants, along with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Commissioner Chris Blankenship, the mayors of several coastal cities and other elected officials.

"Thank you all for your partnership with the state," Ivey said to the assembly of local officials. "It matters."

Ivey, who turned 77 on Friday, said the GOMESA projects were specifically chosen to support water quality, preservation and public access to nature, rather than economic development.

Blankenship echoed those priorities. Undeveloped waterfront is shrinking fast along the coast, making public acquisitions all the more important, he said. Water quality is also a top concern, he said, and "more projects will be announced soon using dollars from the Deepwater Horizon spill."

The projects:

- 5 Rivers: \$253,275 to improve facilities at the Delta Resource Center.
- Baldwin County: \$4 million to convert an existing borrow pit into new wetlands that will improve water quality and reduce flooding in the Magnolia River watershed.
- Bayou La Batre: \$1,629,477 for the city's Utility Board to improve the northern portion of its sewer system.
- Daphne: \$4 million to improve public access via an expansion of Bayfront Park.
- Daphne: \$607,500 for the Daphne Utilities Board to make improvements along D'Olive Creek that will help prevent sanitary sewer overflows during heavy rains.
- Dauphin Island: \$1,313,400 for ADCNR to replace boat ramps and docks at Billy Goat Hole. Blankenship said the current ramps are more than 20 years old, and that the replacements will be safer, more efficient and more accessible to the disabled.
- Dauphin Island: \$2,211,700 to support living shorelines on Aloe Bay, plus additional habitat protection and public access amenities.
- Fairhope: \$999,989 for development of North Triangle Park. Mayor Sherry Sullivan said the improvements will include multiuse trails and an outdoor classroom.
- Foley: \$2.5 million for expansion and improvements to the Graham Creek Nature Preserve.
- GOMESA administration: \$280,321.
- Loxley: \$250,000 for Corn Creek tributary restoration.
- Mobile: \$8 million for riverfront park enhancements as part of the "reconnect with the River" initiative.
- Mobile County: \$2,254,400 for the acquisition of Cedar Point Pier.
- Mobile County: \$1,612,500 to the Mobile County Water, Sewer and Fire Protection Authority to fund the conversion of septic systems to sewer hookups in southeastern Mobile County, between Fowl River Road and Joe Carl Road.
- Spanish Fort: \$8.5 million to acquire Cypress Point. McMillan described the 142-acre tract as "one of the unspoiled gems of Baldwin County" and "an optimal location for a waterfront park." The site had been approved for multi-family residential development but would be protected by the public purchase.
- University of South Alabama: \$2,018,880 for the Healthy Ocean Initiative. Interim USA President John Smith said the money "will play a critical role in establishing the University of South Alabama's new School of Marine and Environmental Sciences as a state and regional leader in addressing challenges facing the coast."
- Various locations: \$1 million for the Alabama Department of Environmental Management to add litter traps to coastal waterways.

# Cranes, trains and automobiles — MTC Logistics expands in Mobile

Posted by Dale Liesch | Oct 20, 2021

Most people might curse a slow-moving train that blocks an intersection, but Greg Canfield isn't most people.

Instead the state commerce secretary praised the traffic jam that prevented him from getting to a ribbon cutting for a new MTC Logistics facility at Mobile's port. For Canfield the train signified increased activity at the port, something MTC would add to once the facility was fully operational.

"That train was just doing its job," Canfield said. "It was serving a damn good purpose."

Touting a logistics background, Canfield knew there were multiple points of access to the facility.

"It just became a matter of figuring out where the alternative access points were," he said.

Canfield was joined by other state, county, city and corporate officials to celebrate the opening of MTC Logistics' new refrigerated cargo facility at the port.

"It's staggering in size and design," Canfield said of the building that represents a \$61 million investment and will bring 75 jobs to the area. "My hat is off to MTC Logistics."

The opening of the facility is more than three years in the making and comes as global supply lines are struggling to keep up with demand as the world slowly comes out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those challenges, specifically targeted toward the logistics industry were not lost on many at the ribbon cutting ceremony, especially Harry Halpert, chairman of MTC Logistics and CEO of Hoffberger Holdings.

"Every day you read about problems in the supply chain," he said. "Those are real problems for MTC Logistics and its employees. Sometimes a paycheck is not enough. Sometimes a 'thank you' is not enough."

Halpert had those in attendance on the rain-soaked Wednesday afternoon stand and applaud the workers in the adjacent facility.

The pandemic-caused supply chain issues were heavily discussed during the event and many of the speakers believed MTC Logistics' decision to expand in the city and the growth of Mobile's Port — which is the fastest growing container port by percentage of lifts over the last five years — has positioned the area to take business from ports to the east and the west.

Rick Clark, deputy director and chief operating officer at the port, said the pandemic opened eyes to a lack of resilience in the supply chain.

"This provides supply chain solutions," he said. "This adds resiliency for times when we have interruptions."

MTC Logistics' decision to expand in Mobile means more jobs and a large investment in the port, but it also provides an opportunity to bolster the area in other ways. APM Terminals Managing Director Brian Harold said the port had been losing refrigeration business over the past few years, but this move will help that trend stop.

"I'm confident we can get that back," he said. "The uphill climb seems to be leveling off a bit and the future looks bright."

Speakers praised the facility's state of the art refrigeration systems and other innovative design elements that set it apart in the logistics field. Rick Shultz, co-chairman of Arco Design, a MTC Logistics partner on the facility, said a 50-foot tall mobile racking system can store 42,000, 2,000-pound pallets instead of the traditional 30,000 pallets.

"It's an investment in the future of this facility and in Mobile," he said.

The facility is also more efficient and flexible than others, Shultz said.

"MTC Logistics put the time and effort into doing everything right," he said. "They wanted this facility to be successful, not for five years, not for 10 years, or 15 years; they wanted it to be successful for 30, 40 and 50 years."

Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson and County Commission Chairwoman Merceria Ludgood both spoke of the importance of Team Mobile in helping MTC Logistics choose the city for its newest venture.

"Team Mobile existed before Sandy Stimpson became mayor and it probably existed before Merceria Ludgood became a commissioner," Stimpson said. "Even as elected officials come and go, Team Mobile helps us realize that we play a role .... You realize that you have to do what's right for the city."

Ludgood talked about the jobs the company would bring to the area with this announcement.

"This reminds us that what happens in the business sector often affects real people," Ludgood said. "In this case, those real people are the employees."

Ludgood also commented on the company's option to purchase 20 acres next to the facility, where officials are already planning the next expansion.

“We all look forward to growing together,” she said. “If you grow, we’ll grow with you.”

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## Foley mayor reveals “Vision for the Future” of growing city

Posted Thursday, October 21, 2021

By Jessica Vaughn

FOLEY - There are big things in the works for the city of Foley. Mayor Ralph Hellmich presented the “State of the City” on Tuesday, Oct. 19 during a South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce Leadership Series, where he gave a sneak peek into the “vision for the future” for the rapidly growing city.

“I think our city is poised to handle this growth, and I think we’re poised to move forward and handle things the way people want it, the quality of life, the infrastructure, all of that,” said Hellmich. “It takes money and it takes cooperation and everything, so we talk all the time. We have ideas on how to move forward, but we’re going to ask for help from our citizens on some of these visions.”

### Parks

Hellmich said the city is planning to host community development meetings in the near future concerning the modernization of city parks. Hellmich said plans for the public parks include ADA equipment, modern playground equipment, LED lighting and new facilities. Current plans include the addition of pickleball courts, an ADA playground and a bathroom building for the tennis courts. A public meeting will be announced at a future date where citizens can attend and give their opinions on what they would like to see in each city park.

“We have not done a modernization of our public parks since I’ve been here,” said Hellmich. “Our folks do a great job maintaining what we have and we add things from time to time, but we need to look at every one of our parks and we need to modernize them.”

Along with the modernization of city public parks, Hellmich says plans are underway to replace the city’s public swimming pool with an indoor aquatics center. The current plan is to build the aquatics center at the location of the existing pool with the possible inclusion of a splash pad beside the facility. The facility will potentially have sides that can be lowered or raised depending on weather and time of year, offering year-round use of the aquatics center.

“Right now all of our folks that are in organized sports here in Foley go to Gulf Shores to swim for things, and we shouldn’t be doing that in our city,” Hellmich said. “We’re to the point now where we need a modern aquatics center.”

### Public Library

A major announcement that recently came with the approval of the FY21/22 budget is the construction of a brand-new public library. The current library is 20,000 square feet after an expansion was completed in 2006. Hellmich said the library has been at capacity for nearly three years, and after discussions it was determined more than a further expansion was needed.

The proposed site of the new library is at the empty lot on the east side of the Foley Dog Park. The Foley Council voted at the October meeting to move forward to look at the site and determine if it would be suitable for building.

“The vision is that we build a three-story library, approximately 40,000 square feet, that will meet the needs of Foley for the next 40 years,” Hellmich said. “It would be a modern library, with meeting spaces on the bottom and modern tools that meet the needs of our citizens. It’s nationally recognized as a gold standard library; we have a fantastic resource so we want to position this resource to serve our citizens.”

The approximate cost of the new facility is \$8 million. The FY21/22 budget includes obtaining renderings and designs for the site, with hopes to begin construction during FY22/23 and to have the site completed during FY23/24. The current site of the library would be repurposed to accommodate the growing city staff.

### Public Works Building

The current Public Works building was constructed in 1979, when, according to Hellmich, it had plenty of room. Now, he says the site is bursting at the seams, and future plans include the construction of a brand-new Public Works building on 13-acres located on North Poplar and Section Streets. The new site would also be home to the city’s engineering department.

“Foley has recently bought that piece of property, we’re signing the documents on it shortly,” said Hellmich. “That’s a need for our future as we add more people and we add more garbage cans and continue to serve our citizens, we need the space and that’s why we’re going to move to a new location.”

The projected cost of the project is \$7 million. As with the library project, the funds to begin this project were included in the FY21/22 budget. Hellmich said the hope is to begin construction by the fall of 2022.

“So those are the kinds of things we’re going to do,” said Hellmich. “I think that we’re doing great here in Foley, and we do have a vision for the future. It doesn’t just include these things, there are other things we’ll work on as well.”

Other major projects include expansions and equipment upgrades to both the city's police department and fire department, infrastructure improvements and road projects, and drainage improvement projects. You can view the entire State of the City slide presentation at <https://cityoffoley.org/mayor>.

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## Paul DeMarco: Alabama's port of Mobile ready to step up to help solve nation's supply chain problems

By Guest Author

October 20, 2021

The Nation's economy is already seeing the effects of inflation.

The increase in prices is detrimentally affecting consumers and the cost to manufacture goods. Alabama is being hit tremendously hard on both counts due to the high inflation.

The supply chain crisis is a major problem in the country and the port of Los Angeles, where 40 percent of the Nation's imports come through, has ships backed up off the coast.

The good news for Alabama is that our state port is seeing an increase in ships unloading material to the state. With so much congestion at ports around the country, shipping companies are taking advantage of Alabama's gateway to the Gulf of Mexico. Millions of dollars have been spent and more contracts are in place to modernize the port for even more cargo to unload in our state.

And it has paid off, as this past year there has been a 27 percent increase in volume of containers being shipped through the port in Mobile. Refrigerated cargo products are up even higher at 47 percent from the same time last year.

Alabama's deepwater port was first dedicated in 1928 and it now has a total economic impact of \$25.4 billion for the state.

Hopefully, the national supply crisis will be solved soon and the Alabama Port of Mobile will increase its share of the Nation's supply chain.

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## U.S. trucking industry disruptions to last as long as pandemic persists – Buttigieg

Kanishka Singh

Wed, October 20, 2021

(Reuters) - U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said on Wednesday he expects disruptions in the trucking industry to last as long as the COVID-19 pandemic persists.

"There are going to be disruptions and shocks to the system as long as the pandemic continues," he said in an interview with CNN when asked about the driver shortages in the trucking industry.

He had said on Sunday that supply chain issues could last into 2022 as many companies struggle with disruptions.

Rating agency Moody's said on Wednesday that the pressure on U.S. supply chains will take time to subside. Increased transportation costs and shortages of commodities and consumer goods will put upward pressure on consumer prices, Moody's said.

The rebound in economic activity across some parts of the world as coronavirus restrictions are eased has exposed shortages across supply chains, with companies scrambling to find workers, ships, and even fuel to power factories, threatening the recovery from the pandemic.

Last week, U.S. President Joe Biden urged the private sector to help ease supply chain blockages that are threatening to disrupt the U.S. holiday season.

"The private sector was not expecting the speed of the economic recovery that we have been experiencing," Buttigieg told CNN.

"You add on to that the fact that we have some issues with our infrastructure as we (the Biden administration) have been saying every day since we got here," he added.

### Transportation Research

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#### The important economic factors rarely mentioned in infrastructure debates

*All large infrastructure projects should be vetted via a rigorous benefit/cost analysis.*

Robert Poole Director of Transportation Policy

October 6, 2021

With the ongoing national focus on infrastructure, one of the best papers I've read in several years is "Economic Perspectives on Infrastructure Investment" by Harvard's Edward Glaeser and Massachusetts Institute of Technology's James Poterba. The economists' report was prepared for the Aspen Economic Strategy Group and released on July 14, 2021. What distinguishes the paper from so much that is being written about the need for increased infrastructure investment in the United States is its comparison of how engineers frame the problem and how economists do so. (And I write this as an MIT-trained engineer who has spent much of his career trying to explain economic reasoning to transportation engineers.)

Glaeser and Poterba explain in some detail that infrastructure "needs" as defined by groups like the American Society of Civil Engineers and a series of reports by McKinsey are lacking in assessing the benefit/cost ratio of proposed investments. Instead, these reports on infrastructure either compile what amount to engineering wish lists or create ratios of infrastructure spending as a fraction of gross domestic product (GDP) which tell us little about whether these are economically worthwhile projects to invest in. They also point out the potential conflict of interest when engineering consulting firms do the preliminary work estimating a project's costs and usage—and then gain lucrative contracts to manage the actual projects. This system often results in huge cost overruns (e.g., the Big Dig in Boston and California's high-speed rail project approved by voters in 2008).

From Glaeser and Poterba's economic analysis perspective, they argue that, at least, all large infrastructure projects should be vetted via a rigorous benefit/cost analysis (BCA) to decide if they are worth being funded or financed. They suggest several possible ways to require this, including having Congress mandate that federally-funded highway and transit projects must pass a benefit/cost analysis screening in order to proceed; requiring state departments of transportations (DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to do that for every project, or shifting large projects to a national infrastructure bank subject to a benefit/cost analysis mandate. The problem with each of these is politics. Many elected officials—federal, state, and local—love to select infrastructure projects based largely on their political benefits rather than their benefits exceeding their costs.

Another long-standing problem in U.S. infrastructure is deferred maintenance. And, again, the problem is mostly political. Elected legislators tend to prioritize new projects with ribbon-cutting opportunities over adequate ongoing maintenance, which may be barely visible to voters. The result is that roads and bridges wear out prematurely, need repeated repaving and other unplanned maintenance, and often need to be rebuilt sooner than they would have otherwise. This is penny-wise and pound-foolish. Consequently, and unfortunately, despite lots of talk about "fix it first" provisions in federal or state infrastructure legislation, this hardly ever seems to happen.

The authors also discuss the many cost-increasing provisions of federal law that raise U.S. transportation infrastructure costs above those of other developed countries. These include "Buy American" provisions and other protectionist measures that increase material costs, Davis-Bacon "prevailing wage" laws and other regulations that increase labor costs, and the well-known practice under design-bid-build contracting of bidding low to get the contract and making it up with numerous cost-increasing change orders.

Another key point on which they elaborate is that the United States should make greater use of pricing and user fees for major transportation projects. This is not only a better way to finance most large projects, but if the pricing is allowed to vary in proportion to demand, it can produce greater user benefits and, in some cases, reduce the total number of lanes needed, which would be an important cost-saving.

Glaeser and Poterba discuss transportation public-private partnerships (P3s) as a useful alternative to business as usual, but they don't fully explain how valuable the design/build/finance/operate/maintain approach can be in addressing the seemingly intractable politicization of U.S. transportation funding and management that they discuss.

Here is how P3 projects procured as design/build/finance/operate/maintain (DBFOM) address key problems:

**Deferred maintenance:** Under DBFOM the project is designed to minimize not the initial construction cost but the life-cycle cost because long-term, ongoing maintenance is built into the long-term concession agreement. This amounts to ensuring better long-term stewardship of the expensive and valuable asset.

**Benefit/cost analysis:** Especially under the revenue-risk version of DBFOM, the project cannot be financed unless the projected revenues are enough to service the bonds issued to finance the project and produce a return on the developer/operator's equity investment. For an availability payment DBFOM that does not include toll revenue, the state DOT's willingness to commit to a 35-year stream of payments so the project can be financed means the DOT must complete a benefit/cost analysis to ascertain that the project makes financial sense.

**Willingness to charge users:** In a number of cases, a megaproject (such as the original express toll lanes on the I-495 Beltway in northern Virginia) was developed based on variable tolling as the means of financing, while the state DOT had deferred adding new lanes due to lack of gas-tax funds. This was an early example of what some have called "outsourcing of political will" to implement variable pricing that the state itself was unwilling to do.

**Cost overruns:** DBFOM projects are not immune to cost overruns, but the key question is who bears the risk of this happening. To my dismay, the authors dismiss this by writing, "large public entities are typically better able to bear risks than most private firms." But the large public entity does not bear those cost overruns: taxpayers do, whereas in DBFOM projects the investors willingly take on megaproject cost overrun risks. This premise has been demonstrated by the fact of several bankruptcy filings of toll-financed megaprojects in both Australia and the United States, not mentioned by the authors.

In their summary of the case for (limited) use of long-term P3s, Glaeser and Poterba cite as potential benefits reduced costs, specialized expertise, and improved quality, for all of which there is evidence. But they also state that the case for such public-private partnerships depends on "their being able to borrow at better rates than a city government or bear risk better."

Thanks to the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) and tax-exempt private-activity bonds, borrowing cost differences are minimal, but the report's authors don't mention those important tools, and as noted above, they devote little attention to the very real risk transfers that are possible (and should be identified in competent value-for-money analyses).

Despite minor shortcomings on P3s, Glaeser and Poterba's overall economic assessment of how poorly the United States addresses major infrastructure is excellent and much-needed. In this brief review, I have only scratched the surface of the valuable insights and examples set forth in their paper.

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## State seeks feedback from Alabamians on broadband access

Posted on [September 21, 2021](#)

**MONTGOMERY** – Want to see further improvements in broadband access in Alabama? Here's is a simple way Alabamians can help. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is requesting information about broadband internet access and speed from Alabama residents and businesses.

Alabamians are encouraged to take the speed survey at <https://alabama.speedsurvey.org/> to help the state more precisely locate gaps in broadband service areas. The information gathered will be used for more specific mapping of service gaps and planning efforts to help fill those gaps.

*"The COVID-19 pandemic shined a spotlight on the importance of having access to high-speed internet across the Alabama," ADECA Director Kenneth Boswell said. "Taking this speed survey will help us gather the data we need to map and plan our efforts to help close those service gaps."*

ADECA administers the Broadband Alabama program, which includes the Broadband Accessibility Fund created by the Alabama Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Kay Ivey. Since 2018, the fund has assisted broadband providers with extending high-speed internet service for households, businesses and community anchors in unserved areas of the state or in areas lacking minimum threshold service.

Many Alabama homes and businesses receive less than the current federal definition of broadband service, which is 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and three Mbps upload speed. The information gathered from the speed survey will help pinpoint the specific areas that lack this coverage. Your address will not be made public and the information will be used solely for the state's planning efforts.

*"Broadband is a huge economic driver for recruiting industry and jobs," Boswell said. "This survey is quick and easy and helps show us precisely where the service gaps are, so we encourage all Alabama residents and businesses to take it and help us continue Gov. Kay Ivey's efforts to grow Alabama's economy."*

A video explaining the survey is available on the [ADECA YouTube channel](#):