

SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COMMISSION

SWMC Receives Award at the MAR/MTPA Conference

Continuing education is an integral part of the professional development philosophy for staff and board members of the SWMC. When an educational opportunity is combined with a beautiful location and perfect Michigan weather, the result is memorable.

The Michigan Association of Regions (MAR) and the Michigan Transportation Planning Association (MTPA) hosted the annual combined conference in Traverse City July 26-29.



Linda Preston and Johnnie Rodebush at the MAR/MTPA Conference

The SWMC board was represented by Johnnie Rodebush and Linda Preston. SWMC executive director John Egelhaaf, and staff members Larry Koepfle, senior planner, and Shelley Klug, associate planner

also attended.

The SWMC is honored to recognize Johnnie Rodebush for his continued active participation in MAR activities. Each year Mr. Rodebush awards the “*Johnnie Rodebush Regional Leadership Award*”. The award is given to the member of a regional planning board who exhibits exemplary leadership within and beyond their board. In addition to the award given in his honor, Mr. Rodebush was also elected as the MAR Vice Chairman for 2006.

The SWMC received MAR’s 2005 “*Innovative Award*” for the Commission’s local resource mapping work done for the Galien River Watershed. Linda Preston accepted the award on behalf of the SWMC.

Mr. Egelhaaf was invited to attend an evening session with MDOT and TC-TALUS regarding their challenges to conduct a comprehensive transportation study for the Traverse City area. The session was an opportunity to share information on lessons learned and pathways to excellence. MDOT director Gloria Jeff engaged the conference in an informative exploration of the strong



Mr. Rodebush presenting the “*Johnnie Rodebush Regional Leadership Award*”

connection between land use planning and the effective stewardship of the State’s transportation resources.

Ms. Klug attended sessions featuring downtown revitalization programs and tools and new collaborative regional economic development initiatives.

Mr. Koepfle served as moderator for the MAR/MTPA session entitled: “*Air Quality – Steps Toward Attainment*”. The featured speaker was Mr. Michael Koerber, Executive Director of the Lake Michigan Air Directors Consortium. Mr. Koerber discussed steps local communities can take to achieve air quality attainment status and presented local initiatives that communities were implementing around the Great Lakes.

“Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them. They make the impossible happen.” Dr. Robert Jarvik



City of Hartford

The City of Hartford has **successfully** pursued a number of grant opportunities for community improvement this year. The City is to be commended for their active role in preparing for these funding opportunities and for their commitment to providing local match and support for these projects.



Hartford City Hall

Each of the awards received this year will be used to improve the quality of life for residents in and around Hartford.

The most recent announcement (made September 29, 2005) is for an Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFGP) in the amount of **\$88,664** from the Homeland Security

Department to procure Personal Protective Equipment and to modify the fire station.

Hartford also received a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development for **\$30,000** in grant funds and **\$100,000** in loan funds to finance the purchase of a dump truck, a plow truck and a squad car for the Police Department. The City has already received the plow truck and squad car and expects to receive the dump truck before the end of October. These purchases would not have been possible without the assistance of the Rural Development program.

Earlier this year, the City received a Public Works grant of **\$170,000** from the MEDC to undertake a water improvement project. To complement this grant, the City also received a loan of **\$200,000** from the Van Buren County Economic Development Corporation. The loan has an interest rate of two percent

The City of Hartford has received \$688,664 in federal and state grants and \$300,000 in low-interest loan funds to make community improvements in 2005!

(2%) for a term of ten (10) years.

And, for the reconstruction of the East Main Street, the City has received a grant of **\$300,000** from MDOT and **\$100,000** in CMAQ (Air Quality) funds.

The City of Hartford's interest in community improvement also extends to water quality as evidenced by the City's explicit expression of support for the development of a Watershed Management Plan for the Paw Paw River as submitted by the SWMC in a proposal to the MDEQ. (Final approval of the plan is anticipated)

The SWMC congratulates the City of Hartford for these successful endeavors!

\$\$ An Incentive to Beat the Pump! \$\$



For years there has been little incentive to share a

ride to work in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. Gas prices were moderate, traffic was minimal, and most commuters enjoyed their independence.

However, according to Kim Gallagher, local Rideshare Coordinator, things have changed.

"Today, with rising gas prices, people in southwest Michigan are looking for options to reduce the costs of the daily 'lone commute.' The U.S. Department of Labor reports that after housing costs, transportation costs are the second largest, exceeding food, education, recreation, and medical care."

Responding to ever-increasing gas prices, the Rideshare program in southwest Michigan is seeing an increased interest from commuters looking for alternatives.

The Rideshare program offers services to commuters that can reduce commuting expenses by as much as 50 percent. *"It is strange that people will take the time to drive across town to save .05 cents per gallon of gas when they could actually cut their daily fuel and operating expense in half just by carpooling!"* says Gallagher. The SWMC encourages employers and employees to explore the following options:

•Share a ride daily or weekly with

friends, family, or co-workers. (not just to work - try shopping, entertainment, and recreational venues)

- Bike or walk to work and school - be more healthy! Kids too!
- Form a "walking school bus" in your neighborhood.
- Employers - offer flexible work schedules for employees allowing more opportunities for ridesharing.
- Call the SWMC Rideshare program to form a van or car pool!

Call or email Kim Gallagher to find out how you can save money on your commute!

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Board Members Exposed!

Members appointed to the governing board “*should be representatives of business, business organizations, industry, finance, agriculture, professions, organized labor, utilities, education, public health agencies, racial or ethnic minorities and the underemployed and unemployed. The Commission shall at least reflect the minority representation as found in the total population of the region... in addition, the Commission will also strive to maintain adequate female representation upon its governing board.*” (SWMC Bylaws)

Annually, upon request, SWMC board members submit profiles that reveal their various affiliations and minority status. A compilation of this information appears in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Annual Report, which demonstrates SWMC’s compliance with these standards.

In 2005, **ten** members reflect three ethnic or racial minorities. (An increase from eight members in 2004.) This percentage of

members slightly exceeds the percentage of minorities seen in the total population of the three counties. The increase from thirteen women appointees in 2004 to fifteen in 2005 also reflects another positive trend.

Twenty members (50 percent) hold elected offices throughout the three counties in various cities, towns and villages. In addition, the majority of members have been appointed to at least one governmental commission or board. These committees range from economic development, planning, zoning, roads and transportation, parks, health, housing, sewer and water. Many members serve on several of these hardworking groups.

Sixteen members are employed in government and thirteen are retired or semi-retired, the remaining members are farmers, lawyers, bank and business managers, health professionals, or are self-employed. The retirees’ professional backgrounds are in education, engineering, manufacturing, marketing and

social work. This range of expertise certainly enhances the Commission’s resources.

Individually, the members are active at the local level in organizations such as the Red Cross, 4-H, League of Women Voters, Chambers of Commerce, labor unions, veteran’s societies, and other development and improvement associations.

Some members also enjoy involvement in sports leagues or environmental groups while others specialize in serving schools, libraries, museums, and the arts. A variety of religious affiliations are also reported.

In response to the request to list Health Care involvement, one member responded “Patient.” A sense of humor is a real asset and is very welcome.

The communities of southwestern Michigan can be pleased to have this wide range of talents and skills available to work together with the SWMC to achieve the region’s common goals.

The Rural Transportation Safety Forum

The SWMC, in partnership with MDOT and the Federal Highway Administration hosted a Rural Transportation Safety Forum August 9, 2005 at the beautiful Priscilla U. Byrns Heritage Center in St. Joseph.

“It was definitely the best forum nobody attended!”

Presentations were given by a variety of professionals in transportation safety related fields. The topics included: *Michigan Graduated License Law, The Challenges of Influencing Driver Behavior, Drunk Driving Enforcement and Education Campaigns and Countermeasures, Safe Routes to School, Safety Enhancements to Low Volume Rural Roads, Traffic Crash and Safety Analysis for Southwest Michigan, and local SADD programs activities.*

Those who attended received the most up-to-date information about a variety of transportation modes and learned about programs currently being developed which will improve the safety and quality of life in Michigan.

The topics were important and interesting - the speakers were great - there was a free lunch - it was held in a beautiful venue - and yet there were very few in attendance. Let us know what you think! Please tell us how we can reach a larger audience by sending your suggestions to: swmicomm@swmicomm.org

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Funding Legislation Passed! SAFETEA-LU is the law of the land - Finally!

On August 10, 2005, President Bush signed into law the “Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

It has been an interesting journey for this bill with an interesting name.

SAFETEA-LU reauthorizes the Interstate Maintenance Program, the National Highway System, the Surface Transportation Program, the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program, and the Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program. The reauthorization is retroactive to FY2005 – FY2009 and represents an overall increase in funds available to the states. It also however, has a record number of “high priority” projects as part of the \$286.4 billion. More than 6,000 projects in almost every congressional district made their way into the final bill. This breaks the previous “pork” record by nearly 2,000.

A few congressmen, including Representative Fred Upton, 6th

District, resisted the temptation to load up on projects for their districts. US-131 in Kalamazoo was the priority project in the 6th District. It met the criteria of being first on the list of needed projects. The completion of US-31 in Berrien County also has a projected construction start date of 2011, which falls into the next reauthorization cycle. (Representative Upton should be commended for adhering to the local priorities established through the transportation planning process.)

For Michigan, the bill increases the amount of annual transportation funding by \$239 million on average. Public Transit Funds increase by \$28 million per year to \$108 million per year average. The distribution formulas have not been finalized to give a breakdown of what will be available to our urban areas; however it is anticipated that we will see increases for TwinCATS and NATS for the Surface Transportation Program, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program funding for the next three to four years, and an increase in planning

funds available for the TwinCATS and NATS programs. (Any use of these increased funds will have to be matched by an increase in local support.)

A number of new programs are emphasized in SAFETEA-LU such as Borders and Corridors, State Strategic Highway Safety Plan, Safe Routes to Schools, and the separation of Safety as a sixth core program. Most intriguing is the Safe Routes to Schools Program. It calls upon cooperative efforts among schools, municipalities and individuals to improve conditions that will promote and encourage children walking to school. This is in response to the collective concern about health and social issues in the United States.

About the name “SAFETEA-LU”... Lu is the name of the wife of Congressman Don Young (R. Alaska). Not only did he receive some of the highest pork projects in the bill, his wife was “immortalized” in its title.

“It's kind of fun to do the impossible.” **Walt Disney**