

## Transportation planners outline 2011 goals

By: Kelly Jackson

DALTON, Ga. -- Moving goods more efficiently through Whitfield County and mitigating the impact of traffic from new companies in Tennessee are among key goals for the Greater Dalton Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Transportation Planner Zach Montgomery said at a committee meeting Monday that the group hopes to study these and other traffic issues in fiscal year 2011. The members plan to form a "Goods Movement Task Force" of truck drivers, railroad, law enforcement and airport officials, he said.

"(We need to) pick their brains to figure out how we can make the movement of goods easier and better for them because they drive the economy," he said.

By 2035, about 32,206 more people -- many of whom will work for the Volkswagen and Wacker Chemical plants in Tennessee or for ancillary businesses -- are expected to live in Whitfield County, Mr. Montgomery said.

"We would like to do a study to determine which roads coming into the county would be most adversely affected so that we can direct future maintenance and improvements to those roads," he said.

The MPO also plans to examine ways to lessen traffic congestion on Veterans Drive and local impacts associated with the proposed high-speed rail line from Chattanooga to Atlanta, and local greenway corridors.

Dalton City Administrator Ty Ross, chairman of the MPO policy committee, said the studies will "help things move from the conceptual stage to the actual project and funding stage."

These are the first new planning projects since the county took over management of the MPO from the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission in September 2009, Mr. Montgomery said.

County Finance Director Ron Hale said the county wanted more control over its local transportation programs and is paying about \$16,000 a year to manage the MPO in-house. The rest of the MPO's current budget of about \$165,000 comes from state and federal funds, he said.

Urbanized areas where the population is 50,000 or greater are required to have MPOs to access federal transportation funds, said Bill Allen, transportation planning consultant for the Dalton MPO.

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"It was set up by the federal government with the idea that decisions should be made on the local level, rather than the state and federal level," he said.

Mr. Montgomery said the Greater Dalton Metropolitan Planning Organization is working now to update the area's Long Range Transportation Plan, which outlines all road projects planned in the area through 2035.

The plan must be updated every five years and is in the public review process, he said.