

**Southwest Region University Transportation Center
Project Proposal - FY 2012**

TITLE OF PROPOSED PROJECT: Accessing the Mega-Region: Evaluating the Role of Livable Community Patterns in Gulf Coast Mega-Region Planning

STRATEGIC GOAL(S) ADDRESSED: LIVABLE COMMUNITIES, ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS, ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

CONSORTIUM MEMBER: UNO

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET: \$ 9,000

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DR. BILLY FIELDS

PHONE NUMBER: 512-245-7726

EMAIL ADDRESS: WF16@TXSTATE.EDU

HAS THIS PROPOSAL BEEN SUBMITTED FOR FUNDING ELSEWHERE? NO

DID THIS PROPOSAL RECEIVE FUNDING FROM ANOTHER SOURCE? NO

DOES THIS PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS? NO

WILL THIS PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVE OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AS PARTNERS? NO

PROJECT MONITOR NAME, ORGANIZATION, ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER:

DAN JATRES

REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION -- JEFFERSON, ORLEANS, ST. BERNARD, ST. TAMMANY PARISHES

10 Veterans Memorial Blvd.

New Orleans, LA 70124

504-483-8500

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT:

This research analyzes both the need and mechanisms for integrating livability components such as transit and active transportation into a broader mega-regions transportation framework. The research builds a conceptual framework for understanding how transportation livability concepts fit within the larger mega-regions literature. This framework based around the study of walkable urban rail connections and regional green infrastructure greenbelt systems is then used to analyze key strategies that could be integrated into the larger Gulf Coast /Texas mega-region transportation planning framework through analysis of three case studies in Austin, Houston, and New Orleans. Major existing and emerging opportunities to tie infrastructure into a mega-region transportation system will be identified in these three case study cities.

Accessing the Mega-Region: Evaluating the Role of Livable Community Patterns in Gulf Coast Mega-Region Planning

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Understanding the role of mega-regions in fostering economically competitive regions in the global marketplace is emerging as a key area of concern for scholars. Rather than focusing solely on national economic indicators, scholars are increasingly focusing on the role of mega-regions as key interface units in the global economy. Building competitive regions requires focusing on nurturing human capital and building strong transportation networks to link into the global economy. Regions that are successful at attracting external talent and nurturing a strong, educated local workforce will be competitive to companies that can either grow or relocate to these successful regions. To be fully competitive in the global network, infrastructure networks to link to the global economy must be in place¹.

From a transportation perspective, this global view of mega-regions has generally led to analysis of the role of large-scale transportation projects such as rail, port, and highway systems in providing access to the global marketplace². While encouraging connections of these large structural components is a key component of mega-region strategy, fostering the type of transportation components that build livable communities favored by the creative class is a less well-studied component of a mega-region strategy³.

BACKGROUND

The proposed research seeks to analyze both the need and mechanisms for integrating livability components such as transit and active transportation into a broader mega-regions transportation framework. Because of the lack of detailed prior research in this area, the proposed research will first build a conceptual framework for understanding how transportation livability concepts fit within the larger mega-regions literature. This framework will then be used to analyze key strategies that could be integrated into the larger Gulf Coast /Texas mega-region transportation planning framework emerging through SWUTC.

¹ Ross, Catherine (Ed.) 2009. Megaregions: Planning for Global Competitiveness. Island Press, Washington, DC.

² Ross, Catherine. 2008. *Megaregions: Literature Review of the Implications for U.S. Infrastructure Investment and Transportation Planning*. Georgia Institute of Technology: Atlanta. Report FHWA-BAA-HEPP-02-2007 to Federal Highway Administration.

³ Campbell, Scott. 2009. "The Imperative of Growth, the Rhetoric of Sustainability The Divergence of the Ecoregion and the Global Megaregion," in Ross, Catherine (Ed.) 2009. Megaregions: Planning for Global Competitiveness. Island Press, Washington, DC.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Two focus areas will be examined. The first focus area centers on the connection between mega-region rail connections and “walkable urban” neighborhoods⁴. Understanding the interface between rail station TOD “nodes” and more local active transportation needs offers an avenue to meaningfully tie the mega-region concept to more localized neighborhood livability concerns.

The second area will examine the role of green infrastructure components⁵ like regional greenway systems⁶ in mega-region transportation systems. Regional trail systems like the Minneapolis system focused around the Midtown Greenway and the planning of the Atlanta Beltline system offer potential to link regional transportation planning with neighborhood economic development and active transportation needs. Linking these trail-oriented development opportunities through a regional network also offers the potential to link green infrastructure environmental goals with the emerging urban-orientation of climate change mitigation strategies⁷.

The potential for utilizing walkable urban rail connections and the regional green infrastructure greenbelt systems will be examined within the Texas/Louisiana mega-region. Three case study cities that show the diversity of opportunities and constraints will be examined: Austin, Houston, and New Orleans. These three communities have expanding trail and light-rail systems. In the case of Austin, local bond initiatives are being used to build a regional bicycle system connecting to the new regional light rail line. Houston was awarded a \$15 million TIGER grant in June 2012 designed to connect bicycle facilities with the expanding light rail system. New Orleans is also expanding the light rail/streetcar system through a \$45 million federal TIGER grant. Major existing and emerging opportunities to tie infrastructure into a mega-region transportation system will be identified in these three case study cities.

WORK PLAN

Task 1: Build Livability-Centered Mega-Regions Conceptual Framework

This task will involve synthesizing and creating connections between the livability and mega-regions literature. The literature review will focus on creating a framework for understanding how the livability concepts of walkable urbanism and green infrastructure can be utilized within a mega-regions planning conceptualization.

⁴ Leinberger, Christopher. 2007. The option of urbanism: Investing in a new American dream. New York: Island Press.

⁵ Ross, Catherine. 2008. *Megaregions: Literature Review of the Implications for U.S. Infrastructure Investment and Transportation Planning*. Georgia Institute of Technology: Atlanta. Report FHWA-BAA-HEPP-02-2007 to Federal Highway Administration.

⁶ Benedict, Mark A. and McMahon, Edward T. 2006. Green Infrastructure: Linking Landscapes and Communities. Washington, D.C., Island Press.

⁷ Fields, Billy. 2009. *From Green Dots to Greenways: Planning in the Age of Climate Change in Post-Katrina New Orleans*. *Journal of Urban Design* 14(3): 325-44.

Task 2: Identify Major Existing and Emerging Green Infrastructure/Greenway Connections in Texas/Louisiana mega-region.

The focus of this task will be to identify existing and emerging greenbelt systems within the case study communities in the Texas Triangle and Louisiana Corridor that could act as the backbone of a mega-region, green infrastructure system within the regions.

Task 3: Identify Major Existing and Emerging Walkable Urban/Rail Connections in Texas/Louisiana mega-region.

The focus of this task will be to identify existing and emerging rail-centered intracity transit and intercity connections within the case study communities in the Texas Triangle and Louisiana Corridor that could create the basis of a mega-region walkable urban system within the regions.

Task 4: Create Synthesis Report

Task 5: Develop Presentation of Outlining Key Findings of Study

STAFFING PLAN

The project will be conducted by Dr. Billy Fields. Dr. Fields is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas State University and affiliated scholar with the UNO team. His research focuses on understanding the key elements of resilient communities. He has examined resiliency from transportation, urban planning, and hazard mitigation perspectives through positions as the Director of Research at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in Washington, DC and most recently as the Director of the Center of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of New Orleans.

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

It is proposed that the project will be completed within a period of 13 months (October, 2012 – October, 2013).

Activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Conduct background research for literature review	■	■	■	■									
Draft outline of conceptual framework linking mega-region and livability research					■	■	■	■					
Conduct research to identify existing and emerging walkable urban/rail and green infrastructure/greenway connections								■	■	■			
Create synthesis report											■	■	
Develop presentation outlining key findings													■

- Conduct background research for literature review (October 2012-January 2013)
- Draft outline of conceptual framework linking mega-region and livability research (February 2013-May 2013)
- Conduct research to identify existing and emerging walkable urban/rail and green infrastructure/greenway connections (May 2013-July 2013)
- Create synthesis report (August 2013-September 2013)
- Develop presentation outlining key findings (October 2013)

DELIVERABLES

The research will result in a final report that establishes a functional framework for linking transportation mega-region research with existing livability/TOD concepts and examine how this framework could be put into practice in the Texas/Louisiana mega-region. Research results will be available for presentation at the upcoming SWUTC Mega-Regions Conference. In addition, other opportunities for conferences and journal publications will be explored.

PLAN TO PURSUE ADDITIONAL FUNDING AFTER CONCLUSION OF SWUTC PROJECT

The case studies of Austin, Houston, and New Orleans will create detailed data that can be used in future research in these regions. A working partnership has been established with the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission on the Pedestrian Bicycle Resource Initiative project. This working partnership can potentially be expanded to provide resources for additional resources on the mega-regions project. In addition, other opportunities to partner with CAMPO in Austin and HGAC in Houston will be explored.