

# Southeast Regional Airport Authority



## **Board Meeting Saturday March 21, 2009 New Orleans Airport Hilton Atchafalaya Room**

901 Airline Drive  
Kenner, La 70062  
9:00 am -11:00am

### **Minutes, Approved**

**Board Members Present:** Arnold Baker, Carl Cantrelle, Jr., Scott Cowen, Glenn Hayes, Daniel Schexnaydre, Daniel Songy, Greg St. Etienne

**Board Members Absent:** Debbie Settoon, Jim Hudson

Mr. Cowen called the meeting to order at 9:00 am in the Atchafalaya Room of the New Orleans Airport Hilton located at 901 Airline Drive. Daniel Songy called the Roll and all members were present except Debbie Settoon and Jim Hudson. The minutes of the February 4<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved.

Mr. Cowen added three discussion points to the agenda: a draft report of SERAA's work status to the state legislature; a budget proposal for state funding; and a status update on the SERAA website.

Mr. Cowen introduced Mr. Walter Brooks of the Regional Planning Commission, as the speaker. Mr. Brooks led a conversation about transportation issues and past plans concerning the airport. Jason El Koubi and Stephen Moret of Louisiana Economic Development (LED) joined the conversation via telephone.

Before Mr. Brooks gave his presentation, Mr. Cowen reviewed the status of the RFP for Consulting Services that was in the process of being developed in partnership with LED. Mr. Cowen asked if there were any questions or concerns regarding the RFP. Mr. El Koubi gave a brief description of the purpose behind the RFP and the expected scope of work for the consultant.

Mr. Cowen asked Mr. El Koubi to talk about how LED and SERAA are going to work together to select the consultant. Stephen Moret responded to Mr. Cowen's question. Mr. Moret stated that he expects to establish a steering committee that would consist of representatives from SERAA and LED. The

committee would work through the selection process and the SERAA members would receive progress updates and report back to SERAA.

Mr. Phil Jones stated that the Aviation Board is developing an RFP for consulting services as well. He believes that the emphasis will be placed on determining the value of the airport rather than creating a long-term vision and strategy. Mr. Cowen stated that SERAA has not reviewed the aforementioned RFP and asked whether the Aviation Board's RFP process is a cause for SERAA and LED to revise their respective RFP. Mr. Moret suggested that SERAA and LED review the Aviation Board's RFP to determine whether it will have an impact on the SERAA RFP. Mr. Jones offered to obtain a copy of the Aviation Board's RFP on behalf of SERAA and LED.

Mr. Cowen asked Mr. Moret and Mr. El Koubi to discuss the timeline of the RFP process. Mr. El Koubi stated that the RFP would be published for about a week and responses would be vetted for another couple of weeks to determine the consultant that is best-suited for the engagement. He suggested that mid June is the expected time for the consultant to begin their work.

Mr. Cowen stated that Carl Cantrelle, Jr., Glenn Hayes, and Greg St. Etienne will be the SERAA representatives on the RFP steering committee. He then asked if anyone had any thoughts on substantive changes to the RFP. Mr. Cowen said that he was comfortable with LED's revised version of the RFP and that he had no suggestions for substantive change.

Mr. Glenn Hayes confirmed that Scott Cowen is the Chair of the steering committee. Mr. Cowen confirmed.

Mr. Stephen Moret stated that he believes that the expertise needed for this engagement might cost more than the \$250,000 that LED planned to contribute and that LED and SERAA should prepare for this possibility and begin searching for other funding sources.

Mr. Cowen made a motion to approve the draft of the RFP. Motion was seconded and therefore approved.

Mr. Cowen reintroduced Mr. Walter Brooks who then began his presentation.

Mr. Brooks began with a brief overview of the Regional Planning Commission's history. The RPC's primary mission is to ensure that the region remains eligible for public funds to be spent on transportation-related issues. Mr. Brooks stated that the RPC controls the flow of these federal monies and will be able to help SERAA implement action plans if RPC is kept informed. Mr. Cowen asked Mr. Brooks to talk about how the RPC is funding. Mr. Brooks expressed that each of the represented parishes contribute funds that are matched by federal programs.

Mr. Brooks stated that currently the New Orleans region is spending over \$100 million in highway construction due to large scale projects that are underway. Mr. Cowen asked Mr. Brooks to speak about the substantive interactions that the RPC is able to have with the Aviation Board. Mr. Brooks stated that the RPC is responsible for reviewing and approving the airport's master plan. He mentioned two particular regional projects that the RPC worked on recently: the airport access road and improving the quality of regional landscaping. He stated that the RPC can assist with transportation-related access to the airport. Mr. Brooks stated that the RPC has a very strong working relationship with the Department of Transportation and Development.

Mr. Brooks stated that the RPC is interested in evaluating the ways in which they can improve access to the airport through Airline Highway. He said that the RPC has environmental clearance to connect

Earhart to Airline Highway, which would be a major overpass construction project (over \$100M). The project would also include the expansion of Airline Highway from a 4-lane road to a 6-lane road. In order to improve appearance and improve the flow of traffic they plan to expand the median of Airline Highway and eliminate several of the 26 traffic lights between the airport and the City of New Orleans. This project would require the City to purchase land from KCS on the south side of Airline, which Mr. Brooks estimates has a value of about \$20M. Mr. Brooks said that they are working to get more support from the state before they can actually begin this project.

Other RPC projects include small street overlays and traffic signalization.

RPC commissioned a study to assess the effectiveness of rail connection between the airport and downtown New Orleans. He stated that the city of St. Louis has a rail system that connects the airport to the downtown area. Mr. Brooks said that a similar structure would add great value to the New Orleans region. He noted that funding is an issue because the state does not receive nearly as much funding for transit projects (like railway improvements) as it does for highway projects. Major funding for rail projects comes from a nationally competitive pot that requires a 50% match from the State. Building this rail structure would require a \$450M capital investment according to Mr. Brooks.

Mr. Cowen asked Mr. Brooks how other communities have addressed the rail issue that challenges the region. Mr. Brooks stated that it is less of an issue for other cities because they have more available monies. He used Houston as an example and stated that they built their rail system without any federal subsidization because it is very challenging to access such funding.

Next Mr. Brooks talked about the proposed rail system between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. This project would require different technology than the short-distance light rail from the airport to downtown. It would be a diesel-powered commuter train that can operate on a freight line. The State is looking into developing a high-speed (110 mph) that would cost an estimated \$200M. Mr. Brooks said that the RPC currently has a study in progress to determine how to improve rail access to downtown New Orleans.

Mr. Cowen asked Mr. Brooks about the operating costs of this rail system and what this would mean for the commuter. Mr. Brooks said that he believes the commuter fare would be about \$10 each way. Mr. Cowen asked about the possibility of creating a long-distance bus system that has special HOV lanes for buses. Mr. Brooks said that this is an option that he had seen in other cities called Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). He said that it would be a possibility for the downtown-to-airport Airline Highway connection. He also said it would be possible, if the Baton Rouge-to-New Orleans diesel system is established, to use the diesel trains to shuttle commuters, along the KCS rail, from downtown New Orleans to the airport and reduce costs in comparison to the light rail.

Mr. Brooks stated that the RPC has the ability to transfer some of their highway-designated money to transit projects. He also stated that the State of Louisiana gets 20 cents for every dollar spent on gasoline to put into their highway fund. Mr. Brooks suggests that developing a way to commit some a portion of these monies to transit projects would be highly beneficial to the residents of Louisiana.

Mr. Cowen asked Mr. Brooks to talk about the potential effects of the federal stimulus monies on transportation and transit projects in Louisiana. Mr. Brooks estimated that the State will receive \$400M and that the effects will be significant. He said that the New Orleans region and the RPC would receive about \$170M from the \$400M pool.

Mr. Cowen moved on to the next agenda item: seeking funds through the legislative session. There were no objections to the notion of pursuing funds in this manner. A formal motion was approved by the Board.

Mr. Cowen suggested that the next meeting be held in May to discuss the RFP process. Mr. Cowen added that he would like to update the website to include all current relevant documents and promote transparency.

Mr. Glenn Hayes noted that there are ethics compliance forms that need to be completed and submitted to the Louisiana Board of Ethics in order to follow protocol.

Mr. Cowen asked whether the Board members wanted to amend the legislation that established SERAA to include a representative from Baton Rouge. The Board members decided not to pursue this, but to foster a sense of inclusiveness by reaching out to Baton Rouge, Ascension, St. Tammany, St. James, St. John, East Baton Rouge, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard to ensure that they are connected to the SERAA mission. Mr. Cowen made a motion to implement this and it was approved.

Mr. Cowen opened the discussion to public comments. A representative from BRAC and HNTB each introduced themselves.

Mr. Cowen adjourned the meeting.

The next meeting will take place Tuesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup> from 5 – 7pm at the Courthouse in St. Charles Parish.