

Vibrant NEO 2040 – Vision Session Q&A Transcript
Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium

Akron Urban League (Akron, OH)
October 8, 2013

Panel: Hunter Morrison, Executive Director NEOSCC (HM)
Jason Segedy, Director, Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (JS)
Chris Horne, Planner, Sasaki (CH)

Question/Comment: How do the public surveys compare to the workshop results? How close were they?

C.H: There was great similarity between the results.

Question/Comment: How has this process been applied in other similar regions? What is the model and how are they implementing it?

C.H: Two examples are Salt Lake City and Des Moines both of which have had real capital projects. Sometimes it is also a change in thinking. Des Moines realized they are one job-shed and that luring businesses to skip a municipal border by offering tax incentives, only to have them skip somewhere else when the credits expired, makes no fiscal sense.

Question/Comment: Congratulations for pulling this off – a project of this scale – and for engaging people! What is the timeline of getting this to leadership and next steps?

H.M: Recommendations are going to be defined by scale – local, county, etc. We've asked this of our consultants. This will also require continued collaboration. We need to go for the low-hanging fruit. We've identified best practices, pilots, and other tools. The information in the final report will be shared over the next few months.

Question/Comment: Transit and commuter rail often gets high aspirational marks, but is at a low-level of use and is not the preferred mode as exemplified by actual use.

H.M: Part is that some of the smaller systems don't really work well simply because they are small. There are 8,000 acres of vacant industrial land near high-quality transit that could be repopulated to use the transit network. There are other things to do like put in bike racks and amenities. We also have changing demographics.

J.S: Hunter said a lot of this already, but our demographics as a mega region is more dispersed than peer areas, plus we have lower than average congestion and parking costs. There are transit-dependent riders to serve, plus choice riders. We are trying to help build places that encourage use.

C.H: The Health Line [GCRTA Bus Rapid Transit in Cleveland] is a national best practice.

Question/Comment: I heard a long time ago about creating a truly regional transit authority. Will this happen [check]?

H.M: We are not advocating creation of a single transit authority. The county-based funding system makes this difficult. Where there is dedicated sales tax revenue, there is more long-term planning. We are suggesting connecting the big dots/cities and to improve collaboration. Today, we are a regional commuter-shed, but we cannot get places easily by transit. We can try to connect existing services better.

Question/Comment: Why isn't the private sector represented? Is this by design or just how it turned out?

H.M: Members of the private sector have participated in workstream meetings and the Fund for Our Economic Future [Board member] works with the private sector. They also work with TeamNEO on the Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy (RECS), which includes businesses. We've been aligning the RECS work with our own work and there are some points of connection. Additionally, Cleveland State University and Dr. Edward "Ned" Hill has worked closely with us. We are not going to do a separate economic development strategy. We had an economic development workstream. The work of these other groups is more on our regional strengths, and we used their information to inform some of the growth projections.

C.H: I speak with the Fund regularly. Sasaki works with private firms on a regular basis too. We are figuring out how this effort could be complementary to existing good efforts in the economic development community.

H.M: Our focus is on place-based economic development and this is our value in this area. This is something the Quality Connected Places workstream looked at.