

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

Lorain County Transit Center (Elyria, OH)
October 23, 2013

Panel: Hunter Morrison, Executive Director NEOSCC (HM)

Question/Comment: Established cities and suburbs... I've heard a lot about senior citizens moving into senior centers. Are they part of this categorization? How does that affect the population and transportation needs?

H.M: What we're seeing across the region and across the country, we are seeing two demographics – older adults downsizing and younger kids that grew up in the suburbs who want something else. People want to be in places that have those services: Medina City, Wadsworth. One aspect of compact communities is that they want smaller housing and to get around, plus also aging Baby Boomers who want to downsize – areas like Medina, Youngstown see this.

Question/Comment: Colors are hard to see on the presentation. Question is: When you come to your final report, will it be specific to individual communities, smaller communities? How will this be presented?

H.M: We are not doing a plan – we're doing a framework. Individual cities and municipalities do plans and implement them. This is a framework. By looking at them in the manner I showed you. By place types. What are some of the challenges that those townships face? Are they similar to other areas? We've got legacy cities, they are very similar. What are the recommendations for smaller steel cities? Also seeing patterns related to the age of development. These areas are aging out. Garfield Heights and Austintown have a lot of the same housing stock and a lot of the same challenges. Our recommendations will be broken down into what applies to the different types of areas.What about the traditional towns, what are they facing - Burton, Chardon, Oberlin? Similar things in terms of assets and challenges. It is a framework for connecting within your county and across, not one size fits all. Trying to get as much information that you can use. If you are a new mayor, what can I do? We are hoping this gives us a start on how to do this.

Question/Comment: The following was stated as a comment: While public transportation envisions going from the west toward Cleveland, please consider the West Shore corridor...There is economic development within Lorain County that could be enhanced greatly.

H.M: This is part of the reason we are having these forums to identify efforts that are already underway.

Question/Comment: Points east..., why in the vision was the major rail connection between Lorain and Cleveland, especially when we are sitting in this elegantly restored train station?

H.M: My understanding is that the most feasible rail connection is from Lorain to Cleveland and not from Elyria to Cleveland. My understanding is this is the more challenging route due to freight traffic.

Question/Comment: Follow-up question to question 4: What is the difference between the two types of bus transit listed - BRT and Express Bus?

H.M: There are three levels on the map – existing routes where we mapped what is there today. We see an opportunity if you want bus which is point to point with maybe a one stop in the middle. OpportunityDemand at both ends to make it work. Connecting the downtowns. We also identified Bus Rapid Transit routes, one in the corridor, higher volume that operates like a train. We think there is an opportunity to better connect the cities of Elyria and Lorain. Also think about Warren and Youngstown. These are ideas to come out and say, “These are broadly feasible.” Not everything on the map is set in stone. You are the second person today to mention the Chicago to Cleveland route. Congresswoman Kaptur and former Congressman LaTourette were interested in this.

Question/Comment: How does this relate to young professionals? The City of Cleveland is doing a lot of creative things. More money and opportunities. How are we accounting for this in this vision?

H.M: Demographics – Baby Boomers and Millennials. We’ve got historic downtowns in the region. The only one performing anywhere near its potential is Cleveland. There are developers that are buying up empty buildings and turning them into apartments. That is also driving businesses back to downtown Cleveland. Fortune 500 companies are moving their operations back to downtowns because that is where the talent is and they don’t want to drive. You should be able to get from Oberlin to downtown Cleveland on a bus. 20,000 students at University of Akron – it should be the most vibrant downtown. I worked in Youngstown and in the last three years, in a difficult market, three buildings were converted, 14,000 commuter students in downtown, fixed two buildings up and used historic tax credits. Now they have a waiting list. Places like downtown Elyria is where people want to be. Hudson in Summit County made up the downtown. Chagrin Falls is very lively because that is where people increasingly want to be. We have access to places like Elyria and Lorain. If you building it you will come [to younger person] and the business will come. Call them Innovation Districts because you need to make them tight so that people bump into each other. That is what is happening in downtown Cleveland. Youngstown is getting it. We think there are possibilities.

Question/Comment: Who’s going to fund this?

H.M: A lot needs to be funded privately and strategically. Developers are wanting to do things in downtown Akron.

Question/Comment: Follow-up to question 7: What about old infrastructure?

Certain infrastructure is aged out and needs to be replaced. Water and sewer are there.....Can say this, that the infrastructure network that we have in these core cities is the asset to build from. You may need to rebuild some of this, and you can’t do it alone and hope someone will come along. You need to be strategic. It is strongest in legacy cities. Strongest density of intersections is in Canton. Start with cores – start with the places you want to be.