

June 1, 2005

Ms. Karyn L. Rotker
Poverty, Race & Civil Liberties Project Attorney
ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation
207 East Buffalo Street, Suite 325
Milwaukee, WI 53202-5774

Dear Ms. Rotker:

This letter will respond to your letters of May 16, 2005, one to Gary Korb, the University of Wisconsin Extension Agent who works with the Commission as a regional planning educator, and the other to me as Executive Director of the Commission. Both letters focus primarily on outreach efforts by the Commission to central city low-income and minority groups and organizations with specific respect to the current projects to prepare updated regional land use and regional transportation plans for the year 2035.

With respect to your inquiries and comments, please be advised of the following:

1. The Commission continues to strengthen its outreach activities with specific respect to organizations and groups that primarily serve central city areas, some of whom participated last year in the Federally-sponsored certification review of the Commission's work. Enclosed is a list of those groups and organizations presently on the Commission's outreach contact list. There are 56 groups or organizations listed, and we are continually adding to that list. We communicate with these groups and organizations on a periodic basis, and are in the process of contacting each one with a view towards setting up individual meetings in an attempt to ascertain issues that are important to disadvantaged individuals who reside in central cities and that are germane to land use and transportation system development and maintenance. A star next to the name of the group or organization indicates that we have been successful in holding such a meeting. These groups and organizations are also routinely advised of forthcoming public meetings and hearings relative to major regional plan updating efforts.
2. The Commission's outreach effort with respect to updating of the regional land use and transportation plans is many-faceted. In addition to posting all written materials on the Commission's website where they can be readily accessed by most individuals, the Commission is producing and distributing hardcopy newsletters and shorter brochures that condense the newsletter material, and is providing presentations and briefings on request. The Commission continually accepts public comment on the work being undertaken. News releases announcing meetings are sent to over 50 media outlets, some of which serve persons of limited English proficiency. Paid advertisements are being placed in both Spanish and English in a newspaper serving the Milwaukee Hispanic community. We are taking steps to help enable individuals to communicate with us during such meetings. For example, just recently we provided a sign language interpreter at a meeting so that we were able to converse with a speech-impaired individual. We published a recent brochure in Spanish. We stand ready to provide linguistic translators upon request.

3. The Commission's outreach work does include efforts to contact citizens, officials, and organizations who, during last year's Federal certification review, expressed concerns about public involvement, with a view towards better understanding whatever concerns they may have. Some contacts have already been made. Other contacts will be made as the process proceeds.
4. With particular respect to three subjects that you raise – affordable housing, access to jobs, and community development – please be advised of the following:
 - a. The Commission intends to address the topic of affordable housing in a separate planning effort that will follow completion of the forthcoming updated regional land use plan.
 - b. The issue of access to jobs is continually addressed both through long and short range transportation planning and through Commission-coordinated annual efforts to expend Federal and State funds targeted at this area of concern. Just last week, for example, the Commission acted on a request by the Social Development Commission of Milwaukee County to amend the regional transportation improvement program to enable that agency to secure Federal funds being made available to provide loans to low-income individuals so that those individuals can acquire automobiles and thereby access employment opportunities.
 - c. Community development and re-development issues are considered in the making of the regional land use plan. These issues are critical to the economic vitality of the Region and its central cities and are addressed by the Commission's advisory committee guiding the land use planning effort.
5. Your letter to me implies that a recent Commission decision to use an "open house" style of public involvement in a set of meetings throughout the Region runs contrary to a Federal policy to recognize impacts to communities and people early and continually throughout the transportation decision-making process. We would note in this respect that the subject Federal policy applies not just to the Commission and its work efforts – which very clearly take place at the beginning of the decision-making process – but also to State Departments of Transportation and county and local governments that build upon system planning efforts and proceed to create and execute specific transportation projects. Apparently, you believe that some other style of public involvement would have been better at this stage of the Commission's work on the 2035 plan. I will have Gary Korb contact you to arrange a meeting to get your views on public involvement, style of public meetings, and the way in which public notices should be worded. At that time, he can discuss with you the Commission's current public involvement efforts and obtain any suggestions you may have for improvement.

In closing, we should note that the Commission has long taken very seriously its planning responsibilities relative to all Federal regulations, including those associated with Title VI and environmental justice concerns. Commission practices in responding to those policies have been held out for emulation elsewhere in the nation. The recently completed Federal recertification of the Commission found no need to cite corrective actions for the Commission to take with respect to its planning procedures. Indeed, the planning process sponsored by the Commission was found to meet all Federal requirements. The Federal review team made a number of suggestions as to

how the Commission could strengthen its outreach efforts. The Commission takes seriously those suggestions and will make every reasonable effort to see to it that issues germane to the process are recognized and appropriately dealt with. We will confer with Federal officials from time-to-time to be sure that we are appropriately responding to their suggestions.

Sincerely,

Philip C. Evenson
Executive Director

PCE/lw
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cc: Governor Jim Doyle
Frank J. Busalacchi, Secretary, WisDOT
Dewayne J. Johnson, District Director, WisDOT
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Enclosure (#108633)