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**Envision 2020  
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Planes, trains and automobiles – central Alabama has them all. With the explosive population growth anticipated, as well as high traffic volume already, Envision's Bus Subgroup of the Roads and Mass Transportation Task Force is taking a serious regional look at our current public ground transportation resources, as well as current and long-term needs. Without a doubt, transportation coordination is at the heart of regional cooperation for a progressive central Alabama.

According to the US Department of Transportation 66 percent of the US rural population have little or no access to public transportation; 45 percent of rural elderly have no vehicle and 57 percent of rural poor have no vehicle.

Envision's Bus Subgroup has gathered a team of transportation service providers, citizens, business and government representatives to examine the feasibility of coordinating bus transportation in the River Region. Currently, the Montgomery City Planning Department is working with the Montgomery Transportation Coalition to create and conduct a survey of low-income families' transportation needs, which will be the basis for developing a similar survey for all counties in the River Region. Once we have a clear picture of needs and current transportation resources, a specific plan of action will be implemented.

The Bus Subgroup also identified three areas that must be explored: coordinated transportation to insure maximal service at the lowest possible cost; consideration of a regional transportation system; and educating the public and business community about federal incentives available to companies for their employees who carpool and/or take public transportation.

Besides transportation needs for work and other human services, transportation for tourists is a major economic development issue. In 1998, according to the US DOT, an estimated 46.4 million international visitors spent \$91.3 billion in travel to or within this country. In the same year total travel expenditures were \$515.2 billion and provided 7.6 million jobs. In Alabama tourism is a \$6.5 year industry, and in the River Region, we have just seen the tip of the iceberg. Clearly, from the economic development aspect, this area is ripe for collaboration on coordinated transportation.

The Bus Subgroup's research revealed existing transportation resources vary widely across the region. Plans are underway to consult experts over the summer and compile information on other regions' transportation initiatives. Based on our needs and other areas' successes, recommendations for action will emerge over the coming months.

## **Biscuits – Huge Marketing Success**

Marketing geniuses. That's what everyone is calling Sherrie Myers and Tom Dickson, owners of the Montgomery Biscuits. To say this dynamic husband-wife team hit a home run in central Alabama's River Region might be understating their success. It was brought to Envision's attention recently that in the book, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals*, which was written in 1890 by T. C. DeLeon, it states, "Montgomery, like Rome, sits on seven hills. The city is picturesque in perch upon bold, high bluffs, which on the city side, cut sheer down to the Alabama River; here seemingly scarce more than a biscuit-toss across."

With opening night sold out weeks in advance, the "boys in butter and blue" are already boasting a standing of second in the league for attendance, with 72,000 in attendance for the first 16 games. The Class AA professional team and stadium are part of the new energy and realization of our potential as a leading southern city and region that can compete successfully on the world's economic playing field. While other areas of the US are struggling, the River Region is experiencing a surge of population growth and a seller's market in the demand for real estate. And the good news is we have only just begun.

Myers and Dickson used their passion and expertise for providing unique affordable family fun and applied the principles of perseverance, focus on a specific goal and focus on the future. They have the long view. Reaching goals by persevering, focusing on the common vision and planning carefully for the future are at the heart of the Envision 2020 process. As was the experience of the Myers and Dickson duo, application of those same principles in the Envision process has worked every step of the way. Indeed, creation of the Biscuits and a world-class stadium/multipurpose arena touched on six of Envision 2020's 25 goals.

1. **Downtowns and Riverfronts Goal:** A region that contains restored, revitalized and redeveloped downtowns with vibrant shopping, recreation and living opportunities, where the river, made accessible and protected, is a natural link with the entire region.
2. **Events, Sports, Programs:** A region that provides a wide variety of cultural, recreational, entertainment and sports opportunities for all ages, all income levels, all ability levels and all areas of interest. **Recommended Strategy:** Build a new centrally located, state-of-the art, multi-functional civic arena and renovate existing facilities that would attract a greater variety of sports and entertainment sought by citizens and visitors to the River Region. Through a dedicated governmental entity, utilize incentives to create private/public partnerships that will bring the project to fruition.
3. **Recreational Facilities Goal:** A region that has family oriented, multifaceted cultural and recreational programs and facilities that offer affordable, wholesome events and activities for all.
4. **Historic Preservation, Physical Design, Beautification Goal:** A region that provides a beautiful, clean living environment in all neighborhoods with special emphasis on enhancing our traffic corridor; i.e. through landscaping, eliminating

billboards, creating underground utilities, adaptive reuse and infill while capitalizing on our rich heritage by restoring historic buildings and sites.

At the very heart of the project are Envision's goals for **Economic Development and Tourism!** Based on early sales of merchandise and food, with a whopping 23,000 Mary B's biscuits sold in the first 21 home games, the Biscuits are projected to be number one in the minor leagues in those categories. Tax revenues generated go to the bottom line for the City of Montgomery.

This investment in Alabama's capital city and the surrounding area is an investment for everyone in the state. For those who are in easy driving distance, as well as visitors and tourists, it is great entertainment, for the same cost as a movie, in a beautiful, safe, historic setting. Additionally, it benefits everyone in the state by improving our image and the desirability of living in central Alabama. That, by any measure, is a win-win!

**In Other Action:**

**The Tourism Task Force** will evaluate the regional tourism map project and make recommendations for the future.

**The Crime, Drugs and Public Safety Task Force** has identified youth crime and drug use and cross-county communication among law enforcement and public safety officials as 2 major areas of regional concern. Plans will be formulated over the summer to address these and other issues.

**One of the Culture and Arts Task Force** subgroups will begin an assessment of arts education resources and needs in the region

**How to get involved**

1. Call 269-0224 to sign up for a task force or arrange for a speaker.
2. Use the Envision Plan to guide activities and planning in all organizations.
3. Pick up a copy of the Envision 2020 Regional Tourism map and become a home-state tourist. It will be fun and educational!