

RMA PowerPoint Script

#1. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the newly created Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority. I'll talk about what is an RMA, how did we get to where we are, and what might an RMA do to help us address congestion and mobility issues in Brazos County

#2. To begin to answer these questions, let's go back to the catalyst that started RMA discussions. Congestion and mobility have become very real issues in Brazos County. The Texas A&M Transportation Institute tracks congestion trends in cities across the country. In Bryan-College Station congestion has been increasing at over 5%/year since 1982, essentially doubling every 15 years

#3. And that congestion has a real impact on both our quality of life and our ability to attract economic growth to our area. It is a key issue that business and companies consider when deciding where to locate new facilities. And our citizens deal with the increasing congestion as we go about our daily lives.

#4. And it has gotten the attention of our citizens. The City of College Station regularly conducts surveys to allow its citizens to prioritize the issues of greatest concern. The last two surveys were conducted in 2016 and 2019. In both of those surveys "managing traffic congestion" was identified as being, by far, the greatest issue

#5. And those findings were further emphasized in a 2018 survey conducted by the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization. The MPO asked citizens "what level of congestion do you want to see maintained in the area, and how much would you be willing to pay to achieve that congestion level". The MPO received over 5000 responses to that survey, with over 70% of the respondents saying they desire to keep congestion at or below current levels, and those respondents indicated a willingness to pay \$1220/year/household to attain that mobility level.

#6. And we should realize that congestion is increasing despite an ongoing significant effort by local governments to address the problems. Annually, the two cities and the county combined spend about \$35 million dollars on transportation. State-of-the-art traffic management strategies are being implemented. In addition, Texas A&M operates, in terms of ridership, the 7th largest transit system in Texas. We have the highest level of transit ridership per capita in the state. Yet, despite this, as measured by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, we are the 10th most congested metro area in Texas. And we can't forget that these governmental entities have many other demands on their limited resources. There are limitations to what local government can do.

#7. Our Metropolitan Planning Organization has identified a 2050 Major Thoroughfare Concept. I should note that Brazos County, the cities of Bryan and College Station, The Texas A&M University System, and the Texas Department of Transportation all serve on the MPO Policy Board that adopted this plan. It is estimated that, in current dollars, implementation of this entire plan will cost roughly \$3 billion. That's billion, with a B. With current resources, we are funding about 3% of that cost each year. Many of the lines on the thoroughfare plan today are just that—lines. Project development has not been started—there is a lack of funds or no local entity able to take the lead to develop, design and construct the project.

#8. As we all know, in terms of congestion we are not like the big cities. But our congestion is clearly increasing. We all can think of roadways in our area that had little to no congestion 5-7 years ago that now experience noticeable congestion most every day. It has become an issue that citizens indicate they are well aware of, and desire be addressed. To alter the congestion trend, we need to do more than what we have been doing in the past.

#9. And as we seek to define the problem, it is important that we realize that transportation projects can take a long time to get built. As stated earlier, many of the thoroughfares shown previously on the MPO 2050 plan today are no more than lines on a map. Getting those lines turned into a completed project can easily take 10-20 years. As we will see, the RMA can be a valuable tool to get this

project development process started. All this suggests the mobility issues are a concern to our residents, and despite the significant commitments being made to streets and traffic, the problem continues to worsen at a noticeable rate.

#10. Recognizing the significance of the transportation issue locally, in 2017 local leaders expressed a desire to investigate creating a Regional Mobility Authority. It is, perhaps, the one significant tool we did not have in our “toolbox”. It was the desire of these local leaders that no action be taken on the RMA unless there was widespread support for creating such an entity. Accordingly, for two years, the concept was discussed in detail at the local level. At the end of that process, unanimous support was expressed for creating the RMA. The entities depicted on this slide all signed letters supporting its creation, and Brazos County Commissioners Court took the lead in preparing the petition to be submitted to the Texas Transportation Commission. Our local state legislators were involved from the start and have provided strong support and leadership. A road forward had been identified

#11. So, exactly, what is a Regional Mobility Authority? In complicated terms, it is a countywide independent local government agency. It is regionally focused on developing and implementing transportation projects. The Metropolitan Planning Organization takes the lead on planning, the RMA can often take the lead on implementation. Creation of an RMA is authorized by Texas Legislation, as is the process required to create an RMA. The RMA does not have taxing authority but it does have eminent domain authority. And a point we will continually emphasize is that the RMA is locally controlled—a local board will make decisions.

#12. We are not alone in having an RMA. There are 10 RMAs in Texas, we can learn a great deal from what others have already done. We have an ongoing dialogue with many of these RMAs

#13. The RMA has extremely broad authority as to what it can do. It can be involved in projects addressing any mode of transportation—for example., the RMA can pursue projects concerning roads, transit, aviation, rail, parking and pedestrian facilities., and others. It can pursue the projects steps needed to bring projects into reality.

#14. In Brazos County, the key role for the RMA will likely be to accelerate the development of projects whose needs have been clearly identified and prioritized by the local MPO planning process. The RMA can use its capabilities to bring together different agencies and multiple funding sources to leverage resources and expedite timelines. It can help our area to take advantage of the new funding likely to be available from sources such as the new federal infrastructure bill.

#15. There are a number of projects in our area that the RMA can help move forward. This list is illustrative only, it is not all possible projects, nor is it necessarily the projects that will have the highest priority. But it might give you an idea of where the RMA can make a difference by getting the project development work started.

#16. This is a timeline of where we have been and where we are. To get an RMA established, a petition must be submitted by Brazos County Commissioners Court to the Texas Transportation Commission requesting that they approve an RMA for Brazos County. Not too surprising, state law dictates the content of that petition. Such a petition was submitted in November 2018. It was unanimously approved by the Texas Transportation Commission in a Minute Order in May 2019. In December 2019 Brazos County Commissioners Court accepted the minute order, and that action officially created the RMA. The RMA board held its first meeting in January 2019

#17. And as we will continue to emphasize, this is a local entity with local control, no one in Austin is telling us what to do. The Governor appoints the chair or presiding officer, who needs to be a Brazos County resident. As our RMA is set up, Brazos County Commissioner Court appoints four additional board members. Commissioners Court accepts a nominee from the City of College Station, the City of Bryan, and The Texas A&M University System, and the County also identifies a board member. So, a five-member board comprised entirely of local citizens oversees our RMA.

#18. The RMA will not be the silver bullet that solves all our transportation problems. But it is the biggest missing tool in the toolbox, and if used properly can help to flatten the growth in local congestion

#19. So, what happens next? To be effective, the RMA will need a meaningful source of ongoing revenue. State law allows the vehicle registration fee in the county to be increased by \$10, with that money dedicated to the RMA. We chose to require a county wide election take place to give our citizens the opportunity to decide if this should happen. With the strong support of our local elected officials, the past legislative session authorized us the opportunity to have such an election in Brazos County. It is our intent to have such an election in November 2022. Prior to that election, we will be informing voters on exactly what will be done with the money and when it will be done, if the voters choose to support the referendum.

#20. The RMA has already shown that real benefits can come from the entity. The discussion on the RMA led to the creation of a local transportation vision statement. That document is signed by 15 partners. In summary, it says that we all recognize that transportation is a major issue, and we all recognize that we must work together to effectively address the problem. While that may sound obvious, we believe we are the only county in the state to have such an agreed upon vision, and it is a key selling point when meeting with various officials. It was the RMA discussion that led to this vision, and it is just an example of how the RMA can help to bring partners together to make projects happen. We are fortunate that in our County all the agencies and localities involved in transportation planning, programming and construction cooperate well to address the transportation issue.

#21. So, in closing, keep in mind that roadways like Rudder Freeway and FM2818 were free flowing not all that long ago. Congestion has been and continues to increase. If all we do is what we have done in the past, we would expect that congestion to continue to grow at about 5%/year. The RMA can give us one more tool to address that problem.

#22. Please note the RMA web site, as considerable additional information is included on that site. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today and will be happy to respond to questions you may have.