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October 10, 2023

Re: Responses to *Public Information Open House* Comments for PI 0007836, Bartow and Cherokee Counties, State Route (SR) 20 from Interstate (I)-75/Bartow to I-575/Cherokee

Thank you for your feedback concerning the proposed project referenced above. We appreciate your participation and the questions and comments received through the project's website. As the project develops, the proposed project plan may need to be revised. If there are significant changes to what was shown on the project's website, there will be additional public outreach. If no significant changes are proposed, the project will proceed to right-of-way (ROW) acquisition and final design. Following the completion of all ROW acquisitions, the project design would be finalized, and the project would advance to construction.

Every comment provided during the project's comment period beginning on June 6, 2022, and ending on July 22, 2022, will be made part of the project's official record. The project's website received **7,132** page views in total. Of the **376** respondents who formally commented, **108** were in **support** of the project, **89** were **opposed**, **32** were **uncommitted**, and **147** expressed **conditional support**.

The Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) has prepared a single response letter that addresses all questions and comments received during the comment period and are summarized below (in *italics*) followed by our response.

- *Comments supporting the project.*

Thank you for your support.

- *Comments were received regarding the high cost of the proposed project.*

This project is needed to alleviate future congestion along SR 20 between I-75 and I-575 and to reduce crash severity and frequency along the corridor. Based on the length of the corridor and duration of anticipated construction, the project is comparable to other similar Georgia DOT projects in overall cost.

Cost estimates are developed by itemizing the materials and labor required for the construction of the project including erosion control, ROW needs, traffic control, and utility costs. The cost for itemized construction items is obtained by utilizing Georgia DOT's vast historic cost database. These estimates are updated on a monthly basis to account for unit item cost changes due to the project's location within the state and increases/decreases in prevailing market cost.

- *Comments were received regarding the construction of the proposed project, including duration, future communication, and delays.*

The proposed project is scheduled to begin construction in late 2027 with a construction duration of approximately 48 months.

At this stage, it is undetermined if off-site detours would be necessary. Potential closures and detours will be communicated to the public, local governments, schools, and first responders.

Rock blasting may need to occur along sections of the corridor in order to widen the roadway, and traffic may need to be detoured during this activity. The contractors will work with Georgia DOT to develop daily construction schedules for the blasting.

Georgia DOT will continue to seek public input at major milestones during the project's development. Once the Environmental Assessment (EA) is approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), a Public Hearing Open House (PHOH) will be held to facilitate exchange of information between Georgia DOT and the public prior to making a commitment to the location and design of the project. Additional coordination meetings may be held with the local residents to answer questions prior to the PHOH. Please contact the project email SR20Improvements@dot.ga.gov for additional information.

- *Comments were received requesting landscaping.*

Grass is the extent of the landscaping in the medians. Shrubbery and small native evergreen trees are currently planned for the center islands of the roundabouts.

- *Comments were received about the raised median and resulting access changes to businesses/neighborhoods, the Restricted Crossing U-Turn (RCUT) locations, and conventional U-turn locations.*

Raised medians are considered an effective means of access management and a feature to reduce mid-block conflicts on roads with higher traffic volumes. As currently proposed, the median openings are spaced to maximize access while reducing safety risks and operational issues. Some RCUT intersection locations would be designed to accommodate U-turn movements for tractor-trailers and other large vehicles, such as dump trucks, emergency vehicles, and horse trailers. Additional RCUT and U-turn locations will be evaluated as the project's design continues to develop.

According to the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) *Safety Benefits of Raised Medians and Pedestrian Refuge Areas* brochure, raised medians have been found to reduce motor vehicle accidents by 15 percent. The brochure can be found online at: http://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/access_mgmt/docs/benefits_am_trifold.pdf.

RCUT intersections have been installed in many states in the U.S., and federal studies have shown a reduction in crashes at those locations by 28% to 44%. These studies have also shown a reduction in the number of fatal crashes by more than half.

The RCUTs can also improve the overall roadway operations even when considering the additional distance traveled by traffic entering from minor roads or driveways. While RCUTs can cause a slight increase in travel time during periods of low traffic volumes, they have been shown to decrease delay during periods of higher volumes, reducing the time it takes to clear an intersection and resume normal travel speeds,

thereby resulting in an overall benefit for local roadway users as well as those traveling along SR 20.

- *Comments were received about the raised median and the effect on emergency services response times.*

The project design enables operations for all vehicles, including emergency vehicles. The proposed median will be designed with a mountable curb to allow emergency services to cross where median openings are not readily available. Coordination with emergency first responders has been conducted as part of the project design process and will continue throughout the construction of the project to ensure timely emergency response times.

- *Questions about the proposed design and comments requesting specific design changes were received such as shifting the alignment north or south, incorporating acceleration lanes, etc. to minimize impacts to homes and neighborhoods.*

Comments regarding specific requests for design changes are being analyzed on a case-by-case basis. The analysis must consider the environmental and physical constraints in the area. The project team will balance engineering design and impacts to sensitive areas along the project corridor.

The project's design will continue to be refined and will take requests for design changes into account where possible. The updated design that incorporates any revisions made in response to the June-July virtual Public Information Open House (PIOH) comments will be presented to the public at the PHOH once the NEPA document is approved by the FHWA.

- *Comments were received related to sidewalks.*

All Georgia DOT projects must be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and pedestrian accommodations are required in areas where warranted. Given the location and presence of pedestrians in the area, sidewalks and crosswalks are warranted. Specific warrants for the inclusion of sidewalks include:

- The presence of pedestrian travel generators and destinations (i.e., residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, schools, public parks) or areas where such generators and destinations can be expected prior to the design year of the project
 - Existing evidence of pedestrian movements in the project vicinity
 - Where a need is identified by a local government, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), or regional commission through an adopted planning study
- *Comments were received expressing concern that large trucks and trucks pulling trailers would not be able to navigate U-turns.*

Due to factors such as sight distance and ROW, not every U-turn is made for tractor-trailers. The typical median U-turn crossover can accommodate larger vehicle U-turn

movements given the wide median in a typical transportation corridor. A single-lane crossover is designed to provide adequate turning radii and tracking for both the front and rear ends of larger vehicles. If the median width is less than adequate for larger vehicle U-turns, additional pavement may be added at the far side of the U-turn crossover to accommodate the larger vehicle movements.

- *Questions about sight distance at specific locations along the project corridor.*

Sight distance is the distance from which an object at eye level remains visible to the observer. Safe and efficient operation of a vehicle is highly dependent on adequate sight distance because it directly relates to a driver's ability to avoid conflicts. Multiple sight distance criteria are evaluated during the project's development utilizing guidance provided in the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) publication, *A Policy on the Geometric Design of Highways and Streets* (also known as the *Green Book*), and Georgia DOT's *Design Policy Manual*. These publications serve as the highway design standards in the state of Georgia, and the proposed project is designed with these standards.

All sight distance calculations are dependent on design speed. Stopping sight distance ensures that vehicles traveling along the highway can see an object in the road and have adequate distance to react and stop prior to reaching the object. Intersection sight distance ensures that vehicles at intersections can see oncoming traffic and vice versa. Design decisions regarding sight distance are made to address existing substandard sight distance values and are not an effort to increase highway speeds unless the geometric design of the highway improvements specifically call for an increased design speed.

- *Comments related to the Hawks Farm Subdivision entrance.*

Existing structures and monuments at the Hawks Farm subdivision entrance may be impacted by the project and require replacement. During the ROW acquisition process, the Georgia DOT would assess any damages to a property as a result of the project and negotiate a fair and reasonable compensation. All reconstructed driveways and entrances would be designed to accommodate vehicles currently accessing the property.

- *Comments were received expressing concern about roundabouts.*

The Georgia DOT understands that driving through an unfamiliar intersection may be somewhat intimidating at first, but studies have shown roundabouts to be a safer alternative to signalized or stop-controlled intersections. Once familiarized, local traffic typically has no issues using a roundabout. Educational information on navigating roundabouts is available at:

- <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/pages/Roundabouts.aspx>
- <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/roundabouts/fhwasa08006.pdf>
- <https://youtu.be/cNM0W3qUwx0>

- *Comments regarding the proposed traffic signals, and/or roundabouts, including requests at specific locations throughout the corridor.*

For each intersection of two or more public roadways, an Intersection Control Evaluation (ICE) is completed. An ICE analyzes multiple intersection control methods, such as traffic signals, roundabouts, and stop signs, to determine the best fit for the intersection. As part of that ICE process, an analysis is conducted to determine if the intersection meets signal warrants per the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD) administered by the FHWA.

This study includes many different aspects of the intersection including traffic conditions, traffic volumes, pedestrian characteristics, physical characteristics of the roadway, and the traffic engineer's conclusion and recommendations. To obtain approval for a traffic signal, the study must include the analysis showing that a traffic signal will improve the safety and operations of the intersection more so than other alternative traffic control devices (such as roundabouts; multi-way stops; and geometric improvements, such as left turn lanes, right turn lanes, medians, islands, or channelization). As stated previously, comments regarding specific requests for design changes are being analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

For more information on requesting a traffic signal, please visit the following link.

<https://mydocs.dot.ga.gov/PublicOutreach/0007386/PDF/Traffic%20Signals%20Public%20Information%20Document.pdf>

- *Comments were received regarding concerns about excessive speeds.*

Georgia DOT does not regulate or impose compliance with speed limits. For specific concerns about speed limit enforcement, please contact your local law enforcement officials with your concerns.

However, during construction of transportation projects, Georgia DOT encourages drivers to take the necessary precautions and adhere to any advanced warning signage in order to safely travel through active work zones.

- *Comments were received suggesting the need for other projects in the region.*

The need for other projects in the region is beyond the scope of the proposed project. However, requests for transportation improvement projects can be made by contacting the Atlanta Regional Commission for projects within Cherokee County or the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission for projects within Bartow County using the contact information provided below.

- Atlanta Regional Commission (Cherokee County Projects)
Patrick Bradshaw, TIP Administrator
pbradshaw@atlantaregional.org
- Northwest Georgia Regional Commission (Bartow County Projects)

Julianne Meadows, Planning Director
jmeadows@nwgrc.org

Through its Quick Response program, Georgia DOT also allows community members to request or suggest small traffic operations and safety projects. There is a page on the Georgia DOT website that provides instructions for how to request a project at <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/Projects.aspx>.

Simply scroll down to *Suggest A Quick Fix*:

Suggest A Quick Fix

The **Quick Response Project Program** allows Georgia DOT to quickly identify, approve and construct small traffic operations safety projects on the state route system. If you have a suggestion for a quick fix project, please share your thoughts in the form below.

Notice: Due to recent updates to Microsoft Edge, this form may not display properly within the Edge and Internet Explorer web browser. The Suggest A Quick Fix form works best on the following web browsers; [Firefox](#), [Google Chrome](#), [Safari](#).

[Open Comment Form](#)

Then click the *Open Comment Form* button, complete the form, and submit the request.

- *Comments were received regarding potential increased noise and air pollution generated by the proposed project.*

A Noise Impact Assessment is completed for every federal-aid highway project in the state of Georgia authorized under Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). This includes federal-aid projects that are administered by Georgia DOT, local public agencies, and roadways operated by others on behalf of the state of Georgia. In accordance with 23 CFR § 772.15, federal funds may be used for noise abatement measures when traffic noise impacts have been identified and abatement measures have been determined to be feasible and reasonable pursuant to 23 CFR § 772.13(d).

As part of the federal environmental process, Georgia DOT conducts an air quality analysis to consider future air pollution impact of projects. Once this analysis is complete, avoidance, minimization, and mitigation options are considered. The air analysis, along with other environmental studies, is included in an environmental document that meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and is made available for public review.

- *Comments were received regarding concerns of potential impacts to streams.*

Preliminary impacts to Waters of the United States (WOTUS) have not been calculated at this point in plan development; however, the proposed project's design was developed so that impacts to environmentally sensitive resources would be avoided or minimized to the fullest extent practicable. Any unavoidable impacts would be documented per Section 404 of the Clean Water Act permit and mitigated through activities to restore, enhance, or create Waters of the US.

- *Comments were received regarding Georgia DOT's public outreach website.*

Georgia DOT strives to provide consistent virtual access to all public involvement materials. In the event you are unable to access the website, please send an email to SR20Improvements@dot.ga.gov so that Georgia DOT can consider providing materials in an alternative manner or provide guidance on how to access the website.

The PIOH website will remain open for public viewing and can be found following this link: <https://sr20improvements-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/pages/i75toi575>.

- *Comments regarding environmental impacts.*

As stated previously in this letter, projects using federal funds must adhere to NEPA. Environmental surveys and reports must be completed and summarized in a NEPA document which is subject to approval by FHWA. These surveys include 1) the Social Environment, 2) Cultural Resources, such as historic and archaeological resources, 3) Natural Resources such as waters, invasive species, threatened and endangered species, etc. and 4) the Physical Environment, such as air and noise.

Upon identifying all environmental resources, Georgia DOT attempts to develop a conceptual plan that satisfies the proposed project's need and purpose, addresses public feedback, and minimizes the impact to the environmentally sensitive resources. When impacts cannot be avoided, we evaluate ways to minimize and/or mitigate those impacts in the most responsible manner possible.

- *Comments about runoff.*

Georgia DOT takes drainage and runoff very seriously and a large component of transportation projects is the capture, control, and containment of runoff. Transportation projects are designed in such a way as to accommodate the increase of runoff. A pre/post-construction hydraulic analysis will be completed for the project and Best Management Practices (BMP) will be provided, where needed, to minimize excess runoff onto adjacent properties.

Additionally, the roadway's drainage design would be brought to current standards, where possible, as part of the overall design process. The proposed project must comply with Georgia DOT's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit, which includes incorporating permanent water quality control and detention measures, or BMPs, into the design where appropriate, where those BMPs have not been determined to be infeasible. Criteria to determine BMP feasibility includes the following: stormwater management and treatment requirements; safety to motorists, Georgia DOT maintenance staff, and the general public; site constraints such as available ROW, soil type within the project area and topography; the cost associated with operating the BMP; special watershed or stream considerations; and maintenance challenges.

A more detailed list of post-construction stormwater BMP selection criteria can be found in Chapter 10 of the Georgia DOT Drainage Design for Highways Manual at: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/Drainage/Drainage%20Manual.pdf>.

- *Comments were received concerning the Georgia DOT's process for acquiring ROW.*

Please note that the proposed project alignment has not yet been finalized. It is possible that the proposed ROW shown on plans could be reduced or perhaps eliminated. As the project development process moves forward, Georgia DOT will continue to work with businesses and residences on impacts to their properties. Where possible, the alignment and construction limits will be reduced to minimize impacts.

In the event your property is required in total or in part, a certified appraiser from the Georgia DOT's appraiser prequalification list will make an appraisal of the area to be acquired, including any damages to the remainder of the land, if applicable. The appraisal will also include values for improvements required or damages that may be applicable. Property owners will be compensated at the fair market value for the purchase of ROW and easement. Should you be required to relocate as part of this project, a Georgia DOT representative will assist you during your relocation. To further explain the relocation program and hopefully answer any other questions you may have, please see the following link to the brochure "What Happens When Your Property is needed for a Transportation Facility".

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/AboutGeorgia/Documents/Publications/Program%20Brochures/ROWBrochure-English.pdf>

- *Comments were received regarding Level of Service.*

Level of service is a measure of traffic congestion. The Georgia DOT collects traffic counts along a roadway to help determine the level of congestion and to develop projections of traffic congestion along a project corridor if no improvements were made. This preliminary analysis determines if travelers will experience increasing levels of high congestion and long delays if no improvements are made. Georgia DOT provides traffic forecasts based on a 20-year projection from traffic counts. From those counts and projections, a capacity analysis is conducted that can help determine future traffic needs, such as the number of travel lanes needed based on achieving an acceptable level of service.

- *Comments were received concerning the residents' quality of life and the potential development that may result from the proposed project.*

The need and purpose of this project is to improve mobility, reduce congestion, and reduce the crash frequency and severity along this major arterial state route. Development and population growth have continued to increase the demand along SR 20, and traffic along SR 20 is consequently projected to increase, which will

decrease the level of service of the roadway in the future. Additional roadway capacity is needed to alleviate this future congestion along SR 20 between I-75 and I-575.

Land use and zoning decisions in Georgia are made by county and local governments. Land use changes and building permits are beyond the control of Georgia DOT but are under the jurisdiction of Bartow County, Cherokee County, the City of Cartersville, and the City of Canton.

Within the City of Canton, the Community Development Department should be contacted at 770-704-1500 regarding current and long-range planning, land development, building construction, and code compliance.

Planning and development questions within the City of Cartersville should be directed to Randy Mannino, Director of Planning and Development, at 770-387-5600.

Zoning and development questions within Bartow County should be directed to Richard Osborne, Bartow County Zoning Administrator, at the following email address: osborner@bartowcountyga.gov.

Planning and zoning questions within Cherokee County should be directed to Margaret Stallings, Cherokee County Planning and Zoning Director, at 678-493-6101.

- *Comments about the Knox Bridge Day Use Area.*

The proposed project would require the temporary closure of the Knox Bridge Day Use Area while construction occurs in this area. However, shifting the widened road to the north at Knox Bridge would allow for a reconfigured driveway to improve accessibility to and from the facility. The existing driveway is skewed, and right-turns into the area from SR 20 are not allowed. The temporary closure of the facility would also be minimized by performing construction in the immediate area during winter months when the Day Use Area is typically closed to the public.

- *Comments requesting a more detailed plan for the intersections of Oakdale Road/Canton onto Hwy 20.*

The public will have an additional opportunity to review the plans during the PHOH later in project development. More detailed plans will be available for review during this meeting.

- *Comments requesting limitations to the number of billboards along the project corridor.*

Billboard installation is not a Georgia DOT action. This effort is completed through coordination efforts between county or city officials and private industries.

- *Comments requesting to coordinate the installation of a fire hydrant during construction.*

Please contact your water service provider: Bartow County Water Department, Canton City Water and Sewage Department, or Cherokee County Water and Sewage Authority. Your water service provider will coordinate with Georgia DOT during design to ensure water mains, hydrants, meters, valves, and other appurtenances are properly relocated prior to construction of the roadway.

- *Comments noting that White Road was rerouted to Highway 108 and suggesting that updated Project Location Maps are needed.*

The project layout at this location will be reviewed and revised per current maps.

- *Comments questioning how the left turn at Field Landing Road at SR 20 would be safer with the proposed project.*

The intersection of SR 20 at Field Landing Road is to be converted to a right-in/right-out intersection. Traffic on Field Landing Road will only make a right turn onto SR 20 and would need to U-turn approximately 650 feet down the road at the Copper Hills Drive/Lusk Court intersection. This eliminates the potential for “T-bone” crashes between left-turning vehicles on Field Landing Road and through traffic on SR 20 because the turning vehicle is forced to make a right and merge with the oncoming traffic.

- *Comments about the new gas stations and new Dollar General.*

Adequate access to commercial properties such as the gas stations and the Dollar General will be provided during and after construction.

- *Comments about the alternatives considered to minimize impacts to families and businesses along the roadway from Knox Bridge heading east towards Canton.*

During the Concept Phase of project development, any project that alters an intersection that falls along a state road or national highway or will be designed or constructed using state or federal funding requires an ICE to ensure that Georgia DOT is identifying and selecting a control solution that is most appropriate for each impacted intersection.

The evaluation assesses whether the proposed solutions: (a) meet the purpose and need of the project, (b) address key performance criteria (safety, non-motorized users, operational quality, etc.), and (c) meet the needs and values of the local community and directly affected stakeholders. Five alternatives were considered for this project, and the proposed project was considered the best solution given the constraints of the corridor.

The proposed project's design was developed so that impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including the social environment, would be avoided, or minimized to the fullest extent practicable.

Again, thank you for your feedback. Should you have further questions or comments, please send an email to the project address: SR20Improvements@dot.ga.gov.

Sincerely,



Eric Duff
State Environmental Administrator

ED/JK

cc: Jeff Lewis, GDOT Board Member (District 11)
Chuck Hufstetler, State Senator (District 052)
Kay Kirkpatrick, State Senator (District 032)
Brandon Beach, State Senator (District 021)
Mitchell Scoggins, State Representative (District 014)
Matthew Gambill, State Representative (District 015)
Jordan Ridley, State Representative (District 022)
Mandi Ballinger, State Representative (District 023)
Ruth Solomon-Roberson, GDOT Project Manager (via email)
PDF for Project File