



June 25, 2013

Engaged Citizen
14 Backyard Way
Anytown, Georgia

Re: P.I. Nos. 0002862, 0003681, 0003682, Cherokee and Forsyth Counties
Projects STP00-0002-00(862), STP00-0003-00(681), STP00-0003-00(682)
Proposed SR 20 Improvements from Canton to Cumming
Responses to Public Information Open House Comments received during the Scoping Period

Dear Engaged Citizen,

Thank you for your comments concerning the proposed project to improve State Route (SR) 20 between Interstate (I)-575 in Cherokee County and SR 400 in Forsyth County. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) appreciates your participation and all of the input that was received as a result of the May 16 and 21, 2013 Public Information Open Houses (PIOHs) as well as through the project and MetroQuest survey websites. Every written comment received and verbal comment given to the court reporter at the PIOHs, as well as those comments received electronically through the project and MetroQuest survey websites, will be made part of the official record of the project.

A total of 361 people attended the PIOHs (148 in Cumming and 213 in Ball Ground) and 848 visits to the MetroQuest survey website were made. Of the respondents who submitted a formal comment, the distribution was as follows:

- o 99 paper comment forms,
- o 11 court reporter comments,
- o 2 email comments, and
- o 102 written comments via the MetroQuest website.

Additionally, many visitors to the PIOHs and MetroQuest website provided map-based input on areas of concern or community facilities. These were not counted as part of the formal comments. However, this input has been added to a database of locally important areas to help the project team better understand the issues and guide their development of solutions.

GDOT values each comment received for this project and we encourage you to stay engaged as we hold additional PIOHs in the fall of 2013. This will provide another opportunity to comment as the project advances. Should you have any further questions, comments, or concerns, please call the GDOT project manager, Karyn Matthews, at (404) 631-1584. For project status updates, schedule information, additional information, etc., please visit the project website at: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/Projects/activeprojects/StateRoute/SR20/Pages/I-575toSR400.aspx>.

The attendees of the PIOHs, visitors to the MetroQuest website, and those sending in comments afterwards raised the following questions and concerns. GDOT has prepared this one response letter that addresses all comments received. This way everyone can be aware of the concerns raised and the responses provided. Please find the following categories with example comments (in **bold**) followed by our response.

GDOT Project Development Process- What voice do I have in the decision-making process as GDOT develops solutions to improve SR 20?

Everyone has a voice in this project. This PIOH was the first step and GDOT has only just begun project development. Our approach is to start fresh with no preconceived solutions using information gathered from the public to help supplement our initial studies and create a clearer understanding of the issues and constraints in which we can begin to develop solutions. We will consider a full range of alternatives and document the

evaluation of those alternatives in accordance with federal environmental analysis regulations. These PIOHs have been an initial effort to gather data and public input, which is a valued part of the process. All public involvement activities contribute to the project database of community resources, stakeholders, and local concerns. GDOT will continue to seek public input at major milestones during project development.

Additionally, the project team will incorporate any future growth areas, new developments, or other community modifications through the established coordination process. Coordination is ongoing with local entities (including school systems and the Atlanta Regional Commission, among others), state agencies (including the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, among others), and federal agencies (such as the Environmental Protection Agency) via meetings of Technical Advisory Committees (TAC). Citizens Advisory Committees (CAC) have also been formed for this project and will provide additional perspective to inform the proposed solutions. The CACs include participants representing multiple perspectives and special interests affected by this corridor including social, commercial, residential, and trucking interests among others.

We encourage everyone to participate to the maximum extent possible by attending public meetings, staying engaged through the website noted above, or communicating concerns through the appropriate representative on the CAC.

Draft Need and Purpose- How will this project reduce the number of crashes, improve mobility, and provide congestion relief on SR 20 between I-575 and SR 400?

Many comments were received regarding safety, mobility, and congestion. The project team's initial assessment combined with the feedback received through the Scoping Process (TAC/CAC meetings, PIOHs, website feedback, and input from other federal, state, and local agencies and tribal governments) has identified the draft project needs of the SR 20 corridor between Canton and Cumming as:

- high population and employment growth,
- constrained access to activity centers,
- high crash rates,
- inefficient movement of people and goods,
- constrained east-west travel, and
- roadway and intersection congestion.

The proposed SR 20 Improvement Project is looking at the corridor-wide improvements between I-575 and SR 400 that are needed long term. The intent is to provide a safe and reliable facility that would operate acceptably through the year 2042. The draft purpose of the SR 20 project from Canton to Cumming is to provide transportation improvements that address these needs.

Many commenters identified areas along SR 20 between Canton and Cumming where traffic congestion and safety are a concern. One example of a safety-related comment is the need to install roadway reflectors to assist drivers traveling between dusk and dawn. Two examples of traffic-related comments include the need for congestion relief near Canton Marketplace and the status of passing lanes construction. The widening of SR 20 from I-575 to Scott Road near Canton Marketplace is currently scheduled to begin construction in 2018 (see also below- **Alternatives- In and Around Canton Marketplace**). Construction of the existing passing lanes project along several sections of SR 20 is currently on schedule for completion at the end of July of this year. The passing lanes project and the widening from I-575 to Scott Road will help provide congestion relief in specific sections of roadway.

We also heard comments about congestion and safety in several specific areas, and we are using this feedback to identify potential small, quick turnaround projects that target localized problems. These will be considered for implementation on a different timeline than the overall long-term improvements to the SR 20 corridor.

Community Considerations- How will GDOT consider the rural character of the land, homes, subdivisions, businesses, and generational family land in the project area during the design process?

The proposed SR 20 Improvement Project will be developed to meet the draft project need and purpose using context sensitive solutions. GDOT strives to balance the need to move vehicles in a safe and efficient manner with quality of life issues. We will work toward developing solutions that meet the needs of the traveling public while avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating impact to the environmental resources along the corridor including:

- o natural (e.g., wetlands, streams, and protected species),
- o human (e.g., churches, businesses, institutions, and commercial or residential displacements),
- o cultural (e.g., historic properties, cemeteries, Native American interests, and archaeological findings), and
- o physical (e.g., air pollution, noise pollution, and hazardous material involvement).

During project development we are required to identify these environmental resources, evaluate potential impacts, and assess opportunities for resource avoidance, minimization, or mitigation. One example is that farmland impacts will be evaluated and coordinated with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). GDOT also strives to minimize impacts to all property owners. For a more comprehensive outline of the resources to be evaluated, please view the Scoping Booklet at the website noted above or contact the GDOT Project Manager.

Truck Traffic- There is a lot of truck traffic on SR 20. How will trucks be affected by the SR 20 project?

SR 20 is and will continue to be designated as a truck route as it is part of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act Network Route, National Highway System and the Atlanta Strategic Route Master Plan. Design considerations of truck traffic will be part of the alternatives analysis process.

Alternatives Analysis Process – What improvement options are available for SR 20?

One of the components of the environmental evaluation for this project is the development of a full range of alternatives. We will consider each alternative's potential to address the project need and purpose (e.g., congestion relief, crash reduction, and mobility improvement on SR 20 between I-575 and SR 400) in addition to a variety of other factors, including cost, environmental concerns (natural, human, cultural, and physical environments), community input, accessibility, and other considerations. Various concept alternatives will be developed and evaluated including:

- o No Build Alternative – this concept would make no improvements to SR 20 or include no new roadways. It is always an option and also provides a comparison for other alternatives considered.
- o Transportation System Management Concept – this concept would seek to improve the operations of SR 20 relying upon lower cost roadway improvements such as intersection improvements, turn lane additions, traffic signal coordination, and shoulder upgrades.
- o Build Alternatives – these concepts would evaluate build alternatives to meet the need and purpose and potentially add roadway capacity by adding lanes, re-aligning intersections, potential portions of new location roadway, and flattening curves.

The alternatives analysis process will start with a set of broad brush concepts that will be evaluated from a high level perspective and will be reduced to a more focused detailed set of alternatives. The most effective alternatives and combinations of alternatives will be carried forward for further evaluation. The environmental evaluation will assess how the alternatives avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to environmental resources. The alternatives analysis process is being coordinated with the local, state, and federal agencies involved in the project and will be brought to the public for feedback. We will clearly describe and document the decision-making process as the project develops.

Alternatives- Transportation System Management Options- Can additional passing lanes and turn lanes be built and can traffic signals be better timed?

Many options are on the table. Of the Transportation System Management (TSM)-related comments received, several include:

- the addition of turn lanes onto side roads and businesses to improve safety,
- improving traffic signal timing,
- intersection improvements,
- request for additional passing lanes,
- widening the lanes, and
- increasing the speed limit.

Some examples of the areas suggested for these options include: between Kroger and the Sawnee School; the entrance of Forest Creek subdivision; SR 20 at SR 369; and SR 20 at Harmony and Union Hill Road. We will conduct a systematic approach to determine which alternatives continue through the screening process for further evaluation.

Alternatives: Increased Capacity – More lanes are needed.

GDOT collected traffic counts along the SR 20 corridor between I-575 and SR 400 in 2011 to determine the level of traffic congestion and to develop projections of traffic congestion along the project corridor if no improvements were made to SR 20 by 2042. This preliminary analysis determined that travelers will experience increasing levels of high congestion and long delays if no improvements are made. Details on travel time and level of service, which is a measure of traffic congestion, were made available at the PIOHs, and continue to be available on the project website noted above.

Alternatives: In and Around Canton Marketplace – What can be done to improve the heavy congestion on SR 20 near Canton Marketplace?

The project team heard that traffic congestion in this area is a problem. The widening of SR 20 from I-575 to Scott Road is currently scheduled to begin construction in 2018. Of the many suggestions/comments received about this area, some include:

- rework the merge lane,
- address traffic synchronization,
- widen with additional lanes,
- reconfigure the striping of lanes in the area, and
- provide more background information to better understand how the traffic congestion in the area of Canton Marketplace resulted in its current state.

A passing lane project was previously proposed in the area and developers have been required to make certain minor improvements due to impacts generated. However, given the extensive input we received and concern about congestion in this area, we are working to determine if there are any other feasible short term options that might help alleviate traffic congestion in this area.

Alternatives: In and Around Cumming- How will the project affect the City of Cumming?

It is too early to know how the project will affect the City of Cumming, but we will evaluate potential options and establish the environmental (e.g., human, natural, cultural, and physical) constraints in coordination with the public, as well as local, state, and federal agencies. We received numerous suggestions on possible ways to route traffic around Cumming. Examples of the suggestions we received include (*please note this list may not be inclusive of every comment*):

- cutting through the Tyson chicken plant's parking lot and past Bank Ave. to connect with Veterans Memorial Blvd.

- not re-routing SR 20 around Cumming as previous proposals had presented back in the mid 2000's, but rather staying on existing SR 20
- use Chamblee Gap to Hutchinson Rd. as an alternate route
- use Sawnee Dr. to Bald Ridge Rd. as an alternate route
- don't connect SR 20 to or near Kelly Mill Rd. or Tolbert St.
- realign SR 20 to go north around exit 15
- use Veteran Memorial as Hwy. 20 and Hwy. 9
- use SR 369 as SR 20 from SR 20 to SR 400
- use SR 92 from I- 75 to Roswell as a model of what SR 20 should be
- use Bethelview and connect to SR 400
- four-lane SR 371 to McFarland to provide an alternative to SR 400
- use Hutchinson toward the quarry to possibly intersect with SR 400
- roundabout at Veterans Highway and SR 9 and bypass Cumming to the west
- bridge over the Cumming downtown area

Although some ideas above are contradictory, the next step is to develop alternatives based on public feedback, input from the CACs/TACs, and the local constraints while trying to achieve our purpose of providing a safe facility that improves mobility and reduces congestion. We will then begin to filter these through the alternatives analysis screening process.

We will be working with the CACs and TACs to screen alternatives and will share these results with the public at the upcoming PIOHs this Fall. Clearly every preference cannot be accommodated, but we will look for additional input to help narrow down these alternatives to the preferred solution.

Northern Arc/Outer Perimeter- What is the connection of the SR 20 project to the Northern Arc/Outer Perimeter project?

The proposed SR 20 Improvement project is an independent project that we believe is needed regardless of other projects identified in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The only connection to the former "Northern Arc/Outer Perimeter" project is that one of the comments heard repeatedly at the public meetings for that project was *Why don't you just widen SR 20 instead?* Additional background history is available at the website noted above.

Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities- Why are there now bicycle lanes on sections of SR 20?

The bike lanes signed along SR 20 in Cherokee County were a direct result of the ongoing passing lanes construction project. The bike lanes were incorporated into the design in accordance with current GDOT policy to accommodate bike travel whenever possible. GDOT recently adopted a *Complete Streets* policy, applicable to all projects, which will result in a much more holistic approach to cycling accommodations along SR 20.

Other roadway projects within the vicinity of SR 20 between Canton and Cumming

The comments on each project have been forwarded to the corresponding GDOT Project Manager for their consideration.

Other area needs mentioned through the participation process

Response Time of Emergency Responders- Since the draft need and purpose would address travel times along the SR 20 corridor, the project would be anticipated to have a positive benefit on emergency response times. Please direct any specific concerns about emergency responders to Cherokee County Fire & Emergency Services at (678) 493-4000 or Forsyth County Emergency Management Agency at (770) 205-5674.

Sewer- Decisions about where sewer lines are placed are made at the County level. This project will not address sewer lines in the Free Home area. Please contact Geoff Morton, County Engineer with the Cherokee County Public Works Agency, at (678) 493-6077 or Tim Perkins, Director of Forsyth County Water & Sewer Department, at (770) 781-2160 for more information.

Speed Limits

Enforcement- Although enforcement of the speed limit is not within the scope of this project, the need to reduce the frequency and severity of crashes is one component of the draft need and purpose of this project. Appropriate design speeds and potential intersection improvements may be considered where they will reduce crashes, improve mobility and relieve traffic congestion. For specific concerns about speed limit enforcement, please contact the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office at (770) 781-3056 or the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office at (678) 493-4100.

Proposed Speed Limit for SR 20 corridor- Design speeds are a function of the roadway widths and geometry associated with each alternative, and as the project progresses, potential speed limits for the alternatives will be shared with the public.

Intersection of SR 369/SR 372- The intersection of SR 369 and SR 372 is outside the scope of this project, which is to evaluate potential improvements of SR 20 between Canton and Cumming. Please contact Ryan Fernandez, GDOT Project Manager, at (404) 631-1162 for more information about this intersection project.

Next Steps- Where do we go from here?

As a result of the May 16 and 21, 2013 PIOHs we are summarizing all feedback into a Scoping Report, which will be available on the project website or by contacting the GDOT project manager. Over the next few months, GDOT will incorporate this public input into alternatives development and will begin to screen these alternatives in consultation with project advisory committees. Then, we will hold additional PIOHs in the Fall of 2013 to share the results of Scoping and the status of the alternatives screening process, as well as request more public input.

In the meantime, to find more about the project, review materials from the PIOH, and view the upcoming Scoping Report and project newsletter, upon availability, please visit our website at:
<http://www.dot.ga.gov/Projects/activeprojects/StateRoute/SR20/Pages/I-575toSR400.aspx>.

The project newsletter will be sent to all those who have provided a formal comment and contact information. Should you have any further questions, comments, or concerns, please call the GDOT project manager, Karyn Matthews, at (404) 631-1584 or the GDOT environmental analyst, Sam Pugh, at (404) 631-1167. Again, thank you for your observations and remarks.

Sincerely,



Glenn Bowman, P.E.
State Environmental Administrator

GB/sp/ld

cc: Karyn Matthews, GDOT Project Manager
Scott Gero, AECOM