SUMMARY OF NORTH GEORGIA
REGIONAL TRUCK LANE USER TASK FORCE MEETING

GDOT Truck Lane Needs Identification Study – July 26, 2006 - DRAFT
Dalton State University – Dalton, Georgia

The first North Georgia Regional Truck Lane Users Task Force Meeting for the GDOT Truck Lane Needs Identification Study was held at Dalton State University in Dalton, Georgia on July 26, 2006 beginning at approximately 10:00 AM. Tim Kassa, Project Manager for the study welcomed the group and described the purpose and the format of the meeting. The group made self-introductions. The following individuals attended the meeting.

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Andrew Smith, the Project Manager for the HNTB consultant team explained that the study began in April 2006. The purpose of the study is to examine the feasibility for a truck-only lane system in Georgia and to identify locations where truck only lanes can be feasible from the standpoints of engineering, operations, and economics. The study will be complete by October 2007. Mr. Smith pointed out that truck volumes are increasing rapidly nation-wide and in Georgia. GDOT has been studying freight and truck travel issues for a long time. There are several major planning initiatives across Georgia that involve truck travel (see handout).

Mr. Smith began the slide presentation that gave an overview of the project's purpose and scope, the role of the Advisory Committees, the study work program, the analysis framework for the project, the project schedule, and the relationship of the project to other on-going state and regional studies. Claudia Bilotto (GeoStats) and Dike Ahanotu (Cambridge Systematics) discussed the results of the data collection activities that are underway for the project. Jamie Cochran described the planned public involvement and stakeholder coordination activities and

tools to be used to communicate about the project (i.e. website, etc.). Copies of the meeting agenda and slide presentation are attached.

Group Exercise

Part of the meeting was devoted to a break-out session where the group was asked to respond to a set of questions. The responses are shown below.

What are the most significant issues impacting truck travel in Georgia?

- Safety – there is a lot more congestion today.
- Accident severity is greater - there are more vehicles involved in accidents now.
- In Atlanta, I-85 North to the Suwannee area is a big problem.
- I-285 from I-75 to I-20 (west side) is one of the most congested areas we operate in.
- Atlanta is one of the most dangerous areas due to traffic congestion.
- In Atlanta, the vehicle speeds are too high.
- The lane merges in Atlanta are very bad, especially along I-285, I-20, and I-85.
- The system-to-system interchange at I-285 and I-20 is a bad problem.
- The roadway grades are bad on the interstates in Atlanta.
- The lane changes are highly dangerous, especially in Atlanta.
- One problem is that traffic gets backed up and cars try to get ahead of the trucks and cut in front of them causing accidents.
- There are problems when there are trucks in the restricted lanes and cars do not move over at merge areas.
- Impatient drivers cause problems.
- The restricted lanes for trucks are not a bad thing – they were started in the late 1980s, but traffic has increased since then and there has been no increase in the number of truck lanes.
- Cars are forced to interact with trucks in the restricted lanes (when getting on and off the highway).
- There is a huge increase in the number of trucks traveling in the center restricted lane in order to avoid cars.
- There is a liability against the carrier if the truck is not traveling in the restricted lane.
- We need a roadway for through trucks (with no ons/offs).

- We are seeing an increase in accidents because there are only two lanes that trucks can travel in.
- There are accidents when trucks have to move to the left side because it is the blind side.
- Trucks are passing on the right side in order to avoid slow trucks in the left lane.
- Trucks cannot travel at the posted speed because a lot of cars will pass them.
- Rear-end crashes with trucks are occurring because trucks are not allowing a proper following distance and are trying to prevent cars from moving into the gap (between trucks).
- When trucks are in the two right lanes, it is difficult for motorists to see GDOT's message signs (they are placed on the right side of the road).
- GDOT needs more overhead signs.
- There are poorly designed ramps on I-75 – GDOT is working on improving these.
- The road geometry is too tight – the ons and offs are too tight for trucks.
- The ramps in some areas need to be extended – GDOT is working on this.
- There are congested interchanges - the ramps in these areas need to be reworked.
- Trucks are generally instructed to operate at about 60-67 MPH.
- There is a big difference between the truck speeds (60-67 MPH) and car speeds (80+ MPH).
- Construction zones cause problems for trucks – workers seem to be too relaxed about high speed traffic. GDOT should consider rerouting traffic in some situations.
- Enforcement of construction zones is helping the situation.
- Enforcement is improving things – some tickets are being written for motorists traveling over 100 MPH.
- Some crashes are occurring due to the congestion caused by road construction.
- Trucks and cars need better awareness of what is happening downstream in the traffic flow.
- "Speed harmonizing" – this method is being used in Europe to gradually slow the posted speed limits on roadways depending on congestion to reduce accidents.
- Many times, there are more injuries or fatalities from traffic back-ups than in the original accident that caused the congestion.
- GDOT still sees problems in getting accidents cleared quickly.

- Better coordination among the agencies responsible to clear accidents is needed (GA State Patrol, emergency response agencies, GDOT, etc.)

- There are also big vertical curves in North Georgia that make the back-ups worse when there is an accident.

- There have been major truck incidents when the truck has lost its load – these can be cleared more quickly than they are. We need the right people at the scene to move the material.

- We need to protect the material that falls off the trucks (trucking industry). We need to use air bags.

- Some truck incidents tie up the highway for 5-6 hours and take away two traffic lanes.

- Travel time reliability is also an issue – delivery schedules are dictated by customers.

- Drivers schedule their breaks relative to congested areas, like Atlanta.

- Firms put rigid restrictions on delivery times that the truckers have to meet.

- The federal restriction on truckers' service hours impacts the truckers scheduling.

- In some metro areas, the line haul trucks go to an area outside the city to offload. This gets the very large trucks outside of the urban core.

- Some trucks use US 41 instead of I-75.

- In the past, some trucking companies chose routes to avoid congestion on the interstate highways, like GA 20. Today, this does not work because the roads are not truck-friendly. We need more truck-friendly roads in Georgia.

- Truckers look for opportunities to run in the off-peak direction of traffic.

- Bypasses are helping trucks avoid congested areas.

- There are serious problems with truck parking.

- Truck stops and rest stops are usually full by 6:00 – 8:00 PM.

- Some truckers are forced to stop at certain places (even if there is no parking) because of the service hour restriction.

- If truckers have to park along an interstate highway or other highway, they are encouraged to park at the entrance to the road to avoid accidents from high speed traffic exiting the highway.

- There are accidents in parking areas because of the high level of congestion there. This is caused by bigger trucks, inexperienced drivers, etc.

- The parking problem is not as severe in North Georgia because there is a welcome station/rest stop nearby.

- The truck stop at Exit 328 is one of the worse places for trucks to exit.
- I-75 is difficult all the way through Atlanta.
- In Forsyth, Georgia, I-75 does not seem congested.
- Population growth is happening and congestion is happening everywhere.
- Real-time information on traffic congestion for truckers would be very helpful.
- GDOT's Navigator website (www.ganavigator.com) is a great resource for traffic information.
- There is an opportunity to share information about congestion with truckers by calling "*DOT" which connects to the Atlanta Traffic Management Center.
- Truckers need better traffic information (more accurate and timely information).
- We should discourage the use of cell phones and headsets by drivers of cars and trucks.

What factors should be considered in determining whether truck only lanes should be built in Georgia?

- We should think about whether we need new lanes or should fix the existing ones. The cost for new lanes should be a consideration.
- If I am paying for (truck only) lanes, I do not want to share them.
- If toll lanes are put in, at some point, the trucks will not use them. We do not want truck lanes without trucks in them.
- Will truckers have a choice of whether to use truck only lanes or not?
- We need new roads in Atlanta to connect the interstate highways, such as the Northern Arc.
- We need to consider the long-term effect of the truck only lanes on the transportation system.
- In Georgia, our interstate highways focus on making everyone drive through Atlanta. We need other alternatives.
- There has been tremendous progress in improving highways, but growth is still happening.
- The longer we wait to improve the transportation system, the harder it will be.
- If we build any new roads, they should not have a lot of interchanges. They bring development and congestion.
- We should protect mobility with efficient roads (few traffic lights and no schools nearby).

- In New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, they have through roads together with access roads with limited connections to them (example is Peachtree Industrial Boulevard).
- We should consider the cost to the taxpayers.
- The trucking companies will pass the costs on to the consumers.
- We should consider fairness – will citizens like building roads that can only be used by some groups of travelers?
- We need to show that truck lanes are better for motorists.
- Trucks are seen as obstacles by the public – separating the commercial vehicles from general traffic would be a good thing.
- We should consider reversible lanes (changing the direction of the lane depending on traffic).
- We should not consider reversible lanes – they are dangerous.

Who should be involved in developing public policies on truck only lanes?

- People responsible for the weigh stations
- Carpet industry
- Safety professionals in the trucking industry
- NW Georgia Traffic Club
- Wrecker companies
- Law enforcement officials
- Insurance companies, such as Travelers and Baldwin Alliance