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4. COORDINATION WITH AGENCIES, STAKEHOLDERS, AND THE PUBLIC

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In compliance with the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)¹, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21)², and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)³, FRA and GDOT implemented a comprehensive program to coordinate with federal, state, and local agencies, and maximize participation of the many stakeholders and the public in the Study Area at key points in the environmental review process. The program allowed for dialogue on issues and alternatives and assisted in the development of solutions. This chapter describes coordination and the public involvement activities that were conducted as part of the Tier 1 DEIS for the Project.

4.1.1 Coordination Plan

Consistent with SAFETEA-LU, which calls for the development of a coordination plan for all projects for which an EIS is prepared under NEPA, GDOT, in coordination with FRA drafted a Public Involvement and Coordination Plan (PIP/CP). The Plan provided structure for coordination and communication between lead federal and state, cooperating, and participating agencies, including tribal governments, and was intended to guide the agency coordination process, make reviews more efficient, and streamline the project decision-making process. More specifically, the PIP/CP outlined the activities that occurred during the NEPA process to coordinate agency participation and comment. It was designed to provide flexibility to address changes to the Project. The PIP/CP also guided the public involvement process for the Project and is intended to ensure ongoing public involvement using a variety of tools and techniques to invite and encourage the public to learn about and become involved in the Project. FRA approved the PIP/CP on February 20, 2013, and a copy of the Plan can be found in **Appendix C**. GDOT submitted the plan to cooperating and participating agencies with the Draft Scoping Document for review and comment.

4.2 AGENCY COORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU promotes efficient project management by lead agencies and enhanced opportunities for coordination with the public and other federal, state, local, and tribal government agencies during project development. Because FRA served as the co-lead agency with GDOT for the Project, the agency coordination and consultation was conducted in accordance with CEQ regulations as well as FRA requirements. GDOT prepared and mailed cooperating and participating agency⁴ invitation letters to federal, state, and local government agency representatives. SAFETEA-LU Section 6002 defines lead, cooperating and participating, agencies as follows:

¹ Pub.L. 109-59, August 10, 2005.

² Pub.L. 112-141, July 6, 2012.

³ Pub.L. 91-190, January 1, 1970.

⁴ Participating agencies, as defined by SAFETEA-LU, are those with an interest in the project. FHWA was originally a Lead agency in co-operation with FRA for the project, but has since changed status to a Participating agency.

- **Lead Agency:** FRA, the federal agency with primary responsibility for complying with NEPA on the proposed Project;
- **Cooperating Agency:** Any federal agency other than the lead agency that has discretionary authority over the proposed action, jurisdiction by law, or special expertise with respect to the environmental impacts expected to result from the proposed Project; and
- **Participating Agency:** Any agency that may have an interest in the Project and is afforded an opportunity for involvement in the development of the proposed Project. Participating agencies also may provide the lead and cooperating agencies access to information integral to understanding and assessing the proposed Project’s potential impacts and benefits.

A full list of lead, cooperating, and participating agencies can be found in the next section in **Exhibit 4-1**.

Outreach efforts to agencies affiliated with the Project included agency scoping meetings, interagency coordination meetings and one-on-one stakeholder agency meetings, which are described in the following subsections and detailed in **Appendix C**.

4.2.1 Agency Scoping

The NEPA process for the Project began with early coordination and an agency scoping process. Federal, state, and local agencies received invitations to participate and provide comments regarding possible concerns or considerations for the resource areas under their authority. A copy of the invitation letter and mailing list are included in the Scoping Section of **Appendix C**.

The scoping process for the Project was conducted in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.7 to solicit participation from agencies, counties, municipalities, and the public as part of the NEPA process. The scoping process was used to identify the range of mode technologies and corridors to be studied, the potential impacts to the human and natural environments, and the key issues and concerns to be addressed in the Tier 1 EIS.

The agency scoping meeting was announced in a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare the EIS published in the Federal Register on May 16, 2013 (see **Appendix E**). Thirty-one state and federal environmental regulatory and review agencies, Native American tribal councils, municipalities, counties, and other government organizations and officials were notified of the Agency Scoping Meeting and scoping process through direct mailings, which also initiated the early coordination process. One agency scoping meeting was held via webinar on June 4, 2013. **Exhibit 4-1** below displays the federal, state and local agencies invited and their responses on participating in the Atlanta to Charlotte Tier 1 DEIS.

Exhibit 4-1: Lead, Cooperating, and Participating Agencies

Agency	Type	Participation Level	Accepted Invitation to Participate	Attended Scoping Meeting	Provided Written Comments
FRA	Federal	Federal Lead Agency	✓	✓	
FTA	Federal	Cooperating	✓	✓	
FHWA*	Federal	Participating	✓	✓	
U.S. Department of the Interior	Federal	Participating			

Agency	Type	Participation Level	Accepted Invitation to Participate	Attended Scoping Meeting	Provided Written Comments
U.S. Army Engineering Division	Federal	Participating	✓	✓	
Advisory Council for Historic Preservation	Federal	Participating	✓	✓	
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Federal	Participating	✓	✓	✓
National Park Service	Federal	Participating			
U.S. Fish and Wildlife	Federal	Participating	✓	✓	
GDOT	State	Lead State Agency	✓	✓	
NCDOT	State	Participating	✓	✓	
SCDOT	State	Participating	✓	✓	
Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Historic Preservation Division	State	Participating			
North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office	State	Participating			
South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office	State	Participating	✓	✓	
Appalachian Regional Commission	Regional	Participating			
Atlanta Regional Commission	Regional	Participating			
Georgia Mountain Regional Commission	Regional	Participating			
Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization	Regional	Participating		✓	✓
Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study	Regional	Participating			
Spartanburg Area Transportation Study	Regional	Participating	✓	✓	
Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization	Regional	Participating	✓	✓	
City of Charlotte	Local	Participating	✓	✓	
City of Atlanta	Local	Participating	✓	✓	
City of Greenville	Local	Participating			
City of Spartanburg	Local	Participating			

Agency	Type	Participation Level	Accepted Invitation to Participate	Attended Scoping Meeting	Provided Written Comments
City of Augusta	Local	Participating			
City of Columbia	Local	Participating		✓	
<i>*FHWA initially was to serve as a cooperating agency but later decided to serve as a participating agency.</i>					

At the June 24, 2013 agency scoping meeting, GDOT provided an overview of the Project, the NEPA process, and the scope of the Project. After the presentation, GDOT opened the floor for agency representatives to ask questions, provide input, or specify analysis for consideration in the EIS process. The agency scoping meeting is summarized in the Scoping Summary Report in **Appendix C**. Feedback from the agency scoping meeting included comments pertaining to:

- Permitting
- Funding
- The Tiered EIS process
- Declaring a Preferred Alternative
- Corridor feasibility
- Indirect and cumulative effects
- Last mile connectivity
- The definition of “shared use” in the Project
- Operating speeds

4.2.2 Interagency Coordination Meetings

Coordination meetings between federal and state lead agencies took place throughout the development of the Tier 1 DEIS. These meetings provided opportunity for ongoing coordination and discussion of the Project process, products, and issues. Participating agencies were involved in, and participated in the review of Corridor Alternatives development, a review and update of the technical findings of the Alternatives Development Report (ADR), important project updates, overview of the environmental analysis, and next steps in the Tier 1 DEIS process. **Exhibit 4-2** below shows the interagency coordination meetings that followed the Agency Scoping process.

Exhibit 4-2: List of Interagency Coordination Meetings

Meeting Type	Agencies	Number of Attendees	Summary	Date
NCDOT Agency Project Update Meeting	NCDOT, FHWA, GDOT	9	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. NCDOT provided updates on Gateway Station and provided insight on the Project as it relates to the Charlotte area. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	August 27, 2012
SCDOT Agency Project Update Meeting	SCDOT, FHWA, GDOT	7	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. SCDOT provided a rail update on projects across South Carolina and described the kick-off of their Statewide Multi-Modal Plan. SCDOT also provided some suggestions to Project staff to consider. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	August 28, 2012
City of Atlanta Agency Project Update Meeting	City of Atlanta, GDOT	8	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	January 24, 2013
CLT Airport Agency Project Update Meeting	CLT, GDOT	8	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. CLT provided updates on airport projects and future planning initiatives for the airport property. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	March 28, 2013
Corridor Alternatives Development Meeting Webinar	GDOT, NCDOT, SCDOT	10	Overview of methodologies and findings for each section of the ADR. Agencies could ask questions/provide feedback. A copy of the questions, comments and responses are found in Appendix C .	September 30, 2014
Agency Project Update Meeting Webinar	GDOT, NCDOT, SCDOT, FRA, FHWA, USACE, City of Charlotte, ARC, City of Atlanta, US EPA – Region 4	21	GDOT briefed stakeholders on the work that has been completed and provided an overview of the findings within the ADR. GDOT also discussed the status of the Tier 1 DEIS, Corridor Alternative Screening, and the environmental categories being analyzed. The meeting minutes can be found in Appendix C .	December 10, 2014
Augusta, GA Project Update Meeting	City of Augusta, Augusta Economic Development Authority, Development Authority of Columbia County, Oglethorpe Public Affairs, State	11	This meeting was to update the City of Augusta on the Project through the public scoping meetings in June 2013. The meeting focused on the identified study corridors that travel through the City of Augusta. GDOT explained the scoping and initial screening process and why those corridors were not recommended to move	January 9, 2014

Meeting Type	Agencies	Number of Attendees	Summary	Date
	Transportation Board, and GDOT		through to the refined evaluation. The meeting minutes can be found in Appendix C .	
SCDOT Project Update Meeting	SCDOT and GDOT	7	This conference call provided SCDOT representatives with a recap of Project activities since the public scoping meetings in June 2013.	February 4, 2014
Southeast Rail Coalition – Monthly Phone Conference	FRA, SCDOT, NCDOT, GDOT, FDOT, DDOT, TDOT, VDRPT	Varies by call	Regular Project updates have been provided to state DOTs participating in monthly Southeast Rail Coalition meetings. The Southeast Rail Coalition aims to achieve a regional approach to planning, construction and operation of the southeast rail network.	August 2017- Ongoing
Southeast Rail Forum	FRA, SCDOT, NCDOT, GDOT, FDOT, DDOT, TDOT, VDRPT	200+	GDOT staff presented Project updates to multiple stakeholders and rail professionals at the Southeast Rail Forum in Greenville, SC	March 26-28, 2018
Lead Agency Monthly Phone Conference	FRA and GDOT	5 – 10, varies by call	GDOT staff provides monthly Project updates and FRA provides feedback on the Tier 1 EIS document and the NEPA process.	2012 – Ongoing

4.2.3 Section 106 Coordination

In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act⁵ (Section 106) and 36 CFR 800, FRA sent coordination letters on July 9, 2015, to the state historic preservation officers (SHPO) of GA, SC, and NC, and to historic preservation-focused agencies and organizations to request information on known eligible historic properties within the Study Area. The following organizations received early coordination letters:

- Advisory Council on Historic Preservation;
- Atlanta Regional Commission;
- Atlanta Urban Design Commission;
- Charlotte Regional History Consortium;
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission;
- Georgia Mountains Regional Commission;
- Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer;
- National Park Service - Southeast Region;
- North Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer;
- North Carolina Office of Archives and History;
- Northeast Georgia Regional Commission; and
- South Carolina Department of Archives and History - State Historic Preservation Officer.

Letters were received from the Georgia SHPO on July 27, 2015, and from the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources – State Historic Preservation Office on August 13, 2015. An email was received from the Atlanta Urban Design Commission on August 25, 2015. Responses from these organizations are included in

⁵ 36 CFR Part 800. National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Appendix C. GDOT and FRA will continue to consult with these entities regarding any potential cultural resource impacts of concern in the Study Area.

Section 106 also requires tribal consultation. Native American Tribes may have interests in natural or cultural resources located in the Study Area. GDOT compiled a list of federally recognized tribes with former and current habitation within the Study Area in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The following tribes and the Georgia Natural Heritage Program were contacted via letter during the scoping process:

- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians,
- United Keetoowah Band,
- Cherokee Nation,
- Poarch Band of Creek Indians,
- Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana,
- Muscogee (Creek) Nation National Council;
- Kialegee Tribal Town of the Creek Nation,
- Muscogee (Creek) Nation,
- Thlopthlocco Tribal Town,
- Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas,
- Catawba Indian Tribe, and
- Tuscarora Nation.

FRA and GDOT will continue to consult with the tribes regarding potential natural and cultural resource impacts of concern to the tribes throughout Project development. GDOT received one phone call and follow-up email on August 3, 2015 from the Catawba Indian Tribe requesting to be notified once a route has been established for further involvement. An email from the United Keetoowah Band was received on August 19, 2015, stating they want to be involved in the consultation for the Project. A letter from the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas dated August 27, 2015, was received stating that there are no known impacts to cultural assets of the tribe based on the Project's Study Area; however, they requested information as the results become available (see **Appendix C**).

4.3 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Stakeholders were engaged on an ongoing basis to provide timely and ongoing feedback. Stakeholders were identified as any agency, organization, or group with an interest in the Project that was not designated as a participating agency. In addition to the scoping meetings, GDOT met with stakeholders to introduce them to the Project and to discuss the study corridor evaluation process, outreach process, schedule and goals. Meeting summaries are located in **Exhibit 4-3** below as well as in **Appendix C**.

Exhibit 4-3: Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholders	Number of Attendees	Summary	Date
NS, GDOT	9	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. NS staff provided information about their passenger rail policies, discussed opportunities for shared vs separate track, and highlighted previous high speed rail feasibility studies. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	September 14, 2012
H-JAIA, GDOT	4	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. H-JAIA staff described current projects, future planned projects, and coordination with high-speed	March 5, 2013

Stakeholders	Number of Attendees	Summary	Date
		passenger rail service including station locations. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	
GSP, GDOT	9	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. GSP provided an overview of ongoing and future projects around the GSP Airport. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	March 14, 2013
Charlotte DOT (CDOT), CATS, GDOT	7	GDOT staff presented Project background information and future public and stakeholder involvement information. CDOT and CATS provided information about planned railroad and safety improvements. More information on this meeting can be found in Appendix C .	March 28, 2013

4.4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Due to the large geographic size of the Study Area, the public involvement activities included three public scoping open houses (one in each state) as well as virtual outreach including a recorded PowerPoint presentation that was available on the website of the scoping meeting, electronic comment cards, and input solicitation. These activities were able to provide information to a larger group than the public meetings alone.

4.4.1 Public Scoping Meetings

For the public scoping process for the Tier 1 DEIS, GDOT conducted a series of interactive meetings and open forums designed to provide the opportunity for both agencies and the public to review and comment on the Project.

Press releases, a media release, email blasts, and newspaper notices were distributed for public notification in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina in late May 2013. The dates, locations, and times for the Tier 1 DEIS public scoping meetings were advertised on the Project website. Pursuant to NEPA, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a Draft Tier 1 EIS for the Atlanta to Charlotte Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan (PRCIP) was published in the *Federal Register* on May 16, 2013. See **Appendix E** for the NOI.

Three public scoping meetings were held in early June 2013 in Suwanee, GA; Greer, SC; and Charlotte, NC. Each meeting followed the format of an open house-style meeting. A brief PowerPoint presentation explaining the Project was displayed on a continuous loop during each meeting. Interactive topic-specific areas focusing on the initial Purpose and Need, Corridor Alternatives, and potential station area locations were set up along with display boards. Project staff members were available for one-on-one discussions with meeting attendees. The display boards included information on the various study corridors, technologies of the trains, the Project schedule, intercity passenger rail history, and the environmental process. The Project Team representatives were comprised of staff from GDOT, SCDOT, NCDOT, the FRA, and the Tier 1 EIS consultant team. The Project Team provided a welcome letter, fact sheet, and a short survey to all attendees. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation used at the public scoping meetings, the public scoping meeting display boards, and the meeting handouts were posted on the Project website (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoCharlotte>).

The times and locations of the three meetings were as follows in **Exhibit 4-4**:

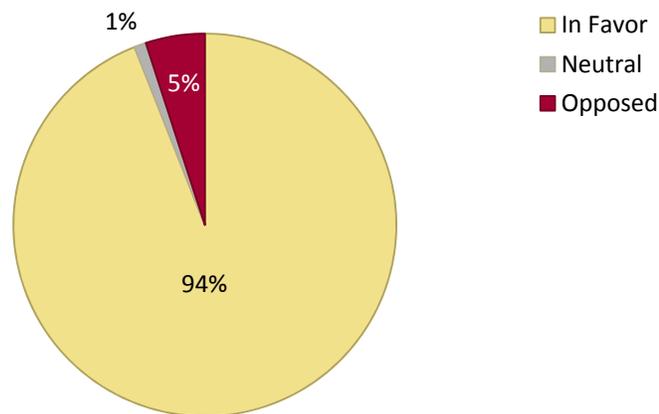
Exhibit 4-4: Public Scoping Meeting Locations and Attendance

Meeting Date	Meeting Location	Estimated Attendance
Tuesday, June 4, 2013	Suwanee Council Chambers 232 Buford Highway Suwanee, GA 30024	70
Wednesday, June 5, 2013	301 East Poinsett Street Hall C Greer, SC 29651	72
Thursday, June 6, 2013	2327 Tipton Drive Charlotte, NC 28206	40

4.4.2 Public Scoping Meeting Comments

A total of 182 individuals attended the three public scoping meetings. A total of 139 comments were submitted through various means including a court reporter, a comment/survey form, email, and a survey via the online virtual public meeting. The comment period began on June 4, 2013, and ended on March 1, 2014. The majority of the attendees or those commenting via online survey responded positively (94% in favor) to the Project as shown in **Exhibit 4-5**.

Exhibit 4-5: Comments Received During Scoping



A summary of the takeaways from the public scoping meetings include:

- There is an interest for overall connectivity, including connectivity to multi-modal facilities, urban areas and employment centers;
- There is an interest for inclusion of higher education institutions and key stakeholders;
- There is an interest for safe, reliable, and convenient passenger rail service;
- There is an interest for quick and efficient service, and travel time should be the primary factor in determining a preferred route;

- Ticket costs should be competitive with air travel costs for successful operation;
- There is an interest in inter-governmental cooperation, especially between each state's department of transportation;
- There is a general interest in the potential for economic development opportunities along the route and around stations;
- There is a general interest in the potential for passenger rail service to reduce congestion in urban areas and improve air quality; and
- There is a general interest in a funding/financing plan and expected subsidies.

Specific comments and questions received during the scoping process were summarized into 11 categories to which responses were made by FRA and GDOT, and summarized in **Appendix C**. The 11 categories include:

- Multi-modal urban and employment connectivity;
- Involvement of higher education institutions;
- Safe, convenient, and reliable passenger rail service;
- Expedited project implementation;
- Travel time;
- Competitive ticket pricing;
- Intergovernmental coordination;
- Economic development;
- Traffic and air quality;
- Preferred route and station selection; and
- Funding and subsidies.

The public comment period for the scoping period closed March 1, 2014. GDOT encourages public input throughout the NEPA process; however, the next official public comment period begins when the Tier 1 DEIS is released for public review.

4.5 COMMUNICATION TOOLS

FRA and GDOT have maintained open and accessible communication with the public by use of the following communications tools. FRA and GDOT will continue to utilize these tools through the completion of the Atlanta to Charlotte PRCIP.

4.5.1 Fact Sheets

GDOT distributed two-page, color fact sheets during outreach efforts and at public meetings in both electronic and hard copy formats. GDOT also distributed these publications to public officials, elected officials, and other interested stakeholders (refer to **Appendix C** for copies of the fact sheets). GDOT will distribute two additional fact sheets: one prior to the Public Hearing and a final fact sheet at the completion of the Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

4.5.2 Public Website

GDOT established a website for the Project at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoCharlotte> to provide updated Project information during the Tier 1 NEPA process. The Project website includes a synopsis of the Project, frequently asked questions, the Alternatives Development Report, a Project fact sheet, and information and maps regarding the Project Study Area. Contact information for GDOT staff and a main Project email are included on the main page of the website.

4.5.3 Master Email and Mailing List

GDOT developed and maintains a master email and a mailing list database of contacts for the Project. The list was established by using information gathered from cities and counties in the Project Study Area, from FRA, and from previous studies in the area. The list is used to distribute information such as electronic fact sheets, information regarding upcoming meetings, and general updates to the Project. The list will continue to be maintained and utilized through the completion of the Project.

4.5.4 Comment Form

Comment forms were used during public outreach for the Project to solicit input from the public. When the Tier 1 DEIS document is available for public review during the public comment period, GDOT will make comment forms available at public meetings and on the GDOT Project website (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoCharlotte>). The following **Exhibit 4-6** is an example of the comment form used for this Project during the scoping process to help inform FRA and GDOT on the public's perceptions and concerns. All results from the comment forms are or will be included in the Administrative Record.

Exhibit 4 6: Survey and Comment Form Example



Survey & Comment Form

The Atlanta to Charlotte Passenger Rail Corridor is an extension of the Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor, which is under development from Charlotte to Washington, DC. The extension from Charlotte would travel southeast through portions of South Carolina and into Atlanta. The exact logical termini of the alternative corridor routes have not yet been established and will be finalized as a part of the scoping process which will address connectivity to proposed and existing passenger rail stations, airports, and other regional transportation services along the corridor. Please provide your feedback to help us shape the vision for this very important project!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____

1. Do you have any comments on the presented purpose of the Atlanta to Charlotte PRICIP project?

2. Do you have any comments on the presented project needs?

3. Do you have any comments on the alternatives presented at this open house?

4. Please list any issues, challenges and/or opportunities in your area that the team should be aware of going forward.

5. Please list any stakeholders, organizations or groups we should coordinate with going forward.

4.6 NEXT STEPS

During the 45-day public comment period for this Tier 1 DEIS, FRA and GDOT will hold public meetings. GDOT and FRA will determine the number of meetings and locations in coordination with SCDOT and NCDOT. The meetings will be an opportunity for FRA and GDOT to hear comments on the Tier 1 DEIS. After the close of the public comment period, FRA and GDOT will consider public and agency input as well as the findings of the Tier 1 DEIS. The lead agencies will then select a Preferred Corridor Alternative from among the alternatives considered in the Tier 1 DEIS.

In accordance with MAP-21 and the FAST Act, FRA may issue a combined Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (FEIS/ROD). The Tier 1 FEIS/ROD will identify the Preferred Corridor Alternative, summarize the environmental impacts, respond to public and agency comments received on the Tier 1 DEIS, and discuss the reasons why it was selected. During the development of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD, GDOT will also undertake additional public and agency coordination. GDOT will post the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD on the Project website (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Rail/AtlantatoCharlotte>), and publish notices in primary Project Area newspapers.