



TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT ACT

*Your Penny, Your Progress*

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**CONTACTS**

Karen Judd, [kjudd@dot.ga.gov](mailto:kjudd@dot.ga.gov)

*Photos available on request.*

## **TIA penny paves the way to progress in central Georgia**

The first of three Transportation Investment Act (TIA) project delivery bands has recently come to a close. As promised to the citizens of the three regions that passed the TIA referendum in 2012 - River Valley, Heart of Georgia Altamaha (HOGA) and the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) – all 261 Band 1 projects are underway or have been completed.

State Transportation Board Member Don Grantham (12th Congressional District) said TIA's most significant impact was helping local governments acquire the funding required to get much-needed projects off the ground.

"Many of the Band 1 TIA projects have been on the shelf for 10 or even 20 years just waiting to be funded. TIA finally made the regions independent from unreliable federal funding, so the voters in these regions are really the ones that should be commended for helping to finally get all these projects moving," Grantham said.

How have Band 1 TIA projects helped meet the unique transportation needs of each region?

**River Valley** - The 16-county River Valley region, which encompasses the cities of Columbus and Americus, had eight TIA projects in Band 1 with a total approved budget of \$91 million.

According to Harris County Commissioner Harry Lange, chairman of the River Valley TIA (project selection) Roundtable, the region chose projects that promoted regional transportation and growth, even though some counties would pay more into the collective TIA pot than others.

"Our area is very much into the concept of regionalism and so this was viewed as a benefit to the whole area," Lange said. "Columbus derives benefits from the majority of projects in surrounding counties as a result of improved roadways creating easier commutes into the city."

State Transportation Board Member Sam Wellborn (3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District) echoed Lange's sentiments towards the importance of using TIA funds to create a more connected region. He points to the \$31.7 million widening of SR 1/US 27 near Cuthbert. Scheduled to finish in summer 2016, the project will complete the final phase of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP) corridor extending from the Georgia-Florida state line to Cussetta in Chattahoochee County.

"The US 27 project will complete an uninterrupted four-lane travel option from Columbus all the way to Tallahassee, Florida. That used to be a rough drive, so people are about to have a much more pleasant commute around the region and even down to the beach," Wellborn said.

The US 27 project also fosters greater economic vitality throughout the region by providing a more desirable route for truck drivers, a trait it shares with the \$15 million South Georgia Tech Parkway project in Americus. Randy Howard, Sumter County commissioner, said the widening and realignment of the Parkway will make the route more attractive to truck drivers, which in turn, will help the County make the industrial-zoned property lining the route more attractive to investors.

“Tech Parkway is a little too narrow now and has difficult turns for truck traffic, which can account for drivers finding other routes to travel outside of our area. We’re hoping that the new construction will make drivers more comfortable, and allow for new supply and transport possibilities that will not only be beneficial for existing businesses, but new investors as well,” Howard said.

Wellborn believes few of these projects would have moved forward without TIA revenue and the region may have continued to struggle with transportation connectivity issues indefinitely.

“I couldn’t be more bullish, more excited about what TIA is doing for my hometown of Columbus and the River Valley region. It’s the single most significant transportation event to ever happen here, and we’ve never been in a better financial situation to fix these long-term problems because of it,” he said.

**Heart of Georgia Altamaha** - Comprised of 17 counties, the HOGA region had 204 Band 1 projects with a total approved budget of \$66 million of TIA funding and focused on smaller projects that had a major impact on local residents.

“These projects might seem small, but they have a big impact locally. Many were road resurfacings in rural areas and farming communities, and have made a big difference to the people who are reliant on good roads to get their products out or just getting to and from their homes safely,” State Transportation Board Member Don Grantham (12th Congressional District) said.

In addition to resurfacing 154 miles of roadway, TIA funds were also used to rehabilitate or replace seven bridges in the HOGA region, including the 65-year-old Springhaven Bridge in Laurens County that lacked guardrails. TIA provided a low-cost facelift that updated the bridge’s structure to greatly improve driver safety, particularly among the 1,200 West Laurens High School students who cross the bridge each school day.

“The new bridge put in place was much needed as the old bridge was very narrow and in ill repair. It was not appropriate for the level of traffic utilizing this road. The widening of the bridge now provides for a much safer road with better driving conditions for everyone, especially our young student drivers,” said Jon Martin, District 2 Laurens County commissioner.

TIA funds were also used to support larger transportation projects throughout the region, including \$1.7 million towards the Eastman Dodge Bypass. Completed ahead of schedule, the new Bypass offers an alternative route for truck drivers to get to U.S. 341 and better accommodates the future freight traffic demands that should result from the upcoming expansion of the Port of Savannah. Dodge County Manager Bobby Peacock noted that the project was a long time in the making.

“This project had been on the drawing board for some time and I definitely think that the T-SPLOST funds were instrumental in moving the project forward,” Peacock said. “Our people do feel that this is a worthwhile project.”

**Central Savannah River Area** – The CSRA had 49 Band 1 projects for a total approved budget of \$144 million. The 13-county region - that includes Augusta - put an emphasis on projects that helped to grow and modernize the current transportation infrastructure with the intent to better serve an ever-increasing population.

Grantham said the Band 1 TIA projects addressed several highly traveled routes through Columbia and Richmond counties, including the widening of Wrightsboro Road in Augusta. The project, using \$2 million in TIA funding, expanded the road from two lanes to four and added a bike lane in each direction from Jimmie Dyess Parkway to Bobby Jones Expressway. The project was completed in December 2015. Grantham praised residents' patience while construction was taking place.

"That's a road that a lot of people rely on to get into the city and to access popular shopping centers here. Even with the loads of orange cones and barrels and traffic headaches, people see that TIA is working. Their patience has paid off and I've heard nothing but accolades since the project has finished up," Grantham said.

Outside of Augusta, many TIA projects were chosen to help spur economic growth in rural areas of the CSRA. Charles E. Lee, executive director of the Development Authority of Washington County, said that TIA helps create the transportation infrastructure necessary to attract business and industry.

"Rural communities like ours struggle in economic development circles, so anything that happens or is constructed that can better our stance in the eyes of economic development professionals, site selection consultants, project managers, and the like, ultimately helps our local economy and improves our desirability." Lee said.

Deepstep Road is one of those projects. As the world's largest producer of Kaolin, a white clay used in everything from toothpaste to tableware, Washington County was in need of more substantial roadways to support the heavy hauling necessary to transport the product. TIA funded a \$2.8 million project that resurfaced a key stretch of Deepstep Road from Sandersville Industrial Park to the Baldwin County line. The project provided an alternative heavy hauling route to the Fall Line Freeway and better access to a new industrial park.

Washington County Commissioner Horrace Daniels believes the project has been well-received by residential and commercial drivers alike, but most importantly, it's helping Washington County grow.

"We're building a community here, and the Kaolin industry is what makes our community grow. TIA was the blessing we needed to provide them with a good road, and now they'll continue to bring us good business in return," Daniels said.

***Forty-six counties and their respective cities comprise the three regional districts that approved the 2012 TIA Referendum. Cumulatively, they are expected to self-generate \$1.6 Billion in new revenue over 10 years dedicated to local transportation improvements. Projects were selected by regional commission roundtables of local elected officials after public input. Seventy-five percent of the revenue is utilized for the construction of these projects while the remaining 25 percent is disbursed monthly to the regions' governments for discretionary use on additional local transportation-related efforts not on the TIA project list. The TIA Program is administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation. For more information visit [www.ga-tia.com](http://www.ga-tia.com), or follow TIA on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/transportationinvestmentact](https://www.facebook.com/transportationinvestmentact)) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/TIAatGDOT>).***