



## Delayed Projects

Everyone is annoyed when a road construction project is not finished on time. Any future benefit is lost to the frustration of the moment. Resentment builds among inconvenienced area businesses and motorists tired of a continuing kink in their travel routines. The delayed work becomes a larger-than-life disruption of a community's daily rhythm.

No one is more acutely aware of this than the Georgia Department of Transportation – the responsible agency for hundreds of highway construction projects occurring daily throughout the state. We have focused intently in the past several years on improving our performance on what we refer to as project delivery. Managers have been assigned whose principal priority is on-time, on-budget delivery. Other systemic policy and process improvements have been made as well. They are working. An independent survey by the non-profit Transportation Research Board shows Georgia DOT is first in the nation in overall on-time, on-budget project delivery – 85% of our projects since 2001 completed within budget (the national average – 47%) and 85% on time (national average - 55%).

Granted, that likely rings hollow to motorists trying to navigate through a project that seems never-ending; or worse still - a project where day after day they see no visible signs of progress. It is as bewildering as it is aggravating.

To understand what sometimes happens to a highway construction project, it is helpful to think of the whole process as a highly synchronized progression of movements – each one dependent upon a preceding movement.

The first thing normally occurring at a project site after Georgia DOT awards the contract (always to the lowest bidder, per state law) is the necessary clearing away of any foliage and incidental appurtenances in the work area. To the public, perhaps stunned and dismayed by the sudden disappearance of a row of roadside trees or shrubs, this is the beginning of the project - often a very unsettling beginning.

That unease magnifies if actual project work doesn't begin for weeks...or months. But the Department's contractor can't begin its work until the second movement, if you will, has taken place. That is the relocation of utility lines and devices by their various owners. That no longer involves just phone, power and water lines, but now fiber optic cables and control cabinets of a dozen or more companies – all with their own priorities for their work crews. These relocations usually need to take place in a defined sequence too; one company may not be able to move its line if another hasn't already.

Only when all that is complete can Georgia DOT's contractor get to work. A further complication -- to lessen the impact on an area and its traffic, the Department most often limits the contractor's work hours to just nights or weekends. Add in a period of sustained bad weather, material shortages, an equipment failure, financial problems of a contractor or a sub-contractor, an accident, an error in specifications, or just plain bad luck -- and you're likely looking at delayed delivery. Be assured, it's as frustrating to the contractor as it is the public – expensive equipment sitting idle means money lost.

All of which is why we try very hard before any project begins to address every issue or contingency that can cause a delay. Construction though – like all human endeavors – is subject to error. Mistakes do happen.

Georgia DOT understands responsibility for delays, whatever their cause, ultimately rests with us. This is our job; we rightfully are expected to complete work on schedule and on budget. Most all of the time, we do.

*Gerald Ross is Chief Engineer of the Georgia Department of Transportation.*