
Purpose: Traditionally, on GDOT-let projects, utility coordination has been the responsibility of the District Utilities Office. However, in recent years a growing number of municipalities and local governments (hereinafter referred to as “Coordinating Agency”) are stepping into this role and undertaking the utility coordination on GDOT-let projects in the vicinity of their jurisdiction. This is often to the advantage of both GDOT and the Coordinating Agency; however, certain guidelines and practices must be followed. The purpose of this document is to briefly describe these processes and highlight the responsibilities for successful local utility coordination on GDOT-let projects.

Project Framework Agreement and Local Utility Coordination: A Project Framework Agreement (PFA) is executed between GDOT and the Sponsor to establish the project responsibilities, schedule, and funding responsibility of preliminary engineering (PE). In the PFA, the responsibility of utility coordination is designated. When a Coordinating Agency agrees to coordinate utilities, they are required to follow the GDOT Plan Development Process (PDP). As part of this, utility coordination shall be done in accordance with the Utility Accommodation Policy and Standards Manual (UAM), current edition.

During the utility coordination, it is requested (as a minimum) that a copy of the following utility information be submitted to the District Utilities Office for each Utility Owner located within the project limits.

- A Copy of the First and Second Submission Letters to each Utility Owner
- “No Facilities Letter” or “No Conflict Letter” from each Utilities Owner on their letterhead (if applicable).
- Letter showing receipt of Marked Plans for Existing and Proposed Adjustments or Relocation of the Utility Facilities within the project from each Utility Owner.
- Copies of existing mark-ups and relocation plans from each Utility Owner.
- Any Joint Use Agreements for traffic signal or ATMS work.
- Copies of executed lighting agreements for any street or pedestrian lighting.
- Prior Rights information along with documentation that satisfactory arrangements have been made with each Utility Owner for reimbursement of utility adjustments.

Concept Development: Upon execution of the PFA, GDOT or their consultant will begin developing a concept report – establishing the scope of work for the project. During this time, a concept layout is drafted and often survey data is acquired. Also, during the concept development, the Coordinating Agency is encouraged to request and perform a utility ballpark cost estimate based on anticipated impacts of the project. A ballpark estimate is a “worst-case scenario” estimate where it is assumed that adjustment may be required for all facilities within the proposed project limits. At a minimum, a layout or sketch of the proposed project should be provided to utilities as part of this estimate request. It would be very beneficial to have a ballpark estimate for each alternative considered as part of the concept report, as this may assist in providing justification for choosing one alternative over another.

The Project Manager will request a Concept Team Meeting at which GDOT and other attendees will discuss the feasibility of the project and any alternatives considered. Before the Concept Team Meeting, the Coordinating Agency should draft a Concept Utility Report (CUR) which addresses significant utility impacts and provides information about each utility within the project limits. As part of the CUR, the Coordinating Agency will provide a recommendation concerning the use of Subsurface Utility Engineering (SUE) and Public Interest Determination (PID) – both of these options should be discussed and coordinated with the District Utilities Office prior to the Concept Team Meeting. The CUR will be further edited and finalized after the Concept Team Meeting and will then be submitted to the Project Manager for inclusion in the draft Concept Report. The draft Concept Report will be submitted to GDOT for management approval once any comments from the Concept Team Meeting have been addressed. If SUE is performed, the Coordinating Agency must use a prequalified GDOT SUE firm. The State Utilities Office should be copied on information provided by the SUE consultant.

Preliminary Design: The preliminary design phase begins after the concept report has been approved. GDOT will begin completing environmental studies and will submit an environmental document for FHWA approval. As per the PDP, upon concept report approval the Coordinating Agency should send a 1st Submission to all utility companies within the project area – requesting a response time depending on the project type, per the UAM. The PDP specifies what information should be included in the 1st Submission plans. If a project utilizes SUE, then SUE would take the place of 1st Submission plans. Confirmation of SUE plans would still be required from each Utility Owner once the SUE package is complete. SUE confirmation would be sent out in the form of a letter to each utility requesting their concurrence or corrections to the SUE plans as well as their anticipated preliminary relocation for facilities in conflict (see next paragraph concerning preliminary relocation). The Coordinating Agency shall provide existing utility information (from SUE or otherwise) to the GDOT Project Manager so that it can be implemented in the project design plans. The District Utilities Office should be copied on 1st Submission transmittals and provided with response information from each company.

Following 1st Submission but prior to PFPR, and once the design of the project plans is further developed (preliminary drainage, cross sections, etc.), a request should be sent to each utility with facilities in the project asking for a preliminary relocation plan. This is not a 2nd Submission nor is it a request for a detailed analysis of anticipated adjustments. Rather it is intended to be a “first-glance” assessment of what facilities will likely be adjusted, to what side of the road they will be relocated, and any significant conflict points – if known – that could affect the phasing or staging of the project. This information will be used to help establish better defined Right of Way limits and environmental impacts and help reduce any unforeseen impacts that may affect the project schedule later during the final design. If a project utilized SUE in lieu of 1st Submission, the request for preliminary relocation should accompany the SUE confirmation request.

Once the environmental document is approved by FHWA and the design team is in receipt of and has incorporated all 1st Submission plans from utilities, a Preliminary Field Plan Review (PFPR) will be

requested by the Project Manager. Preliminary Plans should not be submitted for a PFPR request until all existing facilities have been shown on the plans. Existing facilities based solely on survey data or field visits are not acceptable documentation – information gathered from the 1st Submission or SUE is required. If existing or proposed utilities are to be attached to or otherwise impact a structure, that information should be shown on the bridge layout or structural drawing. Any request by a utility to attach to a proposed structure must be submitted to the Bridge Design Office via coordination with District Utilities and the Project Manager. If the proposed bridge crosses a railroad, the utility will be required to obtain a separate permit from the railroad to cross over the track as a bridge attachment.

The PFPR will typically be a formal meeting consisting of an office plan review and a subsequent field visit. During the PFPR, the District Utilities Office and Coordinating Agency will discuss the preliminary relocations provided by the utility companies. An official PFPR report will be generated by the Office of Engineering Services and responses will be made by the Project Manager following the review.

Following the PFPR, GDOT will ensure that any required design variances or exceptions are submitted and approved. Approval of a variance or exception shall be completed before the Final Field Plan Review (FFPR) is requested. Design variances or exceptions are not encouraged but may be required depending on the project's scope and budget. The current editions of the AASHTO Roadside Design Guide, GDOT Design Policy Manual, and Utility Accommodations Policy and Standards Manual should be consulted to verify that existing features in the right of way are not out of compliance with clear zone or lateral offsets. Any feature that is within clear zone or does not meet the lateral offset requirements will require an approved design variance or exception.

For projects that propose lighting along a state route, the photometrics for those lights must be approved by GDOT prior to the request for FFPR. After photometric approval, the lighting plans can be included in the plans for FFPR. Lighting plans for on-system projects must be approved by GDOT. Additionally, lighting pole locations must be provided in the 2nd Submission plans.

Right of Way Acquisition:

Once a PFPR has been held and an environmental document has been approved, Right of Way Plans can be submitted to the GDOT Right of Way Office for approval. Upon Right of Way Plan approval, Right of Way funds can be authorized. As a standard, all permanent easements are typically purchased with the right to place utilities. If the required right of way extends beyond an existing utility easement, an Easement Limited Agreement shall be executed with the utility company.

Final Design: After the PFPR report is approved, the final design phase begins and GDOT will begin completing design plans. After GDOT has made any requested design changes per the PFPR, a 2nd Submission should be sent to all utility companies, usually with the same response time as requested for the 1st Submission. The Coordinating Agency should consider the time required for underbuilt facilities to review the design of the pole owner and design their own facilities accordingly. This may require

more time be allotted for the underbuilt facilities than is provided to the pole owner. A minimum of thirty days should also be allotted for the Coordinating Agency and District Utilities Office to review the relocations before providing them to the Project Manager. As with 1st Submission, the District Utilities Office should be copied on 2nd Submission transmittals to utility companies and given the opportunity to review proposed relocations. Once 2nd Submission responses are provided and the design plans are complete (including final bridge or structural plans), a Final Field Plan Review (FFPR) will be requested by the Project Manager. Plans that do not include all existing and proposed utilities should not be submitted for a FFPR request. At the FFPR, any final comments or corrections will be addressed and GDOT will make any adjustments to the plans. If the design of the project changes in a manner as to effect the current relocation of utilities, a revised 2nd Submission should be sent to all utility companies for their review and response.

Certification: The utility, right of way, and environmental certification is a concurrent process along with the final design. In order for utilities to be certified, applicable executed utility agreements and approved permits must be in place for all Utility Owners. The Coordinating Agency is responsible for ensuring the following requirements are met for permitting and certification.

1. A utility permit must be submitted through GUPS by project PI number, for each facility within the project limits, regardless of their level of conflict. Permits for proposed lighting are required if said lighting is to be installed and maintained by a utility. All permit requests must include the following documentation:
 - **Permit Data/Form 8413** – Automatically generated during the permitting process.
 - **Utility Adjustment Schedule (UAS)** – The UAS should be detailed and outline the timeframe for proposed facility adjustments. If the Owner has no conflict then the UAS can specify 3-5 days for final plan review and attendance at the preconstruction conference.
 - **NPDES Compliance Form** – If the relocation work does not require a NOI, then the Owner should select the option that states that a NOI is not required. If an NOI is required, it should be attached and included with the permit. The NPDES form can be found at this link: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/doingbusiness/utilities/Pages/Permitting.aspx>
 - **Cost Arrangement Letter:**
 - **No-Cost Letter** – applicable if the utility has conflict but will adjust at no-cost to GDOT.
 - **No-Conflict Letter** – applicable if the utility has no conflict on the project.
 - **Project Plans** – project plans that show the utility's existing and proposed facilities.
2. An executed Lighting Agreement between GDOT and the local government for proposed lighting on the project.

Authorization, Letting, and Construction: Once a project has received final plan approval and GDOT is in receipt of acceptable project certifications (utility, right of way, and environmental), GDOT will

request construction funds to be authorized for the project, usually seven weeks prior to the letting. The project will then be let and awarded to a contractor.

Four week prior to the project letting, the District Utilities Office will issue Notice to Proceed (NTP) to the utilities that are permitted within the project limits. Once NTP is received, the Utility Owner can begin work based on their UAS. Owners whose work is being done by agreement will receive a separate notification to begin work by the State Utilities Office. Additionally, the State Utilities Office provides a Notice of Award (NOA) to all utilities in the project once the project has been awarded to a contractor.

A preconstruction conference is held on all GDOT projects subsequent to project award to a contractor. The Coordinating Agency shall invite all utility companies within the project limits to attend. Additionally, the contractor will be responsible for ensuring that subsequent monthly utility coordination meetings are held, as needed, during construction.

Roles: The *Project Manager* is the main point of contact for all project issues and questions and is tasked with keeping the project on schedule and within the scope and budgetary limits set forth. The Project Manager is responsible for insuring that the Coordinating Agency adequately handles all utility coordination.

The role of the *District Utilities Office* is to review and provide comments to existing and proposed utility plans, review plans and make comments for PFPR and FFPR, serve as a subject matter expert to the Project Manager and the Coordinating Agency, and assist in the successful coordination and certification of utilities.