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June 5, 2025

Re: Responses to Public Information Open House (PIOH) Comments for P.I. No. 0017182,
Henry County, Interstate 75 at County Road 312/Bethlehem Road

Thank you for your feedback concerning the proposed project referenced above. We appreciate your participation, and the questions and comments received through the project's website and the in-person PIOH. As the project develops, the proposed project plan may need to be revised. If there are significant changes to what was shown on the project's website and at the PIOH, there will be additional public outreach. If no significant changes are proposed, the project will proceed to right-of-way (ROW) acquisition and final design. Following the completion of all ROW acquisitions the project design will be finalized, and the project will advance to construction.

Every comment provided during the project's PIOH comment period beginning on March 27, 2025, and ending on April 10, 2025, as well as the Environmental Assessment comment period ending on April 26, 2025, will be made part of the project's official record. During these comment periods, the project's website received **871** page views in total, and **47** people attended the in-person PIOH. Of the **46** respondents who formally commented, **25** were in **support** of the project, **6** were **opposed**, **5** were **uncommitted**, and **10** expressed **conditional support**.

The Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) has prepared a single response letter that addresses all questions and comments received during these comment periods which are summarized below (in *italics*) followed by our response. For the purposes of this response letter and to provide clarity, existing Bethlehem Road will be referred to as "Old Bethlehem Road" and newly aligned Bethlehem Road will be referred to as "Bethlehem Road."

- *"If it improves the drainage and appearance of the hill in front of our property we would be appreciative."*

As part of the project development, evaluation of existing drainage systems is required to ensure current standards are satisfied and determine if upgrades are needed.

As the project is currently proposed, the existing culvert near this parcel is to be abandoned and the drainage routed further upstream to a detention pond. Additionally, the existing alignment is realigned away from this parcel and the only ROW required would be for reconstruction of a driveway tie-in.

- *"Curious about the traffic that will occur on Greenwood/Lester Mill, I didn't see any traffic expansion there, the addition of traffic lights on both ends will likely be a disaster."*

A multilane roundabout is proposed at the intersection of Bethlehem Road and Greenwood/Lester Mill Road. The traffic operational analysis was performed, and the roundabout would reduce traffic delays and accommodate for future traffic.

There were several comments received that were concerned about the durability of the pavement for the proposed improvements, the maintenance of local roads, and if developers would be responsible for repaving roads destroyed by trucks.

- *“Please make the asphalt itself durable enough for that kind of traffic.”*
- *“Are the developers responsible for repaving the roads that will be destroyed by the trucks?”*

As part of the design process, the project team evaluated multiple pavement design and material types under current and future traffic conditions for the proposed improvements.

Once the project is completed, future road maintenance would be the responsibility of Georgia DOT, Henry County, or the City of Locust Grove depending on where the portion of roadway is located and who is responsible for its continued maintenance. Please contact the Henry County Department of Transportation (770-288-7623) or Locust Grove Department of Public Works (770-957-5043) to inquire about maintenance projects.

- *“The current stop sign at Price Drive and Bethlehem needs to be revisited. Cars are speeding down Bethlehem and running through the stop sign. Can some strips be added to warn drivers of the upcoming stop sign!”*

Local authorities are responsible for enforcing traffic laws in the area. Georgia DOT has shared this concern with the City of Locust Grove and Henry County. Once the proposed project is completed, all through traffic in the area would be shifted to the newly aligned Bethlehem Road, reducing traffic volumes on Old Bethlehem Road. The design speed on existing Old Bethlehem Road would also be reduced to 25 miles per hour (mph).

- *“With all this construction going on and all these projects, how does this benefit the residents of Henry County?”*

The growth that Henry County has experienced over the last several decades has contributed to an increase in traffic volumes and congestion at State Route (SR) 155 and Bill Gardner Parkway interchanges with I-75. Without the additional access provided by a new interchange, the interchanges of I-75 at Bill Gardner Parkway and SR 155, and adjacent roadways and intersections, will experience worsening conditions in the future. The construction of the proposed interchange at Bethlehem Road would balance access demands at three interchanges instead of two, thereby improving operations at the interchanges of I-75 at Bill Gardner Parkway and I-75 at SR 155, as well as several intersections throughout the entire project area to the benefit of Henry County’s residents.

- *“Where is the money coming from to make the infrastructure changes necessary to accommodate traffic?”*

The project is being funded by the Federal Highway Administration, as well as by the State of Georgia, Henry County, and the City of Locust Grove.

- *“Request that only local traffic, no construction vehicles are allowed on Lester Mill Road from Bill Gardner Parkway to Greenwood Industrial.”*

The contractor selected for the construction of the project will develop a staging and construction plan that will be reviewed by Georgia DOT and may consider vehicular restrictions on certain roads during construction. Those accommodations would be determined through coordination between Georgia DOT, the contractor, and local officials.

- *“Request an overhead clearance barrier erected at Bethlehem and Lester Mill at 13 feet to prohibit traffic -- tractor-trailers, and anything higher from utilizing Lester Mill Road.”*

Georgia DOT cannot introduce a hazard to restrict traffic movements. Traffic restrictions will be enforced at the local level. Georgia DOT is in coordination with both Henry County and the City of Locust Grove and has shared this concern with local officials.

- *“Bethlehem Rd is not a straight road and putting an off ramp there is too close to the elementary school.”*

Georgia DOT is committed to minimizing impacts to neighborhoods and schools. The newly aligned Bethlehem Road and interchange would be constructed south of the existing Old Bethlehem Road and the existing bridge across I-75. This alignment places it further away from Bethlehem Elementary School. Only a small amount of ROW would be acquired for the construction of the interchange off-ramp.

It should be noted that, as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, the environmental team also conducted a detailed noise impact assessment for this project. As a result, one noise barrier is proposed along I-75 southbound within the vicinity of the elementary school. The proposed noise barrier would be voted on by the public at a later time.

- *“Please consider re-aligning Academic Parkway to the intersection at Old Bethlehem Road and the new Price Drive as part of this project. This will eliminate an otherwise two extra turns being created for traffic going to and from Bethlehem Elementary School and the apartment complexes.”*

The project team explored multiple alternatives as part of the design process. However, this realignment of Academic Parkway was determined to be infeasible due to environmentally sensitive resources in the area, as well as other design restrictions. In order to minimize the number of intersections in close proximity to each other, which can negatively affect traffic operations, the decision was made to connect the realigned Price Drive with Old Bethlehem Road and the newly aligned Bethlehem Road in this location. Additionally, providing the connection between Price Drive and Bethlehem

Road east of Academic Parkway would avoid impacts to the Bethlehem Baptist Church and Cemetery as well as Bethlehem Bottoms.

- *“These semi-trucks need to be kept out of our residential neighborhoods and off our residential streets. The intersection of Bethlehem and Lester Mill/Greenwood needs major signage (or whatever other means necessary) to keep these trucks off of Lester Mill and Bill Gardner. They already disregard the current small signs and go where they please, destroying our roads and making them unsafe. This is going to potentially funnel even more increased truck traffic to these roads that are already 'No truck' or 'No thru truck' routes. They're already here and we don't need more.”*

Truck restrictions are enforced by local jurisdictions. Please contact the Henry County Planning and Zoning department at (770) 288-7526 or the City of Locust Grove Community Development office at (770) 957-5043 to inquire about enforcement in this area.

- *“People take Bethlehem Road as a shortcut to SR 42 due to the large amount of traffic on Bill Gardner Pkwy and Hwy 42. If this is built, then we will no longer be able to take advantage of this route. If it provides us some relief, I'm for it, if it is going to cut us from using Bethlehem Rd, then I am not for it.”*

Once the proposed project is completed, the newly aligned Bethlehem Road would become the alternative route to Bill Gardner Parkway for accessing US 23/SR 42.

- *“It will create more traffic on Bethlehem Road as people would use it as an alternative route to get into Locust Grove. Also, there is a school in the area.”*

The proposed improvements are designed to improve safety and reduce traffic on existing Old Bethlehem Road by shifting nonlocal traffic to the newly aligned roadway. Once the project is completed, Old Bethlehem Road would only be used by local residents and for access to the elementary school. The design speed on Old Bethlehem Road would also be reduced to 25 mph.

Cul-de-sacs are proposed in three locations along existing Old Bethlehem Road - just west of Academic Parkway and on either side of I-75. Old Bethlehem Road would remain accessible through the realigned Price Drive on the west side of I-75, and through the proposed roundabout on the east side of I-75.

The newly aligned Bethlehem Road would be two lanes in each direction and provide access to the Greenwood/Lester Mill intersection, I-75, and US 23/SR 42 for through traffic. These proposed improvements would increase connectivity, improve traffic operations, and balance demand on local roadways in the area.

In addition, the project is designed to address anticipated growth due to current and anticipated developments and accommodate both current and projected future traffic volumes. The improvements are anticipated to result in an 83% and 86% delay improvement within the entire study area in the AM and PM peak hours, respectively, during the Open Year (2028) Build condition. In the Design Year (2048) Build

condition, the proposed project would result in an 82% and 85% delay improvement within the entire study area in the AM and PM peak hours, respectively.

- *“This would hinder the residents of our community (Eagles Brooke) from entering or leaving the subdivision. Due to the already heavy flow of traffic this would result in far too many accidents, not to mention the loss of someone's life.”*

As part of the proposed project, the intersection of Eagles Brooke Drive/Lester Mill Road/Greenwood Road and the newly aligned Bethlehem Road would be converted to a roundabout. Roundabouts lower crash rates and crash severity by reducing the number of points where vehicles can cross paths and promoting lower vehicle speeds.

The following comments and questions were received regarding economic developments in the area.

- *“What is the development west of the railroad tracks?”*
- *“There's over three and a half million square feet of available warehousing in the areas along SR 42 and SR 155. Why are we approving more future warehousing when we haven't even filled up nearly all these other existing warehouses?”*

Georgia DOT does not have the authority to limit development that has been planned and/or permitted through local jurisdictions. According to land use interviews conducted as part of the NEPA process for the proposed project, higher-intensity land uses, which may allow for commercial development, have been in the planning stages since 1999 with the approval of the Eagles Brooke Development of Regional Impact (DRI). Recent, planned, and expanding developments in the area are anticipated to increase passenger vehicle and truck traffic within the project area and increase the number of vehicles and trucks needing access to I-75.

Georgia DOT recognizes that there is a need to provide responsive roadway enhancements and improvements that offer safe and efficient access to new developments, as well as reduce potential future traffic congestion and improve the surrounding infrastructure for all users, including the local communities it serves. The proposed improvements for this project seek to accommodate existing and future growth and improve throughput and travel conditions in the area. Construction of the new interchange would provide more efficient access between this area and the interstate system, balance demand across three interchanges, and provide congestion relief at SR 155 and Bill Gardner Parkway interchanges. The newly aligned Bethlehem Road would divert traffic away from local roads and improve traffic operations, reduce traffic delays, and lower crash rate and severity within the project area.

Please contact the Henry County Planning and Zoning department at (770) 288-7526 or City of Locust Grove Community Development office at (770) 957-5043 to inquire about future development plans in this area.

The following comments and questions were received about other transportation improvements outside of the scope of this project.

- *"Are they going to have plans to make an Express Lane going north as well as south?"*
- *"I'm against anything that increases truck traffic without an additional lane on I-75 in both directions."*
- *"Has there been any consideration of expanding express lanes to run North and South at all times?"*
- *"Easing traffic congestion must begin with adding lanes to the roads primarily used for travel which is Hwy 42 and Hwy 155. The proposed project will only allow for an additional exit/entrance from I-75 which still takes the traffic to an already congested Hwy 42 and Hwy 155."*
- *"My bigger concern is the truck lanes being constructed and ending at 155. That's where the real problem starts and I don't see any benefit of a very expensive truck lane that ends where the problem starts."*
- *"There are many tractor trailer trucks in that area, as well as, regular vehicle traffic. Every new lane will only help with the overload of traffic in the Henry County area. Weekly, I see tractor trailers in lane 1, sometimes from Henry County all the way to Clayton County."*

Georgia DOT is currently exploring I-75 corridor improvements. The new bridge proposed as part of the I-75 at Bethlehem Road interchange project is designed in such a way to allow for potential future improvements on I-75. The implementation of separate transportation projects is beyond the scope of the proposed project; however, requests for transportation improvement projects can be made by contacting the Atlanta Regional Commission using the provided link:

<https://atlantaregional.org/about-arc/contact/>.

The following comments and questions were received about the roundabouts proposed along the project corridor.

- *"Please make the roundabouts large enough and sturdy enough to withstand the beating they'll receive from the semi's."*
- *"Roundabouts will not be beneficial for the numerous tractor-trailers that access the commercial facilities in this area."*
- *"Would like to understand how the new Bethlehem Road intersects with Greenwood Industrial. Is it exactly across the entrance to Eagles Brooke Community (formerly Eagles Brooke Country Club)?"*

Detailed traffic analyses that take into consideration both existing and future passenger vehicle and truck traffic volumes were completed for all roadway segments within the proposed project area. These studies evaluate the performance of multiple intersection control types for a particular location and seek to determine the best possible overall value in terms of performance-based criteria. Roundabouts were selected as they provide the best traffic operations while minimizing project construction costs and impacts to adjacent properties as well as proposed developments in the area.

The intersection of Eagles Brooke Drive, Lester Mill Road/Greenwood Road, and the newly aligned Bethlehem Road would be converted to a roundabout. Roundabouts have been demonstrated to provide a number of safety, operational, and other benefits

when compared to other types of intersections. Compared to conventional, at-grade, intersection control types, roundabouts have fewer conflict points, lower speeds, and have been found to reduce crash frequency, crash severity, traffic delays, fuel consumption, and air pollution.

Each of the proposed roundabouts has also been designed for both passenger vehicle and truck traffic. These designs would incorporate specialized features such as concrete truck aprons, which are engineered to support the wheel tracking of long or oversized vehicles, allowing them to navigate the roundabouts more effectively.

The following comments were all in favor of the project.

- *"Love the concept and well needed"*
- *"I approve and support GDOT's I-75 at Bethlehem Road Interchange Project. The aspect that I love about GDOT's I-75 at Bethlehem Road Interchange Project is that the I-75 and Bethlehem Road Interchange will have double roundabouts which will improve safety and reduce the number of intersection conflict points."*
- *"I work for Summit Racings at exit 216. We definitely support this project as it will hopefully relieve some of the traffic at our exit, especially the truck traffic."*
- *"Thank you for providing a great visual of the Bethlehem Rd Project. Keep it beautiful. Quality First. It all makes sense now. Looking forward to the finished product. Thank you for providing engineers on site to get more details on the project."*
- *"This is a fantastic proposal as the traffic between the Bill Gardner exit and the Summit exit are constantly congested. I believe this would relieve some of that and give alternative routes when traffic is bad."*
- *"The traffic on Bill Gardener is progressively worsening in the morning and evenings. Many afternoons the exit ramp backs up onto I-75 which is dangerous. I am in full support of a plan that alleviates traffic from exit 212 and am appreciative of making the bridge wide enough to allow for future expansion of I-75 which is needed as well."*
- *"I live less than a minute from where they'd be breaking ground. I think it's great for us that commute to work in the city as this will cut down almost 5 to 10 minutes just to get to the highway to exit 216 or 212. I just hope it's a good layout, though allow for traffic to move easily through."*
- *"Should alleviate a lot of truck traffic off rt155 and Bill Gardner."*
- *"Hopefully, this will eliminate the traffic and backups that happens at our exit 212 in Locust Grove. I'm all for any relief we can get from all of these tractor trailer trucks that crowd our roadways at exit 212."*
- *"Do it!"*
- *"I think this would be a great addition! I know traffic is a nightmare at the 212 exit and it would be great to have another option for getting home."*
- *"I'm for anything that has the potential of reducing truck traffic through the City of McDonough."*
- *"This project would take some of the semi-truck traffic off of hwy 155."*
- *"Anything that gets some of the trucks off 155, 42 and Bill Gardner Pkwy is a good thing in my opinion."*
- *"A roundabout would be perfect at that intersection. When the school lets out there are so many cars stuck at the stop sign because one person is too afraid to take a left and holds every back. A roundabout would make that line almost non-existent."*

- *"It should have been done years ago, let's get this done, shouldn't take years."*
- *"I'm excited to see this project move forward and alleviate a significant amount of industry trucks. Similar to the usage and design in Harlem, GA, this will really help reduce congestion along Bill Gardner and HWY 42."*

Thank you for your support of this project.

Again, thank you for your feedback. Should you have further questions or comments, please call the project manager, Porshia Hayden, at 404-631-1573 or the environmental analyst, Mary Seagrave Eurek, at 404-631-1593.

Sincerely,



Eric Duff
State Environmental Administrator

ED/MSE/CHW

cc: Dana Lemon, Georgia DOT Board Member (District 13)
Mary Ann Santos, State Representative (District 117)
Ricky Williams, State Senator (District 25)
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PDF for Project File