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In December 2024, the Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) hosted three (3) Community Conversation meetings to provide updated information on the proposed I-285 Eastside Express Lanes project and solicit preliminary input on the typical sections under consideration. The attendees of the Community Conversation meetings and those persons submitting feedback raised a number of questions. Georgia DOT has developed this summary of input and has provided responses to clarify the Proposed Project's features and process. Below, the project team has organized the feedback received as a result of the Community Conversation meetings into broad topics and has provided additional information related to each.

## Community Conversation Meetings Overview

A total of 217 people attended the Community Conversation meetings, and meeting materials and ability to provide input were also available online. At the meetings, 39 feedback cards were completed, and 14 respondents provided feedback to the court reporter. In addition, feedback from 19 individuals was received via email for a total of 72 respondents. Of the 72 respondents who noted a preference for the location of the proposed express lanes, the breakdown is as follows:

- Elevated Outside (Alternative 1) – 19 respondents noted as preferred alternative
- At-Grade Inside (Alternative 2) – 2 respondents noted as preferred alternative
- At-Grade Outside (Alternative 3) – 4 respondents noted as preferred alternative
- Hybrid Elevated/At-Grade (Alternative 4) – 15 respondents noted as preferred alternative
- Other – 16 respondents provided input on other alternatives
- Uncommitted/No Preference – 4 respondents

*In addition to the four typical sections presented at the Community Conversation meetings and online, what other suggestions were received as part of the feedback collected?*

Suggestions on additional alternatives for consideration received as part of the feedback collected at the Community Conversation meetings included the No-Build alternative, bi-directional express lanes, mass transit, tunnel/stacked lanes, one express lane in each direction, tolling of existing lanes on I-285, construction of truck lanes, and construction of an outer perimeter.

*What social, natural, cultural, and/or physical environmental factors were noted as a specific concern in the feedback collected?*

Respondents noted community cohesion, noise, impacts to neighborhoods, property impacts/relocations, proximity of property to I-285, air quality/pollution, runoff/drainage, tree loss, visual impacts, wetland/stream impacts, congestion during construction, congestion on arterial roads, wildlife/wildlife crossings, and home/property values as areas of concern related to the Proposed Project.

## Other Projects in the Area

The Proposed Project shares termini with two other Major Mobility Investment Program (MMIP) projects currently underway in the same area: the I-285 Top End Express Lanes to the north and

the I-285/I-20 East Interchange to the south. For more information on those projects please visit their websites:

- I-285 Top End Express Lanes: [I-285 Top End Express Lanes](#)
- I-285/I-20 East Interchange: [I-285/I-20 East Interchange](#)

Any feedback received related to these projects has been forwarded to the respective project teams.

## Project Need

The need and purpose of the Proposed Project is to provide passenger vehicles, transit riders, and commercial vehicles with an effective transportation alternative to address the following needs: unreliable trip times for commuters, lack of accessibility and regional connectivity, and legislative mandate to accelerate project delivery following the Transportation Funding Act legislation in response to the urgency of traffic conditions.

Georgia DOT would construct express lanes to provide an alternative for motorists and transit vehicles along the limits of the Proposed Project. These express lanes would be tolled to manage traffic volumes, improve travel time reliability, and increase transit options and opportunities (including providing toll-free trips for transit riders and registered vanpools).

## Project Limits

The limits of the Proposed Project are generally between I-85 to the north and I-20 to the south. At the north end, the Proposed Project will tie-in with Georgia DOT PI 0001758, the proposed I-285 Top End Express Lanes, near Henderson Road. At the south end, the Proposed Project is being coordinated with the I-285/I-20 East Interchange project (Georgia DOT PI 0013915), which is currently under construction. In the area of I-20, the express lanes are proposed to begin (northbound) or end (southbound) near Rainbow Drive. This would allow users of the express lanes to travel through the I-20 interchange and remain separate from general purpose traffic entering and exiting I-285 to/from I-20. The current construction of the I-285/I-20 East interchange project does not preclude the future express lanes proposed under this project.

## Environmental Impacts

### Air Quality

The Clean Air Act requires the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for criteria air pollutants, which can be harmful to public health and the environment. These standards provide public health protection, including protecting the health of "sensitive" populations such as asthmatics, children, and the elderly. Georgia DOT will evaluate the Proposed Project for criteria pollutants and mobile source air toxics (MSAT). Criteria pollutants include ozone, carbon monoxide (CO), and fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>).

Ozone: A conformity analysis of ozone is conducted at a regional level because the effects of ozone are experienced at a regional level rather than at a local level, near the project source. Such an analysis is conducted over a large area such as an entire city. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the region's metropolitan planning organization included this project in both the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan and Fiscal Year 2020-2025 Transportation Improvement Program by reference number AR-ML-240. The conforming plan demonstrated that the project meets the ozone conformity requirements; therefore, an analysis of ozone is currently not required.

CO: There are no areas within the State of Georgia that are classified as nonattainment or maintenance for CO, per the 1-hour and 8-hour primary NAAQS for CO. In an effort to continue to expedite the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for Georgia DOT projects, Georgia DOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have signed an agreement effective May 1, 2020, determining that quantitative CO project-level analyses are not required for projects located in CO attainment areas throughout Georgia.

PM<sub>2.5</sub>: On August 24, 2016, the EPA revoked the 1997 Primary Annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS that designated 24 counties and three partial counties in Georgia as non-attainment areas for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. This revocation of the 1997 designation became effective on October 24, 2016, 60 days after EPA's published action in the Federal Register. Transportation Conformity for the PM<sub>2.5</sub> standards in the State of Georgia is no longer required, and the State of Georgia is considered to be in attainment for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. The final rule for a stricter PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard became effective on May 6, 2024, but the new standard has not yet been implemented in the State of Georgia. EPA is required to designate areas as attainment or nonattainment within two years of the final rule for a new standard, which would not be until 2026. States would then need to establish SIP goals for areas that are in nonattainment or maintenance for the new standard. All states need to submit SIPs to implement a changed NAAQS within three years of the NAAQS updates. If an area is designated as nonattainment, SIPs are developed within 18 to 24 months after the designation.

MSAT: EPA regulates MSATs, a group of air pollutants, and a MSAT analysis will be conducted for the Proposed Project.

### Noise/Noise Barriers

Considerations for mitigating impacts from highway traffic generated noise, including noise barriers, are part of the planning, location, and design of the I-285 Eastside Express Lanes. The project does not propose to remove or reduce the length of existing noise barriers, rather, it will evaluate all areas of the Proposed Project, including those with existing noise walls, to ensure adequate abatement is received where feasible and reasonable.

A traffic noise analysis will be conducted for the Proposed Project to determine the acoustic impact and the need for abatement measures on noise sensitive receivers (e.g., residences and public outdoor spaces, etc.). During the planning phase, the analysis will focus on identifying potentially impacted noise sensitive receivers. Final location of noise barriers will be determined during final design, after Developer award, with the input of affected landowners and residents. Benefited landowners and residents will be invited to participate and vote on whether they would like to have the barrier constructed. Only at that point will a final decision be made. For the walls/barriers to be installed the vote will need to be over 50 percent in favor.

The determination of noise impacts and abatement measures will comply with Title 23, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 772, and the Georgia DOT's policies for highway noise barrier construction. More information regarding the Georgia DOT's noise barrier policy can be found in the Georgia DOT's Guidebooks and References [Air and Noise Environmental Resources - GDOT](#).

Additional information concerning the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) guidelines is available at [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/regulations\\_and\\_guidance/index.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/regulations_and_guidance/index.cfm).

### Tree Clearing/Loss

Clearing of trees and other vegetation would be necessary within the construction limits of the Proposed Project as it is standard Georgia DOT policy to keep the entire right-of-way maintained (tree trimming and mowing) to limit potential hazards to the traveling public. As Georgia DOT continues to develop the Proposed Project, it is committed to minimizing negative effects and maximizing benefits.

### Community Impacts

The Proposed Project is being designed with a focus on minimizing adverse effects on the environment including neighborhoods and communities. The Proposed Project would widen an existing corridor, and as such, project development activities are focused on confining improvements as much as physically possible to this previously disturbed and developed transportation corridor. However, not all improvements fit within the existing right-of-way and therefore some impacts to adjacent properties are anticipated. These impacts are based on physical needs to meet the goals of the project while avoiding and minimizing impacts to the surrounding environment. Unavoidable impacts would be mitigated as much as possible. Communities are being considered as part of project development. A Community Impact Assessment will be conducted as a part of environmental documentation and will outline the avoidance and minimization measures that are feasible to implement.

### Visual Quality

The Proposed Project is being designed with a focus on minimizing adverse effects on the environment including visual impacts. The Proposed Project may introduce new elements to the I-285 corridor within the project limits that could be visible from adjacent properties. These new elements are based on physical needs to meet the goals of the project. Unavoidable impacts would be mitigated as much as possible. Visual impacts will be assessed as a part of the environmental document, and the avoidance and minimization measures that are feasible to implement will be discussed.

### Wetland and Streams

Natural resources including wetlands, streams, and open waters are being identified, and project effects on the natural environment will be evaluated as a part of the environmental document. Areas considered to be environmentally sensitive areas (ESA) will be given consideration in environmental studies. It is the goal of Georgia DOT to try to avoid or minimize impacts to the environment, which is managed by the guidelines set forth in the Clean Water Act and NEPA.

### Wildlife and Plant Species

Natural resources including protected wildlife and plant species are being identified, and project effects on the natural environment will be evaluated as a part of the environmental document. Areas considered to be ESAs will be given consideration in environmental studies. It is the goal of Georgia DOT to try to avoid or minimize impacts to the environment, which is managed by the guidelines set forth in the Endangered Species Act and NEPA.

### Run-Off/Drainage

During the preliminary and final design phases for the Proposed Project, Georgia DOT and the developer will identify the stormwater runoff drainage needs for the Proposed Project, following Georgia DOT policies for drainage design and requirements of Georgia DOT's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) program.

## Tolling

Georgia DOT would construct express lanes to provide an alternative for motorists and transit vehicles along the limits of the Proposed Project. These express lanes would be tolled to manage traffic volumes, improve travel time reliability, and increase transit options and opportunities (including providing toll-free trips for transit riders and registered vanpools). Georgia DOT and the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) will establish parameters that will govern toll rates and those will be refined through the procurement process. At the conclusion of the Request for Proposal (RFP) portion of the procurement the SRTA Board will then adopt the final parameters that were included in the RFP prior the execution of the contract. Information on policies and business rules for Georgia Express Lanes managed by SRTA can be found here: <https://srta.ga.gov/georgia-express-lanes/>.

## Right-of-Way

### Property Values/Displacements/Property Impacts/Community Impacts

The Proposed Project is in the early stages of development and the conceptual project footprints presented at the Community Conversation meetings and online will continue to be refined with a focus on avoiding impacts to private property when possible. If avoidance is not possible, the Design Team will explore opportunities to minimize or mitigate these impacts while adhering to design standards and the scope limitations of the project.

If there are identified impacts to your property you will be contacted by Georgia DOT, and they will guide you through the acquisition process. Information will be provided on how your property would be impacted and the next steps in the right-of-way (ROW) process. More information regarding the acquisition process can be found in the pamphlet titled What Happens If Your Property is Needed for a Transportation Facility ([Right-of-Way Services - GDOT](#)). The pamphlet is available in English and Spanish.

All property acquisition will comply with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act. Georgia DOT appraises properties and mitigates impacts for parcels that are partially or fully acquired for the project.

## Construction

Mechanisms would be put in place to maintain traffic flow; minimize air quality, noise and construction lighting impacts; manage waste disposal; protect surrounding natural resources; control erosion; and handle any accidental waste spills. Deliveries of construction materials would be scheduled to minimize disruptions to surrounding land uses. Construction activities would be scheduled so that property access and utility disruptions are anticipated, scheduled in advance, and are as brief as possible. Advance notification for such utility disruptions would be provided to affected property owners and businesses.

## Transit

Through the Proposed Project, Georgia DOT would make a substantial capital investment in infrastructure in the I-285 corridor that is multimodal by providing reliable travel times to support the opportunity for future transit service operations that would be funded by other transit agencies in the region. All transit operators in the region could benefit from the capital infrastructure investment in the corridor, including but not limited to Atlanta-Region Transit Link (ATL) Authority, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), and Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA). Additionally, transit service operations can be scaled to meet the transit demand, and the fleet can be upgraded over time to new technology. Agencies with legislative authority to fund and operate transit are responsible for transit service in the state of

Georgia. These agencies currently do not have plans for heavy rail in the I-285 corridor. Typically costs of heavy rail exceed the costs of highway travel lane capacity expansion. Express lanes would provide infrastructure for transit service providing connectivity to communities in the corridor that do not exist currently.

The Proposed Project would provide future opportunities for registered public transit operators and vanpools by allowing them to use express lanes without paying tolls. In March 2022, Georgia DOT, Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority, MARTA, Cobb County, Gwinnett County, and ARC entered a Memorandum of Understanding to advance a MARTA-led Planning Study for high-capacity transit within the I-285 Eastside Express Lanes.

MARTA is conducting a planning study to improve and optimize connectivity in the Atlanta region by leveraging the proposed Georgia DOT I-285 express lanes projects between the I-20 interchanges, as part of Georgia DOT's MMIP. For more information, please visit <https://www.i285expresslanestransit.com/>. At this time, the ARC's Metropolitan Transportation Plan does not identify any programmed transit expansion projects along the I-285 Eastside corridor.

## Funding

The I-285 Eastside Express Lanes is a Public Private Partnership (P3) project. Final design and construction of the project would be conducted with private industry partners, which would greatly expand the options for innovative technology and funding and would likely lessen the amount of public contribution that would otherwise be required by traditional delivery. This type of project delivery allows the state to leverage the future revenue potential of the project to reduce the public contribution amount required to deliver the design and construction of the project. The overall delivery of the project is also anticipated to be greatly accelerated as a P3 partner will be able to deliver the project in larger sections than the state could through traditional design-bid-build construction projects. By utilizing the P3 delivery method, the P3 partner would deliver the project in fewer construction phases, likely over a shorter overall construction duration, and would carry associated risks. The private-sector partner would design, construct, finance, operate, and maintain the express lanes in exchange for future toll revenue. Programmed funding for ongoing project development work does include federal funds.

## Future Updates

The project website (<https://i285eastsideexpresslanes-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>) will continue to be updated during the preliminary engineering process and a refined project concept(s) will be presented at the project's Public Information Open House (PIOH) meetings proposed to be held in the second half of 2025. If you'd like to stay informed about the project, you can subscribe to the project news here: <https://mailchi.mp/dot.ga.gov/i-285-eastside-express-lanes>.