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Re: Responses to Public Information Open House Comments for PI No. 0013914, DeKalb County, Interstate (I) 285 from Henderson Road to I-20, Eastside Express Lanes

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 events during the Public Information Open House (PIOH). As the project's preliminary design and details are refined, the preferred alternative and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document will be available for public review at a future Public Hearing Open House (PHOH) which is currently anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

Every comment provided during the project's comment period beginning on October 2, 2025, and ending on November 20, 2025, will be made part of the project's official record. The project's website received **5,547** page views in total, and **384** people attended the in-person PIOHs held on October 21, October 23, and November 6, 2025. **336** respondents formally commented. Of those: **17** were in **support** of the project, **259** were **opposed**, **30** were **uncommitted**, and **30** expressed **conditional support**.

The Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) has prepared a single response letter that addresses all questions and comments received during the comment period which are summarized below (grouped by theme notated in **bold blue font** with comments listed in **bold italics**) followed by our response. Please note that comments received regarding specific addresses have been responded to separately from this letter.

General Support or Opposition

- ***Commenters expressed support for the project and for the design efforts to minimize the project impacts.***

Thank you for expressing your support for the proposed project.

- ***Commenters expressed general opposition to the project.***

Your opinion is invaluable while Georgia DOT navigates the early stages of preliminary project development. Georgia DOT appreciates your feedback and will carefully consider it throughout the design process.

We encourage you to visit the project website for information and to sign up for updates as additional information becomes available.

Project Information, Need, Scope, and Timeline

- ***Commenters think the project is unnecessary, does not meet the needs of the corridor, or suggested that adding lanes would worsen traffic and not solve congestion issues. Further, commenters requested traffic information.***

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 (TFA) in response to the urgency of traffic conditions.

Traditional highway expansion will no longer adequately support increasing highway travel demands. The Georgia State Transportation Board (GSTB) adopted lane management policies to construct new capacity lanes as express lanes in June 2007. For the proposed project, 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).

Regarding requested traffic information, Georgia DOT is utilizing PTV Group's PTV Vissim traffic simulation software to forecast future traffic patterns and utilization of the express lanes in the project corridor. The modeling process is still underway, so detailed utilization forecasts are not yet available. Once the analysis is finalized and results are ready for publication, the findings will be captured in the NEPA document and shared with the public during the PHOH. The PHOH is currently anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Commenters expressed concern that the improvement to traffic congestion will not outweigh the proposed impacts or will not improve traffic at all.***

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 TFA legislation in response to the urgency of traffic conditions.

A traffic analysis for the corridor is in progress and will be incorporated into the NEPA document which will be available for public review at the PHOH, tentatively scheduled for 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Commenters requested information on performance of other express lanes in the state including their effect on volumes and/or travel time in the general purpose lanes noting that the proposed project would not help the majority of travelers.***

Atlanta's congestion growth has outpaced all other major U.S. cities, with a 23% increase in hours lost to traffic in the past two years. In 2025, Atlanta's lost 75 hours to traffic¹, and increases in congestion are expected as the population continues to grow. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) forecasts the 21-county Atlanta region will potentially add 1.8 million people by 2050, bringing the region's total population to 7.9 million².

Traditional highway expansion will no longer adequately support increasing highway travel demands. The Georgia State Transportation Board (GSTB) adopted lane management policies to construct new capacity lanes as express lanes in June 2007. Rather than expanding general purpose lanes that quickly refill with traffic, Georgia Express Lanes use variable pricing to actively manage congestion and provide faster, more reliable trips for motorists, transit providers, and state-registered vanpools. Georgia currently operates four Express Lane systems across metro Atlanta: the I-85 Express Lanes, I-85 Express Lanes Extension, I-75 South Metro Express Lanes, and the Northwest Corridor Express Lanes.

The State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) manage the tolling operations and monitors facility performance of the operational Georgia Express Lanes system. In Fiscal Year 2024, it was reported by SRTA that more than 30.4 million commutes/total trips occurred in Georgia's 67-mile network of Express Lanes.

In FY 2024 (July 2023 – June 2024), drivers used the Express Lanes for 30.4 million trips, saving substantial time compared to the general purpose lanes.

- I-85 Express Lanes: Nearly 12.4 million trips and drivers traveled about 10 miles per hour (mph) faster than general purpose lane drivers during peak periods
- Northwest Corridor Express Lanes: More than 8.4 million trips and divers traveled about 20 mph faster than general purpose lanes drivers during the afternoon peak period

Express Lanes also boost transit reliability. After the Northwest Corridor opened in 2018, transit on-time performance improved from 83% to 96%, and Xpress riders saved an average of 15

¹ INRIX 2025 Global Traffic Scorecard, <https://inrix.com/scorecard/>

² Atlanta Regional Commission Population and Employment Forecast, <https://atlantaregional.org/what-we-do/research-and-innovation/population-employment-forecasts/>

minutes per trip. For more detailed performance of specific express lanes facilities, we encourage you to review the SRTA Annual Reports: <https://srta.ga.gov/annual-reports/>.

- ***Comment questioning if coordination on the development of the proposed project with local government and other stakeholders occurred.***

Coordination has occurred and is ongoing with DeKalb County, City of Tucker, Tucker-Northlake Community Improvement District (CID), Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), and several other entities located within or adjacent to the project corridor.

- ***Commenters expressed concern over the size of the project and questioned the change in scope from one express lane in each direction to two.***

Under the previous plan, Georgia DOT would only build one express lane in each direction for the I-285 Eastside Express Lanes project. The increased scope of the express lanes supports reliable trip times, presents greater opportunities for private sector innovation, and allows the gain of additional lanes for users and transit providers with reduced public funding. In conjunction with the I-285 Top End Express Lanes (PI No. 0001758) and the I-285 Westside Express Lanes (PI No. 0013917), the proposed project results in an entire northern half of I-285 operating with two dedicated, barrier-separated express lanes in each direction creating a consistent, higher-capacity system.

- ***Comment noted that public transit should be able to use express lanes for free. A second comment suggested that two-wheeled vehicles be allowed to use the lanes for free.***

Public transit providers and state-registered vanpools would be able to use the express lanes free of charge. Transit and registered vanpool riders would only need to pay their standard transit rider fee. There is currently no provision for two-wheeled vehicles (e.g. motorcycles) to use the proposed express lanes for free.

- ***Comment questioned if commercial trucks will be allowed to use proposed express lanes.***

Heavy trucks, defined as any vehicle with two or more axles and/or any vehicle with six or more wheels, will not be allowed to use the proposed express lanes.

- ***Comment questioned why the project changed from one high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane to two express lanes.***

Under the previous plan, Georgia DOT proposed to construct one express lane in each direction and not one HOV lane for the I-285 Eastside Express Lanes project. The increased scope to include two express lanes supports reliable trip times, presents greater opportunities for private sector innovation, and allows the gain of additional lanes for users and transit providers with reduced public funding. In conjunction with the I-285 Top End Express Lanes (PI No. 0001758) and the I-285 Westside Express Lanes (PI No. 0013917), the proposed project results in an entire northern half of I-285 operating with two dedicated, barrier-separated express lanes in each direction creating a consistent, higher-capacity system.

- ***Commenters express opposition to elevated express lanes and the construction of overpasses or express lanes over private property.***

When practical, the express lanes will be constructed at-grade or on walls. Bridges would be implemented in areas to minimize ROW needs and impacts to surrounding areas, avoid reconstruction of existing roadways or interchanges, and when crossing other roadways. It is not anticipated that the proposed project would be constructed exclusively on bridge structures. The strategy of implementing adjacent express lanes that incorporate bridges to minimize impacts has already been implemented along with the I-75 Northwest Corridor Express Lanes on the northwest side of Atlanta. A similar approach is anticipated for the proposed I-285 Eastside Express Lanes corridor.

No overpasses or proposed express lanes would be constructed over private property. All proposed improvements would be constructed within existing ROW or within ROW acquired by Georgia DOT prior to construction.

- **Commenters expressed concern with the current proposed timeline and questioned the total construction time. Some commenters requested that the project construction be expedited, requested additional information regarding the proposed timeline, or requested clarification on when the public will be able to review the final plans.**

Procurement for I-285 East Express Lanes Phase I (I-285 westbound from Henderson Road to Northside Drive including I-285 westbound to SR 400 northbound express lanes and I-85 southbound to I-285 westbound express lanes) is underway. The selected Developer would enter into a design, build, finance, operate, and maintain agreement for the I-285 East Express Lanes Phase I project and a Comprehensive Development Agreement (CDA) for the remaining phases, which includes the proposed project. Therefore, the start of construction has not yet been determined. The final project design will be advanced by the successful bidder (Developer) upon award of the contract. Planning and development of remaining phases under the CDA will follow a collaborative process.

- **Commenters noted that reversible express lanes do not alleviate traffic congestion.**

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 (TFA) in response to the urgency of traffic conditions. The proposed project would construct two, barrier separated express lanes along both sides of I-285. The proposed express lanes would not be reversible and would be open in both directions 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

- **Commenters questioned changes to the general purpose lanes and suggested that some of the general purpose lanes be converted to express lanes rather than building new express lanes.**

No general purpose lanes would be removed as part of the proposed project, and no new general purpose lanes would be added. The number of general purpose lanes would remain the same as today.

Federal guidelines allow general purpose lanes to be converted to express lanes only when it can be demonstrated that the conversion improves overall corridor performance. Existing I-285 is already a congested facility and removing general purpose lanes would not meet the corridor performance improvement thresholds required by federal policy.

- **Commenters questioned how to determine where the express lanes are proposed to be elevated.**

The concept designs presented at the PIOH and available on the project's website at <https://i285eastsideexpresslanes-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/pages/conceptdesigns> depict the proposed locations for elevated express lanes. Each PIOH layout sheet shows the elevated express lanes as a green shaded two-lane roadway with orange shaded shoulders. See the following example:



Access Points

- **Several comments were received around access points proposed for the project as well as the addition of new access points. New access points were specifically mentioned at Memorial Drive and Lavista Road.**

The proposed project's express lane access point locations are based on travel demand, stakeholder input, and potential changes in local traffic patterns/volumes. The private-sector partner(s) will evaluate the potential to expand the number of access points for express lanes users and transit operators. Georgia DOT retains approval authority for any access changes.

Henderson Road Express Lane Merge: An express lane interchange is not proposed at Henderson Road. Details at the PIOH showed an express lane merge point proposed for just north of Henderson Road. This merge point would allow drivers in the express lanes to merge into the I-285 general purpose lanes and vice versa. Traffic from either the express lanes or the general purpose lanes would not have direct access to Henderson Road. Access to Henderson Road would remain the same as it is today.

Northlake Parkway Express Lane Interchange: An express lane interchange is proposed at Northlake Parkway, which would require removing the existing north-facing general purpose entrance and exit ramps. There is not enough space to provide both general purpose and express lane access at this location, and combining these access points at the same interchange is typically avoided when the interchange is not a system-to-system connection. Drivers in the general purpose lanes who need to access Northlake Parkway would instead exit at LaVista Road, approximately 0.3 miles away. The Northlake Parkway bridge over I-285 would remain open to drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

East Ponce de Leon Avenue/Church Street Express Lane Merge: An additional express lane interchange is not proposed at Memorial Drive or at other locations between US 78/Stone Mountain Freeway and Redan Road. Details at the PIOH showed an express lane merge point proposed for just south of East Ponce de Leon Avenue/Church Street, to the north of Memorial Drive. This merge point would allow drivers in the express lanes to merge into the I-285 general purpose lanes and vice versa. Traffic from either the express lanes would not have direct access to Memorial Drive. Access between the general purpose lanes and Memorial Drive would remain the same as it is today.

Redan Road Express Lane Interchange: An express lane interchange is proposed at Redan Road. The Redan Road bridge over I-285 would remain open to drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Further, access at Redan Road would allow users of the express lanes to reach the Indian Creek MARTA Station to continue their commute via rail or bus.

- ***Commenters requested that adequate signage be provided for access points.***

Georgia DOT is committed to a thorough design process that includes careful consideration of traffic patterns, signage, and exit design both during and after construction. Georgia DOT will also continue to monitor and evaluate the performance of the existing infrastructure and make necessary adjustments to enhance safety and efficiency.

Project Funding and Delivery Model

- ***Commenters expressed concern about the funding type, total cost of the project, and impact to taxpayers.***

Preliminary project funding comes from the passage of the 2015 TFA by the Georgia General Assembly and from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Additionally, the project would be delivered through a Public-Private Partnership (P3) contracting model, whereby Georgia DOT will solicit bids from private investors, equity partners, and Developers for the project. The successful bidder will then partner with Georgia DOT and secure financing for the design and construction of the project.

Conducting final design and construction with private industry partners expands the options for innovative technology and would likely lessen the amount of public contribution otherwise required by traditional delivery. Taxpayer obligation would be known at the time a Developer is selected.

- ***Commenters expressed concern about Georgia DOT's role in final design.***

The Developer's final design would be subject to Georgia DOT approval and must comply with all state and federal design guidelines, details, specifications, and standards. The Developer's final design must also comply with all applicable state and federal environmental laws, rules, and regulations and approved environmental documentation and permits.

Tolling

- ***Commenters expressed concern with the use of the P3 model and the flexibility the program gives the private sector to set toll rates.***

Georgia DOT and the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) will establish parameters that will govern toll rates, which will be refined through the procurement process. At the conclusion of the Request for Proposal (RFP) portion of the procurement process, the SRTA Board will adopt the final parameters included in the RFP prior to the execution of the contract. Information regarding policies and business rules for Georgia express lanes managed by SRTA is available at <https://srta.ga.gov/georgia-express-lanes>.

The I-285 Eastside Express Lanes is a 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. This model is also likely to reduce the amount of public contribution otherwise required by a traditional delivery method. With the P3 model, the state can leverage the project's future revenue potential to further reduce the public funding necessary for design and construction.

To deliver the proposed project following traditional design, procurement, and construction strategies, Georgia DOT would likely need to divide the project into multiple construction phases wherein construction of the project would be staggered over many years due to the size and funding needs of the proposed project corridor. Also under traditional delivery strategies, Georgia DOT carries most of the risks associated with the multiple project interfaces and coordination between projects and stakeholders.

Using the P3 model, many risks would be shifted to the P3 partner, and the overall delivery of the project is anticipated to be greatly accelerated as a P3 partner would be able to raise funds, deliver the project in larger sections, with fewer construction phases, and likely over a shorter overall construction duration than the state could as a traditional Design-Bid-Build construction project.

- ***Commenters expressed concern over the inclusion of toll lanes in the proposed project and the potential for toll lanes to create inequitable corridors that exclude low-income commuters.***

The proposed project would not eliminate any existing general purpose lanes on I-285, which would remain available to drivers at no cost. Rather, the proposed express lanes would be a travel option whereby users may pay a toll to use the express lanes, or continue to use the existing, free, general purpose lanes. All travelers in the general purpose lanes, including those in low-income areas, would benefit from a decrease in traffic and travel time in the general purpose lanes due to the proposed express lanes project. Public transit providers that may operate in the I-285 corridor and state-registered vanpools would also be able to use the express lanes free of charge. Transit and registered vanpool riders would only need to pay their standard transit rider fee.

Georgia DOT is collaborating with the Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL), MARTA, Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), and four metro Atlanta counties to advance Express Lanes Transit (ELT) to create more regional connectivity and expand transit operations in the metro region. For general information on metro Atlanta transit operations and providers, visit ATLTransit.ga.gov.

Additionally, MARTA has completed a planning study to improve and optimize transit connectivity in the Atlanta region on I-285. The goal of the MARTA I-285 ELT Study is to develop a plan and preliminary designs for sustainable, equitable, and premium transit service along I-285 between the H.E. Holmes MARTA Station and the Indian Creek MARTA Station; identify opportunities to leverage the proposed express lanes to better serve communities and major employment centers; and position MARTA to seek funding for the implementation of future transit solutions. More information on the study can be found here: <https://www.i285expresslanestransit.com>.

MARTA offers reduced fare programs for riders. Visit the MARTA websites at https://itsmarta.com/tsp_home.aspx or <https://itsmarta.com/reduced-fare-program.aspx> for more information on the available programs and eligibility requirements.

Design Considerations and Other Alternatives

- ***Commenters requested aesthetic treatments for bridges in the project corridor and creation of an appealing space beneath the elevated express lanes.***

Aesthetic treatment of bridge structures and landscaping plans are usually implemented under a separate agreement and by permission from Georgia DOT with a local government or other stakeholder. Coordination has occurred and is ongoing with local governments and stakeholders. If an aesthetic and/or landscaping plan and agreement is executed with a local government or stakeholder, it will be incorporated into the project.

- ***Commenters expressed concern over use of existing ponds for drainage/runoff.***

Run off and drainage associated with the proposed project would not be routed to existing ponds. Proposed drainage areas are illustrated on the PIOH concept designs located on the project's website (<https://i285eastsideexpresslanes-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/pages/conceptdesigns>). Blue hatched areas shown over existing ponds denote the pond as an environmentally sensitive area (ESA).

- ***Commenters expressed concern about drainage, stormwater runoff, risks of flooding, pollution, and impacts to nearby water quality.***

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 (<https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/StormWater.aspx>).

- ***Commenters suggested various design changes be considered for the proposed project including in the area of the Lindmoor Woods Subdivision.***

Thank you for your suggestions. These design recommendations have been captured and are part of the project record. Comments regarding design changes are analyzed as part of the proposed project's alternatives analysis, which considers a range of alternatives, or design options, in coordination with FHWA and participating agencies in regard to the environmental and physical constraints in the area, design feasibility and compliance with policy, as well as how they address the mobility needs for the proposed project.

As the proposed project moves through the preliminary design process, the project team will continue to refine the design concept in coordination with state and federal agencies as additional project information and data are collected through coordination with stakeholders, public comment, and technical studies. The preferred alternative will then be presented at a future PHOH, currently anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Commenters asked how local street traffic patterns and circulation would be affected after express lane construction. Commenters asked if planned local developments have been considered.***

A traffic analysis is in progress for the corridor and does account for increased traffic on local streets resulting from the proposed project and from planned development or redevelopment. Needed improvements to local streets associated with the proposed project would be shown at the PHOH, tentatively scheduled for 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Commenters requested that surface street improvements safely accommodate pedestrians.***

Safety is a top priority for Georgia DOT, and Georgia DOT is committed to a thorough design process that includes careful consideration of the project design. Georgia DOT will also continue to monitor and evaluate the performance of the existing infrastructure and make necessary

adjustments to enhance safety and efficiency. Adding new sidewalks and bike lanes are not within the scope of the proposed project, however, Georgia DOT would coordinate with local governments to determine if they wish to provide funding to advance portions of bike and pedestrian facilities on replaced or modified overpasses that currently lack such facilities.

- ***Commenters asked what other alternatives were considered. Commenters requested other alternatives including at-grade alternatives, alternatives in the median, and alternatives in tunnels.***

Georgia DOT developed the project need and purpose by analyzing traffic issues along the project corridor through data analysis and gathering public and stakeholder feedback. Four project alternatives were presented to the public in December 2024 through a series of Community Conversation meetings. These alternatives consisted of:

- a fully elevated express lane alternative to be constructed on the outside of the general purpose lanes;
- a fully at-grade express lane alternative to be constructed on the inside of the general purpose lanes;
- a fully at-grade express lane alternative to be constructed on the outside of the general purpose lanes; and
- a hybrid alternative with elevated and at-grade express lanes locations to be constructed on the outside of the general purpose lanes.

The project alternatives that were presented are available for viewing on the Design Considerations tab within the Community Conversations Virtual Meeting Room on the project's website at <https://0013914-285eastside.scoutfeedback.com/en/DesignConsiderations>.

Impacts During Construction

- ***Commenters are concerned with the potential congestion resulting from construction to traveling public and local residents.***

To minimize disruption to motorists and adjacent neighborhoods during construction, mechanisms would be put in place to maintain traffic flow as much as possible. Construction activities would be scheduled to minimize disruptions to property access. Deliveries of construction materials would be scheduled to minimize disruptions, and temporary lane and road closures would be communicated in advance, with work performed during non-peak hours when possible.

- ***Commenters requested limitations on the times of construction to reduce noise impacts.***

In order to minimize disruption, Georgia DOT will review construction time periods and lane closures during the Request for Proposal (RFP) process that defines the scope of work for the Developer to follow. While Georgia DOT and the private sector partner will work to reduce construction related noise, associated sounds from the work zone are unavoidable on a project of this magnitude.

- ***Commenters expressed concern over impacts to air quality during construction.***

During construction, mitigation practices to reduce construction emissions will be implemented and may include:

- Dust control through water spraying or soil stabilization
- Covering or stabilizing stockpiled materials
- Minimizing idling of construction equipment
- Maintaining equipment to reduce exhaust emissions
- Coordinating staging and material handling to reduce unnecessary travel and emissions

- ***Commenters expressed concern about construction vehicles routing through neighborhoods.***

Construction vehicles will be required to follow all local traffic laws and restrictions including not using streets with posted restrictions around through trucks or weight restrictions. During construction of the proposed project, the Developer will be required to maintain the pavement inside of the project's construction limits.

Safety and Emergency Response in Express Lanes

- ***Commenters noted concerns regarding residential safety with the proposed lanes shifting closer to residential properties.***

Construction of the proposed express lanes would incorporate a combination of concrete barriers and/or sufficient space between the travel lanes and any structures to significantly reduce the likelihood of vehicles or debris leaving the roadway and impacting adjacent properties. Constructed barriers would be compliant with Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware (MASH) standards to prevent vehicles from leaving the express lanes. MASH compliance requires barriers to be tested with vehicles at parallel-angle impacts, ensuring the barriers can redirect vehicles without overturning the barrier. These barriers are designed to withstand impacts from cars, buses, and trucks at higher speeds. Additionally, fencing along the proposed Georgia DOT ROW would also reduce the likelihood of objects leaving the roadway and entering adjacent properties.

- ***Commenters expressed concerns about safety of elevated express lanes.***

When practical, the express lanes will be constructed at-grade or on walls. Bridges would be implemented in areas to minimize ROW and impacts to surrounding areas, avoid reconstruction of existing roadways or interchanges, and when crossing other roadways. It is not anticipated that the project would be constructed exclusively on bridge structures. The strategy of implementing adjacent express lanes that incorporate bridges to minimize impacts has already been implemented on the I-75 Northwest Corridor Express Lanes on the northwest side of Atlanta. A similar approach is anticipated for the proposed I-285 Eastside Express Lanes corridor. Construction and operation of I-75 Northwest Corridor Express Lanes have not resulted in any safety concerns. Georgia DOT bridges are inspected regularly to ensure the safety of the traveling public. Further, barrier walls are compliant with the Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware (MASH) to prevent vehicles from leaving the express lanes, and the express lanes design including barrier wall heights will prevent debris from falling from the express lanes on to at-grade roadways or adjacent property.

- ***Comments questioned how emergency vehicles will access express lanes and reach crashes or incapacitated vehicles.***

The entire express lane system will be live monitored by Georgia DOT's Transportation Management Center. Traffic detectors including cameras for automated emergencies/crash detection will be deployed along the express lanes. Drivers also have options to call 511 or 911 depending on specific situation to notify first responders. Emergency vehicles as well as towing and recovery vehicles will be able to pull through via one side of the express lanes shoulders.

Transit Expansion and Transit Accommodation

- ***Commenters request other modes of public transportation are implemented such as investment in MARTA and light rail.***

Thank you for the feedback regarding public transportation. While expanding public transit remains a key aspect to solving metro Atlanta's complex transportation challenges, transit service expansion alone would not address the identified needs for this proposed project. Georgia DOT is working collaboratively with the region's transit operators and planning agencies through their study of new, high-capacity transit within the proposed I-285 Eastside Express Lanes.

Traditional funding for transit projects comes from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and local funding. Currently, there is not sufficient transit funding for a rail transit-only solution on I-285. To provide more mobility options and reliable travel, the ARC and State Transportation Board adopted express lanes as a strategy to combat congestion in metro Atlanta.

Georgia Express Lanes are also considered transit lanes as they support bus rapid transit. Express Lanes Transit (ELT) improves existing transit operations and performance, provides more reliable transit trip times, and promotes transit-oriented development. ELT supports existing transit services and future transit operations planned for the corridor.

Georgia DOT is collaborating with the Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL), MARTA, Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), and four metro Atlanta counties to advance ELT to create more regional connectivity and expand transit operations in the metro region. For general information on metro Atlanta transit operations and providers, visit [ATLTransit.ga.gov](https://atltransit.ga.gov).

Additionally, MARTA has completed a planning study to improve and optimize transit connectivity in the Atlanta region on I-285. The goal of the MARTA I-285 ELT Study is to develop a plan and preliminary designs for sustainable, equitable, and premium transit service along I-285 between the H.E. Holmes MARTA Station and the Indian Creek MARTA Station; identify opportunities to leverage the proposed express lanes to better serve communities and major employment centers; and position MARTA to seek funding for the implementation of future transit solutions. More information on the study can be found here: <https://www.i285expresslanestransit.com>.

- ***Commenters suggested that the project focus on transit accommodations only.***

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 ATL 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 has completed 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 (MTP) does not identify any programmed transit expansion projects along the I-285 Eastside corridor.

Property Impacts, Property Values, and Displacements

- ***Commenter expressed concern about property impacts and displacements along Northern Avenue.***

Information shared at the PIOH showed displacement of buildings in Northern Pine Apartments and Barrington, both located on the west side of Northern Avenue adjacent to I-285. Additionally, ROW is also shown as being required on several parcels between Barrington and Tuscany

Village Apartments along with small slivers of ROW from Tuscany Village Apartments. No displacements are proposed from Tuscany Village Apartments. Georgia DOT strives to minimize property acquisitions and displacements for transportation projects. The proposed I-285 Eastside Express Lanes project is in preliminary project development/environmental evaluation phase. The preliminary concept layouts published at the PIOH events showed properties that have the potential need for ROW acquisition (slivers, easements, full displacements). As the proposed project continues through development to final design, identified ROW will be refined and minimized as much as possible. Project development activities are following all requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

- ***Commenters expressed concerns around impacts to property values.***

Property values are affected by numerous variables, including location, home condition, mortgage rates, and the economy. The proposed project would add express lanes to an existing highway and not change the function or designated use of the corridor. As part of any large transportation project, Georgia DOT evaluates the impacts to property and mitigates impacts to the extent practicable and allowed by law, such as noise and visual impact mitigation, to minimize the impacts on property.

- ***Commenters asked if properties indirectly affected by the proposed project will receive compensation for loss of home enjoyment or impact to quality of life and expressed concern about disruptions to community cohesion as a result of the proposed project.***

Compensation is based on the physical needs to meet the goals of the project. Georgia DOT strives to design the project 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 ROW and therefore some impacts to adjacent properties are anticipated. Any unavoidable impacts would be mitigated as much as possible.

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.

- ***Commenters had questions about how potential relocations are determined.***

Potential relocations are determined by the project's anticipated impacts to structures on a property or reduction in property access as a result of the proposed Georgia DOT project. Project impacts and potential displacements can change as the design evolves; Georgia DOT will leverage opportunities to mitigate project impacts and avoid displacements as part of the continuing project development.

- ***Concerns were expressed regarding displacements along the corridor such as minimizing potential relocations as much as possible, concerns with relocating during a housing shortage, receiving fair market value, and the potential for eminent domain.***

Property impacts shown at the PIOH are subject to change as the proposed project moves through the development and environmental process. The progress of the design will continue to analyze impacts and Georgia DOT will make every effort to proactively minimize property acquisitions and displacements. The timeline for corridor-wide ROW acquisition has not yet been determined and is dependent on the approval of the environmental document and the future P3 partner's final design.

In the event ROW is needed from a property, a representative from Georgia DOT would contact the property owner to begin the acquisition and negotiation process. For more information on Georgia DOT's ROW process, please visit:

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/AboutGeorgia/Documents/Publications/Program%20Brochures/ROWB-rochure-English.pdf>.

- ***Commenters requested early acquisition of their property.***

Georgia DOT will consider early acquisition in areas that are being considered for redevelopment or other opportunities in areas that the project development has reached a point Georgia DOT is confident that the ROW impacts would not change with further concept development.

- ***Comment questioned ROW needs in area of Midvale Road, specifically near Highlands and Glenrose Subdivisions.***

Information shared at the PIOH showed small amounts of ROW and easement needed from Glenrose Subdivision and small amounts of ROW from Highlands Subdivision. As design progresses, areas of required ROW and easement will be refined and minimized to the extent possible. Currently no ROW or easement is proposed to be acquired from the wooded parcel located at the end of Lauderdale Drive.

Environmental Documentation, Impacts, and Mitigation

- ***Several comments noted the lack of environmental documentation for the proposed project, and one comment noted that the Developer's final design should comply with environmental laws, rules, and regulations.***

The proposed project is currently in the preliminary design and engineering phase, which includes the environmental process. Specific impact information, such as existing and future noise levels, are not yet available. As the project design and details are refined, the preferred alternative and the NEPA document will be available for public review at a future PHOH. The NEPA document will include requested details from the technical studies (Noise Impact Assessment (NIA), Community Impact Assessment (CIA), Ecology Assessment of Effects, and Cultural Resources Assessment of Effects) including impacts and proposed mitigation. The PHOH is currently anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Commenters expressed concern about impacts to surrounding environmental and community resources. Specifically, Montreal Park, South Peachtree Creek, Henderson Middle School, Henderson Elementary School, historic neighborhoods, cemeteries, and wildlife habitat were mentioned.***

Projects using federal funds must adhere to NEPA. Environmental surveys and reports must be completed and summarized in a NEPA document, which is subject to approval by FHWA. These surveys include 1) Social Environment, 2) Cultural Resources such as historic and archaeological resources, 3) Natural Resources such as waters, invasive species, threatened and endangered species, etc., and 4) Physical Environmental such as air and noise. Upon identifying all environmental resources, Georgia DOT attempts to develop a conceptual plan that satisfies the proposed need and purpose, addresses citizen feedback, and minimizes the impact to the environmentally sensitive resources. When impacts cannot be avoided, Georgia DOT evaluates ways to minimize and/or mitigate those impacts in the most responsible manner possible.

Noise

- ***Commenters expressed concerns about an increase in noise levels throughout the corridor, requested sound barriers, asked what the criteria are that Georgia DOT uses to determine where sound barriers are constructed, and requested that Georgia DOT commit to installing sound barriers along the entire project corridor.***

As part of the environmental analyses being completed for the proposed I-285 Eastside Express Lanes project, a NIA is being prepared to evaluate all areas of the proposed project. This traffic noise analysis would determine the potential acoustic impact to noise-sensitive resources (such as residences and public outdoor spaces, etc.) that may occur following the construction of the proposed project and would evaluate where noise abatement (such as noise barriers) may be effective to reduce traffic noise levels while meeting state and federal standards for safety and constructability. This analysis would also evaluate existing noise barriers to confirm their current

effectiveness and would identify any potential replacements that would be necessary due to potential design and construction conflicts.

During the preliminary design phase, the analysis focuses on identifying potentially impacted noise-sensitive resources, along with locations where noise abatement would be warranted. Final location of noise abatement measures would be determined during the final design phase and would be followed by a voting period for which the input of affected landowners and residents would be solicited. Benefited landowners and residents would be invited to participate and vote on whether they would like to have any new noise abatement measures implemented, with a majority vote (50% +1) resulting in the final determination for/against installation. The vote would also include surface treatment options for concrete portions of the proposed barriers. The assessment of noise impacts and abatement measures would comply with Title 23, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 772, and Georgia DOT's Highway Noise Abatement Policy for Federal-Aid Projects.

More information regarding Georgia DOT's noise barrier policy can be found at <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/AirNoise.aspx>. Additional information concerning the FHWA noise regulations is available at https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/regulations_and_guidance/index.cfm.

- ***Commenter requested noise barriers be constructed with ashlar finish and requested noise barrier material be reflective.***

Information on proposed noise abatement including type(s) and potential aesthetic treatments will be available at the PHOH, which is anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Multiple comments questioned if noise abatement would be considered for elevated express lanes and requested information on noise barrier height restrictions.***

As part of the noise analysis, abatement in the form of noise barriers will be analyzed for both the at-grade and elevated sections of the proposed express lanes. The maximum barrier height that can feasibly be maintained is 30 feet for ground-mounted barriers, with a maximum panel height of 18 feet for wall-mounted barriers and 12 feet for barriers proposed along bridges.

Identified abatement measures must be feasible and reasonable to construct as described in Georgia DOT's Highway Noise Abatement Policy for Federal-Aid Projects found at <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/AirNoise.aspx>. Information on proposed noise abatement will be available at the PHOH, which is anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Several commenters referenced information on pending noise barrier construction along I-285 when they purchased their property.***

Noise analysis and abatement is only considered for Type I projects, which are defined in Georgia DOT's Highway Noise Abatement Policy for Federal-Aid Projects found at <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/AirNoise.aspx>. Type II projects are federal or federal-aid highway projects for the construction of standalone noise abatement on existing highways. Georgia DOT does not have a policy of abating noise on existing highways, and therefore does not have a program for Type II projects.

- ***Commenters requested that noise barriers be constructed before the express lanes are constructed.***

As part of the technical provisions for the construction of the proposed project, Georgia DOT may evaluate requirements related to the timing of removing existing noise barriers and constructing new proposed noise barriers to reduce the duration that adjacent communities are without noise protection. Construction phasing will determine when noise barriers would be constructed; however, it is not typical for noise barriers to be constructed prior to roadway work completion. More information on proposed noise abatement will be available at the PHOH, which is anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Commenter requested noise barriers not be relocated closer to residence.***

Proposed noise barrier locations are not yet determined; however, during abatement analysis, noise barriers are sited and sized to optimize their intended benefit of sound level reduction. All noise barriers would be located within existing ROW or ROW purchased by Georgia DOT prior to construction.

- ***Commenters suggested a 7-decibel reduction minimum goal for noise abatement would not be a noticeable difference.***

Sound levels are measured in decibels (dB), which use a logarithmic scale to reflect how the human ear perceives sound. Because this scale is not linear, even small numerical changes can represent meaningful differences in sound energy and human perception. For example, a 3-dB change is just barely noticeable to most people, while a 10-dB change is generally perceived as a doubling or halving of loudness. Given this relationship, a 7-dB reduction is considered a substantial and noticeable improvement in highway noise levels.

- ***Commenters noted engine braking contributes to noise levels along the corridor.***

The enforcement of engine-braking restrictions, including the use of Jake brakes, is not under the authority of Georgia DOT. These regulations and any associated enforcement fall under the jurisdiction of local county and city governments, which are responsible for adopting ordinances, posting regulatory signage, and enforcing noise-related violations.

Air Quality

- ***Commenters expressed concern about increased air pollution as a result of the proposed project.***

The proposed project would not induce demand; rather, it would serve existing demand currently unmet by the interstate system. The unserved demand, which moves through arterials, would then have a better, faster, and more environmentally friendly way to travel.

The Clean Air Act requires the U.S. 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 does not anticipate the proposed project causing or exacerbating any violation of the NAAQS. Criteria pollutants include ozone, carbon monoxide, and fine particulate matter.

While it is possible that some localized areas may show an increase in emissions and ambient levels of these pollutants due to locally increased traffic levels associated with the proposed project, localized emission reductions for some areas may occur due to improved traffic flow and reduced congestion. Regarding pollution created by use of the proposed I-285 Eastside Express Lanes, an Air Quality Impact Assessment, which will include a pollutant emissions analysis, will be prepared for the project as traffic forecasting and design progress.

The NEPA document and associated analyses will be presented at a future PHOH, currently anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

Community Impacts

- ***Commenters expressed concerns about impacts to neighborhoods affecting community character and quality of life. Commenters expressed concerns about neighborhoods being impacted but not benefitting from the express lanes.***

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 ROW 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 (CIA) will be conducted as a part of environmental documentation and will outline the avoidance and minimization measures that are feasible to implement.

Visual Impacts and Tree Loss

- ***Commenters expressed concern over the visual impacts to residents and aesthetic changes to the corridor's landscape.***

The proposed project is being designed with a focus on minimizing adverse effects on the environment, including visual impacts. A visual impact assessment is currently in progress as part of the CIA and will be included in the NEPA document as part of the NEPA process.

The CIA and completed NEPA document will be available at a future PHOH, when the finalized preferred alternative design is presented to the public. The PHOH is currently anticipated in 2027. This timeline is subject to change.

- ***Commenters expressed concern about the removal of existing trees, and one comment expressed concern over tree removal on private property.***

No tree removal would occur on private property, unless that property has been acquired by the Georgia DOT through the ROW acquisition process.

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 ROW maintained (tree trimming and mowing) to limit potential hazards to the traveling public. Impacts shown at the PIOH are subject to change as the proposed project moves through the design development and environmental process. As Georgia DOT continues to develop the proposed project, it is committed to minimizing negative effects and maximizing benefits.

Community Engagement/Public Input

- ***Commenters expressed concerns that they have not been given the opportunity to approve the proposed project with some requesting that the public be provided the opportunity to vote on the proposed project through a local election.***

Georgia DOT is governed by a 14-member State Transportation Board (GSTB) which exercises general control and supervision of Georgia DOT. The GSTB is entrusted with powers which include but are not limited to naming the Commissioner; designating which public roads are encompassed within the state highway system; approving long-range transportation plans; overseeing the administration of construction contracts; and authorizing lease agreements. Board members are elected by a majority of a General Assembly caucus from each of Georgia's 14 congressional districts. Each GSTB member serves a five-year term.

In December 2009, the GSTB adopted the Managed Lane System Plan (MLSP). The proposed express lanes projects on I-285 are included on the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): <https://atlantaregional.org/what-we-do/transportation-planning/transportation-improvement-program/>.

Georgia DOT has conducted public involvement throughout the preliminary development phase of the proposed project including the ability to review information on the project website and ask questions and provide input via a dedicated project email and hotline.

A community survey was launched and a Community Conversations series hosted in December 2024. In-person events for the Community Conversations series were hosted at three locations along the project corridor on December 4, 9, and 10, 2024. The Community Conversations series provided the opportunity for the project team to reintroduce the project

to the public, announce the updated delivery model, and present the expanded scope of the project since public involvement efforts in 2019.

Project development/public involvement activities are adhering to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The next instance for public engagement would be at the Public Hearing Open House (PHOH). It is anticipated that the Preferred Alternative (preliminary concept design refinement) and NEPA document will be finalized in 2027, and made available for formal public review and comment at the PHOH.

Public participation is a critical part of the project development process. Georgia DOT encourages the public (residents, business owners, commuters) to participate in the PHOH and to submit official comment on the proposed project. All comments collected from the future PHOH, and during the recent PIOH comment period held in 2025, will be made part of the proposed project's official record.

Public outreach details will be published in the NEPA document and will be available on the project's website.

- ***Commenters expressed that their questions were not fully answered by representatives at the in-person meeting and requested additional information.***

This proposed project is in the preliminary development phase. The intent of a PIOH in these early project stages is to solicit early input into the transportation planning process, including input on potential alignments, environmental concerns, and general public feedback regarding the proposed project to help guide the development of a preferred concept. Final design, project schedule, cost, ROW, and other information are not yet available.

Georgia DOT encourages the public to visit the project website for the most recent project updates and future public involvement advertisements: <https://i285eastsideexpresslanes-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>.

Further questions or comments can also be provided through the project hotline at 678-247-3685 or by emailing EastsideExpressLanes@dot.ga.gov.

- ***Commenters requested project notifications by radio, social media, mailing information, and in ways to reach those who are not online and who live farther from the corridor.***

Thank you for your suggestions for additional outreach. Georgia DOT has conducted extensive public outreach throughout the project including but not limited to newsletters, surveys, flyers, and meetings with local officials at different stages of the proposed project to coordinate on specific areas of interest or concern. In addition, social media and mailed postcards were used to advertise the October and November 2025 PIOH meetings.

Georgia DOT encourages the public to subscribe to text or email notifications on the website (<https://i285eastsideexpresslanes-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>) to stay informed of future public involvement and project updates.

- ***Commenters expressed the need to provide PIOH information in multiple languages.***

Materials at the PIOH meetings were available in Arabic, Amharic, Burmese, Dari, French, Pashtu, Spanish, and Swahili, and translators were available at the meetings. Information about the meeting was also provided to community stakeholders in advance of the PIOH meetings to distribute to the community. Additionally, the project website offers a "Translate" feature on the left margin of the page.

- ***Commenters indicated that the website was difficult to navigate and did not contain useful information.***

The Virtual Meeting Room (VMR) is designed to provide the same information as the meetings held in person. All materials linked in the VMR will remain on the project's website for future use. Further questions or comments about the materials or the project can be provided through the project hotline at 678-247-3685 or by emailing EastsideExpressLanes@dot.ga.gov.

- **Commenters asked how to find the video of the meeting and expressed appreciation for the online visualization video.**

There was no formal presentation at the PIOH meetings, and no video recording was made of the meetings. Multiple meetings dates and locations were offered to allow several options to those wishing to attend. The same information and displays were shared at each meeting. All of the meeting information is available on the project's website (<https://i285eastsideexpresslanes-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>). The project website does include a video depicting an artist rendering and animation of the proposed project, available by scrolling to the Project Visualization portion of the site.

Other Improvements

- **Commenters suggested improvements outside the scope of this project, including a truck bypass (outer perimeter).**

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 ARC using the contact information provided below:

Atlanta Regional Commission
Victor Engel, Planning Administrator
vengal@atlantaregional.org.

- **Commenters requested improvements to the U.S 78/Stone Mountain Freeway general purpose interchange with I-285.**

ARC's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and TIP are financially constrained and included only funded or regionally prioritized projects. At this time, improvements to the U.S. 78/Stone Mountain Freeway interchange with I-285 are not included in the RTP or TIP. The current TIP is available online at <https://atlantaregional.org/what-we-do/transportation-planning/transportation-improvement-program/>.

- **Commenters requested repairs to existing infrastructure in the area, including culverts and walls.**

To report a specific issue, please visit Georgia DOT's customer service portal at <https://gadot.service-now.com/gsp> Regarding pavement conditions within the proposed project's limits, while a general rehabilitation of the existing general purpose lanes is not a part of I-285 Express Lanes project, certain portions of the existing lanes will be improved as part of the project. In addition, during construction of the express lanes, the Developer will be required to maintain the pavement inside of the project's construction limits.

Again, thank you for your feedback. Should you have further questions or comments, please call the P3 Pre-Let Program Manager, Xavier James, at 404-631-1583 or the Environmental Analyst, Mary Seagrave Eureka, at 404-631-1593.

Sincerely,



Amber Phillips
State Environmental Administrator

AP/WD/jb

cc: Joseph Stein, Georgia DOT Board Member (District 7)
Mary Margaret Oliver, State Representative (District 84)
Karla Drenner, State Representative (District 85)

Imani Barnes, State Representative (District 86)
Viola Davis, State Representative (District 87)
Emanuel Jones, State Senator (District 10)
Kim Jackson, State Senator (District 41)
Randal Mangham, State Senator (District 55)
Sally Harrell, State Senator (District 40)
Xavier James, Georgia DOT P3 Pre-Let Program Manager (via email)
Chandria Brown, P3 Pre-Let Assistant Administrator
Tim Matthews, Assistant P3 Director and Pre-Let Program Administrator
Hiral Patel, P3 Division Director
PDF for Project File