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May 20, 2024

Thank you for attending the Public Information Open House for the proposed SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing improvement, PI Number 0017183. We are currently in the concept phase of this project and are here to gather information from the public as well as to share information that we have gathered.

In this handout, you will find a description of the transportation issue we are attempting to solve, a review of activities completed to date, the process to identify a proposed solution, a location map, and a comment card for you to provide additional feedback for the project team.

Your comments are important to us. You may provide your comments today by filling out the comment card provided with this handout and dropping it in the comment box. If you wish to provide your verbal comments, a court reporter is located onsite who will transcribe your comments and provide those to the project team.

If you prefer to leave comments after the meeting, you can also provide comments by **Wednesday, June 5, 2024** using any of the following methods:

- Online at <https://0017183-savannahrivercrossingproject-gdot.hub.arcgis.com>/Mail in your comment card to Mr. Eric Duff, Georgia Department of Transportation, 600 West Peachtree Street NW, 16th Floor, Atlanta, Georgia 30308.

The project displays seen here at the meeting will be available for review after this open house at the website noted above. Hardcopies will also be available at the GDOT District 5 field office located at 630 West Boundary Street Savannah, GA 31401. All comments will become part of the project's official record and will be responded to by Friday July 5, 2024.

Again, thank you for attending this open house. If you should have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact the project hotline at 404-123-4567.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric Duff" followed by the letters "ESR" in a smaller, printed font.

Eric Duff
State Environmental Administrator
Georgia Department of Transportation

Why are we here and what is the issue we are seeking to address within your community?

The Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) is here to discuss long-term solutions that would allow larger ships to enter the Port of Savannah by:

- providing an overview of the planning phase of the proposed project (including a Feasibility Report);
- providing an opportunity for the public to be involved in the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts;
- enhancing public awareness and transparency in the project development process;
- and discerning the types of public involvement early in project development that are best suited to the communities in the project area to promote meaningful engagement

Although structurally sound, the existing SR 404 Spur/US 17 bridge's height over the Savannah River limits the size of the ships that can pass underneath to access the Port of Savannah's terminals, located upriver from the bridge.

As the fastest growing port in the nation, the Port of Savannah is a significant economic engine for the Savannah region, the state of Georgia, and the nation. Potentially stifling future growth, however, is the Port's accessibility to larger ships. These larger ships, which are becoming increasingly common on the world's oceans, are limited by the existing 185-foot clearance of SR 404 Spur/US 17 bridge. The proposed project seeks to address this limitation. The project team is evaluating alternatives so that the project can proceed into conceptual engineering design and preliminary environmental studies.

Georgia DOT is here for meaningful public involvement. The US Department of Transportation defines meaningful public involvement as a process that proactively seeks full representation from the community, considers public comments and feedback, and incorporates that feedback into a project, program, or plan when possible. The impact of community contributions encourages early and continuous public involvement and brings diverse viewpoints and values into the transportation decision-making process. This process enables the community and agencies to make better-informed decisions through collaborative efforts and improves the decision-making process.

Features of meaningful public involvement



Current conditions of the SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing:

The existing bridge provides 185 feet of clearance over the Savannah River (see Figure 1). The bridge clearance is the distance from the mean high-water elevation to the underside of the bridge. Mean high water is the average of all daily tidal high-water elevations observed over 19 years. The bridge's current clearance poses two challenges:

1. **Accessibility.** The existing bridge does not provide enough clearance for a generation of ever larger ships (up to 23,000 twenty-foot equivalent units, or TEUs). These ships are increasingly common on the world's oceans given their economy-of-scale benefits of fuel efficiency and lower overall operating costs. TEUs describe the capacity of container ships.
2. **Operational efficiency.** The bridge's clearance is sufficient, despite operational limitations, for ships with capacities of 14,000 to 17,000 TEUs, which currently call on the Port of Savannah. The passage of such ships beneath the bridge to access the Port of Savannah depends on a delicate balance between the bridge's clearance, ship loads, and tidal fluctuations. A larger bridge clearance would create larger windows of time for these ships to arrive and depart, allowing more flexibility in operations.

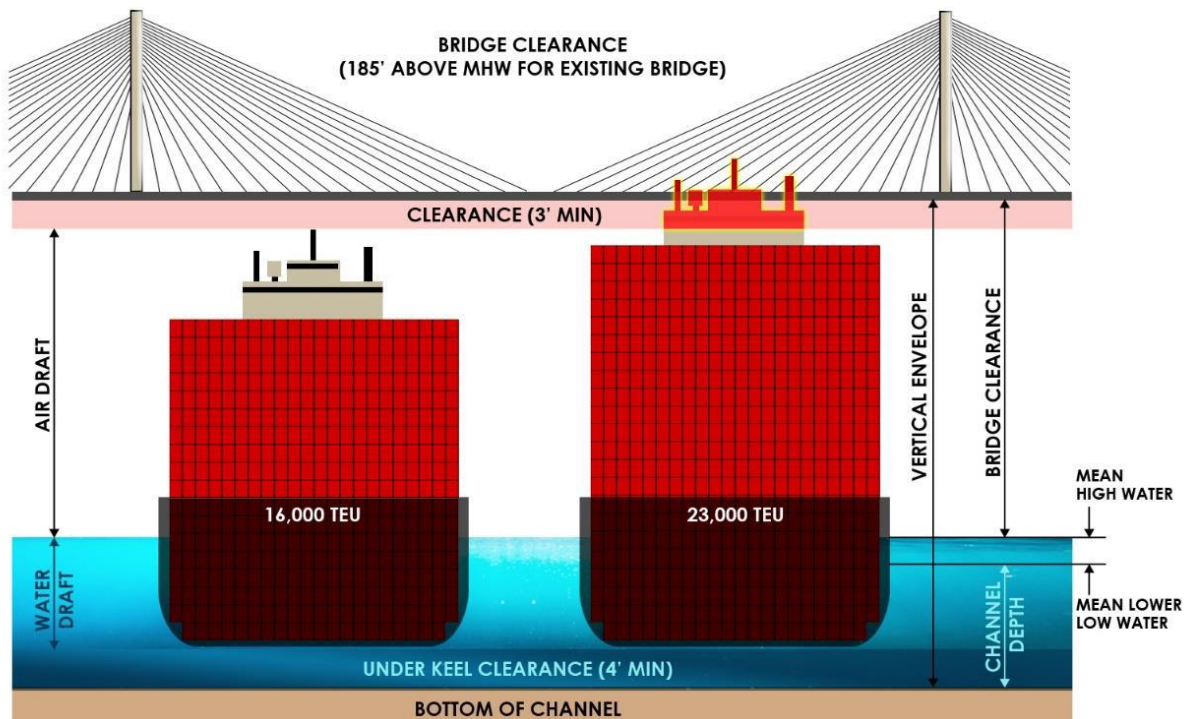


Figure 1. Maximum Clearance for Existing Talmadge Memorial Bridge

Without this Project (No-Build):

- The existing bridge clearance would continue to limit efficient, reliable passage of ships that can currently pass under the bridge to the Port of Savannah (ships between 14,000 to 17,000 twenty-foot equivalent units, or TEUs).
- Larger, more commercially viable ships (up to 23,000 TEUs) seeking access to the Port of Savannah would not be able to access the Port. This could make the Port of Savannah less competitive compared to other ports that can accommodate larger ships, potentially resulting in adverse economic effects on the Savannah area and surrounding region.

Proposed Solutions (also see Project Location Map attached):

As part of Georgia DOT's 2022 Savannah River Crossing Feasibility Study, 27 potential alternatives in six categories were identified to address the clearance limitations of the existing SR 404 Spur/US 17 bridge. The six categories are:

1. Tunnel
2. New Bridge – Same Location
3. New Bridge – Truman Parkway Extension
4. Remove Bridge and Re-Route US 17 Traffic
5. Modify Existing Bridge
6. Downriver Port Facilities

The Study Team developed a three-tiered screening approach to identify feasible alternatives that best meet the needs of Savannah, the state, and region (see Figure 2).

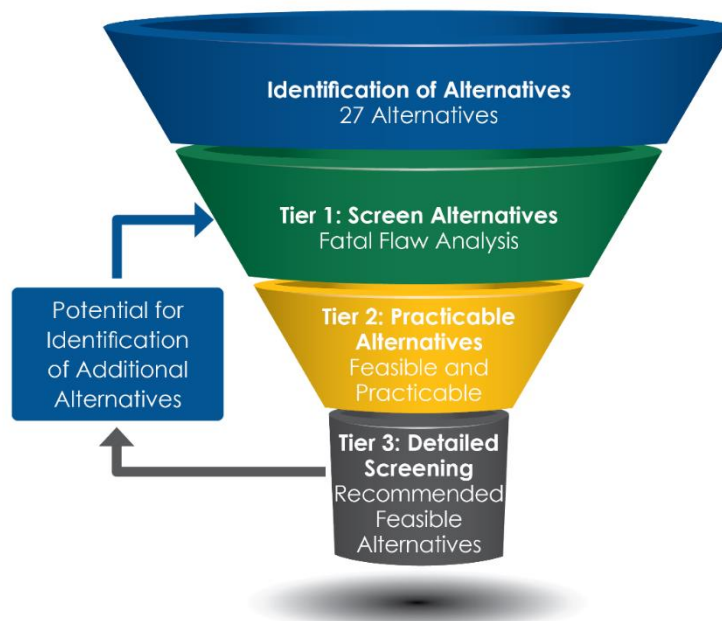


Figure 2. Alternatives Evaluation Approach

As a result, the 2022 Feasibility Study identified two feasible alternatives:

- a tunnel
- a new bridge at the same location

Benefits of Project Implementation:

- A permanent solution to the current clearance limitations for ships trying to access the Port.
- Ensures safe and efficient access to the Port of Savannah under existing and future growth demands.
- Improve the economic viability of the Port without compromising regional connectivity.

How Can You Assist: The Georgia DOT would like your feedback on the proposed project and solutions, the project activities to date, the needs and conditions in the corridor, and on public engagement practices that would best suit your community as the proposed project advances in the concept phase.

Where is this project in the process? This project is currently in the concept phase. The concept phase defines the existing issue seeking to be resolved along with a proposed solution that will meet the community's needs.

What are the Next Steps? After the public meeting is held, feedback will be assessed, and revisions may occur to the proposed alternatives initially brought to the public. An additional Public Information Open House is planned for Quarter 4 2024, and stakeholder and community outreach is ongoing.

Because the project anticipates federal funding and approvals, it will be evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as a next step. A lead federal agency, anticipated to be the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), will oversee the NEPA process. In addition to the lead agency, the project team will engage with other potential regulatory agencies to ascertain concerns and formulate measures to address these concerns early in project development. CEQ regulations ([40 CFR §§ 1500-1508](#)) address the basic decision-making framework and action forcing provisions established in NEPA. The principles or essential elements of NEPA decision-making include:

- Assessment of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of a proposed action or project
- Analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, based on the applicants defined purpose and need for the project
- Consideration of appropriate impact mitigation: avoidance, minimization and compensation
- Interagency participation: coordination and consultation
- Public involvement including opportunities to participate and comment
- Documentation and disclosure.

Environmental team members will work concurrently and collaboratively with design team members as the project moves through the concept phase. At the completion of the concept phase, a Concept Report will be completed, and a preferred alternative will be identified for preliminary design.

SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing

FACT SHEET

Updated February 2024

Port of Savannah

The Port of Savannah is the fastest growing port in the nation and a significant economic engine for the Savannah region, Georgia, and the rest of the Southeast. Georgia's deepwater ports support more than 500,000 jobs and \$122 billion in annual revenue to the state's economy.¹

The Issue

The SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge carries US 17 across the Savannah River, and it also serves as a gateway for ships calling on the Port of Savannah's terminals, located upriver from the bridge. With a vertical clearance of 185 feet, the bridge effectively limits passage from an ever-larger generation of ships seeking to navigate beneath the bridge to access the Port.

Project Purpose

The Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT), in partnership with the Georgia Ports Authority, is examining future, long-term improvement alternatives to replace the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge.

Next Steps

Georgia DOT will assess the impacts (e.g., environmental) of the long-term alternatives and provide an opportunity for public input. There is no timeline or funding currently identified for a preferred alternative.

Short-Term Solution

Concurrently, Georgia DOT is moving forward with a maintenance project to replace the existing cables, bridge bearings, and joints and explore raising the bridge profile for additional clearance. Visit: <https://us17sr404-0019219-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>



As of May 2021, the largest container ship to call on the Port of Savannah was the CMA CGM Marco Polo (shown above). Ever-larger ships are becoming increasingly common on the world's oceans. Photo by Stephen Morton/Georgia Ports Authority

¹ <https://www.terry.uga.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/GA-Ports-2019-final.pdf>

MORE INFORMATION

Web Page: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/savannahriverxing>
Email: savannahriverxing@dot.ga.gov

SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Updated February 2024

About the Project

What is the purpose of the project?

The SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing Project (PI No. 0017183) is evaluating future, long-term improvement alternatives for the existing SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge over the Savannah River. Although structurally sound, the bridge's clearance limits an ever-larger generation of ships from navigating beneath the bridge to access the Port of Savannah's terminals, located upriver from the bridge. The Port is a significant economic engine for the Savannah region, Georgia, and the rest of the Southeast. Potentially stifling future growth, however, is the Port's accessibility to larger ships. Therefore, this project is mainly driven by an economic need to address the bridge's clearance limitations while being mindful of the need to maintain safe, efficient vehicular access between Savannah, Hutchinson Island, and South Carolina (via the Back River Bridge).

What are the bridge clearance limitations?

The existing bridge provides 185 feet of clearance over the Savannah River. The bridge clearance is the distance from the mean high-water elevation to the underside of the bridge. Mean high water is the average of all daily tidal high-water elevations observed over 19 years. This clearance limits efficient, reliable passage to larger ships seeking access to the Port of Savannah. As of May 2021, the largest ship to call on the Port and travel beneath the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge was the CMA CGM Marco Polo at ~16,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs). TEUs describe the capacity of container ships. Meanwhile, ever-larger ships (up to and beyond 23,000 TEUs) are becoming increasingly common on the world's oceans given their economy-of-scale benefits of fuel efficiency and lower overall operating costs.

Who is managing the project?

The Georgia Department of Transportation is leading the work, in partnership with the Georgia Ports Authority.

How did the project come about?

The project follows the results of the Savannah River Crossing Feasibility Study, which examined more than two dozen improvement alternatives to the existing bridge. Out of those, the study put forward feasible alternatives that best meet the needs of Savannah, the region, and state. All alternatives underwent a three-tiered screening process, with the study either advancing or eliminating alternatives depending on their ability to meet certain criteria. These criteria evaluated each alternative based on engineering feasibility and practicality, impacts to the surrounding area (e.g., environmental, cultural), and cost of construction, among others. It should be noted that the feasible alternatives represent long-term solutions to the existing bridge's limitations.

What happens next?

In mid-2022, the study shifted to a conceptual project phase. From here, the feasible alternatives will be evaluated under a more intense microscope, with further assessments of impacts (e.g., environmental) as well as the opportunity for public review and feedback.

Does the presentation of feasible alternatives mean they will be implemented?

The presentation of feasible alternatives marks a significant milestone, but it is not the final step in this comprehensive process. There is no timeline or funding currently identified for a preferred alternative.

How can people learn more about the project?

The web page, available at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/savannahriverxing>, is the primary source for up-to-date information about the project. Public engagement will commence in the future.

MORE INFORMATION

Web Page: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/savannahriverxing>
Email: savannahriverxing@dot.ga.gov

SR 404 Spur/US 17 at Savannah River Crossing

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

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How does the project relate to the Savannah Harbor Deepening Project (SHEP)?

The Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Ports Authority, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers marked the completion of the deepening in March 2022. The project deepened the Savannah Harbor to reduce tidal restrictions and provide more efficient passage for larger ships navigating the Savannah River. Even with the harbor deepening, the clearance limitations of the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge still pose challenges to larger ships. More information about SHEP can be found at www.sas.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Savannah-Harbor-Expansion/What-is-SHEP.

What other efforts are underway to address the clearance limitations?

Concurrently, Georgia DOT has launched the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge Major Maintenance Project (PI No. 0019219) to replace the existing cables, bridge bearings, and joints and explore raising the bridge profile to obtain additional vertical clearance. Although a short-term solution, these efforts will allow for more robust bridge inspections and extend the remaining service life of the bridge. Construction is expected to start in early 2025, although that schedule is subject to change. The bridge will remain open to traffic during construction; however, lane closures in both directions are anticipated. To learn more about the maintenance project, visit <https://us17sr404-0019219-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>

About the Bridge

Where is the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge?

Located in Chatham County, Georgia, the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge spans the Savannah River. The bridge carries US 17 from Savannah to Hutchinson Island. US 17 then enters South Carolina via the Back River Bridge.

Is there a traffic problem on the bridge?

No. Traffic volumes on the four-lane roadway of the SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge totaled 19,200 vehicles per day in 2020, with no congestion on an average day, meaning there was adequate capacity for the volume of traffic using it. Traffic volumes totaled 20,300 vehicles per day in 2019.

Is there a structural problem with the bridge?

No. The existing SR 404 Spur/US 17 Bridge was built in 1991. The most recent bridge inspection report noted the bridge is in Satisfactory Condition.

How does Savannah's bridge clearance compare to other major East Coast ports?

The Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge in Charleston, South Carolina, has a clearance of 186 feet. The Port of Virginia in Norfolk, Virginia, has no clearance limitation because of a tunnel that carries vehicles under the river channel. The Bayonne Bridge in New York/New Jersey has a clearance of 215 feet; it was raised to this level in recent years due to a clearance limitation that hindered larger ships from calling on the Port of New York/New Jersey.

About the Port of Savannah

What is the significance of the Port of Savannah?

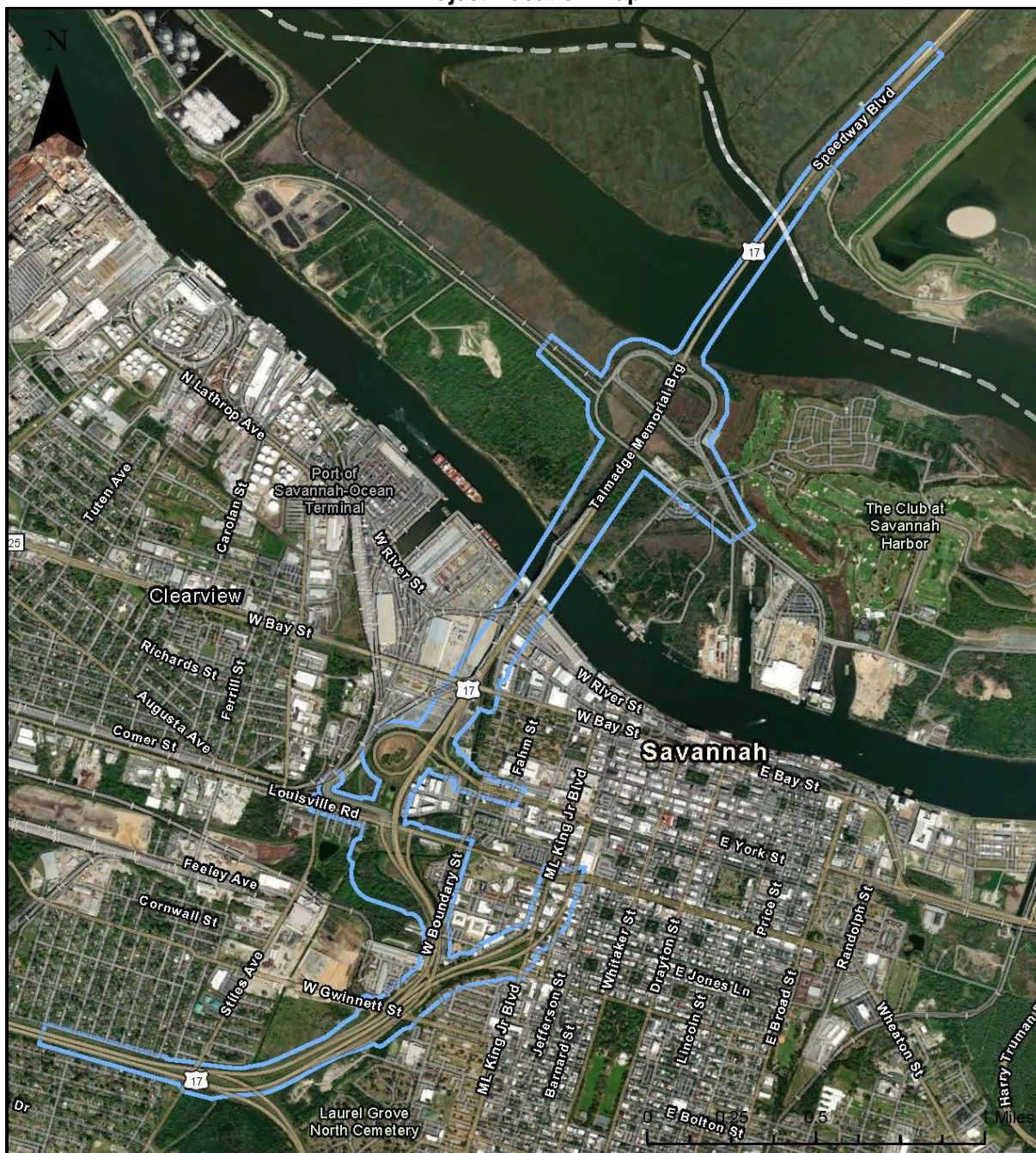
The Port of Savannah is a critical conduit through which raw materials and finished goods flow to and from destinations around the world. According to the Georgia Ports Authority, the Port of Savannah handled a total of 4.9 million TEUs in calendar year 2023, and it anticipates investing \$4.2 billion in the next 10 years as part of its master plan to expand cargo handling capabilities to support future supply chain requirements. Georgia's deepwater ports support more than 500,000 jobs and \$122 billion in annual revenue to the state's economy, according to a University of Georgia economic impact study.¹

¹ <https://www.terry.uga.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/GA-Ports-2019-final.pdf>

MORE INFORMATION

Web Page: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/savannahriverxing>
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Project Location Map



Legend

 Environmental Survey Boundary

Savannah River Crossing Environmental Survey Boundary

Georgia Department of Transportation
Chatham County
PI No. 0017183

Comment Card

Please print responses.

Name _____

Address _____

Do you support the project? (check your response)

☐ **For** ☐ **Against** ☐ **Conditional (I would support this project if... describe below)**

☐ **Uncommitted (if uncommitted, please tell us why)**

Comments: _____

How would you like to be engaged in the process moving forward? (select all that apply)

☐ **Website/Social Media** ☐ **Digital/Printed Newsletter** ☐ **Mobile (text/call)** ☐ **Stakeholder Meeting**

☐ **Other (describe below)**

Comments: _____

Help GDOT Improve Future Meetings:

Advertising: How Did you hear about the meeting: ☐ Newspaper ☐ Signs ☐ GDOT Website ☐ Radio

☐ Word of mouth ☐ Social Media ☐ Post card ☐ Other _____

Attendance: Did you attend in person? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Questions:	Answer	If answer is no please provide a suggestion/comment
Was the location convenient?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Was the time convenient?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Were your questions answered?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Do you understand the project?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Were Materials (in person or virtual) understandable	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Please share your suggestions on improving the ways GDOT conducts or advertises Open Houses:

Mail to:

*Mr. Eric Duff, State Environmental Administrator
Georgia Department of Transportation
600 West Peachtree Street, NW – 16th Floor
Atlanta, Georgia 30308*