



**Russell R. McMurry, P.E., Commissioner**  
One Georgia Center  
600 West Peachtree NW  
Atlanta, GA 30308  
(404) 631-1990 Main Office

August 9, 2019

«AddressBlock»

Re: Responses to Open House Comments for P.I. Nos. 0012757 & 0012758, Chatham County – Interstate 16 (I-16) Widening from Interstate 95 (I-95) to Interstate 516 (I-516) and the I-16 at I-95 Interchange Reconstruction

«GreetingLine»

Thank you for your comments concerning the projects referenced above. We appreciate your participation and all the input that was received as a result of the June 6, 2019 Public Information Open House (PIOH). All comments received during either open house session or during the subsequent comment period have been made part of the projects' official record.

A total of 119 people attended the two sessions for the open house, and a total of 26 comments were received and recorded. From these received comments a variety of questions and concerns regarding the projects were provided, as described below. The Georgia Department of Transportation (Department) has prepared this one response letter that addresses all these questions and concerns raised so that everyone can be aware of the nature of the comments received and the responses provided. Please find the comments summarized below (in *italics*) followed by the Department's response. Where applicable, comments concerning the same topic have been organized together so one reply can be applied.

- *Three comments were received regarding the project schedule.*

*...Plan is wonderful, transparent, easy to understand. Most impressive is the 95/16 interchange. I wish it didn't take as long, but it is what it is. ...that 95/16 exit is dangerous. I'm surprised they haven't had any deaths on it.*

*...I'm very excited about the 95/16 interchange improvements. The current exit from 95 south to go to 16 towards Savannah is really dangerous and we need this badly.*

*Clarity was requested on the interchange construction schedule.*

Response: In an effort to expedite the implementation of these projects, the Department has utilized a Design-Build contracting mechanism which allows innovative delivery techniques to start construction activities sooner than the more traditional Department letting process. Although the overall construction schedule and phasing is currently being finalized, the contract was executed in October of 2018, final project design is on-going, construction activities are anticipated toward the end of the year, and the two projects are scheduled to be completed by Summer of 2022.

- *Two comments were noted about increasing existing traffic delays (due to construction activities) to an already congested area.*

Response: Some traffic delays should be expected during the construction of any major project due to construction staging and lower speeds needed to maintain a safe environment for both the traveling public and workers within the construction work zone. The Department has specified some measures to help alleviate these impacts, such as restrictions on allowable closure times and durations. Most of the

implemented lane closures will occur at night or over weekends to reduce impact to the weekday peak periods. Once construction activities begin you may subscribe to weekly traffic impact alerts by e-mailing [1695Improvements@dot.ga.gov](mailto:1695Improvements@dot.ga.gov).

- *Three comments were received concerning access to roadways/areas adjacent to I-16. Those comments noted:*

*...Bunger Pit Road and a portion of Chatham Center Drive need to be restored to the length of I-16;*

*...Due to frequent trains stopping and blocking Telfair Road, the concrete barricade that's blocking Bunger Pit Road/ I-16 Frontage Road must be removed. The barricade is located on public right of way and not private property; Access to commercial/ industrial worksites are restricted via ingress/ egress routes which cause a persistent and unpredictable safety hazard; Prioritizing the previously explained concerns will go a long way with I-16/ Frontage Road landowners who will support the greater I-16/95 Interchange Project;*

*...The problem that I would like to address at this point is access to 1600 Telfair Road. The best access to my property is through the Chatham Parkway/I-16 interchange. The concrete barriers are located adjacent to the bridge from the center of I-16. There is no advanced warning devices when approaching from the Chatham Center side and minimum devices when approaching from the Telfair Road side of the barricades. This is a hazardous condition that if someone runs into the barricades, it could be detrimental to the person that struck the barricades. It's also detrimental for all the businesses that are located on either side of the concrete barrier wall because it limits access by the first responders. I would like to express my concerns regarding safety for all persons working on Telfair Road and Telfair Place. Two of our major access roads have been closed. Therefore, we are stuck behind two railroad tracks. There are several times during the day that the trains are completely stopped and no traffic can come through. We had three of our employees stuck for 30 minutes today. The main issue is in case of an emergency, no emergency vehicles can get through in this situation. Bunger Pit and Telfair Rd. need to be opened immediately.*

Response: The requested activities are outside the purview of the I-16 widening project which is to add two general purpose lanes (one in each direction) from I-95 to I-516. Since the widening of I-16 will occur almost entirely within the existing ROW, no modifications to the side roads mentioned are required as part of this project. The I-16 widening would continue to span Bunger Pit Road with the construction of new I-16 bridges and all existing access points will remain unaffected.

- *Fourteen comments noted concerns about noise levels and noise abatement measures. The following comments include the concerns/issues expressed by the public:*

*...More sound barriers are needed, or the proposed sound barrier locations need to be extended (further south and east) or a new noise/sound study is needed. Several of these comments noted that the noise is intensified due to larger trucks gearing down and use of "Jake Brakes" (engine break uses for truck diesel engines).*

*...Noise readings were not taken when traffic was at its highest or during a hurricane evacuation.*

*...Request to have a sound study on the 26-acre lake that's used for recreational purposes.*

*...When I addressed the sound wall to the design team, they checked the previous documents and they found that Chatham Center Lake warrants a sound wall.*

*...The project as presented was well received by myself and husband. Safety issues were well addressed. The issue is my neighborhood will not be getting the sound barrier we were promised.*

*...I spoke with several of the Department's people today & received differing information concerning the Sound Abatement. The location of the noise abatement was on the boards, but some said it was not approved as yet & permits were needed. I heard that the sound level was tested during a hurricane evacuation. If there is any question about the need for sound abatement, please redo the sound testing!*

*...I read the FHWA Act of 1970 applies to construction noise & requires traffic impact noise. It states that the highway agency must incorporate all feasible & reasonable noise abatement into the project design. It also states that it must promote general welfare & foster a healthy environment. I would be happy to invite you to my home to hear the noise, which will increase with construction & an additional lane. I would like to have the noise barrier in place before construction begins or simultaneously. I also saw on the Department's I-16/I-95 Project handout a note that states that "property owners & renters who would benefit from a proposed noise barrier will be given the opportunity to participate in noise barrier voting & votes will be calculated & posted on this page once finalized." My vote & the vote of all residents in Southbridge is yes for a sound barrier.*

Response: The project team is currently reevaluating the 2017 noise study based on the I-16 at I-95 Interchange concept modifications presented at the PIOH. The reevaluation is based on the Georgia Department of Transportation's Highway Noise Abatement Policy for Federal-Aid Projects (2/26/2018) which determines the feasibility and reasonability for constructing noise abatement such as noise walls. Factors that go into this evaluation include the amount of noise reduction, constructability, safety, and cost. Thus, some residences may be impacted by noise but not qualify for noise abatement under the policy mentioned above.

Comments were received which noted concerns for the timing of noise readings (including during Hurricane Evacuation) and the use of "Jake Brakes" within the project corridor. Every effort has been made on this project to accurately represent both the existing and future noise environment along the project corridor utilizing the Hourly A-Weighted Sound Level (A-Weighted is the most common weighting used for noise measurements to evaluate what the average person would hear). Noise levels measured during the field monitoring are not used for the determination of traffic noise impacts. Noise impacts are analyzed utilizing the FHWA Traffic Noise Model (TNM). To determine noise impacts, a TNM was developed to predict future noise levels during the loudest free-flow traffic hour projected out to the year 2041. The results of the year 2041 TNM are validated by a year 2016 TNM which was developed using existing roadway geometry and traffic counts taken during the sample field noise readings along the corridor.

By verifying that the difference between the 2016 TNM and sample field noise readings are 3.0 dB(A) or less, with no rounding, the change in noise levels between 2041 and 2016 conditions is ensured to be due solely to project-related changes and does not erroneously reflect discrepancies due to modeling and monitoring techniques.

Regarding the sound study at Chatham Center Lake, the previous noise study evaluated the lake as a noise receptor, but a sound barrier was not warranted at this location. The findings in the current Noise reevaluation have not changed from the findings in the previous study.

A specific Noise Stakeholder Meeting will be conducted prior to the noise reevaluation finalization with an anticipated date of the meeting being in the Fall 2019. The purpose of this meeting will be to disclose the final design of the proposed noise walls and to provide the property owners and residents a chance to vote for whether the proposed noise wall will be constructed or not.

- *Today's meeting was disappointing because there was no one with an overall understanding of the entire project, only the widening project and the ramp at I-95. I think you owe us a far better effort than that.*

Response: We regret for anyone to leave the project's PIOH with unanswered questions. While we cannot speak directly to what these unanswered questions may have been, the intent of this PIOH was to specifically discuss the characteristics of I-16 widening and the modifications to the I-16 and I-95 interchange. Multiple members of the project team were available to discuss both projects. For additional project information or updates we encourage everyone to visit the project website: [www.dot.ga.gov/BS/Projects/SpecialProjects/1695Improvement](http://www.dot.ga.gov/BS/Projects/SpecialProjects/1695Improvement).

- *Eight comments were received that noted the interchange at Dean Forest and I-16 needed to be completed as part of or prior to the I-16 Widening. One comment was received that noted no improvements to the Dean Forest interchange are needed. The comments received noted that the existing bridge was in bad shape, truck traffic is an issue, safety of the interchange needs to be improved, and that traffic routinely queues onto I-16 during heavy commute hours.*

Response: The Department has a programmed project (GDOT P.I. No. 0013727) to improve the I-16 at Dean Forest Road interchange, which is separate from the I-16 Widening project (GDOT P.I. No. 0012757). As presented at the PIOH, the P.I. No. 0012757 will need to perform some structural modifications to the existing Dean Forest Road Bridge to support the proposed widening to I-16; however, all other Dean Forrest interchange improvements will be implemented within P.I. No. 0013727.

Additional information for project P.I. No. 0013727 can be found utilizing the Department's GeoPI website at (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/BS/Projects/ProjectSearch>). Simply enter the P.I. No. 0013727 into the search box and the website will take the user to the available information.

- *One commenter noted concerns about tree/vegetation clearing activities within stream and lake buffers.*

Response: Where possible, the project team is continuing to work to avoid and minimize impacts to federal and state waters along with any associated state-protected buffers (including those on personal properties). Unfortunately, with a project of this size, all impacts cannot be avoided. In those instances, the Contractor will be applying for a permit from the U.S. Army corps of Engineers and variances from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GAEPD) prior to any construction activities taking place within the limits of protected resources. The permitting and variance request activities are on-going at this time.

- *Two comments were provided related to truck traffic through the corridor.*

*...Truck traffic should use Jimmy Deloach.*

*...Widening roads will only bring more traffic. I wish the Department would build a separate route for the enormous trucks that drive right into downtown Savannah. It ruins the experience of our beautiful city.*

Response: The need and purpose of these projects are to widen I-16 and reconstruct the I-16/I-95 interchange in order to improve the operational efficiency and implement safety improvements to both existing facilities. During construction, all vehicular traffic will be encouraged to use alternate routes.

- *Resident recently purchased home and is now being presented with the widening of I-16: "I would not have bought where I bought. Other buyers will think the same. You're lessening our values. We need something to make us more at ease about where we live."*

Response: The Department has provided the public an opportunity to review and comment on these projects prior to the June 6, 2019 PIOH. The initial PIOH for these projects was held on June 28, 2016 at Garden City – City Hall with the purpose of presenting the proposed action to the public and solicit feedback. Approximately 203 people attended this open house.

- *I'm concerned about the noise from the widening of I-16. I inquired about a sound wall for the lake property located at 1600 Telfair Road. They stated that the earlier studies did not take any sound measurements of my property and it was stated today that the current plan is to clear-cut all of the trees on Georgia D.O.T.'s right of way that provide some sound protection and if they're gone, that's going to be a problem.*

*...Wind is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year striking these vertical banks. So every day when the wind hits the bank, the lake gets a little bit bigger and I've got less land. Therefore, the lake is getting closer to I-16 every day. I want to do whatever is possible at least take the measurements to see if I warrant a sound wall. (The commenter noted that a sound wall is needed to provide wind protection to his lake, and that the lake is used as a competitive water ski site and the sound wall or the trees or both will provide protection from the wind.)*

*...In addition, the trees provide root protection and vegetation to reinforce and stabilize the bank. So that's another reason why I would like to retain all the trees, my trees on my side of the right-of-way fence and the additional trees that are on the other side of the right-of-way fence.*

Response: As part of these projects, all the existing trees within the ROW will be removed. While being performed in these projects the tree removal is part of the Department's larger regional effort to provide a safer roadside condition and avoid the interstate from being obstructed by fallen trees during major storm events such as hurricanes. Once the trees are cleared, vegetation will be established for soil stabilization. Wind protection walls are not proposed as part of either project.

As part of the 2017 noise study re-evaluation, the lack of trees is already a point of consideration, and the removal of trees within the existing I-16 ROW does not affect the existing ambient noise environment. Per FHWA, states may not use vegetation for noise abatement since, in most instances, using vegetation for noise reduction is deemed ineffective unless the vegetation is a minimum of 100 feet thick, a minimum of 20 feet high and sufficiently dense (100% opacity) to provide the required 5 dB(A) noise reduction. The existing condition does not meet this condition. More information can be found at:

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/regulations\\_and\\_guidance/faq\\_nois.cfm#G6](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/regulations_and_guidance/faq_nois.cfm#G6).

- *Need to do vibration studies and erosion studies because that additional vibration is going to cause additional erosion of the banks because of the vibration of the soils.*

Response: As part of the initial project planning and design process, a Vibration Control Plan is to be prepared by the Contractor, subject to the Department's approval. The plan shall establish project protocols to avoid damage to existing structures as well as methods to address public concerns in cases when the vibration levels may exceed established thresholds.

- *The contract drawings call for a brand-new fence to be put up. So, if it's an 8-foot fence to be put up, how would they put up the 8-foot fence along the right-of-way line and not disturb the vegetation that's there? Or at least how would you minimize the vegetation on that right-of-way line and would there be any encroachments into my property in order to put up the new fence?*

Response: In accordance with the Department's standard specification and guidelines, all fencing is to be constructed within the ROW line. No permanent fence installation will encroach on adjacent property. If it is determined during the design or construction process that an encroachment will be necessary to install any fence, each impacted property owner will be contacted prior to that activity taking place.

- *One comment was received that questioned if the project will affect drainage in the area of the lake?*

Response: During the design process of the project, a drainage study and evaluation of the area drainage will be performed. The intent of this project is not to address or improve any of the existing drainage conditions, but rather maintain the existing conditions. Additional drainage or modifications may be determined necessary to address any additional run-off due to the widening of the existing interstate.

Throughout the life of construction, the Contractor will be required to maintain positive drainage.

- *Resident requests copy of comments.*

Response: A request for copy of all received comments for this PIOH should be made through the Department's Office of Legal Services at 404-631-1499.

- *I would like to get a better understanding of how the turbine will be constructed over the existing exit/on ramps.*

Response: The new I-16 at I-95 interchange ramps will be constructed outside of the existing loop ramp and directional ramps foot-print. These ramps will be phased constructed in order to maintain access and interchange operation during construction. Once the proposed ramps are constructed, the traffic will be shifted to the new configuration.

- *Eight comments were received that were unhappy about the concept change.*

*...Why did the design change from the 2016 concept to the 2019 turbine configuration? What were the pro's and con's for both concepts and the arguments to change it?*

*...I had been so pleased with and totally supportive of the original stack design, and I was so proud that the Department had come up with a design that addressed not only our*

*transportation needs, but also stood to elevate Savannah's image for thousands of travelers every day - helping to grow our tourism and economic development efforts.*

*...I was greatly deflated when I saw the new renderings depicting the "half turbine" design. If I had known that was coming, I would have done back flips to try to save the original design. That said, if it were just a matter of the diminished wow factor that would be one thing that I would probably just chalk up to typical Savannah ball-dropping.*

*...The Department had the right idea with the original stack design. What happened?*

*...The transformation I see in the new design raises serious safety concerns that I cannot in good conscience let go ignored.*

*... I don't see how this half turbine design is capable of serving addressing needs throughout the project lifespan. I also don't see how it can be expanded to meet those needs.*

*... I believe we should take advantage of the undeveloped status of three of the four quadrants surrounding this intersection to create a longer-term solution.*

*...So you seem to have addressed half the problem with the I-95/I-16 interchange. I realize that you have segregated the traffic but the distance for the traffic going two different directions to merge remains dangerously short. Would love to know the reasoning on this.*

Response: The Department decided to implement these projects by utilizing a Design-Build contracting mechanism, which not only fosters a faster delivery of these projects but also utilizes innovative designs and techniques developed by the contracting industry to reduce the overall cost of implementation.

With the need and purpose of the projects in mind, to improve the operational efficiency and safety conditions of both facilities, the Department evaluated a series of Design-Build Team proposals. The concept presented at this PIOH not only achieved the intended purpose of these Projects, but the lower elevation of the proposed bridge structures at this interchange reduces potential long-term maintenance costs and environmental impacts. Further, the decision to build a half turbine configuration was a best-value solution that reduced the cost required to construct the interchange improvements while providing equal or better benefits both to the natural environment (reduction in impacts to canals and wetlands) and community (reduction in travel delays, ROW/easement acquisition, and providing mitigation to noise impacts).

Finally, as part of the revised concept plan development process, a revised Interchange Modification Report (IMR) is required to be reviewed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The preliminary operational and safety analysis findings presented in the IMR indicate that the revised design yields equal, if not slightly better, safety and operational improvements when compared to the original design.

- *Three comments were received related to exploring alternative concepts to roadway widening in order to address the congestion issue along I-16.*

*...Please factor in the concept of people moving, not just car/truck moving...multi-modal transit. It's been proven time and again that if you build for cars, more cars will come. You cannot build out of traffic jams, as the widest street in the history of the world (ring road around Atlanta) has proven.*

*...Please do not widen I-16 with more traffic lanes. We can't continue trying to build ourselves out of traffic jams, especially when every new vehicle adds to the impact of climate change.*

*...I don't consider widening I-16 an improvement. I consider it a very bad idea. It's old school and we need to be thinking about our future here in GA. What we need is less reliance on fossil fuels and that will entail some innovation, not the same old same old.*

Response: Traffic projections show that implementation of these two projects will improve mobility and reduce delay through the design year of 2041. Although congestion throughout the corridor would not be eliminated by these two projects, the duration and severity of the congestion would be improved when compared to the existing and No-Build conditions.

- *Six comments were received that noted rail transit and bicycle paths need to be included along I-16.*

*...Instead of more car lanes., please put a train in the median of I-16...with a few local stops, then a fast track to Macon and on to Atlanta.*

*...Please invest the state's funds in a passenger train that goes from Savannah to Atlanta, instead of widening I-16.*

*...The impact of this emerging crisis is already being felt on the coast with increasingly strong storms and higher tides. So called "king" tides are becoming more frequent, resulting in the complete inability of people to travel to & from Tybee Island. However, when you build roads for people in a complete street style, you get multiple modes of transit which accommodate many more people. Rather than widening I-16 for more cars, I urge you to support Rep. Carl Gilliard's proposal for a rail system from here to Atlanta. Put a rail in the median for a couple of stops locally between Savannah, Macon, and Atlanta. Install beautiful trails on either side for bikes and walkers.*

*...I do not support the expansion of widening I-16. I believe this is an opportunity to build a high-speed rail that could make the movement between SAV and ATL more efficient. I work at Georgia Southern and since the consolidation of the university there have been many discussions about having a rail for commuters from Savannah to Statesboro, and this seems like the perfect opportunity to do so. Not only would this increase the efficiency of movement on I-16, it would also shift our reliance on cars/trucks/etc., which as we all know are contributing to the climate change.*

*...A commuter rail line from Savannah to Macon and safe bicycle paths along the I-16 corridor are the way to go.*

*...Put in generous walk/bike trails. I would be happy to have you discuss this with the Urban Land Institute, Walk/bike campaign of Chatham County, and our county's MPO. Thank you!*

Response: High speed rail/transit rail is not proposed as part of the I-16 Widening or I-16 and I-95 Interchange Improvements. The Georgia Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP) and more information can be found at: <http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Transit/TransitPlan>. The Department does not have plans to construct walk/bike trails within the interstate ROW due to safety considerations. The projects as currently designed do not preclude future walk/bike trails on any of the adjacent roadways.

- *Six comments were received concerning the safety of the design as presented at the PIOH.*

*...The exit ramp from I-95 presents drivers with a too-sharp right-hand curve followed by a too-sharp left-hand curve. The severity of the first right-hand curve is significantly obscured by the overpass from WB I-16 to SB I-95, which offers just enough of a presence to distract SB to EB exiting drivers without providing the greater traffic calming effect that is more inherent to a stacked interchange design.*

*...This right hand curve within the exit is unintuitive to direction-oriented drivers who expect to curve left from a NB to EB exit, especially when they just observed WB I-16 traffic having already diverged to the right several hundred feet prior to this curve.*

*...The right-hand curve will be the sharpest curve in an interstate exit that many cars and trucks will have encountered for hundreds of interstate miles. No matter what warnings signs are given, many drivers will enter this curve with the expectations they developed over many miles.*

*...This sharp right-hand curve is followed closely by a sharp left-hand curve, which is made more hazardous by how the left-hand curve occurs near the joint between asphalt pavement and concrete bridge.*

*...Any failures to successfully navigate this right-left S-curve could result in a car or truck potentially crashing over the edge into WB or EB I-16 traffic below.*

*...An inherent characteristic of the turbine design is that it creates lengthier turning curves in tighter arcs, which presents drivers with a sharper curve covering a much longer distance. Therefore, this design risks the danger of drivers attempting to straighten out before it is time at various distances along this curve wherever they expect the curve should end.*

Response: The design of the projects, including the ramps, follow state- and federally accepted engineering practices.

- *It appears that drivers will experience this change of slope at the transition joint between concrete bridge and asphalt pavement just south of I-16. This segment appears to occur in a walled, soil-filled containment structure similar to those we have at various points along Savannah's Truman Pkwy. In my experience, these soil-filled structures soon present problems related to the settling and uneven compaction of soil, as manifested through wavy, dipping areas along the road surface. A replication of such a problem here would provide hazardous conditions just prior to the inherently hazardous point of convergence.*

Response: Geotechnical borings have been taken and wall foundation investigations are being developed for the design of these embankments. The Department requires the Contractor to design and construct the project in accordance with state- and federally accepted engineering practices.

- *The three lanes eastbound and westbound need to end and begin at the Pooler parkway exit. Merging into two lanes after passing the interchange on I-16 is going to be a nightmare.*

Response: The need and purpose of the projects is to widen I-16 and reconstruct the I-16/I-95 interchange in order to improve the operational efficiency and safety condition of both facilities. Any improvements beyond the currently defined project limits would be beyond the scope of these two projects.

Again, thank you for your comments. If you would like additional information regarding these projects, please call the projects Hotline at (912) 480-9625, email [1695improvements@dot.ga.gov](mailto:1695improvements@dot.ga.gov), or visit the project website at [www.dot.ga.gov/BS/Projects/SpecialProjects/1695Improvements](http://www.dot.ga.gov/BS/Projects/SpecialProjects/1695Improvements).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Ron Nelson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

W. Ron Nelson,  
GDOT – Project Principal

WRN/PC/jlc (Jacobs)

cc: PDF for Project File