



2019 Public Information Open House Response to Public Comments

March 2020

I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project
 GDOT PI 0013915, DeKalb County

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In November 2019, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) hosted two (2) Public Information Open Houses (PIOHs) to provide project information and to solicit public comments on the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project. The attendees of the PIOHs and those persons submitting comments within the comment period raised a number of questions. GDOT has developed this summary of comments and responses to provide clarity on the project's features and process. Below, the project team has organized the comments into broad topics. In each section, individual comment themes are presented in italics followed by GDOT's response to each comment. GDOT anticipates additional responses will be added in the future to more thoroughly address the comments received and will update this summary as the project concept evolves and more project details become available.

Project Overview

Project Scope

Comments were received regarding the scope of the project.

The purpose of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project is to reduce congestion and improve safety through one of the most heavily-traveled stretches of interstate within the Atlanta-metropolitan area, particularly during peak periods. The project proposes to reconstruct the interstate system-to-system ramps at the I-285/I-20 East Interchange and add a combination of collector-distributor (CD) lanes and auxiliary lanes along I-20 east of the interchange and I-285 north of the interchange. The project will remain primarily within the existing right-of-way, requiring small amounts of additional right-of-way from some adjacent properties.

Project Process

Comments were received requesting increased and continued transparency with the public about the project and coordination with local governments, agencies, and other stakeholders.

Since the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project was announced in early 2016 as part of the larger Major Mobility Investment Program (MMIP), GDOT has coordinated with stakeholders and sought to inform the public about the project. GDOT has held more than 200 presentations and meetings to educate and seek input from MMIP stakeholders and local citizens in the past two years. These include concept coordination meetings with elected officials and local government staff as well as numerous presentations and coordination meetings with city councils, homeowner's associations (HOA), and other civic organizations. Information on the project has been shared by both traditional and social media outlets. GDOT has also undertaken activities to distribute and gather more information about the project, including:

- sending early coordination letters to federal, state, and local agencies;
- soliciting feedback from organizations, local governments, and agencies along the corridor;

- requesting that HOA and civic organizations along the corridor share information with their contacts and distribution lists about the project and public meetings; and
- visiting businesses to distribute and post project information along the corridor.

In addition, GDOT hosted two (2) Public Information Open Houses (PIOHs) along the corridor in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); published legal ads, mass mailed postcards, and posted road signs advertising the public meetings to generate attendance; posted meeting materials online at both the project website (<https://www.dot.ga.gov/BS/Projects/SpecialProjects/I285I20East>) and GDOT public outreach website (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Public/PublicOutreach>); and solicited comments via the project website, email, letter, and court reporter.

The PIOHs were informal meetings with an open house format. The purpose of the PIOHs was to inform the public of the proposed project in their area, gather information from the public, and receive comments about the project. Generally, formal presentations are not made at these meetings. The open house format was intended to allow participants to speak one-on-one with staff so that everyone may have the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers in depth.

The PIOHs attracted 237 attendees and generated 91 public comments, in addition to the project team receiving phone calls and emails. As the project is still in the concept design/environmental review phase, GDOT will continue to coordinate with local governments and other stakeholders on the project's preliminary engineering. Additional comments may be submitted by emailing eastinterchange@dot.ga.gov.

The project website will continue to be updated during the preliminary engineering process and a more refined project concept will be presented at the project's Public Hearing Open Houses (PHOHs) that are proposed to be held in 2020. The design-build contractor, referred to as the Developer, would be responsible for completing the final design for the project.

Project Schedule

| | Before 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|---|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Stakeholder Coordination | Stakeholder and Public Involvement  | | | | | | | | |
| Project Planning | | | | | | | | | |
| Environmental Process (Pre-Let) | | | | | | | | | |
| Preliminary Engineering | | | | | | | | | |
| Right-of-Way | | | | | | | | | |
| Developer Selection | | | | | ★ | | | | |
| Final Design | | | | | | | | | |
| Environmental Re-evaluation Process & Permitting (Post-Let) | | | | | | | | | |
| Construction | | | | | | | | | |

Funding

Comments were received regarding project funding.

The project was made possible by the General Assembly's passage of the Transportation Funding Act (TFA) of 2015 and funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). These funding sources are only available to be used on roads and bridges and cannot be used for transit facilities or access.

Additionally, the project at this time is anticipated to be delivered using a Public-Private Partnership contracting model, whereby GDOT solicits bids from private investors/equity partners/Developers for the project. The successful bidder partners with GDOT and secures financing for the design and construction of the project.

Design

Comments were received inquiring whether a Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI) was considered at the Wesley Chapel Road, Panola Road, and Glenwood Road interchanges along I-20.

The scope of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project does not include any improvements to Wesley Chapel Road. Nevertheless, to improve its operation and safety, the Wesley Chapel Road interchange will be reconfigured. Through the addition of a westbound CD road, vehicles entering I-20 westbound from Wesley Chapel Road will not need to weave with vehicles attempting to exit I-20 to travel north on I-285. In the eastbound direction, a lane will be added to the eastbound CD road to improve the weaving of vehicles intending to exit to Wesley Chapel Road with traffic coming from the eastbound directional ramps at the I-285/I-20 East Interchange. To further improve the operation of the existing

interchange, “Do Not Block” the intersection box signing and striping at the junction of the I-20 ramps and Wesley Chapel Road will be considered in accordance with GDOT policy. A DDI is being proposed at the Panola Road and I-20 interchange as part of a separate GDOT project (PI 0002868). That project is currently programmed for construction in 2027. Improvements to Glenwood Road are not part of this project.

A comment was received requesting dedicated lanes for large trucks, buses, etc.

During 2018, the average truck percentage on I-20 within the project limits ranged from 9% to 11%. At the I-285/I-20 East Interchange, the percentages of truck traffic on the ramps ranged from 4.5% to 21.5%, indicating significant truck movement within the interchange. Despite the large truck volumes, there will be no lanes strictly dedicated to trucks and buses as this would increase the project cost and the width of the I-20 and I-285 corridors, which would result in the need for considerable additional right-of-way from private properties along these corridors. Currently, trucks and buses are restricted to the outermost lanes to enable faster travel speeds in the inner lanes.

Comments were received requesting capacity improvements at the I-285 north to I-20 east ramp and Wesley Chapel Road interchange.

Multiple options were investigated to improve the traffic operation and safety of the I-20 eastbound CD road, which is formed by the convergence of the I-20 eastbound exit ramp to Wesley Chapel Road as well as the directional ramps from I-285 northbound and southbound to I-20 eastbound. A fourth lane will be added to the eastbound CD road to improve the weaving of vehicles intending to exit to Wesley Chapel Road with traffic coming from the eastbound directional ramps at the I-285/I-20 Interchange that will be entering I-20 eastbound.

Comments were received inquiring whether entering I-285 north from the I-20 west entrance ramp at Wesley Chapel Road would require shifting lanes.

In the westbound direction, an I-20 westbound CD road will be added between Wesley Chapel Road and the I-285/I-20 East Interchange. One of the primary benefits of the I-20 westbound CD road is that it enables motorists that originate from Wesley Chapel Road to gain access to either northbound or southbound I-285 without the need to enter onto and exit from westbound I-20. This benefit is expected to facilitate movement between Wesley Chapel Road and I-285.

A comment was received requesting Spring Woods Valley be included as a continue on-ramp for I-20 east.

No new access points are being created by this project. The project only includes those improvements to existing ramps/roadways necessary to improve traffic flow and safety. The project scope presented at the PIOH has been verified by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and GDOT and found to provide the optimal improvements to traffic operation and safety with minimal impact to the existing right-of-way (ROW).

A comment was received requesting clarification on how the project addresses weaving on I-20 east from traffic entering from I-285 and exiting at Wesley Chapel Road.

To facilitate the weaving on the I-20 eastbound CD road, overhead signs will be placed on the two-lane, I-285 southbound to I-20 eastbound directional ramp to direct motorists that are intending to enter I-20 to get into the left lane and that are intending to get off at Wesley Chapel Road to get into the right lane before they enter the CD road. Encouraging these vehicles to align themselves in the proper lanes in advance should reduce the amount of weaving on the CD road.

Comments were received requesting an additional lane on the I-285 north to I-20 east exit.

The proposed improvements for the I-20 eastbound CD road are based on detailed traffic and safety studies. The results of the traffic study predict the CD road and the I-285 northbound to I-20 eastbound ramp to operate at acceptable levels of service in the Design Year (2045), or 20 years after construction is complete. The improved capacity and efficiency of the CD road should reduce the backup on the I-285 northbound to I-20 eastbound ramp.

A comment was received inquiring why funding would be spent to reconstruct the I-20 east to I-285 south ramp, a low volume ramp, to raise the speed limit to 45 miles per hour while the I-285 north to I-20 west ramp will remain at 20 miles per hour.

Multiple concepts were developed for the I-285/I-20 East Interchange and the individual ramps at the interchange. The various design speeds for ramps within the interchange were evaluated with respect to cost and benefit to traffic operations and safety. Each concept was then refined to ensure that the existing movements could remain operational while the new ramps were being built and to safeguard that the proposed configuration would not preclude future express lanes. The proposed concept increases the design speed of the I-20 eastbound to I-285 southbound ramp from 40 mph to 45 mph, which is the middle-range recommended design speed for a directional ramp by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) for interchanges with interstate design speeds of 65 mph. Although this ramp is relatively lightly traveled compared to other ramps in the interchange, increasing its design speed to 45 mph is expected to improve safety on the ramp. Since the improvements to the ramp will remain within the existing right-of-way, the estimated cost to improve the ramp's design speed is less than 1% of the overall project cost. This investment is considered prudent and would not deplete funds from other locations in the project.

A comment was received requesting that the project include capacity improvements, one or two lanes in each direction.

The proposed improvements along I-20 and I-285 are based on detailed traffic and safety studies. The project will improve traffic flow at the I-285/I-20 East Interchange as well as upstream and downstream of the interchange. These

improvements will reduce travel times and improve safety. Current GDOT policy requires that all new capacity added to the freeway system be in the form of express lanes. The improvements have been designed to not preclude the programmed future implementation of the I-20 express lanes.

A comment was received requesting wider lanes on I-20.

All travel lanes along I-20 as part of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project will be the standard 12-foot lane width, except at the Panola Road Interchange where lane widths will be reduced to 11 feet under the existing bridge. The lane width reduction is a temporary condition until the Panola Road bridge over I-20 is replaced as part of the Panola Road Diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI) Project (PI 0002868), which is programmed to go to construction in 2027. The DDI project will provide 12-foot travel lanes along I-20 under the new Panola Road bridge.

Comments were received requesting a flyover bridge over Wesley Chapel Road.

Extending the I-20 entrance ramp over Wesley Chapel Road would require substantial procurement of private property on the south side of I-20 east of Wesley Chapel Road. Instead, multiple options were investigated to improve the traffic operation and safety of the I-20 eastbound CD road. A fourth lane will be added to the eastbound CD road to improve the weaving of vehicles intending to exit to Wesley Chapel Road with traffic coming from the eastbound directional ramps at the I-285/I-20 East Interchange.

A comment was received requesting secure lighting on the highways.

The lighting for the project will replace all existing lighting impacted by the project. Additional lighting will be added in the interchange areas to meet the current GDOT guidelines for interchange lighting, along the I-20 eastbound and westbound CD roads, and under the Wesley Chapel Road bridge over I-20. Additional lighting will be studied after the new lighting locations have been approved and accepted by GDOT.

A comment was received requesting ample signage to direct people correctly.

Signage will be provided according to state and federal guidelines.

A comment was received requesting coordination of traffic signals and the elimination of the flashing arrow for turning.

Traffic signal coordination is an ongoing process. DeKalb County updates their signal coordination on an as-needed basis. To request a review of traffic signal timing, please call DeKalb County Transportation Division at (770) 492-5206. Flashing arrows are utilized in accordance with GDOT's policy. Flashing arrows do not change the operation of the intersection but could improve it by allowing additional vehicles to turn left after they yield to all oncoming traffic and to any pedestrians in the crosswalk.

A comment was received requesting improved pedestrian wheelchair access at Covington Highway and Panola Road.

Covington Highway and Panola Road are outside the limits of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project. Your comments have been shared with GDOT's District 7 for consideration. Please note, the sidewalks within this project's limits will be designed in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design.

Employment

A comment was received requesting project-related employment for neighborhood residents.

For information on employment with GDOT, please visit <http://www.dot.ga.gov/Pages/Employment.aspx>.

Construction

Commenters inquired about noise and impacts to traffic associated with construction.

Roadway construction inevitably creates some inconvenience and delays for motorists and adjacent property owners; however, all construction activities would be conducted to minimize negative impacts as much as possible. As this project gets closer to construction, the contractor will create a traffic management plan to establish communication protocols regarding construction activities, lane closures, and traffic delays and will work with local jurisdictions to advertise construction-related traffic notices so that local businesses and the traveling public can stay informed and plan their trips accordingly. In addition, the contractor will provide a plan and process for carrying out noise mitigation measures. Please note, construction of the project will follow all applicable, current GDOT policies and standards including the GDOT's Construction Manual, available online at:

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/Business/Source/construction/cm001.pdf>

A comment was received requesting beautification projects be added to the project.

Landscaping is not performed by GDOT contractors and is usually implemented under a separate agreement and by permission from GDOT with a local government or other stakeholder. GDOT does not perform maintenance of landscaped facilities within GDOT right-of-way and only allows its right-of-way to be landscaped and maintained by others under separate agreements. If a landscaping plan and agreement is in place, this work is typically performed at the completion of construction activities in the affected areas.

Commercial Vehicles

Comments were received stating issues with commercial vehicles (trucks) on the interstates, including parking on exit ramps; traveling outside of the far right lanes; excessive noise; air pollution; and littering.

The interstate ramp shoulders are provided as a location where vehicles may stop for mechanical difficulties, flat tires, or other emergencies. The shoulders are not intended as an overnight parking area for commercial vehicles. The Georgia State Patrol (GSP) is responsible for enforcing traffic and criminal laws on the state's roads. Your comments will be shared with the GSP. For more information on the GSP, please visit <https://dps.georgia.gov/divisions/georgia-state-patrol>.

Considerations for mitigating impacts from highway traffic generated noise are part of the planning, location, and design of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project. A Noise Impact Assessment will determine the acoustic impact of the proposed project and the need for abatement measures on noise sensitive receivers (e.g., residences and public outdoor spaces, etc.) Additionally, an air quality assessment is being completed as part of the Environmental Assessment, which will be made available to the public.

Comments concerning trash removal were forwarded to the GDOT District 7 office.

A comment was received inquiring how bridges would be impacted by cold, icy weather.

Like all bridges in locations with seasonal freezing environments, the bridges within the project limits are subject to snow and ice conditions. GDOT considers these adverse conditions when establishing the maximum super elevation (i.e., the cross-slope in curved locations) on the interstates and directional ramps, which were used in the design of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange.

Maintenance

Comments were received requesting trash, debris, and tree removal, and more attention to roadway conditions such as addressing potholes and lane striping.

Comments concerning the maintenance of the roadways, litter removal, and tree removal were shared with GDOT District 7.

Environmental Impacts

A comment was received requesting consideration for the wildlife and deer in the area.

The proposed project involves modifications to an existing transportation facility, and wildlife habitats adjacent to the project are already subject to the effects of the existing facility. The project will remain primarily within the existing right-of-way, but will require small amounts of additional right-of-way from some adjacent properties (as shown at the plans presented at the Public Information

Open House) for the new auxiliary lanes, westbound CD road, and to ensure the Miller Road and Fairington Road bridges across I-20 remain open throughout the construction period. Access control measures such as fencing will continue to be in place to restrict deer from entering I-20 and I-285, for the safety of motorists and deer alike.

Noise/Noise Barriers

Comments were received requesting noise barriers be constructed as part of the project.

Considerations for mitigating impacts from highway traffic generated noise, including noise barriers, are part of the planning, location, and design of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project. Please note, existing and proposed noise barriers were not shown on the displays at the Public Information Open Houses (PIOHs) as the noise study is ongoing.

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

The determination of noise impacts and abatement measures will comply with Title 23, Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), Part 772, and GDOT's policies for highway noise barrier construction. More information regarding GDOT's noise barrier policy can be found in GDOT's Environmental Procedures Manual.

http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/Environmental/GDOT-EPM-Chap05_6.pdf

Additional information concerning the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) guidelines is available at

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/regulations_and_guidance/index.cfm

Comments were received requesting existing noise walls be replaced with higher structures of different material.

Existing noise walls in the project area are expected to remain or be replaced in kind. If replaced, the new noise wall will perform per GDOT noise abatement requirements and will be at a minimum, the same height or taller. As part of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project, all areas of the project, including those with existing noise walls, will be evaluated to ensure adequate abatement is received where feasible and reasonable. The material and the appearance of the barriers

have not yet been determined. Information will be shared as soon as the details have been determined.

Right-of-Way

Comments were received inquiring about acquisition of properties for the implementation of the project.

The project will remain primarily within the existing right-of-way, requiring only small amounts of additional right-of-way from some adjacent properties (as shown at the plans presented at the Public Information Open Houses) for the new auxiliary lanes, westbound CD road, and to ensure the Miller Road and Fairington Road bridges across I-20 remain open throughout the construction period. As currently proposed, the project would not result in any residential, commercial, or institutional displacements.

In the event any portion of a property is required, GDOT's right-of-way team will meet individually with the property owner to discuss the project and the impacts to the specific property. At that time, the property owner will be shown design drawings and have the opportunity to discuss their specific property and access needs. More information regarding the acquisition process can be found in the pamphlet titled *What Happens When Your Property is Needed for a Transportation Facility*, which can be found on the GDOT website at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/ROW>.

Comments were received regarding the project negatively impacting property values.

The purpose of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project is to improve safety and traffic flow through one of the most heavily congested areas of the Atlanta region. The proposed improvements would enhance operations at this existing facility and provide benefit locally and regionally for local residents and commuters. As the plans for the project are still under development, the conceptual drawings presented at the PIOHs will continue to be refined with a focus on avoiding perceived negative impacts when possible. If avoidance is not possible, the Design Team will explore opportunities to minimize or mitigate these impacts while adhering to the scope limitations of the project.

Tolling

A comment was received stating that express lanes and tolling should not be considered for I-20.

The addition of express lanes are not being considered as part of this project. For more information about express lanes in Georgia, please visit <http://www.dot.ga.gov/DriveSmart/GEL>.

Transit

Comments were received regarding the project's impact on the future implementation of transit along I-20 east.

Transit is an important part of an entire regional transportation system, providing additional traveling options for users. Transit improvements are not proposed as part of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project; however, the project team is in close coordination with those stakeholders with transit planning responsibility, including DeKalb County and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). Your comments have been shared with these stakeholders for their consideration. More information on transit in the I-20 east corridor can be found at <http://www.dekalbtransitmasterplan.com>.

Comments were received with suggestions for transit improvements along the I-20 east corridor.

As mentioned above, transit improvements are not being considered as part of the project. However, the comments have been shared with DeKalb County and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) for the continued planning of transit in the I-20 east corridor.

Future Updates

To provide additional responses to public comments received, the project website will continue to be updated during the preliminary engineering process and email announcements will be distributed periodically with updates. A refined project concept will be presented at the project's Public Hearing Open House (PHOH) meetings to be held in Q3 2020.