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October 8, 2020

Re: Responses to the Open House Comments for PI No. 0013915, I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project, DeKalb County

Dear Citizen:

The Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) thanks you for your comments regarding the proposed I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project. The project proposes to reconstruct the Interstate system-to-system ramps at the I-285/I-20 East Interchange in DeKalb County 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. These operational and geometric improvements would improve traffic flow and safety performance.

We appreciate your participation and the input received as a result of the Virtual Information Meeting Website and Virtual Meeting Room, Call-in Question and Answer Session, and the Public Hearing Open House (PHOH) hosted in August and September 2020. The Virtual Information Meeting Website <https://0013915-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/> collected over 3,400 views and a total of 320 people were engaged through the combination of the Virtual Meeting Room, the Call-in Question and Answer Session, and the PHOH. Every written, electronic, and verbal comment given as part of these efforts will be made part of the project's official record. Of the 23 respondents who formally provided comment, 6 were in **support** of the project, 1 was **opposed**, 1 was **uncommitted**, and 2 expressed **conditional support**.

Those who participated in the above outreach efforts submitted comments regarding a broad range of topics. Georgia DOT has prepared this one response letter that addresses all topics so that everyone is informed of the comments raised and the responses given. An electronic version of this response letter can be found on the project website <https://majormobilityga.com/projects/eastsideic/>.

Please find the comments summarized below (in *italics*) followed by our response.

- *Comments were received in support of the project.*

Your support for the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project is greatly appreciated.

- *Comments were received inquiring whether noise barriers would be constructed generally as part of the project and specifically at the following locations along I-285: from Glenwood Road to I-20 westbound ramp; between Columbia Drive and Rainbow Drive; and in the areas of Knollberry Lane and Idlewild Road. Additionally, comments were received regarding the need for quality construction material of the noise barriers and about the height of existing barriers.*

The locations of proposed noise barriers are shown in the Noise Impact Assessment that is included as Appendix D of the Environmental Assessment document found on the project website <https://majormobilityga.com/projects/eastsideic/>. In addition, locations of noise barriers are also shown on the interactive noise barrier look-up tool on the project

website: <https://0013915-noise.scoutfeedback.com/>. Almost 11 miles of noise barriers are proposed to be constructed along I-285 and I-20, an increase of more than six miles from what is currently existing. According to the preliminary noise analysis conducted for the project as part of the environmental studies, noise barriers were found to be feasible and reasonable at the specific locations referenced in the comments.

Please note, the final locations and dimensions of noise barriers will be determined during final design of the project. Benefited landowners and residents will be given the opportunity to vote either in favor or against the installation of noise barriers through a balloting process administered by Georgia DOT. Only at that point will a final decision be made. A barrier will not be constructed if a majority of those that would benefit from the barrier do not desire it.

The determination of noise impacts and abatement measures comply with Title 23, Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), Part 772, and Georgia DOT's policies for highway noise barrier construction. More information regarding Georgia DOT's noise barrier policy can be found at this link:

<https://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/EnvironmentalProcedures/Noise/References/Noise%20-%20Highway%20Noise%20Abatement%20Policy%20for%20Federal-Aid%20Projects.pdf>

All new noise barrier panels installed as part of the project will be comprised of precast concrete. No existing noise barriers will be eliminated or shortened, but they may be replaced or repaired, if necessary. All existing noise barriers that are not impacted by construction and provide the required level of noise abatement will remain in place. All existing noise barriers that are impacted by construction will be replaced with new barriers that have a top of barrier elevation that is no lower than the top of wall elevation of the existing barrier.

- *Comments were received regarding the proposed design of the project, including:*
 - *addition of an exit for Columbia Drive from I-20 westbound;*
 - *management of traffic weaving at the I-20 eastbound ramp and Wesley Chapel Road;*
 - *addition of an auxiliary lane on the section between Wesley Chapel and Panola for a total of five lanes in each direction;*
 - *expansion of the I-285 auxiliary lanes to six total lanes north from I-20 to Glenwood Road and five lanes from Glenwood Road to Covington Highway; and*
 - *consideration of dedicated managed lane exits from I-285S to I-20E and from I-20W to I-285N.*

No new access points are being created by this project. The purpose of this project is to improve traffic flow and reduce crashes at the I-285/I-20 East Interchange and along I-20 east of the interchange and I-285 north of the interchange. Thus, the project scope only includes those improvements to existing ramps and roadways necessary to provide the optimal improvements to traffic operations and safety while minimizing property impacts.

Multiple options were investigated to improve traffic operations and safety within the I-20 eastbound collector-distributor (CD) road, which is formed by the convergence of the I-20 eastbound exit ramp to Wesley Chapel Road and 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 between vehicles intending to exit on Wesley Chapel Road with those desiring to enter eastbound I-20. This additional lane is also expected to alleviate congestion on the I-20 eastbound exit ramp and reduce the backup on eastbound I-20.

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 intending to enter I-20 to move into the left lane and the motorists intending to exit at Wesley Chapel Road to move into the right lane before they enter the CD road. Having the vehicles aligned in the proper lanes before entering the CD road should reduce the amount of weaving within the CD road.

The number of lanes required between Wesley Chapel Road and Panola Road was determined by the existing traffic volumes and projected forecasts. The proposed CD lanes in conjunction with the auxiliary lanes shown in the concept design are expected to perform at an acceptable level of service.

Based on the forecast traffic volumes and traffic analysis, the concept design for I-285 northbound from I-20 to Glenwood Road will operate at an acceptable level of service. Adding an additional auxiliary lane would not significantly improve the level of service but would result in higher project costs. Adding lanes north beyond the Glenwood Road exit is not included in the scope of this project.

The design for the I-285 Eastside Express Lanes Project (PI 0013914) was closely coordinated with the design for the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project. The Eastside Express Lanes are proposed to begin/end just south of Glenwood Road, which allows adequate spacing for I-285 southbound drivers to exit the express lanes and maneuver to the exit for I-20 east or westbound and for drivers entering I-285 northbound from I-20 east or westbound to maneuver and enter the express lanes at their begin point. No direct connections to I-20 from the Eastside Express Lanes are proposed; however, the design for the project was also developed to not preclude direct connections to future managed lanes on I-20 (PI 0013913), which are currently programmed for construction in FY 2038.

- *A comment was received regarding the implementation of transit in the project area.*

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

- *A comment was received inquiring about stakeholder and public outreach conducted as part of the project.*

Since the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project was announced in early 2016 as part of the larger Major Mobility Investment Program (MMIP), Georgia DOT has coordinated with stakeholders and sought to inform the public about the project. Georgia DOT 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 associations (HOA), and other civic organizations. Information on the project has been shared by both traditional and social media outlets.

Specifically, Georgia DOT has undertaken the following activities to widely distribute project information in the project area, which is located in south DeKalb County, and to

actively gather public input, including:

- conducting multiple meetings with neighborhood homeowner groups surrounding the interchange, DeKalb County government and Commissioners, and City of Stonecrest officials;
 - working with local stakeholders mentioned above and other organizations and churches to distribute project information and post information on websites and social media channels;
 - utilizing an electronic database of 1,100+ contacts comprised of stakeholders, residents, and mailing lists from previous projects in the project area to distribute project updates and outreach event announcements;
 - distributing direct mail to a mailing list of 6,000+ property owners, residents, and businesses in the corridor to inform them of outreach events;
 - delivering outreach event announcement fliers/newsletters to businesses and apartment complexes in the project area;
 - posting road and yard signs advertising outreach events;
 - ensuring meeting locations are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible and providing contact information on all meeting advertisements for requests for specific accommodations;
 - conducting field work and connecting with churches in the study area to identify any populations with Limited English Proficiency backgrounds with translation or interpretation needs;
 - hosting two Public Information Open Houses (PIOHs) in November 2019 to provide project information, answer the public's questions, and collect input; and,
 - hosting a Virtual Information Meeting Website with Virtual Meeting Room, Call-In Question and Answer Session, and a physically distanced, outdoor Public Hearing Open House (PHOH) in August and September 2020 to provide project updates, answer questions, and collect comments.
- *Comments were received regarding the encroachment of stormwater capture facilities onto residential property.*

The project is being designed to minimize impacts where possible. Although some right-of-way will be procured for the project, as shown on the concept display plans available on the project website <https://majormobilityga.com/projects/eastsideic/>, no additional stormwater will be diverted onto private property. As the project advances into final design, these comments will be communicated to the Developer.

- *Comments were received regarding right-of-way impacts to specific residential properties.*

No residential units or businesses would be displaced by the proposed project. However, the proposed project would result in the loss of narrow sections of both residential and business property as well as some business parking. In the event any portion of a property is required, Georgia DOT'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 If Your Property is Needed for a Transportation Facility," which can be found on the Georgia DOT website at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/ROW>.

- *A comment was received inquiring about any necessary detours during project construction and how they may specifically impact school transportation.*

There are two existing local road bridges across I-20 that will be replaced as part of the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project. One of the bridges carries Fairington Road across I-20 at a 60-degree angle. The Developer will be able to build the replacement bridge, which will cross approximately perpendicular with I-20, while the existing bridge remains operational. The other local road bridge across I-20 is along Miller Road. Sufficient right-of-way is being procured to enable the Developer to build the replacement bridge in stages while maintaining the operation of one lane in each direction along Miller Road across I-20. The Developer is responsible for proposing the traffic management plan during construction. The Developer could propose an alternative technical concept that calls for the temporary closure of the Miller Road crossing while a new bridge is installed on the same alignment. In that case, the Developer would be required to first obtain the approval of DeKalb County.

- *A comment was received inquiring how truck traffic would be impacted by the project, and if truck-only lanes were proposed.*

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 that the truck movement within the interchange is not substantial enough to merit lanes strictly dedicated to trucks and buses. Providing additional truck lanes 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.

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. The redesigned interchange will provide more direct ramps with gradual curves that eliminate large speed changes and are easier and safer to drive, particularly for trucks, which have higher centers of gravity and more difficulty navigating sharp curves at high speeds. The proposed concept increases the design speeds of the I-285 southbound to I-20 eastbound ramp from 35 mph to 45 mph, the I-20 westbound to I-285 southbound ramp from 15 mph to 45 mph, and the I-20 eastbound to I-285 southbound ramp from 40 mph to 45 mph.

Current truck restrictions on I-20 mainline will be continued after the project is built. Since all the ramps at the I-285/I-20 East Interchange are two lanes or less, no additional signage will be placed on the ramps to restrict truck traffic.

- *A comment was received regarding impacts to a commercial property, specifically citing loss of property, loss of trees, increase of noise, decrease of property value, and disruption to minority-owned business tenants.*

Based on the concept design, some right-of-way will be required from the commercial property. None of the buildings would be displaced; therefore, there would be no disruption of tenants' businesses. Approximately 15 parking spaces in the location where right-of-way would be acquired may be impacted, and these could be restored in another location. Trees within existing Georgia DOT right-of-way and within the procured right-of-way from the property would be removed to construct the proposed improvements at this location. Georgia DOT's right-of-way team will meet with the property owner to show

design drawings and discuss the impacts to their specific property, access needs, and potential implications on the value of the property. More information regarding the acquisition process can be found in the pamphlet titled "What Happens If Your Property is Needed for a Transportation Facility" which can be found at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/ROW>. As the project advances into final design, comments regarding the property impacts will be communicated to the Developer.

A noise barrier is not proposed at this location as the preliminary noise analysis completed as part of the environmental studies indicates there is no noise impact. As indicated in the Noise Impact Assessment, the predicted noise level in the 2045 Build Condition (60.2 dBA) is slightly less than in the 2045 No Build Condition (60.5 dBA) and only slightly above 2018 Existing Conditions (59.8 dBA). Noise levels in all three conditions are well below the Federal Highway Administration Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC) for commercial properties.

Lastly, the effects of the proposed project on communities and community resources, including environmental justice (EJ) populations, were assessed as part of the environmental studies. None of the identified project impacts would fall disproportionately on minority or low-income populations and none of the impacts would be substantial. The required right-of-way has been reduced to the extent feasible and prudent with the construction of a safe and operationally sound facility that would meet the needs and purpose of the project. The public involvement for the project included extensive outreach with the community, including coordination with local and regional agencies to identify and reach minority and low-income populations. Since the I-285/I-20 East Interchange Project was announced in early 2016, Georgia DOT has held more than 200 presentations and meetings to educate and seek input from stakeholders and local citizens, including a PIOH in November 2019 at the Omega World Center to provide project information, answer the public's questions, and collect input.

Again, thank you for your comments. Please visit the project website for updates at: <https://majormobilityga.com/projects/eastsideic/>. Should you have further questions or comments, please contact Matthew Fowler, Georgia DOT Planning, Tolling, and Finance Program Manager, at eastinterchange@dot.ga.gov or 470-407-9167.

Sincerely,



Eric Duff
State Environmental Administrator
ED/khd

Cc (via email): Robert Brown, Georgia DOT Board Member (District 4)
Stacey Key, Georgia DOT Board Member (District 5)
Renitta Shannon, State Representative (District 84)
Karla Drenner, State Representative (District 85)
Michelle Henson, State Representative (District 86)
Pam Stephenson, State Representative (District 90)
Vernon Jones, State Representative (District 91)
Doreen Carter, State Representative (District 92)

Emmanuel Jones, State Senator (District 10)
Tonya Anderson, State Senator (District 43)
Matthew Fowler, Georgia DOT Program Manager
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PDF for Project File