

The Interchange

The Georgia Department of Transportation Newsletter for the
I-16/I-75 Macon Improvement Project

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Project Update

Greetings and welcome to the second edition of the I-16/I-75 Macon Improvement Project Newsletter! Since the last issue, we have decided to give the newsletter a name so residents, stakeholders, and concerned citizens could feel more connected



to the project. Therefore, we named the newsletter *The Interchange* which not only is descriptive of the project but also represents the most prominent transportation feature in the city of Macon.

The proactive public involvement process that we have undertaken has enabled us to meet with the Advisory Committee on several occasions to discuss possible alternatives for the I-16/I-75 project area. From these meetings, the Advisory Committee unanimously selected a concept alternative. Our next step in this process will involve presenting the horizontal and vertical perspectives to the Advisory Committee for review. Upon their approval, this preferred alternative will then be presented to the public by way of a Public Information Meeting (PIM), which will be held in mid October (*Please refer to the Legal Advertisement section in the Macon Telegraph for the date, time, and location of this meeting*).

Again, we continue to encourage participation from all of the citizens of Macon in this important project and look forward to seeing you at the upcoming meeting!

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GDOT Begins Environmental Analysis of I-16 & I-75

In order to ensure that the improvements to the I-16/I-75 interchange have the least possible amount of impact to the environment, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and its consultants will thoroughly analyze the project area to determine sensitive areas and issues. Early identification of possible environmental constraints not only allows for avoidance and minimization of impacts but will also reduce the likelihood of redesign due to environmental impacts once the project is in the final design phase.

Recently, the Project Team completed the first of several specialized field surveys that are being used to define the potentially impacted areas. The following is a brief description and status of these surveys:

Air/Noise Quality Impact Analysis

Computer analysis for predicting ambient carbon monoxide (CO) concentrations for signalized intersections within the proposed project limits will be conducted. In addition a noise impact study, which predicts expected noise levels resulting from the proposed roadway improvement project, will be completed once the details of a preferred alternative are completed. The detailed traffic modeling, which should be completed in early September, will provide additional required data in order to finalize the air/noise impact studies.

Natural Resources

Based upon investigations of natural resources, water quality, and agricultural and farmland uses within the project corridor, it is anticipated that impacts to these areas will be minimal.

Ecological Resources

Wetlands: The entire corridor has been surveyed for Jurisdictional Waters of the United States. The waters and wetlands have been delineated and surveyed onto project base maps. We have also initiated coordination with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to obtain their concurrence regarding the location of wetlands within the project's area of potential effect (APE).

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Public Involvement is the Key to Success

Public involvement continues to play a key role in the development of the I-16/I-75 improvement project. As mandated by the state, the Project Team has worked diligently to develop a Public Involvement Plan that provides continuous opportunities for residents, citizens, and other stakeholders to participate in the plan development process. As the project progresses, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and its consultants will continue to work closely with the public.

Since the last issue of this newsletter, the Project Team has moved a step closer towards realizing the transportation issues and concerns associated with the I-16/I-75 improvement project.



On August 3, members of the Project Team met with the Advisory Committee to discuss various design concept alternatives

that are being developed by GDOT and to identify a preferred alternative. As discussed in the previous issue of the newsletter, the Advisory Committee is a group of 15 individuals who represent diverse perspectives regarding the project. Among the criteria and tools used in evaluating the alternatives was the level of service (LOS), highway capacity software (HCS), average daily traffic (ADT), design hourly volume (DHV), and stopping sight distance. *Please refer to the project website for explanations of these and other terms (www.i16i75.com).*

After many hours of intense discussion, the Committee unanimously selected an alternative which combines several features of the original design concepts with concepts developed as a result of concerns and ideas expressed by the committee. The public involvement process was successful in bringing a group of individuals with differing perspectives together to build consensus and develop a plan that meets the needs and goals of the overall community.

The preferred alternative concept developed by the Advisory Committee will be available for public review and comment at the next Public Information Meeting (PIM), which is scheduled for mid October. GDOT encourages the attendance of all concerned parties and will continue to welcome the public as a partner in this plan development process.

Did You Know? Did You Know?

Did you know that the city of Macon has had a wonderfully rich and varied history? There is really no place in the city that one can't simply look around and see evidence of Macon's interesting past. This especially hold true when you stop and consider why Macon looks the way it does today. As with most cities, transportation has played a central role in the what, where, when, and why Macon came to be. The following are a few major milestones in Macon's transportation history:

- Muscogee/Creek Indians and the early European settlers used a trading path that followed the Fall Line from Alabama to the Savannah River and forded the Ocmulgee River in the area now located within the Ocmulgee National Monument.
- The plan for the city of Macon was designed in 1823 and included roadways that varied in width from 120 feet to 180 feet. The plan followed a basic grid pattern with the exception of Cotton Avenue, named for the crop most often transported upon it, which was the old Federal Road to Monroe County.
- The first permanent bridge across the Ocmulgee River in Macon opened in 1826 at Fifth Street, which is now known as Coliseum Drive/Martin Luther King Jr., Drive.
- The first steamboat arrived in Macon in 1829, which facilitated faster transport to the ports of coastal Georgia.
- The Monroe Railroad, the first railroad in Macon, began operation in 1839 and ran from Macon to Forsyth County. By 1898, Macon had become the center of 11 railroads.
- The first automobile arrived in Macon in 1899. Sixty years later, the interstate in Bibb County was completed. The I-16/I-75 Interchange currently carries over 130,000 vehicles per day. By the year 2025, the number of estimated vehicles will be close to 200,000 a day.

*Source: "History of Macon and Central Georgia", by John C. Butler.

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Habitat: Surveys of the corridor have been completed to describe all habitats identified. The aerial photographic maps of the site, which delineate the different habitats, have also been prepared.

Threatened and Endangered Species:

Ecologists from the project team are presently conducting intensive surveys of potential habitats for the presence of federally protected wildlife, which includes both plants and animals. These surveys, which began in November 1999, will continue through the months of September and October 2000.

Cultural Resources:

History: The archival research and field surveys have now been completed for the proposed project. The APE was defined as a broad corridor extending 500 feet from the edge of each side of existing pavement for a total width of approximately 1200 feet. The review of existing information revealed that seven properties listed in or nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, one National Historic Monument, and one Traditional Cultural Property are located within the proposed projects' APE. These properties are the East Macon Historic District, the Macon Historic District, the Macon Railroad



Industrial District, the Pleasant Hill Historic District, Riverside Cemetery, Rose Hill Cemetery, the Shirley Hills Historic District, the Ocmulgee National Monument, and the Ocmulgee Old Fields Traditional Cultural Property. The Survey Report, which is a compilation of the field and archival research, was submitted in May for review by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

Archaeology: The Phase I Archaeological Survey for the project has been completed. The survey did not identify any sites within the APE that were considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; therefore, no Phase II studies are required.

Community Impacts

An investigation of each community and its facilities and services is currently being analyzed. In addition, there will be an analysis of relocation impacts once the details of a preferred alignment are completed. Impacts to land use, economic consequences, and construction impacts within the project limit will also be assessed. These impacts are expected to be minor, since most of the construction will be completed within the existing interstate right-of-way.

Hazardous Materials Analysis

Field investigations and database searches to identify potential hazardous waste sites including underground storage tanks have been completed.

The goal of the detailed surveys is to gather and analyze social, economic, and environmental data to determine if modifications in the project location and scope are necessary to ensure project compliance with federal laws. The status and preliminary results of these surveys have been discussed with the regulatory agencies at a coordination meeting held in Macon on March 28, 2000. The agencies that were invited to attend included the following: Federal Emergency Management Agency, Georgia Department of Natural Resource's Environmental Protection Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resource's Historic Preservation Division, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Following the meeting, field visits with the agencies were conducted in order to familiarize the agencies with the project area.

Next Steps

Over the next few months we will be assessing the impacts that the proposed roadway improvement concept alternative may have on the environmental resources identified during the data gathering and survey phase as discussed above. This assessment will deal with both direct and indirect impacts on the surrounding resources. The environmental analysis will include historic, ecological and community resources and potential impacts on land use, economic, parklands, and other environmentally important resources in the area. The results of these assessments along with recordation of the previously completed environmental surveys will be the core of the environmental document that will be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration and other regulatory agencies for project approval.

The **Georgia Department of Transportation** cordially invites you to attend a *Public Information Meeting* for the I-16/I-75 Macon Improvement Project, which will be held in mid October at the Macon City Auditorium (415 First Street).

For more information, please contact Joe Palladi, State Transportation Engineer, at (404) 656-5436

I-16/I-75 Improvement Project Schedule

- Oct. 11 Submit draft Concept Validation Report to GDOT
- Nov. 1 Submit Final Concept Validation Report to GDOT
Submit Bridge Concepts to GDOT
Submit Final Design Data Book to GDOT
Submit Design Exception Reports to GDOT
Submit Interchange Modification Report(s) to GDOT
Notice To Proceed with Preliminary Design Phase

Keeping in Touch

Your involvement is one of the most important elements of the I-16/I-75 Improvement Project. You can learn more about this project or contact the Project Team in any of the following ways:

Website:

www.i16i75.com

Project Contacts:

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(404) 656-5436

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