

The Interchange

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

Volume 3 Issue 1

Summer 2002

I-16/I-75 Improvement Project Update

Greetings and welcome to the fourth edition of *The Interchange*. There have been several important developments since distribution of the last project newsletter in the summer of 2001. Most notably, coordination efforts concerning future relocation of the Norfolk Southern Railroad have been concluded and the project team has resumed both engineering and environmental analysis on the preferred concept alternative (see "Railroad Coordination").

The project team has commenced work on a flood study in accordance with Federal guidelines. Engineering efforts will include hydrology studies for the Ocmulgee River, design modifications as necessary, and possible mitigation efforts to ensure river flood levels do not increase above present conditions. The computer modeling for the Ocmulgee River will take into account changes in topography as a result of various local projects, such as the Ocmulgee Heritage Greenway, in addition to improvements to the interstate.

Work on other project tasks has also resumed full-swing (see articles on pages 2 and 3). The I-16/I-75 Improvement Project website, www.i16i75.com, has been updated with new and current information including an interactive project display, summaries from public meetings, and answers to frequently asked questions. We invite everyone to visit the project website often to monitor our progress and provide feedback/comments as necessary. ♦

In This Issue.....

√ I-16/I-75 Improvement Project Update	1
√ Railroad Coordination	1
√ Neighborhood Outreach Continues..	2
√ Did You Know?	2
√ Status of Environment Analysis	3
√ Next Steps	4

Railroad Coordination



In March 2000, members of the I-16/I-75 Advisory Committee requested that the project team investigate alternative interstate/interchange designs that would not preclude future relocation of the Norfolk Southern "H" line. This rail line is currently located adjacent to the Ocmulgee River between the I-16/I-75 interchange and Coliseum Drive. Between March 2000 and November 2001, the GDOT project team coordinated with the City of Macon, Bibb County, NewTown Macon, Norfolk Southern, and the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority (GRPA) in an effort to integrate rail relocation with the proposed interstate improvements. Feasibility studies were prepared by both Moreland Altobelli Associates, Inc. (GDOT's design consultant) and Joseph Passonneau & Partners (a transportation consultant retained by NewTown Macon). These studies indicated that relocating the railroad to the northeast side of the river would require lowering I-16 where it crosses Spring Street and elevating Spring Street at least thirty feet. Accomplishing this would require closing Spring Street between Riverside Drive and Emery Highway for a period of up to two years. In November 2001, the City of Macon and the Bibb County Commission recommended that the interchange project proceed without provisions for rail relocation. ♦

Neighborhood Outreach Continues

In keeping with the goal of strong public involvement with the I-16/I-75 Interchange Improvement Project, our effort to communicate with and listen to communities near the project continues. Over the past few months, small local meetings were organized with the Shirley Hills/North Highland and the Winship Hills/Northwoods neighborhoods. These meetings were held to address concerns raised by residents and to provide an opportunity for productive dialogue to take place between the project team and the communities. More than 50 people attended these meetings. The major concern of each community pertained to the project's potential noise impacts on the neighborhoods.



The Shirley Hills/North Highland meeting was a follow-up to an initial neighborhood meeting in January of 2001. The discussion at the second meeting centered around the placement of noise walls on the section of interstate abutting Shirley Hills. The residents were given information on the various types of noise walls, their relative costs, and the approximate amount of funding available for the installation of noise walls based on the total number of households impacted. The Department committed itself to working closely with the Shirley Hills neighborhood through their representative on the Citizens Advisory Committee on the selection, installation, and landscaping of the noise walls.

The Winship Hills/Northwoods meeting was organized to present an overview of two GDOT projects adjacent to the neighborhood: the I-16/I-75 Interchange Improvement Project and the I-75 Improvement Project from Pierce Avenue to Arkwright Road. Presentations were made by the project teams for both projects, followed by a question and answer session. The discussion that followed focused almost exclusively on existing and future noise impacts to the Winship Hills and Northwoods neighborhoods.

Several residents requested more detailed information from the I-16/I-75 noise impact study. The Department committed to and subsequently performed additional noise readings at specific locations within the neighborhood. The additional noise readings, however, confirmed the earlier findings that no significant future impacts to the Winship Hills neighborhood would result from the I-16/I-75 project. ♦

Did You Know?

Pleasant Hill Historic District

Sitting west of the Ocmulgee River is the Pleasant Hill Historic District, a historically African American community that developed between the 1870s and the mid-1930s. Pleasant Hill, said to be named for the cool breezes that run through its hilly, and once wooded terrain, encompasses approximately 205 acres. Its offset grid pattern reflects the topography and incremental development of the neighborhood.

Initial development of the Pleasant Hill community began in the 1870s. Resident builders, carpenters, plasterers, and brick masons of Pleasant Hill built many of the houses in the neighborhood. The architecture consists of significant examples of Georgia's vernacular

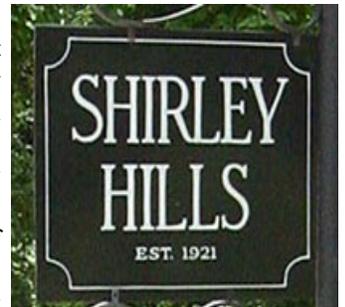


house types such as the saddlebag, shotgun, "L"-shaped cottage, and square plan with pyramidal roof. Victorian Eclectic, Colonial Revival, and Craftsman detailing embellish some of the homes in the neighborhood. Schools, churches, corner stores, and other commercial and institutional buildings were built among the houses, making Pleasant Hill a self-sufficient, self-contained community. Its schools became a viable education center

for African Americans in other parts of Macon.

Shirley Hills Historic District

Sitting on approximately 275 acres of naturally hilly landscape northeast of the Ocmulgee River is the Shirley Hills Historic District, a subdivision of popular early 20th century style homes developed from the early 1920s through the 1940s. This historic district has a wide range of styles such as the Colonial, Spanish Colonial, Classical Revival, Tudor



Revival, Italian Renaissance, French Renaissance, and Craftsman. Land for this new neighborhood came from the estate of Augustus Octavius Bacon (1839-1914), a Georgia legislator and U.S. Senator. Shirley Hills derived its name from the granddaughter of U.S. Senator Bacon.

The firm of John Leon Hoffman, Inc. designed the Shirley Hills site plan. Hoffman, a pupil of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. during the construction of the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, designed Shirley Hills in the Olmsted tradition of creating a picturesque setting with informal and seemingly natural landscaping. The winding road layout and spacious land division are sensitive to the natural terrain. This style of design was prevalent in garden suburbs of the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th century. ♦

Status of Environmental Analysis

Over the past few months we have been finalizing details on the special studies for the Environmental Assessment (EA) of the I-16/I-75 Improvement Project. These studies are required to analyze the potential environmental impacts that would result from the proposed project. At the onset of this project, we quickly became aware of the many sensitive environmental resources located within the project corridor. These resources include several historic districts and properties, extensive wetlands and streams, a large floodplain associated with the Ocmulgee River, large recreation areas, adjacent commercial and residential communities, and a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP).

Many changes to the proposed project have occurred in order to meet the goals of avoidance and/or minimization of impacts to environmental resources. As a result, implementation of the proposed project would result in minimal environmental impact, specifically:

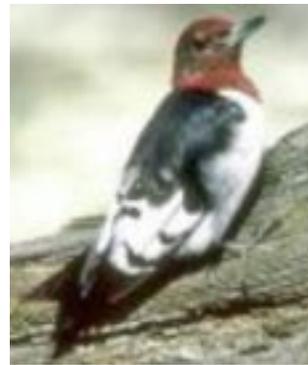
- project construction would not affect historic or archaeological resources, threatened or endangered species, farmland, air quality, or water quality;
- the project would not result in any disproportionate effects to minority or low-income populations, and land use along the project corridor would not change;
- minimal impacts would result to Riverwalk Park from project construction due to right-of-way acquisition;
- minimal floodplain impacts would occur, although most impacts would be avoided due to the proposed construction of bridges and elevated structures over much of the Ocmulgee River floodplain;
- there would be no residential relocations and only one business would be displaced by the proposed project.

Also, impacts to jurisdictional waters of the U.S. would be relatively minimal. Approximately 2.5 acres of wetlands and 1,700 linear feet of stream channel would

be impacted. Alignment and structure modifications have been made to avoid and/or minimize impacts to wetlands and streams, including the proposed construction of bridges, elevated structures and retaining walls. All impacts to jurisdictional waters would be mitigated in accordance with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Standard Operating Procedures for Compensatory Mitigation.

The proposed project would result in noise impacts to a total of 32 residential sites, two cemeteries, and one passive park. Based on analysis of the impacted sites, it was determined that the Shirley Hills neighborhood was the only area where effective noise abatement measures would be considered reasonable and feasible. A 12 to 20-foot tall barrier extending from a point along the westbound lanes near the Baconsfield apartment complex to a point beyond the Ocmulgee River Bridge is proposed, and would provide an 11 to 16-decibel noise level reduction within the adjacent residential community.

As the environmental analyses come to a conclusion, we are continuing to prepare the draft EA document. It is anticipated that the EA will be finalized and submitted to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in July



Red-headed Woodpecker

of 2002. We will also prepare a Section 4(f) analysis concurrently with the EA, since the project would impact the Riverwalk Park. This analysis is necessary to demonstrate that there are no other feasible alternates that avoid use of the parkland and still meet the project need and purpose.

Once the FHWA reviews and approves the draft EA and Section 4(f) documents, GDOT will hold a public hearing on the project to describe the proposed improvements, discuss environmental impacts, answer questions regarding the project, and receive written and verbal comments from the public. ♦

Next Steps...

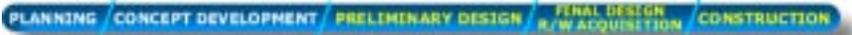
The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) will be under review this summer by both GDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Following EA approval from the FHWA, a Public Hearing will be scheduled. Another Advisory Committee Meeting will be held prior to the Public Hearing.

Please visit the project website (www.il6i75.com) for the latest information concerning upcoming public meetings.

PROJECT TIMELINE



We are here



Georgia Department of Transportation
I-16/I-75 Improvement Project
P.O. Box 4305
Macon, GA 31208

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.il6i75.com

Project Contacts:

- Joseph P. Palladi, P.E.
State Urban Design Engineer, GDOT
- Angela Alexander
Asst. State Urban Design Engineer, GDOT
- Genetha Rice-Singleton,
Urban Design Project Manager, GDOT
(404) 656-5436

Project Hotline:

1-800-470-2344

E-Mail:

comments@il6i75.com

Mailing Address:

I-16/I-75 Improvement Project
P.O. Box 4305
Macon, GA 31208

