



NORTHWEST CORRIDOR PROJECT NEWS

Northwest Corridor (I-75/I-575) Project Newsletter

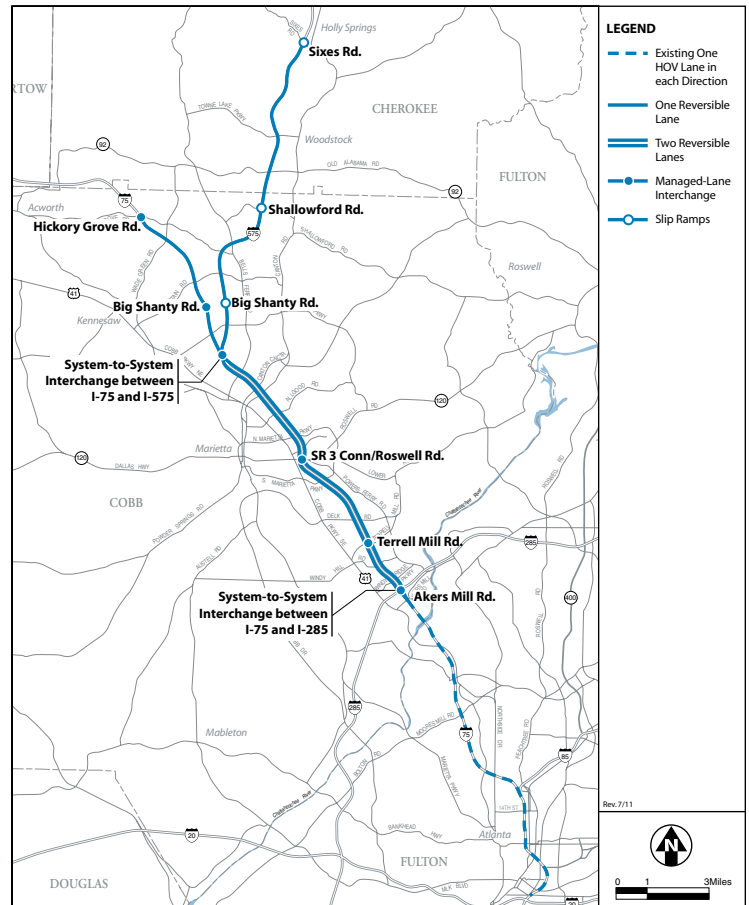
Final Environmental Impact Statement is Complete!

The completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is a major project milestone for the Northwest Corridor Project (NWCP). It is the latest effort in the continuation of compliance with the federal environmental process which began in early 2004. The Notice of Availability (NOA), used to advertise the date when the document is ready for public review, was published in the Federal Register. A thirty (30) day public comment period begins when the FEIS is available. (See page three for information on where to review the various documents associated with the FEIS).

For the last ten months, the Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) has been working with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to develop the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Northwest Corridor Project. The FEIS documents the project technical analyses, agency consultation and public involvement activities conducted since the publication of the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) and public hearings last fall.

Several activities have led up to the completion of the FEIS. In May 2007, the Northwest I-75/I-575 Corridor Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) was published. The AA/DEIS evaluated four build alternatives that included different combinations of transportation system management, high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) (i.e., carpool) lanes, truck only lanes, and bus rapid transit (buses operating similar to a train servicing a limited number of bus stops) improvements.

Following the public review of the AA/DEIS, a number of changes occurred that called for the preparation of a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS). The SDEIS issued on September 18, 2010 addressed the changed conditions affecting the project as well as evaluation of a new alternative that more closely matched the financial resources available to GDOT for construction of this project. Under the new alternative, tolled reversible managed lanes would be constructed in the project corridor. Following the public review of the SDEIS, minor





changes were made to the alternative to minimize environmental impacts, address traffic congestion and further reduce costs. This modified alternative was selected by GDOT as the Preferred Alternative and is evaluated in the FEIS.

NWCP and the I-85 Express Lanes

Managed lanes have been a topic in the Atlanta area media recently with the opening of the I-85 Express Lanes from Chamblee-Tucker Road in DeKalb County to Old Peachtree Road in Gwinnett County. While both the Northwest Corridor Project and the I-85 Express Lanes are intended to provide increased mobility and traffic relief in two of the region's most congested corridors, the scope and operation of the two projects vary greatly.

The I-85 project converted the existing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, one in each direction, into High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes. Vehicles with three or more riders can access the lanes for free; vehicles with one or two riders can access the Express Lanes for a fee. To use the I-85 Express Lanes, motorists must register for a Peach Pass account and obtain a transponder. Users may switch between a toll and a toll-free status, depending on their vehicle's occupancy, prior to their use of the lanes.

Some of the key differences between the I-85 project and the NWCP include:

- **NWCP adds additional lanes to I-75 and I-575.** Two new lanes would be added to I-75 between I-285 and I-575. One new lane would be added to I-75 between I-575 and north of Hickory Grove Road, and one new lane would be added to I-575 between I-75 and Sixes Road. The project does not convert or change any of the existing lanes on I-75 or I-575. The reversible feature would help minimize traffic congestion in the direction with the most demand, e.g. southbound in the morning commute period and northbound in the afternoon commute period.
- **NWCP utilizes dedicated entrance and exit points on I-75.** Six new managed lane interchanges are proposed on I-75. This would provide system-only access to and from the managed lanes to local streets, eliminating the need to cross over multiple lanes of traffic to enter or exit the system. The access locations would be separate from the general purpose interchanges. For I-575, users will continue to use the existing interchanges to enter and exit I-575, and access the managed lanes through three new pairs of slip ramps.





- **NWCP is barrier separated.** The managed lanes system is separate from the existing I-75 and I-575 facilities, allowing enforcement of proper use of the lanes and management of incidents such as traffic accidents and vehicle breakdowns.
- **NWCP will toll all users.** All motorists, regardless of how many passengers are in the car would be charged the same toll rate (excluding registered transit vehicles, military vehicles, emergency vehicles and school buses). Motorcycles must pay the toll to use the NWCP.
- **NWCP is a Public Private Partnership (P3) project.** Final design and construction of the project will be conducted with private industry partners, which will greatly expand the options for innovative technology and funding.

Tolls for the Northwest Corridor Project will be collected electronically and toll amounts will vary by time of day and congestion level. Users will have the opportunity to pay by transponder or by license plate. Registration for a Peach Pass account will not be required, though existing Peach Pass account holders will be able to utilize their transponders to access the facility.

How to Review and Comment on the FEIS

A thirty (30) day public comment period begins when the FEIS is available for review. As your comments are valuable to us, we have made the FEIS accessible in a number of ways:

1. On the project website, www.nwcproject.com;
2. At the following area libraries and Georgia DOT Offices:
 - Atlanta-Fulton County Library, One Margaret Mitchell Square, Atlanta GA 30303,
 - Cobb County Central Library, 266 Roswell St, Marietta GA 30060,
 - RT Jones Memorial Library, 116 Brown Industrial Pkwy, Canton GA 30114,
 - Georgia Department of Transportation, Office of Environmental Services, 600 West Peachtree Street, NW., 16th Floor, Atlanta, GA 30308,
 - GDOT District 6 Main Office, 500 Joe Frank Harris Parkway, Cartersville, GA 30120,
 - GDOT District 6 Cherokee Area Engineer's Office, 874 Peoples Valley Road, NW, Cartersville, GA 30120,
 - GDOT District 7 Main Office, 5025 New Peachtree Road, Chamblee, GA 30341, and GDOT District 7 Office, Cobb Area Engineer's Office, 1269 Kennestone Circle, Marietta, Georgia 30066
3. You may also request a DVD and additional content through the "Contact Us" tab on the website, by calling our Voice Mail Hotline at (404) 377-4012 or emailing us at nwcpcomments@projectsolvemail.com.
4. Paper copies may be requested by contacting Darryl VanMeter at Georgia Department of Transportation using the phone number or email address on the back of this newsletter.
5. Project informational displays, or kiosks, will be held in the vicinity of the corridor depicting project information and allowing the opportunity for public comment. A separate flyer announcing the kiosk locations, dates and times will be distributed electronically and in hard copy, and posted on the project website.

After review of the FEIS, you may submit your comments by email, phone or mail with the contact information listed on the back page of this newsletter. [To be included in the official project record, please submit your comments by November 21, 2011.](#)

The Preferred Alternative

After careful consideration of several different alternatives for how the NWCP would operate most efficiently, public comment and cost considerations have contributed to Georgia DOT's selection of a preferred alternative for the project.



The Preferred Alternative extends the existing two I-75 HOV lanes, one in each direction, that currently end at Akers Mill Road, south of the I-75/I-285 interchange. Two new managed lanes would be added on elevated structures on the west side of I-75 between Akers Mill Road and I-575. A single managed lane would then continue north on I-75 from the I-75/I-575 interchange to just beyond Hickory Grove Road. A single managed lane would also continue north on I-575 from the I-75/I-575 interchange to a point north of Ridgewalk Parkway and south of the Sixes Road interchange.

The proposed new managed lanes on I-75 and I-575 would be reversible, only serving the traffic flow during morning and afternoon peak commute periods. During the morning peak commute period, both lanes would accommodate heavier southbound traffic. During the evening peak commute period, the lanes would be reversed to accommodate heavier northbound traffic.

To access the reversible lanes, vehicles would use the managed lane interchanges and slip ramps. The new managed lane interchanges would be separate from the existing general-purpose interchanges. Slip ramps would provide access to the reversible lane on I-575, allowing traffic in the inside general-purpose lanes to merge to the highway median where the new reversible would be constructed. Separate slip ramps would be used for northbound and southbound traffic.

A total of six managed-lane interchanges would be constructed on I-75 at the following locations: I-285, Terrell Mill Road, Roswell Road, I-575, Big Shanty Road and Hickory Grove Road. On I-575, three pairs of slip ramps would be constructed near the existing general-purpose interchanges at Barrett Parkway, Shallowford Road and Sixes Road. The exact location will be slightly different for southbound and northbound accesses in order to fit everything within the existing median.

Safety is a key concern with the reversible managed lane system. Features will be put in place to ensure only vehicles travelling in the appropriate direction can access the system. The managed lane slip ramps on I-575 would only allow vehicles to enter the system and travel southbound during the morning peak period and northbound in the evening peak period. At those interchanges on I-75 that allow access in both directions of travel, mechanical gates would be lowered to prevent use by the northbound travelers during the morning southbound operation and would change to prevent use by the southbound travellers



I-75 Managed Lane Interchange (South of I-575) – Simulation Looking North at Roswell Road

during evening northbound operation. Access to the managed lane system would also be closed for a period of time during the day when traffic is light for changing direction.

Every vehicle using the managed lanes will pay a toll, including single driver vehicles, carpools and certified alternative-fuel vehicles. The only exceptions will be registered transit vehicles (buses and vanpools), military vehicles, and emergency vehicles. Heavy and medium trucks, such as those with more than two axles, will not be allowed to use the managed lanes at all. Tolls will be collected electronically and priced so that traffic in the lanes will maintain a minimum average speed of 45 miles per hour (mph). Known as dynamic pricing, the toll will be adjusted by such factors as the time of day and congestion level to ensure traffic keeps moving at the desired rate.

The I-75/ I-575 corridor is challenged by high traffic congestion and the proposed managed lanes system is anticipated to provide great benefit. Traffic analysis conducted for the FEIS for the year 2035, show that the managed lanes on the I-75 segment from Akers Mill to Hickory Grove Road could save travelers more than half their average commute time in the morning and evening. The same savings are also forecast for those travelling the Akers Mill to Sixes Road segment. Transit utilizing the managed lanes could also benefit from the reduced travel time. Additionally, by maintaining a minimum average speed of 45 mph in the managed lanes, users can more accurately predict how long their trip will take.

Community Outreach

Community Noise Wall Meetings

Analyzing noise level impacts to residents in construction project areas is one of the environmental concerns addressed by Georgia DOT. In early 2011, Georgia DOT adopted a new Noise Abatement Policy which changed the guidelines for how the effects of roadway noise are measured and applied to the design of noise walls on the corridors. When these guidelines were applied to the preferred alternative in the FEIS, additional properties beyond those listed in the SDEIS and shown at the public hearings, met the criteria for receiving noise walls.

In November, two public meetings are scheduled to discuss the noise wall plans with those newly identified affected property owners and to seek their comments. While the focus of the meeting is to present information to this group, the general public is welcome to attend. All comments are welcome and will be recorded. Similar information will be presented at both meetings, so it is not necessary to attend both. There will be a recorded presentation for general information about the project. In addition, the FEIS will be available for review. Please feel free to stop by any time between the published meeting hours.

November 8, 2011

5:00pm - 7:00pm
DoubleTree Hotel
2055 South Park Place
Atlanta, GA 30339

November 10, 2011

6:00pm - 8:00pm
Embassy Suites Hotel
620 Chastain Road
Kennesaw, GA 30144

Additionally, from November 8, 2011 to November 21, 2011 an online version of the meetings and a survey will be available on the project website www.nwcproject.com.

2010 SDEIS Public Hearings

In October 2010, two public hearing open houses were held in Cobb and Cherokee counties in support of the publication of the SDEIS. At the open houses, the public could view project displays and a video presentation, speak with project staff, and review the SDEIS document. The public could also submit a verbal comment to a court reporter or a written comment card. Spanish and Portuguese interpreters were



available. In total, 205 people attended the meetings, with over 35 comments received at the meetings.

During the entire comment period over 100 agencies, organizations, and individuals submitted comments, both positive and negative about the project. Comments include general support or opposition of the proposed managed lane system, engineering design, need for additional transit, tolling, funding, concern over visual and noise impacts, and concerns about safety of the reversible system. Comments from the public are important to Georgia DOT and to our process. All of the comments were reviewed and considered; some are reflected in the Preferred Alternative and other comments have been used to refine how the alternative is evaluated.



Public hearing at Woodstock High School

What's Next?

A Record of Decision (ROD) is expected to be issued by FHWA in the first quarter of 2012. The ROD will identify the selected alternative, list and describe any measures needed to minimize effects to the natural, human and built environments, and contain the comments received on the FEIS and the responses. Following the issuance of the ROD, FHWA and Georgia DOT will make a final decision regarding the implementation of the Northwest Corridor Project. If the decision is made to move the project forward, Georgia DOT will select a Public Private Partnership (P3) team to implement the final design, construction and operation of the managed lane system. For more information on the P3 program, please visit www.georgiap3.com. Stay tuned for project updates!

Thank you for your continued participation! 

Get Involved!

For project updates and to join the mailing list or provide feedback:

Voice Mail Hotline: (404) 377-4012

Email: nwcpcomments@projectsolvemail.com

Website: www.nwcproject.com

To submit written comments, or for more information please contact:

Darryl D. VanMeter, P.E.

State Innovative Program Delivery Engineer
Georgia Department of Transportation
One Georgia Center
600 West Peachtree NW, 27th Floor
Atlanta, Georgia 30308

ACRONYMS

DEIS: Draft Environmental Impact Statement

ETL: Express Toll Lanes

FEIS: Final Environmental Impact Statement

FHWA: Federal Highway Administration

GDOT: Georgia Department of Transportation

HOT Lanes: High Occupancy Toll Lanes

HOV Lanes: High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes

LPA: Locally Preferred Alternative

MARTA: Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority

NOA: Notice of Availability

PPP: Public Private Partnership

RFP: Request for Proposals

RFQ: Request for Qualifications

ROD: Record of Decision

SDEIS: Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement

TOL: Truck Only Lanes