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MPO SEEKS PUBLIC INPUT ON AREA TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

Old Problem, New Approach -- There has been much discussion over the past several years about how to solve Savannah's transportation problems. Problems with east-west mobility are a long-standing and growing concern for Savannah's residents, businesses and visitors, and threaten to affect the region's quality of life, economic vitality, and tourism industry. Of primary concern are the growing automobile and truck traffic levels and the associated incompatibility of congested and unsafe roadway conditions within historic areas of downtown Savannah. In response to these issues, the Chatham Urban Transportation Study (CUTS) Policy Committee is initiating "*Connecting Savannah: Moving People – Making Neighborhoods*" project. The study will be directed by the Chatham County–Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) Executive Director, Tom Thomson.

The MPO acknowledges the concept of studying the east-west corridor is not new. Despite previous technical analyses and recommendations for proposed roadway investments, the public has not reached an agreement on a solution, or set of solutions. So what is new? To move forward, there must be community consensus on the solution. The proposed process will create the opportunity for participation in a credible planning and decision-making process. The primary focus of *Connecting Savannah* is proactively engaging the public.

Committed to Public Dialogue -- Throughout the development of the *Connecting Savannah* initiative, the project team, on behalf of the CUTS/MPO, will be gathering the views of the community on existing conditions and future transportation strategies and solutions. "Technical analysis and collaboration with local and state decision-makers is only part of our approach," states Tom Thomson. "Establishing early and meaningful dialogue with concerned citizens is fundamental to our planning process."

As a first step, the study team will establish citizen participation groups representing geographic areas and other interests within the Savannah area. Each group will identify issues, work with the *Connecting Savannah* team to develop potential solutions, and come together as a community to decide which projects warrant advancement to the next phase of development.

The MPC will be assisted by Wilbur Smith Associates as lead consultant. Lott+Barber Architects, a local Savannah firm, and Dovetail Consulting, an Atlanta-based public involvement firm, will play major roles in helping the community reach consensus on the way forward. "The first phase of the process is about bringing people and projects together," said Mr. Thomson, "and we will work on this intensively with a target of consensus within 6-8 months."

CUTS is the *Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)* responsible for Chatham County transportation planning. The federal government requires that an MPO be established in urbanized areas of over 50,000 people to conduct regional transportation policy-making and planning. The MPO is comprised of representatives of local, state and federal government and transportation authorities and ensures federal spending on transportation occurs through a comprehensive, cooperative and continuing process involving both the public and policy-makers. The MPC provides staff services to the CUTS/MPO Policy Committee, which is chaired by the chairman of the Chatham County Board of County Commissioners, Dr. Billy Hair.

For More Information – Please write thomsont@thempc.org or call (912) 651 – 1446.