

Connecting Savannah: Moving People — Making Neighborhoods



Project Fact Sheet

August 2004

A Historic Perspective

There has been much discussion for many years about how to solve Savannah's transportation problems. Issues 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. In response to these challenges, local transportation planning and engineering officials have undertaken a number of studies to understand and develop solutions for positive change.

In the late 1980s, thoroughfare plans and surveys identified problems on Bay Street. In the early 1990s, general alternatives began to emerge including tunnels and rerouting traffic to other corridors. In the late 1990s, the East-West Corridor Study was initiated. Upon its completion in 2002, there were several recommendations, but to date no action has been taken.

A New Approach

The current transportation project, "Connecting Savannah: Moving People—Making Neighborhoods," has a focus on bringing together people and projects. This connection occurs by actively engaging those with a stake in the outcome, especially those impacted by recommended changes.

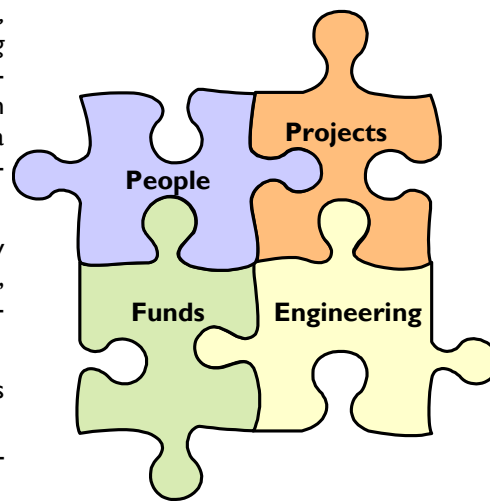
The approach will be to work with a variety of stakeholder groups in their own settings, at their preferred meeting times and locations to:

- Understand community values, concerns and interests;
- Identify opportunities for both short- and long-term improvements;
- Confirm the feasibility of options; and
- Identify what alternatives merit additional study.

The new approach is dynamic and proactive; where community members can identify with and gain access to the planning process at an early stage and make a difference; where opinions and concerns of the community as a whole matter.

A Collective Vision

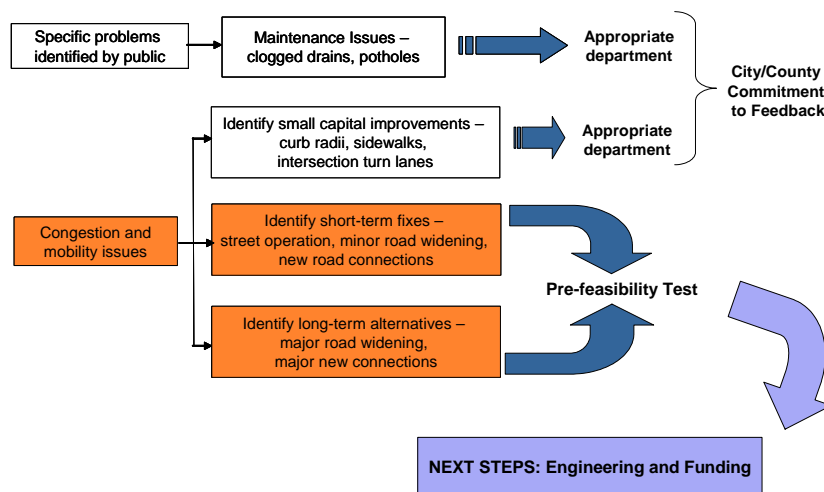
Undoubtedly, the Savannah metropolitan region is a great place to live, work, and visit. To maintain and enhance its livability, competitive business environment, and tourism potential, the transportation system must reflect the collective aspirations of the residents, businesses, and visitors. For this to happen, there must be an understanding of how transportation improvements are developed, what they may look like, and how they address the goals of the community.



Issue Identification and Consensus-Building Process

Throughout the development of the *Connecting Savannah* plan, 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, Executive Director of the MPO, sponsoring the development of the plan. "Establishing early and meaningful dialogue with concerned citizens will be fundamental to our planning process."

As illustrated in the diagram below, the planning process and discussions with the public will focus on issues at multiple levels. Small, immediate transportation issues involving maintenance or small capital improvements will be routed to the appropriate City of Savannah and Chatham County departments. Major congestion and mobility issues, requiring the identification of short and long-range alternatives, feasibility testing and ultimately funding and engineering, will be the primary focus the *Connecting Savannah* project.



Community Outreach and Collaboration

The MPO will be assisted by Wilbur Smith Associates as lead consultant for the *Connecting Savannah* project. 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. This study team will put the process in motion by collaborating with citizen participation groups representing the geographic areas and diverse interests within Savannah and the surrounding community. 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.

Are we getting it right? Initial reactions to the process of open dialogue and communication have been encouraging and receptive. According to Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson, engaging the public is the most critical challenge, "I think their approach to involving citizens is exactly what we on the City Council are trying to do." Following a similar briefing, a neighborhood organization that represents homeowners along the DeRenne Corridor from Habersham Street to Waters Avenue was especially pleased about the outreach effort. Dwayne Simpson, Vice President of the Kensington Park Homeowners Association said, "We had a very open discussion...We're starting from square one - everything in the past is in the past." Dr. Billy B. Hair, Chair of the CUTS/MPO Policy Committee added, "I certainly expect the study to come up with doable and feasible alternatives to our east-west [mobility] problems."

The study team will continue to build on this positive momentum with a target of reaching consensus in the next 6-8 months.

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**CUTS is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) responsible for Chatham County transportation planning. The MPO is comprised of representatives of local, state and federal government and transportation authorities and ensures federal spending on transportation for urbanized areas of over 50,000 people 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.