



CONNECTING SAVANNAH: *Moving People – Making Neighborhoods*

Status Report as of December 2004

October 12: Stakeholders Conference

November 4: First Working Group Meeting

November 30: Second Working Group Meeting

I. STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE – October 12, 2004

OVERVIEW

- First meeting in a series of discussions to listen and search for real understanding on what the transportation challenges and potential solutions are for the Savannah metropolitan region.

PURPOSE

- To introduce the purpose, approach and desired outcomes for the Connecting Savannah project and how it fits into the regional transportation planning process;
- To create a forum for open discussion with other interested stakeholders to identify and discuss common transportation issues and related concerns; and
- To identify the most pressing issues that must be addressed in order to create viable transportation solutions for the Savannah-Chatham County area.

ATTENDEES

- Over **75** concerned citizens, business owners, elected officials, and local government representatives.

PROCESS

- Participants were divided into five break out groups to address two questions:

Assets – If you were to describe the Savannah area to friends or relatives who have never been here, what favorable transportation attribute would you tell them about?

Problems/Needs – What is Savannah's most critical transportation problem or need? Be specific as you can be.

RESULTS

- Each group developed a list of responses to each question. Next, each group identified the top 3 assets and top 3 problems/needs for each list. The following is a compilation of top assets and top problem/needs from all five groups:

Top Assets

- Squares
- Neighborhoods
- Grid System
- Canopy Roads/Live Oaks/Palms
- Beauty of Scenic Drive to Beach
- Walkability/Pedestrian Oriented Streets/Pedestrian Friendly
- Public Transportation/Bus System
- Airport/Rail System/Seaport
- Truman Parkway to Downtown

Top Problems/Needs

- East/West travel (is limited, lacks connectivity, need bypass)
- Traffic congestion (Truman Parkway and impact of new developments)
- Alternative modes of transportation
- Traffic control and flow during peak travel times
- Need extension of Truman Parkway to I-95



- Speeding in congested areas
- Disjointed bicycle network
- Need more frequent transit service
- Transportation planning is too heavily auto-oriented
- Need driver awareness of pedestrians
- Lack of sidewalks
- Regional connections
- Downtown parking
- Need better synchronization of traffic lights
- Land use preferably limited to existing transportation

WORKING GROUP FORMATION

- Following the breakout group session, the conference reconvened. After viewing the top 3 problems from each breakout group, participants were asked to list the problems they would be interested in actively resolving.
- The Connecting Savannah Team developed 3 working groups based on participants input:
 1. East / West Connections
 2. Alternative Modes of Transportation
 3. Traffic Management/Small Capital Projects

II. WORKING GROUP SESSION – November 4, 2004

OVERVIEW

- The Working Group session was the next step in the Connecting Savannah process to listen to stakeholder expectations, issues and concerns.

PURPOSE

- Discussion of what the group thinks should be achieved by this process (ensuring the public and project team goals are consistent);
- Development of a list of technical questions that must be addressed to identify feasible options as well as identify data needs (identify what we need to achieve our goals);
- More in-depth discussion on specific problems and issues in order to guide alternative development (start narrowing our focus).

ATTENDEES

- Over **60** concerned citizens, business owners, elected officials, and local government representatives.

PROCESS

- The group decided to fold the traffic operations/small capital project issues into two major break out groups: 1) East / West Connections and 2) Alternative Modes of Transportation.
- Both groups were asked to address several questions:

Where have we been? – What is the top issue, idea or understanding you took away from the October 12, 2004 Stakeholder Conference?

Expectations – What do you hope to achieve with the next round of working group meetings for the Connecting Savannah process?

Issues – What specific questions do we need to answer to reach our goal?





RESULTS

- Each group developed a list of responses to each question. Following a lengthy discussion, each group prioritized the major concerns for each area of focus:

Expectations (common issues voiced in both working groups)

- Priorities and Consensus -- identification of priorities, specific problems and building consensus on possible solutions
- Implementation – projects that move forward as a result of public participation; implementable solutions; involvement of decision makers and implementers (those that will make it happen) so this [process] is not just talk; commitment to make this happen
- Creative and Holistic Solutions – need to look at more creative solutions, not just road construction; recognize there is no “silver bullet” solution, a series of projects is needed, not just one

ISSUES: Working Group 1 – East / West Connections

General Issues:

1. Lack of good connectivity between Skidaway and I-16 from Bay to DeRenne
 - a. Roads that traffic are using are destroying adjacent neighborhoods
 - b. Speed on Henry and Anderson is not consistent with residential character
 - c. Inconsistent travel patterns with adjacent land uses
 - d. Whole area is a neighborhood so only solution is to go around – Truman extension
2. Large commercial trucks on Bay Street as well as other neighborhood street
 - a. Cause wear and tear on historic buildings
 - b. Make it unsafe pedestrian environment
 - c. Trucks rough on pavement
 - d. Unsafe for vehicular traffic as things fall off trucks
 - e. Be careful not to transfer the problem to someone else’s neighborhood
3. Tybee Island commuters deal with a train crossing and drawbridge conflicts causing delays
4. Area is geographically restricted since there are lots of “fingers” with no connectivity
5. Concerned that widening of east/west roads will make them lose their unique character (tree canopies, historical character, etc)
6. Solution – Truman extension to Abercorn – goes around the area
7. Abercorn South area is already becoming a bottleneck at lights – too busy – frequent accidents – not pedestrian friendly
8. Need to reduce dominance of single occupant vehicle (SOV)
9. Oglethorpe/MLK Blvd – too much traffic, too slow
10. Solution – move Truman to I-95 or I-16 to create SW Bypass and then limit Bay Street to local traffic
11. Access to hospitals, especially for emergency access, as corridors become congested
12. Delay caused by lack of traffic signal synchronization

Priority Issues:

- Through traffic, especially commercial, through residential neighborhoods
- Area geographically challenged - No geographic solution without reshaping something
- Majority of access is toward west
- Growth will just make situation more critical
- Delay, travel time and congestion on major corridors
- Need for commitment – feedback – working with decision-makers





ISSUES: Working Group 2 - Alternative Modes of Transportation

Priority Issues:

1. Safety – the top issue of discussion; relates to many areas of concern:
 - a. Safe conditions are needed for cycling and walking
 - b. Lighting improvements are needed
 - c. People must feel safe from criminal activity to use transit or bike/walk at night
 - d. Sidewalk and bike lane improvements are needed
 - e. Improve driver education to help create a safer environment
2. Benefits of alternative transportation – The public needs to be educated on benefits of transportation alternatives, including social, economic, and environmental benefits. Auto dependence also has a negative impact on the character of the community.
3. Consider light rail transit/trolley
4. Conduct a needs assessment locally and regionally
5. Respect for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users is needed

III. WORKING GROUP SESSION – November 30, 2004

OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

- This Working Group session reacted to the need for more background information before moving as soon as possible to identification of potential solutions. Tom Thomson presented information on the MPO's Long Range Plan, Transportation Improvement Program and the County's SPLOST program.

ATTENDEES

- Over 40 concerned citizens, business owners, elected officials, and local government representatives.

IV. NEXT STEPS

The first round of two meetings solidified the issues, direction, and technical questions that must be answered by the *Connecting Savannah* process. The November 30th Working Group session provided background information to understand existing conditions. The next meeting is scheduled for January 6 at the Coastal Georgia Center from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. and will focus on identification of short, medium and long-term improvement alternatives for key problems previously identified.

