



CHATHAM URBAN TRANSPORTATION STUDY

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

October 25, 2006

10:00 A.M.

Voting Members

Russ Abolt
Michael Brown
Jason Buelterman
LTC Carl Coffman
Patrick S. Graham
William W. Hubbard
James Hungerpiller
Otis Johnson
Glenn Jones
McArthur Jarrett
Mike Lamb
Pete Liakakis
Harold Linnenkohl
Stephen R. Lufburrow
Doug J. Marchand
Clint Murphy
Carl Palmer
Andy Quinney
Representative
Anna Maria Thomas
Wayne Tipton
Eric R. Winger

Representing

Chatham County
City of Savannah
City of Tybee Island
Hunter Army Airfield
Savannah Airport Commission
Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce
Town of Vernonburg
City of Savannah
City of Port Wentworth
Chairman, ACAT
City of Pooler
Chairman Chatham County Commission
GDOT
Chairman, MPC
Georgia Ports Authority
Chairman, CAC
Chatham Area Transit Authority
City of Garden City
CAT Board of Directors
Town of Thunderbolt
City of Bloomingdale
Savannah Economic Development
Authority (SEDA)

Present

X
X
X

X

X

Voting Member Alternates

George Fidler
Matthew Fowler
Trip Tollison

Representing

Savannah Airport Commission
GDOT-Atlanta
Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce

Present

X
X
X

Others Present

Allan Black, P.E.
Jo Hickson
Billy Jones

Representing

Chatham County
Coastal Georgia Greenway
City of Savannah

Present

X
X
X

Jane Love	MPO Staff	X
Keith Melton	GDOT – Atlanta	X
Constance Morgan	MPC	X
Teresa Scott	GDOT-Jesup	X
Radney Simpson	GDOT-Atlanta	X
Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP	MPC Executive Director	X
Wykoda Wang	MPO Staff	X
Mike Weiner, P.E.	City of Savannah	X
Robert Wilder	Garden City	X
Mark Wilkes, P.E., AICP	MPO Staff	X
Ardis Wood	Preserving Savannah Neighborhoods	X

Call to Order

Mr. Pete Liakakis called the October 25, 2006 Policy Committee Meeting to order.

I. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Clint Murphy **moved** to approve the October 25, 2006 Policy Committee Meeting Agenda as presented. Mr. Russ Abolt seconded the motion.

Policy Committee Action: the motion to approve the agenda as presented carried with none opposed.

II. Committee Reports

A. **Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation**

In the absence of Mr. McArthur Jarrett, Chairman of the ACAT Committee and his representative, MPO staff reported that the ACAT Committee endorsed both action items. The items endorsed were: 1) the amendment to the 2030 LRTP to clarify MPO policy on enhancement projects and 2) approval of the amendment to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP to include Phase One of the Back River Bridge Bikeway.

B. **Citizens Advisory Committee**

Mr. Clint Murphy, CAC Chairman, reported the Citizens Advisory Committee met and approved the amendment to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan to include Phase One of the Back River Bridge Bikeway. He stated that volunteers from the CAC will act as committee liaisons for four current studies: 1) the SR 204 Study; 2) the Northwest Tollway Study; 3) the Statewide Truck Only Lanes Study; and 4) the Chatham County Interstate Needs Study. There will also be individuals from the CAC involved in the Context Sensitive Design Manual development.

Mr. Murphy added that the Committee also voted unanimously in favor of pushing the cities of Savannah and Pooler and the County of Chatham to move forward on the I-95

Lighting Improvement at I-16. He concluded that he and the Vice Chairman of the CAC would like to schedule a meeting with Chairman Liakakis, Mr. Abolt, Mayor Johnson and Mr. Brown to discuss how the Citizens Advisory Committee can continue to contribute to the Transportation Planning Process and include more citizen involvement in that process.

C. Technical Coordinating Committee

Mr. Mark Wilkes gave a quick review of the October 19, 2006 Technical Coordinating Committee meeting. The action item on that agenda was the Endorsement of the Amendment to the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan and the MPO Bikeway Plan for Phase One of the Back River Bridge Bikeway. The TCC recommended that the Policy Committee approve this items. Mr. Wilkes also informed the Policy Committee of the status on the SR 204 Abercorn Extension Project traffic projections. He added that GDOT's consultant Mr. Tommy Crochet presented the preliminary traffic projections at that meeting. A copy of this report was provided.

III. Action Items

A. Approval of August 23, 2006 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Mr. Abolt **moved** for Approval of the August 23, 2006 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes. Mr. Murphy seconded the motion.

Policy Committee Action: the motion for Approval of the August 23, 2006 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes carried with none opposed.

B. Resolution of Appreciation for Mr. Lee Mundell

Chairman Liakakis presented Mr. Lee Mundell with a plaque, as a formal expression of appreciation from the CUTS Policy Committee. He then proceeded to read the inscription and thanked Mr. Mundell for his service to the Committee and to the Community. Mr. Mundell thanked Chairman Liakakis and the CUTS Committee for their thoughtfulness and stated he would leave the Committee in the capable hands of Mr. Clint Murphy.

Mr. Abolt **moved** to adopt the resolution referenced. Mayor Otis Johnson seconded the motion.

Policy Committee Action: the motion to adopt the Resolution of Appreciation for Mr. Lee Mundell carried with none opposed.

C. Approval of Amendment to the 2030 LRTP to clarify MPO policy on enhancement projects.

Mr. Wilkes reported that MPO staff has presented to the Committee additional language, proposed to be included in the 2030 LRTP, regarding enhancement projects. The purpose of this language is to clarify the consistency of those projects with the 2030 LRTP.

He presented a copy of the language on screen and gave a brief summary of its content. He concluded staff is recommending that the Policy Committee adopt this language in the LRTP.

Chairman Liakakis initiated the public hearing for public comments. There were no comments made from the public at this time. Chairman Liakakis stated there being no comments from the public, the public hearing was closed.

Mr. Murphy moved for approval of the amendment to the 2030 LRTP to clarify MPO policy on enhancement projects. Mr. Brown seconded the motion.

Policy Committee Action: the motion to approve the amendment to the 2030 LRTP to clarify MPO policy on enhancement projects carried with none opposed.

Mr. Brown then suggested that staff launch a publicity campaign to inform the public of these enhancement projects.

Mr. Thomson stated a presentation will be made at the next meeting on the Context Sensitive Design (CSD) Project. The concept of this project is to give local governments guidelines to adopt so that their engineers will have a measurable standard for incorporating these types of enhancements. He stated at the next CSD workshop staff will present ideas on how to publicize this information.

Mr. Wilkes informed the Committee that MPO staff recently learned that the MPO's CSD initiative has been selected by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as a case study on Context Sensitive Design.

Mr. Murphy questioned whether or not the Context Sensitive Design for Chatham County for the DeRenne Avenue Corridor was selected as a case study. Mr. Wilkes clarified that DeRenne Avenue was a focus area in some of the mini-charrettes at the workshop in July, but that the entire CSD effort is to be the subject of the case study. Mr. Murphy continued, saying the fact that Chatham County was one of the areas chosen as a case study shows that there are good things going on in Chatham County and Savannah in planning and hopefully the media will cover this and alert the public.

Chairman Liakakis suggested that the City/County Government Channels and the Savannah newspapers would serve as a good medium to getting this information out.

D. Approval of Amendment to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP to include Phase One of the Back River Bridge Bikeway

Ms. Wang gave a summary of staff analysis of the requested Amendment to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP to include the Phase One of the Back River Bridge Bikeway. Ms. Jo Hickson, representing Coastal Georgia Greenway, proposed that the MPO amend the 2030 LRTP and the MPO Bikeway Plan to include bikeways on the Back

River Bridge. Ms. Wang stated MPO staff is approaching this amendment in a two phased process. Phase One is for the MPO to approve the concept to add the bikeway facility to the US17 Bridge and ramps to and from the island. Phase Two will be to include the detailed route across the island in the LRTP and Bikeway Plan. This route will not be determined until later, during the master planning of development on the island. She continued that in the amendment process there is a public hearing and a fifteen day public comment period. The amendment has been advertised through the Savannah Morning News, the Government Channels, the local media, and it has been posted on the MPC Website. Thus far only one comment has been received, from South Carolina.

Ms. Jo Hickson gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Coastal Georgia Greenway that will link South Carolina to Florida through the six coastal counties. She gave a virtual tour of the 150 mile route beginning at the Florida border. It will also serve as part of the East Coast Greenway, which will link Maine and Florida.

Mr. Abolt inquired whether there would be some sort of recognition of the Bamboo Farm on the route. He also questioned if the Litchfield Tract, a large passive recreation facility still under development could be accessed from the planned route. Ms. Hickson described the planned route near these sites and assured the Committee that the purpose of the trail is to link cultural resources such as these.

Chairman Liakakis initiated the public hearing for public comments. Hearing no comments from the audience, the public hearing was closed.

Mr. Murphy **moved** to approve the amendments to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP to include Phase One of the Back River Bridge Bikeway. Mr. Abolt seconded the motion.

Policy Committee Action: the motion to approve the amendments to the MPO Bikeway Plan and the 2030 LRTP to include Phase One of the Back River Bridge Bikeway carried with none opposed.

IV. Status Reports

A. **Benton Blvd. Extension**

Mr. Thomson stated at a prior MPO meeting staff had been asked to invite Representative Buddy Carter to further discuss ideas concerning Benton Blvd and to prepare a report that gives the Board more information concerning the traffic patterns in the area. He asked that Mr. Wilkes give a brief overview of the Benton Blvd Extension before Representative Carter voiced his concerns.

Mr. Wilkes proceeded with a brief report on the Benton Blvd Extension. He stated at the June MPO meeting Chairman Liakakis had asked for an analysis to determine the likely users of the extended Benton Blvd. A staff report had been distributed with the information

to date. Mr. Wilkes informed the Committee that preliminary analysis conducted using the MPO's official base year travel demand model suggests that about 3,000 trips per day, or ten percent of the nearly 30,000 vehicles per day on SR 21 in the vicinity of I-95, might be diverted to Benton Blvd. if it were extended to SR 30 as a four lane divided road. The estimated number of trips from committed development in the area amounts to 90,200 trips, much of it on Benton Blvd due to the planned street network. In addition, external traffic from the future Effingham Pkwy brings 31,050 trips to the area, according to GDOT's consultant's draft concept report. However, the capacity of Benton Blvd is limited; it is estimated to accommodate approximately 33,000 as a 4-lane arterial or 49,000 as a 6-lane arterial. Current ROW reservations allow room for a 4-lane extension with a design speed of 45 mph. Mr. Wilkes summarized that, while Benton Blvd has the potential to provide some short term relief as a alternate route to SR 21 at I-95, long term development commitments in the corridor and surrounding area will require a more intensive evaluation of alternatives to mitigate congestion on SR 21 and accommodate future travel between Effingham and Chatham Counties.

Availability of SPLOST funds will be critical to completion of Benton Blvd. in the near-term. Additional funding could be sought from GDOT local assistance program. Cost estimates are approximately \$549,000 for preliminary engineering (PE), \$1,750,000 for ROW, and \$5,490,000 for construction. The current Chatham County SPLOST allocation of between \$1,000,000 and \$2,000,000 could cover most of the PE and ROW costs. The remainder would need to be pursued from GDOT and developers. If state funding is not available, the MPO could consider including Benton Blvd. in the next MPO Long Range Transportation Plan, which would put it in line for federal funding. However, current MPO priorities will take about 15 years to implement at existing funding levels.

Mr. Abolt stated he would ask the GDOT representative to carry to Atlanta the significance of this project and the need to have GDOT assert the leadership in regional transportation planning.

Mr. Thomson stated that it will be necessary to update the analysis of this area in the long range plan to determine what network we need to support the growth that's going on.

Representative Buddy Carter stated the situation on I-95 and Highway 21 merits immediate attention. His desire is to have the Benton Blvd extension completed as soon as possible. Benton Blvd Extension from Jimmy DeLoach Parkway to Highway 30 would give immediate and significant relief to the traffic at Highway 21 and I-95. This problem would only get worse as time goes on. Property owners are very interested in this project. They have attended meetings with the MPC staff and are willing to help with ROW donations. It would make sense to connect Benton Blvd. with the planned Effingham Pkwy, but there are also concerns as to where Effingham Parkway will terminate in Chatham County and thus exactly how much right of way is needed for an extension of Benton Blvd. He stated another immediate concern is that, if federal funds are used for the Benton extension, then the project will require too much time. Thus it undesirable to combine the two projects into one due to the fact that Effingham Pkwy will be receiving federal funds. He promised he would work as diligently as possible to secure state funds.

Mr. Abolt asked staff to check with Mr. Bungard as to whether as much as two million dollars were available for a Benton Blvd extension in the current SPLOST, as mentioned in the staff report. He said he recalled something less.

Mr. Brown asked how much of the traffic volume was during peak periods and was there usually a commuter analysis done on this, as the project proceeds. He stated that, based on periodic visits, there really is a compelling issue here but he wanted to make sure that the project is being viewed in the right way as a commuter issue as well as a local transportation corridor issue. In the event this project does proceed, better information should be obtained regarding the commuter loads and incorporated into the project components to try to address the commuter issues that are within it including trying to make a distinction and track the number of vehicular trips versus the number of people or commuter trips. Would that be something that would normally be collected or would we have to ask for it especially?

Mr. Wilkes said that consultants conducting traffic analysis for Effingham Pkwy on behalf of GDOT had not analyzed this side of the county line. Mr. Thomson said that it is not possible to separate commuters from other, but the MPO will have access to some truck use information from GDOT.

Regarding the balance of local and commuter use, Representative Buddy Carter interjected that the leadership of Effingham County has acknowledged that it has a responsibility to address some of the traffic load, and has shown a willingness to help.

Mr. Brown stated he would like this project to incorporate the total concept of total trip generation and peak trip generation from the beginning and then compare this to the actual number of commuters. He told the group that rideshare and express buses should be a realistic rather than conceptual approach in reviewing this project. He recalled that there is a rail corridor that goes through this area that should be explored to see if the ROW is obtainable for light rail in the future and suggested that anyone that will be affected by this roadway should be in the CAT transit district. The City of Savannah's Godley Track is in the transit district and its citizens are paying the taxes yet residents down the street will not be paying this tax. He stated if consideration is given to reducing commuter volumes consideration should also be given to bus trips coming from nodes and concentrated points. He concluded that these are the concepts that should be put on the table as Highway 21 and I-95 are being studied.

Mr. Abolt questioned staff on its modeling technique and how the Daimler (mega)site would be factored in. Mr. Wilkes said the whole area, not just the zone, would need to be revisited. Mr. Abolt said he thought the megasite could be a factor in getting State aid.

Mr. Thomson summarized that the only rapid option for constructing Benton Blvd extension is to use local funds and State aid. If the MPO want to use federal funds and see it happen before 6-10 years, they will need to place the project ahead of existing priorities (Diamond Causeway, SR 204, and others).

B. Port Priority Projects

Mr. Thomson presented the staff report on the status of the four transportation projects Mr. Doug Marchand listed as Port priorities at the State of the Port Address. The projects listed were: 1) SR 307 Overpass over Norfolk Southern Tracks; 2) Brampton Road Connector; 3) Grange Road Improvement; and 4) Jimmy DeLoach Parkway Extension segment. Mr. Thomson clarified that, on the last-mentioned, Mr. Marchand is referring to a connection to and a portion of the Northwest Tollway, soon to be under study. The Ports would like to build the segment as non-tolled.

Mr. Fowler confirmed that the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) receives \$5 million in earmarked funds, which perhaps they are planning to use for this, but he doesn't know. Mr. Thomson and Mr. Fowler believe that GPA's earmarked funds are counted in the balancing of federal funds among congressional districts in the state. This seems unjust for CUTS/MPO, as the Port business benefits all Georgia residents, yet counting the earmark in balancing reduces the amount of federal funds directed toward local projects. Mr. Thomson said the issue should be added to the County's legislative agenda.

C. I-95 Lighting Improvements at I-16

Ms. Wang reported on the lighting improvements needed on I-95 and I-16. She stated the status on this project is that GDOT has sent the Local Government Project Management agreement to the locals, but the locals have not returned the signed agreement. In order to proceed with this project, GDOT must receive the agreement. The total cost of the energy, operations, and maintenance will be shared by the City of Pooler, the City of Savannah, and Chatham County (50%, 25%, and 25% respectively). GDOT will cover 50% of the installation costs (not to exceed \$100,000) and the City of Savannah will pay for the other 50% of the installation (plus any cost remaining in the event GDOT reaches the \$100,000 limit) A staff report was included in the mailing.

Mr. Trip Tollison said he believed that the agreement stated that the installation would follow the same agreement as the maintenance: the City of Pooler would pay one half of the cost and the City of Savannah would pay one quarter and Chatham County would pay one quarter of these costs. The hold up is that the City of Pooler could not use their hotel/motel bed tax to pay for their half of the installation, and therefore they had to go back to the drawing board. He would like to have information from GDOT on how many interstate interchanges there are in Georgia and which ones are lighted. He thinks this is one of the few that is not lighted. This is a safety issue for everyone, not just a Savannah tourism issue.

Mr. Fowler's reply was that typically when the state supplies the lighting there is an agreement entered into with the local government in which the locals pay at least the

maintenance and electrical bills and possibly more. He stated the state may be in favor of supporting this endeavor.

Chairman Liakakis asked that Mr. Thomson/staff contact the state for the complete installation cost (since this is done in other areas of the state) instead of asking local government to participate.

Ms. Scott interjected normally GDOT always asks that the installation be paid for by the locals because it is requested by the locals.

Mr. Abolt **moved** to have the Committee members direct their staffs to make the request to GDOT to give more credence to Mr. Thomson's request. Mr. Murphy seconded the motion.

Mr. Brown added that there need to be more effective regional conversations. He stated during the G8 there was a state offer where one hundred percent was paid for the installation. Pooler did not want to pay unless it could use the hotel/motel taxes. He said there needs to be a polite conversation about SR21, I-95, Benton Blvd and the regional issues. This is an entry way into the city but geographically it is not located in the city. If this was located in the city, the City would pay one hundred percent of the bill. He asked the Chairman to initiate a polite conversation with everyone and enter into a partnership on a pro-rata basis.

Policy Committee Action: The motion to have PC Committee Members direct his/her staffs to contact GDOT requesting GDOT make full payment for the installation costs of the I-95/I-16 Lighting Improvements carried with none opposed.

D. Tybee Island requests to GDOT for pedestrian improvements on Hwy. 80

Ms. Love gave a brief review on the requests from Tybee Island to GDOT for pedestrian improvements on Highway 80. Tybee Island's requests were: 1) install crosswalks and pedestrian signage on Hwy 80 at the intersections of Highway 80 and 3rd St, 11th St, 12 St, and 13th St; 2) lower the speed limit from 35 mph to 25 mph in the section of Hwy 80 from the beginning of the business district at Tybee Oaks to the Park of the Seven Flags; 3) install a flashing warning light at the intersection of Highway 80 and McKenzie Street; 4) install raised crosswalks/speed tables at each of the Tybee Island crosswalks on Highway 80 during the already scheduled mill and overlay on Highway 80. Ms. Love summarized GDOT's response from their letter to the City Manager of Tybee Island. GDOT was willing to provide a traditional crosswalk on Hwy 80 at 12 St, and to perform both a speed study on Hwy 80 and a signalization study at the Spanish Hammock intersection. They were not willing to install raised crosswalks/speed tables on a road classified as a major arterial. Other options are the installation of in-pavement LED crosswalks (at City's cost), if approved by GDOT, and the removal of Hwy 80 (within Tybee city limits) from the State system, allowing City of Tybee Island to make whatever improvements desired.

Mayor Buelterman said he had received information stating the signal study at Spanish Hammock was not justified due to the traffic level and questioned when the study was done. He also made inquiries regarding; 1) other than 12th Street what locations were being considered for crosswalks; 2) whether or not McKenzie was being considered for a flashing light and a crosswalk. Ms. Love stated that she did not have this information from GDOT at this time.

V. Agency Reports

A. Georgia Department of Transportation

Mayor Buelterman questioned Ms. Teresa Scott on the status of the widening of Highway 80 from Bull River to Lazaretto Creek Bridge. He stated he has also requested a separate bike path to extend the trails out to Tybee. Ms. Scott said that the determination of turtle crossing locations on Hwy 80 may take a year (due to seasonal turtle behavior). Construction is shown for 2012, but in light of recent GDOT budget meetings, she believes it may be pushed farther out. Regarding the bike path, GDOT will include some type of bikeway in the widening project, as the local bikeway plan includes that route, but it may be a shoulder rather than a separate path. They don't know the design yet.

Ms. Scott gave a brief update on the status of the GDOT projects. She stated the project on Highway 17, the Wal-Mart intersection, is due for completion before Thanksgiving. She added the Diamond Causeway project is on schedule. Regarding #11 on the report, Ogeechee Rd., she explained that the public hearing will not happen until the environmental study is finished.

Chairman Liakakis made a motion for the Board Members to lobby the State and Federal Legislation on the environmental studies that hold up projects and what can be done about it. Mr. Abolt seconded the motion.

Policy Committee Action: the motion carried with none opposed.

Mr. Murphy mention to Ms. Scott that some of the CAC members wanted to know how to send comments on the SR 204 project if they could not attend either of the Public Information Open Houses (PIOHs). Ms. Scott said the GDOT web site has a form for comments.

B. Chatham County

Mr. Black gave a brief report on the status of the Chatham County projects. On the Truman Phase V, ROW acquisition will likely be completed by the end of 2007. On the Bay St. project, the environmental document was approved this month. A public hearing on the environmental study will take place in January 2007.

C. City of Savannah

Mr. Weiner gave an update on the status of the lighting projects of the City of Savannah along with the curb cuts, the widening of Gwinnett Street, and LaRoche Avenue. He stated that, on the Anderson Street curve reconstruction, the City is scheduling a public information meeting so that the public will be informed before any design phase is implemented. The DeRenne Avenue and Hampstead Connector interviews with consultants have been finalized and the City is requesting additional information from prospective consultants regarding accomplished projects that are similar to the DeRenne Corridor. The City is also proceeding with the signal pre-emption for emergency vehicles. Handouts were distributed.

D. Chatham Area Transit Authority

There was no report at this time.

E. Georgia Ports Authority

There was no report at this time

F. Savannah-Hilton Head International Airport

Mr. Fidler gave an updated status report on the projects on the Savannah-Hilton Head Airport. Traffic signals are going in at Airways Ave. and I-95, and at Crossroads Pkwy. The County is going to build a connector road from the airport perimeter road to a signalized intersection at Dean Forest Rd. The County will turn the road over to the City and the airport to maintain.

VI. Other Public Comments

Ms. Ardis Wood, Savannah resident, stated the accommodation of traffic by the widening and re-widening of roads becomes too expensive to take on the purchase of row. It changes the character of the community and eats up established neighborhoods. It also encourages urban sprawl and city flight. Ms. Wood was concerned about the loss of trees on Victory Dr. There continues to be development that increases demand, such as at Home Depot, and the solutions have been to repeatedly nick into the median and the sides where the trees are. She suggested a parallel road within the shopping centers. She also voiced concerns regarding the park and ride for hospitals and malls to have this space thought of for the future and asked if there was any plan to reconvene Connecting Savannah participants.

Mr. Thomson answered that there are and will be opportunities for public input, currently through the Citizens Advisory Committee, and later after the City selects their consultant for the Hampstead and DeRenne studies. The MPO is moving through the Action Plan, and he has no plans to re-convene Connecting Savannah participants as a group.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no other Business to come before the Committee the October 25, 2006 Policy Committee was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

Mark Wilkes, P. E., AICP
Director of Transportation Planning