

RECAP OF THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT DURING THE APRIL 22ND SSCN ANNUAL MEETING

State Representative Deborah Silcox's Remarks Reflected:

There is a need to mitigate the effects on our city.

These projects will affect all of Sandy Springs, not just along 400 and 285.

There are really three DOT projects that are going on in Sandy Springs simultaneously:

- GA 400/285 interchange project which is the largest and most expensive DOT project in Georgia history at 800 million dollars.
- GA 400 corridor Express Lanes.
- Top end 285 express lanes project that will be the last to be completed.

Collectively, these projects will take approximately 10 years to complete.

As a State Representative only one of about 25 votes that elects the members of the DOT Board per the Georgia Constitution.

- The Board for the DOT has 14 members that work with groups like the Atlanta Regional Commission to do road planning for the state and signs off on the STATE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP).
- The Legislature appropriates the funding for the STIP, and it is signed off on by the Governor.

Sandy Springs is my hometown and I am:

- Upset about these projects and the effects on our city.
- Willing to fight and use every bit of influence to mitigate the effects on our neighborhoods and our community.
- Cannot do this alone.

Regarding the projects:

- Planning for the 400 express lanes and the 285 express lanes started 15 years ago.
- It is not too late for us to have input into these projects, but we cannot become apathetic or give up the fight.
- We desperately need everyone's input and ideas.

Frustrating aspects of this process:

- Design and planning process.
- On the positive side, DOT allows multiple contractors to compete to design and bid for the best possible technical design at the lowest possible cost.
- FLIPSIDE of that is there is a lot of uncertainty in the details.
- Does not allow for final plans to be released early, creating frustration and confusion.

Importance of individual comment cards public submits to GDOT:

- These comment cards can bring new ideas and identify common themes of thought that can be brought forward.
- The City SSCN, Perimeter Community Improvement District push for significant ideas to be bid out.
- Example, Mayor Paul, the City Council, and the Perimeter Community Improvement District to be willing to pay for a traffic study at Crestline Parkway as an alternative interchange option.

Participation needed regarding sound barriers:

- Need everyone's participation for mitigation of project effects with SOUND BARRIERS.
- Per federal law, every project is required to put out receptors on homeowners' properties to measure the noise in the area to see if it qualifies for sound barriers.
- Noise is measured and then the traffic volume is projected forward for 20 years to determine if the sound barriers are appropriate.
- GDOT will send out ballots to everyone with a receptor.
- SOUND BARRIERS cannot actually be placed unless 51% or more of the neighborhood that qualifies for the sound barriers vote in favor of them.
- SOUND BARRIERS can be added to structures like bridges to further mitigate noise pollution.

Need to mitigate the effects of these projects by negotiating for additional green space:

- Plan in the works for the city to enter an agreement to buy property that is vacant after construction to create pocket parks.
- Quality of life in these neighborhoods is less diminished than it would be otherwise.

GDOT has emphasized that environmental and historical concerns often drive design:

- Safety and minimization are key
- Input from the neighborhoods is crucial.
- Footprint of the design is supposed to be larger than the actual impact.

Communications:

- There will be regular construction updates via the GDOT website with specific information from the Project Manager on each project.
- They have also encouraged me to communicate that all the neighborhoods should subscribe to the monthly newsletter.
- Communication to City Council, and to the Perimeter Community Improvement District by individuals and homeowner association officers is critical as we move forward to protect our neighborhoods and our quality of life.

SSCN OFFICIAL MEETING PROCEEDINGS

Neighborhoods brought forth concerns surrounding:

- Development in Sandy Springs (Big Lots property),
- Property taking and loss due to the GDOT projects,
- Lost property value for those remaining,
- Sound barriers (those in place being removed temporarily during construction, and the need for others during or upon project completion), flyover lanes at the Northridge Bridge,
- Mass transit and the lack of integration of it with the current GDOT proposals.
- Lack of foresight and integration of mass transit within roadway transportation projects.
- The lack of willingness for people to give up their cars and take more than one connection to get somewhere,
- Loss of trees along 285 between Long Island Dr. and Lake Forest,

The below are neighborhood by neighborhood concerns, comments and questions. These have been organized under each neighborhood heading regardless of the point at which they were posed in the meeting.

Other individuals interjected their thoughts and opinions during the course of the free flow conversation.

Where those representing Georgia Department of transportation were able to provide responses they are included here.

Many questions go unanswered in the current planning stages of the road projects and with the lack of existence of any mass transit/heavy rail plans for the area.

In the below bullet sets:

N=Neighborhood or an attending resident

GDOT=Georgia Department of Transportation.

Spalding Woods (Located West of 400 and south of Spalding Dr where 19 homes are projected to be lost along North Northgreen Dr.)

N - Exactly how do the projects work?

GDOT- Projects are bid out private companies and we pay them back through tolls over the next 30 years.

N - Transit is not a bigger part of the conversation...why?

N - Will there be an opportunity for MARTA in the future once the right of way is taken? Or will there be yet another taking to include heavy rail in the future?

N - Claim is express lanes increase efficiency. Mass transit increases efficiency exponentially.

N - Building more lanes has not worked in the past.

N - How can residents along Northgreen Dr., who have been waiting since 1981, get a sound wall.

N – Soundwalls should go in BEFORE construction.

GDOT- each and every project requires the employment of sound receptors for each property. The studies are required in order to determine the need for sound walls.

Neighborhoods are then sent a survey for them to vote if they would like to have those sound walls installed and 51% must vote yes for that to happen.

N - Commuters will be just passing through with no exit point.

N - Transit should be seamless from mode to mode.

N - GDOT should fund mass transit not just highways.

N - Spalding Woods is asking for a sound barrier to be built before the construction to keep noise down and equipment, workers and lights from nighttime work out.

N - There is a general lack of confidence in the planning part of the process, the engineering, etc. Too many variables in the process.

N - The 400 project is only illustrated to the Marta station. Essentially in this area when the projects are completed it will be 21 lanes wide.

N - The Plan wipes out 19 homes.

GDOT - The Procurement process in that area has not started yet and could be as much as a year and a half out. Prior to the information meeting in March GDOT spoke with those homeowners privately. Over the next 6 to 9 months there will be further conversations. Eminent domain is not the first option. GDOT attempts to come to an agreement and they try to relocate residents first.

N - Previously when homes were taken the compensation was not enough.

N - There will be a tremendous loss to the city of the property taxes from those homes on Northgreen Dr just as there was a loss from those homes on Abernathy taken when the road was widened there. Is it worth it?

N - The flyover for North Springs MARTA station does it remain and how are the lanes configured there?

GDOT- The access line to MARTA is maintained and lanes will be at grade near the station.

Northridge Forest (Located East of 400 at Northridge bridge where lanes are expected to be built as a flyover over the bridge):

N - Why aren't you building this like the northwest corridor with reversible lanes?

GDOT- Reversible lanes are not an option for the projected traffic for the next 20 years.

N - We have no natural landmarks along 400 today that would prevent concrete spread.

N - If there are some viable proposals presented by those bidding for the work who do not win the bid what will you do with those ideas? Will you get someone to potentially bid out some of those ideas?

GDOT- The decision making process is a very long and extensive one involving long environmental study. The modeling concept for the future 20 years out indicated reversible lanes could not alleviate the problem. This is how they got to express lanes.

N - Reversible lanes should help... (Questioning the validity of the GDOT models and whether or not they were accurate.)

N - Can you be very explicit about the traffic problem?

GDOT- Without doing anything the traffic model shows that traffic congestion will get worse than the current 5 1/2 hour rush-hour.

N - Flyover lanes will be located 25 feet over the existing bridge. That will generate a huge amount of noise into our residential neighborhood. The diminished real estate value this will cause will detrimentally affect those people whose homes and their value represent essentially their personal life savings.

GDOT- The plan is to get the lanes back to the center of the roadway at some points and be aerial at others. It is understood that MARTA does have plans for the West side at some point in the future.

GDOT- in response to a concern expressed about the impact on Fulton County schools in Sandy Springs it was indicated "avoid" is the first goal then "minimize" if they cannot avoid and "mitigate" is the next option in line for things that they can do with respect to the impact on schools. GDOT has met with Fulton county school leaders 15 or more times. They are restricted to executing those items specifically shown in their plans which would never include anything that put school properties underneath the elevated roadways.

Dunwoody Row (Located along Crestline Pkwy):

N - Asking that Sandy Springs and GDOT consider express lane access be on Mount Vernon rather than the Crestline Parkway option.

GDOT- City Council and GDOT will have the final say.

Talbot Colony (East of 400 just south of the Spalding Dr bridge):

N – 92 of 93 residents of the neighborhood area voted YES to sound walls for the Transform 285/400 project. Sound levels are now measured above permissible decibels for humans. With two projects that potentially overlap in one area will the sound barrier that was committed to be built going to be built and then torn down?

GDOT- It may. Based on a newer sound study that will be executed it may bear out that the sound barrier actually needs to be higher than originally projected.

Lake Forrest / Long Island Area: (Located along 285 just south of the roadway where trees have been removed):

N - What is going on in this area? The Springmont school wants to expand and nothing is being coordinated or communicated.

GDOT- there are currently two projects going on right now so this is creating confusion. Plans are currently being modified and bid. This is the 285 top end collector distributor project area but is just getting started so exactly how things will pan out for this transition area is too early to know. (GDOT Note taken to look into how noise here was studied and evaluated.)

N - Why is there already money being spent and property acquisition before the community comments are made? You already know what you are doing. Why do community leaders not have more say in the GDOT projects?

GDOT- As much studying as possible is done first. There is a need to spend some money upfront. In consideration of the potential developments in the area they need to consider this and make strategic acquisitions before say a new home is built on a particular parcel. Mount Vernon versus Crestline was a solution suggested and GDOT has worked with the city on many occasions however the commitment from the city on this suggested solution comes with their money.

Tiller Walk (Located approximately 1/2 mile South of 285 accessed from Glen Errol Rd just east of Mt Vernon Hwy):

N - What is the 285 corridor plan? Where can we see exactly what all the plans look like?

GDOT- All projects that are underway have their plans posted on the GDOT website. There is a project office and it is a good place to see these plans in person. It is located on Carpenter Drive. People can Google the project name and include GDOT as a keyword in their search to find plans online.

SSCN- We will post all of the relevant known project information on a dedicated page for GDOT links.

Huntcliff (Located West of Roswell Road and just south of the river):

N - It is disheartening that there is not a vision on mass transit. The models you have used have failed us and everyone involved in these projects needs to rethink the approach to transit.

North Riverside (Located between Johnson Ferry Rd and Brandon Mill Rd along Riverside Dr):

N - The interchange you built at Northridge Rd. was completed three years ago. Why did you spend all that money then? Your lack of planning was a huge waste of money. You are going to build 125 miles of concrete.

General questions and comments:

N - How many people would take 2 or more connections to get somewhere? The overwhelming majority of people in the room said they would not.

People are not going to be willing to give up their cars.

N - Fulton County Schools needs to be getting more information regarding the projects and what is happening.

N - The Spalding Dr intersection project that spills over into Gwinnett County. What's going on there and who can provide more information? Neighbors are being told nothing.

Answer: Councilman Paulson indicated that is a Gwinnett County project and he will obtain more info and SSCN will deliver it through our newsletter.

These items were those that were submitted by index card at the conclusion of the meeting:

Questions:

1. Why is GDOT facilitating increased commuting by privately owned vehicles rather than providing a disincentive to use privately owned vehicle commuting as is done in many cities around the world.?
2. Can we get an open records request to see the alternate plans per comment number 4 below??

Comments:

1. What GDOT has planned is not a solution! MARTA is!
2. There should be no aerial lanes on 285. There are too many schools and homes that would be affected negatively nearby.
3. Some people at the meeting are talking about losing their homes to express lanes. I live on Northridge Rd. and if you build a flyover over our bridge then I will be losing my home in a sense also. The home and 2 acres I have lived on for 44 years.
4. At the GDOT meeting in March we were told that there were "alternate plans" that had already been discarded.

Concerns:

1. The need for sound barriers is critical for mitigating noise, providing security for the neighborhood and for aesthetic reasons.
2. The sound barrier wall located between Spalding and Pitts Road will be torn down this summer and not be replaced for 1 to 1 1/2 years. How will noise levels be addressed during this time. With noise at its highest level how can we be without any sound barriers
3. We need a visual respite from looking at SR 400, bulldozers, large pipes. GDOT took the trees that had provided a buffer in this area.