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September 24, 2021

Re: Responses to Open House Comments for PI#: 0014082, Walton County, State Route 81
at State Route 138 - Roundabout

Thank you for your comments concerning the proposed project referenced above. We appreciate your participation and all the input that was received as a result of the July 12, 2021 Online Public Information Open House (open house). Every written comment received will be made part of the project's official record.

A total of **2,475** people attended the open house. Of the **257** respondents who formally commented, **54** were in **support** of the project, **181** were **opposed**, **7** were **uncommitted**, and **15** expressed **conditional support**.

The attendees of the open house and those persons sending in comments within the comment period raised the following questions. The Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) has prepared this one response letter to address all comments received so that everyone can be aware of the questions raised and the responses given. Please find the comments summarized below (in *italics*) followed by our response.

General Project Comments:

- *New traffic lights were recently installed at the intersection and replacing them with a roundabout would waste the work that was done.*

The recent signal project referenced included upgrading the existing traffic signal equipment and bringing that equipment up to current standard. While this is a common practice to ensure equipment throughout Georgia is up to date, it did not address the safety and congestion problems that the intersection has in its current configuration. Once under construction, the construction contractor will remove and deliver the signal equipment to the district signal shop. This allows the equipment to be re-used in cases where signal equipment at other intersections is damaged by storms or crashes.

- *How would the proposed project impact the plan for a more walkable downtown Walnut Grove?*

The proposed roundabout would include upgrades to existing pedestrian facilities, which would benefit the walkability of the project area. In addition to the roundabout slowing approaching vehicles, crosswalks would be placed perpendicular across all travel lanes approximately 45 feet from the yield point to allow space for queued vehicles and to minimize the distance pedestrians would travel across the road. Pedestrian refuge areas would also be provided within the splitter islands and are anticipated to be 6 feet wide.

Roundabout Comments:

- *Buses and heavy trucks would not be able to effectively navigate the roundabout, resulting in accidents and traffic delays.*

Roundabouts are designed to accommodate standard-sized passenger vehicles and buses within the circulatory roadway. This roundabout is also designed to accommodate heavy trucks through use of inner and outer truck aprons. Georgia DOT designers use software to model truck turning movements through the intersection to ensure that trucks can maneuver in the roundabout. Please visit our website at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/DS/Alternative/Roundabouts> for more information on how buses and trucks would navigate the roundabout.

- *People do not know how to use roundabouts properly and a roundabout would result in more accidents than the existing traffic lights.*

It is common for communities that do not currently have a roundabout to be apprehensive about how they work and how well they operate; some degree of unfamiliarity is expected when the roundabout opens. Georgia DOT has found that most people who initially are intimidated by roundabouts quickly learn how to navigate them, showing increased driver familiarity and comfort over time. Please visit our website at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/DS/Alternative/Roundabouts> for more information.

- *The proposed double-lane roundabout would make the intersection more dangerous than a single-lane roundabout.*

A single-lane variation of the roundabout was studied during the capacity analysis, but it did not provide adequate traffic flow in the open year which makes retrofitting unrealistic. Compared to all other alternatives, the multilane roundabout best meets the project's operational needs. The multilane configuration would also accommodate future programmed widening projects (see below) on the SR 138 and SR 81 corridors.

The Georgia DOT District Office plans to coordinate an educational campaign with the local government to educate drivers on roundabouts, including multilane roundabouts.

- *How would the proposed project impact emergency vehicles?*

The roundabout would not delay emergency vehicles going through the intersection. While they would need to drive slower through the intersection itself, roundabouts can reduce waiting time, and thus emergency vehicles should be able to get through the intersection more quickly than the current traffic signal.

Project Cost Comments:

- *Several commenters would prefer the intersection be a signalized red light instead of a roundabout because it costs less money.*

Georgia DOT looks at several different types of intersection control when assessing project options, including whether to install a traffic signal. This evaluation includes traffic volumes, turning movements and crash data. The multilane roundabout best

meets the project's operational needs and addresses safety issues prevalent at signalized intersections.

The total project cost for the roundabout would be higher than signalized alternatives due to right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and construction. However, the operational capacity of the roundabout and its intrinsic safety benefits make the roundabout the preferred alternative despite the higher costs.

Even with a traffic signal, there continues to be crashes at this intersection. While the stop control and signal control were considered as alternatives, they don't reduce crashes as effectively as a roundabout. When these alternatives are evaluated, a cost for the types of crashes that the intersection experiences is assigned. These costs are based on the auto insurance industry's estimates of the amount of money each crash type costs. This is compared to the total project cost and crash reduction of each alternative. The proposed roundabout performed best in this analysis among all alternatives considered.

- *Several commenters noted that they believe money is better spent elsewhere, that congestion at the intersection is not enough to warrant the construction cost of the roundabout, and the project is just too expensive.*

Thank you for your input regarding the project's funding. The proposed project was programmed and justified to address congestion and operational issues. Traffic volumes for 2019 on SR 81 between Habersham Circle and Church Way were 11,125 vehicles per day. The 2019 traffic volumes on SR 138 between Thompson Lane and Forrester Cemetery Road were 14,450 vehicles per day. By 2046, the project's design year, the annual average daily traffic along SR 81 and SR 138 will have increased to 17,575 and 22,750 vehicles per day, respectively.

This intersection was identified by Georgia DOT District Office and Walton County as a priority for the area and was listed in the TSPLOST that recently went to vote. While that did not pass, Georgia DOT and Walton County continued to work together for a solution, which resulted in the proposed project.

Traffic Comments:

- *The area is growing, and traffic is getting worse, and a roundabout would help alleviate traffic congestion.*

Thank you for your comment. The proposed project was programmed to address congestion and operational issues at the intersection. Review of multiple alternatives resulted in the selection of a multi-lane roundabout due to its operational capacity and intrinsic safety benefits.

- *A roundabout would not be able to accommodate the high traffic volumes that use the existing intersection.*

A traffic analysis was done for each alternative reviewed during project concept development. See the table below summarizing the estimated intersection delay in the A.M. and P.M. periods for the design year, 2046, as well as the associated level-of-service. The maximum delay for the multilane roundabout would be able to better accommodate the high traffic volumes than other alternatives reviewed.

Alternative	A.M. Delay/LOS	P.M. Delay/LOS
Multilane Roundabout	33.1 seconds/D	24.9 seconds/C
Signal Upgrade + Widening	45.0 seconds/D	43.5 seconds/D
Signal Upgrade + Turn Lanes	81.3 seconds/F	78.0 seconds/E

- *Traffic from businesses on nearby side roads would have a hard time making turns onto Highways 81 and 138 due to continuously flowing traffic at the roundabout.*

It should be easier to find gaps in traffic with a roundabout versus a stop control intersection. Since the roundabout does not force drivers to stop and wait, like a red light or stop sign, it puts traffic through the intersection faster, reducing wait time along the roadway and the intersection. The approaches of the roundabout would be spaced out enough that finding a gap to enter within the roundabout should not be difficult.

- *Something should be done to slow down heavy truck traffic prior to entering the roundabout.*

The proposed roundabout design would include a tighter curvature on entry that would encourage lower speeds by all users. Lane dividers would encourage both cars and trucks to stay in lane so that they cannot cross lanes to drive faster upon entry to the roundabout. Additionally, advanced warning signs with advisory speed limit will be posted at each roundabout approach.

Project Suggestion Comments:

- *Keep the existing traffic light and fix the timing cycle.*

The Georgia DOT District Traffic Office has and will continue to review the signal timing operations at this intersection. Even with timing plans that fit certain times of the day and/or day of the week, traffic at the intersection is unpredictable, excluding signal timing from being a long-term solution.

- *There should be an entry onto Highway 138 from Old Highway 138.*

An entry at this point is beyond the scope of this project. The process for accessing a state highway starts with a request from the local government.

- *Highways 81 and 138 should be widened to accommodate high traffic volumes.*

There are currently multiple projects that are programmed to widen both Highways 81 and 138. These projects are identified by PI numbers 0014125 (SR 81 from SR 138 to SR 10/US 78); 0014124 (SR 81 from SR 142 to SR 138); 0015575 (SR 138 from Hi Roc Road to SR 81); and 0000414 (SR 138 from Miller Bottom Road to SR 10/US 78). These projects are currently programmed as “Long Range” projects and do not have active schedules for construction. Please contact GDOT District Preconstruction Engineer Sue Anne Decker with any questions regarding these projects (sdecker@dot.ga.gov).

- *A roundabout should be constructed in front of Youth Middle School to improve safety.*

This intersection has been the topic of conversation with the Georgia DOT District Office and Walton County. It was one of the intersections listed in the TSPLOST that recently went to vote. While that did not pass, Georgia DOT and Walton County continue to work together for a solution. A traffic study was conducted, and a roundabout was recommended. Currently, Walton County and the District Traffic Office are working towards identifying funds for a project.

- *The intersection of Highway 138 and Highway 10 in Monroe should be improved.*

This intersection has been the topic of conversation with the District office and Walton County. It was one of the intersections listed in the TSPLOST that recently went to vote. While that did not pass, Georgia DOT and Walton County continued to work together for a solution. Currently, there is a project programmed to add a ramp from Charlotte Rowell Rd/SR 138 onto US 78/SR 10 westbound. Please contact GDOT District Preconstruction Engineer Sue Anne Decker with any questions regarding these projects (sdecker@dot.ga.gov).

- *The entrance to the subdivision adjacent to the proposed project should be removed.*

The entrance to the subdivision was granted through Georgia DOT review and approval. There are no plans to remove the subdivision entrance.

- *A flyover would be a better alternative.*

While a flyover would substantially improve safety and traffic flow at the intersection, the anticipated costs and ROW impacts associated with the project would be much more significant than the current proposed project.

- *Please install a four-way traffic signal at Highway 138 and Nunnaly Farm Road.*

This intersection has been analyzed previously. It currently does not meet the criteria for a traffic signal.

- *Walnut Grove needs a bypass.*

A bypass for Walnut Grove is outside the scope of this project. The Georgia DOT District Office will contact the Georgia DOT Office of Planning for further evaluation.

Construction Comments:

- *How would the proposed project impact the gas line that was recently installed in the project area?*

While the potential impacts are not known at this time, utility coordination and relocation is considered on every Georgia DOT project and will be conducted prior to construction and completion of the project.

- *How would the surrounding area and traffic be impacted during construction of the proposed project?*

The proposed project would not require an off-site detour. Potential detours identified during concept development would have been too long and insufficient for both the high traffic volumes and heavy trucks that use the intersection. While potential delays could be experienced during construction, the project would be constructed to minimize inconvenience to the public to the greatest extent feasible.

Right-of-way/Property Comments:

- *I am concerned that small businesses would be displaced, and that the roundabout would have a negative impact on the small businesses that would remain in the area.*

While there may be ROW and construction impacts to small businesses within the area, it is expected that the traffic calming and safety benefits resulting from construction of the roundabout would improve the walkability of the area, accessibility to the businesses, and create a better environment for the remaining businesses.

Please note that the proposed project alignment has not yet been finalized and the proposed ROW shown on the plans potentially may be reduced or perhaps eliminated. In the event your property is required in total or in part, a certified appraiser from Georgia DOT's appraiser prequalification list will make a fair market value appraisal of the area to be required, including any damages to the remainder land, if applicable. The appraisal will also include values for improvements required or damages that may be applicable. Should you be required to relocate as part of this project, a Georgia DOT representative will assist you during your relocation.

- *How would the proposed project impact Emerald Cove subdivision and its entrance?*

The Emerald Cove subdivision is outside of the project limits and would not be impacted.

Again, thank you for your comments. Should you have further questions or comments, please call the project manager, Courtney Cedor, at 404-865-3467 or the environmental analyst, Max Burch, at 404-347-0339.

Sincerely,



Eric Duff
State Environmental Administrator

ED/MM

cc: Jamie Boswell, GDOT Board Member (District 10)
Bruce Williamson, State Representative (District 115)
Burt Jones, State Senator (District 25)
Courtney Cedor, GDOT Project Manager (via email)
PDF for Project File