



TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM – STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Introduction

As part of the Spalding County CTP, a number of stakeholder interviews were conducted. The stakeholder interviews permitted an opportunity to gain in depth insights into transportation and related issues for the county from a broad base of perspectives. The Stakeholders to be interviewed were selected in consultation with the Project Management Committee. In all 10 interviews were conducted involving 17 participants: 2 with County Commissioners, 2 with staff from Spalding County and the City of Griffin, and 6 with a variety of agencies who have unique perspectives on the transportation system and growth and development in Spalding County. The 6 Stakeholder agencies surveyed were the Downtown Development Authority, Griffin-Spalding Hospital, the University of Georgia Griffin Campus, the Spalding County School System, Spalding County Emergency Medical Services and Norfolk Southern Corporation. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and followed a standardized open-ended questionnaire covering a range of topics relevant to the participant, and offering them an opportunity to expound on their views of what transportation concerns Spalding County has currently and what needs it will have over the next 30 years.

Executive Summary

A number of common transportation themes emerged regarding Spalding County. Some of these concerns are clearly in response to existing conditions while others are prospective, dealing with emerging needs of the County as it begins to experience relatively rapid growth and development as a county on the edge of the Atlanta metropolitan area. Griffin, Georgia the county seat of Spalding County is approximately 40 miles to the south of downtown Atlanta.

All interviewees recognized that the county is poised for significant growth and change and that the transportation system will need to be adapted to accommodate growth and development in ways that are distinctly different from past growth in the county. Many expressed strong desire to maintain the rural character of the county and Griffin's small city charm while encouraging development and denser land use where appropriate. Many participants pointed to new residential developments at Herron Bay, which spans the Henry and Spalding County line, and the 3,400 unit Sun City Peachtree Active Living development as bell weathers for growth to come in Spalding County.

Institutional Coordination and Funding

Nearly all participants indicated that existing institutional coordination on transportation issues is good and several noted that it has improved over the last few years. Much of the institutional coordination takes place through personal relationships and communications; a number of participants acknowledged the key role and success of the Griffin-Spalding Area Transportation Committee (G-SATC) in coordinating on county transportation issues. A number of participants expressed concerns about being brought into the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) in terms of being less competitive for funding than through direct relationships with GDOT. However, most acknowledge that, over the long term, given Spalding County's increasing ties to the Atlanta metropolitan area it needs to be involved in the regional decision making process through ARC.

Economic Development and Land Use

Most participants voiced support for maintaining and enhancing the viability of Griffin as a place of commerce, and for development of mixed use commercial/office and residential development in downtown Griffin consistent with the developments proposed by the current Griffin Livable Centers Initiative (LCI). Several participants voiced the need for improvements to access into downtown from newer large scale residential developments in the northern portion of the county, both from an operational and aesthetic standpoint, to facilitate commercial access to Griffin. A number of participants also spoke of the need to improve access to the metro area for county economic development, especially downtown Atlanta and Hartsfield- Jackson International Airport, and to ease congestion between Spalding County and these destinations.

Several participants noted that there is a direct relation between Spalding County's transportation system and economic development activities, particularly the goal of bringing additional employment opportunities to the county. Toward this objective Spalding County has a strategic location at the edge of the Atlanta metropolitan area with SR-16 providing a southern link between I-75 and I-85, especially if SR-16 is eventually widened to four lanes from US-19/41 to the west. This creates opportunities for development of industry and logistics businesses. Particularly since the county has direct rail access and is embarking on development of a new Airport Master Plan. A number of participants encouraged development of an interchange along I-75 at Jenkinsburg Road to provide better access to Spalding County and stimulate economic development but at least one participant said that they didn't favor this option because alternative access already exists and they felt that it was at odds with preserving the character of the area.

A number of participants said that they felt Spalding County has a basic lack of infrastructure for accommodating growth. A number pointed to the lack of sewer service in large parts of the county. Others noted that the secondary roadway system consists of narrow rural two lane roads that are indirect or circuitous and which often lack logical connections with other secondary roads. They expressed the opinion that the growth in traffic accompanying development in Spalding County and the south-metro area will

necessitate adding new roadway connectors, widening existing roads, and improving intersections of major routes and the secondary roadway system.

Road Maintenance

Most participants expressed the need for improved maintenance and resurfacing of existing roads. Many expressed dissatisfaction with the length of time it takes to repair roads with problems. Nearly all participants recognized that there isn't enough funding currently for transportation improvements and that additional funding sources and mechanisms need to be identified to ensure adequate transportation funds for system maintenance and improvements.

Truck Traffic

Nearly all participants identified truck traffic through Griffin as detrimental from safety, pedestrian, and development perspectives. Most participants were aware and in support of attempts to reroute SR-155 along North McDonough Road between Jackson Road and SR-16 Arthur Bolton Parkway. A number of participants also spoke of the longer term need to identify an SR-16 connector truck route that would take east-west truck traffic around downtown Griffin, particularly as the four-laning of SR-16 between I-75 and US-19/41 is completed and more through trucks are drawn to this route. Most participants linked truck traffic to congestion in and around downtown Griffin.

Transit

Many participants spoke of the need to develop public transit in Spalding County. Some of these views were focused on long term development but many spoke of it as a current need or one that should accompany new developments such as the expansion of the University of Georgia Griffin Campus, Sun-City Peachtree, redevelopment of downtown Griffin, and development of mixed use commercial and residential nodes consistent with the 2024 Spalding County Comprehensive Plan. Most participants noted that effective implementation of commuter rail and higher density in downtown Griffin would require implementing a transit access and circulation system.

The prospect for commuter rail coming to the county is universally seen as desirable and supported by all, but many participants were skeptical about the prospects for implementation of commuter rail in the near future. The initial segment of commuter rail is planned to operate between downtown Atlanta and Lovejoy, Georgia, approximately 10 miles to the north of Griffin, although a maintenance facility is proposed in Griffin, where the commuter rail rolling stock would be housed when not in service. The Norfolk Southern Corporation representative interviewed noted the railroads receptivity to commuter rail operations.

Bicyclists and Pedestrians

A number of participants spoke of the desirability of improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists. Some of these viewpoints coupled the desire for high quality residential development with the expectation that residents in these locations would expect walking and cycling facilities as amenities. In addition, nearly all participants recognized a need to link mixed-use development, and higher density residential development in downtown Griffin, with improvements to the bicycle and pedestrian environment. Spalding County is currently undertaking preparation a new Parks and Recreation Master Plan that will emphasize development of bicycle and pedestrian connections between parks and other activity centers. The University of Georgia Griffin Campus Master Plan includes elements to make the campus more pedestrian oriented, and that includes campus access by bicyclists and transit.

Traffic Operations and Connectivity

Many participants noted that there is a need for improved traffic operations in and around downtown Griffin, and in commercial areas mostly along US-19/41. A number of participants thought there was a need for better traffic signal systems and coordination, and elements of access management especially along SR-16/Taylor Street.

Several participants noted that there is only one grade separated railroad crossing in downtown Griffin; the 6th Street Bridge. Although this bridge is scheduled for replacement, it has been deferred until 2009. Currently the bridge has no sidewalks though it is frequently used by pedestrians, and is difficult for trucks and emergency vehicles to use because it is relatively narrow, and has structure that limits vehicle use to a single lane in the direction of travel. Most participants thought there should be an improved bridge and possibly additional grade separations in downtown, possibly a pedestrian bridge. Norfolk Southern, the railroad operator, wants the 6th Street Bridge replaced with a taller structure that will permit double-stack container rail car operations. Norfolk Southern is very supportive of replacing at grade rail crossings with grade separated crossings to permit both improved safety and operations.

Several participants also noted that the Old Atlanta Highway/SR-3 Bridge is currently out and that it should be looked at for replacement to provide additional local access in the area around Ellis Road and US-41 Business Route, near the University of Georgia Griffin campus. The University, however, feels that the Old Atlanta Highway/SR-3 Bridge should remain closed to vehicular traffic and be replaced with a bicycle and pedestrian only bridge. The University is concerned about the safety and operations of the Ellis Road and North Expressway intersection being made worse because of the close proximity of Old Atlanta Highway/SR-3. The University would like improvements to the interchange of US-19/41 and Ellis Road that would permit direct access at this location from northbound US-19/41, a movement that currently doesn't exist which would – in

conjunction with improvements to Ellis Road -- provide better access to the University of Georgia Griffin campus.

Safety

Several participants expressed concerns about vehicular safety at specific intersections; many along US-19/41, SR-16 especially west of US-19/41, along SR-362, SR-155, and SR-92. Participants frequently mentioned the interchange complex between US-19/41, Business Route US-41, and Ellis Road. Intersections and driveways along SR-16/Taylor Street in downtown Griffin in combination with heavy truck movements through this area were also mentioned as a safety concern. Offset or skewed intersections between roads were frequently mentioned as a safety issue. Proximity of schools to major roads and intersections were also mentioned as safety issues. Many participants noted that there are needs for improving pedestrian and bicyclist safety.