



# Memorandum

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**To:** John Hancock

**From:** Roger Palmer

**Date:** July 24, 2009

**Subject:** Northwest Corridor Project (I-75/I-575)  
Summary of Strategy for Completing the Environmental Impact Statement

As you know, we are preparing a Transition Document to aid in the decision-making process to determine the best approach to completing the environmental documentation for the Northwest Corridor Project. While the details are incomplete at this time, since the modeling is still ongoing, we would like to share with you a suggested approach to this issue that could possibly address the controversy over the use of a reversible system on I-75 and still proceed directly into the FEIS.

As the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was being completed, it was decided that no preferred alternative would be identified leaving the decision to be made as part of the Final EIS. However, the decision was between several transit alternatives rather than vastly different roadway configurations so the roadway was basically consistent between the transit alternates. The reason for this was the extensive roadway alternatives analysis that took place as part of the original Contract to determine the Interim and Ultimate HOV extension strategies.

The Interim strategy to extend the HOV system to the north was rejected by GDOT in a letter from Joe Palladi on October 30, 2002 based on the cost associated with replacing several bridges that would likely need to be replaced again as part of the Ultimate HOV extension strategy and the short time frame expected between implementation of the Interim and Ultimate solutions. This decision was made by GDOT fairly early in the analysis before BRT or truck only lanes were added. Subsequently, the Ultimate HOV extension strategy resulted in the roadway configuration used in the DEIS.

Comments on the DEIS received from the public and the various agencies involved were mainly focused on two issues. The largest number of comments was from the City of Atlanta concerning their opposition to additional busses on downtown streets and the minor rework of the Marta Arts Center Station to accommodate the additional bus traffic associated with the BRT system proposed. Second in number were comments from the trucking industry concerning truck only lanes that could possibly be tolled and the use of the lanes declared mandatory. As you will recall, mandatory

use of the tolled system by trucks was ultimately abandoned by GDOT but the trucking industry remained unconvinced of the value of the truck only lanes. The remaining comments were either in support of the Project or were concerning issues that can be addressed with simple explanations or minor changes to the proposed concept. The major comments along with a realization that funding that can be applied to this Project will be severely limited require some significant changes to the proposed roadway concept. The logical approach after the DEIS is to explore the changes that should be made to the roadway concept.

The first change is to completely eliminate the transit element from the Project. This addresses the comments from the City of Atlanta and certainly helps with the cost issue. The comments concerning truck only lanes and the decision by GDOT to abandon truck only lanes statewide based on a recent study justifies the elimination of the truck only lanes. This eliminates two of the four lanes in each direction proposed in the DEIS which is consistent with addressing the cost saving measures required. The GDOT Board vision to promote the use of managed lanes systems in the Metropolitan Atlanta Area is also in line with promoting innovative methods for financing projects statewide. This leaves a logical list of concepts to explore in order to identify a concept that will make a difference by providing improved travel times on the corridors and one that is financially sound.

Starting with the modification of the roadway alternative presented in the DEIS as described above there would be some logical roadway configurations to consider. The revised concept on I-75 would be two lanes in each direction between I-285 and I-575 and identical to the DEIS roadway concepts north of the I-75/I-575 Interchange on both I-75 and I-575. The travel time savings in the managed lanes associated with this concept should be similar to those discussed in the DEIS. However, the cost for the concept is not likely to be financially viable since the expected cost will be such that the expected revenue generation may not be sufficient to retire the required supplemental bond debt for construction. If this is the case, it would be appropriate to consider a phased implementation.

The phased implementation would be represented by a second alternative which would be the construction of the western side of the modified DEIS concept operated temporarily as a reversible managed lane system located in the median on the west side of the existing median barrier. The tie-ins at I-285 and Hickory Grove Rd would be modified to accommodate the reversible traffic, of course. It is expected that the traffic on opening day would indicate a peak to off-peak split that is compatible with a reversible system. However, as the planned land use is implemented over time, the split is expected to become closer to even as jobs move outside the Perimeter which would be more compatible with a bidirectional system. When that point is reached,



expected to be at some point in time approximately mid-way between opening day and the design horizon, the final phase can be added on the east side of I-75 and the tie-ins modified to operate as a bidirectional system. Of course, all of these assumptions upon which this scenario is based will need to be verified as part of the modeling.

It should be noted that it may be appropriate to evaluate another variation of the temporary reversible system. This alternative would place the additional lanes on the west side of I-75 outside of the existing roadway system similar to half of the U2 Concept described in the DEIS. This system, which is basically the same as the GTP concept, would be placed largely on structure to avoid conflicts with existing interchanges where possible. Additional changes north of the I-75/I-575 Interchange will be explored to further reduce the construction cost. These changes would reduce the managed lane system to one reversible lane on both corridors. This approach would be basically operationally equivalent to the second alternate but could result in a construction significant cost savings over the managed lane system in the median of I-75. Again, as the need arises, the second and final phase of the concept could be implemented with tie-in modifications and an additional managed lane added on both corridors north of the I-75/I-575 split.

We believe that this approach is consistent with the NEPA process and should be acceptable to FHWA. It addresses the concern that the process is arbitrarily selecting a previously rejected alternative and should permit the completion of the EIS process as quickly as possible.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to call me at (404) 364-2658.

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