

7. Community Outreach and Agency Coordination

To continue to move forward with project development, GDOT fully anticipates the need for additional community outreach and agency coordination. Federal, State, regional, and local government agencies and the community at-large need to be informed about the proposed changes to the project, the selected preferred alternative, and the next steps to project development. In addition, agencies, stakeholders, and members of the community need to become involved in the public decision-making process as required by NEPA.

7.1 Community Outreach

For community outreach, GDOT proposes to conduct a comprehensive, but focused community involvement program. The purpose of this outreach will be to inform all recipients of the AA/DEIS, all who commented on the AA/DEIS, and any new interested and/or potentially affected parties of the selected preferred alternative and its potential environmental impacts. Outreach will need to be extended to major stakeholders as well as members of the general public. The type of outreach will need to be customized for these different audiences.

The objective of this outreach will be to ensure the community fully comprehends the design and operation of the selected preferred alternative. Secondly, GDOT hopes this outreach will stimulate dialogue between the project proponents and the community regarding the selection of this alternative, the potential environmental impacts and how they compare to earlier alternatives evaluated in the AA/DEIS, and the recommended mitigation measures. This dialogue will help to ensure the recommended mitigation measures are acceptable to the community, particularly minority and/or low-income populations.

As part of this outreach, GDOT will conduct a formal, advertised, public hearing to solicit comments on the preferred alternative and anticipated environmental impacts of the alternative. The comments received on the AA/DEIS as well as comments received in this planned public hearing would be included and responded to in the Final EIS.

7.2 Agency Coordination

As stated above, agency coordination is similarly needed to educate agencies of the project modifications and to engage them in the public decision-making process. In particular, GDOT received many agency comments on the AA/DEIS that were either critical of past agency coordination and/or requested additional coordination. Moreover, 23 CFR Part 771, Section 771.125(a)(2) states, “Every reasonable effort shall be made to resolve interagency disagreements on actions before processing the Final EIS.” As such, substantial agency coordination is needed for the remainder of the environmental review process.



To initiate this new coordination effort, GDOT will review the agency comments and identify the major concerns about past agency coordination efforts. The Department will develop a new agency coordination plan to guide future coordination activities. To ensure a successful agency coordination program, GDOT plans to develop this plan with input from interested agencies. Once a general consensus has been reached on how agency coordination will be conducted, GDOT will move forward to implement the plan in the spirit of partnership with Federal, State, and local governments with project interest.

A key message in the new agency coordination plan will be clear communication of the project team activities since the publication of the AA/DEIS in May 2007. This message will review changes in various state and regional transportation plans and policies, the need to modify the build alternatives, the screening of potential managed-lane concepts, and the selection of the preferred alternative. In addition, GDOT will explain the agency clearly “heard” comments opposed to the project and has selected the preferred alternative with substantial public support.

And, if the approach to agency coordination is unsatisfactory for either GDOT or interested agencies, GDOT proposed to make a concerted effort to re-establish working relations, move forward and address project issues, and arrive at mutually agreeable solutions. GDOT hopes this approach to agency coordination will greatly improve agency support of the Northwest Corridor Project and the overall success of future project development activities during preliminary and final design, construction, and finally operation.