



### 3. Public Involvement

A public involvement plan (PIP) was developed in the early stages of the planning process for this study. The PIP established the framework for public outreach and describes some of the tools and techniques to be utilized. It also highlights the multiple opportunities for citizen participation in the process and provides the foundation on which future engagement opportunities will build.

This approach is in accordance with the GDOT policy on public involvement in transportation planning and decision-making “to reach out to Georgians of all walks of life and to invite and encourage them to participate in transportation decision-making.”

It is also consistent with Federal Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice), which sets forth the requirement where federal transportation funds are used “to involve appropriate agencies and all citizens in transportation planning regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or education level.”

Some specific goals of the PIP are to:

- Build public awareness and understanding of the transportation planning process
- Gain an understanding of the public’s transportation needs and priorities
- Engage as many citizens as possible—including representatives from the cities and unincorporated Effingham County as well as traditionally under-represented communities—using a broad range of outreach techniques.
- Encourage public and stakeholder consensus around the most effective and efficient transportation solutions to meet Effingham County’s current and future mobility needs

#### **Outreach effort and description**

In October 2007, the Study Team conducted one-on-one briefings/interviews with key stakeholders in the study area to ensure that stakeholders and community leaders in the county and cities had a working knowledge of the Multi-Modal Transportation Study, including its purpose and need, and had a chance to provide input into the process. The list of stakeholders included local government agency representatives as well as leaders of the business community, faith and community-based organizations, homeowners associations, and others. **Appendix A** describes public involvement activities in more detail and includes a summary of stakeholder comments.

#### ***Study Website***

During the study, an internet website was launched to provide an accessible repository of information for this Multi-Modal Transportation Study. It is hosted by GDOT at:

*<http://www.dot.ga.gov/informationcenter/programs/studies/Pages/Effingham.aspx>*



The website provides information on the study, such as fact sheets, frequently asked questions, public meeting schedules, maps and analysis findings.

### ***Public Meetings and Surveys***

A citizen questionnaire was prepared during Fall 2007 to seek opinions on such matters as the long-term vision for the county and the cities, transportation elements and/or needs requiring immediate attention, and opinions of alternative transportation modes such as transit or bicycling. The questionnaire is available on the study website, and has been distributed at public meetings. A summary of questionnaire results is contained in **Appendix A**.

Public meetings are held in locations convenient to the largest number of people and scheduled to coincide with major study milestones. Various methods are utilized to promote the meetings, including newspapers, email notification of stakeholders, and information on the study's GDOT web page. The first meeting was held on December 13, 2007 at Ebenezer Middle School and was attended by about 40 people. This meeting focused on the transportation needs assessment process and preliminary findings. A second public meeting was held April 3, 2008 at Effingham High School and was attended by 35 members of the community. Preliminary potential project maps were displayed, following a discussion of the planning process to date and analytical basis of recommendations, by mode. At both meetings, GDOT and Jacobs Carter Burgess staff answered questions posed by the public, who were also able to utilize written comment forms created for the occasion.

Fact sheets and meeting flyers are posted on the study website, with hard copies available at city and county government facilities. In addition, stakeholders are provided with copies of the fact sheet and meeting notes to inform those they know about public input opportunities. Outreach to traditionally underserved communities included local contacts such as Reverend Delmons White and Homer Lee Wallace of the NAACP, who distributed extra fact sheets and questionnaires and helped promote public meetings. The initial screening process for potentially underserved areas indicated that Clyo, Egypt, Marlow, and the northern part of the county were among this group.

### **Issues and Opportunities Identified**

Both identified stakeholders and the public provided valuable qualitative insight regarding Effingham's transportation system. Their contributions are summarized in the next sections.

#### ***Stakeholder Interviews***

The overarching themes included the county's population growth, the balance and geographic spread of people/housing and jobs, traffic congestion, the existing transportation system, and truck traffic.

Interviewees voiced strong support for potential projects such as Effingham Parkway, upgrading the I-16 Interchange at Old River Road, enhancing Old Augusta Road, implementing corridor improvements on SR 21, and expanding Ft. Howard Road to accommodate future area subdivisions. A summary of the findings can be found in **Appendix A**.



### **Public Consultation**

Fifteen questionnaires were received following the first public meeting (December 2007) and through the study web page. The questionnaires asked respondents to identify:

- their goals and visions for Effingham County
- critical problems the County was likely to face in the next 25 years
- transportation problems they face moving about the county on a day-to-day basis
- areas in the existing transportation network they felt needed immediate attention, and
- the most critical transportation needs in Effingham County

A broad range of issues was highlighted in response to the questions. In their vision for the county, residents wanted to see job and physical growth that occurred in a sustainable and controlled manner. Respondents also desired to see more cultural, shopping, and leisure opportunities, including a shopping mall and more public parks.

“Inadequate clean water” and growing pains from “too many people” were the most popular views on the problems the county is likely to face over the next 25 years, and traffic and congestion was an almost unanimous response to the problems people faced on a daily basis.

Comments received at the second public meeting (April 2008) highlighted the need for countywide transit services, expressed support for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and were generally supportive of proposed potential improvements in all transportation modes. Some community members expressed concern over the future alignment of the proposed Effingham Parkway and also questioned the impact of large-scale DRI development projects on existing transportation facilities such as SR 21.

### **Previous findings from the 2007 Comprehensive Plan**

Detailed issues and opportunities in Effingham County were first identified by community stakeholders during a series of Comprehensive Plan workshops held in Summer 2006. The nine previous DCA planning elements were addressed and, at the county-level, transportation issues and opportunities are described as follows:

#### **Issues:**

- **Reliance on automobiles** – Most residents must rely on their vehicles for traveling to and from their destinations. Most residents understand that traffic congestion will likely worsen as the population increases. Alternatives to the automobile – walking, bicycling, and public transit – will offer residents more mobility choices and reduce automobile dependency.
- **Inter-parcel connectivity and points of conflict** – Commercial development of single parcels has resulted in “strip development” and segregated business activities. Each parcel or



- development that has a separate access creates a potential point of traffic conflict and reduces the efficiency of arterial roads. Roadway design and access management should ensure that new transportation facilities provide greater connectivity, better travel efficiency, and reduction of hazardous conditions.
- **Disconnected subdivisions** – Accessibility between residential subdivisions is typically restricted to vehicle travel along collector roads, as many subdivisions are isolated and only have single entrances and exits. To promote greater accessibility and mobility options and increase efficient delivery of services, subdivisions should be linked with a network of shared roads that allow movement through and between subdivisions. Such linkages shorten travel distances, improve public safety, and promote walking and bicycling between residential areas and other nearby uses.
  - **Lack of public transportation** – For residents with limited means, or for those who would like an alternative to the auto commute, there are currently few options in the county. A rural transit system would introduce public transportation into the county. Regional bus routes – for example, linking Effingham County with Savannah – may also reduce automobile commutes. However, long-term public transportation solutions may require a more permanent and sustainable system than rural transit. As the county continues to grow, transportation alternatives should be continually re-evaluated. The county should also be prepared to participate in a regional commuter rail plan should one emerge.

#### Opportunities:

- **Creation of a long-range transportation plan** – The county currently lacks a long-range transportation plan. In cooperation with the cities, the county should create a long-range transportation plan to address proposed long-range mobility in the county. The plan should also take into account regional transportation demands, traffic forecasts, and the plans of surrounding jurisdictions. Future land uses and development patterns, as mentioned previously, should be intimately linked to the transportation plan. Also in conjunction with the land use plan, the transportation plan should be updated regularly to reflect new initiatives, funding opportunities, and public needs. The county is taking pro-active steps in promoting regional transportation through the development of the Effingham Parkway and this regional, long-term planning should continue.
- **Creation of pedestrian routes and bicycle networks** – Several bicycle routes through the county already exist, but they do not form a continuous network that links residential and commercial areas. Extending these networks and providing bicycle facilities will provide a valuable alternative mode of transit in the county, especially at the southern end where development is becoming increasingly contiguous along major roads. In areas where commercial developments are located near housing, sidewalks and pedestrian amenities along the public right-of-way should also be provided.



- **Designation of scenic corridors** – The county’s scenic roads, along with its natural resources and historic sites, are irreplaceable components which together form the area’s unique character. Honey Ridge Road and Old Louisville Road, for example, are regarded by many residents as valuable aesthetic and historic corridors that need to be protected from inappropriate development, obstructive signage, and clear-cutting. Designation of these corridors as scenic resources will help guide an appropriate level of development while retaining the qualities that make them unique.

The three cities also identified issues regarding automobile dependency and a lack of connectivity between destinations by multiple modes of travel. Immediate opportunities observed by each city include the creation and promotion of multi-use paths within and between city limits.