

## Citizens Advisory Group Meeting Report June 23, 2010

### **OVERVIEW**

The Skanska Team, in conjunction with the Gwinnett County Department of Transportation (referred to as “Project Team”) held the seventh meeting of the Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) for the proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension on June 23, 2010, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Berkmar High School in Lilburn. The CAG was selected by the public during an open house/public meeting on November 3, 2009, to advise the Project Team on issues and concerns related to a possible extension of the Ronald Reagan Parkway. The CAG convened for the first time on January 11.

**All CAG meeting materials and reports, including those referenced in this report, are available in the Citizens Advisory Group tab at [www.ReaganExtension.com](http://www.ReaganExtension.com).**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Provide opportunities for public comment
- Provide feedback from Meeting #6
- Present conceptual alignment options for the blue, orange (update) and green (update) alignment options
- CAG member open discussion

### **WELCOME & PUBLIC COMMENT**

Brian Allen, Director of the Gwinnett County Department of Transportation, welcomed attendees, noting that the Project Team and the CAG had not met since April because there wasn't ample new information in May to bring the group together for a meeting. Mr. Allen then turned the meeting over to Jon Abercrombie, an independent facilitator who moderates the CAG meetings. Mr. Abercrombie notified the CAG members that a court reporter would be recording the meeting to facilitate record keeping, and reminded all in attendance that meeting materials and the meeting report are posted on the project website at [www.ReaganExtension.com](http://www.ReaganExtension.com).

Mr. Abercrombie told CAG members that for the next several meetings there would be an increase in the amount of information about the process of assessing the costs of potential alignment options and about the criteria that go into determining these costs. He added that at the end of the meeting, the group would talk about the schedule of meetings between now and the anticipated end of the study period.

Mr. Abecrombie invited public comment. There was none.

### **BUSINESS ITEMS**

Mr. Allen then briefed the CAG members on a presentation that he made to the P3 (Public Private Partnership) Committee of the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), referencing an article about the meeting that ran in the *Gwinnett Daily Post*. Mr. Allen was invited to make his presentation by Rudy Bowen, the Gwinnett County representative to GDOT, who has subsequently been elected chairman of the GDOT board.

Mr. Allen told the group that he gave a brief PPT presentation to the Committee and spoke briefly about where the Project Team was with the study process. Mr. Allen said that part of the discussion that the Project Team has been having with Georgia DOT involves the potential connection of the Ronald Reagan Parkway to I-85. During the course of those conversations, said Mr. Allen, the Project Team is continuing to work with Georgia DOT on options at I-85. He said the group may have also read that the GDOT board approved the construction project for the implementation of the HOT lanes, called the H-O-T lanes. This project involves the conversion of the existing HOV lanes along I-85 from just south of Spaghetti Junction, the Moreland interchange, all the way to Old Peachtree Road into managed toll lanes. Mr. Allen said that this would be implemented over the next year. The reason they're called HOT lanes, said Mr. Allen, is because they will be available for people who have less than three occupants per vehicle to travel in those lanes, if those owners and operators want to pay a toll.

Mr. Allen said this is the first of several projects that are part of the state's managed lane plan. He said that anything that the Project Team suggests to tie into I-85 through the Ronald Reagan Parkway study area impacts those HOT lanes. Mr. Allen said the Project Team is working with Georgia DOT and wanted to keep the CAG members up to date. He offered the option of arranging a presentation on the HOT lanes to the committee.

Mr. Allen added that the goal right now is that those HOT lanes will be functional about July 2011. He noted that there would need to be some toll gantries built and placed about every half mile or so, rather than barriers.

A CAG member asked, "Did anyone from GDOT give you any feedback after your presentation about constraints that they foresee placing on the interchange [Reagan Parkway and I-85]?" Mr. Allen replied that the presentation and discussion was not yet at that level of detail, but that the Project Team would continue to work with the GDOT staff about those potentials. He also noted that the Federal Highway Administration will have input.

Mr. David Nachman, with the Project Team, added that GDOT staff has attended most, if not all, of the Project Team's technical meetings. He added that while the GDOT staff has seen the same interchange options the CAG has, they haven't been able to comment specifically yet because the traffic data has not been completed.

A citizen asked if HOT meant that it is free to people if their cars have three or more occupants. Mr. Allen said yes. He clarified that right now it's two or more to ride in the HOV lane and it would be changing to three. Any type of van pool or bus would also be free. The citizen asked how authorities would know the number of occupants in a car and Mr. Allen explained that the technology would likely include gantries and video detection. Mr. Nachman added that he believed that cars with three or more regular occupants could register before they travel.

Mr. Allen then mentioned that in the Project Team's ongoing technical meetings, they've been working to formulate a costing tool. "Obviously, a big part of the feasibility for these routes or the group of routes that we're looking at now would be those costs." He said Mr. Nachman would go into more detail during the meeting. He reminded the CAG members that in looking at the various Link Node Maps, there are many combination of routes for any of the three; blue, green or orange routes. [The Link Node Maps are available for viewing at [www.ReaganExtension.com](http://www.ReaganExtension.com).]

Mr. Allen explained that the Link Node Diagram or Link Node Map is a way to put those costs together and mentioned the many possible combinations of potential routes. Mr. Allen stated there were at least 14 different route combinations and the Project Team was at work developing cost projections on all the different node and link options. He provided this information, he said, to help CAG members frame the maps and charts they would see on the screen during the meeting tonight.

## **PROJECT TEAM FEEDBACK FROM APRIL 21, 2010 MEETING**

Mr. Nachman gave a presentation on the feedback from the April CAG meeting, covering these four topical areas:

### **Interest in Traffic Studies and Forecasts**

Mr. Nachman opened his presentation by briefing CAG members on the traffic studies, which are ongoing. The studies will be completed as all the route options are presented to the team conducting the traffic studies. Mr. Nachman said he anticipated being able to share the traffic data at the next CAG meeting, now scheduled for August 18.

### **How Route Impacts are Identified and Measured**

He also said that the Project Team heard the concern about how the impacts of each potential route was going to be defined, measured and compared to each other route. The Project Team, said Mr. Nachman, was aware that in addition to the actual costs – such as construction cost, right-of-way and relocations – there are also implied impacts, such as visual and noise impacts. The Project Team is taking all of these impacts into account. Further, he said, the team heard that noise and sight lines and the potential for property values to be impacted by different alignments are important. The Project Team is working to develop ways to measure and compare these qualitative impacts. The expectation is that at end of the feasibility study, there will be a comparison of orange to green to blue, and a comparison of those impacts.

### **Merging Ronald Reagan Parkway Traffic into I-85**

Mr. Nachman said the Project Team heard the concerns expressed about the impact of the Ronald Reagan Parkway traffic merging onto I-85. He told the CAG they would see a blue interchange tonight and some modifications to improve the green interchange with respect to allowing the traffic to merge onto I-85.

### **Pros and Cons of Presented Alignments**

Mr. Nachman also noted that at the last meeting there was a lot of good discussion and a lot of difference of opinions about the pros and cons of each one of the potential alignments. He identified differences of opinion both from the public and within the CAG members about the impact to business development along the orange alignment. Some people, he noted, think it would be great for business while others actually made the comment that it would be a “final nail in the coffin” to businesses along that route.

There was also difference of opinions about access to I-85, he said. “Some people preferred Steve Reynolds access, some people preferred tying into the middle, some people preferred tying into the outside.” Finally, there were differences of opinion with regards to specific alignments. The green alignment has impact to green space and wetlands, conservation easements, and residents within that area. But there was also opinions expressed, he said, that potentially that alignment could be done in a sensitive and friendly manner to the people that live there.

Mr. Nachman also noted that the Project Team received a considerable influx of opinions to the Reagan Extension project website. (Those comments are compiled into a written report and distributed to the CAG members at each meeting and are also posted in the meeting materials for each meeting at [www.ReaganExtension.com](http://www.ReaganExtension.com).) Mr. Nachman said about 40 to 50 comments were posted to the site that expressed specific opinions for the orange alignment over the green alignment. He noted that not much information had yet been provided on a blue alignment option so that had it had not generated comment, to date. He also noted that some comments said, “we don't think the Ronald Reagan extension is necessary, but if you're going to do it, do it along the orange.” Concerns were expressed, he said, by Huntington subdivision residents that the proposed extension was going to critically impact their way of life. The comments included mention of possible displacement impacts from noise, safety and property values. He also said there was concern expressed over the green alignment relative to the impact to the green space and the wetlands and the conservation easements in the area. Still others, he said, commented that they like the orange alignment because “it's going to revitalize the Pleasant Hill area.”

Taking these comments as a whole, Mr. Nachman again expressed the Project Team's appreciation for the input. He reiterated that the project was a feasibility study, during which a preferred route is not selected. Rather the Project Team compares potentially feasible alternatives. All the comments and input received via the website will be included in the final feasibility report.

## **PRESENTATION**

Mr. Nachman introduced Shawn Reese to lead the technical presentation, which included a visual review of the blue, orange and green route alignments, plus link nodes and maps relevant to each alignment. All of the materials can be viewed on the Citizens Advisory Group page at [www.ReaganExtension.com](http://www.ReaganExtension.com). Provided here are the key points of Mr. Reese's presentation, followed by specific CAG member questions and comments.

As the presentation began, Mr. Nachman referred members to the node diagram posted at the meeting (and on the Citizens Advisory Group page at [www.ReaganExtension.com](http://www.ReaganExtension.com)), explaining that the concept of nodes allowed the project team a lot flexibility because the approach enables the possibility of many combinations within a single alignment. Further, he said, by pricing the segments between the nodes and by being able to combine them into different alignments, the Project Team had the flexibility to study significantly more than just the three options they were tasked to do at the beginning of the project.

### **Blue Route**

Mr. Allen noted that Mr. Reese was starting with the blue route because members of the CAG had not seen this alignment at prior meetings. A member asked, "...Last time wasn't it also stated that you guys had pretty much eliminated blue?" Mr. Allen clarified that the blue route had not been eliminated, but rather the issue was the cost of connecting to I-85. Mr. Nachman echoed that at the last meeting, the team stated they would present the blue alignment tonight. He added that the Project Team was also doing traffic studies along the blue route to have as a comparison to the other routes. Mr. Nachman said the group talked about some of the difficulties of the blue option --one being the interchange with I-85, another being that it still has a wetlands component, another being that it is longer than the other three and therefore, he said, most likely will have the highest cost. Responding to a question from Mr. Allen, Mr. Nachman stated there would also be displacements along Beaver Ruin.

### **Key points in Mr. Reese's presentation of the blue route:**

- The SB Indian Trail exit would be relocated north of Beaver Ruin.
- The proposed Reagan Parkway would have outside connections to and from I-85 South and North.
- Beaver Ruin Road, the eastbound and westbound lanes, would be on the outside of the Reagan Parkway, represented by Typical Section 1, similar to Peachtree Industrial Boulevard.
- At Park Drive, Steve Reynolds, and some other locations, the Ronald Reagan Parkway would cross above the existing road on a bridge. U-turn lanes would be constructed at these interchanges to allow local access along Beaver Ruin without going through traffic signals.
- At times, the blue route has the Reagan Parkway diverting off existing Beaver Ruin so that a 55 mile design speed could be maintained.
- In order to maintain the 55 speed limit on this route, with appropriate curvature, the route would cut through the back of the Singelton Estates and Beaver Hills subdivisions.

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- The blue route contains some common, overlap sections with the green or orange route.

**CAG Member Questions on the Blue Route presentation:**

Q: What would be the impact on the 3,000-student high school sitting there at Steve Reynolds and Beaver Ruin?

Q: With 85 being so close and that high school sitting there, what is the pollution counter... what is the impact on kids or families in that area with those two roads connecting?

A: At this point, we haven't gotten to that level of study. If this would come out to be the preferred alignment, those kinds of studies would be done during the NEPA process -- air, noise, quantitative studies.

Q: What accommodation have you made for the truck traffic coming out of that rock quarry that's headed towards I-85?

A: The quarry traffic would have the same type of access coming in and out. They would have the same signalized intersection at Beaver Ruin that currently exists. It would just be modified. The Ronald Reagan Parkway would bridge over that intersection.

Q: How high do you think that the road will be over the ground surface?

A: Probably about 25 feet, based on the existing floodplains. We have to be roughly two feet above the existing 100-year floodplain. So that's what sets the height of how high the bridge would go, along with the roadway drainage to drain the water off.

Q: Would that be fairly typical throughout the whole stretch there?

A: That would be pretty typical all the way through here. You'd be about 23, 25 feet elevated.

**Orange Alternate 1**

Key points in Mr. Reese's presentation of Orange Alternate 1:

- The Orange Alternate 1 starts at I-85 and Steve Reynolds Boulevard.
- This configuration ties into the existing Steve Reynolds ramps for the proposed Ronald Reagan extension.
- It allows access to SB I-85 for Steve Reynolds Boulevard coming from Satellite Boulevard.
- Local traffic could exit to Shackelford and Club Drive.
- Along sections of this route, parallel to Club Drive, there would be a wall on both sides of the Reagan Extension.
- The route features an elevated structure all the way across Pleasant Hill Road, with walls on the side of Pleasant Hill Road.
- At Bob Hannah Circle, proposed Reagan Parkway will be below the existing Pleasant Hill Road.
- The alignment would call for adding some lanes to existing Ronald Reagan, about at Pleasant Hill Road, to provide for ramps and to be able to diverge and merge traffic from Pleasant Hill Road to the extension.

**CAG Member Questions on the Orange Alternate 1 presentation:**

Q: What would be the impact of buses leaving Corley Elementary?

A: There would not be any change because Pleasant Hill Road will not be changed at this location.

Q: I've got a question about the curvature of the alignment. It seems like the orange route is very straight and I know that it's been discussed...that you need to achieve certain traffic speeds. It seems like when you were depicting the blue route there was very definite curves in certain sections that seem to be far beyond the speed ratings. Does the blue design allow for the traffic speed?

A: Yes, it does.

Q: [In referencing part of the route near Bob Hannah Circle and Pleasant Hill Road...] Under what circumstances would ramps down there be considered?

A: We've always wanted to provide an option for ramps to and from Pleasant Hill. We wanted to study that from a traffic standpoint to see if there was enough traffic to justify the impacts that those ramps might cause. We don't know the answer to that question yet. But those [the ramps] are optional. We're only going to put them in if the cost versus the impacts is determined to be beneficial to the traveling public.

Q: When will the decision be made on whether you moved forward...beyond the feasibility study?

A: The decision will be made after the conclusion of this study, which will likely push that decision into 2011 because this study will take the bulk of 2010 to complete.

**Orange Alternate 2**

Key points in Mr. Reese's presentation of Orange Alternate 2:

- Orange alternate 2 offers other options as it continues along Club Drive.
- The option offers a connection at Club-West Lidell.
- Another option, as the orange route weaves back and forth across Club Drive, would be use an option similar to the green route interchange with I-85 and West Lidell.

**Green Alternate 1**

Key points in Mr. Reese's presentation of Green Alternate 1:

- This route starts at the existing West Lidell intersection with Venture Drive.
- The route would connect across to Satellite Boulevard, beyond Venture Drive.
- In order to tie into I-85 from the Ronald Reagan extension, there would need to be some widening of I-85 to allow for the proper lane configuration.
- Motorists would have about 3,000 feet to get out of the HOT lane if they didn't want to pay the toll and just travel on existing I-85 lanes.
- This route proposes to extend West Lidell Boulevard across I-85, with pedestrian traffic across one side of the bridge.

**CAG Member Questions on the Green Alternate 1 presentation:**

During the discussion of the Green Alternate 1 alignment, members asked questions about how traffic would tie in to I-85 from the proposed Ronald Reagan extension. The Project Team clarified that only one lane of Ronald Reagan would tie into I-85; the other lane would tie across (eventually) to Satellite Boulevard.

Members asked how long a distance a driver would have on I-85 to decide whether he/she wanted to pay the toll and take the proposed extension. Mr. Allen said a driver would have about three-quarters of a mile to decide whether to remain in the HOT lane and pay the toll further down I-85 or merge to get into the general purpose lanes.

Another citizen asked if the West Lidell bridge would be built as a part of this project? Mr. Allen responded that under this concept, it would be build as a part of this project.

Q: How are you going to divert the flow of water from the wetlands area...so it's not going into existing creeks?

A: We will use a system that contains much of the water. The rain has already fallen in this area, so all we have to do is contain and treat that water. We don't want it to get out to the wetlands or to the existing marshes any faster than it is today. This would be addressed during the NEPA process.

Q: There are homes in that area that have to have flood insurance. What about the ones that border them that don't need flood insurance? How will they be affected?

A: We cannot and we will not raise the flood elevation from what it is now. We would have a no-rise certificate. We would implement all measures possible, so that we won't be raising the flood elevation. So the flood insurance requirements would not change under a no-rise scenario.

Q: During construction, who is going to be monitoring things like silt fences that get washed out or sediment that actually does escape from your best management practices? Who's going to be responsible for monitoring that?

A: The Georgia Environmental Protection Agency will oversee. They can inspect it at any time. There are procedures we have to undertake -- erosion/sediment pollution control plans for every construction stage of the project. The engineer who drafts the erosions/sediment control plan would also inspect the site to make sure it was to his/her design. Every time a stage of construction changes, there has to be an erosion control plan or a method implemented. The engineer then inspects the site again and tells the contractor, yes, it's to my design, you can start building. He provides a seven-day letter which means that all measures are in conformance.

Q: So if something were to happen during the construction process, let's say Freeman Lake, for instance, starts to get settled or sedimentation in Freeman Lake, Skanska has some sort of bond or some money set aside in case something fails and you have to mitigate damage? Who pays for that?

A: That would be the responsibility of the contractor who's performing the work.

A member stated that the group hadn't actually talked about what the project was going to cost.

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Mr. Allen said that one of the Project Team's tasks as part of the pre-development phase is to determine project costs.

The member asked about an assurance that if things don't go as planned, these costs don't fall on the taxpayers. Mr. Allen explained that what the County has entered into now is a predevelopment agreement with Skanska. If it's determined at the end of this process, either by Skanska or by the County, that this project is not going to move forward to the next phase, then the County has a contractual obligation to pay Skanska for the product that they're going to deliver to us, which would be those concepts. That's the \$1.4 million that we talked about up front, said Mr. Allen. That's what we would pay should the agreement not move forward, he said.

He added that the copy of the contract between the County and Skanska is a public record.

Mr. Allen then explained that there are actually combinations of 14 routes that are being studied. The costing is done from a node standpoint so that any of those logical combinations could be put together and costed. That data is going to be in the final report at the end of the project and will be available to the public.

Mr. Nachman added that the final decision on whether to move forward with the project is not up to Skanska; it is up to the County.

A member asked if the final report would prioritize the route configurations. Mr. Allen said that is not a part of the predevelopment phase.

In closing out the presentation on the route alignments, Mr. Abercrombie reported that the Project Team was capturing their questions and comments about: the wetlands, the HOT lane merging, wetlands and runoff, and who will monitor the runoff in construction. Mr. Abercrombie noted that these comments would also be in the meeting notes.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. Abercrombie then asked for comments from the public.

A citizen asked if there will be information on the acreage associated with each segment in terms of the amount of right of way that would need to be acquired and used in construction. Mr. Nachman said yes, that information would ultimately be part of the costing data.

Mr. Allen added that any necessary relocations of either businesses or homes would also be a part of the costing tool.

A citizen asked if design specs for some of the water treatment structures that Mr. Reese spoke about could be brought to the next meeting. Mr. Reese agreed.

A member said: "This is not the Tiddlywinks Highway. This is the Ronald Reagan. Something that hasn't been addressed. One of the greatest presidents this country has ever seen. And I hope

this project honors him.”

A citizen asked if the last green route that was presented went predominantly through wetlands. Mr. Reese responded that if ran predominantly through open space that were wetlands. The citizen asked which alignment “took up” the most wetland space. The Project Team said that both the green and blue routes had wetland impacts, with Green Alternate 1 having perhaps the greatest wetland space.

A citizen was interested in knowing and understanding the cost of not building the extension. Mr. Allen noted that the traffic study presentation does measure the benefits that people would gain using the extension and potentially even paying a toll to use it, with a benefit being in travel-saving time, cost and congestion. Mr. Nachman added that the analysis of not building a project was always done during the NEPA process, if the project progressed to that stage.

Mr. Allen pointed out that selecting a preferred route, whether by the Project Team or by the CAG, which is an advisory group, was not a part of the predevelopment phase.

A citizen then asked if a part of the final report would be to take another approach, such as improving traffic flow on existing roads, changing signal timing, adding lanes or other options. Mr. Allen clarified that studying those other type of options was not a part of this predevelopment agreement. He also clarified that “build or no build” was really NEPA terminology and was a part of that process, rather than the predevelopment phase.

Another citizen questioned Skanska’s objectivity in the process. Mr. Nachman stated that Skanska is interested in completing a project that is viable from a business standpoint, but the County has the final say as to what makes sense for the community and what’s a good investment.

Mr. Allen then added that because the county has entered into this P3 agreement with Skanska they will ultimately own a work product valued at \$2.6 million. Had the County hired a consultant to do the same study, that is the amount the County would have paid and that is a verified amount, he said. Yet, in this agreement, the County would only pay \$1.4 million – or about 60 percent – of the true cost, Mr. Allen noted.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS AND UPCOMING MEETINGS**

Mr. Allen and Mr. Abercrombie thanked all in attendance. It was determined that there would not be a meeting in July and that the CAG would meet again on August 18. The location will remain Berkmar High School and start time will remain 6:30 p.m.

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