

Public Meeting Report

Nov. 3, 2009

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Gwinnett County Department of Transportation and the Skanska Team held a public meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2009 at Berkmar High School in Lilburn to inform citizens about the proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension project and to select members of a Citizens Advisory Group that will advise Gwinnett County and Skanska Team during a feasibility study of the project. The meeting started at 6:00 p.m. and lasted two hours. Seven members of the Advisory Group were selected, along with alternates.

In the proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension project, Gwinnett County is working collaboratively with the Skanska Team to pre-develop, and potentially design, construct, finance, operate and maintain roadway lanes and associated facilities along a northern extension to Interstate 85.

There were three purposes for this meeting: To inform citizens about the proposed project, to allow citizens an opportunity to ask questions and to select an initial set of members and alternates for the Citizens Advisory Group, which may be expanded as it organizes and moves forward.

About 150 people attended the public meeting, most of whom stayed to select Advisory Group members from stakeholder groups.

Two presentations were made early in the meeting, by Brian Allen, director of the Gwinnett County Department of Transportation, and David Nachman, project manager with Skanska.

In his presentation, Brian Allen explained the history of the Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension proposal and how the Skanska Team was selected earlier this year as a partner with the County in this project. At this date, Brian stressed, no route for the extension has been determined. One of the aims of the pre-development process is to identify several possible routes, he said.

The study's other aims are to develop design concepts, perform preliminary traffic analysis, perform environmental screening, develop cost estimates and, in the end, make a judgment about the project's feasibility. If the extension is determined to be feasible, the County will negotiate with the Skanska Team on the terms of a partnership to finance, build and operate the project. If it cannot arrive at a satisfactory agreement (or the project is determined not to be feasible), Brian said, the County will pay the Skanska Team its share of the costs for the pre-development work. At that point, all work product produced under the Pre-Development Agreement would become the property of Gwinnett County, and the County could decide whether to proceed on its own with the project.

In his presentation, David Nachman of Skanska talked about the proposed project's goals – to improve travel times, reduce congestion on local streets, improve safety and create a transportation asset for Gwinnett County. The County and the Skanska Team will determine the technical, environmental and financial feasibility of the proposed project and gauge public opinions during the pre-development phase.

Important to all of this, Brian and David said, will be the Citizens Advisory Group, which will help identify public perspectives on the proposed project and offer advice to the County and the Skanska Team.

Meeting Process

The meeting began in the Berkmar auditorium. After a welcome from facilitator Jon Abercrombie and a brief overview of the meeting, Brian Allen and David Nachman gave their presentations, which are described above. Then Jon opened the meeting to questions from citizens.

Among the questions asked:

- Has a route for the proposed extension already been chosen? (Answer: No. The study process is designed to identify possible routes, along with their relative merits and concerns. All possibilities will be considered.)
- Is the outcome of the feasibility pre-determined? (Answer: No. The feasibility study is designed to identify possible ways (yet unknown), from financial, technical and public perspectives, to relieve congestion and provide better access to I-85.)
- What is the timetable for construction? (Answer: The 9-12 month feasibility study must be completed, then the determination will be made if and how to proceed. If the project continues, it then enters a “development” stage, then construction; the specific timetable beyond the feasibility study has not been determined but is estimated at several years.)
- How will the proposed extension affect property values? And wetlands/the environment (Answer: The County and Skanska have a great deal of sensitivity to environmental sustainability, and we understand the perspective of property owners as well. The feasibility study results will address potential impacts on both.)
- How can we be sure that residents’ views will be heard? (Answer: The study process and results will be as open as possible, and the Citizens Advisory Group will be an important conduit for information and advice. Also, citizens can offer their ideas through the proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension web site, www.reaganextension.com.)

From the auditorium, citizens moved to the cafeteria, where discussion circles had been set up for the stakeholder groups. The stakeholder groups were:

- **Residents:** Homeowners and renters from the study area
- **Businesses:** Owners/managers of businesses in the study area or whose businesses might be affected by the proposed project
- **Commuters:** Those who anticipate using the proposed extension
- **Education:** Schools in the study area and/or school system officials whose work might be affected by the proposed extension (e.g., school bus routes)
- **Environmental:** Individuals or groups who are concerned about the proposed extension’s impact on land, water or air in the study area
- **Local government service providers:** Officials whose services might be affected by the proposed extension (e.g., parks and recreation)

There were three seats on the Citizens Advisory Group set aside for residents and one for each of the other stakeholder groups. County officials suggested, for geographic diversity, that the residents divide into groups from the northern, central and southern parts of the study area. As it turned out, there were

Proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension
Feasibility Study Public Meeting
Nov. 3, 2009

not enough citizens from the southern part to create a separate group, so residents met in two groups, from the northern area and the central area. (The central area was given two seats on the Advisory Group because it had the larger number at the meeting.)

There were not enough citizens present from the education community to select an Advisory Group member, but every other stakeholder group had enough participants to hold discussions and select a member and alternate.

To begin the selection process, Jon Abercrombie suggested participants brainstorm in their discussion circles about important criteria or qualities for selecting an Advisory Group member. (The notes of this discussion are below.)

After the brainstorming session and a brief sharing of these ideas, Jon asked those who wanted to serve on the Advisory Group to write their names on flip charts, with enough room that people in the circles could vote using colored dots. Those receiving the greatest number of dots from those in their circles would be the members, those with the second-greatest number would be alternates. (The Advisory Group members and alternates who were selected are listed below.)

As the Advisory Group gets organized in January, it may select members of other stakeholder groups to join it. Jon suggested that it might begin by identifying a representative from the education community, but it could add members from other stakeholder groups as well.

After the selections were made, Jon suggested that citizens in the discussion circles talk about what their representatives in the Advisory Group should keep in mind as they do their work in the months ahead. (The notes of this discussion are below.)

Discussion Notes

Before selecting members and alternatives to serve on the Advisory Group, Jon asked participants, "What are the important criteria or qualities an Advisory Group member should have?" Five of the stakeholder groups wrote their ideas:

Central Study Area Residents (Circle 1)

- Experience
- Time
- Long-time resident
- Good communicator
- Problem solver
- Diligence
- Willingness

Central Study Area Residents (Circle 2)

Proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension
Feasibility Study Public Meeting
Nov. 3, 2009

- Confrontational
- History of leadership
- Long-time resident – past, present and future
- Reliability / Attendance
- Good communicator
- Willingness
- No conflict of interest
- Understand how the county works

Business

- Direct interest for businesses and its employees
- Attendance
- Business background
- Problem solver
- Represents all businesses

Commuters

- Regular usage of Parkway
- Communication skills: impartial, verbal, written
- Local knowledge

Environmental

- Time
- Experience
- Knowledge
- More than 1 motivation
- Availability
- Substitute

After the stakeholder groups chose their members and alternates, Jon asked participants to consider, “What should your representatives keep in mind as they participate in the feasibility study?” Four of the stakeholder groups wrote their ideas:

North Study Area Residents

- Will stimulus money be used?
- Will SPLOST money be used?
- Where will water runoff go?
- What will be the impact on real estate values?
- What will be the impact on wetlands?
- No toll roads

Proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension
Feasibility Study Public Meeting
Nov. 3, 2009

Central Study Area Residents (Circle 1)

- Property values
- Wetland damage
- Water/runoff issues
- Proposed routes
- Pollution
- Transparency from county
- Property tax increases
- Access to parkway

Central Study Area Residents (Circle 2)

- Water runoff changes
- Where's the original study? Why are we not using it?
- Is construction bid-able, or does Skanska get it?
- What is the noise consideration?
- Impact on schools, transportation – safety, house values, egress
- How does eminent domain work with upside-down mortgages?
- How will the toll option affect usability?
- Will Pleasant Hill improvements fix or improve traffic problems?
- Will 29 improvements fix or improve traffic problems?
- Neighborhood street access

Environmental

- Minimal impact on greenspace
- Best possible route
- Runoff pollution

Members and Alternates

Here are the members and alternates selected by the stakeholder groups:

North Study Area Residents

Joseph Walsh, Lawrenceville
Anne Williams, Lawrenceville

Central Study Area Residents (Circle 1)

Henry “Hal” Thompson, Jr., Lilburn
Janet Tobin, Lilburn

Proposed Ronald Reagan Parkway Extension
Feasibility Study Public Meeting
Nov. 3, 2009

Central Study Area Residents (Circle 2)

Eddie Daves, Norcross
Jack Ennis, Lawrenceville

Business

Regular Member: Howard Kaplan, Norcross
Alternate: John McHenry, Norcross

Commuters

Regular Member: Dennis Wright, Snellville
Alternate: Jim Walters, Lilburn

Environmental

Regular Member: Larissa Thomas, Lilburn
Alternate: Carol Hassell, Suwanee
Alternate: Patty Robbins, Lawrenceville

Local Government

Regular Member: Jerry Oberholtzer, Snellville
Alternate: Gerald McDowell, Lilburn