I-285/SR 400 Interchange Improvement Project: Streamlining the Environmental Planning Process
60th Annual Alabama Transportation Conference

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February 10, 2017

Agenda
- Project Background, Goals, and Benefits
- Existing Conditions
- "The Challenge": Expedited Schedule
- Strategies to Meet "The Challenge"
- Outcome

Project Background
- Priority for metro Atlanta region
- Reduce traffic congestion and improve safety
  - Improvements to I-285/SR 400 Interchange
  - Improvements to approaches
- Benefit from existing assets
  - revive285 environmental studies
  - Previous environmental approval for SR 400 CD Lanes project and acquired right-of-way

Existing I-285/SR 400 Interchange

Project Background
- Faster project completion through innovative project delivery methods
  - Accelerate delivery
  - Minimize impacts to traveling public
  - Maximize use of available funding
  - Design-Build-Finance (DBF) Public-Private Partnership (P3)
  - Total estimated project cost: $800 million
Project Goals

1. Reduce weaving maneuvers along I-285 and SR 400 mainline
2. Address current lack of adequate ramp capacity at SR 400/I-285 interchange
3. Improve interchange geometry

Proposed I-285/SR400 Interchange

Typical Section

Project Benefits

- Improved Safety:
  - Reduce conflicting traffic movements and conflicting volumes
  - Reduce number of access points to mainline and increase spacing between access points
- Improved Traffic Operations:
  - Reduce weaving movements
  - Increase I-285/SR 400 interchange ramp capacity
  - Improve interchange geometry (e.g., removal of high volume loop ramp, removal of left-side merges)

Existing Conditions
Crash Summary by Type

Typical Causes: Frequent Stop-and-Go Conditions; Congestion

Accident and Congestion Relationship

Root Cause

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

“The Challenge”: Expedited Environmental Schedule

Environmental Schedule

12 months to:
- Complete traffic analysis and Interchange Modification Report
- Environmental Resource Identification
- Avoidance & Minimization Efforts: Define project footprint
- Conduct Environmental Technical Studies
- Complete an Environmental Assessment (EA)
- Re-evaluate an existing EA
- Obtain a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

We Knew What to Avoid!

- Late Environmental Resource Identification
- Late Scope Changes or Major Design Changes
- Prolonged Review Process
- Dragged-out Agency Consultations
- Public Controversy
Strategies to Meet “The Challenge”

- Early resource identification
- Accelerated feasibility studies
- Effective and accelerated review process
- Inter- and Intra-agency review/decision workshops
- Effective communication strategies
- Extensive public and stakeholder interaction

Early Resource Identification

**Project Constraints:**
- 20 National Register-Eligible Historic Resources
- 44 Waters of the U.S.
- 1 public park
- Relocations
- Environmental Justice Community
- Some Communities with Limited English Proficiency
- Noise Concerns

Accelerated Feasibility Studies

- Early identification of environmental resources
  - Allowed for avoidance/minimization to be factored into project concept
  - Allowed for early development of conservative project disturbance footprint for environmental study
- Developed automated CADD tools to create traffic volume diagrams
- Early collaboration between roadway design and traffic teams

Effective & Accelerated Reviews

- No more than 2 reviews of any documents
- GDOT completed reviews within five business days
- Consultants provided complete QA/QC review package
- Consultant addressed comments within 3 - 5 business days
- Workshops: Outcome of the workshop = GDOT approved document
  - Workshop Objectives:
    - Reviewer & author work as a team to achieve on-time & quality environmental document
    - Highly accountable team of environmental professionals (GDOT & Consultant)
    - Stronger partnership

Review/Decision Workshops

Fostered commitment and accountability between the Consultant, GDOT, FHWA, and federal Resource Agencies

**Intra-Agency**
- Allowed for early consensus on: technical study approach/methodology, survey areas, survey and impact assessment guidelines
  - Minimized risk of scope changes (and resultant schedule delays)
  - Accelerated agency review/approval times for technical studies

**Inter-Agency**
- Allowed for real-time development of project solutions that were acceptable to all parties
  - Meetings to discuss unavoidable impacts and minimization strategies
  - Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Coordination with USACE & USFWS

- Early coordination meeting
- Status teleconferences (GDOT, USACE, USFWS)
- Obtained a waiver for Practicable Alternatives Report (PAR)
- Pre-application meeting
- Two-phase Section 404 Individual Permit application
- Concurrent reviews of Section 7 (FHWA & USFWS)
Communication Strategies
- Weekly internal meetings (Consultant PM and Discipline Leads)
- Bi-weekly Consultant/GDOT team meetings and with FHWA
- Review/Decision Workshops
- Thorough documentation of key decisions, action items, and project progress
- "Live"/interactive meetings with various agencies
- Use of Visual Data to communicate complex information (LOS heat maps)

Public and Stakeholder Interaction
- Conducted early public and stakeholder outreach to identify key concerns
- Used a data visualization tool (fly-through simulation video) to foster public understanding of the complex project and travel pattern changes
- Targeted key concerns at public meetings (post-construction noise levels, artistic renderings of visual impacts, changes in travel patterns)

Maximizing Public Outreach

Tools to Streamline the Environmental Process
- Early resource identification
- Accelerated feasibility studies
- Effective & accelerated review process
- Inter- and Intra- Agency review/decision workshops
- Effective communication strategies
- Maximize public outreach and foster public understanding
“The Challenge” - EXCEEDED

In less than 12 months (347 days)
- New EA/FONSI for I-285/SR 400 Interchange Project and re-evaluation of existing EA/FONSI for SR 400 CD Lanes Project
- Minimal public controversy/positive feedback
- Real-time development of collaborative design solutions

Questions & Answers

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More Information:
http://www.dot.ga.gov/BuildSmart/Projects/Pages/I285SR400.aspx

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