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## CHAPTER II: HENRY COUNTY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Named after Revolutionary War hero, Patrick Henry, the County was established in May, 1821. It now encompasses nearly 328 square miles of land area and is home to four (4) municipalities, including the Cities of Hampton, Locust Grove, McDonough (the county seat), and Stockbridge. The major points of interest in the County include the Atlanta Motor Speedway, located near Hampton, the home of major NASCAR (National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing) events, and Panola Mountain State Park. The park is located along Henry County's border with Rockdale County.

Since the late 1990s, Henry County has become one of the fastest growing counties in the U.S. and currently holds the distinction of the fastest annual rate of growth of any of the counties in the Metro Atlanta region. This rapid growth and the associated development pressures are transforming many rural locations in Henry County into suburban development, with new housing, commercial, school, and entertainment areas emerging continually. This rapid rate of population growth, together with a relatively low level of job growth in high-income sectors, is challenging Henry County and its Cities to meet the citizens' expectations in terms of publicly-funded K-12 school facilities, street and highway infrastructure, water, and sewer systems, recreational areas, emergency services, and other public facilities and services. While local funding initiatives, such as the County's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) initiatives have addressed some of these needs, many unfunded needs, especially in the area of transportation, are apparent in Henry County.

### History of Settlement Patterns

The history and evolution of Henry County are documented in several sources, among them an account by Michael Reaves entitled "*Historic Henry County: An Illustrated History*" published in 2004 by the Henry County Chamber of Commerce. According to his account, the first inhabitants of Henry County were members of the Mound Builders who inhabited various parts of Georgia between the years 800 and 1200 A.D. Remnants of one of the Mound Builders' fort built can be found near the Indian Creek Reservoir.<sup>1</sup>

Later, starting in around 1200 A.D., the Creek Indian Tribes settled in what is now Henry County. Social customs of the tribe influenced the nature of their settlements which were recognized as several houses (usually around 20-25) located in a pattern radiating from a center square. The center was the focal point and "ceremonial and governmental center of the village."<sup>2</sup> This pattern is similar to the modern form of the towns located in Henry County today.

As the number of European settlers increased in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, conflicts with the Indian nations grew. In 1821, the Treaty of Indian Springs was negotiated by William McIntosh, a resident of Indian Springs (now located in Butts County). The treaty gave the land inhabited by the Creeks to Georgia, which would later become Henry County. By 1831, the members of the Creek Tribe residing in and around what is now Henry County were involuntarily moved to Oklahoma.<sup>3</sup>

Henry County was founded by the Georgia State Assembly in May, 1821 at the same time that Fayette, Monroe, Dooly, and Houston Counties were formed. Henry County was much larger at the time of its creation than today. It contained all or portions of the present-day counties of Fulton, DeKalb, Rockdale, Newton, Butts, Spalding, Fayette, and Clayton. Later that year, portions of Henry County began being carved into new counties.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Reaves, "Historic Henry County: An Illustrated History", 2004, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 11.



Henry County's first city, McDonough, was established in 1822 and was a boomtown.<sup>5</sup> The next year, the Village of McDonough was incorporated as the County Seat for Henry County. Many settlers coming to McDonough at that time were merchants hoping to get products from rural Georgia to markets and agents along the east coast of the U.S. Professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and accountants also settled there. However, by the 1840's, the economic viability of McDonough was weakened by the area's first railroad being aligned on the western side of Henry County near the new town of Bear Creek (later renamed Hampton). New towns, such as Griffin and Jonesboro, thrived due to their location near the rail line and McDonough lost residents to other communities. This situation mirrors our modern day conditions showing the influence that transportation access has on the success of communities.

During the years following the Civil War, the residents of the area struggled with a farm economy that had been devastated by war. By 1887, work was started on the Henry County Courthouse in McDonough's downtown square. By 1896, Henry County had its first bank, its first streetlights and started its first water works facility. The County received an economic boost in 1898, when the State of Georgia decided to run an extension of the Atlanta-Macon rail line through McDonough. This action spurred new businesses to relocate there, including factories and services.

Weathering the economic cycles, the County has dealt with challenges and opportunities, and has continued to grow. One factor has been the spillover effect of the phenomenal growth and development of the Atlanta region. Henry County has been a beneficiary of that growth due to public institutions and private entities wanting to do business in Atlanta without having to be physically located there. An example is the U.S. Department of Transportation with its Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) major Air Traffic Control Center which located in Hampton in 1960. Another example is the Atlanta Motor Speedway which located just north of Hampton in 1961.

At about the same time, Henry County was focused on sustaining its long-term growth and formed the Henry County Planning Commission.<sup>6</sup> Among its initiatives was discouraging undesirable land uses emanating from areas north of the County, encouraging the formation of the County Water System, and creation of industrial parks in the area. All of these actions helped to create an environment where growth could bloom.

## Evolution of the Transportation System

As documented by Michael Reaves, the regional transportation system in the Greater Atlanta region, both highways and rail lines, has greatly influenced Henry County's economic conditions. Through the decades, transportation decisions affected the fortunes of communities, business establishments, and individuals throughout Henry County.

By 1920, the Great Depression had seriously impacted Henry County, but unlike other difficult periods, few people left Henry County. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, several public improvement projects, funded with state and federal funds, were undertaken. By 1931, State Road 42 was paved and connected McDonough to Atlanta.<sup>7</sup>

Economic growth continued in the County over the next several decades and in October 1969, Interstate 75 (I-75) was opened in Henry County, bringing with it new businesses. By the 1980s, the growth of Atlanta had accelerated and it was becoming a major business center in the U.S. and internationally. Suburban population and job growth continued throughout the region, including Henry County, and by the 1990s, Henry County had become the fourth-fastest growing County in the U.S.<sup>8</sup>

With the access to key markets in Georgia and other states provided by I-75 and the rail lines through Henry County, new businesses like Nestle, Ford, Nippon Electronics Company, and Toys 'R Us, have

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 29-30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 31.



located in the County, providing growing job opportunities for Henry County residents.<sup>9</sup> These new job opportunities, reasonable housing costs, community and natural amenities, and desirable public school and health facilities have drawn growing numbers of new residents to Henry County, placing growth pressures on the transportation system.

Beginning in the late 1940s through today, Henry County and its municipalities have added to and improved the transportation system, particularly its streets and highways, to accommodate the travel needs of residents and business operations. The County has played the largest role in terms of the transportation investments. The Cities of McDonough, Locust Grove, and Hampton have a role in approving new local roads or roadway improvements in conjunction with new development projects. Henry County handles this role for the City of Stockbridge.

A very important participant in the improvement of the transportation system in Henry County is the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). GDOT has contributed substantial sums of money to improve several state roads in the County, including I-75, U.S. 19/41, SR 20, US 23/SR 42, and SR 138. A notable new investment in Henry County opened to traffic in 2006. The widening of SR 20 created a new connection between I-75 and the Atlanta Motor Speedway along U.S 19/41 near Hampton. GDOT has also committed to making an improvement to a serious traffic bottleneck on I-75 at the I-675 juncture. GDOT will be adding auxiliary lanes to ease traffic flow at this location where heavy truck traffic is present.

This partnership between Henry County and GDOT will continue to be important, both now and in the future, as transportation challenges continue to evolve with the growth and development of Henry County. Partnerships with GDOT on potential commuter rail services and with other partners, such as the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) on expanded commuter bus operations and selected arterial road projects, among others, will also be important. The newly formed regional Transit Planning Board may also play a role.

In 1996, in order to address the increasing demand for a better transportation system in the County, Henry County voters approved their first Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) initiative. The State of Georgia allows counties to collect funds for capital improvement projects, such as roads, schools, park facilities, etc., provided that a measure is placed on the general referendum. The projects to be accomplished with the SPLOST funding are usually identified in advance (to obtain citizen support). The maximum time the SPLOST program can be in place is five (5) years or until the total amount of revenue enacted in the referendum is reached. Counties may enact subsequent SPLOST programs subject to voter approval. The 1997 – 2001 SPLOST initiative included a total of \$71 million of which 57% of the funding was devoted to roads and 43% was devoted to buildings and parks. Eleven (11) major road projects as well as road paving projects were completed with funding from the first SPLOST program. Additionally, each of the four cities in the County and the Fairview area in the northern part of the County received \$ 500,000 each for their own projects.

In 2002, a second SPLOST (SPLOST II) program was approved by voters for the period from 2003 – 2008. About \$140 million is expected to be collected with the majority of the funding (about \$ 85 million) going to transportation projects. The Cities in the County will also share \$ 19 million in SPLOST revenue for their own projects. As of April 2007, several SPLOST II projects are underway or have been completed. The completed projects include phase I of the East Lake Road extension, five resurfacing projects, eight bridge improvement projects, six intersection and signalization projects, as well as several dirt road paving projects including portions of the following roads: South Ola Road, Alexander Road, Pates Creek Road, Rocky Creek Road, Strickland Road and Walker Road, North Ola Road, Turner Drive, Harper Drive, North Moseley Road, Pleasant Grove Road, Rowan Drive, Sims Street, and Ward Drive. The appendix contains the master list of SPLOST II projects as of April 2007. The importance of these SPLOST resources to the County's transportation system is highlighted in more detail in Chapter XI.

Over the years, the transportation system in Henry County has grown and evolved in response to changing demands of its residents, visitors, and economic activities. In order to understand the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.37.



transportation needs, opportunities, and challenges in Henry County now and those expected in the future, it is helpful to understand more about its demographic and economic trends and planning issues.

## Current and Future Demographic and Economic Trends

At the same time as the Joint Henry County/Cities Comprehensive Transportation Plan was being developed, all of these jurisdictions joined together to develop a countywide update to their Comprehensive Plan. This effort was undertaken together with the Transportation Plan as part of the “One Henry Initiative”. Led by County Chairman Jason Harper, the leadership of Henry County and the Cities of McDonough, Locust Grove, Hampton, and Stockbridge have all pledged to conduct joint planning for the entire area of Henry County. This CTP is one of the primary products of the One Henry Initiative.

As part of the Joint County/Cities Comprehensive Plan, consistent with the requirements of the Georgia Planning Act, a Community Assessment was developed in late 2005 and early 2006 for the entire County. The Community Assessment is intended to objectively describe and assess the planning area and provide key facts and information to the public and elected officials about the current planning conditions present in the County and Cities. The Community Assessment has been completed and the Community Agenda is now being prepared. This chapter includes excerpts from the “*Henry County/Cities Joint Comprehensive Plan: Community Assessment and Community Participation Program*” (draft) dated February 28, 2006 developed by Jordan, Jones & Goulding (JJG) that are especially relevant to the Henry County/Cities Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

## Land Area and Land Uses

The County is a diverse mix of rural, suburban, and urban land uses, with the urban uses located within and near its four municipalities, the Cities of Hampton, Locust Grove, McDonough, and Stockbridge. Table II - 1 identifies the current breakdown of land use types in the County. Figure II - 2 and Figure II - 3 illustrate the most current, but not yet adopted as of January 2007 Existing and Future Land Use Maps for the County and its Cities, respectively.

The distribution of current land uses by each local government jurisdiction and unincorporated Henry County can be found in the “*Henry County/Cities Joint Comprehensive Plan: Community Assessment and Community Participation Program*” (dated February 28, 2006). The “Residential” category includes single- and multi-family residential land uses and mobile homes.

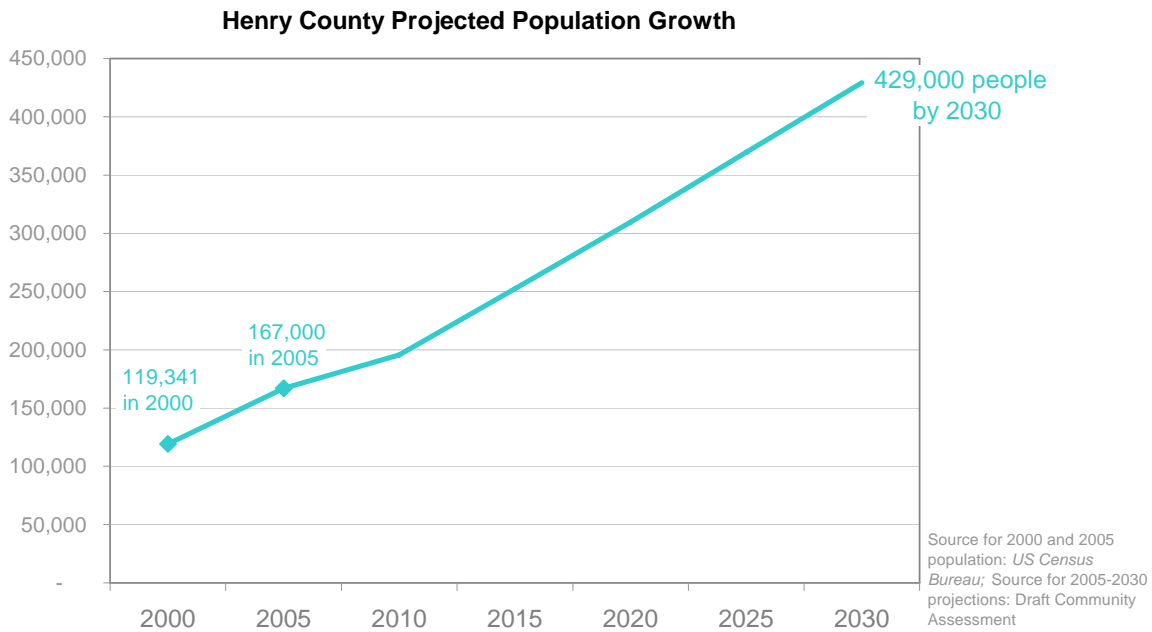
Table II - 1: Existing Land Uses		
Land Use Type	Acres	% of Total
Agricultural/Forestry/Estate Residential	82,957	39.5
Residential	48,196	23.1
Public/Institutional	4,690	2.1
Parks/Recreation/Conservation	3,357	1.5
Transportation/ Communications/Utilities	21,909	10.3
Commercial	3,354	1.5
Industrial	4,591	2.8
Undeveloped/Vacant	40,504	19.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>209,738</b>	<b>100.0</b>



## Population Growth Trends

Based on data from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) and Henry County, the County's population growth has been remarkable since the late 1980s. In the ten years between 1990 and 2000, the County's population grew by over 60,000 people. In the following four years, from 2000 to 2004, the County's population grew by nearly 40,000 persons. Most of this growth has been attributable to in-migration, that is, new individuals and families relocating from other places to Henry County. While in-migration is difficult to predict due to national and regional changes in the job and housing markets, the County predicts this large in-migration trend to continue. The County predicts its 2030 population to be in the range of 358,600 to 490,000 persons, with a mid-range estimate of 429,000 people.<sup>10</sup> Figure II - 1 shows the growth trend for the County's population as a whole.

**Figure II - 1: Population Growth Trends in Henry County**



Source: *Henry County/Cities Joint Comprehensive Plan: Community Assessment*

<sup>10</sup> JJG, "Henry County/Cities Joint Comprehensive Plan: Community Assessment and Community Participation Program", (draft) February 28, 2006



Table II - 2: Projected Population Growth							
Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2004	2005	2010	2020	2030
<b>Henry County</b>	58,741	119,341	156,300	167,000	195,711	309,660	429,360
<b>Uninc. Henry County</b>	48,079	94,816	118,872	124,991	128,791	191,184	259,375
<b>City of Hampton</b>	2,694	3,857	4,065	4,229	10,492	17,361	36,444
<b>City of Locust Grove</b>	1,681	2,322	3,182	3,710	16,307	37,635	45,522
<b>City of McDonough</b>	2,928	8,493	12,270	14,858	17,614	27,869	38,642
<b>City of Stockbridge</b>	3,359	9,853	17,911	19,212	22,507	35,611	49,376

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Atlanta Regional Commission, and Henry County/Cities Joint Comprehensive Plan: Community Assessment and Community Participation Program (02/28/06)

## Employment and Economic Sectors

According to figures from the Georgia Department of Labor which are included in the “Henry County/Cities Joint Comprehensive Plan: Community Assessment and Community Participation Program” (dated 02/28/06), the total number of jobs (employment) located in Henry County was 52,402 in 2005. Of the total number of jobs, the largest economic sectors in the County were in the Service category (29%), followed by Retail Trade (23%), State and Local Government (11%), and Construction (9%). This pattern is expected to continue throughout the planning horizon of the CTP (through 2030).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, just over 60,000 (60,381) persons who lived in Henry County were employed. Just less than one-third of the County residents who are employed work in the County, with two-thirds of them commuting to jobs in other counties. Table II - 3 shows the destinations of work trips made by employed Henry County residents in 2000.

The commuting patterns of employed residents of Henry County are relevant to the CTP development. These commute patterns have implications to the planning and development of transportation systems in Henry County. The large imbalance of work trips originating in Henry County and destined for locations outside the County could imply a demand for commuter-oriented public transportation services to complete these trips. Additionally, the relative imbalance of jobs located in Henry County compared to its population forces more trips and longer trips on the transportation system than would otherwise be necessary, if job opportunities were located in the County. These longer trips help create traffic congestion on roads in Henry County and on regional transportation corridors.

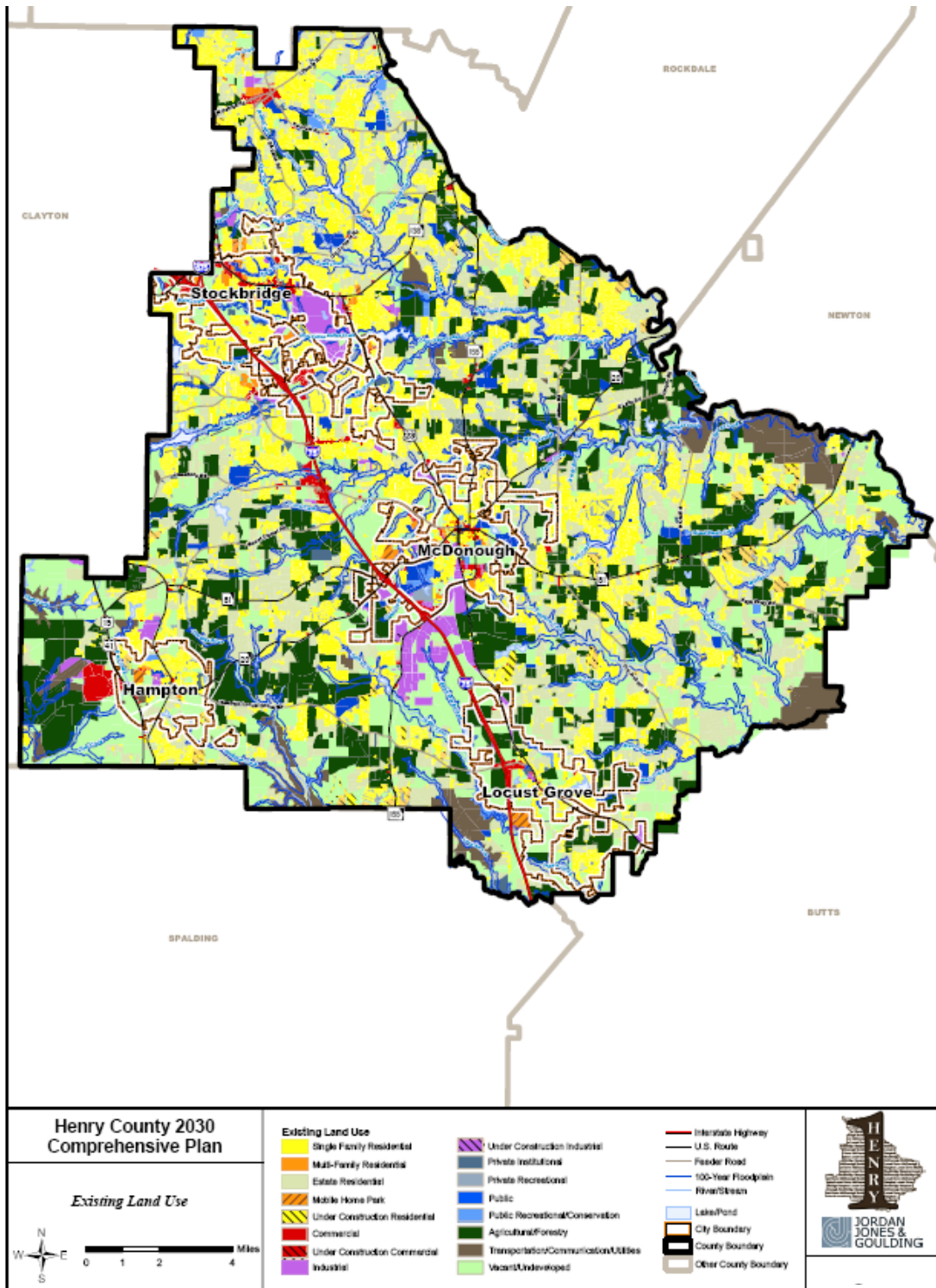


<b>Table II - 3: Job Locations of Employed Henry County Residents</b>		
<b>Employment Location</b>	<b>Number of Workers</b>	<b>Percent of Total Henry County Employed Residents</b>
Henry County	18,751	31.1 %
Fulton County	14,157	23.4 %
Clayton County	13,541	22.4 %
DeKalb County	5,597	9.3 %
Gwinnett County	1,531	2.5 %
Cobb County	1,365	1.9 %
Fayette County	1,137	1.9 %
Spalding	1,005	1.7 %
Other Locations	3,297	5.5 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60,381</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

Source: Georgia Department of Labor; 2000 US Census



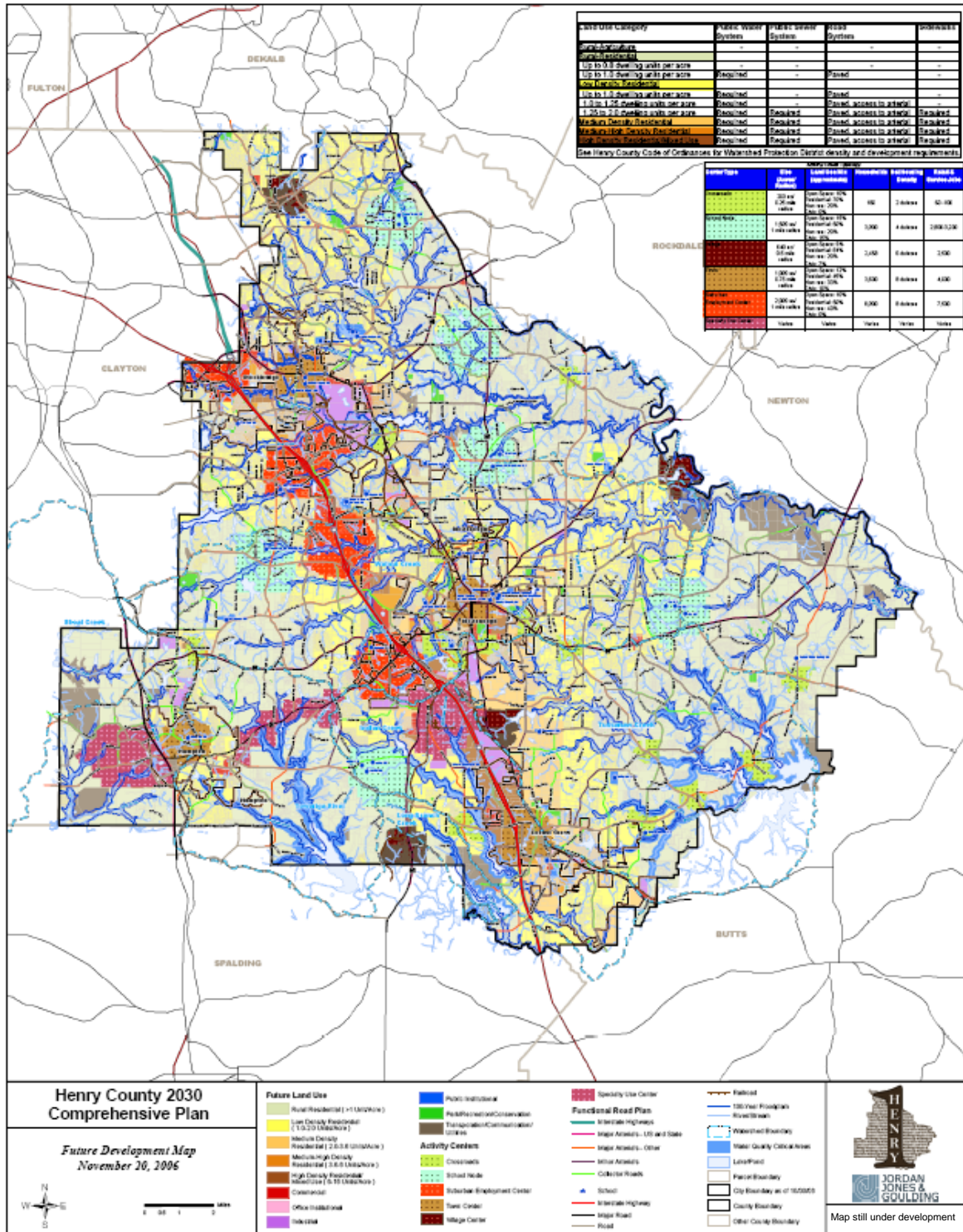
Figure II - 2: Existing Land Use Map



Source: Joint Henry County/Cities Comprehensive Plan Community Assessment February 28, 2006



Figure II - 3: Future Land Use Map



Source: Joint Henry County/Cities Comprehensive Plan – Draft from November 20, 2006



## Community Trends Impacting Transportation and Mobility

The *Community Assessment for the Henry County/Cities Comprehensive Plan*<sup>11</sup> documents several important trends that impact the future vision and nature of development and infrastructure systems in Henry County and its Cities. These include population, economic development, housing, natural and cultural resources, community facilities and services, intergovernmental coordination, transportation, and land use. In addition to the transportation considerations in the Comprehensive Plan, other features of the Plan or trends may influence or be influenced by the transportation and mobility systems available in the County now and in the future. Among the considerations and trends most related to transportation and mobility are:

- **Jobs-Housing Balance** – The number and mix (type) of jobs within the County in relation to the number of households located within the County affects transportation and mobility. In Henry County, the declining availability of land for industrial uses will limit the opportunities for new industrial ventures to locate in the County. Historically, industrial, especially warehousing and distribution jobs, have been important to the local economy. Additionally, jobs in the technical, medical, and other professional fields are growing nationally, but are not strongly represented in Henry County. Without an adequate number and mix of job opportunities within the County, residents will have to commute to jobs outside the County which will result in longer commute trip lengths and trip times and more traffic congestion on the transportation system.
- **Need for Improved Land Planning and Controls** – Land development in Henry County in the past 20 years has occurred in an unfocused manner with most activity being the construction of isolated single-family residential subdivisions that are not physically or functionally connected to adjacent lands, supportive services, or employment centers. Although the cities allow mixed use developments, there is a lack of the kind of mixed use or multi-use development that would reduce the need for vehicle trips. Historically, large-lot subdivisions (of one acre or more per unit) have been an attempt to control growth. However, this development pattern is inefficient to serve from a public infrastructure perspective and does not protect the rural nature of the County. Up until the most recent Comprehensive Plan initiative, there has been little or no support for housing densities in excess of four (4) units per acre. However, recently, this view has been changing as cities allow densities up to 16 units per acre and the Interim Future Land Use Plan developed by Henry County and its Cities has proposed allowing densities up to 16 units per acre and mixed-use development in a few locations close to I-75. The historical pattern of land use decisions, exacerbated by new school and sewer locations, has challenged the County and the Cities by creating a sprawling development pattern, thereby increasing the cost of infrastructure investments (water and sewerage systems, schools, etc.) and adding pressure to an already insufficient roadway system. While the philosophy of land planning and control is evolving within the County and its Cities at the present time, there is still great opportunity for more closely coordinated land use and transportation planning throughout the County.
- **Mix of Family and Non-Family Households** - While about 2/3 of the total households in the County in 2000 were family households (those with children), the number of non-family households (people living alone) in the County is growing more rapidly than family households. Typically non-family households create a demand for small, higher-density housing units. Areas with these characteristics typically are more walkable and bicycle- and transit-friendly than lower density traditional neighborhoods.
- **Rapidly Increasing Population of Seniors** – according to the County’s adjusted estimate of ARC’s population projection, as many as 52,000 additional seniors will be living in Henry County by 2030. This group has different mobility needs than the general public which include a focus on walkable communities and access to public transportation or taxi services in the event they can no longer drive.

<sup>11</sup> Community Assessment for the Joint Henry County/Cities Comprehensive Plan (dated 2/28/06, pp 4-13)



- **Seniors in Poverty** - According to ARC's figures, a higher percentage of seniors in the Cities of Hampton, Stockbridge, and McDonough live in poverty compared to the Atlanta area as a whole or Georgia as a whole. This sector could find the operation of a private auto out of financial reach or beyond their physical capabilities. As this sector of the population grows in Henry County, addressing the transportation needs with options other than private auto travel will be needed.<sup>12</sup>
- **Opportunity to Create a Comprehensive Greenway System** – The County has an opportunity to develop a connected system of greenways that include parks, recreation areas, and conservation land. This greenway network could incorporate bicycle, pedestrian, and trail facilities to enhance recreational as well as transportation opportunities in the County.

## Transportation Role in the Metro Atlanta Region

In 2006, Henry County had the highest rate of population growth of any county in the 18-county Metro Atlanta region. High rates of growth are projected to continue in Henry County throughout the planning period (to 2030); however, they will likely be at an uneven rate over the planning period. The County's geographic location in relation to nationally- and regionally-significant transportation arteries and facilities will likely assure that countywide and regional transportation issues will remain in the forefront of public policy well into the future. The County is traversed by several interstate and inter-regional arteries that are crucial to the economic success of the southeastern U.S. and Metro Atlanta as well as Henry County. These arteries include Interstate 75, Interstate 675, and U.S. 19/41. Other regionally-significant roadways include SR 138, SR 81, SR 20, and US 23/SR 42.

Similar to most of its suburban peers in Metro Atlanta, Henry County has limited travel choices beyond the use of private autos for most travel needs. In terms of public transportation, two express bus routes currently operate from Henry County to employment centers in Downtown and Midtown Atlanta. Henry County Transit provides local public transportation within a limited span of service for County residents, especially seniors, disabled individuals, and low-income persons. The demand for both these services is growing now and will likely continue as the County's population grows.

Interest in creating walkable and bicycle-friendly communities is growing in Henry County and its Cities and will likely continue to be important as the area grows and develops. All four of the Cities (Hampton, Locust Grove, McDonough, and Stockbridge) in the County have conducted and are pursuing downtown or small area plans to encourage mixed use, walkable areas within their jurisdictions.

While portions of the County will likely remain rural or very low density areas, other areas, especially those near the I-75 and I-675 corridors, are developing with more dense and intense urban uses. From a transportation perspective over the next 20 years, Henry County will likely be evolving in its transportation system from a very auto-oriented area to one providing more urban transportation options. As the Metro Atlanta region expands in size, Henry County will also attract more through trips, especially commute trips, from outlying areas such as Butts and Spalding Counties. As these travel flows increase, placing impacts on transportation systems in Henry County, more attention to regional transportation systems and facilities (auto and transit) will become more critical.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

