

CHAPTER VI: INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Planning and delivering a complex program of county-wide transportation system improvements involves not only strong technical analysis, but also institutional capability in implementing the recommended program. This institutional capability includes: effective internal and external coordination processes and procedures to identify transportation needs; development of adequate funding sources and strategies to deliver needed projects and programs; conducting the planning, engineering, and construction phases of projects in a timely manner that causes the least disruption and nuisance to citizens and property owners; using proactive processes to anticipate needs and respond to community needs and desires; and coordinating with all of the various planning and implementation partner agencies to deliver programs and projects.

This Chapter will discuss some of the institutional challenges present in Henry County today with respect to transportation planning, and to some extent, project delivery. The details of the project delivery process are outside the scope of the CTP; however, to the extent that planning processes influence the overall delivery of transportation projects, they are addressed in the CTP.

In order to assess the institutional challenges related to transportation planning, input was gathered from community leaders, County and City staff members, and citizens participating in the public outreach activities for the CTP.

Community Leader Input

At the beginning of the process for developing the CTP, approximately 30 community leaders representing important stakeholder groups were interviewed about transportation issues of concern and community transportation needs, including institutional aspects of transportation planning and program delivery in Henry County. During the period from September through December 2005, the project team interviewed each participant personally using a survey questionnaire. Each participant was invited to answer the standard questions as well as voice concerns about issues or topics not covered on the survey form. The following comments were received from community stakeholders. The issues identified by community stakeholders have been grouped into major subject areas as shown below.

Transportation Vision

- Transportation improvements and development in the County and Cities need to be more closely coordinated.
- The County needs more legacy projects, that is, projects that will be significant over the long-term.
- Henry County should have more focus on coordinating the Comprehensive Transportation Plan with the County/Cities Comprehensive Plan.
- We should create a countywide Transportation Plan that everyone can support and implement.

Project Priorities

- Henry County and the Cities need a better system for identifying project priorities.
- The need for proposed transportation projects should be fully justified.
- The validity of projects included in ARC's Regional Transportation Plan should be confirmed to make sure they are still needed and desired.
- Projects should be selected for funding that benefit as many people or areas of the County as possible (not just one group or area).
- Henry County and the Cities should have a common set of transportation priorities that all jurisdictions support and focus their efforts on.



Program Delivery Issues

- Henry County needs to construct projects more quickly.
- More accurate project cost estimates are needed.
- Better traffic estimates and other technical justifications for projects should be developed so funding agencies and citizens can be convinced of the need for projects.
- More accurate descriptions of the scope of our projects should be developed (location, design concept, right-of-way needs, begin and end points, etc.)

Funding and Implementation

- Henry County should consider public/private partnerships for major transportation corridors.
- The County and Cities should try to obtain more state and federal funding for transportation projects.

Partnerships

- Henry County should work together with the private sector to identify joint opportunities.
- Much better coordination between the School District and Henry County needs to occur on transportation and school site decisions.
- The County and Cities should coordinate more closely with the Water and Sewerage Authority and its decisions.
- The County's Transportation Department should coordinate its projects more closely with utility companies so they can budget the needed funds to relocate utilities in a timely manner for projects.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

- More cooperation and coordination between the County and Cities is needed.
- We need more interaction with adjacent counties on mutual transportation issues.
- Transportation planning in the County and Cities should be coordinated with ARC plans and studies.

Roles and Responsibilities

- More autonomy is needed in transportation at the local government level.

As this list shows, better institutional coordination of transportation functions was a major concern of many community leaders. This concern was voiced at several of the community outreach meetings as well.

State and Regional Planning Partner Input

Meetings with the GDOT General Office and District Office, ARC, SRTA, and GRTA identified some institutional issues that, if addressed, could improve the effectiveness of the transportation planning and project deliver processes. The following themes were identified in these discussions:

- It is very important for elected leaders in Henry County and its Cities to agree on transportation project priorities.
- More frequent information exchange is needed between Henry County and its regional and state planning partners.
- More opportunities to coordinate local decisions that affect land use, development, and transportation need to be found.



- Henry County should consider planning strategies used in other places to improve the coordination of land use and transportation decisions.

Recommended Institutional Strategies

There are several strategies that should be considered to improve the transportation planning activities in Henry County.

County-City Collaboration

At the present time, there is no permanent and periodic process to facilitate and encourage the exchange of information and to consider transportation planning decisions among the County and its four Cities. This coordination is occurring presently, but tends to happen on an as-needed basis when an issue of mutual concern materializes. Having an institutional means to monitor transportation and development decisions in a more formal way could facilitate a more effective county-wide planning process. Suggestions for creating this framework can be found in Chapter XII.

Transportation Planning Function

One of the major institutional considerations related to transportation planning is its role and placement within Henry County's governmental structure. At the current time, the transportation planning function within Henry County government is in transition. The function is currently housed in the Planning and Zoning Department, although a significant level of knowledge and expertise on transportation project delivery resides in the County's Division of Public Works in its Department of Transportation (DOT) and Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) Transportation Program work groups.

Through most of the CTP development process, the day-to-day transportation planning responsibilities have been primarily managed by the County's Planning and Zoning Department with active involvement from the Public Works Division (DOT). Prior to the CTP development, the transportation function planning has alternated between the Public Works Division and the Planning and Development Division.

Generally, there are two (2) general approaches for locating the transportation planning function within a county government structure. They are:

- Assigning the transportation planning function to the department or work group responsible for Comprehensive Planning, Community Development, or some combination of these functions; or
- Assigning the transportation planning function to the Transportation Department or Public Works Department, depending on the local government organization. The Transportation Department typically includes some roadway design, construction, and operations and maintenance responsibilities. Sometimes, the transportation function is included in a larger Public Works Department that might include water and sewer utilities, waste management, etc.

Some local governments, such as the City of Boulder, Colorado have the planning-related and public works/transportation functions all reporting to a single senior manager, thus encouraging important coordination of planning and project delivery activities under a single management "umbrella". Other county-level organizations, such as Duval County/City of Jacksonville, Florida, separate their transportation functions with some planning functions assigned to the Planning Department and some assigned to a separate County/City Authority (Jacksonville Transportation Authority).

The larger urban counties in Metro Atlanta tend to have their transportation planning functions located in their Departments of Transportation rather than their Planning Departments. However, this may be influenced by the regional institutional structure of the Atlanta Regional Commission, which separates its transportation functions in a division and its comprehensive or land use planning functions in another division. This situation makes meaningful coordination between general comprehensive planning and transportation planning challenging.

Henry County is currently in the process of determining the most appropriate location of the transportation planning function. Regardless of its location, there are certain critical work activities that should be undertaken in order for Henry County to maintain a quality level of continuous transportation planning. It



should be noted that the transportation planning function, wherever it resides, needs to create and maintain an effective, seamless working relationship with the County's Department of Transportation (DOT) and SPLOST work groups as well as the County's Planning and Zoning Department in order for the County to meet the community expectations for coordinated transportation and land use planning.

Key Transportation Planning Responsibilities

There are two (2) categories of work effort and responsibilities which should be undertaken by the Transportation Planning work unit in Henry County. The first is managing a continuing, coordinated, comprehensive transportation planning process for unincorporated areas of Henry County and the necessary coordination of such activities with the Cities of Hampton, Locust Grove, McDonough, and Stockbridge. The second major function is active participation in the technical aspects of ARC's regional transportation planning process and providing policy support to Henry County's representative on the ARC Board.

It is difficult to separate individual work functions for each category of work responsibilities due to complex institutional structure established for transportation planning and project delivery in Metro Atlanta. The activities listed below generally describe the type of activities that should be conducted within the transportation planning work group. Additional activities should be added by Henry County and the Cities, as appropriate, to meet local needs and priorities.

- Compiling and analyzing passenger transportation and goods movement data to identify important travel trends and conditions in the County and each city, including traffic counts, transit and paratransit travel patterns and needs, crash statistics, truck volumes, speed conditions, parking, etc.;
- Identifying current and future multimodal transportation system needs and deficiencies for roads, bridges, intersections, traffic control systems, bus transit, rail transit (if applicable), bicycle, pedestrian, and trail systems and coordinating this information with regional and state-level planning partners and the County's DOT and SPLOST work groups.
- Coordinating of capital project identification, evaluation, selection, and programming with Henry County DOT and SPLOST program, ARC, and GDOT District and General Offices;
- Interacting with municipal jurisdictions, regional agencies, and state-level planning partners involved in transportation issues and projects to obtain relevant data and information on transportation conditions to inform decision-making at both the County and City levels.
- Coordinating and exchanging information with transportation planners in adjacent counties to monitor transportation system development that could impact Henry County and its Cities.
- Monitoring the transportation impacts of proposed new development projects, including reviewing and providing comments on traffic impact studies and recommendations for needed transportation system improvements to be provided by developers and/or government agencies.
- Convening both internal (County) and external coordination meetings with key players involved in transportation planning and project delivery issues. (This is described more fully in the next section).
- Responding to citizen questions concerning transportation and conducting town hall and other community meetings on transportation issues;
- Leading the efforts to update the County/Cities CTP at appropriate intervals (at least every five years).
- Actively participating in or leading the transportation planning element of the County/Cities Comprehensive Plan to integrate transportation into the overall strategic direction of the County and Cities;
- Participating in the identification of needed transportation projects to address the needs of driving and non-driving travelers of all age and income groups in Henry County;



- Identifying and pursuing grants and other funding sources to support transportation programs and assisting in developing project funding agreements;
- Identifying and promoting the use of available transportation choices for residents of the County and its Cities (i.e. public transit, paratransit, vanpools, etc.)
- Presenting information to community groups interested in transportation issues in the County;
- Developing written and graphic materials to inform the citizens of Henry County and its citizens about the critical linkage between transportation and land use and development planning, upcoming projects, and other transportation-related issues of concern, etc.;
- Participating in regional transportation planning process and special regional projects located within or near the County;
- Partnering with the private sector in public/private partnerships to furnish needed transportation infrastructure and services that benefits Henry County residents.

The products and services furnished through these work activities should help position Henry County and the Cities in a more proactive position to plan for a transportation vision that meets the needs of its citizens into the long-range future.

Coordinating Transportation and Land Use Planning

The concurrent updating of both the County/Cities Comprehensive Plan and the County/Cities Comprehensive Transportation Plan has provided opportunities to make coordinated land use and transportation planning in Henry County more effective. In the early stages of the CTP development, members of the County's staff as well as the CTP consultant team participated in a Team Charter session held in December 2005. This session was held to discuss the need for coordination between the Comprehensive Plan update that was in its early stages and the CTP development, also just beginning. This discussion, while intended to focus specifically on the needed project coordination, highlighted some general areas where transportation planning and land use and development planning could be better coordinated within the government structure of the County and the Cities. Some of these areas are listed below.

- Sharing of timely and accurate information on the location, extent, and type of development being planned in the County and its potential impact on the transportation system.
- Sharing of data on the actual vs. projected growth trends of the County and its Cities (local projections vs. ARC projections, etc.)
- Exchange of data and information about the community visions of the Cities in relation to the policy direction of Henry County.
- Need for better coordination of technical planning activities between the Cities and Henry County.
- Effective ways of interacting with citizens, community stakeholders, and elected officials on issues of mutual concern to transportation and land use and development planners.

This approach of holding joint planning sessions between the County's land use and development planners and transportation planners should be carried forward and applied to the on-going and future land use and transportation planning activities undertaken by the County and the Cities.

County Transportation Planning Program

In order to improve the effectiveness of the coordination among the various players in both the public and private sectors involved in transportation planning in Henry County, the following strategies are recommended:

- Henry County and its Cities should hold regularly scheduled sessions of technical staffs to discuss the progress in implementing the CTP. It is recommended that these sessions be held at



least quarterly and preferably monthly initially. The group should also discuss any pending land use and development decisions that could impact transportation and vice versa.

- Henry County and the Cities should consider creating electronic information systems, where possible, to facilitate information exchange on transportation planning and development issues. The group should also be responsible for planning for future CTP updates.
- Henry County should convene regularly scheduled quarterly sessions involving the key institutional players in the countywide context who are responsible for actions that impact transportation in Henry County. The mission of this “Transportation Roundtable” would be to systemically exchange information about land use and transportation policies, activities, and decisions that could impact one or more of the participating agencies. This group should also focus on the long-range aspects of planning for Henry County’s transportation systems. Among those agencies that should be included in the Transportation Roundtable are the County’s Planning and Zoning Department, the County DOT and SPLOST Departments, the four Cities, the Henry County School District, Henry County Water and Sewerage Authority, GDOT District Office, and GDOT General Office. Other organizations, such as regional and state planning partners key utility agencies should also be invited to attend (ARC, GRTA, SRTA, and the newly formed Regional Transit Planning Board, Georgia Power, etc.).
- The County and Cities should seek opportunities to partner with the Henry County Chamber of Commerce and the Henry County Council for Quality Growth to showcase transportation as a critical element in creating quality and economically successful communities. These events can also serve to bring the various institutional partners together in a local setting where community consensus on transportation can be demonstrated. These opportunities will be helpful to keep transportation on the forefront of local, regional, and state-level priorities and decisions.
- The County should consider developing a short, concise, electronic mail (e-mail) newsletter concerning transportation issues and policy initiatives that could impact transportation and land use and development which could be distributed to individual staff members with the County, the Cities, planning partner agencies, community organizations, and citizens with a desire to obtain details about transportation issues and events in the County.
- Henry County should seek opportunities to be included in “case studies” or “demonstration sites” for innovative transportation approaches or regional transportation planning studies. Often, these situations bring opportunities for the County to be more visible in highlighting its efforts to proactively plan for transportation needs. They also help keep transportation issues in Henry County as a high priority with local, regional, and state-level decision-makers.
- Henry County should try to host regional transportation events, when appropriate, to highlight transportation issues and opportunities in the area and obtain visibility for these initiatives from regional and state-level decision-makers.

