



March 22, 2016

Thank you for attending the Public Hearing Open House for the proposed widening and reconstruction of SR 15/US 441 from the five-lane typical section located at the northern limits of the City of Clayton northward to the five-lane typical section located just north of the North Carolina state line, PI Number 122090. The total project length is approximately 7.75 miles. Our goal is two-fold: 1) to provide you with information on the proposed project and 2) to provide an opportunity for you to give us your comments on the proposed project. In this handout package, you will find a description of the project, a location map, summary of the environmental study, summary of right-of-way acquisition and a comment card.

As you enter the room, please take a look at the project display. Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) representatives, wearing nametags, are available to discuss the project and answer your questions. There will be no formal presentation.

We hope you will take the opportunity to tell Georgia DOT what you think. Listed below are several ways to comment on the project. Your comments are important to us and, should you provide comments by one of the methods noted below, we will respond to you in writing usually within 30 days of the close of the comment period. All comments will become part of the project's official record.

While you are attending the open house, you can **provide your comments today** by filling out the comment card provided with this handout and dropping it in the comment box, or you may choose to provide your verbal comments to the court reporter who will transcribe your comments.

You can also **provide your comments by Friday, April 01, 2016** by using any of the following methods:

- Online at www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Public/PublicOutreach.
 1. From the menu, select the county in which the proposed project is located and click *Go*;
 2. Then select *122090 Public Hearing Open House SR 15/US 441, Rabun County*;
 3. Lastly, click *Comment* and follow the instructions to leave your comments.
- Scan the QR code to the right with your smart phone's QR reader
- Online at: [https://por.dot.ga.gov/comments/comments.cfm?projID=122090-&projNum=EDS-441\(28\)&projName=US](https://por.dot.ga.gov/comments/comments.cfm?projID=122090-&projNum=EDS-441(28)&projName=US)
- Mail in your comment card to Mr. Eric Duff, Georgia Department of Transportation, 600 West Peachtree Street NW, 16th Floor, Atlanta, Georgia 30308.



The project displays and plans will be available for review for ten days after this open house at the website noted above. Hardcopies will also be available at the Georgia DOT Cleveland Office located at 942 Albert Reid Road, Cleveland, Georgia 30528 and at the Georgia DOT Gainesville Office located at 2505 Athens Hwy SE, Gainesville, Georgia 30507. Following the ten-day public comment period, a copy of all comments received will be available by request at the Atlanta address listed above.

Again, thank you for attending this open house. If you should have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact the project manager, Charles Robinson, at 404-631-1439 of the Office of Program Delivery, or the environmental analyst, David Borchardt, at 404-631-1184 of the Office of Environmental Services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric Duff" with a circled "D" at the end.

Eric Duff
State Environmental Administrator
Georgia Department of Transportation

Why We Are Here: The proposed widening and reconstruction of this section of SR 15/US 441 would provide a consistent two lanes of travel in each direction throughout the corridor, thereby:

- 1 - reducing congestion and enhancing traffic flow,
- 2 - improving the operational characteristics, and
- 3 - reducing the crash frequency along the corridor.

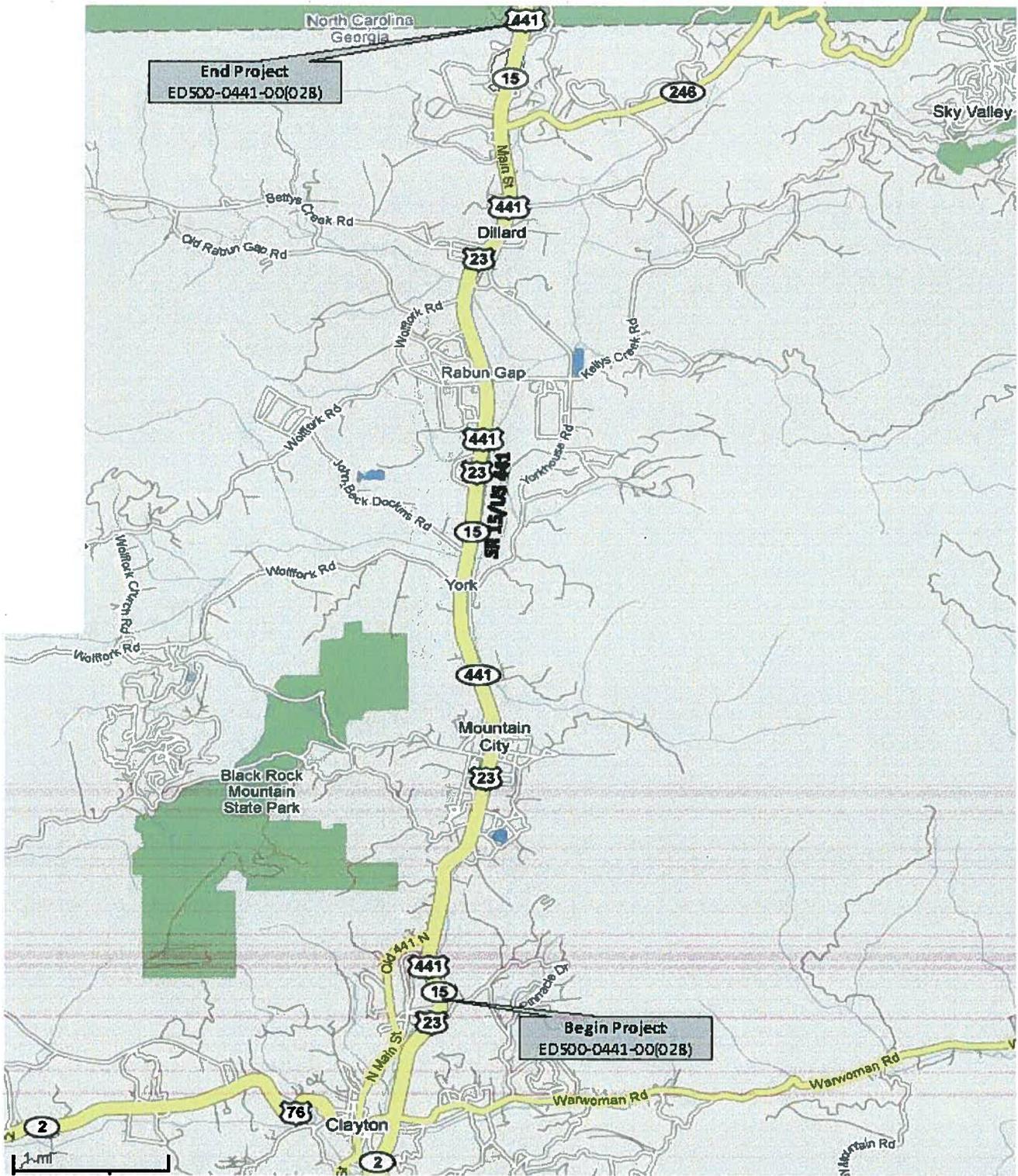
In addition, SR 15/US 441 is the primary north-south corridor in northeast Georgia, is a major tourist route through the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, and is part of the US 441 corridor that travels north-south throughout the State of Georgia from Florida to North Carolina.

Project Description: The proposed Project EDS00-0441-00(028), PI 122090, in Rabun County would provide for the widening and reconstruction of SR 15/US 441 from the five-lane typical section located at the northern limits of the City of Clayton (approximate milepost 12.3) northward to the five-lane typical section located just north of the North Carolina state line for a length of approximately 7.75 miles.

The proposed improvements will provide accommodations for bicyclists on the 6.5-foot paved shoulder for a total of 5.23 miles. In the two urban areas located three miles apart, a multi-use path on the shoulder will be provided for bicyclists and pedestrians. These areas are from Cross Street to Johnson Avenue in Mountain City with a length of 0.84 miles and from Wolfork Road (North) to SR 246 in the City of Dillard with a length of 1.33 miles.

Proposed right of way for the rural SR 15/US 441 typical sections would vary between 150 feet and 450 feet. The proposed urban SR 15/US 441 typical sections right of way would vary between 130 feet and 428 feet, except for within Dillard, where the proposed right of way would vary between 82 feet and 150 feet. Side road improvements would have proposed right of way varying between 100 feet and 150 feet.

Project Location Map:



Widening and Reconstruction of SR 15/US 441
PI No. 122090
Rabun County

Summary of the Environmental Study

In compliance with the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act, GDOT has conducted an assessment of the social, economic, and environmental effects for the proposed widening and reconstruction of SR 15/US 441 from the five-lane typical section located at the northern limits of the City of Clayton (approximate milepost 12.3) northward to the five-lane typical section located just north of the North Carolina state line for a length of approximately 7.75 miles. The following information gives a summary of the environmental document.

Currently, 12 owner-occupied single family residences and 37 commercial business operations are anticipated to be displaced by the proposed project. The roadway would be placed closer to some residences, and loss of some yard area would occur. The proposed project would also result in the loss of business frontage as well as some business parking. However, owners would be compensated for these losses. Please see the right-of-way acquisition statement on the next page for more information.

There would be no significant adverse effects to communities or community facilities as a result of the proposed project. An analysis of Environmental Justice has been conducted in accordance with Executive Order 12898 (Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low Income Populations) and other regulations. The project would have no disproportionate, adverse effects on low-income or minority populations.

Despite the abundance of publicly owned parklands/recreation areas/wildlife refuges within Rabun County, there are no publicly owned parklands/recreation areas/wildlife refuges of State, local or national significance located along the proposed project corridor so there would be no significant adverse effect to any public park.

In accordance with Executive Order 11990, the proposed project was surveyed for wetland and stream involvement. As a result of these surveys there were 25 perennial streams, 27 intermittent streams, 2 ephemeral drainages, 9 wetlands and 2 open waters identified within the project's area of potential effect. It is estimated that 0.09 acres of wetlands will be temporarily impacted, 0.38 acres of wetlands will be permanently impacted, 0.0094 acres of ephemeral streams impacted, and 1,332 linear feet of streams would be permanently impacted by the proposed project. Based on the current anticipated impacts to jurisdictional waters, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 Individual Permit would be required for this project.

In accordance with Executive Order 11988, the proposed project was surveyed for floodplain involvement. Based on the current design, the proposed project would encroach on the floodplains established for Stekoa Creek, Blacks Creek, Little Tennessee River, Jerry Brook, Betty Creek, Lamb Creek, and an unnamed tributary to the Little Tennessee River approximately 200 feet south of the intersection of CR 262/Forest Service Road and SR 15/US 441. The proposed project would require the placement of fill material in these floodplains. Should the proposed improvements result in any increase to the base flood elevations, floodway elevations, or floodway widths, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) coordination and Community coordination shall be conducted by GDOT.

The proposed project corridor crosses Stekoa Creek and The Little Tennessee River, both Section 303(d) listed streams under the Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended. However, adverse impacts on water quality would be reduced with the use of erosion and sediment control best management practices (BMPs) and proper road drainage design.

The proposed project would not exceed state and federal air quality standards, and is consistent with the State Implementation Plan (SIP) for the attainment of clean air quality in the state.

GDOT defines a noise impact as occurring when design-year build noise levels approach or exceed the Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC) thresholds or when predicted design-year build noise levels result in a substantial noise level increase over existing noise levels. GDOT considers approach levels as 1 decibel (dBA) less than NAC thresholds and defines a substantial noise level increase as being 15dBA or greater than existing noise levels. No receptor sites along the project corridor would experience noise level increases of greater than 15dBA. Therefore, no receptors are considered impacted based on the substantial increase criterion. The proposed project will result in 9 impacts (representing 29 receptors) by approaching and/or exceeding the NAC and no

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impacts by substantial increase. The proposed project in the design year would result in a 7.0 decibel increase in traffic generated noise.

Existing noise levels range from 49.0 to 68.0 dBA. The predicted no-build noise levels will range from 50.6 to 69.5 dBA. The predicted build noise levels will range from 55.2 to 69.9 dBA. No abatement measures were found to be reasonable and feasible.

In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the project has been surveyed for existing and eligible National Register properties. Nineteen (19) National Register eligible sites were found within the area of potential effect. The proposed project would have no effect on four of these National Register eligible sites and would have no adverse effect on fifteen of these National Register eligible sites. There were archaeological resources found to be located within the project's area of potential effect.

Through a series of threatened and endangered species habitat assessments, wetland mitigation plans, ecological and biological assessments, several federal and state-protected species were identified within the Project Study area. GDOT is currently coordinating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement

In accordance with the Farmland Protection Policy Act, the criteria of 7 CFR, Part 658 have been applied to determine the project effects on farmland. The project would displace approximately 157 acres of farmland, which represent about 52.7 percent of the total required ROW. Approximately 78 acres are classified as prime farmland by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). However, the site assessment criteria score and the results of coordination with the NRCS indicate that the total farmland impact rating would be 117. Since the total farmland impact rating is less than the 160 point impact rating threshold set by NRCS, no additional alternatives were needed to be examined on the basis of farmland effects.

The proposed project has been surveyed for potential sites where contaminated soil and/or water from leaking underground storage tanks or hazardous waste sites may exist. Twelve sites were identified within the area of required right-of-way for the project to be further investigated. If contaminants are found, avoidance alternatives may be considered, or applicable laws and regulations concerning the removal of toxic or hazardous material will be coordinated with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

Copies of the environmental document are available at this hearing for your review or by request to the Gainesville office on the first page of this handout.

Right-Of-Way Acquisition

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has the responsibility, once a project is approved, or appraising, purchasing property and, if required, assisting individuals, families or businesses in relocating. When purchasing property, we desire to pay full market value for the necessary property. This value will be established by using qualified real estate appraisers who will prepare, for GDOT's use, written appraisals using actual sales data in the surrounding community.

In making an appraisal, the appraiser will contact each property owner and arrange a convenient time to make an on-site inspection of the property with him or her. After completion of the appraisal, the right-of-way appraisal staff will review and field check the findings for accuracy to ensure that all things relating to value have been considered in establishing the amount to be offered. When only a part of the property is needed, we will purchase that part plus pay for loss of value, if any, to the remaining property. In all cases, when GDOT purchases property, we will make additional payments to property owners for the cost of transferring ownership to GDOT. These costs generally include transfer taxes, deed-recording fees, mortgage pre-payment penalties and the pro-rate share of city or county taxes.

GDOT is aware of the problems experience by individuals, families, businesses, and nonprofit organizations when they are required to move. It is our commitment that no family or individual will be required to relocate until comparable decent, safe and sanitary housing is available or is provided for those occupants.

Additionally, GDOT will provide assistance to businesses and nonprofit organizations in relocating to other sites and will encourage them to remain in the community.

The information pamphlet "*What Happens When Your Property is Needed for a Transportation Facility*" is available at the greeter's table. This booklet outlines the services offered and any payments for which you may be eligible, such as moving expenses and replacement housing benefits for owners and tenants. The brochure also outlines the eligibility requirements for receiving these payments.

Results of the field inspection by GDOT personnel have revealed that there will be 12 residences and 37 commercial businesses that could potentially be displaced by the proposed project.

It is important to remember that GDOT is committed to the principle that no one will be required to relocate until housing is available, or, if there is no housing available, until provisions have been made by GDOT to provide housing. It is also important to remember that all displaces will be given sufficient advance notice to GDOT's intention to purchase any property in order to allow sufficient time in which to relocate.

The GDOT District Office, located in Gainesville, Georgia, attention Kevin York, (770) 531-5784, will be in charge of acquiring the necessary right-of-way for this project.

Comment Card

Please print responses.

Name _____

Address _____

Do you support the project? (check your response)

- For
- Against
- Conditional
- Uncommitted

General Comments _____

How did you hear about this Open House? (check) Newspaper Signs GDOT Website Radio

Word of Mouth Social Media Other _____

Was the location of the Open House convenient for you to attend? Yes No

If no, please suggest a general location that is more convenient to your community.

Was the time of the meeting convenient for you to attend? Yes No

If no, please suggest a time frame that is more convenient for you.

Were your questions answered by GDOT personnel? Yes No

Do you understand the project after attending this meeting? Yes No

Please share your suggestions on improving the ways GDOT conducts Open Houses:

Mail to:
 Mr. Eric Duff, State Environmental Administrator
 Georgia Department of Transportation
 600 West Peachtree Street, NW – 16th Floor
 Atlanta, Georgia 30308

