

Roads not only concern in transportation planning

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Here's the latest draft list of top road projects proposed in Gainesville-Hall County's 2040 transportation plan:

1. Widening Ga. 60/Thompson Bridge Road from Ga. 136 to Yellow Creek Road
2. Widening Spout Springs Road from Hog Mountain Road to the Gwinnett County line
3. Improvements at Jesse Jewell and John Morrow parkways
4. Improvements at E.E. Butler Parkway, Athens Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
5. Widening U.S. 129/Athens Highway from Gillsville Highway to the Pendergrass Bypass
6. Widening Ga. 211/Old Winder Highway from Ga. 53/Winder Highway to Ga. 347
7. Widening Martin Road from Falcon Parkway to Winder Highway
8. Realignment of Lights Ferry Road with roundabout at Lights Ferry and Gainesville Street
9. New Exit 14 on Interstate 985
10. New bridge on Ga. 11 at East Fork Little River

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The talk was mostly about roads, but concerns also were raised in a transportation public meeting Thursday night about bicycle paths, airport improvements and even the long-range possibility of commuter rail.

Hall County resident Wayne Stradley said he would like to see Lee Gilmer Memorial Airport in Gainesville factor into Gainesville-Hall County's 2040 transportation plan, which is under development by area government officials.

"It's always kind of overlooked," he said. "And we see it as a great economic tool to ... bring business into Hall County."

Stradley said he is working with a group of people in seeking airport improvements.

"People say we're landlocked," he said. "We're not landlocked; we're vision-locked. There are opportunities to improve our airport."

Stradley was one of about 40 residents attending the meeting, which featured a presentation on the plan by Pond & Co., a Norcross-based consultant to the Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The MPO serves as the lead transportation planning agency for the Hall area, which

includes West Jackson County.

Before the presentation, residents browsed maps on display at the Board of Commissioners meeting room in the Hall County Government Center and talked with officials about projects.

Some asked about the fate of a road project that calls for connecting Ga. 53/Dawsonville Highway to Ga. 60/Thompson Bridge Road now that Gainesville City Council has given the initial OK for the development of a 199-lot subdivision in an area where the road was being considered.

The new road is part of some \$2.42 billion in projects that have been left off a “financially constrained” plan and otherwise dubbed as “aspirations.”

The Hall County area is expected to receive about \$1.4 billion for road projects through 2040 from local, state and federal sources.

The federally required plan also features a “tiered” listing of the projects, or projects divided into time frames between 2015 and 2040.

Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown said he believed the long-range plans might also keep in mind the possibility of passenger rail running through Hall County.

“Hopefully, some of us will live long enough to see it,” he said.

Gainesville-Hall County figures prominently in passenger and commuter rail proposals in the Georgia Department of Transportation’s new long-range rail plan.

Even though an official document isn’t set to be released until December, officials are looking at an Atlanta to Charlotte, N.C., rail service to cut through the Hall area and potential commuter rail stretching 53 miles from Atlanta to Gainesville.

Area officials have scheduled a fourth community meeting on the 2040 plan for Jan. 8. The document is set for an August completion.

The 2040 road plan also will be discussed at the MPO’s decision-making policy committee, which comprises top area elected officials, at 10 a.m. Wednesday at Oakwood City Hall, 4035 Walnut Circle.

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