



**Department of Transportation
State of Georgia
Office of Environment/Location
3993 Aviation Circle
Atlanta, Georgia 30336-1593**

October 26, 2001

F. Thomas Scholl, Jr.
4900 Oxford Road
Macon, Georgia 31210

Re: STP-3213 (1) and STP-3213 (3)/BRMLB-3213 (5), Bibb County, P.I. Numbers- 350520
and 351130/351135, Proposed Improvements to Forest Hill Road

Dear Mr. Scholl:

Thank you for attending the June 11, 2001 public hearing for the proposed improvement project of Forest Hill Road. Your attendance of this meeting and the written comments you provided are appreciated. Your comments will be made a part of the official record of the project.

Due to the inevitable traffic volume increase, noise will also increase throughout the corridor whether the project is built or not. Noise levels were modeled throughout the corridor for existing, build, and no build conditions. Under existing conditions, noise levels range from 63 to 72 decibels (dBA). In accordance with FHWA & GDOT standards a level of 69 dBA is considered an impact for schools, libraries, residences, churches, playgrounds and recreational areas. Under the future build conditions; noise levels would range from 65 to 74 dBA. Several methods of mitigation including walls, berms and revised alignments were considered in an attempt to reduce impacts. However, because of the openings required in these barriers to continue access from the road to the adjacent land uses, these barriers and berms were determined to be ineffective. It was also determined that shifts in the alignment would cause many more displacements and adversely effect historic resources. Thus, no noise abatement measures are proposed.

The following is a more detailed description of the traffic analysis that determined the need for the project:

Existing traffic volumes – The GDOT has three traffic count locations on Forest Hill Road; one between Overlook Dr. and Wimbish (TC 445), one between Wimbish and Lokchappe Dr. (TC 447), and one between Lokchappe Dr. and Forest Lake Dr. (TC 449). GDOT has historical AADT traffic data on these roads dating back to 1985. Traffic counts were conducted in 1996,

Development of future background traffic growth estimates – Using only the three GDOT traffic count locations, the annual traffic growth for the last 15 years at these three locations has been as follows: 445 = 1.56%, 447 = 2.2%, 449 = 2.45%. Applying only a linear regression analysis at these locations, without the consideration of local changes in traffic flow resulting from the increased use of the roadway network on the northwest side of Macon, additional traffic from development along Northside Dr. or Vineville Ave., the following provides projections of future traffic through 2025, in five year increments.

Notes: ¹Traffic volumes have been rounded to nearest fifty or hundred.

Development of design year needs and any additional trip generation – By examining the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, the most recent plan at the time of project concept development, an estimation was made as to the future use of the facility based on its existing and planned functional classification, and any anticipated future adjacent land uses. The 2015 Plan indicates no change in adjacent land use along Forest Hill Road; however, it is anticipated that the existing commercial nodes at both the north and south ends of the project will continue to expand along their respective corridors. This expected commercial growth in combination with the estimated annual growth is the basis for the design year (2024) traffic volumes presented in the Environmental Assessment (EA).

Future no-build traffic conditions – The larger number of vehicles predicted, 28,400, if the project is built vs. the 16,200 vehicles for the no-build condition, as identified in the Environmental Assessment, reflects the fact that once the volume on Forest Hill Road reaches 16,200 vehicles the roadway will be operating at full capacity. Once the facility reaches full capacity, traffic would begin to search for alternate routes, including adjacent neighborhood streets. Due to failing roadway conditions under this volume, accurate predictions of roadway capacities becomes infeasible. However, if constructed, the new 4-lane typical section would allow the projected traffic volume of 28,400 to occur safely and efficiently.

The factors used to adjust traffic data in the Macon Area Transportation Study do not appropriately reflect the actual conditions of the local Macon traffic. The model for the Macon region reflects seasonal fluctuations created by the pass through traffic of I-475 and I-75 north and south of Macon, which effectively lowers Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) estimates for these routes. Although this is correct for the through traffic routes, these same factors are not reflective of local traffic conditions within Macon. We are aware that the growth rates in Macon overall are low, however, development trends for Bibb County indicate an increasing residential population in the northwest area of Macon and the county. Forest Hills Road is a minor arterial roadway and will continue to serve the traffic demand from northwest Macon to Vineville into the downtown area, and provides a major link in a route to access I-75. Although Forest Hills Road is almost completely developed, there is a great deal of ongoing, and planned development in the area, and also an abundance of undeveloped land located at the northern project terminus that will account for some of the growth in this area.

Based upon an evaluation of the project corridor, it is clear that the area from Wimbish to Northside is mostly a residential area with some apartments, churches, and commercial uses especially at Northside Drive. South of Wimbish, the land use along Forest Hill consists mainly of commercial, institutional and multi-family uses (apartments). There are only 16 single-family dwellings fronting Forest Hill Road south of Wimbish. The project will require only 10 displacements, 5 of which are single-family dwellings and 5 are commercial uses. In order to minimize impacts to the mostly residential section of the project, the project scope was reduced to a three-lane section. In addition, the alignment was carefully planned in order to minimize clearing and disruption of existing utilities in this area. This reduced section also requires almost no additional right-of-way except for minor strips and small amounts (approximately 5 to 10 feet) at intersections. In addition, if the project were not to be built, once the existing roadway exceeds its capacity, cut through traffic may increase within the adjacent neighborhoods as cars search out less congested alternates.

Extensive traffic analysis of the corridor indicates that traffic levels are presently at a level where a multi-lane facility is necessary south of Wimbish. Over the next twenty years the traffic modeling predicts that traffic conditions would worsen. Based upon the 2000 census Bibb County population is increasing slightly. Since this roadway is utilized regionally as well as locally it is important to consider growth trends beyond just the City of Macon.

We have revisited the accident rate calculations reported in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and found that some accidents adjacent to the project were mistakenly included in the totals. The EA will be revised to reflect the correct conditions. The following is a brief summary of the revised accident data: In 1998, the last year that the state has complete accident data for comparison, the accident rate (51 accidents) for Forest Hill Road was 20% lower than the state wide average. However, in 1999, there were 57 accidents recorded along this same section of roadway.

Based on predicted traffic conditions for the corridor, it is anticipated that this rate would increase without implementation of the proposed project since increased congestion and degraded operational efficiency typically increase accidents. Improved safety is always a primary goal of roadway improvement projects, however, the accident rate is not the only factor utilized to determine the overall safety or need for improvements within a road corridor. The proposed project is needed mainly to reduce congestion, and to improve traffic mobility and overall operational efficiency.

The Forest Hill Road environmental assessment has been prepared in a format following the current Federal Highway Administration guidelines. One of the purposes of the public involvement process is to hear public concerns and respond to questions regarding the project including an explanation of more technical project elements.

The Macon Area Transportation Study (MATS) policy committee has been involved with the planning needs for the Forest Hill project since the early 1980's. Six different alternates were evaluated with one being selected in 1982. Because of ongoing delays and continuing development in the area, the alignment eventually had to be abandoned. In the early 1990's additional alternates were investigated. By 1995 the plan essentially presented at the recent public hearing had been developed through recommendations of the MATS.

The project has been previously altered (reduced 4-lane north of Wimbish to 3-lane) based upon comments received at public meetings. Additional project modifications based upon the recent public meeting are presently being evaluated.

Proposed improvements at the Forest Hills Road/Vineville intersection would help the efficiency of this intersection. There are also future planned projects in the County Improvement Plan, including the Northwest Parkway, to alleviate congestion on Vineville. A lane width of 14-feet, which is considered bicycle friendly, has been adopted at the local level as the desirable lane width on this project. However, the County agreed to reduce the lane width for the three-lane section to 13 feet to help reduce the project footprint.

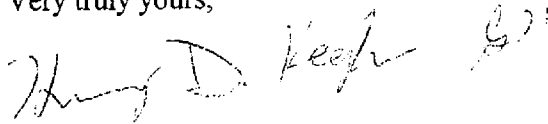
Drainage is an integral part of the design of any project. During the engineering design of this project the engineers will complete hydraulic analyses of the existing waterways along the project to ensure that flooding will not occur in the area.

Scholl Response Letter
Forrest Hill Road Improvements Public Hearing Comments
Page -5-

The County recently hired Mr. Joseph Passonneau, a renowned transportation engineer, to evaluate strategies for softening the project without sacrificing the needed traffic and safety improvements. This study is presently underway, and would be available for public review upon acceptance by the County. It is anticipated that the study will be completed over the next couple months.

Bibb County has hired Moreland Altobelli to complete the environmental process for the proposed project. If you have any further questions or concerns regarding the proposed project, please contact Todd Hill (770-263-5945) or Joe Johnson (478-755-0000) of Moreland Altobelli.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Harvey D. Keepler". To the right of the signature is a small, handwritten mark that looks like "G2+".

Harvey D. Keepler
State Environmental/Location Engineer