

County wants roads master plan

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Many people believe that quick, efficient transportation most arguably could be the very catalyst and separating factor between successful, advanced societies or communities and those that lag behind.

If this thought is true then Georgetown County is getting on the right track. Recently county staff opened the invitation for bidding and thus announced their desire to design a county-wide transportation master plan.

According to the Georgetown County Purchasing Office, the county is seeking a

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qualified planning/ transportation consultant to produce a transportation master plan for the county and its rapid growth areas. This master plan would be incorporated with the existing transportation studies and become an important element and guide installed into the existing county comprehensive plan.

Studies that may be integrated with the future master plan could be the 2003 SCDOT (Department of Transportation) U.S. Highway 17 county study plan, the 2003 Georgetown County Transportation Study, the 2005 Grand Strand Area Transportation Study 2030 long range plan, and the most recent 2006 GSATS study done by the Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments.

The master plan as envisioned by the county will present a primary vision and recommend roadway and highway system improvements based on projected growth. The county would also like the selected consultant to expand the study for the county master plan to include a multi-modal transportation system.

Any plan received is to include both policy and technical direction for decisions that would need to be made in the future regarding facilities as well as a financial plan that would offer alternative revenue sources for funding the proposed projects.

These alternative revenue sources are to include recommendations for the utilization and implementation of impact fees.

The county's rapidly-increasing population, combined with a growth in industry and economic development projects, has led to a lot of discussion of improvements that need to be done to better prepare the area for the future.

Current issues regarding transportation in the county are many and begin with the area's lack of direct interstate highway access. The closest points connecting Georgetown County with an interstate system are I-26 in Charleston, and Florence, where interstates I-

95 and I-20 connect. This limits the number of trucks hauling freight to and from the area and thus the amount of goods that can be shipped in and out, putting limitations on current industry.

Presently the county does not have a designated truck route even though more freight is brought into the county by truck than any other method. This is becoming more and more of an issue as roadways are deteriorating and the county is seeking an increase in industrial presence.

Other than growing industry, the county has experienced explosive growth in the residential sector. This growth has created a strong demand from residents and from county officials for interconnectivity of local neighborhoods that would provide alternate routes to travel besides the current federal and state highways.

Interconnectivity would essentially have to be a joint effort by the county and private developers to alleviate traffic flow and ease congestion along U.S. Highway 17 on the Waccamaw Neck, as well as other areas with large developments.

SCDOT recently released a study analyzing the traffic flow and increased travel along Highway 17. It was their conclusion that the route may be quickly nearing its intended capacity and is in dire need of relief.

The report also said that the route will need capacity enhancement at key locations in order to serve and support the projected growth of county development.

This past December Georgetown County Council approved a 100 percent increase in the Vehicle User Fee, raising it from \$15 to \$30 a year. Council members said the increase would provide the county with new moneys for road projects.

There was some criticism of the fee increase at the time since the master transportation plan was not yet in place.

According to the requirements submitted by the county, the focus of the master plan shall be primarily on the future. The county stated in its request that the key to creating a desirable community is also to create a transportation system that complements the area's planned growth and can contribute to the overall quality of life, both in the public and private sector.

County leaders also say they want the master plan to include the impact of several areas of concern including U.S. Highway 17 traffic flow, U.S. Highway 701 traffic flow, interconnectivity, the identification of by-pass opportunities, the projected effect of the proposed I-73, the projected effect of the proposed "Southern Connector" or S.C. Highway 31, the residual of impact fees, and the identification of priorities with limited funds.

Whenever a selection is made by the county the consultant chosen shall deliver a county travel forecast model, a corridor sketch planning, and the results of a land use analysis.

Letters to the editor may be sent by email to jlesley@gtowntimes.com. They must include the name of the author, hometown, and a telephone number for verification. Letters should be brief and are subject to editing.

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