

# Railroad Crossing Improvements at Candler & McDonough Streets

City of Decatur



November 12, 2009

Thank you for attending the public workshop for these two intersection improvement projects located at the CSX railroad crossings in downtown Decatur. These proposed improvements are located at the following intersections:

1. McDonough Street at College Avenue, Howard Avenue and the CSX rail line.
2. Candler Street at East College Avenue, East Howard Avenue, East Trinity Place and the CSX rail line.

The purpose of this project is to improve pedestrian accessibility and safety around and across two CSX railroad crossings and is based on the City of Decatur's approved Community Transportation Plan. The project scope includes construction of sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities, as well as safety and mobility improvements. In this handout package you will find a project description, project history, project schedule, funding limitations and railroad quiet zone and safety information. As you enter the room, you will notice various stations around the room with City of Decatur staff and its design consultants, who can be identified by their nametags, available to discuss the project and answer your questions. Please take this opportunity to visit the different stations and discuss the project with a City representative.

After you visit the stations and have the opportunity to discuss the project, please fill out the comment card or give your comments verbally to one of the staff. You may leave your comments at the workshop or send in your comments until November 30, 2009. Written comments may be submitted as follows:

Email: [rrcrossings@decaturga.com](mailto:rrcrossings@decaturga.com)  
Fax: 678-553-6597  
Mail: RR Crossing Improvements  
City of Decatur  
P.O. Box 220  
Decatur, Georgia 30031

All comments will be summarized and published on the City of Decatur website as well as made a part of the project record. We hope you will take advantage of one of these opportunities to let us know your thoughts about these two intersections. The displays and plans will be available for review for ten days after the public workshop at the Decatur City Hall and on the City's website at [www.decaturga.com/rrcrossings](http://www.decaturga.com/rrcrossings).

A copy of all comments received will be available for public review after November 30 on the City's website and at City Hall. Thank you again for your interest in this project. If you should have any questions or need additional information, please contact Hugh Saxon, Deputy City Manager, by email at [hugh.saxon@decaturga.com](mailto:hugh.saxon@decaturga.com) or by telephone at 678-553-6507.

Thanks again for your participation.





## Project History

Decatur's Community Transportation Plan (CTP) was adopted in April, 2009 by the City Commission. Along with a number of other recommended transportation improvements throughout Decatur, the CTP included recommendations for these two railroad crossings adjacent to downtown Decatur. Improvements at these two intersections were two of 166 projects in Georgia selected as part of the 2008 & 2009 federal Transportation Enhancement (TE) program and the City was awarded TE funding of \$1.48 million to design and make physical improvements to these intersections. This will be matched with local funding of \$320,000, for a total project budget of \$1.8 million. After a competitive selection process, the City retained the team of URS Corporation and Sycamore Consulting to design these improvements.

## What is the purpose of this workshop?

Goal 1: The City of Decatur is considering options for improvements to the railroad crossings at Candler and McDonough Streets adjacent to downtown Decatur. The purpose of the work is to improve safety and accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists and others using these intersections. The City believes that the best time to solicit feedback from the community is before the design work begins. The purpose of the workshop is provide an opportunity for residents, property owners and business operators to discuss the project, to make comments and to determine what the community feels are the most important goals that should be met when making improvements to these two intersections.

Goal 2: The community has provided differing views regarding the possible implementation of a quiet zone along the CSX railroad corridor. The City has invited experts on quiet zones and general railroad safety issues to the workshop to answer questions regarding the requirements and well as to provide information on the costs and benefits of a quiet zone. The City Commission will make a final decision on whether to pursue a Quiet Zone for the railroad corridor.

Goal 3: The grant for this project comes from federal TE funding, which requires special procedures to be followed. This public workshop is meant to provide information about these requirements to interested residents, property owners and businesses.

## Project Rights-of-Way

In addition to local streets in the project area, College Avenue and South Candler Street are parts of the state roadway system and are controlled by GDOT. The CSX Railroad operates the CSX rail line. Plans may not move to the construction phase until they are approved by GDOT and CSX.

## What are Transportation Enhancement (TE) Funds and how does this affect the design of these intersections?

The TE program was established as a means to enrich the traveling experience of motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians through enhancements to our transportation system. Federal funding for TE projects is allocated to provide aesthetic and functional improvements to historical, natural, and scenic areas. The TE program is managed by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and the design must adhere to their current standards. Examples include:





- Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design.
- Improvements to the intersections have to clear an environmental impact review.
- All design decisions and recommendations must meet GDOT standards or receive a design variance from GDOT's Chief Engineer.

For more information about the TE program, please visit <http://www.enhancements.org/> or <http://www.dot.state.ga.us/localgovernment/FundingPrograms/TransportationEnhancement/Pages/default.aspx>

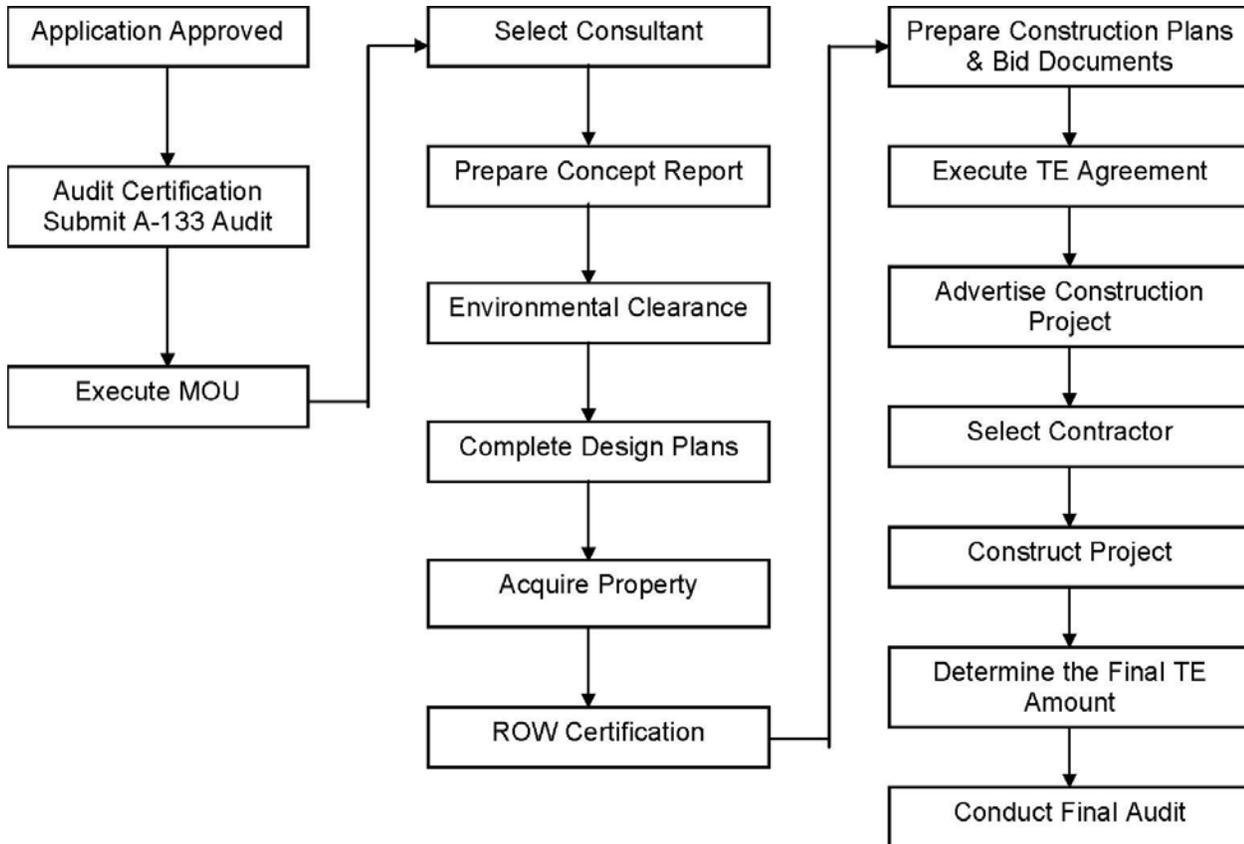
### Project Schedule

Project survey and data collection began in early October, 2009. Another public workshop/public information open house will be held in early 2010 to present design recommendations and to receive additional comments. A recommended plan then will be presented to the City Commissioners for their approval. The environmental process will take up to 9 months to complete, at which time the design plans will be completed and submitted for review to Georgia Department of Transportation and to CSX.

If there is no need to purchase rights of way from adjacent property owners, the project could be let to construction in the winter of 2011, subject to the review process, approval by GDOT and CSX, and the availability of project funding. Based on recent experience, it is unlikely that the project will advance this quickly.



Below is a flow chart of the TE process:



### What is Environmental Clearance and what is the public's role in the process?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal environmental law that was enacted on January 1, 1970. The law established a national policy to promote the protection and enhancement of the environment. Under NEPA, all agencies receiving federal dollars (TE funds are federal dollars) are required to consider the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and determine reasonable alternatives to those actions.

Funding for this project is made available to the City of Decatur through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as part of its TE Program. Therefore, the environmental effects of the project must be evaluated before construction can begin. Fortunately, the types of projects that qualify for TE funding are typically those that will have little or no impact on the environment.

The intersections under consideration here were included in 40 intersections GDOT studied in 2006 and 2007 as part of a traffic signal upgrade project. That earlier project was also subject to NEPA compliance and environmental studies were undertaken. Those studies revealed three significant environmental resources within current project area: The Old Decatur Local Historic District, the South Candler Street/Agnes Scott National Register Historic District, and the Decatur





Depot, located within the Old Decatur Historic District (see project displays). All three of the resources are protected under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 and are therefore subject to consideration within the NEPA framework. Project impacts to the resources would need to be evaluated. If it is found that the impacts would have an adverse effect on any of the resources, the adverse effects would need to be mitigated through design modifications or other context sensitive treatments. If it is found that project impacts could not be mitigated, design alternatives would be discussed, and the most prudent and feasible design alternative that poses the least impact on environmental resources would be chosen.

## Traffic Signal Improvements

Presently, the traffic signal system located at the railroad crossings along College Avenue is inadequate to allow signal improvements such as additional turn signals. Along with a comprehensive county-wide traffic signal improvement program, DeKalb County is planning to replace the existing traffic signal system along College Avenue with a modern system which will allow much greater flexibility in controlling and guiding vehicle and pedestrian traffic. It is expected that construction of the new signal system will take place in 2010-2011 and will complement improvements to the railroad crossings in Decatur.

## Pedestrian Control Devices at Railroad Crossings

Pedestrians generally determine for themselves the shortest distance between where they are and where they want to go, and then proceed along that line, sometimes irrespective of paved pathways, sidewalks, or trails. In light of this, a guiding principle in the design and development of pedestrian facilities should be to provide the most direct pathway possible.

Active control devices change their appearance or position upon receiving a signal that a train is approaching. A warning signal, usually in the form of flashing lights and an audible warning such as a bell, is presented as pedestrians approach the crossing. Sometimes, a gate may be lowered into the pedestrian travel way as an additional form of warning. While use of this type of device is widely accepted at street grade crossings, there is increasing debate about the effectiveness of pedestrian gates used on sidewalks and other walkways, because they are easy to evade.

## Points To Consider During Device Selection

The selection of a traffic control device for use where pedestrians are intended to cross railroad tracks at grade should be the result of an engineering study whose simplicity or complexity will be determined by conditions at the crossing in question. In general, the factors to be examined during device selection should include the following:

- Collision experience, if any, at the crossing, as it involves pedestrians.
- Pedestrian volumes and peak flows, if any.
- Train speeds, numbers of trains, and railroad traffic patterns, if any.
- Sight distance that is available to pedestrians approaching the crossing.
- Skew angle, if any, of the crossing relative to the railroad tracks.



Effective use of channelizing devices that force pedestrians to look and move in certain directions and to cross tracks at certain places can enhance safety at grade crossings by accumulating pedestrian traffic and flowing that traffic through a single, well-designed crossing point.

Some non-standard devices are often not without merit and may incorporate types of innovative features.

For more information refer to

[http://www.fra.dot.gov/downloads/safety/small\\_Jan08\\_Ped\\_Devices\\_GX2.pdf](http://www.fra.dot.gov/downloads/safety/small_Jan08_Ped_Devices_GX2.pdf)

## Railroad Quiet Zones

Locomotive engineers are required to sound the train horn at all public at-grade, highway-rail crossings 15-20 seconds before entering a crossing, but not more than one-quarter mile in advance of the crossing. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) published the Final Rule on the Use of Locomotive Horns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings effective June 24, 2005. The Final Rule does not prohibit blowing the whistle because it gives the locomotive engineer the authority to sound the horn in emergency or potential emergency situations.

The FRA Final Rule preempts any state or local laws regarding the use of the train horn at public crossings. Communities wishing to establish quiet zones must equip proposed grade crossings with adequate safety measures to offset the potential decrease in safety created when a quiet zone is instituted. The additional safety measures must be constructed at the community's own expense and must meet federal specifications.

The Final Rule identifies two types of safety improvement options for upgrading a quiet zone to meet FRA safety standards:

- Supplemental Safety Measures (SSMs), or
- Alternative Safety Measures (ASMs)

Supplemental Safety Measures (SSMs) include the following:

- Four-Quadrant Gate Systems
- Medians or Channelization Devices
- One-Way Streets with Gates
- Permanent Closure

Alternative Safety Measures (ASMs) include:

- Modified SSMs (i.e. Non-Complying Medians, Three-Quadrant Gates, etc.)
- Engineered ASMs (i.e. Geometric Improvements)
- Non-Engineered ASMs (i.e. Programmed Enforcement, Photo Enforcement, Education, etc.)

There is also a wayside or trackside horn program which uses an audio system at the bells, lights and gates equipment to direct a train horn sound to motorists. This system is considered to be less invasive by some in the area surrounding the crossing, but may not benefit the areas immediately adjacent to the intersection.

More information is available at <http://www.fra.dot.gov/us/Content/1318>





## Estimated costs for Railroad Quiet Zone Safety Measures

The City of Decatur would be responsible for all costs associated with installation of a quiet zone. This would include such elements as preliminary engineering, construction, maintenance and replacement of active warning devices or their components, including wayside horn systems.

The City of Decatur would be required to execute an agreement with CSX to reimburse the railroad for all project development and engineering design costs. A deposit towards the work is required.

- \$ 5,000 per wayside horn location
- \$10,000 per crossing signal location

The City of Decatur must guarantee reimbursement to the railroad for all actual costs associated with the installation and maintenance of the railroad improvements required for the quiet zone by means of a project agreement executed by the parties. This may include quiet zone warning devices, wayside horns or both.

The general ranges of costs are:

- Four-Quadrant Gate Systems - \$300,000 to \$500,000
- Basic Active Warning System\* - \$185,000 to \$400,000  
(Includes Flashing Lights and Gates, Constant Warning Time, Power Out Indicator and Cabin.)
- Basic Inter-Connect - \$5,000 to \$15,000
- Annual Maintenance - \$4,000 to \$10,000

Based on these preliminary estimates, installation of four-quadrant gate systems at both intersections would cost the City of Decatur between \$600,000- \$1,000,000.

Improvements at the Atlanta Avenue crossing would also be required to fully implement a Decatur Quiet Zone. Presently, funds are not available to pay for Quiet Zone improvements.

For more information about quiet zones, see <http://www.uprr.com/newsinfo/horn.shtml#3>

## Potential pro's of quiet zones

- Reduced sounding of train horn in quiet zone
- Residential and commercial areas benefits from noise reduction

## Potential con's of quiet zones

- Costly upfront engineering design and equipment installation
- Annual maintenance costs
- Will not eliminate all sounding of the train horn