

Questions from 5.22.2024 GDOT Community Meeting

Paul describes GDOT's dilemma as a balance between safety and aesthetics. Are we considering the safety benefits of keeping tree cover? They provide shade which is not just aesthetic - consider our increasingly hotter summers and how the westside is disproportionately hotter than other parts of the city. Also consider how losing shade puts the onus on individuals to afford owning and maintaining reliable indoor air conditioning (\$\$\$\$).

Safety of the traveling public is GDOT's primary goal. Leaning, disease or dead trees that pose a risk of falling on to the traveling public while they are on the roadway will be removed to prevent any accidents or fatalities.

Why isn't the DOT doing more pruning and assessment to ANSI standards before removing trees?

The vegetation management project prunes and removes trees that can become a hazard to errant vehicles that leave the roadway. GDOT looks at pruning trees before completely removing any in these projects.

Hello GDOT, what's the plan for restoration? Because they won't grow as tall to the shoulders.

We currently have several projects for landscaping restoration within the area, including the Lee, Lowery, and Langhorn interchanges.

Why were the trees planted so close to the interchanges in the first? Why weren't narrower canopy trees planted?

The interstate when first built was cleared for the roadway. Over time trees slowly grew and did not get the maintenance needed allowing them over grow. The standards for trees planted on the right-of-way has changed over the years.

Why was the Lowery Westbound exit clear cut?

The trees along Lowery were cleared to eliminate the threat of falling due to the weight distribution of the canopy. As you can see in this photo of the exit ramp, the weight of the tree is leaning toward the ramp due to the pruning conducted by the utility company addressing power line conflicts.

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Couldn't we just design roadways to decrease speeding? Wouldn't that be more impactful than cutting down trees (of which some were not obstructing views) and creating an environmental issue (heat, noise, pollution) in an area that's already highly impacted?

Interstate 20 was designed as a freeway/expressway to accommodate vehicles at higher speeds. While speeding is a concern for crashes on the roadway, the purpose of this project was to address the safety concerns around the vegetation. Pruning trees and limbs is part of the scope of the project along with removing the trees that pose a significant threat of falling into the roadway.

As a Neuroscientist in Neurorehabilitation I have worked with people who have survived spinal cord injuries, most of which have been caused here in Atlanta by motor vehicle accidents CAUSED by speeding, so again can we emphasize design rather than causing more issues?

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Are the trees the CAUSE of many of the accidents you referenced, can you share the data? I'm curious of how many of these incidents were caused by speeding, distracted driving, and road design, but just ended with drivers hitting trees?

While there are many causes for crashes along the I-20 corridor, the incidents discussed at the May 22 meeting pertained to trees or limbs falling on the roadway. Many incidents start with speeding, distracted driving, etc., but can end with a motorist running off the road and hitting a fixed object, like a tree. Removing the fixed object or tree could reduce the severity of the crash.

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it's interesting to me that the Westside community has been trying to engage with GDOT to decrease noise pollution in this area and instead of assisting with this year long multi-jurisdiction initiative you all have done the opposite of what we need and cut down trees that will make the noise pollution worse, increase heat in an already vulnerable area, and increase air pollution, so you all can (checks notes) have an easier job of maintaining the right of ways?

The purpose of the I-20 vegetation management project is to address hazardous trees or tree cover along the I-20 mainline and corresponding ramps. This is a routine maintenance activity being conducted around metro Atlanta and statewide.

Is GDOT keeping records of quantity of trees being removed in each community they are removing trees in?

GDOT does not keep record of the number of trees removed on its projects. We only address leaning, disease or dead trees that need to be removed due to safety. We keep track of the projects and areas addressed statewide.

Can we be provided with documents/research/plans showing the process of surveying the 30% tree canopy and how that resulted in total tree removal specifically at Langhorn?

GDOT and its contractors conducts a visual survey of tree overhang on each of its vegetation management projects. The overgrown vegetation is the determining factor for this location for safety concerns. Please see photo below.



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At Maynard Terrace, they trimmed limbs but did not remove invasive English ivy on the trees. The invasive vines threaten the trees life, raising the risk of fall during storms. Why?

The area at Maynard Terrace was not within the scope of the landscaping project for the west downtown project. The landscaping work at Maynard Terrace is part of the work permitted with DeKalb County. The District will investigate that area for invasive vines as a separate initiative.

Low maintenance landscaping? Will these be native plants selected by Birds Georgia, Trees Atlanta, Georgia Native Plant Society, and others? Native plants are lower maintenance because they are meant to grow here.

Landscaping design plans and policy are reviewed and approved by our Landscaping Architect within GDOT's Office of Maintenance. GDOT Policy 6755-9 specifies the approved plant species GDOT will permit on the state right of way.

You mention West End CID. Where are the content experts in environment? Are they at the table? It's not just about aesthetics. All GDOT projects and maintenance activities are reviewed by our Environmental Services office, per the state and federal guidelines for environmental review.

What and WHEN is GDOT going to install sound barrier walls? The new decorative plants aren't going to help the greatest needs of community

Sound barrier walls are only installed with Type 1 federal projects with a completed Noise Study from the GDOT Office of Environmental Services. There are currently no Type 1 federal projects programmed that will begin the process to install sound barriers. Please visit the following website for more information.

<https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/Noise.aspx>

Can we please discuss the more important concern for health and safety vs. what's "pretty?"

The purpose of the GDOT vegetation management project and landscaping projects along I-20 are to prune and remove trees on the roadside to safeguard motorists who depart the roadway, lower the probability of hitting fixed objects, remove overhang that could fall onto the roadway, and enhance visibility of signage and the roadway.

What about the debris coming from the highway and under the overpasses?

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GDOT currently has a litter and mowing contract that is on cycle for every 30 days. Additionally, GDOT partners with the City of Atlanta to address, enforce, and clean up urban encampments which are a primary source of the debris from overpasses.

Can we investigate adding a wall or some sort of barrier for noise.

Sound barrier walls are only installed with Type 1 federal projects with a completed Noise Study from the GDOT Office of Environmental Services. Noise studies are completed as a part of the environmental document associated with a programmed project. There are currently no Type 1 federal projects programmed that will begin the process to install sound barriers. Please visit the following website for more information. <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/Noise.aspx>

How long is this "maintenance project" suppose to go on for and will the communities be made aware ahead of time when future work is conducted?.

The vegetation management project is set to close out by mid June and the landscaping project will begin in mid-June and complete by mid summer.

Can GDOT partner with Atlanta entities and work with high capacity transit, instead of expanding roads, and promote cleaner transit options such as light rail LRT and BRT

GDOT's primary responsibility as a state agency is to build, maintain, operate state highways. While many of our projects accommodate transit options, projects that specifically focus on transit originate and are coordinated by the ATL Atlanta Region Transit-Link Authority.

What is the GDOT's community engagement policy for all of their projects? NPU's were set up as the formal engagement vehicle for residents. Was any information sent to NPU leadership prior to this project beginning?

GDOT engages the public through public information open houses for major projects, GA511.org for construction information and updates, detour meetings, press releases, mailers, and general coordination with local governments. Notification for capital projects and maintenance activities are coordinated with the appropriate agency head for transportation within the local government, in this case the AtIDOT. GDOT does not typically have formal public open houses in advance of routine maintenance activities outside of notices on the GA511.org website or app.

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Why are communities not engaged when these plans are made?

GDOT engages the general public on major capital projects during the design process. GDOT also engages the AtIDOT on various projects and initiatives. GDOT does not typically have formal public open houses for minor projects or in advance of routine maintenance activities, including vegetation management outside of notices on the GA511.org website or app.

When was the last time this project was performed in West End? Our crews clean the Lowery and Lee St ramps weekly. Are there any safety issues/concerns we should be aware of? A vegetation management project similar to this has not been completed in the last 15 years. Landscaping at these interchanges was completed by the CID in 2022. Routine maintenance activities including mowing and litter pick up occur every 30 days. These projects address safety issues and concerns involving roadside vegetation.

Does GDOT have research on the issues Councilmember Dozier is pointing out?

GDOT does not conduct research into the overall temperature or climate of an area based on the tree coverage. This type of research into land use or tree ordinance policy would be facilitated by the City or the regional planning authority, Atlanta Regional Commission.

Several large tree stumps have also been left behind. Will these be grinded down?

Yes, the contractor will cut or ground flush stumps as a part of the vegetation management project.

Will the east side of I-20 also need maintenance or only certain parts of I-20?

GDOT conducts routine inspections of all interstate highways and will address all the metro interstate as funding becomes available. We currently have projects that stretch from Milepost 25.62 in Douglas to Milepost 84 in Rockdale County for removal of Dead, Leaning or Diseased Trees.

was a plan shared for continued cutting? I am wondering if they are going to do the same thing on the highway heading east.

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This Project was just on the West side. The District is planning a vegetation management project for the eastbound side on I-20. Additionally, the eastbound side was addressed about 5 years ago between MP 51-53.

What are "best practices" being used by other cities to achieve goals to protect by trimming/pruning trees that are needed for our health and environmental quality of life?

GDOT vegetation management projects are programmed and completed in a similar fashion across the entire state along the interstates.

There are sound barriers along GA400 as it goes through Buckhead. Did a CID build those, or did GDOT?

The sound barriers along GA 400 were likely completed with the construction of the interchanges and the construction of the roadway, as a result of the associated noise study completed with project environmental document. This would've been a capital project and not a CID project.

So the neighborhoods that have been historically underserved and disproportionately affected by heat, air, and noise pollution are having these issues made worse because it is *potentially* inconvenient for GDOT? And the only buy in came from corporate property owners?

The purpose of the GDOT vegetation management project and landscaping projects along I-20 are to prune and remove trees on the roadside to safeguard motorists who depart the roadway, lower the probability of hitting fixed objects, remove overhang that could fall onto the roadway, and enhance visibility of signage and the roadway. The West End CID has partnered with GDOT to enhance the aesthetic of the interchanges leading into the community.

Is there only one single option for noise barrier techniques?

There are many types of noise barriers and all are studied and considered in a noise study conducted as part of the environmental document associated with a programmed Type 1 project. Please visit the following website for more information.

<https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/Noise.aspx>

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Why does GDOT does not participate in the Type 2 project program. The Federal Highway Administration allows states to opt-in on this which seemingly allows for noise abatement without the Type 1 prerequisite

Federal noise regulations require that GDOT consider noise abatement for areas projected to qualify as impacted by traffic noise under Type 1 projects, whereas participation in a Type 2 program is not required by State DOTs. A Type 2 program would be expected to also involve additional requirements for the local government and the adjacent property owners if they wish to be considered eligible for potential noise abatement and mitigation under the Type 2 program, which may include (but is limited to) funding obligations and future land use constraints. These requirements are typically outside the scope of GDOT projects and noise abatement and would also compete for funding with all other projects within GDOT's program. Please visit the following websites for more information: <https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/Noise.aspx> and <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-23/chapter-I/subchapter-H/part-772>.

Can funding from Biden's Infrastructure Funding pay for noise walls for those areas that qualify?

Federal funding from Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill has various requirements and stipulations associated with different types of qualifying programs and fund sources. GDOT points all local governments to the Atlanta Regional Commission to determine eligibility for projects seeking federal funding. Please visit <https://atlantaregional.org/what-we-do/transportation-planning/metropolitan-transportation-plan/funding/> for more information.

Was any thought given to the impact of neighbors impacted by your clear-cutting project? While the purpose of the vegetation management project was to enhance the safety of the traveling public along interstate, the purpose of the landscaping project is to restore a vegetative barrier between sensitive areas of the community and the interstate and restore the landscaping that was established at interchanges.

What is the timeline on this “coming back to the table”

GDOT will continue coordinating with the West End CID and the City of Atlanta on updates regarding these projects. Any future comments or concerns can be directed to our “contact us” portal (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/BuildSmart/Pages/ContactUs.aspx>) and it will be assigned to a subject matter expert.