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**THE HISTORY OF THE GEORGIA STATE ROAD AND TOLLWAY AUTHORITY
AND ITS PREDECESSOR ORGANIZATIONS
(THE STATE TOLL BRIDGE AUTHORITY AND STATE TOLLWAY AUTHORITY)**

**PREPARED FOR
THE GEORGIA STATE ROAD AND TOLLWAY AUTHORITY**

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Section 1: Introduction and Purpose

This document provides an overview of the activities and roles of the Georgia State Road and Toll Authority (SRTA) and its predecessor organizations from its creation in 1953 through its evolution to present time (2005). Currently, SRTA is the only organization which is authorized to plan, develop, construct, and operate toll facilities in Georgia. From its inception, the Authority has had special powers relative to other state-level transportation agencies; however, these responsibilities have evolved over time. This document will trace the history of the organization and its predecessor agencies, the Georgia Toll Bridge Authority, and the State Road Authority. For the purposes of this document, the term "Authority" refers to SRTA or its various predecessor organizations at specific points in time.

The purpose of this history is to trace the evolution of SRTA from its origins and to document the Authority's initiatives and accomplishments. This history will describe:

- The creation of the organization through action by the Georgia Legislature and subsequent legislative changes;
- The Authority's major projects and initiatives since its inception;
- The Authority's major institutional structure and relationships over time; and
- A timeline of major events in the Authority's history.

The sources of information for this history are noted in the Bibliography. They include *Annual Reports of the Authority*, technical documents related to the Authority's major projects, archival material examined from the Georgia Archives and the Georgia Tech libraries, and interviews of key individuals involved in the Authority's operations since the 1970s.

The authors of this history wish to thank Mr. Wayne Shackelford, Mr. David Burgess, Mr. Tom Moreland, and Mr. Frank Harscher all of whom contributed their knowledge and recollections of the Authority and its initiatives for this history. Any errors contained in this history are those of the authors.

Section 2: The Origin and Evolution of the Authority

The State Toll Bridge Authority was created by an act of the Georgia General Assembly in March, 1953.¹ Its purpose was to construct bridges on the state highway system in Georgia through the issuance of revenue bonds to be secured by toll revenues. The interest in creating an entity to oversee the development of toll bridges was strong, especially in Coastal Georgia.

By creating the State Toll Bridge Authority, the Georgia Legislature established a statewide role in developing, maintaining, and operating toll facilities. At the time of its creation, the Authority was established within the Georgia State Highway Department (predecessor to the Georgia Department of Transportation) for administrative purposes. At that time, the Authority's Board consisted of the Governor, the Commissioner of GDOT, and the State's Director of Management and Budget (OMB).

One of the State Toll Bridge Authority's first actions was to construct the Sidney Lanier Bridge across the Brunswick River in Glynn County. Construction started in 1954 and was completed in 1956 when the bridge opened to the public. The bridge operated as a toll facility operated by the State Toll Bridge Authority until tolls were eliminated in December, 1962. At that time, maintenance and operation of the bridge was transferred from the State Toll Bridge Authority to the State Highway Department, a predecessor of the present Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT).² After the discontinuance of the tolls on the Sidney Lanier Bridge, the State Toll Bridge Authority essentially became dormant until 1972.

In 1953, at the same time the State Toll Bridge Authority was created, the State Bridge Building Authority was formed for the purpose of constructing bridges on the state highway system. In January 1961, this Authority was renamed the State Highway Authority. According to the "*Quadrennial Report of the Georgia Department of Transportation: 1969-1973*", the renaming of the State Bridge Building Authority was undertaken for the express purpose of making the Sidney Lanier Bridge a toll free facility. In 1962, the State Highway Authority took responsibility for managing the bonds that secured the construction of the Sidney Lanier Bridge. The State Highway Authority was distinct from the State Toll Bridge Authority that is the predecessor of today's SRTA with a major distinction being that bonds issued by the State Highway Authority were secured with the State's general funds, while bonds issued by the State Toll Bridge Authority were secured through toll revenues.

In March 1972, the State Toll Bridge Authority name was changed to the Georgia State Tollway Authority as an act of the Georgia General Assembly.³ Under the legislation, the Authority was given the authority to issue revenue bonds and was responsible for developing and funding the proposed Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System and the West Georgia Tollway. At this point, the Authority's Board of Directors was composed of the Governor, the Commissioner of Transportation, and the Director of the State's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), with the Governor serving as the Board's Chairman. Therefore, the board makeup of the State Tollway Authority was the same as the State Toll Bridge Authority it replaced. The design and construction activities for the Authority's projects were the responsibility of the Georgia Department of Transportation.

In the 1970s, the West Georgia Tollway was proposed. At that time, the U.S. Department of Transportation was planning the alignment of Interstate 75 through Georgia. When I-75 was aligned along the U.S. 41 corridor and not along the U.S. 27 corridor in West Georgia, interest in improving the U.S. 27 corridor grew. According to a former GDOT Commissioner, a national group known as the U.S. 27 Association, formed in the 1930s, was responsible for generating interest in improving U.S. 27 throughout the eastern states, including Georgia. Several of the cities along U.S. 27 in Georgia, including Rome, Cartersville, and Carrollton, were interested in the project. However, there was some

¹ "State Tollway Authority Act," Georgia Laws 1953 – January-February Session: General Acts and Resolutions, Vol. 1. Atlanta, GA. pg. 302.

² Thirty-First Report of the State Highway Department of Georgia for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 1965 and June 30, 1966. State Highway Department of Georgia, June 1966.

³ "Georgia State Tollway Authority Act," Georgia Laws 1972 Session: General Acts and Resolutions, Vol. 1. Atlanta, GA, pg. 179.

opposition from citizens to tolls.⁴ Opinions differ on the extent to which citizen opposition ultimately stopped the project. Some remember the opposition being so strong that personal threats were made against Authority members. Others recall that the rising fuel prices in the U.S. in the mid-1970s making the construction costs much higher was the reason for the project's downfall.⁵

During the early 1970s, the Authority took over the active planning of the Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System and the West Georgia Tollway from GDOT. However, the cancellation of I-485 by Governor Carter in 1975 caused the future of the Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System to be placed in doubt and most activities ceased on the planning of the Tollway System by the Authority. As noted before, activities also ceased on the West Georgia Tollway around the same time. At about the same time, a new toll project was being considered in Savannah, known as the Truman Parkway.⁶ The project was envisioned to improve the connectivity east and south of the historic downtown. Due to serious opposition from the public, the project was discontinued as a future toll project. According to interviews, the toll project was placed on the local ballot in the late 1970s and was defeated by less than 1,000 votes. The ballot defeat changed the funding strategy for the project and GDOT has continued to construct the project incrementally over the past several years with traditional transportation revenues as opposed to tolls.

At this point in the late 1970s, the State Tollway Authority, still residing within GDOT, changed its focus. The office continued to deal with toll-related issues throughout the State; however, it also assumed new duties within the Department, including truck weight issues, outdoor advertising activities, and GDOT's consultant contract development and management. At this time, the Authority's staff members were all GDOT employees and consisted of the Director, three (3) attorneys and two (2) secretaries.⁷

During the 1980s, the Authority's role changed when the previously issued debt on transportation projects was being paid off. The Authority was not initiating any new projects, rather it was paying off the existing debt for existing projects. The last payment on the debt occurred in 1998. According to interviews, once the debt was paid off, the Authority's existence was still needed because some of the bonds for projects were never called. It is believed that some of the bonds were actually "bearer bonds" and there was no way to contact the holders of the bonds to pay them off. The money for these bonds is believed to be still held in escrow by the State. ✓

During the 1980s, the Authority worked on issues related to the Torras Causeway and was also involved in the development of the North Georgia Tollway which is also later known as the GA 400 corridor. The Authority was responsible for developing the funding strategy for the toll road and the GDOT was responsible for all design and construction activities.⁸

According to the recollection of a former GDOT Commissioner, in the late 1980s, then-Governor Joe Frank Harris was considering an increase in the state fuel tax to expand the State's transportation infrastructure. At that time, the Governor also needed additional resources to fund rising health care costs and prisons. The sales tax in Georgia was ultimately increased one cent, but additional funds were never allocated for transportation.

During the 1990s, activities of the State Tollway Authority continued to focus on the operation of the Torras Causeway and GA 400. During this period, the Authority continued to function as a part of GDOT with staff paid by the Department and reimbursed by the Authority as revenues became available. During the period from November 1991 to May 2000, the chairmanship of the Authority's Board was the Commissioner of Transportation (Wayne Shackelford), not the Governor. In 2000, Governor Barnes wanted Georgia to be able to use Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle (GARVEE) bonds to fund transportation. GARVEE bonds were a financial mechanism devised by the federal government to allow states to issue bonds which were based on the promise of future federal transportation revenues. At

⁴ A series of reports from the various newspapers were reviewed that corresponded with the 24 public meetings held in March and April of 1973 about the proposed West Georgia Tollway. The specific articles are listed in the Bibliography.

⁵ Interviews with Mr. Shackelford, Mr. Moreland, Mr. Burgess, and Mr. Harscher each displayed a number of conflicting views about the exact reason for the project's demise with some of them remembering that it was a combination of rising gas prices and citizen opposition, while others specifying that it was rising gas prices and not citizen opposition, or vice versa, that killed the project.

⁶ Moreland, Thomas. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran and John Crocker on February 25, 2005.

⁷ Burgess, David. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran on March 9, 2005

⁸ Burgess, David. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran on March 9, 2005

that time, about one-third of the State's fuel tax collections were being used to pay debt service for projects. Additionally, about \$100 million was coming out of the State's general fund for transportation primarily for the debt payments associated with bonds, which was workable until an economic recession occurred. At that time, then Governor Roy Barnes attempted to develop a new mechanism to fast-track transportation projects which were critically needed across the state.

In 2001, the official name of the Authority was changed to the State Road and Tollway Authority by action of the Georgia General Assembly.⁹ The change was proposed by then-Governor Roy Barnes as part of a major multimodal transportation expansion program. Governor Barnes advocated accelerating the implementation of highway and transit projects throughout Georgia through the use of GARVEE (Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle) bonds. In essence, to accelerate the delivery of highway and public transportation projects, the State of Georgia planned to issue bonds backed by future federal transportation revenues.

Under the new legislation, SRTA could continue to issue bonds secured by tolls and but could now also receive funds from the federal government for the purpose of constructing transportation facilities (highway and transit). SRTA was also directed to fund designated portions of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (also known as the Developmental Highway Program) and to construct other projects financed by tolls.

The 2001 legislation changed the Authority's Board structure from its three-member panel (the Governor, the Commissioner of Transportation, and the State's Director of the Office of Management and Budget) to a five-member board consisting of the Governor as an ex-officio member and chair, the Commissioner of Transportation, the Director of the Office of Planning and Budget, one member appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, and one member appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Authority now has the power to plan, develop, and construct projects that are not backed by tolls. They can be funded with traditional federal and state funding sources (fuel taxes, etc.). Until 1991, Georgia could not use state fuel taxes to pay off bonds for transportation.

In 2001, the Authority hired its first staff person, the Executive Director. Additional staff members were later hired. During this time, SRTA became involved with developing a financing plan for the proposed Northern Arc, the first segment of a circumferential highway located about 20 miles beyond the I-285 corridor. SRTA was also charged with developing a plan for using the surplus toll revenues from GA 400. As a result of a change in political leadership at the gubernatorial level in 2002, the role of SRTA evolved again.

In 2002, Governor Sonny Perdue was elected to office and in the months following, he indicated that he did not support the same level of GARVEE bond funding for transportation as his predecessor and proposed a more modest level. Governor Perdue proposed to use no more than 20% of the expected Interstate Maintenance (IM) and National Highway System (NHS) funds to back GARVEE bonds. This more modest approach is being implemented by SRTA and GDOT.

On June 4, 2003, Governor Sonny Perdue signed into law Senate Bill 257 which allowed the Georgia Department of Transportation to receive unsolicited proposals for transportation projects from the private sector, evaluate said proposals, and to authorize contracts for those proposals, if warranted.¹⁰ To date, GDOT has received three proposals for public/private partnership projects. Each of the proposed projects involves constructing a toll facility, making SRTA's role in the project development process very significant.

⁹ 01 SB 134/AP. Senate Bill 134 By: Senators Thompson of the 33rd, Stokes of the 43rd, Tanksley of the 32nd, Hooks of the 14th, and Meyer von Bremen of the 12th. Georgia General Assembly, 2001 – 2002 Session.

¹⁰ 03 SB 257/AP. Senate Bill 257 By: Senators Williams of the 19th, Levetan of the 40th, Kemp of the 46th, Tanksley of the 32nd, Adelman of the 42nd, and others. Georgia General Assembly, 2003 – 2004 Session.

Section 3: Toll Road Initiatives in Georgia

The earliest efforts to plan and develop transportation improvements in Georgia using debt financing dates back to the early 1930s. On November 8, 1932, an amendment to the Georgia Constitution was ratified which provided for the assumption by the State of Georgia, of indebtedness of several counties of the State, as well as that of the Coastal Highway District. The District was created by the constitutional amendment and special legislation to construct a highway and a toll bridge across the Savannah River. A Board of Commissioners, appointed by the County Commissioners of the six counties comprising the District, governed it. The District was empowered to issue bonds, levy special assessments on real and personal property, and collect tolls for the use of its facilities. By January, 1992, the District was inactive. The constitutional amendment provided for assessments made against the counties of the District for the construction and paving of the public roads or highways, including bridges, of the State, under certain conditions. It also provided for the issuance of certificates of indebtedness.¹¹

Since that time, the planning and development of user-fee financed projects grew in number and complexity. Based on information obtained through available public documents, mainly at the Georgia Institute of Technology and the Georgia Archives, the State Road and Tollway Authority and its predecessors have been involved in seven (7) major transportation projects over the years. The Authority's major project activities have occurred since the early 1980s. The Authority's major projects listed in chronological order are shown below:

- The Sidney Lanier Bridge Reconstruction
- The Construction of the Talmadge Memorial Bridge
- Torras Causeway Reconstruction
- The Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System,
- The West Georgia Limited Access Highway (West Georgia Tollway),
- The Truman Parkway in Savannah, and
- The GA 400 Tollway (North Atlanta Tollway)

This list of projects reveals that SRTA has planned, developed, and implemented significant transportation projects that have benefited the State, especially the Metro Atlanta and Coastal Georgia regions. The Torras Causeway and Sidney Lanier Bridge projects are located in Glynn County near the Cities of Brunswick and St. Simons Island, respectively. The formulation of the State's first-ever toll facility plan and the planning of the West Georgia Tollway through northwest Georgia occurred during the 1970s. The Authority's more recent projects began in the 1980s, including the Truman Parkway in Savannah and the GA 400 toll facility, and continue to this day. However, the Truman Parkway project is no longer envisioned as a toll facility.

Sidney Lanier Bridge

In 1953, the Toll Bridge Authority initiated construction of its first project, the first Sidney Lanier Bridge over the Brunswick River. The bridge links the City of Brunswick with the Jekyll Island area of Glynn County. The tolls on this bridge started with the opening of the bridge to traffic in 1956 and were eliminated in December, 1962 when maintenance of the bridge was permanently transferred to the State Highway Department.¹² After the discontinuance of the tolls on the Sidney Lanier Bridge, the Authority became dormant for several years until the early 1970s.

Talmadge Memorial Bridge

The Talmadge Memorial Bridge crosses the Savannah Harbor Navigation Channel approximately 15 miles from the mouth of the Savannah River. The construction of the original Talmadge Bridge began in March, 1953, and the project opened to traffic in September, 1954. The construction cost was approximately \$12,500,000 and was paid with state

¹¹ Burgess, David. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran on March 9, 2005.

¹² Thirty-First Report of the State Highway Department of Georgia for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 1965 and June 30, 1966. State Highway Department of Georgia, June 1966.

bonds. The bridge was owned by The Coastal Highway District of Georgia, a political subdivision of Georgia founded in 1924 to build and pave the “ocean highway”, US 17.

The original purpose of the bridge and associated road was to relocate U.S. 17 from its original location in South Carolina through Port Wentworth, Georgia. The State of South Carolina agreed to maintain the portion of the project in their state; however, the State did not agree to changing the location of US 17 because of the toll on the bridge over the Savannah River. The new road was then designated US 17 Alternate. The State of Georgia paid \$2,100,000 for the cost of the portions of the project in South Carolina. The Coastal Highway District and the State Highway Board of Georgia entered an agreement on August 28, 1952. The State agreed to pay the \$2,100,000 and the District agreed, upon retirement of the original construction bond through the collection of tolls, to vest all title of Georgia lands to the State Highway Board.

A toll from the landside users of the bridge was collected by the Coastal Highway District until October 31, 1975, when the jurisdiction was transferred from the Coastal Highway District to the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). In 1981, GDOT considered the need for replacing the bridge. In July, 1987, bids were opened for the construction of the cable stayed main span at a cost of \$ 25.7 million. The project was completed and opened to traffic in March of 1991. The approaches and related roadwork was contracted separately in 1988 at a cost of \$ 45.2 million. The work was completed in 1991. The bridge replacement project was funded with state and federal funds. In 1988, the road over the Talmadge Bridge was designated as US Route 17. Figure 1 illustrates the bridge.



FIGURE 1: TALMADGE MEMORIAL BRIDGE

Torras Causeway

At the beginning of the 1980s, funds the U.S. Department of Transportation established the Bridge Replacement Program. One of the candidate projects eligible to use these funds was the reconstruction of the Torras Causeway, linking the City of Brunswick with St. Simons Island. The original bridge was a causeway with two lift structures which had been built in the 1920s with timber piles.¹³ Glynn County and the City of Brunswick owned and operated the bridge. Under the new federal program rules, the funding for the bridge replacement had to be managed by the State and could not be passed on to local governments, such as Glynn County and the City of Brunswick (the owners of the bridge). In order to replace the bridge, the County and the City of Brunswick negotiated the transfer of the bridge to GDOT for the duration of the construction.¹⁴ About the same time, the state law was changed to allow the Authority to acquire the toll bridge.

¹³ Davis, Jingle. “St. Simons bridge now toll-free, Some fear crowds, crime will invade as 35-cent fee ends,” [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#). October 19, 2003, pg. C1.

¹⁴ Burgess, David. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran on March 9, 2005.

The bonds for the bridge were paid off by Glynn County and the Authority leased the bridge from GDOT because GDOT was, and is, prohibited by state law from collecting tolls on roads and bridges. By allowing the bridge to be leased to the Authority, federal and state funds could be used to improve the bridge. No bond funds were used for the project. As tolls were collected on the bridge, they were used to reimburse GDOT for the operations and maintenance cost of the bridge as well as the local funds to match the federal aid.¹⁵

In 1983-1984, the bridge was improved and a new state-of-the-art toll collection system was installed. The system was the first fully integrated electronic and cash toll collection system in Georgia and the second in the entire U.S. This system allowed “real time” monitoring of toll payments and was later used on the GA 400 toll project.¹⁶

The Torras Causeway project had a sunset provision on the collection of tolls at 2021. This meant that the tolls would be discontinued by 2021, or earlier, if sufficient revenues were collected to pay off the bonds. Various proposals arose in the early 1990s and again around 2000 for raising the toll from \$0.35 to \$0.50 and using the extra revenue (\$0.15) to pay for beach reconstruction in Glynn County. Instead, Governor Perdue removed the toll completely on September 23, 2003. This action left SRTA with only one toll project in Georgia, the GA 400 project.

Truman Parkway

Truman Parkway is a limited access facility whose alignment is located along the east and southern edges of Savannah. The entire project, including both the completed and proposed sections, extends from the south from President Street to Whitfield Avenue, then west to Abercorn Street. The project was originally envisioned in the early 1970s as a toll project, but after a local referendum in or about 1990 resulted in public disapproval of the tolls, the project became a “free” facility.¹⁷ Since that time, GDOT has been developing the project and constructing it in segments as traditional transportation funds become available. The project has five (5) segments. Three of them are now open to traffic, one is under construction, and the last segment is in its design phase.¹⁸ The first roadway segment opened in 1993.

Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System Plan

In early 1970s, when Governor Jimmy Carter was in office, the Authority initiated a system-level analysis of the need for toll facilities in Metro Atlanta. The Authority developed the Atlanta Urban Area Toll System to complete the recommended Atlanta Freeway System proposed in 1958 by the Metropolitan Planning Commission (predecessor to today’s Atlanta Regional Commission).¹⁹

At that time, a viable toll project had to be “self-sufficient” as a stand-alone project before bonds could be issued for its construction, i.e. it had to generate enough revenue to pay for its operations and maintenance costs. State law was changed in the mid- to late-1970s to allow consideration of toll projects to be added to the system that may not be fully self-sufficient in order to create a logical and connected network of toll roads.

Figure 2 presents a map of the proposed Toll System. The Atlanta Urban Area Toll System Plan (ATSP) included important segments of the Atlanta Freeway System that were not ultimately included in the Federal Interstate Highway System. The System Plan consisted of five (5) major components: the North Atlanta Tollway (now known as GA 400), the South Atlanta Tollway (now known as I-675), the Lakewood Tollway, the East Atlanta Tollway, and the Stone Mountain Tollway. The Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System also anticipated construction and completion of I-485 (as a free part of the system). The North Atlanta Tollway Segment (GA 400 extension) was considered to be the “cash cow” of the system given the high growth rates and transportation demand in the northern tier of the Atlanta region.

¹⁵ Burgess, David. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran on March 9, 2005.

¹⁶ Burgess, David. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran on March 9, 2005.

¹⁷ Shackleford, Wayne. Interview conducted by Jamie Cochran and John Crocker on February 21, 2005.

¹⁸ Larson, Scott M. “Truman Parkway opens to Montgomery Crossroad today,” [Savannah Morning Herald](#). Webposted: November 10, 2004. Accessed: March 21, 2005.

¹⁹ Expressway Policy Study Number 2: Crosstown and By-Pass Expressway. Metropolitan Planning Commission, Atlanta, GA 1959.

The East Atlanta Tollway was an important part of the proposed system to provide greater east/west connectivity through Downtown Atlanta to points east. It was planned to connect I-20, the Lakewood Freeway south of Downtown Atlanta and continue to I-285 and a connection to the South Atlanta Tollway. The proposed I-485 which would have paralleled the I-75/I-85 Downtown Connector was also part of the original plan. I-675 was originally included in the ATSP as the South Atlanta Tollway; however, the project was eventually constructed by GDOT as a free facility.

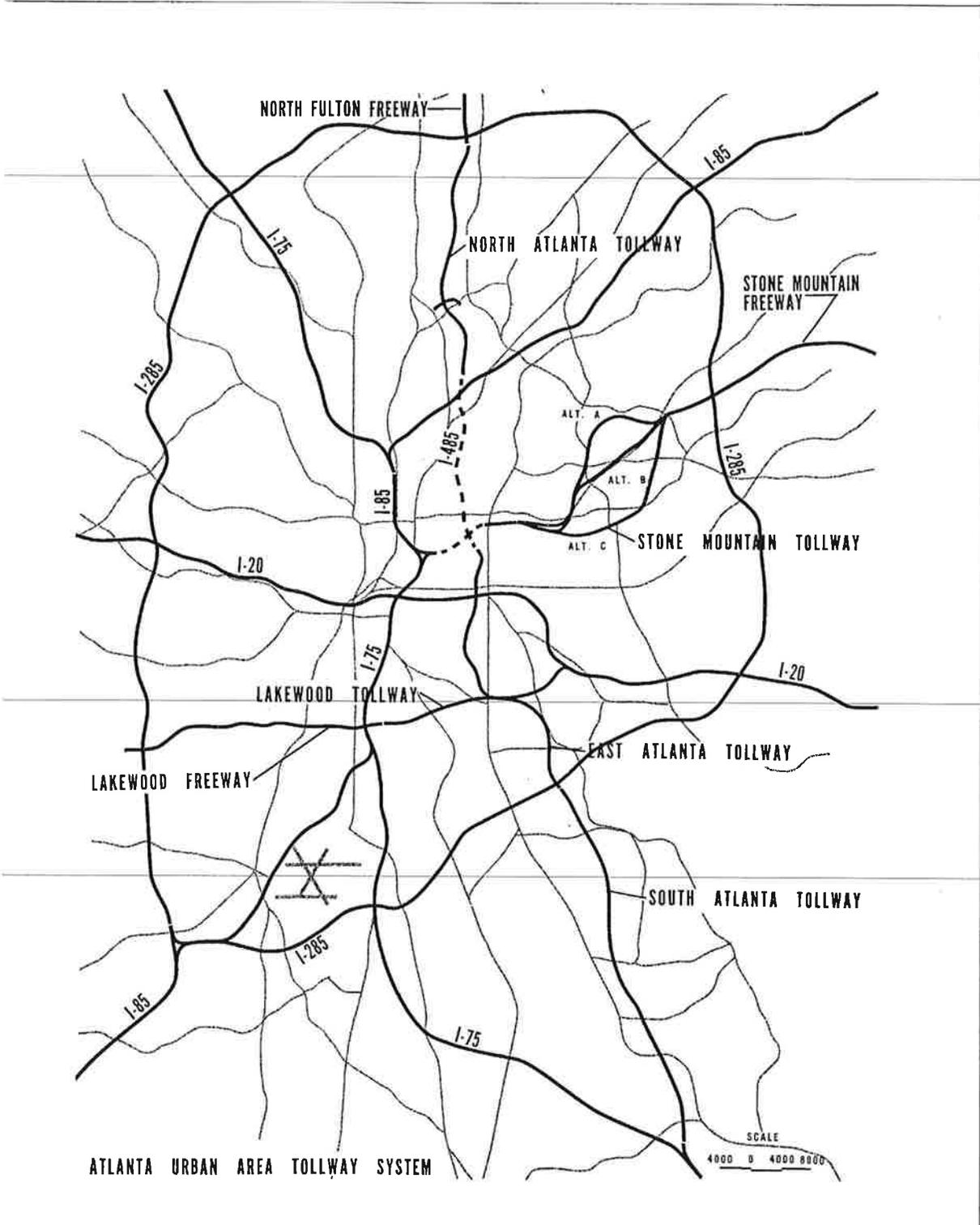


FIGURE 2: PROPOSED ATLANTA URBAN AREA TOLL SYSTEM

The State Highway Department (later renamed GDOT) began the initial traffic and revenue studies on the proposed Atlanta Urban Area Toll System in 1969. Much of the initial planning for the Atlanta Tollway System was originally undertaken by the State Highway Department.^{20, 21, 22} Eric Hill Associates prepared the Community Impact Statements and delivered them to the State Highway Department in March of 1972.^{23, 24} Wilbur Smith Associates delivered a series of Traffic and Revenues Studies between 1970 and 1974.^{25, 26}

In May 1972, the State Tollway Authority and the Georgia Department of Transportation jointly published a report entitled "*Summary of Planning Status for the Atlanta Urban Area Tollway*". It was the policy of the State Tollway Authority to document the planning history of any state or federal aid project that was authorized by the Authority. The report was prepared in response to the policy requirement. At that time, the Tollway System consisted of six segments, including the North Atlanta Tollway, the Stone Mountain Tollway, the South Atlanta Tollway, the East Atlanta Tollway, the Lakewood Tollway, and the Lakewood Tollway Extension. All of the projects, with the exception of the Lakewood Tollway Extension, had a previous planning history as federal aid projects and were still on the federal aid system. According to the report, the preliminary engineering and location studies for the projects had been completed and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) had been completed or were underway at the time for all of the projects except the Stone Mountain Tollway. Assessments of the impacts on parklands were underway (Section 4(f) analyses). Public hearings in connection with the EISs had not been held, but were planned. Detailed status reports for each of the Tollway segments were prepared. The report also contained an administrative record entitled "*Chronological Summary of Significant Correspondence*" starting from January, 1966 through February, 1972.²⁷

According to the *Final Environmental Impact Statement: GA 400 Extension*, the State Department of Transportation (formerly the State Highway Department) discontinued development of the Tollway System in 1975 after the cancellation of the I-485. After strong community opposition, I-485 and the Stone Mountain Tollway were cancelled by Governor Carter in 1975. Development on the Right-of-Way that had been purchased and graded continued throughout the late 1970s and 1980s first as the Presidential Parkway and later as Freedom Parkway resulting the present day Freedom Parkway and Freedom Park.²⁸ The South Atlanta Tollway was constructed as a free interstate facility (I-675). Some grading of the right-of-way east of the current terminus of Langford Parkway (formerly Lakewood Freeway) can be seen today between Lakewood Avenue and Macon Drive. Grading of the roadbed (see Figure 4) including bridge embankments appears to continue for roughly a quarter-mile beyond the current eastern terminus of the roadway. The graded roadbed is currently used as overflow parking for events at the nearby Hi-Fi Buys (Lakewood) Amphitheater. This route would have been the Lakewood Tollway. As shown in Figure 3, in 1983 GDOT continued to show the Lakewood Tollway as a planned I-420 between the current eastern terminus of Langford Parkway and I-20.²⁹

²⁰ J.E. Greiner and Company. Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System. Vol. I. State Highway Department of Georgia. December, 1971

²¹ J.E. Greiner and Company. Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System. Vol. III. State Highway Department of Georgia. December, 1971

²² J.E. Greiner and Company. Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System. Vol. II. State Highway Department of Georgia. March, 1972

²³ Eric Hill Associates. North Atlanta Tollway Community Impact studies. State Highway Department of Georgia, Atlanta, GA. 1971.

²⁴ Eric Hill Associates. South Atlanta Tollway Community Impact studies. State Highway Department of Georgia, Atlanta, GA. 1971.

²⁵ Wilbur Smith and Associates. Proposed Atlanta Urban Area Tollways: Supplemental Study Traffic and Revenues Alternate Tollway Systems. Georgia State Department of Transportation and Georgia State Tollway Authority. Atlanta, April 1974.

²⁶ Wilbur Smith and Associates. Proposed Atlanta Urban Area Tollways: Traffic and Revenues. Georgia State Department of Transportation and Georgia State Tollway Authority. Atlanta, February, 1973.

²⁷ "Summary of Planning Status for Atlanta Urban Area Tollway as of May, 1972". State Tollway Authority and Georgia Department of Transportation. May, 1972.

²⁸ "The Presidential Parkway: End of the Battle," The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution. August 29, 1991, pg. A10.

²⁹ Cancelled Atlanta Freeway Projects. © Peach State Roads, 2003.

http://peachstateroads.tripod.com/atlanta/atlfwys_cancel.html (Accessed on March 30, 2005)

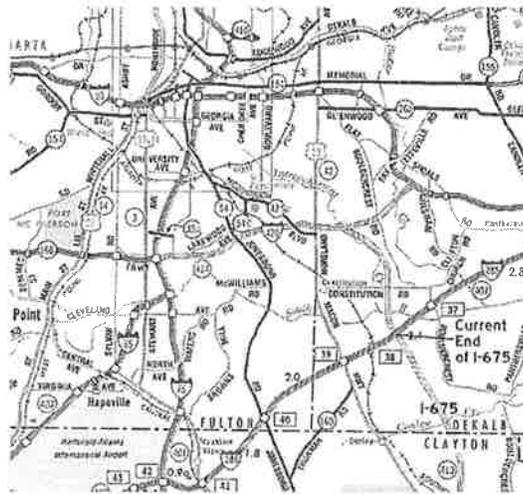


FIGURE 3 – GDOT MAP FROM 1983 SHOWING I-420



FIGURE 4 – EXISTING GRADED ROADBED EAST OF THE TERMINUS OF LANGFORD PARKWAY

West Georgia Tollway

The West Georgia Tollway was proposed as a reconstruction of the U.S. 27 corridor through the western area of Georgia into a limited access facility. The roadway was planned to extend from Chattanooga, Tennessee to the Georgia/Florida state line near Bainbridge, Georgia, passing through Rome, Carrollton, and Columbus. It also included a planned limited-access highway (I-185) between Lagrange and Columbus that was constructed as part of the federal Interstate

System. The Tollway Authority undertook a feasibility study and held public meetings on the West Georgia Tollway in the 1970s.³⁰

The initial *West Georgia Limited Access Highway Feasibility Study* was conducted by the firm of Hensley-Schmidt, Inc. and was delivered to State Highway Department, including the Tollway Authority, in January 1971.³¹ The Environmental Impact Statements were completed in 1974 by DeLeuw, Cather & Company after the facility was officially accepted by the Tollway Authority as one of its tollway projects.^{32, 33}

Initial public meetings regarding the West Georgia Tollway began with a fact-finding tour of 24 cities in the spring of 1973. A review of newspaper articles from the period show that there was little public opposition to the project aside from concerns about disruption to existing communities. The only significant opposition appeared to be in Terrell County where local officials voted not to support the Tollway. Former GDOT officials recall that the local opposition was based on the lack of planned interchanges in desired locations.

The proposed tollway project never materialized. According to former GDOT officials, the construction cost of the project skyrocketed when the fuel crisis occurred in the mid-1970s. Political support for the project waned after that. Today, the U.S. 27 corridor is currently being improved as part of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP) which is managed by GDOT.

GA 400 (North Atlanta Tollway)

After the Torras Causeway project was completed in the mid-1980s, the Authority began work on the GA 400 project. The U.S. Department of Transportation had developed a Toll Project Demonstration Program and was looking for five to seven projects throughout the U.S. to test the implementation of toll projects using a combination of toll revenues and traditional federal and state funds. For the first time, program allowed the use of federal funds along with tolls to construct and operate toll facilities. Up to this point, only toll revenues could be used for toll projects. The GA 400 project was selected by USDOT as one of its demonstration projects.

The project's alignment through Buckhead, one of the City's most affluent areas, caused a great deal of citizen and political opposition. According to a former GDOT official, the City of Atlanta's Mayor Maynard Jackson wanted to stop the project because a group of Lenox Road property owners vehemently opposed the project. At that time, land was already being sold off by members of the group for the roadway. Fulton County had also been acquiring right-of-way for the project for several years.

Under Mayor Jackson's direction, the City approved a huge office development known as the Atlanta Financial Center located along Peachtree Street near the current location of the Buckhead MARTA station. The City was convinced that approval of the huge project in the proposed path of the roadway would end the GA 400 project. GDOT and Atlanta Financial Center officials worked behind the scenes to develop the foundation for the building in a manner that allowed GA 400 to be constructed and the development to be built.

The GA 400 project was originally conceived as the North Atlanta Tollway, which was part of the Authority's Atlanta Toll System Plan. The project had been included in the Metropolitan Planning Commission's 1959 report *Expressway Policy Study II: Crosstown and By-Pass Expressways*.³⁴

³⁰ Hensley – Schmidt, Inc. Perspective: Public Involvement and the West Georgia Tollway. State Department of Transportation and State Tollway Authority. April, 1973.

³¹ Hensley –Schmidt, Inc. Feasibility Study: West Georgia Limited Access Highway. State of Georgia Department of Transportation. 1971

³² Deleuw, Cather, & Co. Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Analysis: West Georgia Tollway for an alternative route west of Bainbridge. Georgia Department of Transportation: Division of Highways and Division of Tollways. January, 1974.

³³ Deleuw, Cather, & Co. Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Analysis: West Georgia Tollway: Cedartown. Georgia Department of Transportation: Division of Highways and Division of Tollways. June, 1974.

³⁴ Expressway Policy Study Number 2: Crosstown and By-Pass Expressway. Metropolitan Planning Commission, Atlanta, GA 1959.

In order to facilitate the construction of the North Atlanta Tollway, in the 1960s, Fulton County began protective purchasing of the right of way for the project, a process which continued through the 1980s. While two important segments of the Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System became infeasible in the mid-1970s and the early 1980s (the West Georgia Tollway and the Stone Mountain Tollway), the North Atlanta Tollway continued to evolve and was incorporated into Atlanta's transportation system. Over time, the project became known as the GA 400 corridor. Today, it is one of the Atlanta region's most important transportation and economic corridors.

Environmental Impact Statement for GA 400 was prepared for the project during the period from 1984 to 1987 with the Final Environmental Impact Statement being accepted by the Federal Highway Administration in August of 1987. Despite the heavy citizen opposition, the road was opened to traffic in 1993.

When it opened, GA 400 was the second facility in the United States with high speed tolling technology, known as "open road tolling." The first facility, East-470 in Colorado, opened a few months earlier. Originally, the Buckhead Loop, a roadway located in the Phipps Plaza area of Buckhead and originally planned as an element of GA 400, was supposed to be a toll road (\$ 0.25); however, the toll was never implemented.³⁵

The GA 400 project was also unique in its use of federal transit funding. The project utilized funds from the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) to prepare the road bed in the highway's median where MARTA trains would operate. When GDOT constructed this portion of the GA 400 corridor, MARTA reimbursed GDOT for the cost of the transit elements.

The GA 400 project was very difficult to implement due to the political and citizen opposition and its location through one of the most highly developed areas of the City. According to former GDOT representatives, at one point, the GA 400 project had a funding shortfall of about \$ 50 million. To provide a source of funds for the shortfall, GDOT entered into an agreement with the Tollway Authority to cover the remaining costs of the project.

According to interviews conducted with former GDOT officials, the role of the State Tollway Authority during the period of GA 400's planning and construction continued to focus on its role as the financier of toll projects, while GDOT focused on the design and construction of them. The extension of GA 400 beyond its original terminus near I-285 was favored by many, including Fulton County, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), and GDOT. GA 400 now exists from I-285 to where it connects with SR 60 in Lumpkin County just south of Dahlonega.

Current SRTA Projects

As of April 2005, there is only one operational toll road in the state of Georgia which is managed by SRTA, the GA 400 project. This 6.5-mile toll roadway runs from the Interstate 85 north of Midtown Atlanta, through the Buckhead district of Atlanta to the Perimeter Area at its junction with Interstate 285. GA 400 continues north of the I-285 interchange, but is not tolled beyond I-285 at this time. Some elected officials from the northern communities in the GA 400 corridor have proposed extending the toll facility north of I-285 to generate additional revenues to construct major roadway improvements (new lanes) to handle the severe traffic congestion that occurs during commute periods.

While GA 400 is the only operational toll facility in Georgia at the present time, there have been several recent proposals that impact the role of SRTA, including upgrading S.R. 316, a major artery connecting the City of Athens with communities in Gwinnett County. This upgrade would involve constructing a tolled, limited access freeway between Lawrenceville and Athens.

Another proposal involves constructing high occupancy toll lanes and "truck only" toll (TOT) lanes along I-75 and I-575 in Cobb and Cherokee Counties. The third proposal involves adding lanes to GA 400 north of I-285 and expanding I-285 between I-75 and I-85 in northern Atlanta.

Given the current state of traditional sources of federal and state funding for major transportation projects, regions and states are increasingly looking to innovative funding sources, including public/private partnerships to deliver critically-needed transportation projects. Given this environment nationally and within Georgia, it is inevitable that more

³⁵ J.E. Greiner and Company. North Atlanta Tollway: Civil Engineering Report. State Tollway Authority and State of Georgia Department of Transportation. December, 1972.

proposals involving toll facilities will surface within the Metro Atlanta area and elsewhere in Georgia. SRTA will continue to play a role in providing the flexibility to leverage new sources of funding for major transportation facilities across the state.

Section 4: The Authority's Institutional Partners

From its inception, the Authority's most important institutional partner has been the Georgia Department of Transportation (and its predecessor organizations). From its earliest history, the executives of the Authority (State Tollway Administrator and later, Executive Director) and GDOT (Commissioner of Transportation), along with the Governor of Georgia, have charted the path for the Authority and have insured that GDOT resources have been dedicated to provide strong technical and operational support for the Authority's projects. To date, the Authority's role has focused on providing the financial resources for toll projects.

In its early days, the Authority was actually established within the GDOT organization. In 2001, its organizational structure was reestablished and altered by legislation passed during Governor Roy Barnes' administration. The new SRTA structure provided more budget and day-to-day management independence from GDOT. While the Authority is now organizationally more separate from GDOT, it must still obtain concurrence from the GDOT Board on its major projects.

During the 1970s through the 1990s, the Authority's work was fully integrated with GDOT's activities. When the Georgia Legislature changed state law allowing the Authority to issue debt, GDOT still provided the production work (planning, engineering, and construction) for the projects. The Authority had no employees at that time. All employees working on Authority projects were employees of GDOT. The Authority had two financial tools to deliver projects, traditional revenue bonds and guaranteed revenue bonds (which built the GA 400 project that opened on August 1, 1993).

Under the administration of Governor Roy Barnes, in addition to SRTA's reorganization, the agency now has additional institutional partners, including the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) and the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). GRTA was created in 1999 and has assumed the role of providing regional public transportation services (express bus services) throughout most of the 13-county Atlanta non-attainment area (in 11 of the 13 counties). GRTA is also responsible for approving on behalf of the Governor's Office the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the Atlanta region developed by ARC. The Authority works with GRTA as needed on initiatives of mutual interest.

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) serves as the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Atlanta region. The Authority continuously works with ARC staff on planning and programming issues to support the organization's activities. In addition to working with ARC, the Authority interacts with the local governments within the region on an as-needed basis related to the Authority's projects and activities.

Section 5: Important Dates in SRTA's History***The 1920s:***

1924: Torras Causeway was built by its owners, Glynn County and City of Brunswick.

The 1930s

1932: Amendment to the Georgia Constitution is ratified creating the Coastal Highway District and empowering it to issue debt and levy assessments from six counties within its jurisdiction for the purpose of constructing roads and bridges.

The 1950s:

1953: State Toll Bridge Authority created by the Georgia General Assembly. Authority works with Glynn County and the City of Brunswick to construct the first Sidney Lanier Bridge over the Brunswick River.

1959: A modified Atlanta Freeway System is developed by the Metropolitan Planning Commission (later ARC) based upon the 1948 Lochner Plan for the State Highway Department (later GDOT).

The 1960s:

1962: Tolls are retired on the Sidney Lanier Bridge. State Toll Bridge Authority bonds are retired by the newly created State Highway Authority.

1969: Preliminary planning begins on the Authority's Atlanta Area Tollway System (AATS) by the State Highway Department.

The 1970s:

1972: Georgia State Tollway Authority Authorization Act is passed by the Georgia Legislature. State Tollway Authority begins work on feasibility studies of the AATS and the West Georgia Limited Access Facility (West Georgia Tollway)

1973: West Georgia Limited Access Facility accepted as tollway project of the Authority. Series of public meetings conducted throughout western Georgia.

1974: Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the West Georgia Tollway is completed.

1975: Cancellation of I-485 and Stone Mountain Tollway by Governor Carter and subsequent discontinuance of planning activities for the Atlanta Urban Area Tollway System

The 1980s:

1983-1984: Torras Causeway ownership is transferred to GDOT and reconstruction of the bridge is completed.

- 1984 – 2004: State Tollway Authority (later SRTA) operates Torras Causeway which is leased from GDOT so that the \$ 0.35 toll can be collected for bridge operations and maintenance.
- 1984-1986: Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the North Atlanta Tollway (GA 400) is conducted.
- 1988: GA 400 is chosen as a federal toll demonstration project by U.S. DOT allowing the use of federal funds to be combined with toll revenues to construct and operate toll facilities.
- 1989: Construction begins on GA 400.

The 1990s:

- 1993: Construction of GA 400 is completed and operations commence by SRTA.

2000 and Beyond:

- 2001: Change of STA to State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) -- Senate Bill 134
- 2003: State law passed authorizing receipt of unsolicited Public-Private Partnerships passed by Georgia Legislature. Tolls removed on Torras Causeway
- 2004: Receipt of first Public/Private Partnership proposals for S.R. 316, I-75/I-575 High-Occupancy Vehicle Lane/Bus Rapid Transit Project, and the I-285/GA 400 Improvements.

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