

Connect Central Georgia

Corridor History and Investment Analysis

Winter 2011

Background

For many years, improved connectivity across Central Georgia has been a priority of Georgia's leadership. Home to three of Georgia's largest cities, the corridor has been a strategic target for economic development initiatives and is identified as a critical freight and mobility link between Georgia and the Southeastern U.S. in Georgia's Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan (2010-2030), also known as Investing in Tomorrow's Transportation Today (IT3).

Facilitating efficient east-west mobility across central Georgia is critical for several reasons. It is home to three military bases: Fort Benning in Columbus, Robins Air Force Base in Warner Robins and Fort Gordon in Augusta. The Central Georgia region also serves as an critical freight link, connecting the Port of Savannah with west Georgia, Alabama and points westward. Additionally, the fall line boasts agricultural and industrial resources, including an abundance of kaolin—one of central Georgia's key natural resources (8-million tons of this white rock are mined annually in the state, at an estimated value of over \$1 billion). Kaolin can be found in a variety of household products, including paper, ceramics, plastic, paint and pharmaceuticals.

Introduction

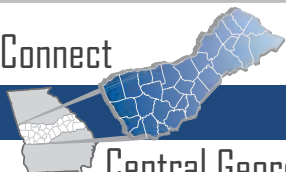
The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is conducting an analysis of the Central Georgia corridor to identify, plan for, and prioritize future transportation needs impacting intra-regional mobility. The study is considering natural resources, economics, freight movements and the travel patterns of the general public. This study will be the first holistic look at traffic and goods movement across this portion of the state and will build off of the accomplishments and lessons learned from previous transportation studies in the corridor. This document attempts to highlight those effects.

Objectives of the Connect Central Georgia study include:

- Assessing capacity and operational needs through the horizon year 2035 for travel through Central Georgia.
- Developing safe and efficient regional connections that meet future demand while maximizing and preserving existing assets.
- Enhance connectivity through Central Georgia.
- Improve safety, accessibility, and mobility options available to people and for freight.
- Enhance the inter-regional connectivity of the transportation system for people and freight.
- Promote efficient system management and operation.
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.
- Protect quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and planned growth and economic development patterns.



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Population and Employment Along the Corridor

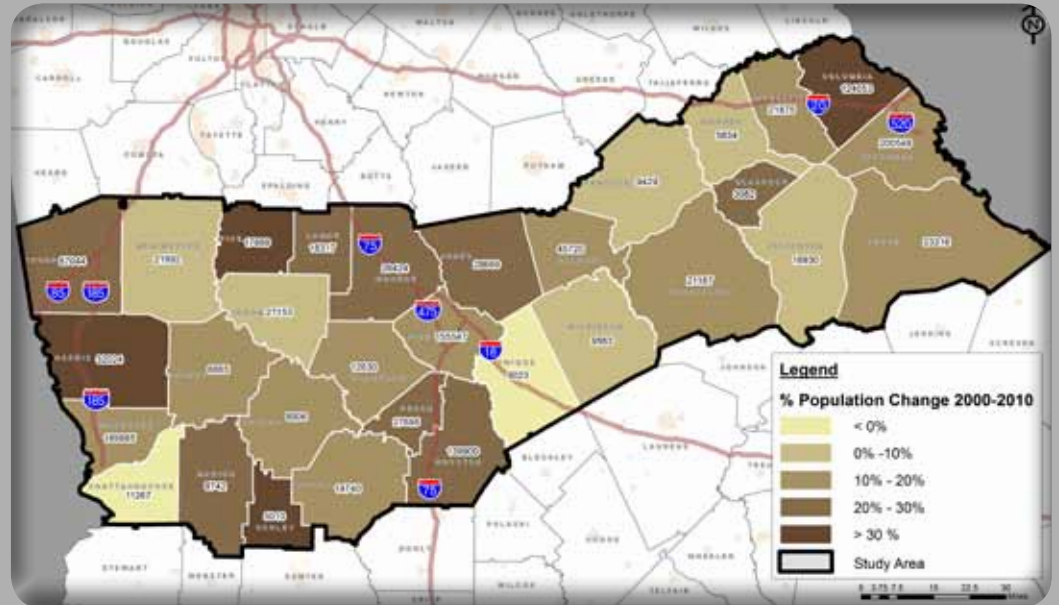
Investment in the corridor can help facilitate and accommodate continued employment and population growth. It can also be the catalyst for future growth in an area where population and employment gain has lagged behind that of the state. Recent growth trends are as follows:

- Population has grown by 9% since 2000 compared to 18% statewide growth
- Employment increased by 7% from 2000 to 2010 compared to 17% statewide growth

Several key locations within the study area experienced significant growth due to new and expanded job centers. Enhanced connectivity throughout the 31-county Central Georgia study area can provide additional opportunities for developments like the following that have occurred in recent years. Key employment growth includes:

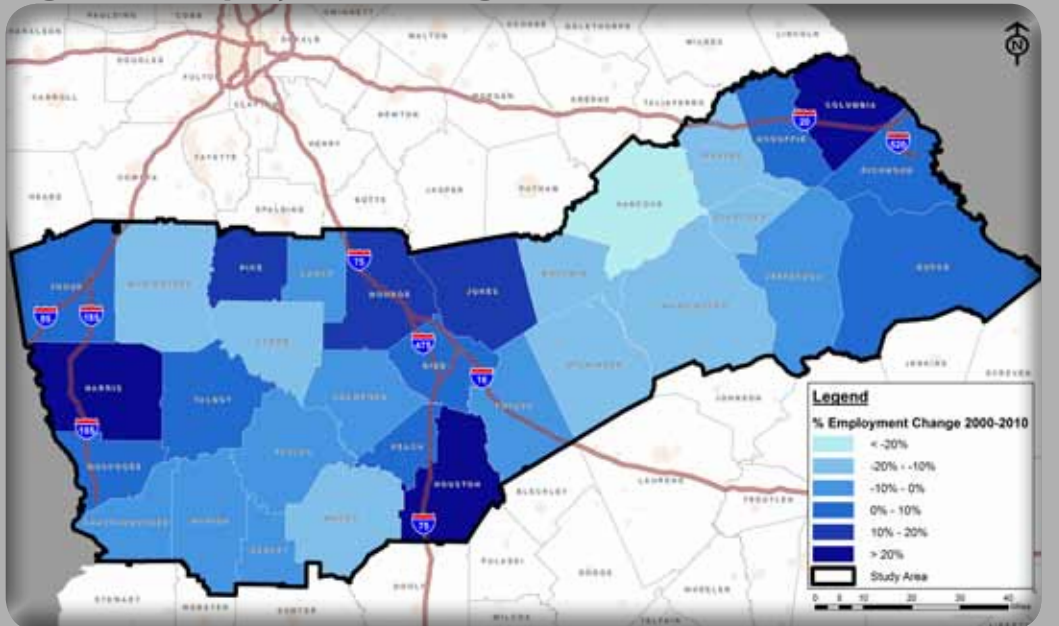
- Kia Plant – LaGrange
New plant employs 5,000
- Expansion of Fort Benning - Columbus
Planned increase in troops by 22,000

Figure 1: Population Change (2000-2010)



Source: Census

Figure 2: Employment Change (2000-2010)



Source: 2000 U.S. Census Sample Data and 2010 GA Dept of Labor Employment Estimates

Past Investment

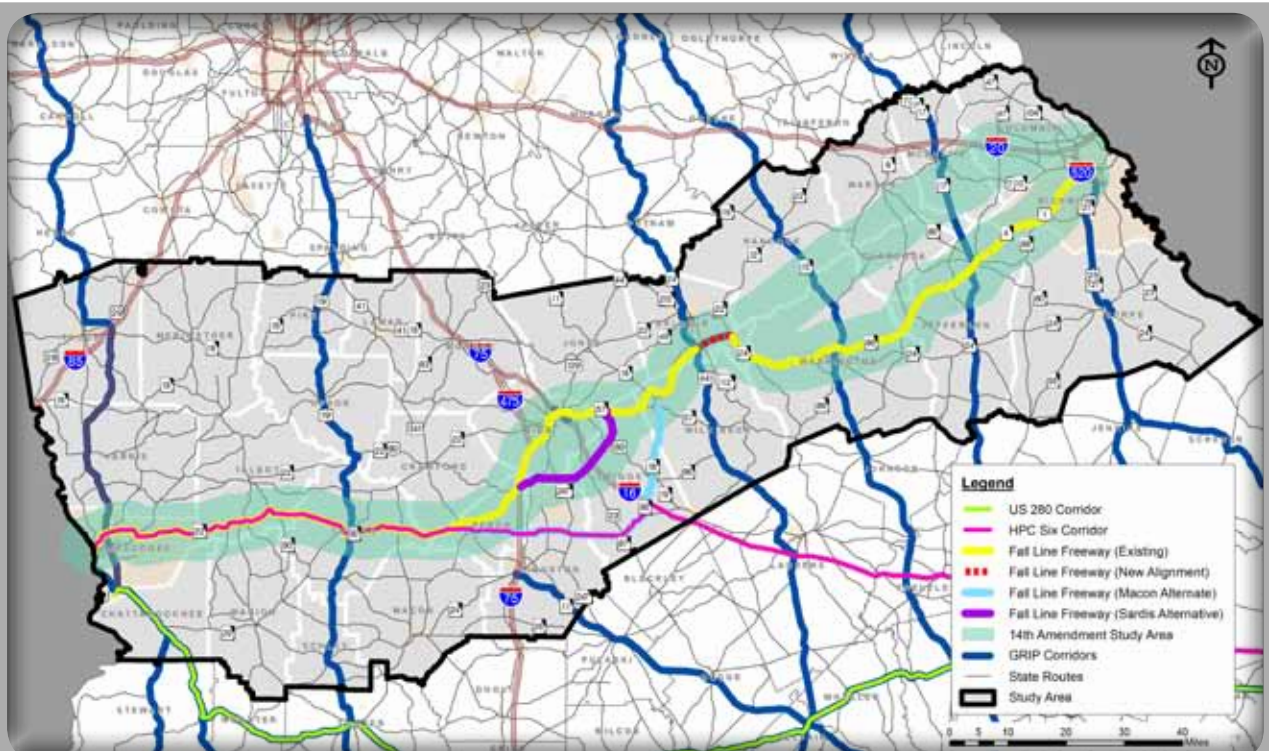
One of the main initiatives that has led to investment in the corridor and throughout the state is the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP). Composed of sixteen corridors that criss-cross the state, the GRIP system expands existing primary routes and truck connecting routes into multi-lane highways. When completed, the system will place 98 percent of Georgia's population within twenty miles of a multi-lane highway, and provide access for oversized trucks to all cities having populations above 2,000.

As the only east-west GRIP corridor in the study area, the Fall Line Freeway serves a critical role in providing connectivity through Central Georgia. Over the past few decades, significant investment has been made to upgrade this east-west facility to GRIP standards. Currently, approximately 86 percent (185 miles) is open to traffic. However, this number includes a section through Macon which relies on I-16 and I-75, a section for which other alternatives are being considered. The remaining upgrades exist along the segment between Macon and Augusta, as the section from Columbus to Macon is fully complete. The construction cost for the improvements made thus far is \$124,224,000. Including the Fall Line Freeway, 66 percent of the GRIP corridors within the study area are complete.

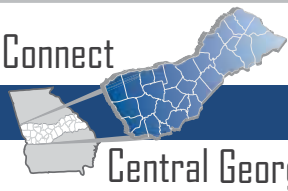
In addition to capital expenditures resulting from the GRIP initiative, several past studies, illustrated in Figure 3 and summarized in Table 1, examined improvements which traverse the study area. IT3 provided high level analysis on the need for and explicitly states a need to explore the impact of improved connectivity through Central Georgia. Georgia's Statewide Freight and Logistics Study validated the importance of this corridor for the future of freight mobility in Georgia. The High Priority Corridor 6 study provided recommendations for connecting Columbus to the ports of Savannah. Additionally, the 14th Amendment Highway study analyzed alternatives for an improved route from Augusta to Natchez, MS based on established control points and project costs. The table on page 4 documents lessons learned and points out areas in which the Central Georgia Corridor study can bridge the gap in developing a comprehensive solution for this corridor.

The Eisenhower Parkway Extension project considered alternatives for completing one of the remaining sections of the Fall Line Freeway, near Macon. This project spurred political and public controversy as the alternatives resulted in impacts to the floodplains as well as to the Ocmulgee National Monument. Opposition to the project stalled progress, and the EIS is currently deemed inactive. Leaders in Macon are currently working to advance alternative solutions, as is noted in the following section.

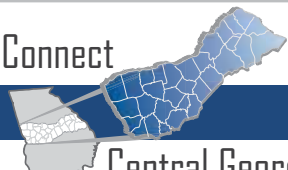
**Figure 3:
Previous
Studies**



Source: Various Studies

**Table 1: Previous Studies**

Study	Lessons Learned/Additional Study Needs
Central Georgia Corridor Study (Completed 2001) <i>Study area - central Georgia, focusing on HPC 6 and US 280</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on freight movement, so non-freight deficiencies are not addressed. • Based on traffic congestion, the deficiencies in Central Georgia are few and localized to higher population areas or bottleneck locations. Few “overall” system deficiencies surfaced in the analysis.
Investing in Tomorrow's Transportation Today (Completed 2011) <i>Study area - statewide</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in GRIP corridors and other freight network improvements could generate exponential growth in GDP (\$15 billion in investment was projected to generate \$100-115 billion in growth) and new jobs. • Filling in missing gaps in the GRIP system can help provide seamless connections from border to border and satisfy some of the \$14 billion of needs in rural areas and mid-sized cities. • Study noted need for improved freight mobility, especially along the Fall Line Freeway. This served as the impetus for the Connect Central Georgia Study.
14th Amendment Highway Study (Completed 2011) <i>Study area - Augusta to Natchez, MS (follows Fall Line Freeway through Connect Central Georgia study area)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on development of alternative designs, alignments, and cost estimates for construction of route linking Augusta, Macon, Columbus, Montgomery and Natchez, MS. • Five alternatives were developed ranging in cost from \$300 million (for alternative using mostly existing roads) to \$7.7 billion for a new interstate facility.
Eisenhower Parkway EIS (Notice of Intent date was 1997) <i>Study area - Macon</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed four alternatives for a 3+ mile segment near Macon. • Public/political controversy due to environmental/social impacts. Alternatives encroached upon wetlands and Ocmulgee National Monument. • Controversy due to these impacts halted progress on the project. The EIS is currently deemed inactive.
Statewide Freight & Logistics Study (Ongoing) <i>Study area - Statewide</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 90 percent of freight shipments in the CCG study area are to/from external locations. • It is estimated that between 1,400 and 2,100 trucks have travel paths through the CCG study area, but elect to take the longer interstate routes rather than utilize the roads inside the study area. • Mining is a significant industry in CCG region, and it contributes to nearly half of freight movement in the region.



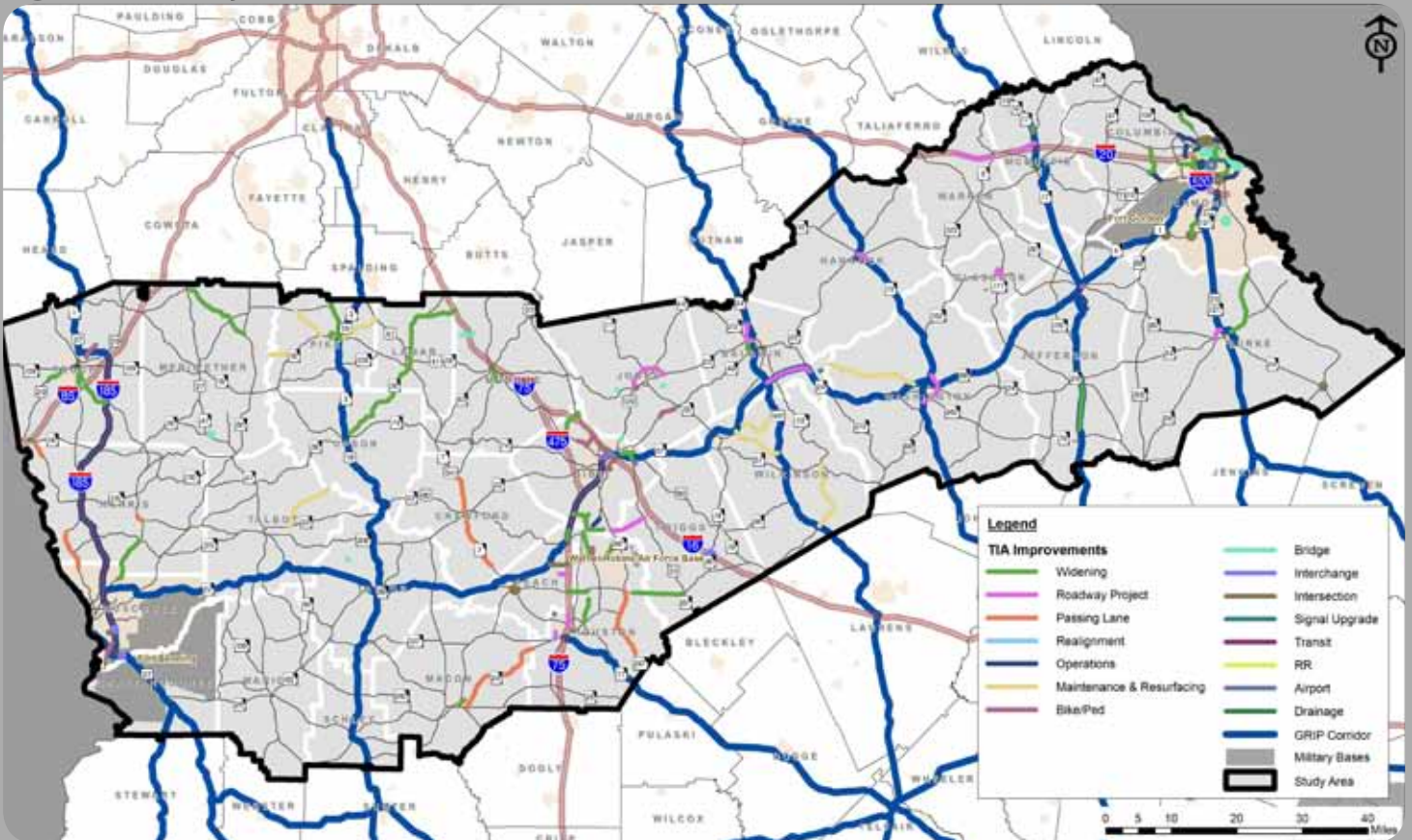
Progress continues towards the identification of enhanced connectivity through the Connect Central Georgia study area. Studies such as the Sardis Road Extension, have presented potential solutions to some of the final missing gaps in the Fall Line Freeway. The Transportation Investment Act (TIA) also provides an opportunity to implement previously identified transportation improvements throughout the 31-county study area.

Throughout the development of the Fall Line Freeway, the issue of how best to connect through Macon has been a critical one. Many options have been assessed and discarded due to social and environmental impacts. The Middle Georgia Regional Commission recently endorsed a recommendation that would extend the existing Sardis Church Road to I-16 at Sgoda Road and to

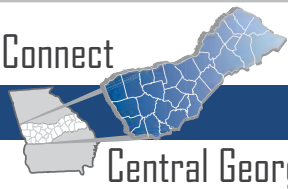
extend Sgoda Road to SR 57, thus tying into the Fall Line Freeway. This will be a key project in enhancing the east-west connectivity through Central Georgia.

In June 2010, the **Transportation Investment Act** was signed into law as a potential funding source for Georgia's transportation system. This law requires Georgia's 12 regions to develop project lists to be funded by a one percent regional sales tax. This referendum will be voted on in the 2012 election. Projects on the TIA list within the study area, which include road widenings, new roadways, operational improvements, maintenance activities and non-vehicular transportation improvements, are shown in the figure below.

Figure 4: TIA Projects



Source: ARCTIA List



Future Investments

The Connect Central Georgia study is intended to identify and prioritize potential solutions that complement current projects and plans. In order to improve mobility for motorists and enhance freight operations through the 31-county study area, the Connect Central Georgia study will build upon current local projects and those included in the regional TIA lists.

In early outreach meetings held for the project, stakeholders noted the following issues and opportunities in the study area:

- Capitalize on the planned growth in freight traffic through the Port of Savannah by improving connectivity.
- Expansion of kaolin to new markets will sustain this industry as an economic driver.

- Development of direct connections to the LaGrange area will promote attraction of parts suppliers/manufacturers to support Kia plant.
- Connections to the proposed inland port in Cordele.
- Additional base expansions (Fort Benning, Fort Stewart, Robins AFB).

The Connect Central Georgia Study will consider these opportunities in the assessment of transportation needs and development of recommendations. Technical analyses will be performed to determine future transportation demand and, in turn, the appropriate improvements, understanding current funding constraints. Existing and planned projects will be considered along with recommended improvements as a comprehensive strategy to improving mobility and connectivity through the study area is developed.

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**For more information, visit the project website at:
www.dot.ga.gov/connectcentralgeorgia**