

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Project: Albany Multimodal Transportation Center

Applicant: Georgia Department of Transportation; City of Albany, Georgia

Project Location: Albany, Dougherty County, Georgia

I. INTRODUCTION

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has determined, in accordance with 23 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) Section 771.121, that the Albany Multimodal Transportation Center (herein referred to as “the Project”), will result in no significant impact on the environment. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and the City of Albany, Georgia (City) propose to construct the Project in part using grant funding through FTA.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on the Project’s Environmental Assessment, dated May 22, 2018 (the EA), and incorporated by reference. The EA was prepared in compliance with the *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* as amended (NEPA) (42 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 4321 et. seq.) and FTA’s implementing regulations (23 CFR Part 771). The EA was also prepared in accordance with Section 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, as amended; Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations”; Section 4(f) of the *U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966*, as amended (49 U.S.C. § 303 and 23 U.S.C. § 138), its implementing regulations (23 CFR Part 774); and other applicable federal statutes, rules and regulations and documented therein.

The EA and these other documents have been independently evaluated by the FTA and have been determined to accurately discuss the project purpose, need, environmental issues, impacts of the proposed project, and appropriate mitigation measures. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The City of Albany and GDOT propose to construct the new Albany Multimodal Transportation Center in downtown Albany. The site is currently comprised of four parcels and a public alley that would be incorporated into the proposed transportation center. The largest site is privately owned and houses the intercity bus terminal and the interim Albany Transit System (ATS) transit station, along with paved drives and parking lots. The remaining parcels include single story masonry buildings, parking lots, driveways, grassed areas, and a public alley.

During the late 1990s, the ATS transfer center was on Pine Street in the downtown area; in 2000 it was relocated to the Albany Civic Center on West Oglethorpe Boulevard, east of the current site. In Summer 2001 the transfer center was relocated to its current location as a temporary location until the City could determine a permanent site.

The Project will make permanent the existing ATS bus transfer location. The transportation center will include a one-story, approximately 10,330 square foot building in the northeastern corner of the site. The building will serve the day-to-day ATS operational needs, including ticketing and waiting areas where the main bus transfer operations would occur. Additionally, it will provide the daily operational needs of intercity bus service. More specific uses and square footages allotted for each area will be determined during the building plan development process.

The site will contain two bus bays for intercity bus operations, a covered pedestrian island and bus bays for 12 buses oriented north-south between West Oglethorpe Boulevard and West Highland Avenue. Buses will enter/exit via West Oglethorpe Boulevard and West Highland Avenue. A drive/parking area accessed from South Jackson Street will serve employee and center visitor parking, curbside drop-off and pick-up, taxi service, and off-street loading and service vehicles. Approximately 25 parking spaces will be provided on the site for center-related parking. In addition, up to 17 spaces will be provided for public parking. On-street parking will remain along South Jackson Street and West Highland Avenue.

The proposed site will be developed to promote safe and efficient modal operations and circulation with a goal of minimizing the opportunities for conflicts between non-motorized and motorized modes of transportation. This includes striping, signage and crosswalks. Additional landscape and streetscape features are proposed to enhance safety and aesthetics.

The public alley between West Oglethorpe and West Highland Avenue will be closed at South Jackson Street; however, it would remain open west of the project site to Jefferson Street to permit access to neighboring parcels.

A vicinity map showing the location of the proposed transportation center is shown in Attachment A.

III. PURPOSE AND NEED

ATS currently leases space for its central transfer facility within the privately-owned building at the Albany Transportation Center (300 West Oglethorpe Boulevard), and shares the exterior operational and parking areas with intercity bus service. The Project is needed to provide a permanent transfer station site for ATS riders, improve transfer station operational safety and efficiency, and reduce transit system operational costs. In addition, city officials and the public have indicated a need for providing economic development and community gathering opportunities in the downtown area. The development of a new, multi-use, permanent and sustainable facility is anticipated to promote consistency between other transportation improvements and the planned growth of the community to act as a catalyst for economic development. The inherent nature of a transit center may also lend itself to a community gathering place and is expressed as a need from the public.

The purpose of the Project is to develop a fully accessible and non-discriminatory multimodal transportation center that can improve the operational capacity, efficiency, and safety of the transit services provided by the ATS and private transportation services. The proposed transit

center will improve serviceability and promote and enhance multi-modal transportation opportunities. This will be accomplished by better accommodating and coordinating existing transit operations and services on the current site, while providing the necessary site and building components to accommodate future bus service expansion and other modes. The consolidation and accessibility of the transit and transit-related services to a centrally located site within the City will increase capacity, community connectivity, and efficiency for a diverse range of customers, modal operations and services.

IV. PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The EA evaluated the No-Build Alternative and the Build Alternative. Based on the environmental review and public input, FTA has selected the Build Alternative as the Selected Alternative for the Project.

Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative – referred to in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) as “the Project” - consists of the construction of a new transportation center for the ATS on the half block bounded by US Routes 19/82 Business (State Routes (SR) 3 / 520, West Oglethorpe Boulevard) to the north, South Jackson Street to the east, and West Highland Avenue to the south. The site contains approximately 3.0 acres.

The Project site will allow the construction of a multimodal transportation center that will meet the stated purpose of the project. The site has sufficient area to allow for the construction of a new transportation center with all the elements necessary to accomplish the purpose, to include a 10,330-square foot building that will house and support the day-to-day ATS operational needs, including ticketing and waiting areas where the main bus transfer operations will occur. Additionally, it will accommodate other potential uses, such as intercity bus, rural transit, taxis, private auto services, and typical transit-oriented and transit-related commercial uses, as well as small public computer lab.

No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative has been considered but was ruled out because it fails to meet the purpose and need of the project.

V. PUBLIC OUTREACH AND AGENCY COORDINATION

Circulation of the EA and Public Comment Period

Notice of availability for the EA was published in the *Albany Herald*, a newspaper serving southwest Georgia, on May 29, 2018. The EA was available for review in the following locations: 1) City of Albany Planning and Development Services Department; 2) Dougherty County Public Library; 3) Tallulah Massey Library; 4) Northside Library; 5) Lee County Public Library Branches; and 6) online at <http://dartsmo.org/transportation-studies/> and on the ATS website at <http://www.albanyga.gov/about-us/city-departments/albany-transit-system/albany-transportation-center-project>. Initially, the notice stated that comments were due no later than June 29, 2018. Copies of the notices are included in Attachment B.

On June 28, 2018, ATS held two public meetings to discuss proposed route modifications, new transit initiatives, and the EA for the proposed Albany Transportation Center (see Attachment B

for a copy of the agenda) The meetings were held in the Albany Transportation Center at 300 West Oglethorpe Avenue from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. ATS extended the comment period until July 9, 2018, to allow additional opportunity for the public to provide comments.

Approximately 60 people attended the 7:30 a.m. meeting on June 28, while approximately 50 people attended the 4:00 p.m. meeting. Most of the public comments at the meetings pertained to bus route modifications and service. Members of the public made only a few comments about the Project, primarily asking that the City not wait another 10-15 years to build the center. One person asked whether a cost-benefit had been completed to justify the new and expanded facility. Two people completed and submitted comment cards during the meetings. Copies of these comments are in Attachment B.

During the 40-day public comment period, ATS two letters (see Attachment B) from the same individual. One letter, which was dated June 22 but appears to have been written the day of the June 28 public meetings questioned whether ATS should have conducted customer surveys to determine support for the project, and whether public transit in Albany is worth the investment. In a second letter, also dated June 22 but apparently written after the June 28 public meetings, the individual continued to question the economic justification for the Project, the goal of the Project to support development in the Albany central business district, the lack of mention of a goal to increase ridership, and the justification for the proposed increase in parking.

All comments have been thoroughly considered but none raises any issue that was not adequately dealt with in the EA or otherwise were not within the scope of the EA; accordingly, no further response is necessary.

Previous Public and Agency Outreach

Local agencies and interested parties were consulted as part of the Project's public outreach and agency coordination. ATS held two forums in 2013 to solicit comments on the site selection process. Documentation for these meetings is included in the EA. As part of the ongoing project coordination with the local transit providers, who are likely to use the facility, GDOT and the City of Albany have coordinated with Greyhound Bus Lines, which provides regional bus service to and from Albany, and the Destiny Transportation Group, which provides rural transit service for Dougherty County.

At the beginning of the preparation of the EA in 2014, the City of Albany sent letters to 22 local, state, and federal officials and agency representatives to inform them that ATS was investigating the environmental impacts of a multimodal transportation center on the site at 300 West Oglethorpe Boulevard, and requesting assistance in identifying known project area conditions of special concern. One response was received: in a letter dated June 25, 2014, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR) provided information on known occurrences of natural communities, plants, and animal of highest priority conservation status near the project site.

Section 106 Coordination

Because of the presence of National Register of Historic Places-eligible (NRHP-eligible) resources in the project areas, FTA coordinated with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office (Georgia SHPO) throughout the development of the EA. In a letter dated April 10, 2017, the Georgia SHPO concurred with the finding that Archaeological Site 9DU286 was eligible for the NRHP. In a letter dated August 17, 2017, the Georgia SHPO concurred with FTA's findings of eligibility for resources in the NRHP-eligible Albany Freedom Historic District. In a letter

dated April 13, 2018, the Georgia SHPO conditionally concurred with the determination of No Adverse Effects for the Albany Freedom Historic District and concurred with the Adverse Effect determination for Archaeological Site 9DU286.

VI. TRANSPORTATION CONFORMITY

The proposed project is in Dougherty County. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that Dougherty County, Georgia is in attainment for the criteria pollutants specified by the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Because the proposed project area is in an attainment area for transportation-related air pollutants, the proposed project complies with both Georgia's state implementation plan for attaining and maintaining the NAAQS, and complies with the conformity requirements of the *Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990*.

VII. FINDINGS

Land Use and Zoning

The Project will not have adverse impacts on land use or zoning.

The Project is consistent with existing local and regional land use, zoning, capital improvement/ infrastructure and economic development plans applicable to the project area. The Project conforms to the *Albany Downtown Riverfront Master Plan* and the *Redevelopment Plan for the Albany Riverfront and the Gateway Tax Allocation District* which support mixed use development and transit-oriented development in the city's central business district. These plans also suggest that transportation center facilities would provide public and community benefits such as improving access to existing amenities, improving regional mobility, and fostering economic development.

Parking, Traffic and Transit Service

The Project will not result in significant adverse impacts to transit service, traffic conditions, parking, or pedestrian safety in the study area. In contrast, the Project will contribute to improved traffic conditions, parking, and pedestrian safety.

Parking

The Project eliminates about 12 on-street parking spaces but provides replacement parking through new parking facilities as part of the proposed facility. The replacement parking is estimated at 56 spaces, which will increase the amount currently available.

Traffic

A detailed traffic analysis was not prepared since traffic volumes with the Project were not projected to exceed the threshold 600 vehicles per lane per hour for principal arterial roads (such as West Oglethorpe Boulevard) and 500 vehicles per lane per hour for minor arterial or collector roads (such as South Jackson Street and West Highland Drive).

Transit Service

Transit service will improve with the Project, which allows the transfer station to remain at its current location, and requires only minor adjustments to the current schedules and routes. In addition, the new transportation center will provide improved amenities and safety for ATS patrons.

Cultural Resources

In compliance with Section 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act* of 1966 and in accordance with the Criteria of Adverse Effect described in 36 CFR Section 800.5, FTA determined that the Project would have No Adverse Effect on the NRHP-eligible Albany Freedom District, provided certain conditions are met. These conditions are that the agreement document stipulates Georgia SHPO's review of new construction, demolition, and rehabilitation plans, as noted in the Assessment of Effects report and described herein under Mitigation Commitments.

Treatment measures were developed based on input from the Section 106 consulting parties to minimize and mitigate adverse effects to the northern wall of the Ritz Theater, which is a contributing resource to the Albany Freedom Historic District. These treatment measures and stipulations are incorporated into the Memorandum of Agreement (MOU), executed XX XX, 2018, between FTA, GDOT, Georgia SHPO, and the City of Albany (see Attachment C).

FTA also determined that the Project will have an Adverse Effect to Archaeological Site 9DU286, although the site is important chiefly for what can be learned from data recovery and has minimal value for preservation in place. Thus, the Adverse Effect will be mitigated through data recovery for the site. The MOA (Attachment C) stipulates the data recovery plan reporting requirements for mitigation of the adverse effects to the site.

Based on the cultural resources analysis included in the EA as well as the consultation with the Georgia SHPO and the other Section 106 consulting parties, FTA finds, in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, that the Section 106 coordination and consultation requirements for the Project have been fulfilled.

Water Quality

The Project will not have an adverse effect on water quality based on the implementation of stormwater mitigation measures.

Floodplains

The Project will not result in any adverse effects to the 100-year floodplain for the Flint River.

Water Resources

The Project will not affect wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or Waters of the U.S.

Air Quality

The Project is in an attainment area for transportation-related air pollutants; therefore, it complies with both Georgia's state implementation plan for attaining and maintaining the NAAQS, and with the conformity requirements of the *Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990*.

Noise

Project-generated noise levels are expected to mildly exceed FTA's "moderate" noise impact criteria limit by one to three decibels for several residential receptors south and southwest of the project site. However, project noise is not expected to exceed FTA's "severe" noise impact criteria limit at any receptor location. Consequently, since this area is already a developed neighborhood with exposure to similar bus activity noise, and whereas ATS buses are not expected to operate throughout the night, noise mitigation measures are not recommended for this project.

Environmental Justice

The Project is on the existing site of the existing bus transfer station. The site is in an urban area with a high minority population, and the primary economic indicators of median household income and poverty levels suggest a modest local economy. An Environmental Justice (EJ) analysis has been completed for the Project and is included in the EA.

Businesses near the existing transit site facility will not be adversely affected by the facility's expansion and construction of the proposed project at the proposed site. The Project will benefit the minority and low-income populations, as well as all members of the local and regional populations who wish to use public transportation. The new facility will be a modern, attractive structure and may serve to generate additional revitalization of the area in the future, which would benefit the community and provide economic opportunity for local businesses.

Implementation of the Project will not result in the displacement of any minority or low-income residents or businesses and would include direct mobility benefits that would be equitably shared across the community by various demographic groups. Therefore, disproportionately high and adverse impacts to minority and low-income communities will not result from project implementation.

Natural Resources

The Project is in a heavily urbanized area consisting primarily of developed land. While there are several Federal and State protected species that are known to, or potentially, occur within a three-mile radius of the project, no protected species were identified during field surveys. In addition, no potentially suitable habitat for the protected species exists within the project area. The closest location for designated critical habitat is the Flint River, approximately 2,000 feet east of the project area. In their June 25, 2014 correspondence, GDNR Wildlife Resources Division indicated that they have no records of high priority species or habitats within the project area. Additionally, the Division stated that due to the project's urban setting and the distance from the Flint River, the project is not likely to negatively impact rare species or habitats.

Hazardous Materials

Based on the findings of the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment prepared for the Project (September 2013), no recognized environmental conditions are associated with the Project. The investigations completed to date are sufficient to characterize, remediate, and subsequently confirm the effectiveness of past removal of the former underground storage tank associated with the bus terminal at the north area of the project site. In recognition of the likely age of the current commercial buildings, it is possible that asbestos-containing materials and lead-based paint coated surfaces are associated with those buildings. A pre-demolition asbestos survey will

be performed by a duly licensed United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) asbestos inspector prior to initiation of any demolition activities.

VIII. SECTION 4(F) DETERMINATION

Section 4(f) of the *Department of Transportation Act of 1969* (49 U.S.C. § 303) declares a national policy that states that the Secretary of Transportation may not approve transportation projects that use publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or any significant historic site unless a determination is made that there is no prudent or feasible alternative to using that land and that all possible planning has been done to minimize harm, or the use; including mitigation, will have a *de minimis* impact on the property. The requirements for treatment of these resources are codified in federal law in 49 U.S.C. § 303 and 23 U.S.C. § 138, and implemented through 23 CFR Part 774.

The investigation of the Selected Alternative has determined that:

- The Project will not take permanently incorporate land from, have an adverse temporary impact to, or cause a constructive use of any publicly owned park, recreation area, or wildlife or waterfowl refuge.
- The Project will acquire property within the NRHP-eligible Albany Freedom Historic District but will not have an adverse effect on the district or any contributing resource of the district. A non-historic addition to the contributing Ritz Theater will be removed and portions of the theater's exterior wall will be rehabilitated per the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (36 CFR Part 67) and applicable guidelines. FTA has determined that the project will have No Adverse Effect to the historic district, and the Georgia SHPO has concurred with this finding in a letter dated April 13, 2018 (contained in the EA's Attachment B). The Project will not permanently incorporate property from a contributing resource within the historic district nor will it cause an adverse temporary occupancy of the historic district. Additionally, the Selected Alternative will not be a constructive use of the historic district. Thus, there is no Section 4(f) use of the historic district.
- The Project will take property from within NRHP-eligible Archaeological Site 9DU238, but as stated in Section VII, FTA has been determined that this site is important chiefly for what can be learned from data recovery and has minimal value for preservation in place. The Georgia SHPO has concurred with this finding in a letter dated April 13, 2018 (contained in the EA's Attachment C). Thus, there is no Section 4(f) use of Site 9DU238.

In summary, there will be a *de minimis* impact to the Albany Freedom Historic District per Section 4(f) of the *U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966*. The Georgia SHPO, as the official with jurisdiction over historic properties, concurred with this determination when they signed the Memorandum of Agreement executed on December 10, 2018.

IX. MITIGATION MEASURES

GDOT and the City will implement the mitigation measures described in the EA and in this FONSI. The FTA will require in any grant for the Project that it be built in a manner consistent with that described in the EA and that all mitigation to which the City and GDOT are committed be implemented in accordance with the EA and this FONSI. FTA will require the City and GDOT to periodically submit written reports on its progress in implementing the mitigation

commitments. FTA will monitor the progress through quarterly reviews of the Project's progress. The following mitigation measures will be implemented:

Cultural Resources (Historic Architecture and Archaeology)

As a part of the Section 106 consultation with Georgia SHPO and the consulting parties, FTA, GDOT, Georgia SHPO, and the City have executed an MOA (in Attachment C) that includes measures to minimize harm to the contributing Ritz Theater in the NRHP-eligible Albany Freedom Historic District and to Archaeological Site 9DU286. The following commitments are agreed upon therein.

I. PLAN REVIEW

A. Ritz Theater

- i. GDOT will submit 75% complete demolition and rehabilitation plans and specifications to SHPO for review and comment, in advance of any construction activities, to ensure the demolition and rehabilitation is being done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* (Secretary's Standards).
- ii. If substantial revisions are necessary, GDOT will submit revised 90% complete demolition and rehabilitation plans and specifications to SHPO for review and comment, in advance of any construction activities, to ensure the demolition and rehabilitation is in accordance with the Secretary's *Standards*.
- iii. GDOT will carry out demolition and rehabilitation in accordance with SHPO-approved plans and specifications.
- iv. FTA and GDOT will coordinate with SHPO if site visits are found to be necessary.

B. Albany Multimodal Transportation Center

- i. GDOT will submit 75% complete new construction plans and specifications to SHPO for review and comment, in advance of any construction activities, to ensure the new construction is compatible with the historic properties in the viewshed.
- ii. If substantial revisions are necessary, GDOT will submit revised 90% complete new construction plans and specifications to SHPO for review and comment, in advance of any construction activities, to ensure the new construction is compatible with the historic properties in the viewshed.
- iii. GDOT will carry out new construction in accordance with SHPO-approved plans and specifications.

II. DATA RECOVERY

A. Archaeological Site 9DU286

- iv. FTA will submit a draft data recovery plan for archaeological site 9DU286 to SHPO for review and comment. The data recovery will focus on residential and

industrial/workplace activities that occurred at archaeological site 9DU286, with a concentration on Albany's African American community during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fieldwork will focus on the most productive areas and would involve machine-removal of topsoil and overburden with a backhoe or grade-all to expose the tops of cultural features; then hand clearing to identify and delineate cultural features or artifact deposits; mapping; and excavation, as outlined in the approved data recovery plan.

- v. The City of Albany will provide an archaeological monitor during demolition activities.
- vi. The results of the data recovery and field monitoring will be presented in draft technical reports submitted to FTA, GDOT, SHPO, and consulting parties for review and comment.
- vii. Final data recovery and field monitoring reports will be submitted to SHPO.
- viii. Results will be presented for public outreach pursuant to the approved Data Recovery Plan and subject to FTA, GDOT, SHPO, City of Albany, and consulting parties review.

Water Quality

As part of the ongoing project design plan development, the water quality control measures described below will be evaluated and incorporated into the Project plans where feasible to ensure that stormwater runoff is treated on-site to the greatest extent possible. Given the urban nature of the Project site, the primary components that will be incorporated into the site design are 1) the reduction of impervious surfaces, 2) the promotion of stormwater runoff diffusion, and 3) the encouragement of effective stormwater management and treatment.

Reduction in pervious areas is applicable to both the site and to the actual building. Within the site, alternative paving materials including permeable pavements in the forms of pervious concrete, and porous asphalt will be used where feasible. Replacement of non-essential hardscape areas with grassed or low maintenance vegetated areas supplemented with high durability ground cover plantings will be used where possible, to diffuse surface runoff as well as allow for infiltration of stormwater.

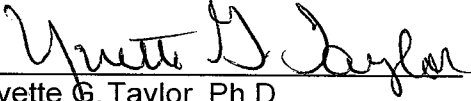
For the buildings, stormwater runoff will be minimized through gutter collection systems. The typical gutter system along the roof edge line is a collection system which is intended to concentrate flows to the gutter downspouts. By eliminating the gutter system, rooftop run-off can be diffused along the entire building perimeter as opposed to concentrated at the gutter downspouts. This approach will also be implemented in the design of the parking area where notches or openings in the curb lines outletting to grass swales will be provided to diffuse sheet flow surface run-off and increase on-site infiltration of stormwater runoff.

Asbestos-containing Material

A pre-demolition asbestos survey will be performed by a duly licensed USEPA asbestos inspector prior to initiation of any demolition activities.

X. FTA DETERMINATION

Based on the Environmental Assessment (May 2018) and its associated supporting documents, FTA finds pursuant to 23 CFR 771.121 that there are no significant impacts on the environment associated with the development and operation of the Albany Multimodal Transportation Center.



Yvette G. Taylor, Ph.D.
Administrator, Region IV
Federal Transit
Administration

12-9-18

Date

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Location Map

Attachment B – Public Involvement and Comments on the EA

Attachment C-Memorandum of Agreement with the Federal Transit Administration, Georgia Historic Preservation Office, Georgia Department of Transportation, and City of Albany

