

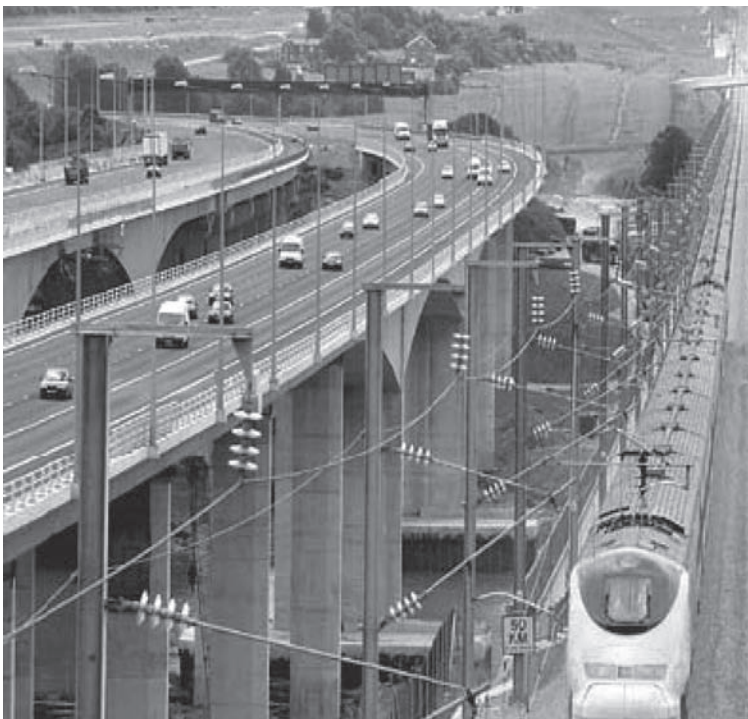


# Scoping Meeting

Tier I Environmental Impact Statement  
Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Study

## WORKBOOK

January 21, 2008



### Background

The concept of High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) service between Atlanta, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee has been a subject of study for approximately ten years. Initially, the Georgia Department of Transportation studied this corridor as part of a 1997 Intercity Rail Plan. The Atlanta to Chattanooga Corridor was first considered for high-speed rail service as part of the federal Maglev Deployment Program funded by the Federal Railroad Administration to demonstrate Maglev technology in the United States. Georgia was among several states that participated in the program. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), in association with GDOT and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), analyzed the 110-mile Atlanta to Chattanooga corridor over a four-year period from 1999 to 2003, exploring mobility options and the opportunity for high-speed passenger service. TDOT prepared a statewide rail plan in 2003, which recommended high-speed rail connectivity with neighboring states

### Introduction

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is preparing a Tier I Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) corridor, with the assistance of the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are the federal co-lead agencies. The FRA and FHWA are operating administrations within the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT). The study, to be completed by 2009, involves the planning and environmental analysis of a potential High Speed Ground Transportation system in the 110-mile corridor between Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (HJIA) in Atlanta, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

### On The Inside...

Project Description .....	2
Project Purpose & Need.....	3
Long Distance Ground Transportation Technologies ..	4
Existing Conditions.....	5
Potential Alignments.....	6
Project Schedule .....	9

# Project Description

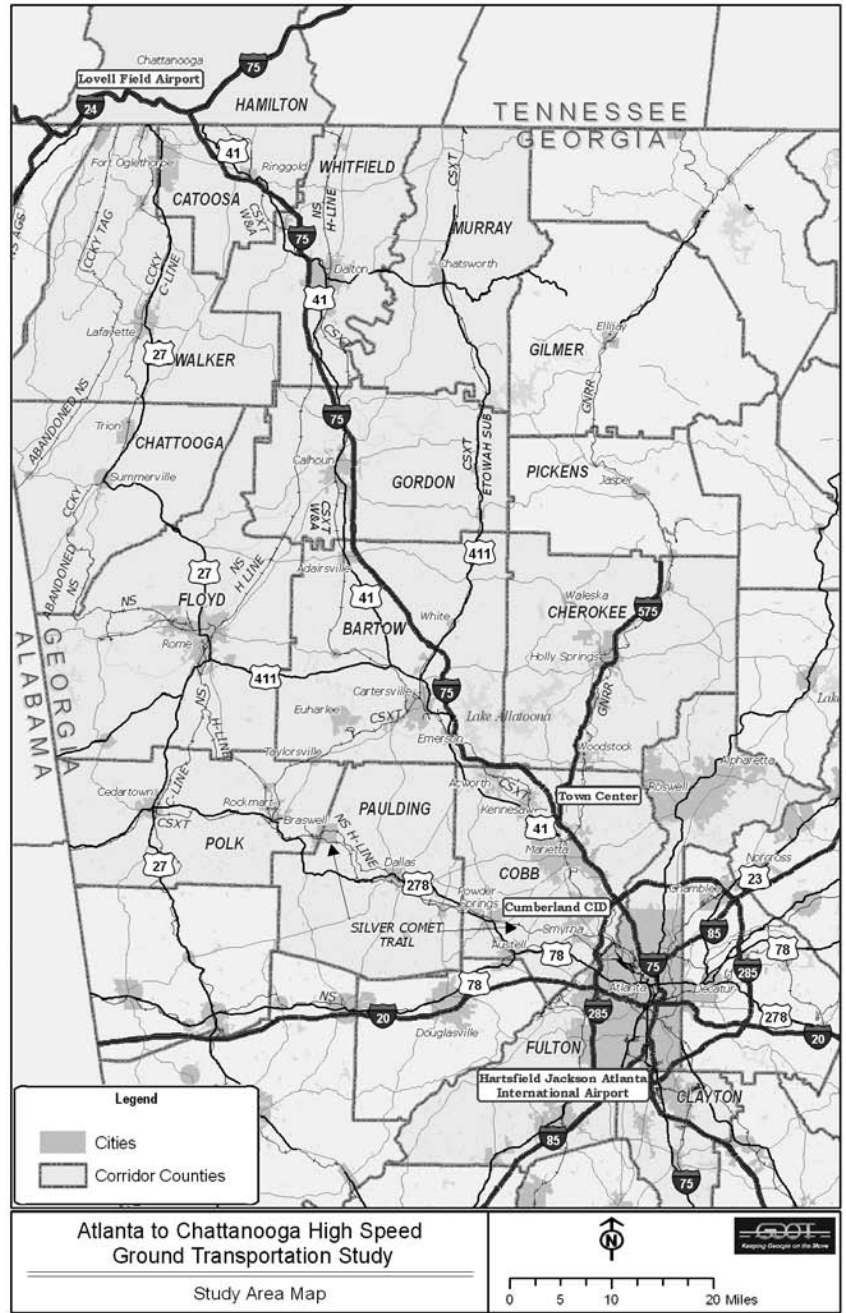
The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that the potential environmental impacts of an action be assessed for every federal action that could “significantly affect the quality of the human environment.” The law applies to any project where there is major federal involvement, including federal financial assistance, the issuance of a permit, or a requirement for federal approval. An environmental impact statement is required when it is apparent from the beginning of the project, or through subsequent analysis, that the proposed project is likely to have a significant impact on the human environment.

The Tier I Environmental Impact Statement for the Atlanta-Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation corridor will:

- Address appropriate environmental and related planning and impact analyses of the High Speed Ground Transportation alternatives to be identified in the study, including maglev and steel wheel technology, in compliance with applicable requirements of both state and federal law, including, but not limited to the National Environmental Policy Act.
- Analyze reasonable location and technology alternatives, estimate potential ridership, identify general station locations, and identify possible implementation phasing.
- Analyze potential feasibility to include projected ridership revenue, operations and maintenance costs, capital costs and economic impact.

Preparation of this Tier I Environmental Impact Statement is designed to ensure that all viable alternatives for the project are evaluated, including a No-Build Alternative; that all substantial transportation, social, economic, and environmental impacts are assessed; and that public involvement and comments are solicited to assist the decision-making process. The evaluation of alternatives helps to ensure that the environmental impacts, benefits, costs, and trade-offs among alternatives are in compliance with federal and state requirements.

The Tier I Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared at a conceptual level of detail appropriate for a programmatic analysis and will provide the FRA, FHWA and GDOT with sufficient



Corridor Study Map

information to select the High Speed Ground Transportation technology, general corridor location, general station locations, and potential identification of an initial operating segment. The study is expected to be completed at the end of 2009.

## Project Purpose and Need

The growth in both population and employment in the Atlanta to Chattanooga corridor is projected to continue, resulting in increased travel demand for both goods and people. The transportation infrastructure that will serve this demand, including highways, transit and aviation, are all projected to be at or above capacity, despite proposed improvement programmed to expand these facilities.

The purpose of the Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation system is to *enhance intercity passenger mobility in northwest Georgia and part of Tennessee by expanding passenger transportation capacity, increasing mobility and providing an alternative to highway and air travel in a manner that is safe, reliable, and cost-effective while avoiding, minimizing and/or mitigating impacts on neighborhoods and the environment.*

In addition, Atlanta to Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation system is intended to address the following objectives:

- The project addresses concerns of increasing vehicular congestion on the I-75 and parallel highway facilities within and between Atlanta and Chattanooga.
- The project supports other modes of transportation, especially modes such as transit.
- The project provides rapid, convenient and reliable transportation, which extends the existing highway and aviation infrastructure beyond current expected usefulness.
- The project assists in improving regional air quality.
- The project promotes regional economic development and joint development opportunities at station areas.
- The project addresses Federal and congressional transportation initiatives.

Transportation demand and travel growth, as prompted by social changes, population growth and economic development, is outpacing existing and planned roadway capacity. Currently, the state and interstate highway system within the corridor is operating at or near capacity, especially within and adjacent to the major metropolitan areas of Atlanta, Rome, Dalton and Chattanooga. Although capacity improvements to the state and interstate system along the corridor are either currently underway or planned for the near future, they are considered interim, that is, they will not address all of the future capacity or mobility needs. Although not



currently funded or programmed, ultimate capacity improvements are needed to accommodate future travel demand. This need is further emphasized by increased traffic volumes, congestion, and accident rates in the study corridor. Social and economic demands will continue to call for provision of alternative transportation choices for those individuals who cannot or choose not to drive, as well as those travelers looking for alternatives to congested highways.

The project addresses the following needs in the corridor.

- Existing and future transportation demand and travel growth
- Provision of total throughput versus just highway capacity
- Enhancement of airport access
- Maintenance or improvement of regional air quality
- Safety deficiencies in corridor
- Promotion of economic development
- Reduction of energy consumption
- Enhancement of intermodal connections and relationships
- Social demands of various population groups
- Support of comprehensive land use planning and smart growth initiatives
- Provision of a critical link in a future Southeast US Region High Speed Ground Transportation System



## **MAGNETIC LEVITATION (MAGLEV)**

- Potential Speeds over 300 mph
- Average Operating Speed 185 mph
- Station Spacing 30+ miles
- Grade Separated Right-of-Way
- Electric Power to Magnets from Track
- Magnetic Force Lifts and Propels on Guideway



## **VERY HIGH SPEED RAIL (VHS)**

- Potential Speeds near 220 mph
- Average Operating Speed 155 mph
- Station Spacing 30+ miles
- Grade Separated Right-of-Way
- Electric Power from Overhead Wires to Vehicle
- Steel Wheel on Steel Rail



## **INTERCITY RAIL (AMTRAK)**

- Potential Speeds 79 to 110 mph
- Average Operating Speed 69 mph
- Station Spacing 30+ miles
- Shared Right-of-Way with Freight Rail Traffic
- Diesel Powered Locomotive
- Steel Wheel on Steel Rail



## **COMMUTER RAIL**

- Potential Speeds 79 to 110 mph
- Average Operating Speed 59 mph
- Station Spacing 7 to 10 miles
- Shared Right-of-Way with Freight Rail Traffic
- Diesel Powered Locomotive
- Steel Wheel on Steel Rail

## Existing Conditions

The study corridor runs from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in the Atlanta metropolitan area, to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and is approximately 110 miles in length. The study area consists of hilly topography dissected by numerous rivers and streams. This area is heavily urbanized, primarily within and around the City of Atlanta and the City of Chattanooga, but also includes suburban and rural areas within the corridor. The study area is contained wholly or in part in the following counties: Hamilton County, Tennessee; and Fulton, Cobb, Cherokee, Floyd, Bartow, Murray, Whitfield, Gordon, Chattooga, Paulding, Polk, Catoosa, Douglas, Clayton and Walker Counties, Georgia.

**Population and Income.** According to data from the U.S. Census, the population in the study corridor has grown from 2,608,619 in 1990 to 3,752,037 in 2006, which is a 43.83% increase over the 16-year period. The project corridor average income of \$41,547 falls in-between the Georgia (\$42,433) and Tennessee (\$36,360) average income. The percentage of households living below the poverty level in the project corridor is 10.73%, which is slightly above Georgia at 9.90% and Tennessee at 10.30%.

**Visitors.** The Atlanta and Chattanooga areas combined have over 23 million visitors to their cities each year. According to the Atlanta Convention and Visitor's Bureau, 20 million visitors come to the Atlanta area annually. The Chattanooga area draws 3.3 million visitors each year.

**Major Highway Network.** Three major highways connect the metropolitan Atlanta area with the northwest Georgia and Chattanooga metropolitan areas. These three routes are Interstate 75, US 41 and US 27. Interstate 75 is one of the most heavily traveled interstates in Georgia as well as in the entire nation. Traffic volumes north of Atlanta on I-75 for 2005 ranged from the low to mid 100,000s in Bartow County to mid 80,000s near the Tennessee border. According to the Georgia Interstate System Plan, completed in 2004, most of I-75 north of Atlanta is projected to exceed available capacity. By 2035, volumes on I-75 will continue to exceed capacity, even assuming that the additional lanes have been implemented.

Portions of US 41 are four lanes from Atlanta to Chattanooga, with two lanes in more rural sections. North of Atlanta, the daily traffic volumes in 2005 ranged from a low of 5,000 to a high of 40,000. While not as heavily traveled as I-75, US 41 is also expected to equal or exceed capacity within the next 20 years, despite several proposed multi-lane improvements. Traffic volumes along the US 27 corridor range from a low of approximately 5,000 AADT to a high of around 40,000 AADT in Rome in 2005. The future (2025) Level of Service (LOS) for the corridor is approaching or exceeding capacity.

Presently, there are 83 roadway improvements or expansions planned or currently in progress along the 110-mile corridor. Many of these improvements are along I-75. However, even with these improvements, many of these facilities are projected to operate at or above capacity. In addition, analysis of accident data on I-75 shows a trend for increasing numbers of accidents and injuries over time as this facility grows more congested.

**Aviation.** HJIAA bears the distinction of being the world's busiest passenger airport with five runways, 29,550 public parking spaces, 76.3 million domestic passengers and eight million international passengers in 2006. Lovell Field currently serves ten major airports via six different airlines. Atlanta's HJIAA is Lovell Field's number one connecting hub, accounting for 28% of Chattanooga's local outbound travel. A total of 503,468 passengers enplaned and deplaned in Chattanooga in 2006. Lovell Field has a current parking capacity of 1,226.

**Railroads.** There are two main railroad lines (W&A, and NS "H" Line) connecting Atlanta and Chattanooga. A third line (NS C-Line) connects Rome and Chattanooga and the northern portion of a fourth line (TAG Line) originally connected Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Gadsden, Alabama.

**Transit.** The major transit systems operating along or near the corridor include, but are not limited to, MARTA, CCT, GRTA, C-Tran, RTD, and CARTA. MARTA operates 464 buses, 812 rail cars and 98 demand response vehicles for 142,385,899 trips annually. CCT operates 54 buses and 12 demand response vehicles offering an estimated 3,854,413 annual trips to its riders. GRTA operates 58 buses, 55 vanpools and four demand response vehicles offering 2,231,859 trips for its passengers annually. C-Tran operates 24 buses and five routes within the limits of Clayton County, Georgia. RTD operates 24 buses, and four demand response vehicles providing 830,502 annual trips to its riders. CARTA operates 49 buses, 12 demand response vehicles, and two sky-rail trains providing 2,529,157 annual trips to its passengers. In addition to these systems, Greyhound operates bus service between Atlanta and Chattanooga, with eight daily departures from Atlanta Monday through Saturday and six departures on Sundays.

**Air Quality.** The following counties and or cities located within the study corridor are considered non-attainment areas for air quality:

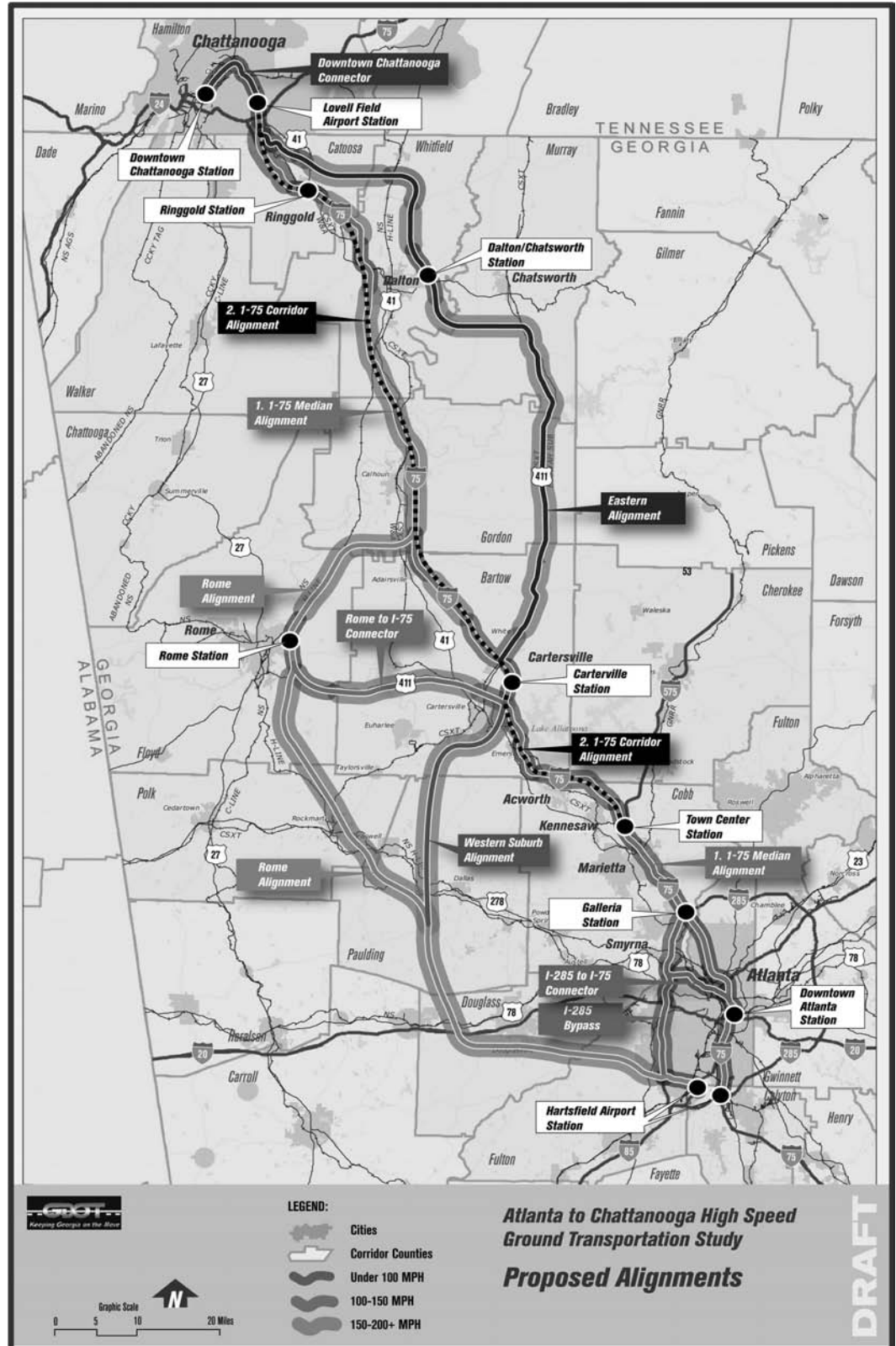
Clayton County • City of Atlanta • Fulton County • City of Rome •  
Cobb County • City of Chattanooga • Cherokee County • Bartow  
County • Floyd County • Catoosa County • Hamilton County

# Potential Alignments

The initial conceptual alignments that have been developed for the study begin at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in Atlanta and end in downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee, after stopping at Lovell Field Airport on the outskirts of Chattanooga. Several alignments have been developed along a variety of corridors to serve the purpose and need of the project. The alignments can either serve the various city centers along the I-75 corridor or pass through the more rural areas at potentially higher speed or a combination of each.

The potential corridors and the major reason behind their development along this approximately 125-mile long route are:

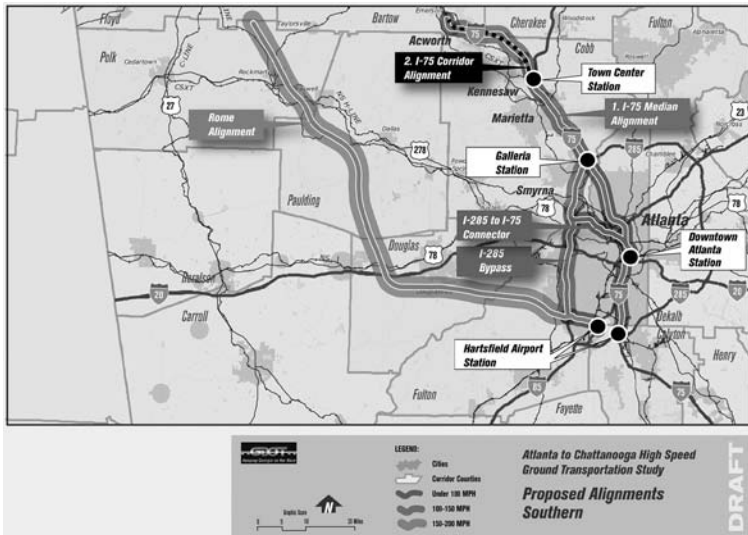
- **I-75 Median Alignment** - The shortest route in the highest developed corridor which stays within the median of I-75 for most of its length to minimize the right-of-way impact.
- **I-75 Corridor Alignment** - Leaves the median after the dense urban Atlanta area to obtain a potentially higher travel speed.
- **Rome Alignment** - Serves Rome with a potentially higher speed alignment, by-passing the densely developed I-75 corridor and activity centers in the southern section.
- **Eastern Alignment** - A potentially higher speed alignment in the northern half of the corridor, which utilizes an existing rail corridor.
- **Western Suburban Alignment** - A potentially higher-speed alignment in the southern half of the corridor.
- **I-285 By-Pass** - A potentially lower cost, higher speed alignment in the Atlanta urban area.
- **I-285 to I-75 Connector** - A lower cost, less impact alignment in the Atlanta urban area.
- **Rome to I-75 Connector** - Serves Rome from the I-75 Alignment.



# Potential Alignments *(continued)*

## Southern Corridor

This corridor extends from the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport to south of the Cobb/Cherokee and Polk/Floyd county lines.



Southern Corridor Map

**I-75 Median Alignment** was developed to serve the most densely developed corridor and has these significant features:

- Four stations; Hartsfield Airport (Southern Crescent Transportation Center), Downtown Atlanta (Five Points area), Galleria Station, and Town Center Station
- Aerial structure in the median of I-75 from the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport to one mile south of I-20
- Tunnel through downtown Atlanta with a deep underground station near Forsyth and Alabama Streets with the tunnel ending north of Bankhead highway
- Aerial structure in Howell Mill Road and back into the I-75 median
- Aerial Station in the median of I-75 near the Galleria with patron access from either side of the highway
- At-grade section in the median from north of I-575 junction to the Town Center Station with patron access from above and either side of the highway

**I-75 Corridor Alignment** is similar to the I-75 median alignment from the airport to approximately two miles north of the I-75 / I-285 junction where it weaves in and out of the median on aerial structure to obtain higher speeds.

- Aerial structure from Delk Road to Town Center Station

- Requires right-of-way outside of and adjacent to the I-75 corridor
- Aerial Station at Town Center spanning I-75

**I-285 By-Pass** starts out at the existing Hartsfield-Jackson Terminal and MARTA station and continues on Camp Creek Parkway to I-285.

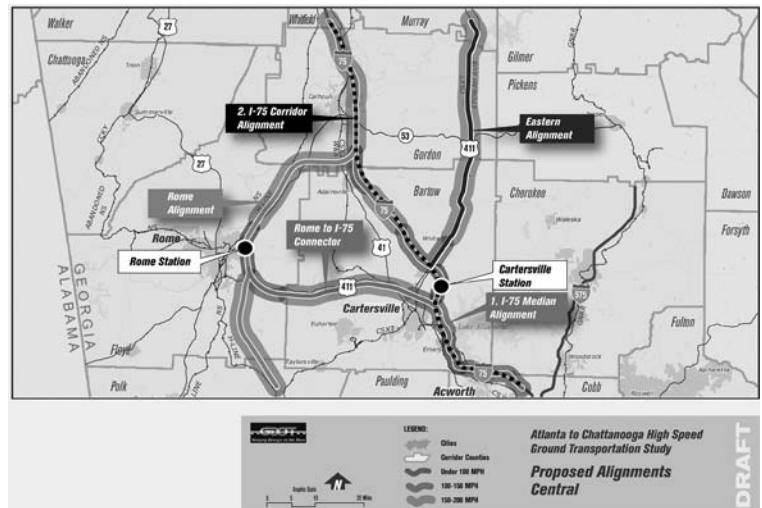
- At-grade along the west shoulder of I-285
- Grade-separated alignment with the local highway interchanges
- An Intermodal Station with MARTA near Martin Luther King Jr. Highway
- A Galleria Station on the west side of I-75

**I-285 to I-75 Connector** attempts to alleviate the aerial structure along Howell Mill Road with a mostly at-grade section along the railroad corridor to I-285 and back to I-75.

**Rome Alignment** provides a potentially higher speed route from the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport to I-75. The alignment by-passes downtown Atlanta and the highly developed I-75 corridor and activity centers north of Atlanta. The line follows Camp Creek Parkway to I-285 and utility corridors through the rural areas.

## Central Corridor

This corridor extends from the Southern Corridor to approximately Calhoun along the I-75 corridor.



Central Corridor Map

**I-75 Median Alignment** stays in the median of I-75 in an at-grade configuration. At some narrow sections, the highway

## Potential Alignments *(continued)*

would be shifted slightly to either side to create sufficient space in the median. It has one station in the median of I-75 near Cartersville.

**I-75 Corridor Alignment** weaves in and out of the highway corridor to obtain higher speeds.

- It crosses Lake Altoona with a high-speed curve passing through some residential areas
- It requires new right-of-way outside I-75
- It is a mix of at-grade, aerial structure and tunnel sections
- It has one station on the east side of I-75 near Cartersville

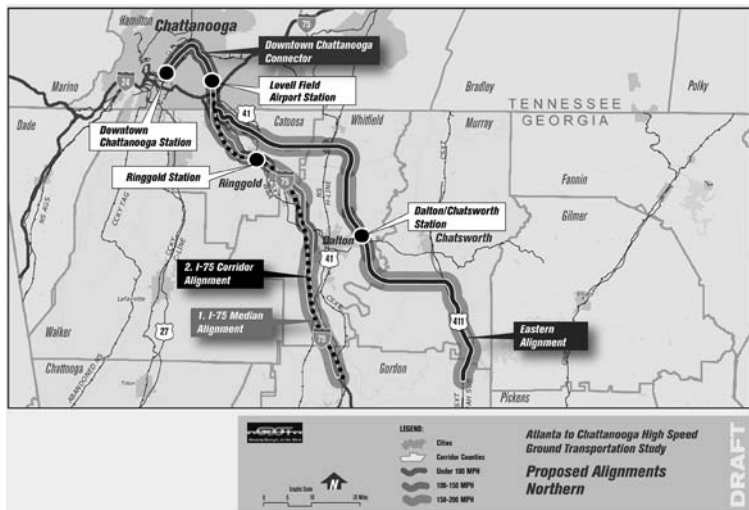
**Rome Alignment** passes through rural areas with a high-speed alignment and serves Rome with a station. It is at-grade and re-joins the I-75 alignment near Calhoun.

**Rome to I-75 Connector** provides a connection from the I-75 alignment to Rome. It is at-grade with short sections of aerial and tunnel sections.

**Eastern Alignment** departs from the I-75 corridor north of Cartersville and generally follows the CSX corridor with a higher speed alignment. The alignment is generally at-grade with short sections of aerial structure.

### Northern Corridor

This corridor extends from Calhoun to downtown Chattanooga.



### Northern Corridor Map

**I-75 Median Alignment** stays in the median of I-75 in an at-grade configuration.

- At some narrow sections, the highway is envisioned to be shifted slightly to either side to create sufficient space in the median.
- The alignment passes to the west of the I-75 corridor south of the Dalton area to avoid the developed area with a mix of aerial and at-grade configuration.
- Dalton has a Station in the median with access from either side.
- It diverts from the I-75 median south of the I-24 corridor passing through residential and commercial areas to the Lovell Field Airport Station along Airport Road.

I-75 Corridor Alignment weaves in and out of the highway corridor to obtain higher speeds.

- The alignment is typically on the side of the highway corridor in aerial structure with significant at grade sections and some tunnels.
- A Dalton Station is proposed on the east side of I-75.
- It diverts from the I-75 median south of the I-24 corridor passing through residential and commercial areas to the Lovell Field Airport Station along Airport Road.

**Eastern Alignment** continues in the CSX corridor in an at-grade configuration with some aerial structure sections.

- The alignment diverts from the CSX corridor south of Chatsworth through the rural areas.
- A Dalton-Chatsworth Station is proposed near Chatsworth Road.
- North of the Dalton-Chatsworth Station, the alignment is mostly at-grade with some significant tunnels and aerial structure sections.
- The alignment section ends at the Lovell Field Airport Station along Airport Road.

**Downtown Chattanooga Connector** continues from the Lovell Field Airport Station to downtown Chattanooga following an existing railroad corridor in an at-grade configuration. A station is proposed near the railroad corridor and downtown.

# Project Schedule

	2007												2008												2009									
	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O		
<b>PHASE I – PURPOSE &amp; NEED</b>																																		
Collect data																																		
Analyze existing conditions																																		
Conduct scoping activity & input																																		
<b>PHASE II – ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS</b>																																		
Identify conceptual alternatives																																		
Evaluate environmental & social impacts																																		
Evaluate economic & ridership impacts																																		
<b>PHASE III – EIS DOCUMENTATION</b>																																		
Draft EIS																																		
Select preferred alternatives																																		
Final EIS																																		
Record of decision																																		
<b>PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT</b>																																		
					Scoping Meeting *								Information Open Houses *				Information Open Houses *								* Public Hearings									

The project is a 30-month study, which is structured in three phases, as follows:

## Phase 1

This phase includes initial data collection activities, including stakeholder coordination; development of preliminary conceptual alternatives; initial environmental baseline activities in the corridor; and preparation of the travel demand model. During this phase, the general location and technology alternatives that will be carried forward for additional study in the Tier I Environmental Impact Statement will be identified.

## Phase 2

The second phase is initiated by formal project Scoping as well as the completion of a draft purpose and need statement. Environmental analysis of the study alternatives will be initiated, including an assessment of community, social and land use impacts. The economic impact analysis of the study alternatives will take place, as well as completion of ridership forecasts. Cost estimates for construction, operation and maintenance will be developed. A maximum of three alternatives will be produced for the final analysis. Public involvement activities will continue throughout this phase.

## Phase 3

This phase is comprised of the preparation, review, and distribution of the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements. The preferred alternative will be recommended to the project sponsors. Public hearings will be held and public comments addressed. The Record of Decision will be prepared based on the study results, public comment and policy input from the sponsoring agencies.

It should be noted that the project has an extensive Public Information Program to exchange information, analysis and opinions regarding high-speed ground transportation in the corridor. The Scoping meetings being held September 18th through the 20th are the public's first exposure to this study. Subsequent formal public involvement activities will include public information open houses, stakeholder meetings, charettes, and public hearings/open houses. In addition, public information materials will include the GDOT web materials, fact sheets, newsletters and displays. Finally, other public involvement activities will include outreach meetings, a speaker's bureau and project booths at major events. Interested parties are invited to contact the persons listed at the end of this package for additional information.

## Contact Information

This scoping session is the first of many opportunities to participate in the Tier I EIS study of alternatives for high-speed ground transportation between Atlanta and Chattanooga. Public meetings will be held during the alternatives phase and after the Draft Environmental Impact Statement is published to get input to help guide the next phases of the study.

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