

The Historic Madison Coalition  
535 South Main Street  
Madison, Georgia 30650

Delivered Electronically  
May 3, 2025

Re: City of Madison Transportation Plan Draft Date: March 19, 2025

Honorable Mayor and Council:

We write to you today to ask that you consider the input and opinions of your constituents on the Transportation Plan now before you, and that you seek revision of the plan before moving forward on it. Significant revisions and additions are, in the opinion of the Historic Madison Coalition, necessary to protect Madison's unique and vitally important Historic District and to provide some much-needed relief from traffic congestion.

The Historic District, both commercial and residential, is at the core of our City. As the City grows through new population and businesses, more traffic will need to flow. As the "halo" area around the City is developed, whether it is annexed or not, the traffic flow will increase. As manufacturing and warehouses around our county are built and operated, freight traffic and new workers' traffic will need to flow through on the way to the next destination for all these new users of our roads.

It is imperative that we all, the elected officials and the residents of Madison, "get it right" as this plan will be relied upon for the next twenty years.

We, therefore, ask you to consider the following:

**1. Proactively Pursue Bypass Project**

For a number of years, members of the community have appeared before you, written to you, attended forums, and in myriad other ways expressed to you their concerns regarding truck traffic in Madison. As you well know, Madison is ill-equipped to handle the volume of truck traffic that currently travels through town. "Truck traffic downtown causes major conflicts with pedestrians and other passenger vehicles. Disruptive noise and vibration, infrastructure deterioration, and congestion are other major concerns. As a two-lane road through a compact downtown, Main Street is ill suited as a designated truck route." pg 22 of Transportation Plan Draft.

As the Transportation Plan Draft points out, US 441 (Eatonton Highway, Madison Bypass, and Athens Highway) and I-20 are both designated freight routes by the State of Georgia. As the plan also states, “A key major recommendation is the proposed bypass that GDOT scheduled for 2035 but is not yet funded. While this bypass has yet to be constructed, it remains a key community desire to divert freight trucks away from downtown.” pg 12 of Transportation Plan Draft.

In order to move the bypass project forward and possibly accelerate its completion, the creation of a committee of City employees who will engage with Morgan County, state elected officials and GDOT is both desirable and necessary. The state has, through its backing of the Rivian project with massive tax breaks, put Madison on the brink of a major traffic catastrophe. Surely making every effort possible to encourage state leaders to take some action to alleviate the situation is required.

In the meantime, the City is not totally helpless. While the City cannot mandate GDOT to act with regard to the State’s planned bypass, there are steps the City can and should undertake. The City needs to create a connector between Highways 441 and 83 north of downtown. Such a connector, coupled with a restriction on truck through traffic in downtown would alleviate much of the traffic burden in town. While slightly inconvenient to truckers who might prefer to go straight south on Highway 83 through town, requiring them to cut over to US 441 and use the bypass and reconnect with Highway 83 at Lions Club Road would be of great benefit to the downtown area.

The proposed City bypass committee can also, in concert with Morgan County counterparts, engage in outreach to residents of the County who reside outside the city limits in order to get “buy in” from them for the creation of a bypass.

## **2. Protect Madison’s Historic District**

Madison Historic District, created in 1974, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Historic District and the tourism it generates result in more than \$61 million dollars annually for the City. Protection of this vital resource must always be a priority for the City when considering any plan or proposal.

The Transportation Plan Draft pays lip service to this notion. “Transportation solutions should align with the City of Madison’s distinctive small-town charm. Thoughtful planning can integrate modern infrastructure without compromising the city’s inviting atmosphere, ensuring that progress enhances rather than erodes its identity.” pg 48, Transportation Plan Draft

However, there is nothing ‘thoughtful’ about the Transportation Plan Draft. Careful

review of the Plan reveals that it, in fact, sacrifices any protection of the Historic District. Simply put, adoption of the Plan would make the Historic District a de facto bypass of Main Street.

The “Proposed Connection Street” between West Washington, Kolb, and Oil Mill/Pennington Roads completely violates the nature of this residential neighborhood. The Plan suggest an invasion of this locally and federally protected Historic District and Regionally Important Resource. The NEGRC clearly states that infill densification should not occur within one mile of a Regionally Important Resource and identifies appropriate development practices for developments near the District.

Instead, in this plan draft, the proposed road is described like this: “The red dashed lines indicate new streets and avenues planned to be integrated with future residential and mixed-use development, extending Madison's historic street pattern.” pg 54, Transportation Plan Draft.

This road would invite copious amounts of traffic not only from development of any City acreage, but the thousands of acres nearby in the County, too. This traffic would be cutting through a *wholly residential neighborhood*. The Madison Historic District would become the de facto southern bypass of the increasingly clogged passages of Main Street and downtown. Here are two glaring examples of how this would happen:

- The characterization of Dixie Avenue and Dixie Highway as a “Major Collector” contributes to the use of this neighborhood as a cut-through to downtown, and Main Street north or south, not just west toward Rutledge. The “Major Collector” label is attached to Dixie Highway, Dixie Avenue, then turning right on Walton Street, and ending at Main Street just north of Hill Park.
- Then, converting Old Post Road and Academy Street into one-way streets is only going to make for more and faster traffic. The plan also calls for on-street parking on Academy Street. The people who live here have parking on their property. This parking will only induce parking by people going downtown to shop or attend events, and bring all the parked car issues to people’s driveways and backyards. We shouldn’t turn Academy Street into a public parking lot. It increases the risk to pedestrians and homeowners, as does the bicycle lane proposed on Old Post Road. Old Post is just too narrow for this.

Would it be a good idea to solve the school traffic problems with East Avenue and the By-pass by suggesting that the car rider line for the elementary school queue around the circle in Cedar Lakes? Of course, not – Cedar Lakes is a residential

neighborhood, just like the historic district.

In simple terms, using a residential neighborhood to solve the problems of a state highway and its intersections is just wrong. While there is a need for connectivity between Washington Street-Highway 83 North with areas to the west, that could be accomplished utilizing an existing road/roads further to the west, outside of the Historic District. We urge you to send the Transportation Plan Draft back to revision that protects the historic district.

### **3. Insist on Correct Data**

“Generally, Madison’s traffic levels are not high.” pg 22, Transportation Plan Draft. REALLY??

The 2007 Transportation Plan included GDOT road assessments of Level of Service and published their traffic count data. While the current plan defines the LOS ratings (pg 54), the data and/or assumptions are obviously incorrect. For example, the South Main Street-Highway 278 triangle intersection has been poorly performing for years yet somehow shows as LOS A in this report. pg 59, Transportation Plan Draft. Likewise, the South Main Street segment is incorrect, reported in the Plan draft as LOS C, when GDOT data shows it to be LOS E. The Transportation Plan Draft before you uses traffic counts to say that traffic is not that bad, but GDOT, who measures the traffic and owns the roads, says our roads are failing to handle our traffic. Accurate data is an absolutely necessary.

As all City residents know, traffic volumes have been increasing for several years. Even so, for projected traffic volumes in the plan, historic growth rates cannot be assumed to be indicative of the future growth given the mega-site development nine miles from Madison. It does not appear that this has been taken into account. An extensive traffic impact study for the proposed Rivian plant exists from which some traffic projections could be drawn. Additionally, there are state-generated reports of Georgia’s freight bottlenecks, as well as plans showing the freight traffic generated by manufacturing, distribution and agriculture in Georgia. Madison and Morgan County are included in projections for these categories. The amount of industrially zoned land that is currently undeveloped is quite large for our small city. Even more undeveloped land surrounds the city limits which could bring massive traffic. While there are certainly unknowns, these traffic issues are quantifiable.

In short, it appears from the narrative verbiage, that the transportation plan draft is using data based upon a math model using historical growth numbers, even though a massive economic development is underway right here in our county. We do not pretend to understand the workings of the least squares linear

progression model that is referenced; indeed, we could not even find it on a Google search. We very much hope we are wrong about the input for the data, but the implications of the plan's usefulness depend on a realistic look at our current situation and its potential for the next twenty years. The basis for the plan deserves much more study.

Given the significant number of concerns with this plan, and the very long shadow it will cast for years to come, we request that you table this draft for further work.

We also request that the residents of the Historic District have the opportunity to meet with the people working on this plan, to voice concerns and explore other alternatives for routing trucks and automobile traffic in Madison that does not involve our streets – where parents stroll their babies, where retirees walk their dogs, where our children play safely in their yards without parents having to worry about all the cut-through traffic and who is getting out of the cars parked at the bottom of their driveway and all along the street – in other words, our neighborhood.

#### **4. Focus on Big-Rig and Freight Traffic**

Any new Transportation Plan should focus on the need to address truck traffic and freight as a “key area” item and must, of course, work to ensure safety at freight/ pedestrian intersections.

Suggested steps items in the key freight planning area should include:

- Contact NEGRRC regarding initiation of a freight cluster plan. This would be accomplished in the Near-Term by the Public Works Director & City Engineer

This task initiates setting up a plan to establish an appropriate stakeholder group; evaluate train crossings; forecast future needs; establish an economic development market assessment; establish environmental and community impacts; and establish a plan to facilitate efficient movement of freight, improve access to jobs, ease traffic congestion, improve safety and access.

- Freight Bottleneck Mitigation – This would be accomplished in the Near-Term by the Public Works Director, City Engineer and GDOT

This task would identify bottleneck location boundaries; evaluate and develop solution suggestions.

#### **5. Put Trails in a Separate “Recreation Plan”**

“At its core, this transportation plan aims to update to the Major Thoroughfare Plan from 2007 with more of an emphasis on non-vehicular modes.” pg 12, Transportation Plan Draft. “This plan integrates more modern planning practices as well as places more emphasis on non-vehicular modes like walking, biking, and using Passenger Transport Vehicles (PTV), such as golf carts. pg 12, Transportation

Plan Draft.

Trails are not, in fact, transportation, but rather are more recreation. Trails should be removed from the Transportation Plan Draft and considered in a separate recreation plan along with parks, etc. The City's transportation issues are too great for recreational funding to consume Transportation Special Purpose Local Sales Tax revenues.

#### **6. Build a Parking Deck for Downtown**

When the West Washington Street gateway project was conceived, one aspect of it was a parking deck to benefit downtown merchants and visitors. However, quite suddenly, the parking deck was cast aside in favor of an apartment building development. That development appears now to have been abandoned. Rather than inject parking onto residential streets, revive the construction of a parking deck.

The City of Athens has built a parking deck that blends into its downtown area almost seamlessly, benefiting merchants and visitors alike. Using that model would be a boon to downtown while protecting one of the City's most valuable assets, the Historic District.

#### **7. Add More and Significantly Deeper Stakeholder Interviews to the Process**

While there was a Project Advisory Group involved to some extent in the development of the Transportation Plan Draft, it appears that a number of significant stakeholders were not included. When the draft is revised and certainly before any adoption of a plan, the City should add interviews with significantly omitted stakeholders to gain further insight into the merits of and objections to the plan. Many could offer valuable input on parking needs, stacking traffic patterns, cut-through traffic, safe crossings, and other issues. Stakeholders who should be consulted include:

- Representatives of local industry
- The Georgia Department of Transportation
- Morgan County Board of Education
- Historic Madison Coalition
- Additional downtown merchants
- Residents on Academy/Old Post and North/South Main Streets

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

The Historic Madison Coalition  
Celia L. Murray

cc: John Klimm, City Manager  
Deborah Gilbert, City Clerk

