



**NORTHWEST I-75/I-575 CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS/  
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (SADP)  
DRAFT LAND USE STRATEGY  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*prepared for:*  
**FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION *and*  
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION**

*in cooperation with:*  
**GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION *and*  
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## **0.0 SUMMARY**

### **0.1. Introduction**

The Northwest Corridor (I-75/I-575) High-Occupancy Vehicle/Bus Rapid Transit (HOV/BRT) project seeks to improve access to and connectivity between major activity centers including Downtown Atlanta, Midtown Atlanta, Cumberland Galleria, Marietta, and Town Center. The project includes the addition of HOV lanes along I-75 from Akers Mill Road to Hickory Grove Road in Cobb County and along I-575 from I-75 to Sixes Road in Cherokee County. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service with stations is also proposed along the I-75 corridor from Town Center to Midtown and Downtown Atlanta. An Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been prepared to identify the impacts of this project.

The character of dispersed land development combined with overstressed transportation facilities designed to serve primarily the ever increasing number of privately owned vehicles has resulted in the massive congestion issue in the I-75 Northwest Corridor of the Atlanta region. Now, during the planning phase for the next stage of major investments of transportation funds in the corridor, the linkages between transportation – mobility - and land use patterns are being investigated. That investigation includes the Station Area Development Planning (SADP) program that is running parallel to the Northwest Corridor EIS process.

The SADP process has been designed to involve the community in the development of land use and circulation plans for areas around the proposed BRT stations. The overall objective of the process is to carefully fit the BRT stations into the context of areas in which they will reside. The information obtained during the SADP process is being used to formulate plans for the station areas that would be suitable for adoption by the local land use planning agencies. The SADP process was developed and initiated in 2004 under the direction of the City of Marietta, Cobb County, the Cumberland Community Improvement District (CID) and the Town Center CID, by the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). The SADP program was organized in the summer months of 2004 and has paralleled the preparation of conceptual and preliminary planning studies for transportation improvements in the Northwest corridor. The continuing SADP program will unfold over the next few years and be led by local governments. The continuing stage will parallel the planning, design and construction of the corridor's transportation improvements. The station area plans in this report are intended to enable the communities along the corridor to focus discussion on relevant land use strategies and development opportunities at the proposed station locations.



The primary transportation investments in the I-75 Northwest Corridor are intended, among other goals, to benefit the public by:

- Improving operation of the general purpose lanes in the interstate corridor,
- Offering travel options of faster shared rides in the HOV lanes,
- Using high speed BRT transit service, and
- Providing more efficient, isolated operation of large commercial trucks to remove some of them from the general purpose lanes.

The overall thrust of the transportation investment is, therefore, to improve both the public's mobility and the level of accessibility to the corridor.

Given that transportation improvements will occur, local governments have the opportunity to work with the private sector to guide land use changes including the areas that benefit most from improved mobility, areas such as those surrounding transit stations. The successful combination of transportation and land use policy would have numerous benefits for the public including:

- Providing the public travel options to their privately owned vehicles;
- Generating operating income for the transit component of the transportation system could be realized with a public-private arrangement for developing publicly owned tracts adjacent to several stations with revenue-generating transit friendly land uses;
- Reducing negative environmental consequences resulting from dependence on private vehicles including vehicle miles traveled; and
- Enhancing the opportunity for the creation of a healthier community social structure.

To take advantage of the improved station area mobility, the SADP program sought to determine if there are opportunities to cluster a greater number of jobs, residences and other high-trip generating land uses within walking distance of the stations. How and to what extent the clustering can be accomplished and whether it is in the best interest of the community to do so remain key decisions in the SADP process that will be addressed both in the short term and over the coming decade.

As transportation investments alter the regional mobility landscape new options for private investments may be opened. This study explores the ways for local government to utilize plans and policies to assist in guiding private investment to form a land use structure that benefits the marketplace and provides long lasting, land use patterns benefiting from improved accessibility.



An integral part of the process has been an ongoing dialogue with citizens of the corridor to review the step-by-step advancement of the planning process. At each major step, local governments and the public have made significant decisions contributing to the outcome described herein. However, the SADP process to date represents only the first stage in moving toward setting in place a viable transit-compatible land use program. Decisions regarding the future use of land in the corridor rest with property owners, the land development industry, local governments and the public.

In early 2005 the initial citizen involvement process was launched with a six month series of workshops at various locations along the corridor to capture the early response of the public to emerging transportation plans for the corridor and their concerns regarding land use changes in proximity to the potential station locations. By June 2005, two decision tracks merged into a consensus decision to eliminate all but five station sites. Sites at or near Delk Road, South Marietta Parkway (SR 120), Allgood Road, the Canton Road Connector and Bells Ferry Road were dropped from further consideration due to one or more reasons including design obstacles, cost, low transit ridership projections, overlapping station service areas and, public opposition. The final five stations met key planning and engineering criteria for design, transit operations, potential cost, and, importantly, preliminary acceptance by the public. The citizen involvement process and its results are documented in the January 2006 report entitled "Phase I Station Area Development Planning Summary Report, March Through June 2005."

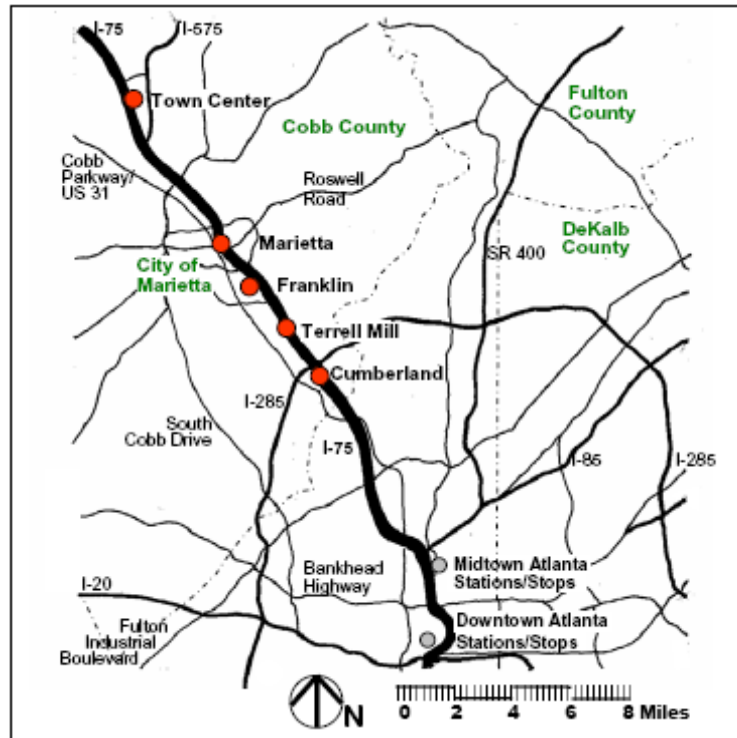
Figure 0.1 shows the five stations that were included in the end stage of the SADP process: Cumberland, Terrell Mill, Franklin, Marietta and Town Center.

The second round of the public involvement process started in February, 2006 and extended to the completion of the draft station-area land use plans in October, 2006. During this period, numerous public workshops were held in the corridor including a series of station design charette sessions organized for each of the five stations. The citizen involvement process and its results are documented in the report entitled "Phase II Station Area Development Planning Summary Report, 2006."

This final report is intended to report the significant findings of the station area planning effort that has run concurrently with the preparation of the DEIS. The plans portrayed are the end product of this phase of work.



**Figure 0.1 Station Locations**



## 0.2. **Station Area Plans**

The term, “transit friendly”, has come into use as a shorthand way of acknowledging the interdependence of fixed guideway transit systems and the location of their customer base. The acronym of “TOD” (for transit oriented development) typically designates an area populated by transit friendly land uses. Together the terms imply the creation of a special collection of land uses clustered at transit stations that result in more transit customers within an easy walking distance of the station. In brief, a fixed guideway transit system that is a prerequisite for a transit friendly or TOD designation, relies on a fixed or set route for transit service (such as BRT buses using the HOV lanes planned for the I-75 Northwest corridor) and connecting stations that provide access to the system. There are several key guidelines for a successful TOD area in the I-75 Northwest Corridor.

- *Recognize that walking is an essential part of urban life and an indispensable part of virtually every transit trip.*
- *Create a mixture of complementary land uses that seek to combine transit origin and destination land uses, increase the convenience of supportive land uses to reduce the number and length of trips and reduce dependence on private vehicles.*
- *Build a stable community that creates viable investment opportunities for the private sector in station areas.*



- *The manner in which buildings are designed and placed in the urban landscape can determine the success of the community-building TOD effort.*
- *In defining the influence zone for transit stations, walking distance is a definitive characteristic for every station area.*
- *Recognize that a hierarchy of station types exists due to the functional and structural differences in segments of the I-75 corridor.*

A variety of development factors contribute to the character and intensity of land development at or near transit stations. The five development factors that should be in place for the station areas are:

1. Strength of the regional market that drives the rate and intensity of development;
2. Attractiveness of property in the vicinity of the station that can attract or repel development depending on its condition;
3. Attractiveness of individual sites for development;
4. Local government's land use policies;
5. Other governmental policies that can implement economic development programs.

The results of the station-area planning efforts are reported by describing the following items for each of the five stations:

1. Conceptual station plan – primarily platforms, walkways and parking facilities - for the BRT system;
2. Guidance for the station-area land use plan set by the community's land use planning program;
3. A vision statement for the station area;
4. Highlights of a real estate market examination of development prospects in the station area; and
5. A recommended SADP station area land use plan.

Highlights of the examination of the five station area plans include:

### **0.2.1. *Cumberland Station***

The BRT station is located in the heart of the Cumberland regional activity center, in the center of I-75 on a platform over the interstate highway lanes, with bus access from the highway's HOV lanes and from Akers Mill Road bridge. Pedestrian access is provided from the Akers Mill Road bridge and from the west side of the highway by a pedestrian bridge. Immediately



adjacent to the west side of the station platform is the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Center that is in the final stage of construction. The BRT station would include a Cobb Community Transit (CCT) bus transfer center and capacity for a potential future I-285 BRT operation.

Small area planning in the Cumberland Station area is being handled well by the Cumberland CID and the Cobb County Planning Department. The SADP land use plan is consistent with the current Cobb County Comprehensive Plan and the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) plan. Core recommendations of the SADP plan focus on the ring of private properties that surround the station between the Akers Mill Road bridge and the Cumberland Boulevard bridge. High-density, mixed-use private development is projected for six tracts including office, residential, retail and hotel accommodations. No obstacles to the development of the property were noted with the exception that the area will capture its share of regional growth in competition with other regional centers with the build-out stage likely to occur by 2020. See Figure 0.2.

Based on the current and projected measurements of market forces, the build-out stage could see the addition of \$616 million of development in today's dollars and include 1.35 million square feet of office space, 1,175 dwelling units, 110,000 square feet of retail space and 450 hotel rooms.

### **0.2.2. Terrell Mill Station**

The BRT station is located in the center of the interstate at the top of a three-tiered structure; the interstate highway lanes would occupy the intermediate level and Terrell Mill Road the bottom level. Pedestrian access to the station would occur from Terrell Mill Road at the south end of the bus platforms and from a pedestrian bridge from the platforms to the west side of the interstate.

At present, the station area is best described as a stable multi-family and office park enclave with the exception of the semi-vacant light industrial zoned parcel to the immediate west of the station and on the north side of Terrell Mill Road. This core property becomes the primary focus for short-term redevelopment prospects in the station area due to its proximity to the station and the presence of an underused multi-story garage on the site. The SADP plan calls for the core property to become the focal point of a Transit Village with redevelopment by the construction of residences, offices or a combination of these uses and a token amount of "convenience" retail space. Like the Cumberland Station, the SADP plan for the Terrell Mill Station is consistent with the Cobb County and City of Marietta comprehensive plans. See Figure 0.3.

Based on the current and projected measurements of real estate factors, the build-out stage could see the addition \$70 million of development in today's dollars and include up to 300,000 square feet of office space, 300 plus dwelling units and 5,000 square feet of retail space, depending on the selected development program for the core property. Over time, other



adjacent multi-family and office properties are likely to be upgraded to keep pace with the competitiveness of the attractive location at the north end of the Cumberland regional activity center.

### **0.2.3. *Franklin Station***

The station would be located offline from the through north/south HOV lanes that remain in the center of I-75. The general location of the station between Franklin Road and the interstate roadway was requested by the City of Marietta and would lie within the boundaries of the LCI planned area. The exact location and form of the proposed station and parking might be determined in the coming months as the city continues its redevelopment planning for the area. The present station area between Franklin Road and the interstate consists of four multi-family residential complexes with substantially reduced market appeal, a small obsolete strip commercial center and a single level office complex. West of Franklin, land use is made up of a variety of business, warehouse and storage establishments.

The goal of the City's LCI plan is to revitalize the area as a transit based neighborhood with both residences and work places. The transit station should figure prominently in both the physical layout and transportation function of the area. It is likely the pace of the revitalization/redevelopment effort will be carried out in stages over time commensurate with two factors: the ability of the City to assist in the venture, and growth in the demand for housing and work places in the corridor.

Based on the current and projected measurements of real estate factors, the build-out stage could see the addition of \$245 million of development in today's dollars and include up to 1,200 plus dwelling units and 20,000 square feet of retail space. If the City succeeds in achieving growth in office or other "employment" building space, additional office and retail space and fewer residences may be the result with commensurate changes in the value of development.

### **0.2.4. *Marietta Station***

The conceptual BRT station shown at the Marietta Station shows a three level configuration that would be very similar in form and function to the station at Terrell Mill Road. The platforms would begin above both the interstate lanes and Roswell Road and continue north toward Gresham Road. Pedestrian access would be provided from Roswell Road below the platforms and from a pedestrian bridge to the west side of the highway where transit support facilities - a CCT bus transfer center and park-and-ride facility - would be located.

Existing land uses in the station impact area include a wide variety of retail, general business and residential properties, many past their economic prime. The SADP plan focuses on the opportunity to stimulate redevelopment of the



area with selective interventions by the City of Marietta. The focal point of the redevelopment area would fall on the property adjacent to the transit support facilities on the west side of I-75 within the wedge-shaped property from Roswell Road to Gresham Road and Cobb Parkway to I-75. Over time additional properties outside the focal area would likely redevelop as a community shopping/living center for Marietta. See Figure 0.5

Based on the current and projected measurements of real estate factors, the long-range, build-out stage of six tracts could see the addition of \$245 million of development in today's dollars and include in a mixed use area up to 400,000 square feet of office space, 315,000 square feet of retail space, 800 dwelling units and 125 hotel rooms. This new development would add to the existing healthy retail base that currently operates at locations in the area and is expected to continue for years to come.

### **0.2.5. *Town Center Station***

The end-of-the-line station, north of the Town Center regional shopping mall and in the heart of the Town Center regional activity center, would be located in an offline configuration on the east side of the interstate highway. Buses and private high-occupancy vehicles would access the mid-highway HOV lanes at a new elevated intersection or use the roadway of the soon to be extended Big Shanty Road. The station conceptual plan integrates the bus platform into a park-and-ride garage north of the new Big Shanty pavement on property that is an extension of land currently used by GRTA and CCT as a park-and-ride lot on Busbee Drive. Construction of a service roadway would be required to tie the station facility into Big Shanty Road, Busbee Drive and the area's arterial road system.

The character of existing development in the impact area of the Town Center Station contains a mixture of developed and undeveloped land, unlike the solid development pattern exhibited by the station areas to the south. The Town Center station location, originally identified in the LCI plan prepared for the area, envisions it as the center of a transit village within the regional activity center. A series of related circulation and land development improvements are aimed at easing movement in the area and accommodating greater development intensity to maximize benefits of the improved access afforded by the BRT system. See Figure 0.6

Based on the current and projected measurements of real estate factors, the long-range, build-out stage of six tracts could see the addition of \$435 million of development in today's dollars and include in a mixed use area up to 160,000 square feet of office space, 120,000 square feet of retail space, over 2000 dwelling units and 125 hotel rooms.

### **0.3. *TOD Action Plans***

Table 0-1 summarizes the relationship of the five station areas to the five development factors. The table shows the grading of the stations to indicate



where TOD implementation activities may be needed. A plus 1 (+1) score suggests a positive set of conditions prevail and few, if any, proactive efforts will be needed by local government to stimulate development. A score of zero (0) indicates some guidance and/or proactive steps may be required by local government; and a score of minus 1 (-1) indicates a more serious set of issues have been identified that may need to be address by local government.

**Table 0-1 Station Area Development Potential**

STATION AREA	Cumberland	Terrell Mill	Franklin Road	Marietta	Town Center
1. Strength of the regional market					
	+1	0	-1	-1	+1
2. Attractiveness of property in the vicinity of the station					
	+1	+1	-1	-1	+1
3. Attractiveness of individual sites for development					
	+1	+1	+1	0	+1
4. Local government's land use policies					
	0	0	0	0	0
5. Other government policies that can implement economic development programs					
	+1	0	-1	-1	0

Based on the different assets affecting each station area, an Action Plan has been developed for each station area to highlight some of the steps that would be appropriate to begin implementing each area plan. Several actions at each station are recommended, such as adoption of a station area plan and a TOD-type amendment to the zoning regulations. And, other actions are advisory actions to test the efficacy of, for example, adoption of a "tax allocation district" project area or retention of a master developer to oversee implementation of a redevelopment strategic plan.

**0.3.1. Cumberland Station Action Plan**

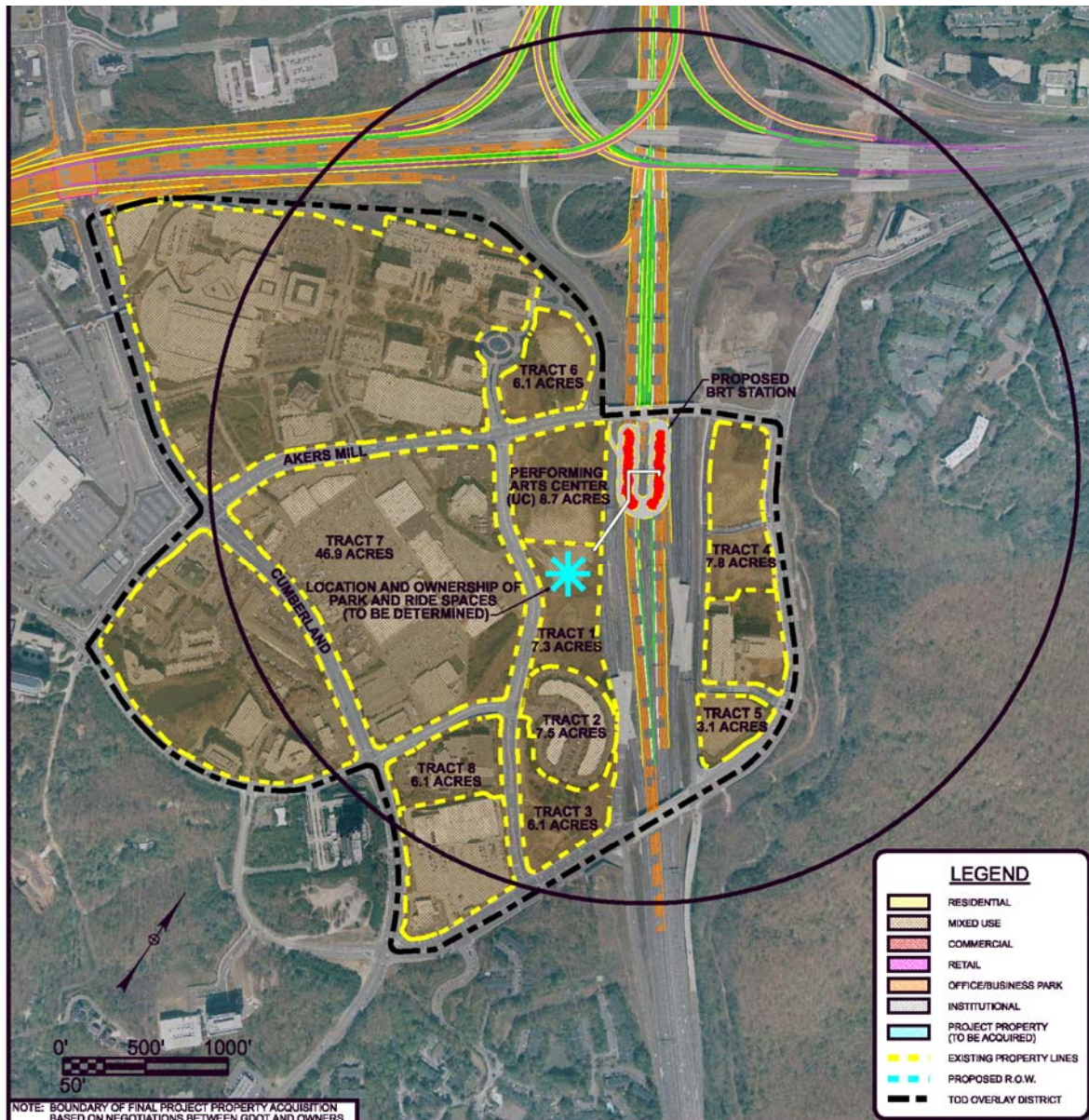
The action plan for Cumberland Station includes the following elements. See Figure 0.2 for the location of the tracts discussed in the action plan.

- Refine the Station Plan during the preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the project: negotiate appropriate arrangements with developer/owner of Tract #1 for park-and-ride parking spaces and pedestrian bridge connection to the station;
- Prepare an update of the Blueprint Cumberland Plan led by the Cumberland CID and in cooperation with Cobb County Planning Department and Economic Development Department; consider:



- Adopting station area plan; drafting, adopting and implementing TOD zoning controls;
- Encouraging preparation of coordinated development plan for Tracts 1, 2, 3, and 7;
- Providing assistance, as needed, in creation of the “Madison” mixed-use project (Tract 5) to spur development momentum on the east side of I-75;
- Supporting transportation and streetscape projects including the Cumberland area circulator bus; and
- Updating the Livable Centers Initiative plan; apply for additional funding for pedestrian and streetscape projects in station area.

**Figure 0.2 Cumberland Station Plan**



### 0.3.2. **Terrell Mill Station Action Plan**

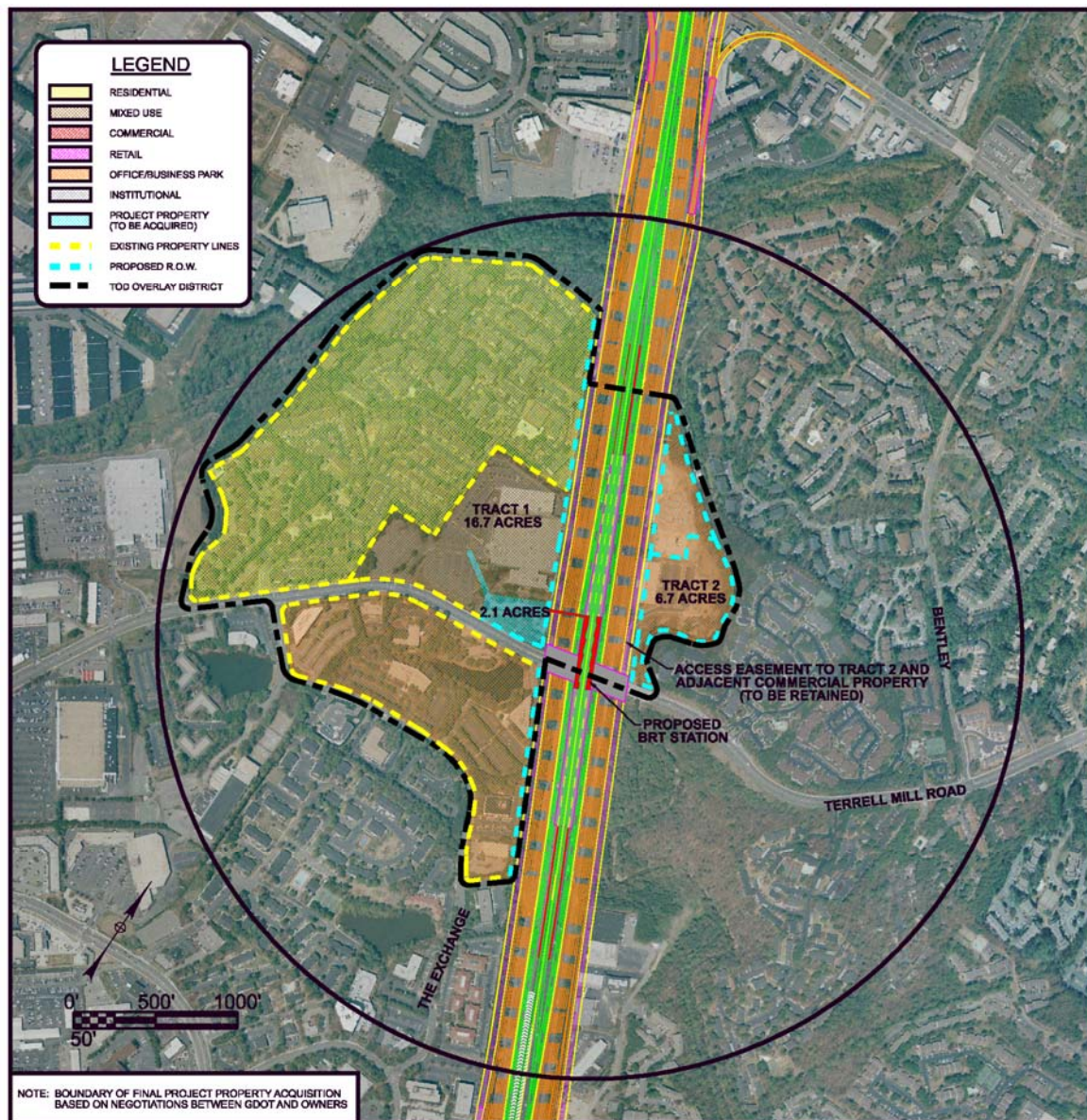
The action plan for Terrell Mill Station includes the following elements. See Figure 0.3 for the location of the tracts discussed in the action plan.

- Refine the Station Plan during the FEIS phase to include surface park-and-ride lot with space for future garage.
- Prepare redevelopment strategic plan led by Cobb County Planning Department, Economic Development Department and agencies from the City of Marietta; consider:



- Adopting station area plan; drafting, adopting and implementing TOD zoning controls;
- Preparing and applying for Livable Centers Initiative plan approval for support of pedestrian and streetscape improvements to station area;
- Adopting TAD provisions to support TOD plan implementation; and
- Joining a combined marketing program with key property owner(s) to support property rebuilding, especially on Tract 1.

**Figure 0.3 Terrill Mill Station Plan**





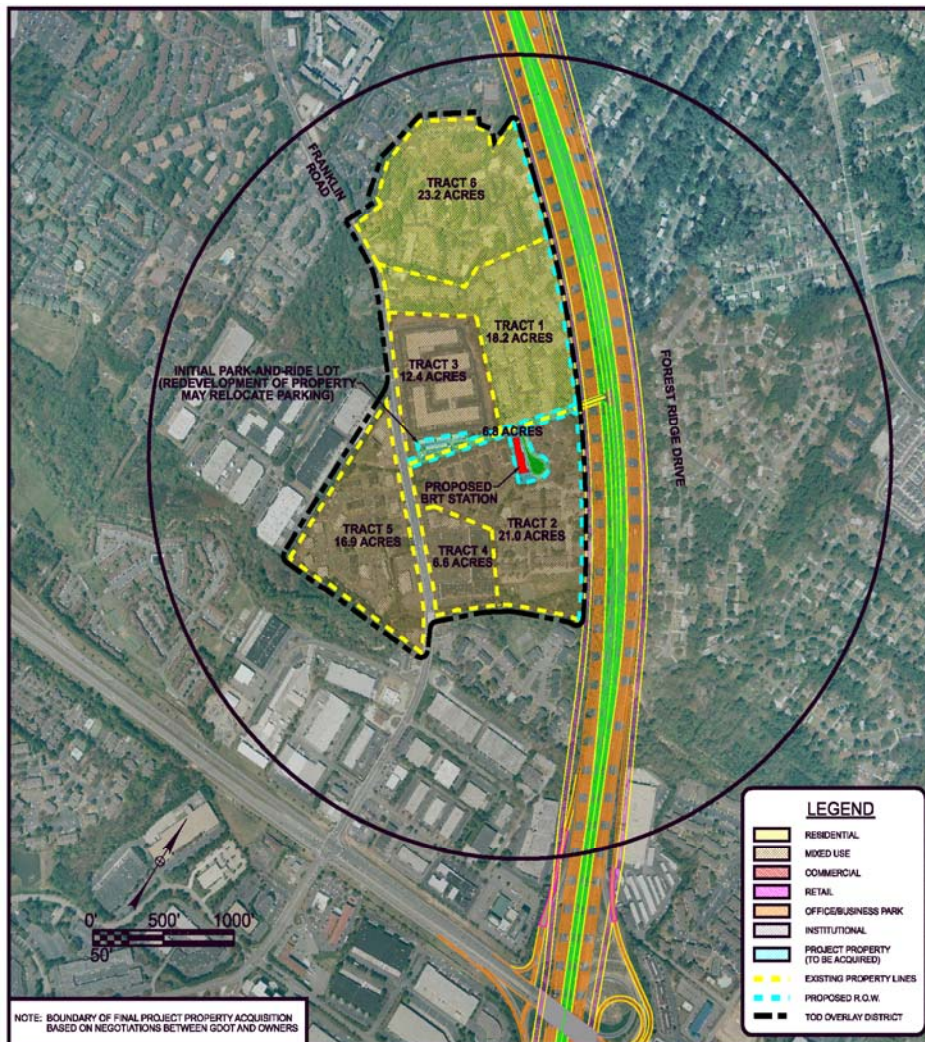
### **0.3.3. Franklin Station Action Plan**

The action plan for Terrell Mill Station includes the following elements. Figure 0.4 shows the tracts that are discussed in the action plan.

- Integrate the Station Plan during the FEIS phase to better fit into City's revitalization plan for key properties in the LCI area.
- City of Marietta and GRTA negotiate resolution of parking facility size and financing.
- Prepare redevelopment strategic plan led by City of Marietta Planning Department and Economic Development Department; consider:
  - Developing initial project scope to include sufficient land to alter the current negative development image of the Franklin Road corridor and attract private investment;
  - Adopting station area plan; drafting, adopting and implementing TOD zoning controls;
  - Applying for funding from Livable Centers Initiative program for key pedestrian and streetscape projects in LCI area;
  - Using unique powers of the Marietta Redevelopment Corporation in plan implementation;
  - Using TAD funds to support TOD plan implementation at densities that balance land costs with local planning policies; and
  - Utilizing a master developer for implementation of the station area TOD.



**Figure 0.4 Franklin Station Plan**



**0.3.4. Marietta Station Action Plan**

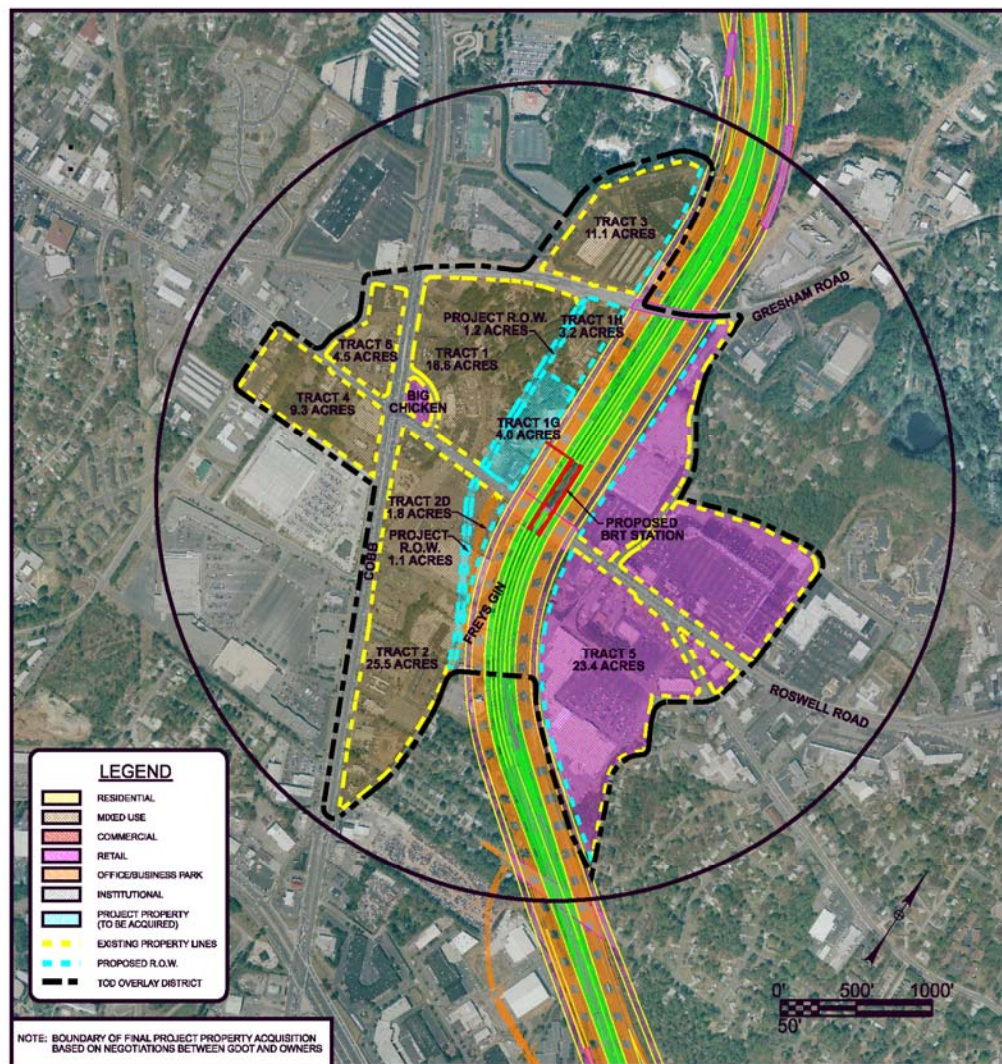
The action plan for Terrell Mill Station includes the following elements. Figure 0.5 shows the tracts that are discussed in the action plan.

- Refine the Station Plan during the FEIS phase: relocate garage and coordinate size with parking at the Franklin Station and land development needs.
- Prepare redevelopment strategic plan led by City of Marietta Planning Department and Economic Development Department; consider:
  - Adopting station area plan; drafting, adopting and implementing TOD zoning controls;



- Focusing first on redevelopment of Tract 1 and the immediate BRT station area to set a new development pattern in the area;
- Applying for expanded Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program support to include station area; applying for funding for pedestrian and streetscape projects in revitalized area;
- Using unique powers of the Marietta Redevelopment Corporation in plan implementation;
- Utilizing a master developer for the station-area TOD; and
- Adopting TAD to support TOD plan implementation at densities that balance land costs with local planning policies and support streetscaping and other infrastructure improvements.

Figure 0.5 Marietta Station Plan



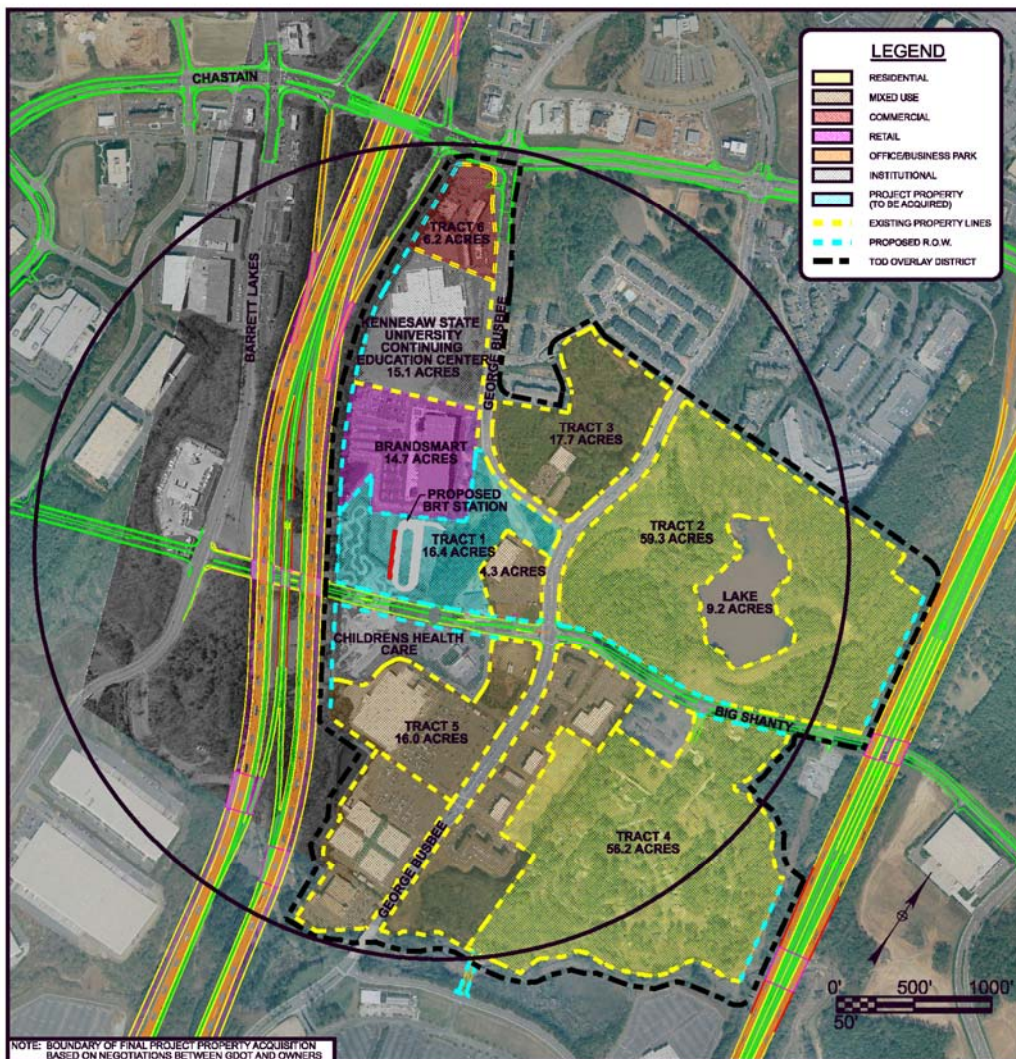


### **0.3.5. Town Center Station Action Plan**

Due to strong development pressure in the area, implementation of these recommendations during the next several years is essential to reserve future sites from piece-meal development which would preclude the opportunity to create a transit oriented, mixed use development around the new station. Figure 0.6 shows the tracts that are discussed in the action plan.

- Refine the Station Plan access during the FEIS phase: examine the feasibility of relocating HOV access to Big Shanty Road (extended) location.
- The key implementation item is the acquisition of the vacant tract owned by BrandsMart to the south of its existing facility and a remnant tract owned by Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Once the tracts are acquired or at least controlled, the transportation entities need to work with the Town Center CID to finalize a plan for the station and its immediate surroundings, and then be willing to sell or enter into a joint public/private partnership for the excess land not needed for the station plan.
- Prepare redevelopment strategic plan led by Cobb County Planning Department and Economic Development Department; consider:
  - Adopting station area plan; drafting, adopting and implementing TOD zoning controls, and working with land use and transportation entities in the specific planning of the station area to insure that the vision of a mixed use transit oriented village can be realized;
  - As a planning advocate for the station area, the Town Center CID should consider:
    - Providing assistance in soliciting developer interest in Tract 1 from developers experienced with the proposed joint public/private partnership type of undertaking.
    - Becoming proactive in working with the owners of the key parcels as they prepare their development proposals and become an advocate during the re-zoning process for those development proposals that are consistent with the objective of mixed use village type development within the BRT station area. The converse is that the CID would withhold their support from proposals that are not consistent with this vision.
    - Updating the Livable Centers Initiative plan; apply for funding for pedestrian and streetscape.

Figure 0.6 Town Center Station Plan



#### 0.4. **Recent Developments**

To prove the point of inevitable change in the Northwest corridor of I-75, two significant land development undertakings have been announced since the onset of the drafting of this report in November 2006. While the eventual land use implications of these events are still to be determined, they demonstrate the dynamic forces at play in the corridor.

At the Cumberland Station it is noted in the report that a portion of the tract being used for the current construction of the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Center was to be offered by the owner for land development purposes. To that end, the owner issued a Request for Proposal to developers and in response received several proposals. In November, 2006 the Arts Center Board selected a development team to undertake the construction of the



project. To date plans are in the jelling stage, but prospects remain very promising for the construction of a mixed-use, high-density project containing office, residential and retail land uses on a site adjacent to the proposed BRT station. The text of this report notes this latest event at the station, but due to the recent timing of the developer selection, the final details of the development plan are not known.

At the Town Center Station, a developer has proposed 4.1 million square feet of housing, office, hotel and retail space near Town Center Mall, on Tract 4 of the Town Center SADP. The site of this proposed development, dubbed Cityside, is on the south side of Big Shanty Road, east of Busbee Parkway, within walking distance and within the SADP planning area for the Town Center BRT Station. The development proposes 2,700 condos and apartments in buildings of about five stories (no single-family detached houses), 300,000 square feet of office space, and 300,000 square feet of retail space. The proposal is consistent with the Town Center CID's LCI Plan. The Atlanta Regional Commission, has deemed the project a "development of regional impact," and is review its transportation, environmental, water, sewer and housing impacts. The project must also be reviewed by GRTA and receive a zoning change, from residential to urban village, from the Cobb County Board of Commissioners.

## **0.5. Conclusion**

This report represents documentation of the first stage in the station area development and planning process. In the future, local governments and the citizens must address a series of tasks to be accomplished in the coming years. As the major transportation plans in the I-75 Northwest Corridor proceed through the federally mandated environmental and design review and approval process, key issues regarding the TOD plans can be resolved. As in all of the SADP work to date, it is acknowledged that resolution of issues represents a balancing of factors and the decisions made describe the unique decisions appropriate for the City of Marietta and Cobb County.