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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on May 8, 2012

Work group aims to boost Exit 17 park-and-ride lot

Lot could be used as a future transit hub

Area government officials are forming a “work group” to study how to bring more cars and people to the Georgia Rideshare lot off Exit 17 at Interstate 985.

Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown pushed for creating the group after officials discussed the lonely state of the park-and-ride lot off Thurmon Tanner Parkway and Ga. 13/Atlanta Highway at Tuesday’s Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Policy Committee meeting.

The discussion was prompted by MPO transportation planner David Fee’s presentation on a survey of commuters using carpooling lots off I-985.

His report cites, among other things, few commuters using the 360-space lot at Exit 17, as well as a lack of lighting and overall security.

“There’s some follow-up that needs to be done,” Brown told the committee. “It’s great to get a gee-whiz report, but if we don’t do anything with it, all we have is a nice report.”

Officials talked about a wide range of ways to deal with the Exit 17 lot, including using it as a future hub for transit service.

“Let’s come up with a strategy that includes education, marketing, the whole operational piece of it,” Brown said.

The committee could consist of Brown, Community Service Director Phillippa Lewis Moss, a Georgia Department of Transportation representative and perhaps others.

I-985 has three park-and-ride lots, with Gwinnett Transit operating routes to Atlanta out of the one off Ga. 20 at Exit 4 in Buford.

“That lot is full,” said Srikanth Yamala, the MPO’s transportation planning manager.

The Exit 16 lot off Wallis and Mundy Mill roads in Oakwood is generally about half-full and has been in place for many years. The Exit 17 lot was built as part of a \$75 million road reconstruction project completed in 2009.

Brown said he believes the Exit 17 lot has much potential.

“In the future, if we think that transit is an option or some sort of express service toward Atlanta, maybe that’s a good place (where) you headquarter it,” he said.

He also cited the Central Hall Multiuse Trail, which will run between Palmour Drive in Gainesville and near Frontage Road in Oakwood, skirting the Exit 17 lot with a pedestrian tunnel at Atlanta Highway near the Georgia Department of Labor.

“Maybe you look at that (Exit 17 lot) being a trailhead,” Brown said. “Maybe there is something that needs to be done to create a purpose for people to go there.

“If you don’t create some sense of presence there, it’s going to continue to be an area that collects trash, (where) the grass isn’t cut ... and the lights won’t be on.”

Robert Mahoney, preconstruction engineer with the DOT, said the DOT typically turns such a lot over for upkeep to the local government after construction is finished. The Exit 17 lot is in unincorporated Hall.

Hall County’s public works director, Ken Rearden, said he wasn’t aware of the situation.

“But you are now?” asked the policy committee’s vice chairman, Alan Wayne.

“Yes, sir,” Rearden said.

Moss said that about a year ago, Hall Area Transit tried out a route in the area around the park-and-ride lot and “we had a very good response” from students attending nearby Gainesville State and Lanier Technical colleges.

“The one place they refused to go was Exit 17, and that was because of its immensity and ... it felt insecure to them,” she said.

Oakwood Mayor Lamar Scroggs said he believes that area residents, including those living in Habersham County, have to be informed of the park-and-ride lot.

“People have to know (if) there’s a bus running from there to Exit 4 or to Atlanta,” he said. “There has to be some (shelter), lighting and security. Until these things are pretty well put in place and made secure for the public, they’re not going to use it that well.”

Wayne pushed along the idea of the work group to Yamala and the rest of the committee.

“Let’s make something happen here,” he said.