

2004 Program Assessment and Recommendations



DRI Workshop Held:
July 16, 2004

Presented to Land Development Committee:
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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone for their involvement in the DRI process over the past year, particularly those who devoted their time to attend the GRTA 2004 DRI Workshop. Thank you for your continued dedication to the DRI program, as we strive to meet and exceed your expectations in the upcoming year.



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SECTION 1: Introduction

The Georgia Regional Transportation Authority's (GRTA) policy for the administration of Developments of Regional Impacts (DRI's) has been in effect since January 14, 2002. GRTA recently held its third DRI Workshop since the policy was implemented. The first workshop focused on administrative improvements. The second workshop was more general, seeking to learn more about how well the DRI process was working and how best to improve the policy. Ultimately the purpose of all DRI workshops is to learn more about the effectiveness of the policy, keeping the lines of communication open between all parties and periodically considering improvements.

The 2004 DRI Workshop focus was education and coordination. The need to enhance this area of the program has been identified in each of the last two workshops. Additionally, as GRTA develops a process to track decisions, coordination and education become more important.

This report is intended to accomplish three goals: 1) Revisit and assess the degree of success in implementing the recommendations from the 2003 *DRI Workshop Report & GRTA Responses*; 2) Provide a program assessment from the 2004 DRI Workshop; and 3) Outline recommendations for improving the DRI policy and administration. As it relates to this third goal of improvement, the recommendations are driven not only by workshop comments, but also by DRI program needs and staff's belief that the policy can become more effective and efficient.

GRTA would like to thank those who participated in the workshop and hopes this report is responsive to the needs of the region.

SECTION 2:

Evaluation of 2003 Program Goals

GRTA concluded its 2003 *DRI Workshop Report & GRTA Responses* with a section entitled “2003 GRTA Staff Recommendations.” The section covered four general areas and encompassed a total of twelve recommendations for improving the DRI program administration. GRTA succeeded in partially or completely implementing many, but not all, of the recommendations. The recommendations may have been too aggressive, however, given the available resources. As a consequence, the 2004 recommendations are designed to be more realistic. The following is a brief assessment as to the degree in which the recommendations were implemented:

Tracking and Enforcement:

Short-term Recommendations:

- **Recommendation:** Formalize system of tracking local government decisions for each review.
 - **Assessment:** This recommendation is only partially complete. GRTA has met with each of the jurisdictions individually to compare its decisions, to identify problems associated with implementing conditions, and to gather ideas on the best method for formalizing the process. The matter was also addressed at the 2004 DRI Workshop. The process has simply taken longer than anticipated because conditions are implemented over time and in different ways, depending on the jurisdiction.

- **Recommendation:** Develop guidance for state and local governments on how to best integrate GRTA conditions into approvals and permitting.
 - **Assessment:** This recommendation has been completed as a matter of general guidance, but more specific and uniform formats are still required in order to better track the conditions.

Long-term Recommendations:

- **Recommendation:** Revise policy to include required tracking and enforcement procedures.
 - **Assessment:** This recommendation has not been completed, but is underway. GRTA is retaining a consultant to assist with policy revisions. Budget constraints delayed policy revisions.

Review Procedures:

Short-term Recommendations:

- **Recommendation:** Revise format and content of review documents to improve clarity and to provide appropriate level of information.

- Assessment: This recommendation is partially complete. Revisions have been made to the Letter of Understanding and the Certificate of Completeness. The Notice of Decision still needs to be revised, but that may not occur until the policy is revised.
- Recommendation: Formalize the process used in scheduling meetings in order to provide more advanced notice.
 - Assessment: This recommendation has been implemented. The Staff Report and Recommendations meeting is now a formal meeting scheduled several weeks in advance in order to promote maximum attendance.
- Recommendation: Focus on the GDOT review of DRI's by improving the system of information delivery and input.
 - Assessment: This recommendation has been implemented. Applicants are provided with contact information for GDOT District offices and local government transportation officials, and they are required to provide submittals to those offices. GDOT is invited to meetings where state routes are an issue, and GDOT is given the opportunity to provide input.
- Recommendation: Work with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to improve required review documentation and procedures as they relate to the GRTA policy.
 - Assessment: This recommendation is being implemented. The DCA is preparing to initiate a technical policy revision to its DRI regulations. GRTA staff has met with DCA and provided written comments.

Education and Coordination:

Long-term Recommendations:

- Recommendation: Develop and put into place an educational program about the goals, policies and procedures of the program for local government staff, local government officials and GDOT staff that is tailored to each audience.
 - Assessment: This recommendation has not been implemented and that is the reason that the 2004 DRI Workshop focused on this as one of the two major issues.
- Recommendation: Provide a forum for staff to hear local government perspectives on GRTA decisions.

- Assessment: This recommendation was implemented for this year, but a more formal and efficient process needs to be established. GRTA contacted and met with each of the jurisdictions as part of the DRI tracking effort. During the process, GRTA discussed tracking, implementation, specific projects, and concerns of the local jurisdictions.

Written Policies and Technical Guidelines:

Short-term Recommendations:

- Recommendation: Propose improvements to the technical guidelines and the information required for each review.
 - Assessment: This recommendation was not implemented, but is now underway. Staff and budget concerns caused GRTA to delay efforts to revise the policy.
- Recommendation: Develop measurable performance-based guidance for assessing review criteria.
 - Assessment: This recommendation was not implemented, but is now underway. Staff and budget concerns caused GRTA to delay efforts to revise the policy.

Long-term Recommendations:

- Recommendation: Present, review and adopt changes to the technical guidelines, the review criteria and the review policies.
 - Assessment: This recommendation was not implemented, but is now underway. Staff and budget concerns caused GRTA to delay efforts to revise the policy.

SECTION 3

2004 Program Assessment

A. DRI Workshop Background

As part of the ongoing effort to evaluate and improve the DRI policy, GRTA holds an annual DRI workshop to allow stakeholder input. The 2004 DRI Workshop was held on July 16, 2004.

GRTA's DRI program staff decided to focus this year's workshop on education and coordination rather than have a steering committee set the topics. Coordination and education have been identified as a need in prior workshops and staff wanted to gain more specific input. Second, GRTA met with each of the jurisdictions this year in an effort to discuss tracking, implementation, projects, and other concerns. The experience caused staff to believe that a workshop focus on education and coordination would be helpful because it would allow the DRI stakeholders to present ideas as a group.

The 2004 Annual DRI Workshop was held on July 16, 2004. Approximately 140 people were invited to participate in the workshop and 37 invitees chose to attend. Participants were divided into five (5) groups. The workshop was divided into two breakout sessions, each lasting forty (40) minutes. Reports were presented to the entire group after each session. During the first break-out session, the groups were asked to identify educational needs for the DRI program. Participants were asked to assess the need for education, parts of the DRI program that need more clarification, and potential venues (such as ACCG, RDC committees, etc.) that could be used. The second session was devoted to coordination. Participants were asked to assess coordination lapses, the need for additional coordination, and potential solutions. A general comment period followed the break-out sessions in order to discuss other pertinent issues. Finally, time was allotted for informal discussions with staff to address specific project issues.

B. Tables

The following tables describe the main issues discussed by the participants. A listing of specific concerns, comments, and suggestions follows each issue.

The concerns, comments, and suggestions offered at the workshop have been summarized. GRTA apologizes if some concerns were not adequately captured and would be happy to address such issues upon request.

Coordination Issues

Comment: DRI Projects have to go through governmental approvals (such as rezoning) where the projects can change significantly from what is reviewed and conditioned by GRTA.

Summary of Participant Comments:

- While GRTA and the RDC review a project as if it is finalized, local government action has been prohibited until the review is completed. The project is still in flux until final local governmental action.
- Conditions established by GRTA can limit the ability of the local government to alter the site plan or to deny certain portions of a development.
- Conditions can be difficult to enforce when the proper zoning is in place.
- The local government should have a say in whether a project can go forward before the DRI process begins.
- Local governments should be able to hold a concept meeting for DRI projects at the local level, after methodology meeting with GRTA, but before the GRTA/RDC review.

Participant Suggestions:

- Simplify conditions to allow more flexibility at the local level.
- Give more consideration to the type of governmental control necessary at the local level.
- Allow local governments to hold a project conceptual meeting prior to initiation of review by RDC and GRTA.
- Some type of local government approval of a conceptual use on a site would be beneficial prior to conditions being established by GRTA which could limit the local government from making changes to a development plan at a later date.

GRTA Response:

- GRTA has been taking steps to simplify conditions of late, so as not to require all uses as proposed on a plan submittal or at the densities proposed. There may still be instances where these requirements may be in place, but it would only be when deemed as being regionally significant. Additionally, GRTA is looking at simplifying other types of conditions such as connectivity between adjacent parcels.
- Stipulations under GRTA's DRI Policy require the agency to take into consideration the type of governmental action that is necessary. These issues are typically resolved with input from the local government at the Staff Report meeting scheduled for every DRI.
- The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has control over allowing a local jurisdiction to take an action on a DRI project prior to GRTA/RDC review. However, it should be noted that GRTA staff has spoken to DCA about this request, and the positive outcomes that a "project conceptual review meeting" could entail. Staff is hopeful after the discussions that a change may be possible.

Comment: More coordination is needed at the beginning of the process.

Summary of Participant Comments:

- Not all the key planners are involved in the process, or they may be getting involved too late in the process.
- Questions as to why the local jurisdiction can not have access to the traffic study prior to the certification of a complete submittal by GRTA.
- More coordination is needed to allow for a stage of local conceptual meeting either included with or separate from the pre-application meeting.

Participant Suggestions:

- Get all players involved from the start.
- Coordination process needs to occur early in the process.
- Provide a clear GRTA invitation to facilitate early coordination.
- Public access to the site plan or other visual of project via a website would be beneficial.
- To have time to properly review a traffic analysis, the local jurisdiction should have access to the study as soon as possible.
- There is a benefit of having more involvement with local residents earlier in the process as well.

GRTA Response:

- GRTA has attempted to identify the main contact persons (planning and transportation) for each local jurisdiction, while also inviting other state agencies, RDC's, and other affected agencies to all meetings. Thus far, no real efforts have been made towards a public participation component; however, such efforts have not been ruled out for the future.
- GRTA is reconsidering its policy on the early distribution of the traffic analysis. Prior thought has been that withholding the analysis could resolve any concerns of a local jurisdiction or state DOT from reviewing an outdated study, and it could also limit the wasteful use and distribution of paper. Further, as certification can take place within 5 days of submittal of the traffic study, GRTA staff did not believe this delay to be causing any problems.
- The idea of a "project concept review meeting" has been previously discussed.

Additional Coordination Comments:

Summary of Participant Comments:

- It is not always clear who is responsible for providing road improvements.
- If GRTA is making recommendations, it should be a staff person from GRTA who enforces them.
- Coordination process is too complex and inefficient with DRI tracking.

Participant Suggestions:

- Recommendations need to be more specific from GRTA on how to accomplish a particular decision.
- Simplification of the process and coordination efforts would be a benefit to everyone.

GRTA Response:

- Ultimately, GRTA only has enforcement capabilities through control over future transportation funding. As such, GRTA has identified projects which are needed in order to meet the needs of the area under study upon completion of the project. It is up to the local government to determine how the project is to be completed. It would be difficult for GRTA to dictate responsibility of improvements, as each local government has varying abilities in getting projects completed due to such things as development impact fees.

Education Issues

Comment: Participants in the DRI process may not understand how it works and may not have a complete understanding of goals.

Summary of Participant Comments:

- Get developers headed in the right direction at the very beginning.
- There is not a clear understanding of the time frame.
- Confusion on the DRI education levels of the local elected officials.
- Local government does not understand their veto power.
- Developers typically do not understand the process and rely on consultants to lead them through it.
- There needs to be education on all levels including local government, consultants, etc.
- Poor attendance at methodology meetings which are important to the process.

Participant Suggestions:

- Educational outreach opportunities should be considered. An example would be an education session offered at the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association or to ACCG members.
- Develop a simple pamphlet to show developers what GRTA is looking for out of developments.
- There is a need for a DRI manual outlining the process and the roles of participants.
- Stress the importance of methodology meetings and encourage participation.

GRTA Response:

- The idea of a DRI handbook has been discussed for quite some time internally and with previous workshop participants. There is renewed interest in seeing an education component added to the DRI program; however, staff limitations have prevented this thus far. It is hoped that an educational element may be developed concurrently with any future revisions to DRI policies.
- Educational outreach to large numbers of potential participants could also be beneficial. Again, the concern is the limitation that a small staff has on such an outreach program. Targeted opportunities to provide presentations should be further considered.

Additional Education Comments:

Summary of Participant Comments:

- Who is responsible for funding improvements and how will it be enforced?
- Submission process is unclear.
- There are delays in filing Form 1 and 2 by local government.
- Participation of land planners and traffic engineers early in a developer's process would be beneficial.
- There needs to be more neighborhood group involvement.

Section 4:

2004 GRTA Staff Recommendations

Below are the recommendations for improvements to the program over the next calendar year.

- Develop and adopt a GRTA DRI Policy revision
 - Revise GRTA review documents (EX: Technical Analysis Transmittal, Notice of Decision, etc.) for purposes of clarification.
 - Move towards a performance-based review.
 - Institute policy-based conditions as opposed to strictly detailed conditions.
 - Consider certifying local jurisdictions, or areas, whereby GRTA's review would be more limited.

- Develop a DRI guide book based on the policy revision.

- Implement an educational outreach element to include:
 - Periodic meetings with elected officials and staff.
 - Regular reports at ARC committee meetings.

- Develop and implement a DRI Tracking system with the assistance of local jurisdictions.