

## 1. Introduction

Transportation is fundamental to a prosperous economy and quality of life for residents, visitors, and businesses in Effingham County. As emphasized by current SAFETEA-LU legislation, the movement of people and goods is dependent on a safe, accountable, flexible and efficient transportation system, which takes into the account the needs of all users and the environment.

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), in cooperation with Effingham County, initiated a multi-modal transportation study for the county and the cities of Guyton, Rincon, and Springfield. The study is made necessary by the projected growth that will take place over the next twenty-five years of approximately 30,000 new residents and 15,000 new jobs.

The objective of this Mutli-Modal Transportation Study (MMTS) is to improve access and mobility, with improved safety and security, for people and goods throughout the county and as part of the rapidly-growing Georgia Coastal Region. The MMTS supports, and was developed in coordination with, the 2007 update to the Effingham County Comprehensive Plan.

This study provides an assessment of transportation inventory and needs, and the policy and strategy framework to help Effingham County Officials select and prioritize future transportation programs and projects through the year 2030. The MMTS includes a detailed inventory and analysis of multiple aspects of the transportation network, including roads and bridges, bicycles and pedestrian facilities, public transportation, and freight, and can be used as a guide in creating an official financially-constrained Effingham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

### Overview of Planning Area

Effingham is a rapidly growing county located in southeast Georgia. Georgia's Coastal Region comprises 10 counties, with Effingham being one of four that are inland. Effingham is bordered by Chatham County to the south, the Ogeechee River to the west, Screven County to the north, and the Savannah River to the east. Bulloch and Bryan Counties lie to the west of the Ogeechee, while the South Carolina counties of Hampton and Jasper are across the Savannah River. Sizeable cities in neighboring counties include Savannah, Statesboro, and Hilton Head, South Carolina. Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Force base are also close by.

In Colonial days, Effingham County was referred to as St. Matthews Parish, of which the historic settlement of Ebenezer was the center. Following the Revolutionary War, the legislature named Effingham County as one of the eight original counties in Georgia in 1777. Ebenezer



Figure 1.1 Ten-County Coastal Georgia Region

Source: [coastalgeorgiadc.org](http://coastalgeorgiadc.org)



was the home of Georgia's first governor, John Adam Treutlen, who had represented Ebenezer at the Georgia Provincial Congress in 1775 and was on the drafting committee of Georgia's first Constitution.

Today the county covers approximately 480 square miles and includes the incorporated cities of Springfield, Rincon and Guyton which are surrounded by unincorporated areas of Effingham County. With 4.7% annual growth, Effingham was the 57th fastest-growing county in the nation between July 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 and July 1<sup>st</sup> 2005<sup>1</sup>. The county and the cities of Guyton, Rincon, and Springfield all experienced a higher rate of growth than the State of Georgia as a whole, and ranked among the highest in the fast-growing coastal region.

### **Guyton**

Guyton is located in west central Effingham County and is the smallest of the county's three cities in terms of both land area and population. Originally known as "Whitesville", Guyton began as a 250-acre land grant to a squire, following his service in the Revolutionary War. In 1838, the Effingham County Commission seized the land due to non-payment of taxes and proceeded to survey it, plat streets and property boundaries, and auction off lots. Additional streets were laid out when the city was incorporated in 1886. During its heyday in the early 1900's, Guyton saw up to 10 trains a day and was a thriving center of commerce for local farmers. After a period of decline following the 1960's abandonment of the prominent railroad running through the center of town, Guyton grew and prospered again, and has gained new residents at an increasing rate in recent years. In 2005, there were approximately 1,700 residents in the city, which now covers an area of 1.2 square miles. The downtown area has the most historic buildings of the three cities and is considered a historic district.

### **Rincon**

Rincon is situated approximately 20 miles north of Savannah in southern Effingham. It is the youngest of the three cities, having been established in 1890 by the Southbound Railroad Company. As is typical of Georgia's "railroad strip communities"<sup>2</sup>, Rincon is bisected by a railroad and its main street runs parallel to the tracks. Surrounding streets are arranged in a grid pattern. In 1955, Rincon was incorporated and over the next fifty years saw an increase of over 5,000 residents, to the current 2005 estimate of 6,850 people. Much of this growth occurred from 1980 onwards, spurred on by proximity to Savannah and employment opportunities at nearby industrial firms and utilities. The city limits cover approximately 6.7 square miles, making it the largest city in Effingham.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Top 100 Fastest Growing Counties, Table HU-EST2005-05

<sup>2</sup> *Georgia Community Development and Morphology of Community Types*, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Section (1989)



## **Springfield**

Located north of Rincon, Springfield was selected as the county seat for Effingham County in 1799. Little more than a “stagecoach stop” at first, Springfield was laid out by surveyors based on a “square town plan” in 1821, with squares and parks reserved for public use.<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of General Sherman’s “March to the Sea” during the Civil War, Springfield waned but rose from the ashes to become a bustling railroad town by the early 1900’s. Passenger rail service has since been discontinued, but an active freight line still runs through the city and various historic structures and businesses are still found in Springfield. Over the past few decades, Springfield experienced steady population growth. By 2005, 2,300 residents called the city home.

## **Relationship of Effingham County to the Coastal Region**

Effingham is part of the Georgia Coastal Region, which covers 10 counties and 35 cities and is the second fastest growing region in the state, second only to Atlanta. The 2000 Census records the regional population at approximately 560,000 within a 5,110 square mile area. In 2005, Effingham contributed a population of 47,000.

Effingham plays an important role in the coastal community, both as a destination and as a thoroughfare for people and freight traveling to destinations such as Savannah and South Carolina or connecting with I-95 or I-16 for longer distance journeys. The region is well served with strategic transportation connections, including interstates I-16 and I-95; several major highways such as US 80, SR 21, SR 119, and SR 17; as well as rail and the port of Savannah. These facilities are important drivers of physical and economic growth. Effingham County’s Economic Development Authority (EDA), in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, has attracted over \$1 billion of new investment since 2000.

## **Plans and Agencies**

### **Planning Agencies and Regions**

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) plans, constructs, maintains, and improves the state’s roads and bridges. In addition, GDOT provides planning and financial support for other types of transportation facilities and services including bicycle paths, mass transit, and airports. Effingham County and the Cities of Guyton, Rincon, and Springfield are eligible to receive state and federal transportation funds through GDOT.

The Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) works with and serves governments in the coastal region, including Effingham County and the Cities of Guyton, Rincon, and Springfield. The Coastal

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<sup>3</sup> Effingham County Comprehensive Plan (2007), Natural and Cultural Resources Data Appendix



Georgia RDC is the regional planning agency for Coastal Georgia and all planning activities in Effingham County should be consistent with regional plans produced by the RDC.

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) serves as an advocate for local governments. State policies are often articulated through DCA which provides extensive resources in the areas of building codes, coordinated planning, housing, and more. DCA's mission is "partnering with communities to help create a climate of success for Georgia's families and businesses." Formal programs include comprehensive planning guidance and Development of Regional Impact (DRI) review.

Within Effingham County, several agencies and private organizations are engaged in planning activities. The county and each of the three incorporated cities have planners on staff. In 2007, county and city planners collaborated with each other and relevant agencies to update Effingham's countywide Comprehensive Plan. The independent EDA is responsible for industrial recruitment and economic development throughout the county. The EDA is composed of representatives from each of the cities and the county commission districts. It works closely with the Chamber of Commerce which supports the business community with special focus on small business development.

### ***Existing Plans Review***

In preparing this Multi-Modal Transportation Study, multiple other related planning documents were consulted in order to maintain continuity, as listed in **Table 1.1**. Current ongoing planning efforts also have an impact on the development of this Multi-Modal Transportation Study. In 2005, collaborative efforts were initiated with Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to design a Regional Plan for Rural and Coordinated Public Transportation. The concept of the regional plan is to merge the funding and resources of the DHR with GDOT to bring about a seamless regional system providing transportation to DHR consumers and the general public simultaneously in Bryan, Bulloch, Camden, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, Liberty, Long, McIntosh, and Screven counties. Described in more detail in later chapters, the Regional Plan for Rural and Coordinated Public Transportation is scheduled to be completed in Summer 2008, with implementation of services in Effingham beginning in July 2008.



**Table 1.1 Resources Consulted During Planning Process**

Planning Documents	Geography	Sponsor
Effingham Comprehensive Plan - Community Assessment and Technical Appendix (2007) - Public Participation Plan (2007) - Community Agenda (November 2007)	Effingham County	Coastal Georgia RDC
Municipal Code and Ordinances	Effingham County	Effingham County Government
Historic Effingham - Ebenezer Scenic Byway Georgia Scenic Byways Map (June 2006)	Effingham County	Effingham County
Developments of Regional Impact, various plans and documents (ongoing)	Effingham County, selected sites	Georgia DCA
Coastal Georgia Regional Plan (June 1998, updated November 2004)	9-County Coastal Region (Bryan, Bulloch, Camden, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, Liberty, Long, and McIntosh)	Coastal Georgia RDC
Coastal Georgia Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (May 2005)	10-County Coastal Region (Same as above + Screven)	Coastal Georgia RDC
Regional Plan for Rural and Coordinated Public Transportation, Phase I (November 2005)	10-County Coastal Region	Coastal Georgia RDC
2005 – 2035 Georgia Statewide Transportation Plan	State of Georgia	Georgia DOT
2008-2011 Georgia Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP)	State of Georgia	Georgia DOT
2005 – 2035 Georgia Statewide Freight Plan	State of Georgia	Georgia DOT
Georgia Coastal Comprehensive Plan - Community Agenda (October 2007)	Chatham, Bryan, Liberty, McIntosh, Glynn, Camden	Georgia DCA
Metropolitan Planning Organization 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan (September 2004)	Savannah and Chatham County	Savannah-Chatham MPO
Chatham County Comprehensive Plan - Community Assessment (2007)	Savannah and Chatham County	Savannah-Chatham MPO