



Memorandum

To: Michael Czymbor; City Manager
From: Matthew Davis, AICP; Deputy City Manager
Date: March 17, 2021
Re: Argent Boulevard Roadway Conditions Meeting Update

As you are aware, on March 9, 2021 the City Council, City Staff, Josh Johnson of SCDOT and representatives of Thomas & Hutton attended a workshop meeting to discuss the traffic concerns raised by several parties along Argent Boulevard. The public was also able to view the meeting virtually.

The Mayor began the meeting by stating that Argent Boulevard is an SCDOT controlled road, and any improvements must be approved by that agency. Mr. Johnson further emphasized that improvements must be justified through studies and then satisfy criteria that is dictated by state law. A map was presented identifying various development projects in the Argent corridor including those outside of the City limits but still impacting traffic on the road. Representatives from Thomas & Hutton described previously suggested improvements that were the result of a traffic study in 2017 for the entire East Argent PDD. The current concerns were noted and included the intersection of Argent Boulevard, Jasper Station and Short Cut Road, the Highway 278 and Argent intersection, Argent and Highway 170, excessive speed, and lighting issues. It was noted that new development will in large part fund any road improvements as currently SCDOT has not earmarked any funding for this corridor beyond routine maintenance. Finally, specifics about how traffic studies are conducted and analyzed, how recommendations are made, how funding is determined and how the LATS (Low Country Area Transportation Study) long-range transportation plan all factor together was discussed.

The Mayor and Council asked that needs be identified. Below is a list of those needs, a brief explanation, possible funding sources and a timeline for those needs.

- **Police Sectors** – the Police Chief remarked that the long-term plan of the department involves dividing the City into patrol sectors. Currently the number of officers on duty at any one time does not allow a regular police presence on Argent Boulevard as the greatest need for officers is in the downtown area. Funding enough officers to implement the sector plan would allow a greater emphasis on regular traffic enforcement on Argent Boulevard. This option is dependent upon funding for additional officers. Until the necessary funding is in place the HPD will enhance traffic patrols along the corridor as they are able and will continue to coordinate with the Jasper County Sheriff as well.
- **Speed Indicator Signs and Lights** – these are signs that read the speed of passing cars and can flash when the posted speed is exceeded. The Police Chief is obtaining quotes from several vendors and



examining all options. Some signs are capable of capturing speed data and vehicle type. These signs could be ordered within a few weeks and installed as soon as they are received.

- Comprehensive Transportation Study – this study would examine the entire Argent corridor, considering all existing and proposed development and would enhance the previous study. Ultimately it will provide recommended improvements. This study can be funded from Development Agreement Fees and begun within the next two months. Once improvements are identified City staff can then ensure those improvements or a portion thereof are completed as development occurs. Adding these projects in the City’s Capital Improvement Program will identify proposed timing and funding.
- LATS – the widening of Argent Blvd. and improvements to the Argent/278 intersection are currently identified in the Long-Range Transportation Plan. This plan goes out to 2040 but provides no funding priority for these projects. Adding more specific improvements can increase the opportunity to obtain funding for projects from other sources. This plan will be updated in 2021 and should begin in late Spring/early Summer.
- Other Suggestions and Comments – other solutions that were mentioned included the following:
 - Roundabout at Jasper Station/Argent/Short Cut Road – this is an idea that could be thoroughly examined as part of a comprehensive transportation study
 - Additional development provides an opportunity to obtain funding and create more connections giving drivers greater options
 - Close Short Cut Road – this idea would need to be part of the comprehensive study as well to examine its potential impact to the existing traffic flow, effects on emergency services and access to other properties.
 - Better enforcement/shoulder issues – as mentioned previously, manpower is limited and there are other areas of the City that warrant an emphasized police presence. The HPD will increase their efforts when possible and work with other law enforcement partners. There may be an opportunity to construct “pull offs” in certain areas along Argent Blvd. that would allow for safer traffic stops. Staff is still researching this and will report back as soon as there are definitive answers.
 - Lighting along Argent Blvd. – while not cited as a cause in most incidents, illumination along the corridor, especially at driveways and entrances is minimal in many locations. The Police Chief is working with the electric utility provider to obtain a cost for streetlighting.

The City has concentrated a great number of resources to develop a plan moving forward. Staff highly recommends immediately beginning the process of developing a scope of work and selecting a qualified consultant from the City’s approved list to perform the comprehensive transportation study. According to the Police Chief most accidents are occurring during good driving conditions and can be attributed to distracted driving and frustrated drivers taking chances on a high-volume road. As development occurs new connections and roadways including linkages to East Argent Parkway will provide safer options. In the meantime, increased speed patrols and the installation of signs warning of excessive speed with flashing lights could have an impact on traffic speed. Enhanced patrols can begin immediately and signs with lights could be installed within a few weeks.