

February 20, 2008

## **ISSUE: City of St. Marys and US Navy – Emergency Evacuation Routes**

Camden County has expanded beyond the capability of rapid and safe evacuation for its residents in the event of a natural or man-made emergency. The City of St. Marys has adequate internal evacuation capacity via the four-lane St. Marys Road, the four-lane Georgia 40, the four-lane Kings Bay Road and the soon to be completed four-lane Colerain Road. The City is also providing cross connections between these highways to facilitate the possible need for alternate evacuation routes.

The issue is all of these roads shrink into two lanes beyond I-95 (i.e. 12 lanes into 6) and then they all merge into a two-lane highway at present Georgia 40 near Vicuna Road (i.e. 12 lanes into 2). I-95 is not an option for transference of this capacity, as it is normally blocked off in a disaster to facilitate interstate evacuations. Nor is two-lane US 17 viable. Our evacuation assembly point is Waycross, GA. During the last ‘near miss’ in 1996, with only a fraction of our current population, Georgia 40 was a ‘parking lot’ with many residents enduring the entire storm event in their cars. This is not an acceptable scenario. Also, there will always be a need for essential traffic to head east to the Navy Base when everyone else is going west, and this could put our military personnel at risk.

The City of St. Marys would respectfully request that Georgia 40 be expanded to 6 lanes from Vicuna Road to US 1 in Folkston; and the feeder roads be expanded to four lanes from I-95 west to the Vicuna Road intersection point.

The Georgia Department of Transportation is doing a great job with their budgets, and that is greatly appreciated. They need, however, a huge influx of additional specifically earmarked funds for this work. A Category 5 hurricane respects no budgets or political time constraints. We do not want a Katrina disaster on our hands.

The Camden County Emergency Management Center (Mark Crews) is doing the best it can, but without adequate highway evacuation capacity, their effective response will be severely limited. Add the increasing population due to large area projects and the possible impact this will cause.

**Recommendation:** The emergency evacuation needs of future residents and the current residents can be accommodated through a partnership between public and private entities. It is critical to the saving of lives, jobs, and property of Camden County. We would hope and expect that our reasonable requests for funding and approval will be received with support, and financial assistance.