

Girby Road Extension Major Street Plan Analysis

Due to recent inquiries regarding property located along the planned Girby Road Extension, the Planning Staff has evaluated the potential impacts of the future development of this portion of the proposed major thoroughfare, which would be a westward extension from the present terminus of Girby Road. Following are a description of Girby Road as proposed, and a re-evaluation of its status as a planned major street.

The Major Street Plan describes the Girby Road Extension Major Street as extending west from Knollwood Drive, terminating at a connection with Eliza Jordan Road, with a 100-foot divided right-of-way. The Major Street Plan states that the Extension would connect to Dawes Lake Road and Scott Dairy Loop Road; serve the Campground, Grelot, and Dawes Communities; and relieve future demands on Cottage Hill Road.

To build the portion of Girby Road between Hillcrest and McDonald Roads would require the acquisition of a large portion of a property owned by Mobile County Public Schools, which is presently developed with a middle school. In addition, the proposed roadway would coincide with a floodplain area and an area containing multiple lakes (around Dawes Lake Road), which would pose significant environmental and drainage concerns.

Girby Road is not illustrated in the MATS 2030 Plan, whose only proposal for the vicinity in the next 25 years is to widen Hillcrest Road, south of the site, from Halls Mill Creek to Three Notch Road. However, there are plans for Extensions to Snow Road and McDonald Road, which would intersect the western portion of the Girby Road Extension, and make it a viable major street.

A more direct route following the section line might seem an advisable alternative, and is in fact feasible between Knollwood Drive and Hillcrest Road; however, there are existing neighborhoods flanking that section line between Hillcrest Road and Sollie/Cody Road, and right-of-way would need to be purchased from over 40 homeowners, in addition to owners of acreage in the area. The detrimental effects of constructing a major street through previously residential backyards might be too great.

Major Street concerns notwithstanding, this situation may be instructional as the Planning Commission considers new subdivision applications. This area lacks adequate east-west roads; the nearest east-west streets are Cottage Hill Road, approximately 1.5 miles north, and Three Notch Road, approximately 2 miles south, and the large residential area between these roads has relatively few connections to Hillcrest Road, the north-south connector serving the area. The absence of these roads and connections illustrates the importance of establishing minor street connections between and within neighborhoods. Ideally, these streets would be planned prior to the development of neighborhoods, and regardless of whether Major Streets are planned for an area.

Connections between minor streets are a significant but underrated traffic management tool. Allowing more connections between minor streets—even residential streets—reduces the pressure on the few “bottlenecks” in an area, and creates alternative routes when one point of access is blocked. In addition to being more convenient for residents, there are public safety benefits, as response times for emergency vehicles could be reduced by having more ways into, around, and out of a neighborhood. Furthermore, minor streets can more easily accommodate environmental needs, and they discourage high speeds, making them safer for pedestrians and cyclists as well as autos.

By emphasizing connections between minor, low-speed roads, traffic is dispersed over a larger area and can move more consistently, at safer speeds. Often, this removes the need to widen overburdened collector streets, which typically only increase traffic (and runoff) in the long run, as well as being more costly and unsightly than minor streets. With more such minor street connections, the loss of a Major Street Connection is less problematic.

Based on the preceding, it is recommended that the Girby Road Extension be rerouted along the section line between Knollwood Drive and Hillcrest Road; that the portion of Girby Road between Hillcrest Road and Eliza Jordan Road be removed from the Major Street Plan; and that minor street connections be further encouraged in the future.

PROPOSED GIRBY ROAD EXTENSION

