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Project XL: The Atlantic Steel Redevelopment

WHAT IS PROJECT XL?

Project XL, which stands for "e**X**cellence and **L**eadership," is a national initiative that tests innovative ways of achieving better and more cost-effective public health and environmental protection. The information and lessons learned from Project XL will be used to assist EPA in redesigning its current regulatory and policy-setting approaches through a collaborative process. Project XL encourages local public sector and community organizations to test new ideas that demonstrate community-designed and directed strategies for achieving greater environmental quality consistent with community economic goals. It also requires substantial involvement by stakeholders, i.e. the people and organizations affected by EPA's decisions. EPA hopes that these projects will provide opportunities for everyone to think "outside the box" of our current system and to find solutions to obstacles that limit environmental performance.

SUMMARY OF THE ATLANTIC STEEL PROJECT

On September 7, 1999, EPA and Jacoby Development signed a Final Project XL Agreement which will remove barriers to construction of an urban redevelopment project in Atlanta. This redevelopment project will explore new ways to meet community, environmental and economic interests.

Jacoby proposed a mixed-use (residential, retail, office, and entertainment) redevelopment of a 138-acre site in midtown Atlanta that was formerly the home of Atlantic Steel. An essential component of the Atlantic Steel redevelopment project is construction of a bridge which would cross an Interstate highway adjacent to the site and link the site and the surrounding community with a nearby rapid transit station.

SUPERIOR ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

The Atlanta metropolitan area is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. In part due to its rapid growth, Atlanta has failed to meet federal air pollution standards and as a result is barred from building certain types of road projects. The prohibition on new road projects also applies to the bridge linking the Atlantic Steel site with the rapid transit station. However, projects that will reduce air emissions can be approved as Transportation Control Measures (TCMs). EPA has never evaluated a project of this size and complexity as a TCM. Through Project XL, EPA is using an innovative approach to approving the entire Atlantic Steel redevelopment project as a TCM.

Improving access to the Atlantic Steel site is essential for completion of the redevelopment. Construction of interchanges and a bridge across the interstate for cars, pedestrians, bicycles, and public transportation will improve access to the site. The bridge would serve as a vital link between the Atlantic Steel redevelopment site, the west side of midtown Atlanta and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) Arts Center station.

The Atlanta region will continue to grow. If the Atlantic Steel site is not redeveloped, the growth it represents would locate at other sites in the Atlanta

region. EPA and Jacoby believe that construction of the bridge and redevelopment of the Atlantic Steel site will produce less air pollution than an equivalent amount of development at other likely sites in the region. The combination of the site's location, design elements and connection to the public transportation system are expected to work together to reduce growth of auto traffic in the Atlanta region. The project will also accelerate the clean-up of an underused former industrial site in midtown Atlanta.

FLEXIBILITY

Because Atlanta is currently restricted from obtaining federal approval for new road projects, the proposed bridge cannot be built without the flexibility being provided by EPA under Project XL. There are two components to the flexibility. First, EPA will view Atlantic Steel's location, transit linkage, site design, and other elements together as a Transportation Control Measure. The second component of the flexibility is an innovative approach to evaluating the air quality benefits of the project. EPA analyzed Atlantic Steel's expected air quality benefit compared to an equivalent amount of development at other likely sites in the region. Based on the EPA analysis, redevelopment of the Atlantic Steel site will produce significantly less air pollution than an equivalent quantity of development at other sites in the region and can therefore be approved as a Transportation Control Measure.

APPROACHES TO BE TESTED

- Will the combination of location, linkage to transit, and design characteristics of a development project result in significant, measurable emissions reductions?
- Can the application of "smart growth" site design principles (pedestrian friendliness, mix of uses, etc.) make a difference in travel patterns, even in Atlanta -- where people drive more per capita than any other city in the country?

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

EPA and Jacoby participated in a number of public stakeholder meetings to discuss the project and the Final XL Agreement. EPA and Jacoby have also participated in meetings with an Environmental Justice Focus Group and several meetings regarding the proposed bridge at the invitation of the City of Atlanta and/or the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Atlanta Regional Commission. EPA received valuable feedback on the Project Agreement from national and local environmental and transportation groups and other interested organizations and individuals. A Stakeholder Participation Plan, minutes from public meetings, and public comments and responses are posted on the Project XL web site at: ***http://www.epa.gov/projectxl***.

CONTACTS

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FOR ELECTRONIC INFORMATION

More information about Project XL is available on the Internet at http://www.epa.gov/ProjectXL