**VALDOSTA-LOWNDES METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

**LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

**FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT THE VLMPO PLANNING AREA**

**BACKGROUND**

# The Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization (VLMPO) under 23 CFR § 450.306

supports the improvement of the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate stormwater impacts of surface transportation within the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Area (this area’s boundary is shown in Exhibit A).

A federal Green Streets Municipal Handbook (*Managing Wet Weather with Green Infrastructure*) has been provided through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assist local governments in implementing projects for low impact development since December 2008. The EPA encourages local governments to capitalize on the successful introduction of low impact development in transportation applications to encourage soil and vegetation contact and infiltration and retention of stormwater in urbanized areas.[[1]](#footnote-1)

At the local level, the VLMPO’s *2045 Transportation Vision Plan* (adopted September 2, 2020) includes an Environmental Mitigation Report, stating that efforts should be taken upon investments in transportation to prevent further development of impervious surfaces, seek to increase permeable surfaces (especially for parking areas), and incorporate green stormwater infrastructure into transportation projects where appropriate. Considerations for this include: utilizing low impact development, remedying severe channelization, increasing riparian buffers, or shifting from gray to green infrastructure. [[2]](#footnote-2)

The 2017 *Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan* encourages the management of surface water to boost economic and population growth, identifying opportunities to optimize existing and future water infrastructure, and implementing cost-effective water management strategies. [[3]](#footnote-3)

The 2021 *Comprehensive Plan for Lowndes County and the Cities of Dasher, Hahira, Lake Park, Remerton, and Valdosta* calls for the enhancement and improvement of water systems along with incorporating additional green spaces to gateways and parking areas. [[4]](#footnote-4)

There is a widely recognized need for improved source control of stormwater, limiting its transport and pollutant conveyance to the collection system, restore predevelopment hydrology to the extent possible, and provide environmentally enhanced roadways throughout the VLMPO area. Between 1974 and 2005 the Coastal Plains region lost more than 1.1 million acres of forested wetlands, largely due to low- and high-intensity urban development. In return, these areas have seen a 42-63% increase in impervious surface acreage that significantly contributes to stormwater runoff, raising the likelihood of severe and frequent flooding.3 The prevention of pollutant discharge, and implementation of these conservation practices are key elements of the Low Impact Development concept.

By adopting, in the form of a policy, the Low Impact Development strategies that are already being called for and implemented through local, state, and federal plans, policies, and laws, the VLMPO will affirm its commitment to smart-growth and conservation of resources within the MPO area’s transportation system, and will continue to restore, protect, and promote both natural and built environments within the VLMPA.

**VISION AND INTENT**

The vision guiding this Low Impact Development Policy is that the VLMPO will continue to promote and incorporate the natural and built environments through the use of low impact development for transportation projects throughout the VLMPA.

Further, the intent of this policy is to incorporate low impact development as a feature of urban stormwater management for the VLMPA’s transportation network, and to work towards creating a restored, resilient, and sustainable network for all transportation users.

**LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

In the development and operation of the transportation network, special attention should be paid to the safe accommodation of all roadway users and modes, of all ages and abilities. Moreover, special attention should be paid to improving conditions in areas of the community that are currently, or have been, underinvested and underserved.

Recognizing the importance of coordination between land use and transportation decisions, the surrounding community’s current and expected transportation, land use, and utility needs (including broadband) should be considered continually and comprehensively in the development and operation of the transportation network.

The various agencies and jurisdictions within the VLMPO area, and their partner agencies, should coordinate and work together to implement the vision and intent of this policy and fulfill its requirements.

**APPLICABILITY**

The requirements of this Low Impact Development Policy shall apply to all new construction, retrofit/reconstruction, maintenance, and ongoing projects within the VLMPO area that will use Federal funds through the VLMPO, for any phase of project implementation, including planning, design, right-of-way acquisition, construction, and engineering.

**PROJECT REQUIREMENTS**

The following requirements may apply to any locally-sponsored roadway project within the VLMPO area that will use Federal funds programmed through the VLMPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan and/or Transportation Improvement Program, including Lump Sum projects.

1. Any roadway which is to be newly constructed or completely reconstructed should be designed and constructed to consider:
	1. Provide for the safety and convenience of all users of all ages and abilities, including but not limited to pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and freight users; and
	2. Address the needs of all users both along roadway corridors and crossing the corridors.
2. Any project in which an existing roadway surface is to be restored or rehabilitated, and any remediation of deficient or non-existent sidewalks, should be reviewed for the potential of implementing low impact design strategies within the road right-of-way. Consideration may include an evaluation of whether the scope of work needed to include this additional design step is reasonable and economically feasible in relation to the scope of the proposed roadway maintenance or improvement.

**DESIGN STANDARDS**

The latest and best design criteria and guidelines should be used in the implementation of all projects to which this policy applies. The Low Impact Development design solutions that are used should complement the context of the community. The resources listed below are examples of recommended design standards as of the adoption of this policy. The latest and best design standards are subject to change as materials are updated and new resources become available.

* City of Valdosta: Master Stormwater Management Plan (2010)
* Lowndes County Soil Erosion, Sedimentation and Pollution Control Ordinance (Revised, June 2016)
* Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): *Managing Wet Weather with Green Infrastructure: Green Streets Municipal Handbook* (2008)
* Georgia Water Planning Council: *Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan* (2017)
* Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC): *Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in Georgia* (2016 Edition); Chapter 6- BMP Standards and Specifications for General Land Disturbing Activities, Appendix C- Construction Materials
* Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT): Design Policy Manual (Revision 6.4, 1/25/2022), Chapter 2- General Design Policy Information
* Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT): Context Sensitive Design Online Manual (Revision 2.0, 12/29/2016), Chapter 3- Leading with Best Practices
* Sarasota County (Florida): Low Impact Development Guidance Document (Updated May 2015), Chapter 2- Evaluating Your Site and Planning for LID, Chapter 3- LID Practices in Sarasota County
* Center for Watershed Protection: Georgia Coastal Stormwater Supplement to the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual (First Edition, April 2009), Chapter 4- Stormwater Management and Site Planning and Design Criteria
* Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): Development of Site-Specific Hydrologic and Hydraulic Analyses for Assessing Transportation Infrastructure Vulnerability & Risks to Climate Change (September 2020)

**EXCEPTIONS**

Any exception to applying this Low Impact Development Policy to a specific roadway project must be approved by the VLMPO Policy Committee. Documentation of the reason for the exception, and supporting data, shall be made publicly available.

The VLMPO Policy Committee may allow an exception to this Low Impact Development Policy under the following circumstances:

* Ordinary maintenance activities designed to keep assets in serviceable condition (e.g. mowing, cleaning, sweeping, or spot repair), but not involving reconstruction.
* There is extreme right-of-way, topographic, or natural resource constraints.

The VLMPO staff may also suggest an alternative accommodation in lieu of an exception to this policy.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation of the VLMPO Low Impact Development Policy will proceed as follows:

* VLMPO staff will make the Low Impact Development policy a routine part of everyday operations and may approach all transportation projects and plans as an opportunity to improve the transportation network for all users of all abilities while working in coordination with all jurisdictions.
* VLMPO staff will document the Low Impact Development elements to be implemented as part of each applicable project.
* The VLMPO will continue to monitor the construction of a comprehensive network of Low Impact Development infrastructure and identify key projects that could help to eliminate any gaps within that network.
* The VLMPO will continue to discuss the latest and best Low Impact Development principles and practices with staff, elected officials, engineers, and other decision-makers.
* The VLMPO will encourage local governments to incorporate Low Impact Development elements into transportation projects and to adopt local Low Impact Development policies.
* The VLMPO will seek out appropriate funding sources for successful implementation of Low Impact Development policies.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

In order to assess and quantify the effectiveness and successful implementation of this Low Impact Development, a range of performance measures will be tracked and reported on annually by the VLMPO.

The performance measures used may be those performance measures that are listed in the current VLMPO Metropolitan Transportation Plan. These performance measures are hereby incorporated by reference into this Low Impact Development Policy.

**APENDIX A. VALDOSTA- LOWNDES MPO AREA BOUNDARY MAP**



**APPENDIX B. GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Biodiversity- The variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem.

Conservation- Preservation, protection, or restoration of the natural environment and of wildlife.

Green Infrastructure- The range of measures that use plant or soil systems, permeable pavement or other permeable surfaces or substrates, stormwater harvest and reuse, or landscaping to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspirate stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters.

Green Streets- achieve multiple benefits, such as improved water quality and more livable communities, through the integration of stormwater treatment techniques which use natural processes and landscaping.

Living Infrastructure- Interconnected ecosystems within urban areas.

Low Impact Development- Systems and practices that use or mimic natural processes that result in the infiltration, evapotranspiration or use of stormwater in order to protect water quality and associated aquatic habitat.

Restoration- The action of returning something to a former owner, place, or condition.

Smart Growth-A range of development and conservation strategies that help protect our health and natural environment and make our communities more attractive, economically stronger, and more socially diverse.

Sustainable- Conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources.

1. Environmental Protection Agency. 2008. *Managing Wet Weather with Green Infrastructure: Green Streets Municipal Handbook*. [Municipal Handbook: Green Streets (epa.gov)](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-10/documents/gi_munichandbook_green_streets_0.pdf) (accessed January 3, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Southern Georgia Regional Commission. 2020. *VLMPO* *2045 Transportation Vision Plan*. [Vision2045 (sgrc.us)](https://www.sgrc.us/documents/transportation/visionplans/Vision2045_Metropolitan_Transportation_Plan.pdf) (accessed January 11, 2022.). pg. 119-120, pg. 126-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Georgia Water Planning. 2017. *Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan*. [2017 Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Plan. pdf](file:///D%3A%5CDownloads%5C2017%20Suwannee-Satilla%20Regional%20Water%20Plan%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf) (accessed January 26, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Southern Georgia Regional Commission. 2021. *Joint Comprehensive Plan Update for Lowndes County & the Cities of Dasher, Hahira, Lake Park, Remerton, and Valdosta*. Adopted November 9, 2021. [Lowndes County: Comprehensive Plan (sgrc.us)](https://www.sgrc.us/documents/comprehinsiveplans/LowndesCounty_CompPlan_12172021_Reduced%20Size.pdf) (accessed January 26, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)