

Connect Athens Corridor Plans: A process

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Introduction

What is it? Why is it? And how did it come about

What and why?

- Connect Athens is a planning process to identify short and long-term recommendations for two major gateways and thoroughfares in Athens – Atlanta Highway and Lexington Road.
- Challenges need to be documented and overcome

How?

- An RFP (Request for Proposals) was sent out in April of 2017.
- How many responded?
- How were they selected?



Relationship to other plans



Envision Athens

Envision Athens establishes a common vision and strategic action plan to guide the County forward. The plan is aspirational and represents the ideas of thousands of citizens and stakeholders. The vision and the strategic Action Agenda it informs are the product of hundreds of hours of intense discussion about the future of the County. These conversations served as a foundation for the Action Agenda, which is a prioritization of discrete projects, policies, and programs selected through the process. Many of the Goals and Priority Actions speak directly to the issues and opportunities present on Atlanta Highway and Lexington Road.

Athens-Clarke County Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan sets forth a blueprint to ensure the continued health, safety, and general welfare of the community. The timing of the 2018 Update was strategically scheduled to commence in cooperation with Envision Athens. While Envision Athens took a broader approach to community and economic development, the Comprehensive Plan aligned with specific criteria that must be addressed in hopes of providing a collective outline for achieving initiatives highlighted in the plan. The elements of the Comprehensive Plan, from Goals to the 5-year Community Work Program, have bearing on the priority actions that should be initiated along Atlanta Highway and Lexington Road.

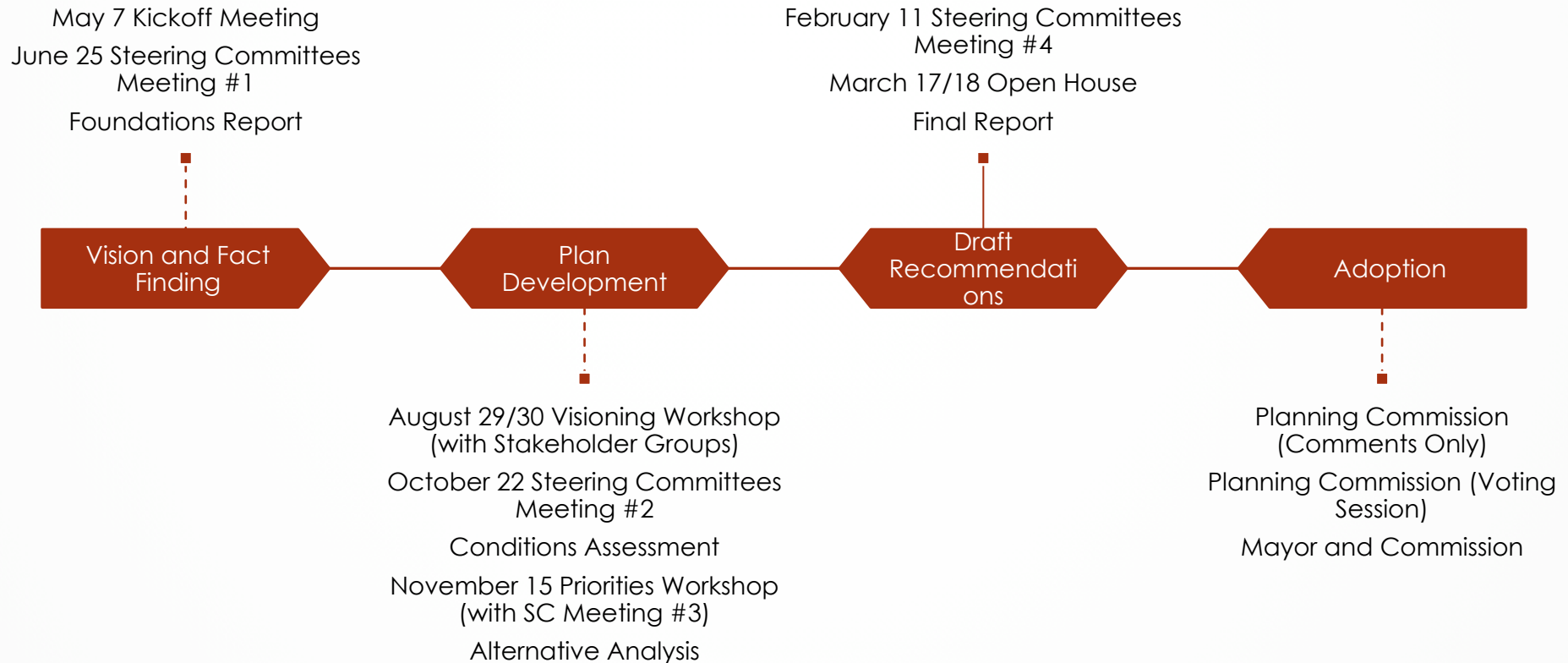
Strategy to Redevelop and Revitalize the Atlanta Highway Corridor (Urban Land Institute)

The Athens-Clarke County Unified Government requested the assistance of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to advise and make recommendations concerning the vibrancy of the Atlanta Highway Corridor. Through its Technical Assistance Program, ULI convened a multidisciplinary panel of experts for a two-day intensive work session to explore ways to retain current retail businesses, expand the desirability of the corridor, and enhance the appearance and flow along the corridor. Connect Athens carries forward many of the panel's recommendations, which were framed as a "big picture road map" for the corridor.

Transportation Plans

A variety of transportation processes continue to inform the future of corridors such as Atlanta Highway and Lexington Road. Many of these processes are required by state or federal agencies and are updated on a specific cycle. Other processes represent a point in time look at how people and goods move within and through Athens-Clarke County. Some plans consider the entire geography while others focus on specific corridors or subareas. Likewise, some plans cover all modes or zero in on specific types of travel such as the 2018 Athens In Motion Bicycle / Pedestrian Master Plan. Given the critical role the Connect Athens corridors play in the County's transportation network, each of these relevant plans were mined for data, trends, and recommendations.

Process Overview





**Corridor
Committees:**
process
leadership

Public: input,
feedback and
insight

Stakeholders:
targeted input

**Elected
Officials:**
monitor and
adopt

Staff: project
management,
local
knowledge

Consultants:
facilitation

Steering Committee Meetings

To ensure a capture of the broader community, steering committees included leaders representing Athens-Clarke County Government, real estate, University of Georgia, small business, churches and the faith community, residents and advocacy groups.

- Provide ongoing direction
- Develop key messages about the process
- Provide an initial step in inclusive engagement



- Offer the perspective of the larger community and be a liaison to those they represent
- Evaluate findings, help develop recommendations, and offer input on priorities.

Visioning Workshops

(April 29, 2018 and April 30, 2018)

Purpose:

- Provide background on the Connect Athens Process
- Share critical conditions and trends
- Facilitate discussions pertaining to major plan topics

Key Takeaways:

- **Function and Safety:** address traffic issues; improve pedestrian mobility; beautify the corridor and add greenspace
- **Aesthetics and Amenities:** add greenspace including medians; create consistent signage and aesthetics; clean up litter
- **Business and Economics:** Explore options for mixed-use development; improve sidewalks and lighting; add greenspace; create cohesive identity
- **Land Use:** encourage more mix of uses; improve access to Atlanta Highway for non-motorists; consider needs of senior citizens
- **Mobility:** improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility; address congestion and safety issues at key intersections; create a cohesive identity; support long-term development efforts through transportation improvements



Priorities Workshop

(November 15, 2018)



Purpose:

- Present initial findings of the visioning and analysis
- Establish values to govern the future of the corridor
- Inform design principles and specific strategies



Key takeaways:

- **Vision and Value Evaluation:** Place more focus and emphasis on quality of place and life
- **Opportunity Prioritization:** Integrate greenspace along the corridor; lessen the impacts of retail shifts and ensure Atlanta Highway remains productive and attractive; ensure the mall area remains a vibrant and productive place in Athens
- **Transportation and Mobility:** Coordinate signals, consolidate driveways, and install median segments; improve existing bus stops and add a transit hub on the corridor; install plantings at key intersections; improve pedestrian crossings and fill gaps in the side walk network



Open House

(March 17, 2019 and March 18, 2019)

Key Takeaways:

- Atlanta Highway: Future planning for the Georgia Square Mall and creating a targeted greenspace vision emerged as top short-term priorities
- Lexington Road: Empowering the member-based business association and conducting a strategic plan for the airport will be key short-term wins; Mobility priorities include constructing the GDOT interchange improvements and improving the Gaines School Road intersection

Purpose:

- Educate participants on the planning process, including how community participation has been reflected in the plan
- Introduce the corridor recommendations and orient attendees on how the plan will be communicated
- Gather feedback to guide the communication of featured short-term recommendations

Community Engagement

- ▶ 200+ Participants at community meetings
- ▶ 5,000+ comments and ideas
- ▶ 17 online engagement opportunities
- ▶ 120+ online comments
- ▶ 2000 hits to the Connect-Athens.org homepage
- ▶ 1,000+ Atlanta Highway website page views
- ▶ 550+ Lexington Road website page views





The Corridors



Atlanta Highway → ← Lexington Road

connect athens

CORRIDOR PLANS

Atlanta Highway

- ▶ 4.6 Miles
- ▶ 174 driveway/intersections
- ▶ Three bus routes with high ridership
- ▶ No dedicated bike facilities
- ▶ Gateway from the west
- ▶ Commercial corridor with transitioning retail and emerging industrial
- ▶ Adjacent residential (single and multi-family)



Lexington Road

- 4.1 miles
- 130+ driveways and intersections
- Gateway from the east
- Intermittent sidewalks, no dedicated bicycle facilities
- Three bus routes and high ridership
- Diverse mix of uses (airport, neighborhood scale commercial, government, residential)





Plan Framework



Corridor Characteristics

The Corridor Characteristics sets the stage for actions and strategies to come. The vision was built with significant input from residents, stakeholders, and staff.

Transportation and Mobility

Transportation and Mobility presents key findings and organizes recommendations within the context of travel mode and corridor aesthetics.

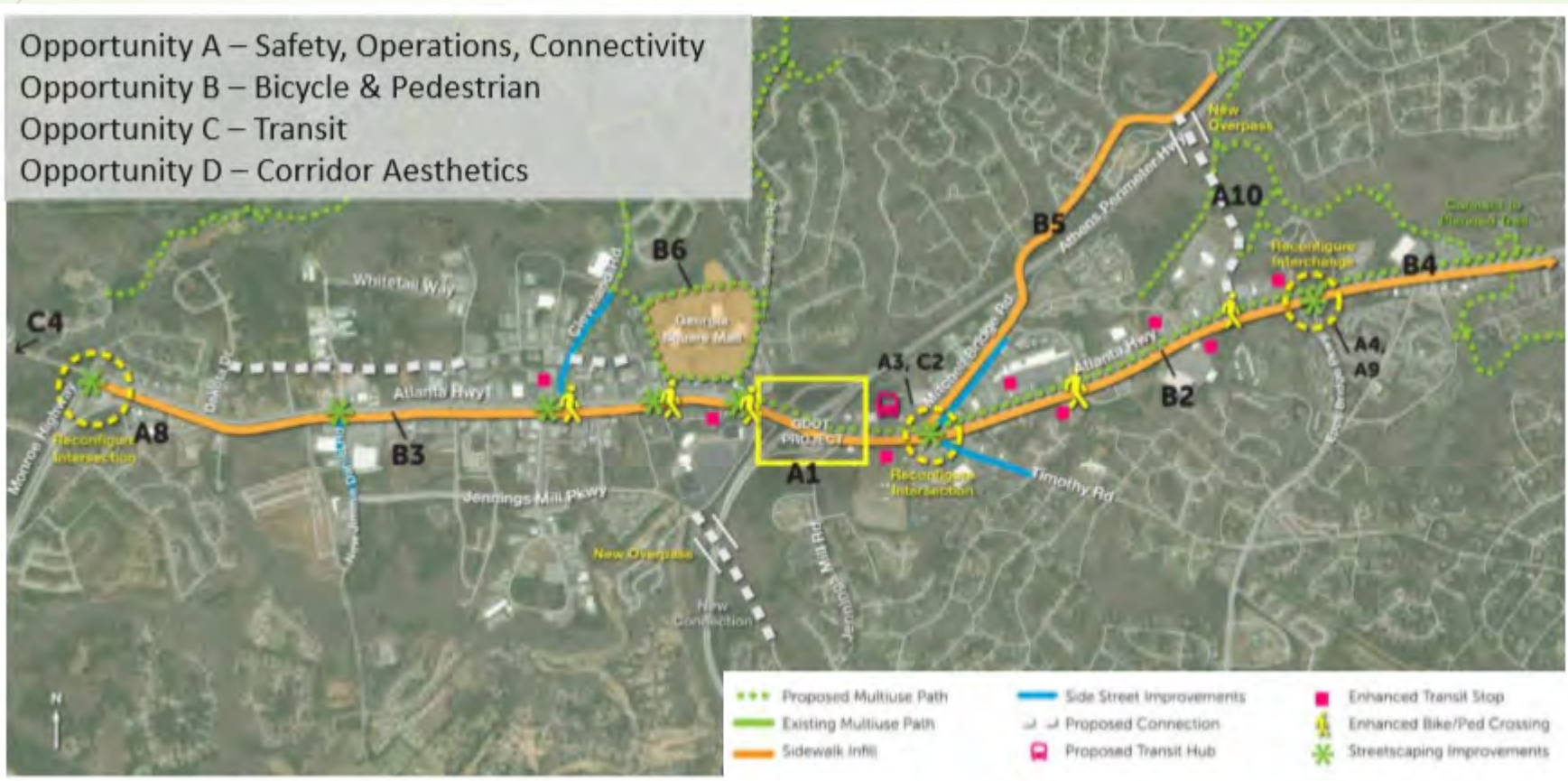
Strategic Opportunities

The Strategic Opportunities relate interconnected actions that, taken together, will help the corridor's vision be realized. The Strategic Opportunities are organized around three topics.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan adds the final layer of detail to the corridor plans. It helps explain specific strategies within the context of cost, partnerships, and likely impact.

Transportation and Mobility -- Atlanta Highway



Strategic Opportunities – Ben Epps Airport

- **Action B1:** Develop partnership between Athens-Clarke County School District and local flight schools
- **Action B2:** Develop partnership with University of Georgia and Athens Tech
- **Action B3:** Facilitate a discussion between appropriate University of Georgia departments and drone startup companies
- **Action B4:** Develop a new access point into Ben Epps Airport
- **Action B5:** Implement the marketing plan in development for Ben Epps Airport
- **Action B6:** Explore and expand cargo opportunities
- **Action B7:** Implement the recently adopted Strategic Plan for Ben Epps Airport
- **Action B8:** Monitor the progress of the passenger air feasibility study currently underway



Action Plan

= Low Public Investment
 = High Public Investment

= Low Mobility Impact
 = High Mobility Impact

Support
 Lead
 1 GDOT
 2 MPO
 3 ACC
 4 Private
 5 Athens Transit System

SHORT TERM

	Action	Cost	Impact	Participation
Safety, Operations & Connectivity	ATL.TM.A1. Construct the GDOT interchange improvement as currently designed.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.TM.A2. Coordinate signal timing throughout the corridor to improve traffic flow during peak hours.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.TM.A3. Reconfigure the Mitchell Bridge Road/Timothy Road intersection.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.TM.A4. Analyze safety concerns at the existing Epps Bridge Parkway flyover.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
Bicycle & Pedestrian	ATL.TM. B1. Enhance pedestrian crossings at Heyward Allen Parkway, Athens West Parkway, Huntington Road, Mall Access Road, and Cleveland Road.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.TM. B2. Construct a continuous sidewalk on the southside of Atlanta Highway east of Athens Perimeter Highway.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★★	1 2 3 4 5
Transit	ATL.TM. C1. Improve existing bus stops to include shelters, benches, and enhanced signage.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.TM. C2. Establish a bus transfer station inside the Loops.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.TM. C3. Increase frequency to 30-minute headways.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.TM. C4. Provide new hourly service to Caterpillar.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
Corridor Aesthetics	ATL.TM. D1. Install plantings at key intersections (Cleveland Rd, Mall Access Rd, Huntington Rd) to bring greenery into the corridor and provide visual interest.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
Greenspace	ATL.SO.A2. Establish a tree planting program for this specific corridor.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.SO.A3. Develop a targeted greenspace vision and plan.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
Retail Shifts	ATL.SO.B1. Build a living parcel inventory.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
Georgia Square Mall	ATL.SO.C1. Establish a new identity for the mall area.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5
	ATL.SO.C3. Conduct a housing market study focusing on the western portion of the county toward Atlanta.	\$\$\$\$\$	★★★★☆	1 2 3 4 5



THANK YOU!

<https://connect-athens.org/>





QUESTIONS?