

SOUTH ATLANTA- CHOSEWOOD PARK NEIGHBORHOOD CLUSTER

*A Plan to Champion Equity, Increase Access,
and Promote Redevelopment*



FORWARD

This plan has been produced for the South Atlanta-Chosewood Park neighborhood cluster located in Atlanta, Georgia. Through research of existing conditions, identification of issues and opportunities, and an exploration of alternatives, this planning team produced a set of recommendations to accomplish a distinct set of goals for the neighborhoods.

Due to recent events surrounding police violence and the COVID-19 pandemic, the study area is experiencing a threat to the vibrant community they created. The loss of jobs and homes across Atlanta has expedited government aid, but these temporary supports are not enough. Even before the pandemic, the Atlanta BeltLine's promises of prosperity hang in the balance with fears regarding gentrification and displacement. An overarching hope for this study area is to preserve its priceless history, protect existing residents, and foster a future in which all of these neighborhoods can thrive.

To maintain dignity and respect for those who live in these neighborhoods, most photos throughout this plan were intentionally chosen to depict true residents of the South Atlanta-Chosewood Park neighborhood cluster. For this we owe gratitude to Focused Community Strategies (FCS) for documenting this area's heritage and cultural identity.

During the Spring of 2021, this neighborhood plan was developed for the Master of City Planning Workshop at the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design. Despite the alternative learning environment warranted by the COVID-19 pandemic, this process replicated the challenges and rewards of collaboration in planning. We would like to thank our instructor, Elizabeth Frantz, our partner group, and all of our peers who provided feedback and guidance.

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WEITZMAN SCHOOL OF DESIGN, DEPARTMENT OF CITY & REGIONAL PLANNING
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The Atlanta BeltLine

The Atlanta BeltLine is a 22-mile loop of multi-use trails built on a former railway corridor. Originally conceived in 1999 by city planning graduate student Ryan Gravel, the project has expanded to include additional parks and trails, streetcars and light rail lines, community programming, and affordable housing. In addition, the project includes a planning area for economic and residential development in the adjacent neighborhoods.

Overview

The Atlanta BeltLine project involves many key players. Notably, the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (ABI) is the team responsible for planning, development, and execution of the project's vision. The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (ABP) is the nonprofit fundraising and awareness-building arm that keeps the project's vision on track. Both groups work closely with the City of Atlanta and other partners.

The entire Atlanta BeltLine project is estimated to be completed by 2030 and cost \$4.8 billion. The project is being funded by a combination of taxpayer dollars, philanthropy, grants, and public-private partnerships. Stakeholders anticipate numerous benefits, including the creation of 30,000 permanent jobs, the generation of \$10 billion generated for the Atlanta economy, and the creation of 28,000 new housing units and 5,600 affordable housing units. However, the project has also raised concerns over gentrification, rising housing prices, increased cost of living, and lack of affordable housing. ABI has come under fire for not making sufficient progress in the creation of the 5,600 affordable units as promised. As of December 2020, only 907 units have been pledged, and not all of them have been built.

Southside Trail & the Study Area

The Atlanta BeltLine Southside Trail is currently a 4.5 mile-long, unpaved interim trail connecting the constructed Eastside and Westside Trails. The section was purchased by the City of Atlanta from CSX in 2018 for \$26 million, funded by



FIGURE 6: A portion of the interim Southside Trail of the Atlanta BeltLine passing under I-75/I-85

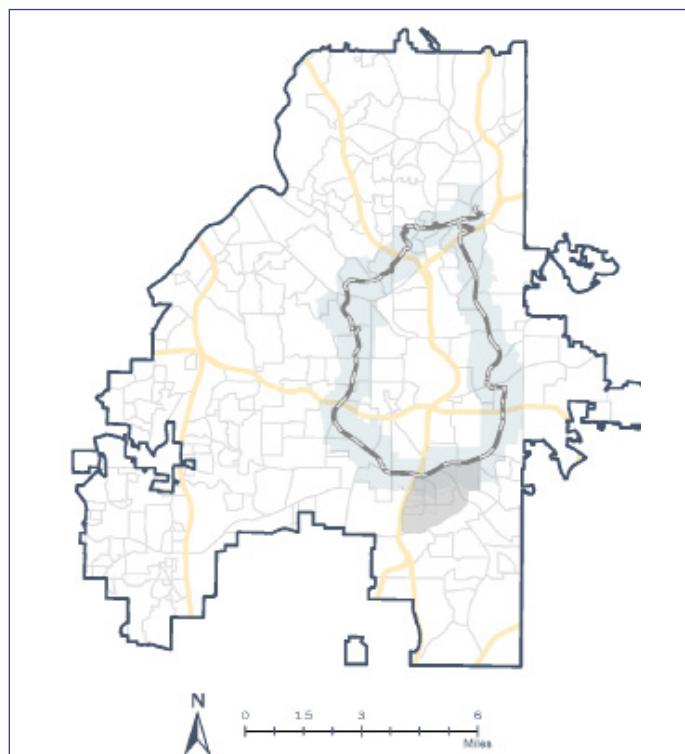


FIGURE 7: The neighborhoods, shown with respect to the Atlanta BeltLine planning subarea and the entire City of Atlanta

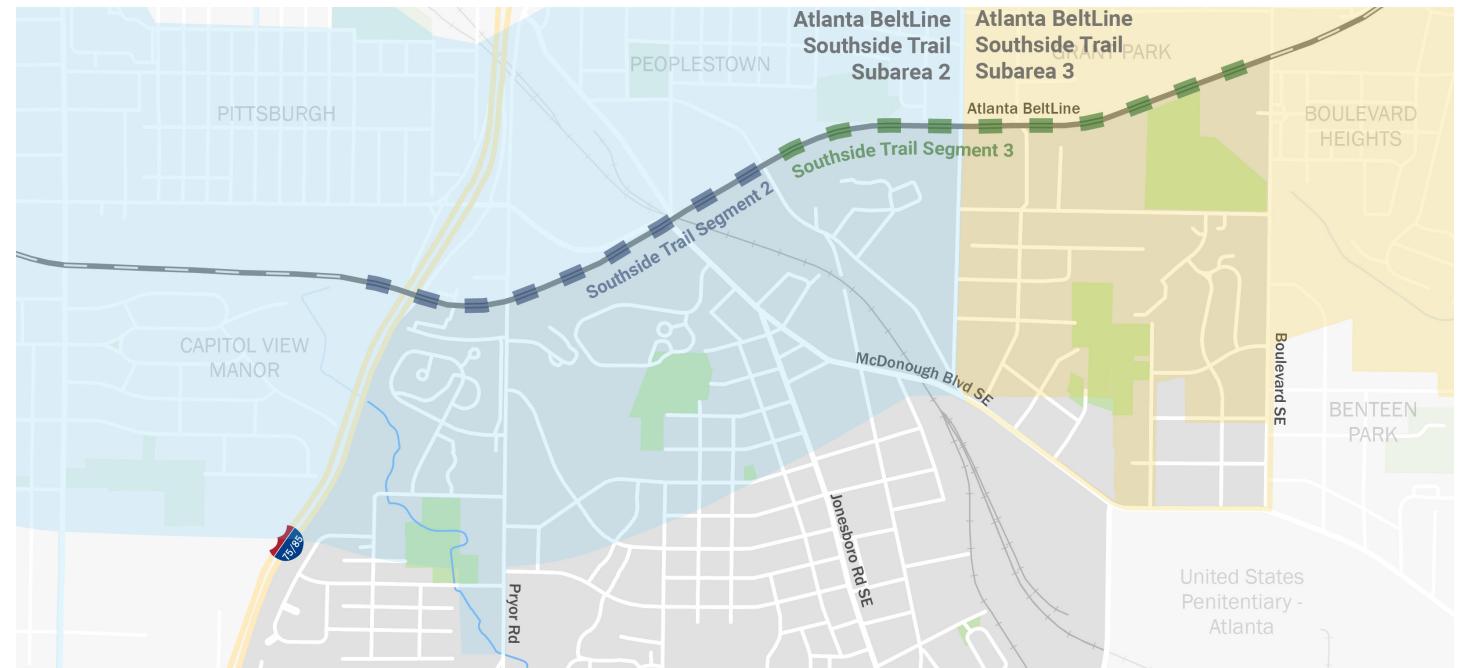


FIGURE 8: Atlanta BeltLine Southside Trail where Segments 2 and 3 intersect the neighborhoods

Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST). The Southside Trail is divided into five segments, each of which is about one mile long. The study area is intersected by Segments 2 and 3.

On January 22, 2020, a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the first phase construction of the Southside Trail at Segment 1, which is one mile west of the study area. Also in January 2020, ABI and the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) acquired a 2.5 acre parcel for Boulevard Crossing Park, which is located at the northeast corner of the study area.



FIGURE 9: Groundbreaking at Boulevard Crossing Park

With this land acquisition, ABI and the DPR have acquired all the land needed to proceed with the Boulevard Crossing Park project. Following the passage of the Special Service District in March 2021, the ABI has secured the necessary construction funding to finish development along the Southside Trail.

Before major construction can resume, however, soil remediation will take place during the summer of 2021. ABI was awarded a \$500,000 Brownfield Cleanup Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to clean up portions of the interim Southside Trail identified as in need of remediation.



FIGURE 10: A 2019 rendered image for Boulevard Crossing Park

Transportation

Transportation infrastructure in the the South Atlanta-Chosewood Park neighborhood cluster includes a diverse road network, operational and dormant railroads, and bike and pedestrian paths of varying quality.

Infrastructure

Major transportation infrastructure not only forms the major boundaries of the study area, but also provide linkages throughout the study area to the metropolitan region at large. Challenges do exist, though, accessibility and mobility.



FIGURE 40: Road network and corridors in the neighborhoods

roads have two lanes in each direction, and most residential roads have one lane in each direction. Few of these options provide on-street parking.

Corridors on I-75/85

There are three corridors in the study area that traverse I-75/85: the Atlanta BeltLine Southside Trail, Fair Dr. SW, and State Route 166. The BeltLine provides an underpass which is only accessible by pedestrians and cyclists, while State Route 166 is an overpass only accessible by motorized vehicles. Fair Dr. SW is an overpass with car lanes, separate (but unprotected) bike lanes, and sidewalks.

Railroads

A double-tracked freight railway owned by the Norfolk Southern Corporation traverses the neighborhood in the north-south direction. The railroad interacts with local roads using two gated level crossings and two underpasses. Cantilever signals and signs are installed at both level crossings. The northern boundary of the neighborhood, the Atlanta BeltLine Southside Trail, was once also owned by Norfolk Southern.

Bike Paths

According to the street view of Google Maps, existing labeled bike paths are found along McDonough Boulevard SE, Milton Avenue SE,



FIGURE 41: An entrance to the BeltLine's Southside Trail that currently only provides pedestrian access via stairs

and Fair Drive SW. Among the neighborhoods' residents, merely 1.5% of commuters bike from census tract 64, and no commuters bike from census tracts 55.02 and 67.

Additionally, the physical bike paths infrastructure throughout the study area is not of uniform quality. Notably, current conditions reveal that connection points between bike paths in the area and the Atlanta BeltLine Southside Trail are not amenable to cyclists (Figure 41).

Sidewalks and Pedestrian Crossings

Not all sidewalks in the area have the same degree of quality. For example, sidewalks on McDonough Blvd. just across from Carver Neighborhood Market have unpaved portions and contain gravel and litter (Figure 42), while the sidewalk immediately adjacent to the retailer is in more pristine condition. This presents a challenge for people of varying abilities to safely make their way to the one major retailer in the community.

Pedestrian safety improvements are also needed beyond sidewalk repair, such as crosswalk painting and road line repainting or reconfiguring (see Figure 43). There are also areas where utility poles block pedestrian crossings.



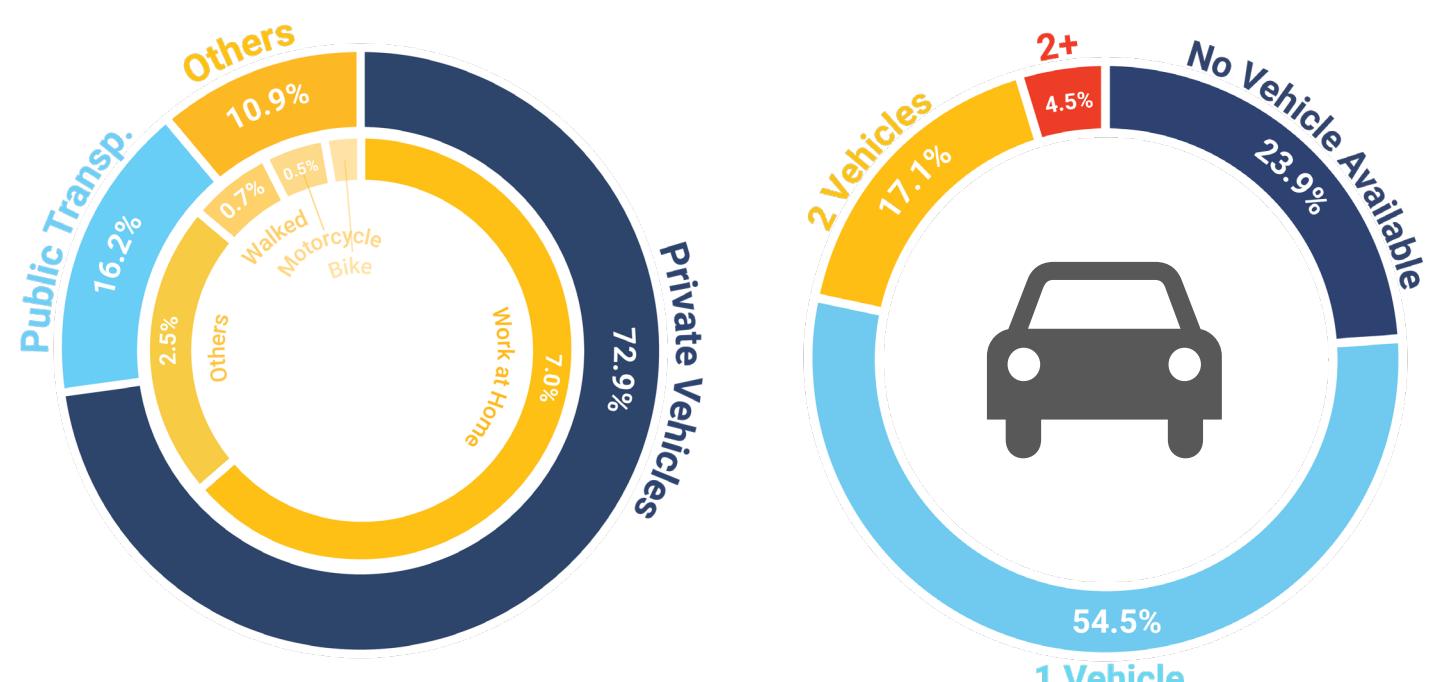
FIGURE 42: The sidewalk along McDonough Blvd. on the opposite side of the street as Carver Neighborhood Market



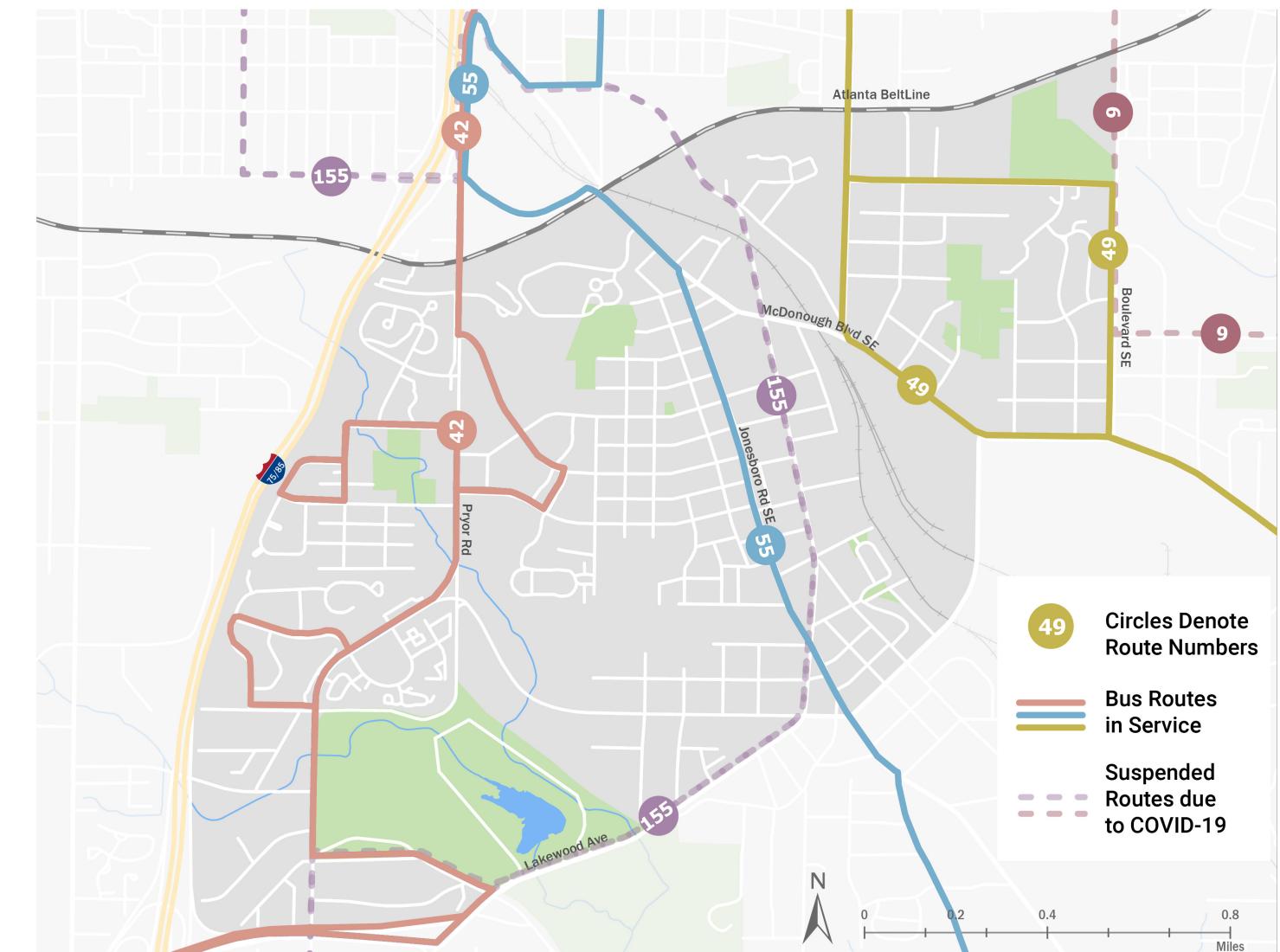
FIGURE 43: McDonough Blvd. approaching Lakewood Ave. with road paintings in need of maintenance

Mode Share and Commuting

In terms of commuting, 72.9% of residents of the South Atlanta-Chosewood Park neighborhood cluster drive in private vehicles, 16.2% take public transportation, 0.7% walk, 0.5% use motorcycles, and 0.3% ride bicycles. The neighborhoods' transportation mode share is higher than the city's average (10.9%), while the shares of walking and biking are both lower than the city's average (5.0% and 1.1%, respectively). The percentage of households in the neighborhoods that do not own a vehicle is also higher than the city's average (23.9% compared to 15.8%).



The top five employment hotspots for residents living in the South Atlanta-Chosewood Park neighborhood cluster include census tracts 119, 9800, 96.02, 19, and 303.45. These areas represent portions of downtown Atlanta, the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the Lenox Square area, and the Oaks of Cumberland area. All of these destinations are aligned in the north-south direction relative to the study area.



Bus Routes

There is no passenger train service in the South Atlanta-Chosewood Park neighborhood cluster, so taking the bus is the only option for public transportation. According to the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), there are normally five bus routes serving the study area:

- Route 9 – Boulevard / Tilson Road
- Route 42 – Pryor Road
- Route 49 – McDonough Boulevard
- Route 55 – Jonesboro Road
- Route 155 – Pittsburgh

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MARTA suspended routes 9, 55, and 155 on April 20, 2020. Route 55 was reinstated on June 15, 2020, but it would be several months before the others came back into service.

The pandemic is still ongoing, but as cases reduce and vaccinations become more widely available, MARTA has resumed additional suspended routes. In the study area, routes 9 and 155 were resumed on April 24, 2021. Overall during the pandemic, the average delays have been shorter than they were before the start of the pandemic, which is likely due to lighter traffic throughout the region.

3.1 | Better Connections

The first infrastructure strategy focuses on forging better connections through physical trail networks, paths, and cycling lanes.

3.1.1 Facilitate and extend Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (ABI) proposed trails

The first action within this strategy is to construct a trail network connecting the Atlanta BeltLine with the greenspaces in the area. The Atlanta BeltLine Subarea 2 Master Plan, updated in February 2019, put forth plans to build new trails to connect the BeltLine, Arthur Langford, Jr. Park, and the Villages at Carver YMCA. This planned path is shown in Figure 83 in solid green. While this trail in the ABI proposal only

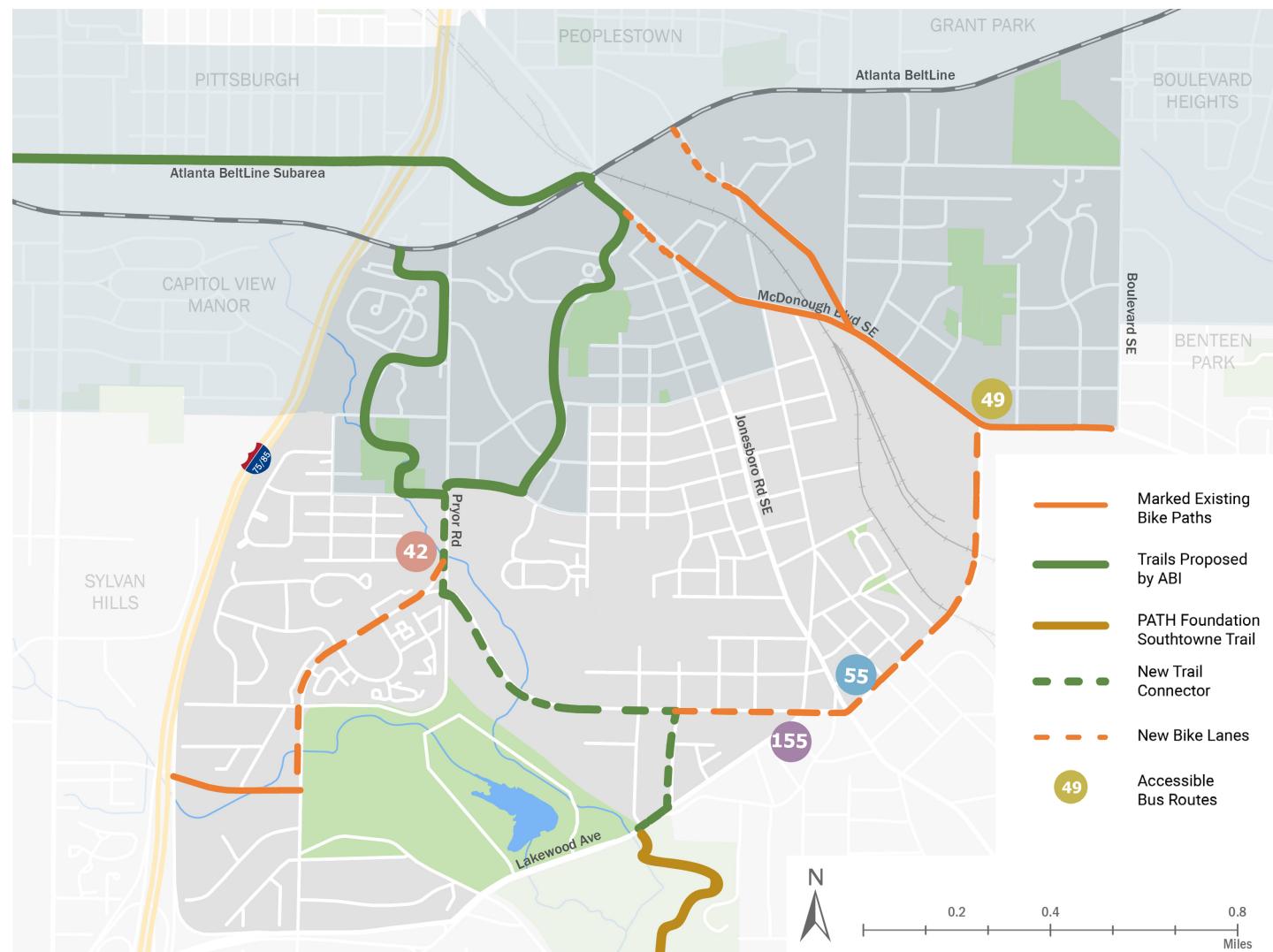


FIGURE 83: Current and proposed pedestrian paths and bike lanes

addressed segments within Subarea 2, this action recommends building upon this proposal and extending the trail further south to connect to the Southtowne Trail across the study area boundary of Lakewood Avenue. Figure 83 shows this proposed connector in dashed green. Installation of clear signs and map markers denoting path network continuation would also help trail users orient themselves.

3.1.2 Add bike lanes to improve connectivity and public transit access

The second action is to connect different transit options using additionally proposed bike lanes, which will branch out from the proposed trails. This would be a short-term solution to designate bike lanes (see 3.2.3 for a longer-term approach). One of two major branches will be a bike lane from the intersection of Pryor Road and Claire Drive to the intersection of Pryor Road and Fair Drive. It will connect the existing bike lane on Fair Drive, which provides a relatively safe option to bike across I-75/I-85. Such connection will provide cyclists with more bus options across the interstate and MARTA train access at the nearby Oakland City and Lakewood stations, both within 15-minutes of biking from Pryor Road. The other branch will extend along Claire Drive and Sawtell Avenue, ending at the McDonough Boulevard

Lead partners would include ABI for oversight, and the PATH Foundation for construction. The nonprofit Trees Atlanta could plant vegetation along the paths, especially in residential areas that may benefit from sound buffers. The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (ABLP) and the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) would be ideal sources to fund such a large-scale project to occur in phases over three to five years.

TIMEFRAME: ● ● ○ ○ (3-5 Years) COST: \$\$\$
PARTNERS: Atlanta DPW
Atlanta DOT
Renew Atlanta Bonds

intersection. The lane will connect the Pryor Road corridor with both major streets, providing transfer options among four bus routes, three of which are within five minutes of biking from each other.

Implementation would involve the City of Atlanta's Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Department of Transportation (DOT). A key funding source could be Renew Atlanta Bonds, which addresses Atlanta's backlog of needed facility and infrastructure improvements.

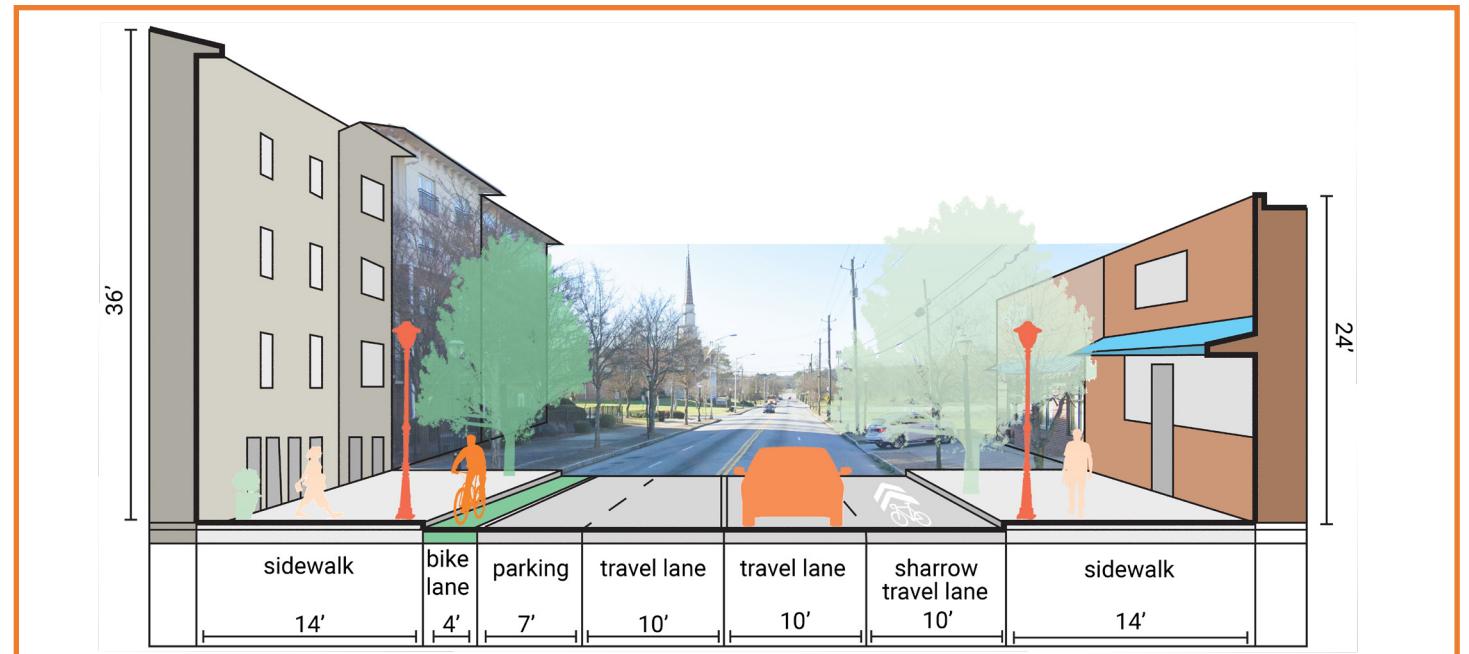


FIGURE 84: Cross-section of the Pryor Road corridor, looking south

3.2 | Transportation Safety Upgrades

The second infrastructure strategy pertains to transportation safety upgrades and improvements for pedestrians and cyclists.

3.2.1 Conduct community-based voluntary sidewalk inspections

This action recommends organizing community-based feedback mechanisms and voluntary sidewalk inspections. Sidewalk infrastructure varies in quality throughout the area.

Ideas and complaints about sidewalks should be collected from the residents through comment collection in community spaces and during neighborhood meetings. Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS), a nonprofit focusing on walking safety in Georgia, can help organize community-based workshops and walking audits in which the residents can identify potential risks and areas for walkability improvements. The problems identified can then be collectively reported to the city services. The City of Atlanta Department of Public Works (DPW) should be involved to fix issues like removing obstructions or repairing concrete.

TIMEFRAME: ● ○ ○ ○ (1-2 Years) COST: \$

PARTNERS: PEDS
Atlanta DPW



FIGURE 85: An area of the sidewalk across from Carver Neighborhood Market and Community Grounds Café, the key retail area in the neighborhoods. The sidewalk has cracked pavement and an overall rough surface.

3.2.2 Improve pedestrian crossing infrastructure

The second action is to improve pedestrian crossing infrastructure. While some intersections have safety measures, several do not, but there are tools that can be used to improve the crossings. One is using reflective paints at intersections such as the one at Pryor Road and Meldon Avenue (Figure 86 on the next page). Another is to install additional streetlamps along the road to improve visibility. Signs for pedestrian wayfinding, like the one illustrated in blue on the sidewalk in Figure 86, can help residents and visitors alike make their way to the Atlanta BeltLine to the north.

TIMEFRAME: ● ● ● ○ (6-9 Years) COST: \$\$\$

PARTNERS: Atlanta DPW
Atlanta DOT
Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.

The ABI should coordinate with the City of Atlanta's Department of Public Works (DPW) and the City of Atlanta's Department of Transportation (DOT) to include the proposed improvements in their future plans.

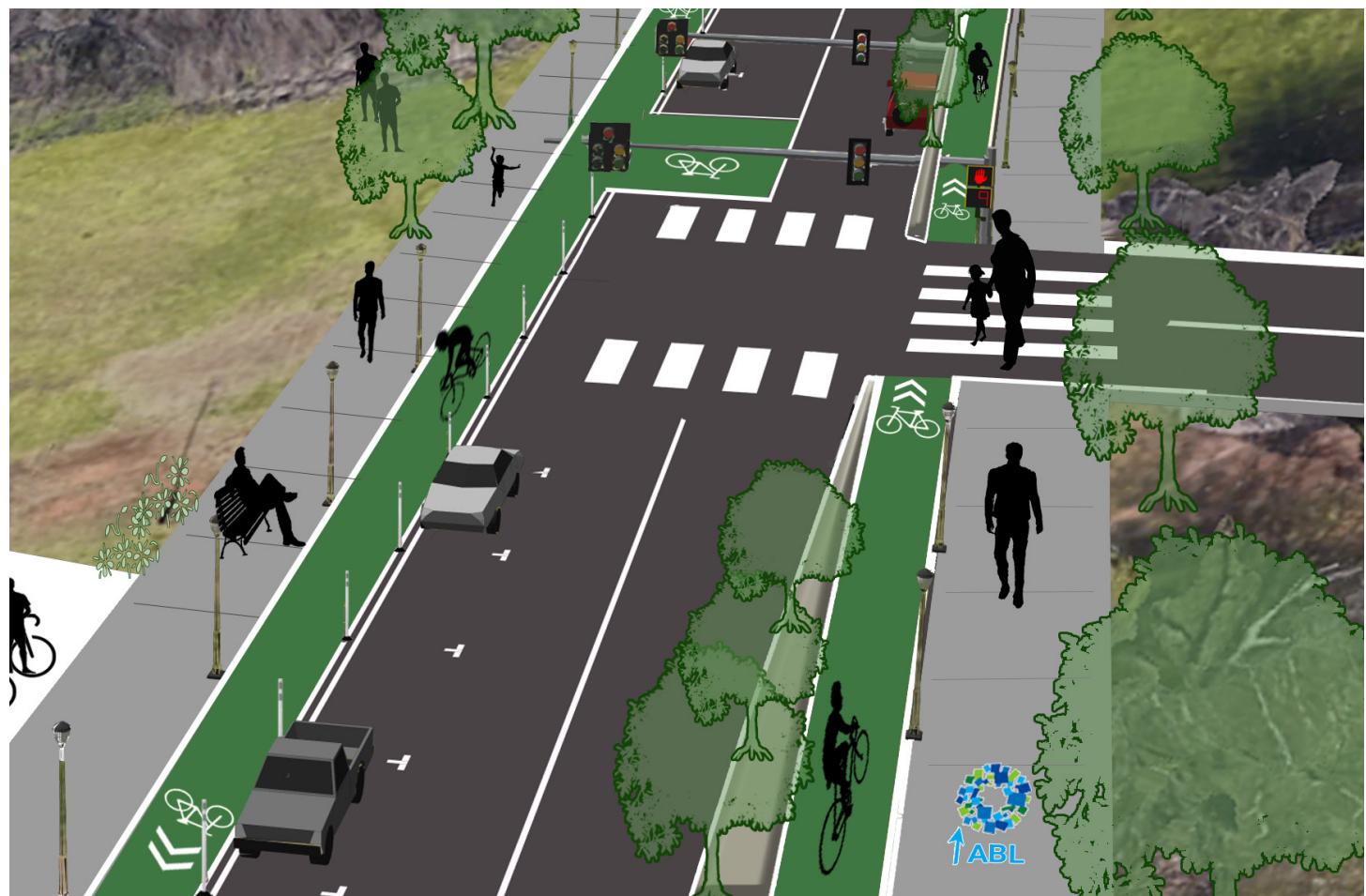


FIGURE 86: Rendering of the Pryor Road intersection with Meldon Avenue, equipped with new infrastructure designed to enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

3.2.3 Implement safety infrastructure for cyclists

The third action is to improve safety for cyclists. This action is the long-term version of the earlier bike lane connection concept proposed in 3.1.2. In this case, the bike lanes which will be connected to other trails or will be frequently used should be more physically separated from the motorized vehicles. Construction of medians and bollards on each side of the street will be protective barriers between designated cycling lanes and the others. Over time, these medians could also have added environmental benefits, like vegetation to soak up excess groundwater (as discussed later in 3.3.3). Reflective paint would also be used here to denote markings on the lanes and bike turning.

TIMEFRAME: ● ● ● ○ (6-9 Years) COST: \$\$\$

PARTNERS: Atlanta DPW
Atlanta DOT
TSPLOST
Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.

One potential funding resource could be through the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST), which is often used for funding complete street projects in Atlanta and make improvements to infrastructures without raising property tax.

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