DEKALB COUNTY

Trail and Greenway Master Plan

JANUARY 24, 2025

DeKalb County
GEORGIA

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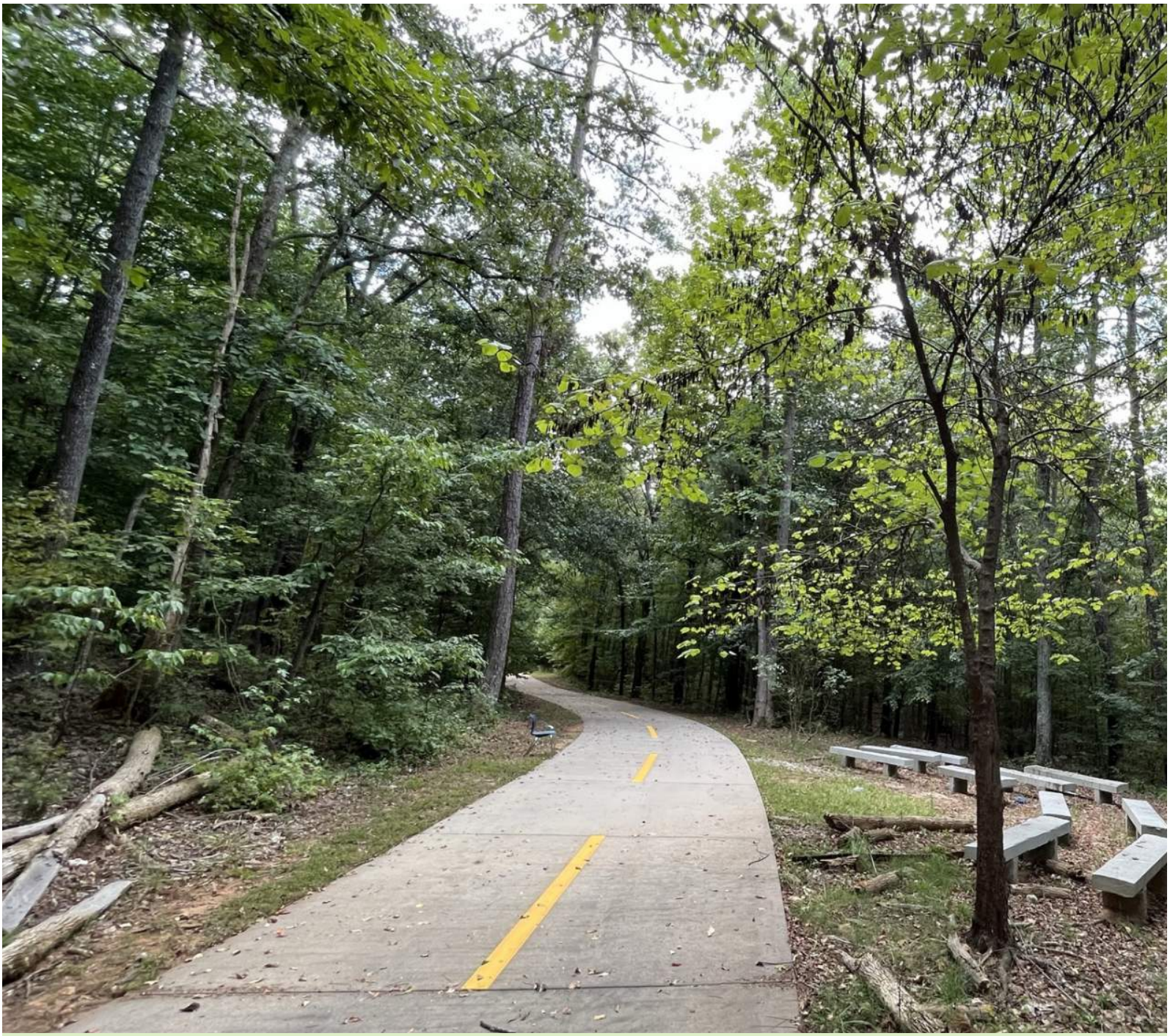


I. Introduction

Executive Summary

Reimagining the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Network is an extraordinary opportunity for the County and the Metro Atlanta region. As trail projects are completed over time, the trail network will become increasingly interconnected and will help move people to the places they need to go, promote health and well-being, improve sustainability and resilience, and increase equitable access to communities and local destinations. This Plan seeks to inspire the entire DeKalb County community, including citizens, trail advocates, and leadership to work together to achieve the vision of an interconnected, world-class trail network that will bring benefits to the County's residents and visitors for decades to come.

The DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan is organized into six primary chapters and six appendices. The first chapter is an **Introduction** to the Trail and Greenway Master Plan. The second chapter is focused on the **Existing Countywide Trails Network**. This section summarizes the key existing conditions within the County's trail network, including gaps and barriers, access to the trail, trail and greenway usage, and other important data that lays the foundation for trail network recommendations later in the plan.

The **Public Engagement** chapter tells the story of what we heard from the community and key stakeholders. This story emerged from many conversations about people's desires for the Countywide Trail Network. These conversations occurred in a variety of contexts: through five in-person open houses held throughout the County, three walking tours, three pop-up events, fifty-seven stakeholder interview attendees, 604 survey participants, 240 online input map comments, and nearly 1,900 unique visitors to the project website. This section captures the key themes that we heard and translates those into recommendations for the proposed Countywide Trail Network.

Developing the Countywide Greenway Vision Network is the heart of this plan. Here you will find the bold ideas that illustrate the potential of a fully realized network. This chapter summarizes the goals and principles that guided the development of the Countywide Greenway Vision Network. The vision network map illustrates how these goals and principles have been incorporated into this plan. The Countywide Greenway Vision Network will connect existing trails to each other, increase access to trails for the County's residents, provide access to important local destinations, and support inter-county and regional connectivity.

The chapter titled **Impacts of the Countywide Greenway Vision Network** summarizes the economic analysis work that takes a data-centered approach to consider the value, benefits, and costs of making investments in the network. The range of benefits that may result from an expanded trail network were measured against the required cost of capital improvements and ongoing operations and maintenance, and the resulting analysis will support the County's decision-making processes as it plans for expanding the network.

Implementing the Countywide Greenway Vision Network will identify the top priority projects for the County to pursue. These projects will be summarized and organized into several tiers, with maps identifying the location of each project. Five high-level feasibility studies of top tier projects will illustrate the potential benefits to the County's trail users. A funding and partnership matrix will support the tiered projects, providing an achievable roadmap for implementation.

Finally, the appendices contain important information, including a full record of public engagement and the complete existing conditions analysis. **Appendix A** provides trail design guidelines that will help planners and designers of future trail projects create world-class trail facilities for DeKalb County. **Appendix B** is the maintenance and operations plan for the Countywide trail network. **Appendix C** includes the complete record of public engagement, and **Appendix D** includes the complete existing conditions analysis. A presentation on the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Benefits Case can be found in **Appendix E**, and **Appendix F** covers funding and implementation.

Purpose and Scope

DeKalb County's Trails Today

As of this writing, DeKalb County currently has more than 65 miles of greenways, trails, and paved paths. These existing trails provide recreational opportunities as well as transportation options for users. These trails have been built by local governments and private organizations over the past three decades. However, like many trail systems in the Metro Atlanta region, the County's trails are largely disconnected from each other. The lack of connectivity limits the benefits that an interconnected County trail network would provide.

Benefits of an Interconnected Countywide Trail Network

Creating Access to Outdoor Recreation and Exercise

Trails and greenways improve public health by supporting outdoor exercise and recreation, yielding long-term savings on health care expenditures.

Attracting and Supporting Residents and Visitors

Trails and greenways are a community asset that enhance quality of life for existing residents and attract new residents and visitors, reinforcing the local tax base and bolstering local economies through trail tourism.

Supporting an Interconnected Transit System

Paired with investments in walkability and transit, trail expansion can support transportation as well as recreation. By making it practical for more people to walk and take public transit, trail expansion can reduce traffic congestion, barriers to employment, and carbon emissions.

An Interconnected Countywide Greenway Vision Network will connect to key destinations to work and play throughout the County

Why the Countywide Trail and Greenway Plan was Needed

The predecessor to this plan was 2000's DeKalb's Greenway Trails: A Master Plan for Multi-Use Trails In DeKalb County, Georgia, prepared by the PATH Foundation. This plan positioned the County to receive federal funding for greenway development and active transportation projects. Subsequent planning efforts, such as the County's 2014 Transportation Plan, ARC's Regional Transportation Plan, city master plans, small area plans, and PATH's numerous trail/greenway studies are relevant to this plan but did not focus on the benefits of a Countywide trail network.

The DeKalb 2050 Unified Plan, which included the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP), adopted in 2022, represented a major step forward in establishing the County's transportation priorities over the next thirty years. The CTP established eleven transportation priorities that helped guide DeKalb County's goals for the Countywide Trail and Greenway Master Plan.

Transportation Priorities

The Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2022) established eleven transportation priorities that helped guide DeKalb County's goals for the Countywide Trail and Greenway Master Plan.

Provide transportation options through connectivity across modes.

Enable healthy communities and improve quality of life.

improve quality of life.

Improve safety.

Improve maintenance.

Promote equity.

Increase funding for improvements.

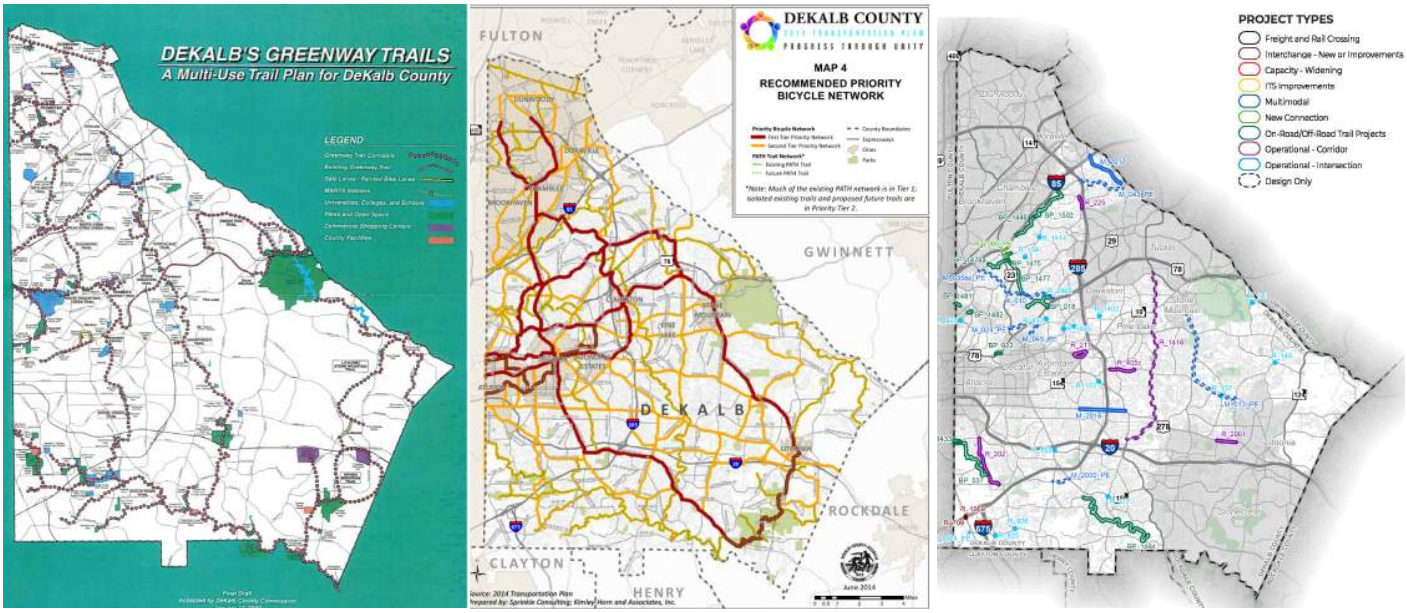
Increase access to jobs and destinations.

Encourage economic development.

Respect and improve DeKalb County's character.

Practice fiscal responsibility in transportation investments.

Better accommodate movement of goods.



Previous trail-related planning efforts included DeKalb's Greenway Trails (2000), the Countywide Transportation Plan (2014), and the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2022).

Scope of this Plan

This plan focuses on expanding the network of **paved or hard-surface trails** in unincorporated DeKalb County. Some of DeKalb's incorporated cities have existing trails and/or trail and greenway master plans. This plan recognizes the value of connectivity between county and city trails and wherever possible, prioritizes those connections. Soft surface trails, such as crushed stone, mulch, or natural surface trails, are not included in this plan.

Trails in this plan generally fall into two categories based on the trail's alignment (i.e., a trail's physical location). A **sidepath** is a shared use path located immediately adjacent and parallel to a roadway. An **independently aligned trail** is a shared use path that is not adjacent to a roadway. Often referred to as greenways, these trails may be located through park land, linear corridors such as utility corridors or alongside streams, through forested or rural land, or other types of greenspaces.

This section of the Arabia Mountain Trail is an example of a sidepath, as it runs adjacent to Browns Mill Road.

This section of the Arabia Mountain Trail is an example of an independently-aligned trail.

What are trails and greenways?

Trails, greenways, and shared use paths are facilities that serve people walking, bicycling, or utilizing other non-motorized modes. They provide opportunities for recreation, connection to nature, green space, and increasingly, transportation for community members and visitors.

What's in the Trail and Greenway Master Plan

The Trail and Greenway Master Plan consists of four major components, which are summarized below:

Countywide Greenway Vision Network: The Countywide Greenway Vision Network is the proposed trail network that best meets the goals and principles that have been shaped and defined by public input, key stakeholders, existing conditions analysis, and County staff.

Capital Development Program & Strategies: Includes projects that have been ranked based on key criteria, a high-level feasibility review of five projects, an analysis of the funding required to build and maintain the Vision Network, and an inventory and analysis of potential funding sources and strategies for obtaining financing.

Trail Design Guidelines: features recommendations based on current best practices for trail design. The guidelines also address trail amenities and wayfinding.

Maintenance + Operations Guidelines: Provide strategic recommendations for improving current practices and bringing them to scale as the trail network continues to grow.

The first step of creating the Trail and Greenway Master Plan was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the existing trails network as well as characteristics of the communities and environments the trails pass through. A summary of the findings of the existing conditions analysis are presented in the following chapter.

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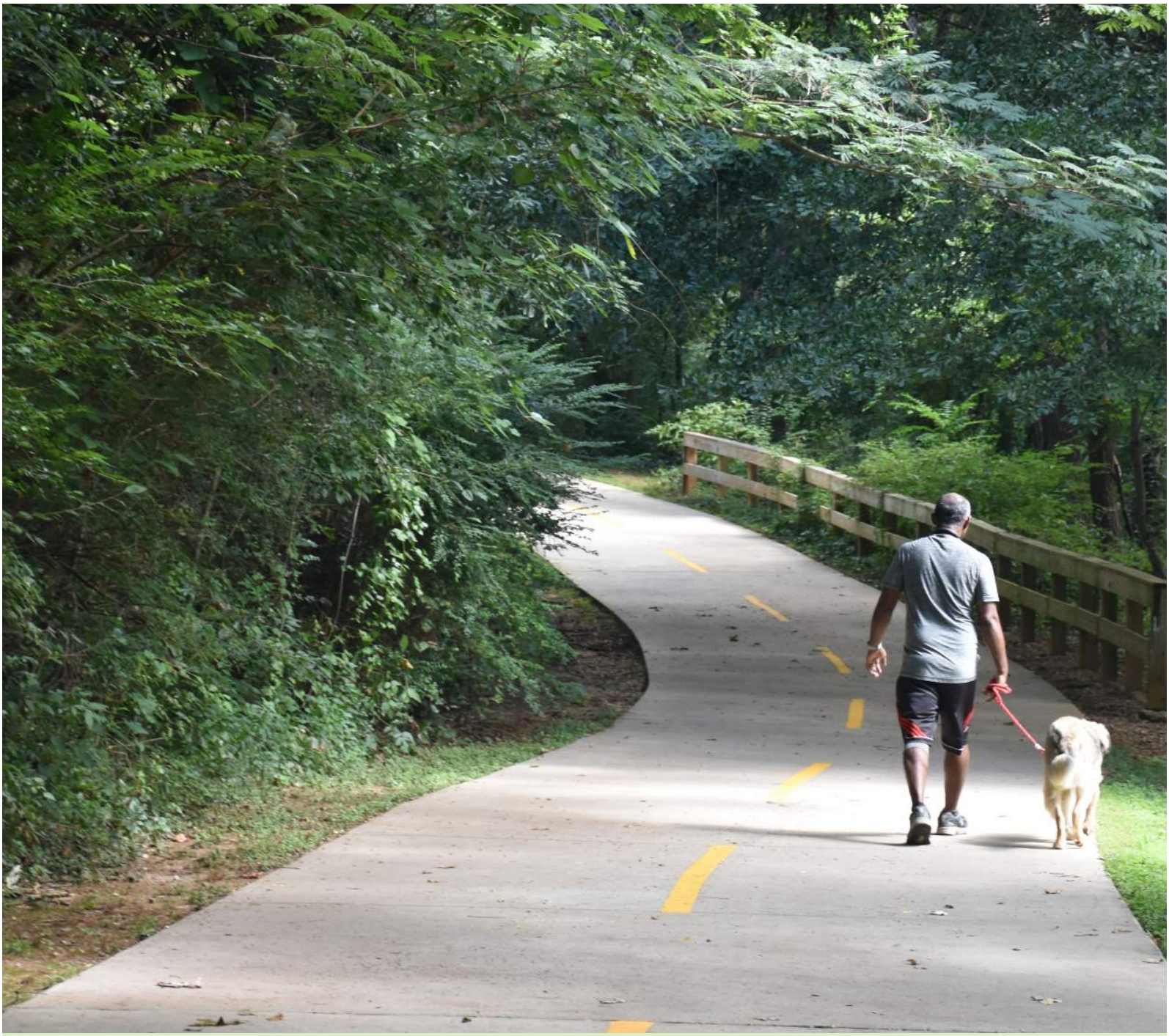


II. Existing Countywide Greenway Network

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the existing conditions that impact the planning and design of trails and greenways in DeKalb County and as such provides a firm benchmark for future trail planning. Data sources used in the development of the existing conditions include field work, trail counts and intercept surveys, crime data, equity-focused US Census data (ethnicity, race, age, income, English proficiency, and gender), traffic counts, and available GIS layers, including topography, hydrology, and existing trail and other transportation networks. The plan was developed between 2023-2024 and used the most up-to-date GIS data available to guide the existing conditions analysis.

The full existing conditions report can be found in Appendix D. This chapter summarizes the most relevant information and takeaways from the report and includes key information on the following:

Site inventory and analysis provides an overview of existing trail infrastructure and the environmental and cultural characteristics of the areas surrounding the Existing Countywide Greenway Network.

Planned and proposed trails accounts for trails that are in the planning stages of development or have been proposed through past planning efforts.

Trail and greenway use records and analyzes findings from automated trail counts and trail intercept surveys that were completed as part of the development of the Plan.

Preliminary analysis identifies existing network gaps and barriers and examines equitable access to trails.

Inventory & Analysis

A countywide inventory and analysis of existing GIS data was conducted to provide an overview of the existing physical, topographic, and population characteristics around the Existing Countywide Greenway Network. The combination of these attributes and features has a strong impact on the shape, accessibility, and utility of the County's trail network.

In addition to the GIS analysis, a representative assessment of physical trail conditions was performed for each of the four major County trails (Stone Mountain Trail, South River Trail, Arabia Mountain Trail, and the South Peachtree Creek Trail). These assessments included the on-site collection of detailed physical inventory along two miles of each trail. The purpose of the physical assessment was to identify common issues associated with the design and maintenance of the trail network. These issues informed the recommendations of the Trail Design Guidelines (Appendix A) and the Maintenance and Operations Plan (Appendix B).

Natural

Located within the central Georgia piedmont region, DeKalb County is generally hilly and shaped by several prominent ridgelines and watersheds. DeKalb County is bisected by the Eastern Subcontinental Divide which separates waterways draining to the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. This prominent ridgeline shapes much of the area's topography.

Three granite monadnocks are unique geological features in DeKalb County that serve as recreational and scenic destinations – Stone Mountain, Panola Mountain, and Arabia Mountain. The three mountains are each contained within state parks and National Heritage Areas and generally have good internal trail connectivity. Each are also regularly cited as prime destinations by residents but lack connectivity to other parks and destinations within the county. [1]

Several trail segments, such as the South River Trail, closely follow a river, stream, or creek due to topography, land ownership, and scenery. Other trails, such as the Stone Mountain Trail, follow ridges or watershed divisions to use topography and major roadway corridors. While waterway corridors are often attractive for greenway trail planning, natural resource regulations and adjacent ownership often create barriers to effective implementation.[2]

Cultural

POPULATION

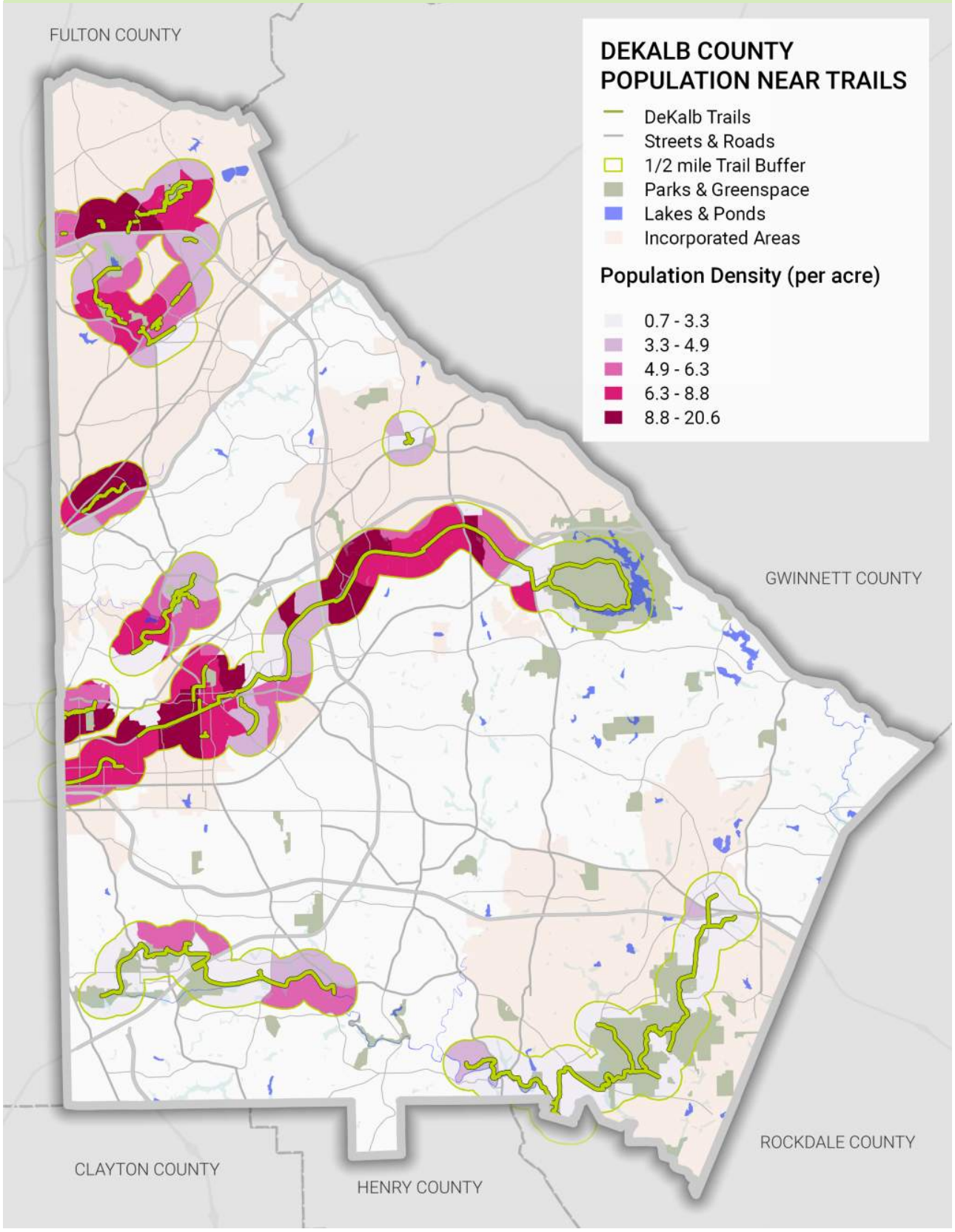
Proximity to trails is a critical factor in accessibility, use, and equity. Currently trails follow the general population distribution of DeKalb County – denser in the central, western, and northern portions of the county. One-half mile is considered a reasonable walking distance to a destination; bicycle trips may be longer. Currently, approximately 22% of DeKalb County residents live within 0.5 miles of a greenway facility. This would equate to a 22/100 Access rating, according to the Trust for Public Land's ParkScore Index.

Figure 1 on the next page shows that the denser census tracts follow the Stone Mountain Trail and portions of the Peachtree Creek Greenway in Brookhaven near Buford Highway. Less dense tracts are located in the suburban neighborhoods in northern and southern DeKalb County.

The Arabia Mountain Trail runs through a National Heritage Area and includes granite monadnocks, which are unique geological features and serve as a regional destination.

1 Georgia GIS Clearinghouse; US Geological Survey DLG
2 Atlanta Regional Commission and Metropolitan North Georgia Water District

Figure 1. Population density within 1/2 mile of trails



DEMOGRAPHICS & EQUITY

DeKalb County's population is diverse with people of many different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This plan utilizes the Atlanta Regional Commission's Equity Analysis Framework which identifies concentrations of people in nine protected classes. These protected classes (listed below) are recognized under federal civil rights and environmental justice regulation.

- Ethnic minority
- Female
- Foreign born
- Limited English proficiency
- Low-income
- Older adults
- People with disabilities
- Racial minority
- Youth

People with lower incomes, racial and ethnic minorities, and older and younger adults have been historically excluded from greenway and trail investment. These populations are also often less likely to be able to drive or have access to a personal automobile. The result is that many of the areas people who are most in need of safe, comfortable transportation options are also areas that have had the least investment in trails and greenways. Gaps in trail access for these populations were examined specifically and are summarized in the Preliminary Analysis section and can be viewed in further detail in Appendix D.

FUTURE LAND USE

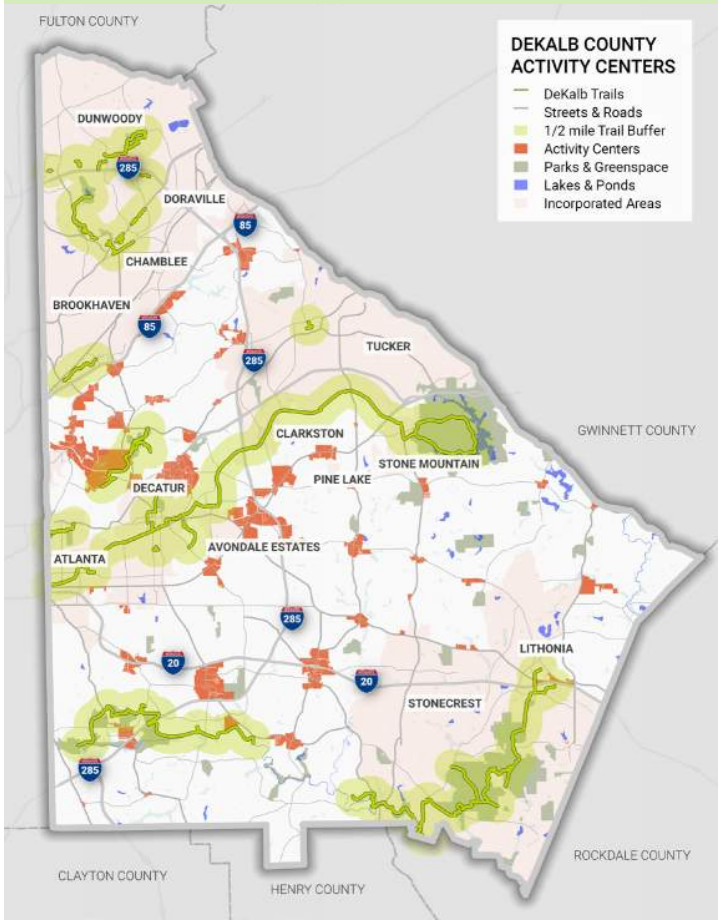
In addition to the distribution and demographics of the DeKalb County's population, trends and patterns in land use are also important to understand when planning the trail network. The County predominantly contains denser urban and suburban areas with scattered pockets of parks, natural areas, and less-dense suburban or rural areas. Trail locations were assessed against future land uses within the County's 2050 Unified Plan. Trails currently span areas envisioned to be suburban neighborhoods, activity centers, industrial, light industrial, or natural / conservation areas.

ACTIVITY CENTERS

Activity Centers, shown in Figure 2, are designated character areas in DeKalb County that "serve as one of the lynchpins of DeKalb County's Land Use strategy" and "are intended to serve as hubs of higher intensity and more clustered uses, providing focal points for the community that serve as employment and service destinations." [3]

As higher-density destinations, Activity Centers are important locations for prioritizing County trail segments. A significant portion of trail visitors utilize trails for community or utility trips (personal business / errands), so linking trails to higher-density areas is useful for promoting physical activity and non-motorized modes of travel.

Figure 2. DeKalb County Activity Centers



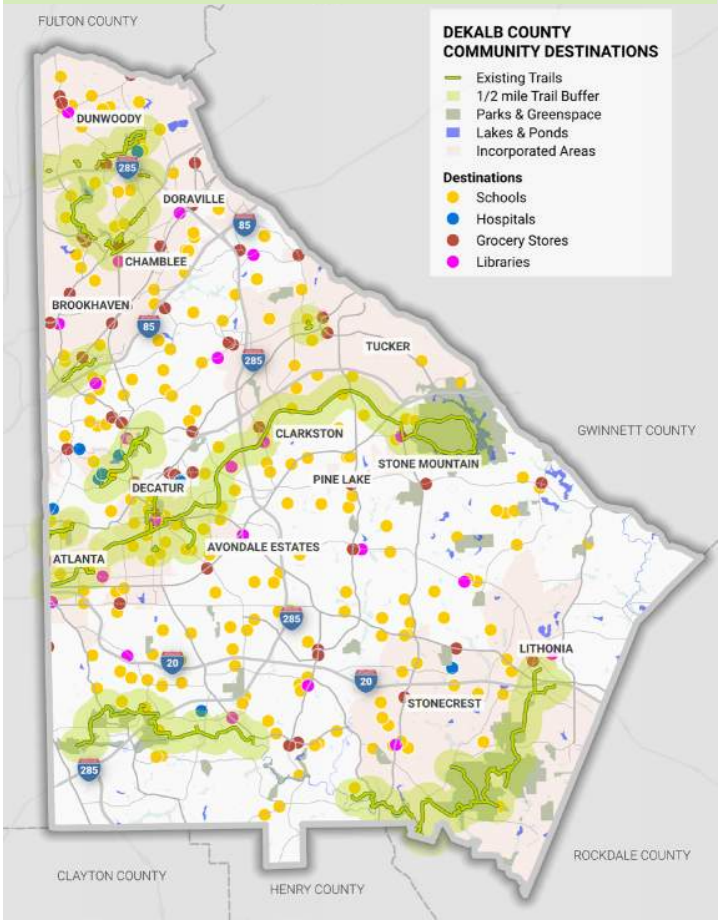
3 2050 Unified Plan – County Activity Centers / Character Areas

COMMUNITY DESTINATIONS

Trails within DeKalb County generally provide good access to community destinations. North of Decatur, the South Peachtree Creek Trail provides direct access to the Atlanta VA Medical Center, the Children's Hospital, and Emory University Hospital. Schools and libraries are distributed fairly evenly across the county with some direct connectivity to trails mostly in incorporated areas.

Grocery stores tend to be in more auto-oriented areas and are also less present in the southern half of the County. Shopping areas along Wesley Chapel Road and S. Hairston Road have some of the fewest grocery stores in southern unincorporated DeKalb County and have no nearby trails. Figure 3 shows community destinations and proximity buffers to existing DeKalb County trails.

Figure 3. Community Destinations



Community destinations, including Clarkston Market, the DeKalb Tennis Center, and Georgia State's Perimeter College Campus are directly accssible from DeKalb County's trail network.

Infrastructure

ROADWAYS

DeKalb County is defined by a diverse roadway network: Interstate highways, such as I-285, I-85, and I-20, major and minor arterial roadways, and many small local streets. The road network defines how people can travel around the county. Some corridors provide opportunities for shared-use paths alongside streets while other roads serve as barriers to safe, comfortable travel. On larger roadways, traffic volumes and speeds can discourage people from walking or bicycling, and limited-access roadways can present physical barriers to travel. Side paths and greenways can be important alternatives to busy roads or provide opportunities to cross roadway barriers.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Connections between transit and trails are critical to successful multimodal transportation systems. DeKalb County trails generally provide good access to transit within the county, especially the east-west MARTA Blue line. Trail access along the Gold Line is more limited. The Chamblee station, however, has nearby access to the Nancy Creek Trail and Blackburn Park.

The Stone Mountain PATH crosses I-285 (top) and also connects to the Avondale Transit Station near Decatur (bottom)

EXISTING TRAILS

DeKalb County has long been a leader in greenway trail implementation in metropolitan Atlanta. The County has consistently built greenways and shared-use paths from the 1990s onwards. The Stone Mountain Trail running from Atlanta and Decatur to Stone Mountain is often considered the region's first multi-use path. Other trails within Stone Mountain State Park, Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area, Panola Mountain State Park, and the incorporated cities throughout the County are many of the most popular and visited trails in the region, serving a variety of transportation, recreation, and leisure trips.

The following tables and map show existing trails within DeKalb County, including both unincorporated and incorporated areas. In this plan, recommendations focus on trail segments within the unincorporated portions of the county.

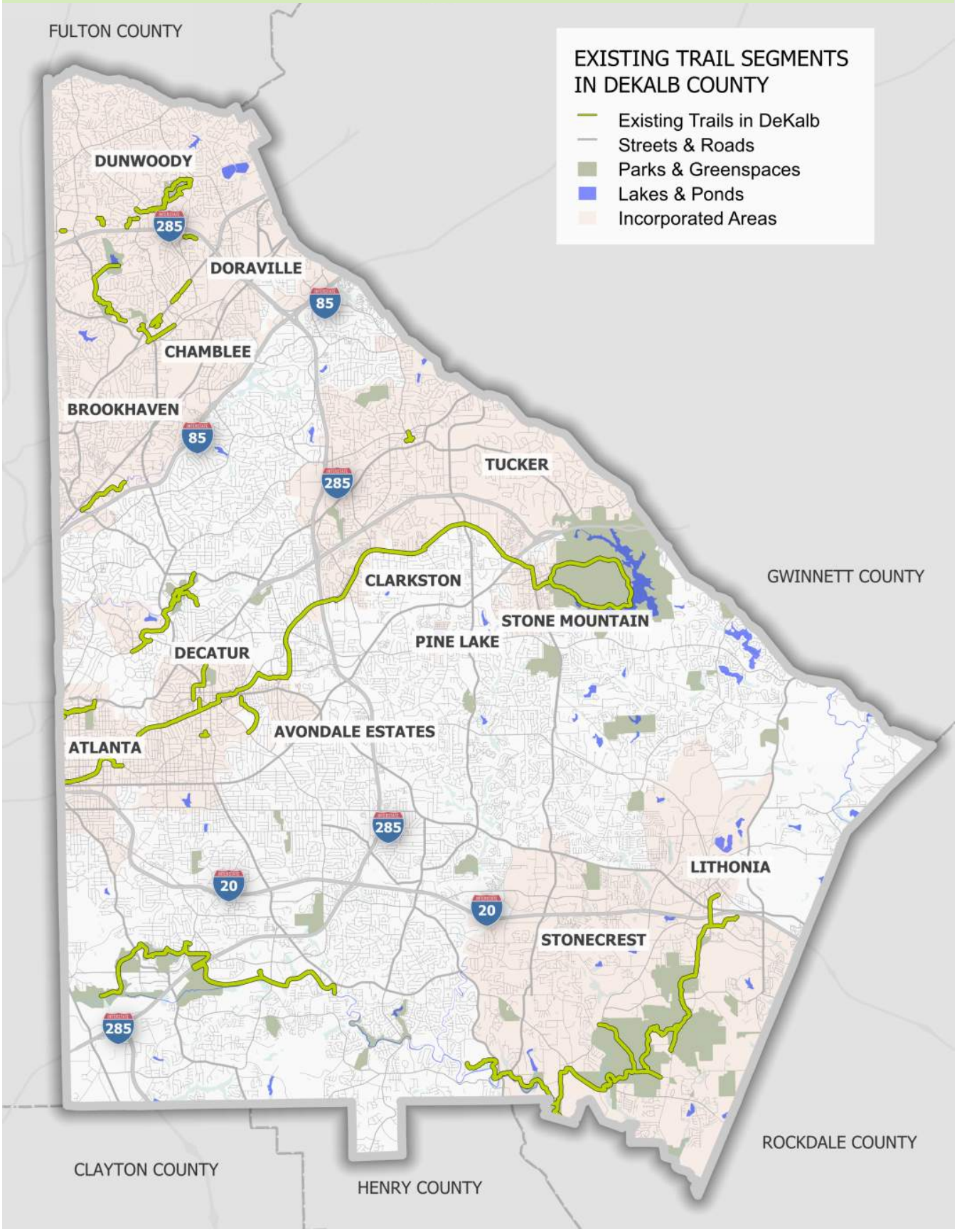
Table 1. Trail Segments by Length

Trail Name	Unincorp. Length	Length
Arabia Mountain Trail	1.7 miles	17 miles
Stone Mountain Trail	7.5 miles	17 miles
South River Trail	8 miles	8 miles
Nancy Creek Trail	N/A	2 miles
South Peachtree Creek Greenway	2 miles	2 miles
Trolley Trail	N/A	1.5 miles
Freedom Park Trail	N/A	1.5 miles
Emory Path	0.2 miles	1.5 miles
Peachtree Boulevard	N/A	1 mile
Tucker Path	N/A	0.5 miles

Table 2. Trail Mileage by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Length	Percent
Unincorporated DeKalb County	19.4 miles	30%
Incorporated Cities	45.6 miles	70%
Total	65 miles	100%

Figure 4. DeKalb County Existing Trails



Planned and Proposed Trails

The Countywide Greenway Vision Network should align with both internal, incorporated city networks as well as external networks in neighboring jurisdictions.

PLANNED TRAILS WITHIN DEKALB COUNTY AND ITS MUNICIPALITIES

DeKalb County and its incorporated cities have a long history of planning for paths and greenway trails, dating back to at least the 1970s. The county has a current Comprehensive Transportation Plan and several municipalities or local organizations have recently adopted bike/ped or trail plans. The map on the next page highlights planned trails and greenways within or immediately adjacent to DeKalb County.

PLANNED TRAILS OUTSIDE OF DEKALB COUNTY

Several plans in adjacent cities and counties address trail segments along DeKalb County's boundaries. These plans provide important connections from the County throughout the metropolitan region, including east through Gwinnett County, west through the City of Atlanta and the Atlanta Beltline, south through Rockdale and Henry Counties, north to northern Fulton County, and far beyond. A map of potential connections to planned trails outside of DeKalb County is shown at right.

INTERJURISDICTIONAL CONNECTIONS

Connections between DeKalb County, local municipalities, and adjacent cities and counties is critical to creating a useful Countywide Greenway Vision Network and supporting a connected regional trail system. Combining trails planned within DeKalb County and adjacent jurisdictions highlights key connection points along city and county boundaries.

Identifying interjurisdictional connections is also important for clarifying maintenance responsibilities between the County, incorporated cities, and other entities. The County currently maintains 31 miles of the 65 mile Existing Countywide Greenway Network. As the network expands in coming years, both the County and cities will need to identify dedicated funding sources for the additional maintenance responsibilities.

The Arabia Mountain Trail could be part of a larger regional trail network as future connections are made to the South River Trail and other planned segments in Rockdale County.

Figure 5. Planned Trail or Bikeway Projects within DeKalb County

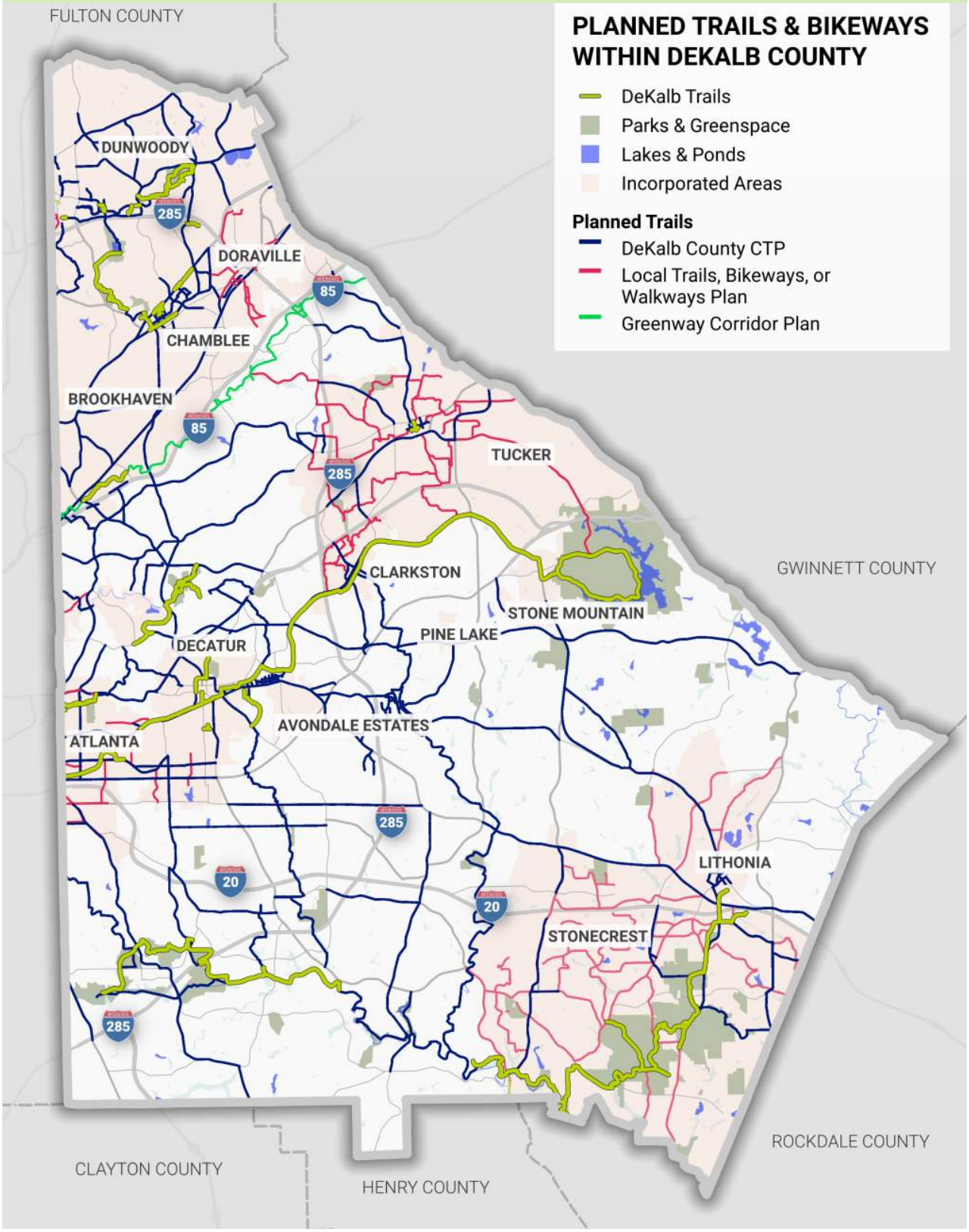
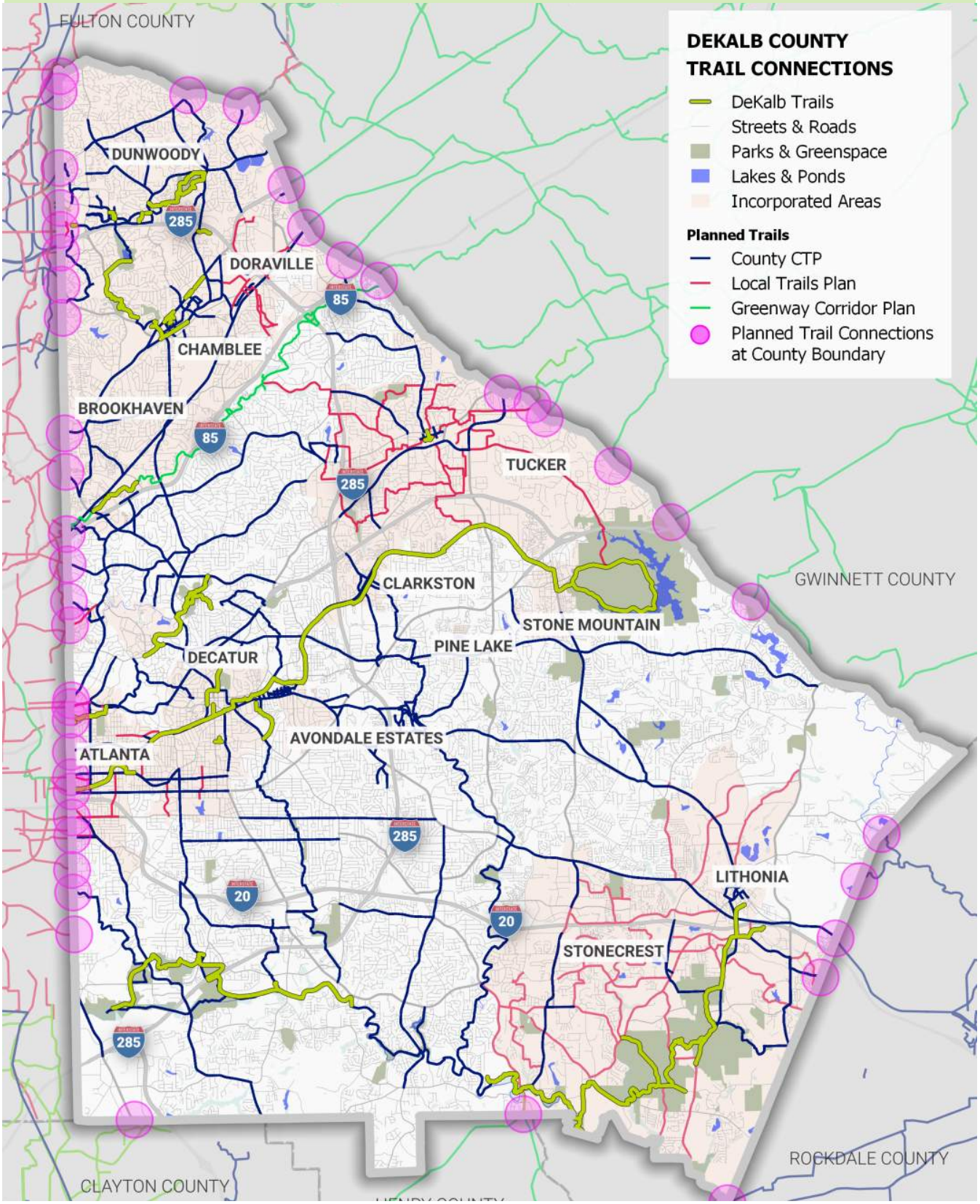


Figure 6. Planned Trails Outside of DeKalb County



Trail and Greenway Usage

Trail usage information is critical for understanding the utility, purpose, and priority of trail segments. Trail use was assessed through two methods: automated video counts at four locations within the county on four days; and intercept surveys at four locations within the county on three days (one survey day was canceled). There are limitations to drawing conclusions or identifying trends from the survey responses and trail use counts due to the coverage (time and geography) of both. However, the responses provide a sample of both quantitative traffic patterns and qualitative user perspectives for representative locations within the county. Moving forward, it is recommended that the County implement a robust automated trail count program and conduct annual intercept surveys.

AUTOMATED TRAIL COUNTS

Toole Design worked with National Data & Surveying Services (NDS) to conduct automated video counts of trail users at four sites:

- Arabia Mountain Trail
- Mason Mill Trail
- South River Trail
- Stone Mountain Trail

Each site received an overhead camera that collected data over a continuous 96-hour period between November 16-19. The exception was Arabia Mountain, where high winds caused a camera failure, requiring an additional 24-hour recording on November 30 to complete the dataset. NDS staff analyzed the video feeds to determine mode of travel (pedestrian or bicycle), direction (E/W or N/S depending on site configuration), and time of day. Time of day totals were calculated for both directions in the tables below.

Table 3. Pedestrian Traffic

Trail	Weekdays	Weekends
Arabia Mountain	179	960
Mason Mill	1015	2127
South River	183	277
Stone Mountain	227	284

Table 4. Bicycle Traffic

Trail	Weekdays	Weekends
Arabia Mountain	41	115
Mason Mill	109	112
South River	59	108
Stone Mountain	134	335

TRAIL INTERCEPT SURVEYS

The Toole Design team and DeKalb County staff conducted intercept surveys at four locations on three dates in November 2023. The four automated trail count sites were used for the intercept surveys as well to capture context and geographic diversity across the county.

Survey questions covered three broad categories:

- Trip Origin, Distance, and Purpose
- Trip Access and Frequency
- Opinions and Preferences
- Respondent Demographics (optional)

The results of the intercept surveys conducted during November 2023 can be found in the Existing Conditions Assessment Memo in Appendix D.

Preliminary Analysis

Network gaps and barriers were analyzed from several perspectives: high-risk or low-stress connections along the existing road network; equity needs within the county; and density of trip generators and destinations.

CRITICAL NETWORK GAPS AND BARRIERS

DeKalb County currently has numerous trail segments separated by significant gaps. The assessment shown on the following map uses the Atlanta Regional Commission's Regional Safety Strategy "Bicycle Risk Factors" to identify higher- and lower-risk roadway conditions within DeKalb County (including incorporated cities).

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO TRAILS

Using the nine protected classes identified in the ARC's Equity Analysis Framework, Figure 8 (at right) shows areas with high concentrations of protected classes. Broadly, the central and southern portions of the county have the highest equity concerns, as well as portions Doraville, Chamblee, and Brookhaven along the I-85 corridor. While portions of the Stone Mountain Trail pass through higher equity concern areas near Clarkston, existing trails are largely absent from most areas with high concentrations of protected classes. Western Atlanta and Decatur, which have the most access to existing trails, have the lowest concentrations of people in protected classes.

Figure 7. Bicycle Risk Factors in DeKalb County

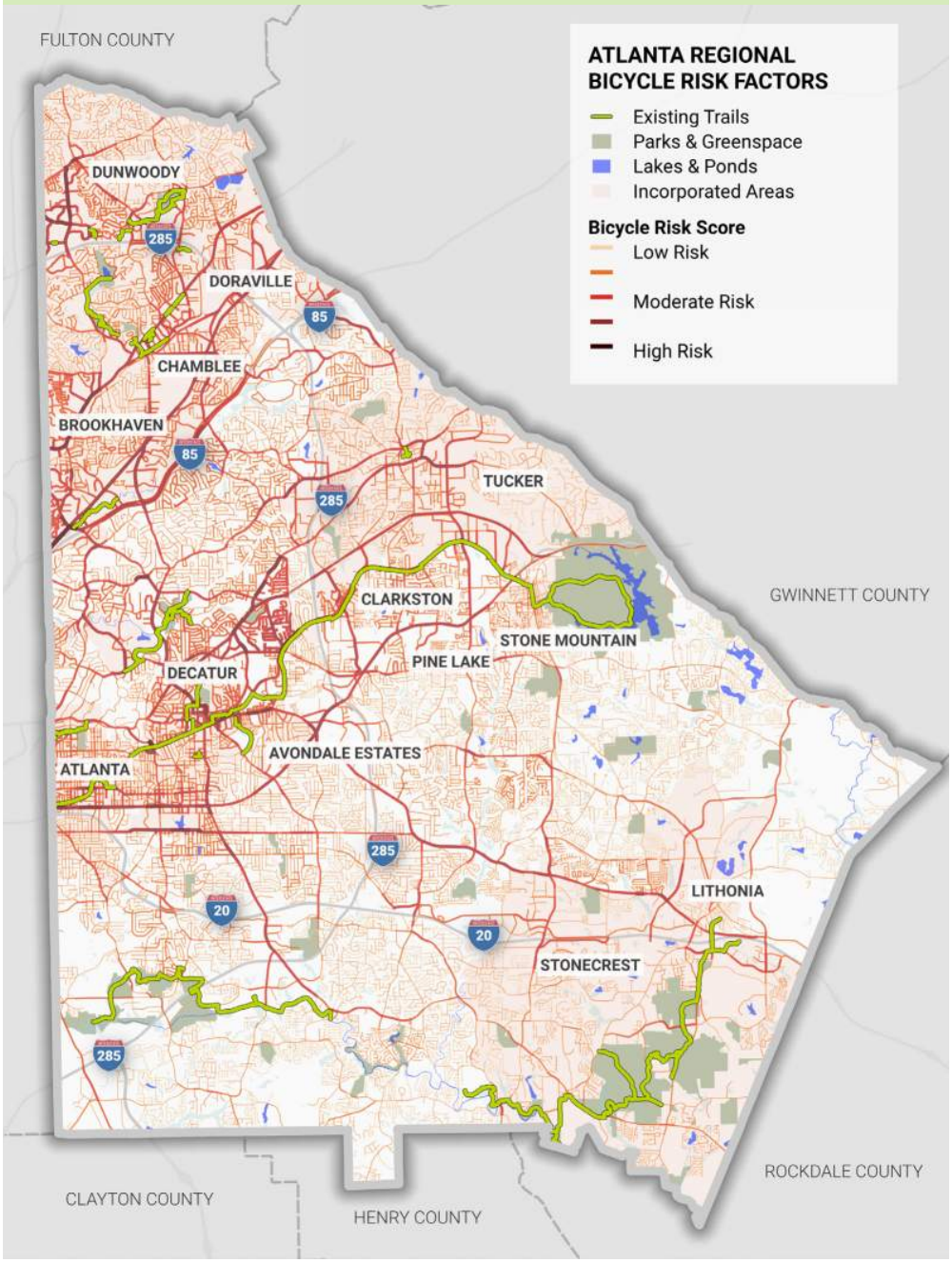
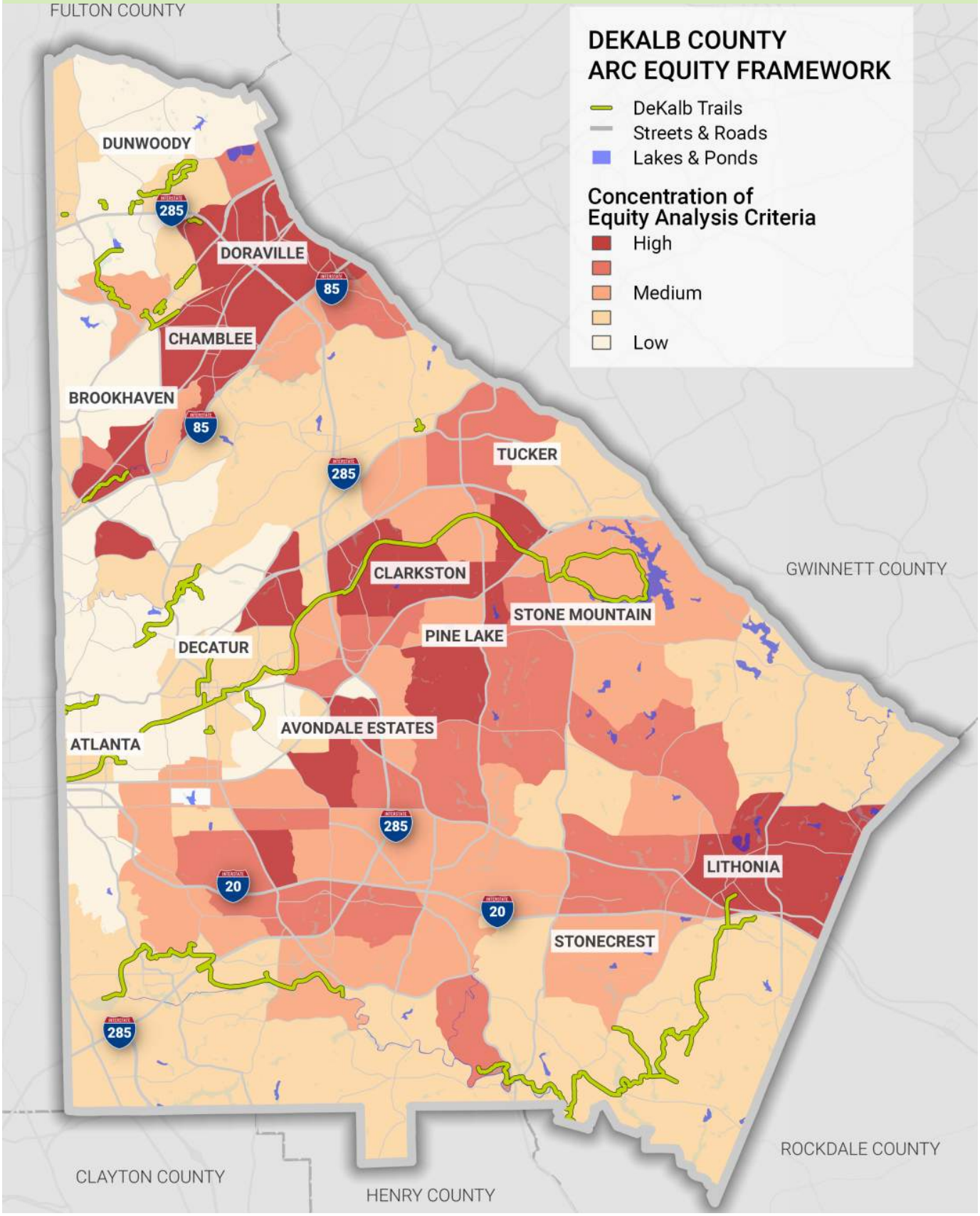


Figure 8. Equitable Access to Trails



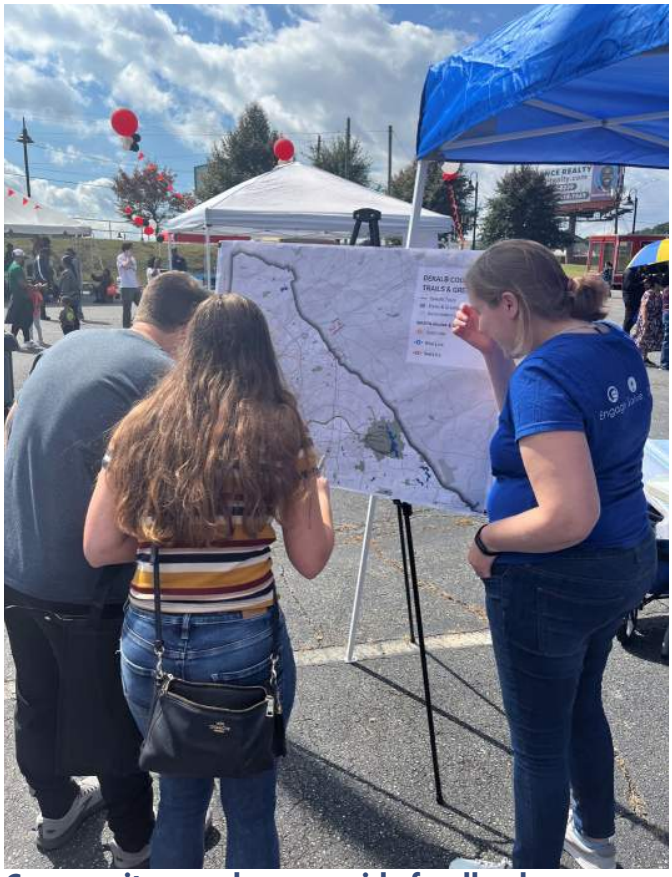
Preliminary Connectivity Analysis

A Trip Potential Analysis (TPA) was used to determine the density of places that need better network connectivity and priorities of new recommended segments. The TPA score helps answer the question: "Where would we see more bicycling and walking if trips were not restricted by the presence, safety, or comfort of facilities for these modes of travel?" The map on the following page identifies the geographic areas that have higher walking and bicycling trip potential. Areas closer to where people live and work, proximity to common destinations such as schools or grocery stores, and presence of trip generators have higher trip potentials than areas without significant development.

An important counterpoint to Trip Potential Analysis is that many greenways and parks located in less developed, natural, or scenic areas serve as recreational destinations for many greenway trail users. The context and location of a trail segment typically relates to its primary purpose (transportation or recreation).

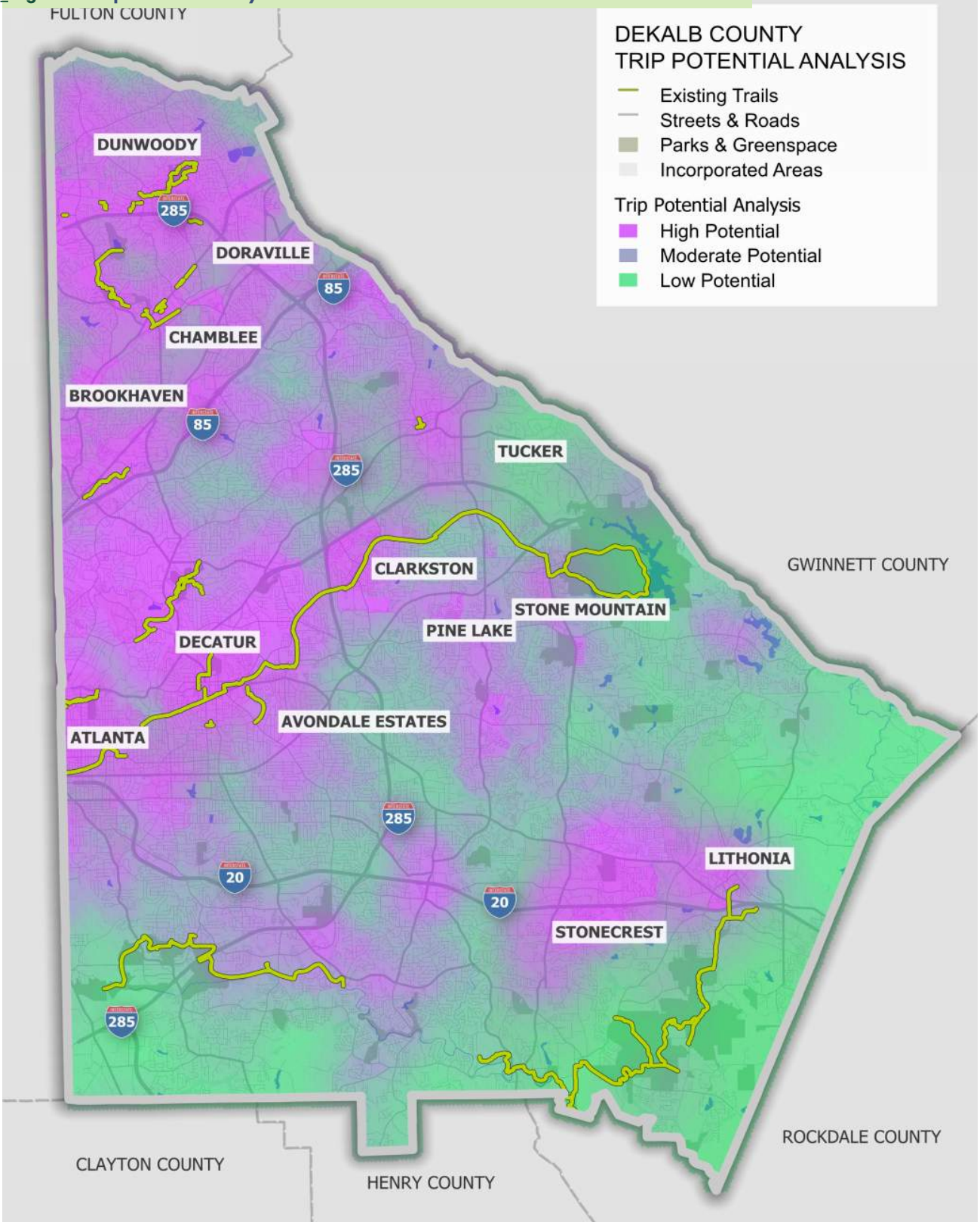
Incorporating Existing Conditions Findings into the Plan

The results of the existing conditions analysis were used to inform subsequent stages in the development of the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan. The existing conditions played a direct role in the process of developing the Countywide Greenway Vision Network, which is described in Chapter 4. Findings from the existing conditions analysis were also used to develop the public engagement plan and tailor outreach to obtain meaningful feedback. A summary of the public engagement process and results can be found in the following chapter.



Community members provide feedback on their desires for the DeKalb County Greenway Network during a pop-up event.

Figure 9. Trip Potential Analysis



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III. Public Engagement

Introduction

The **Public Engagement** chapter tells the story of what we heard from the community and key stakeholders. This story emerged from **hundreds of conversations** about people's desires for the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Network.

These conversations occurred in a variety of contexts:

- **Five** open houses held throughout the County
- **One** virtual open house
- **Three** community walking tours
- **One** stakeholder walking tour
- **Three** pop-up events
- **Nine** stakeholder group interviews
- **604** responses to surveys collected on-line and in-person
- **240** comments received through an online web map input tool depicting the County's network.

This section captures the key themes that we heard and translates those into recommendations for the proposed DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Network.

A Community-Driven Plan

Public engagement is essential for developing and implementing a plan that reflects the community's values. Since the start, the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan planning effort has been dedicated to an iterative process enabling community and stakeholder feedback to be integrated into the technical analysis and plan development.

Planning efforts began with public outreach at a local pop up event in late summer 2023, followed by a series of open house events, other pop up events, intercept surveys along the trail, digital input opportunities, community walking tours, and more. Input collected through community and stakeholder engagement ultimately helped shape plan recommendations and outcomes to create a thriving regional trail network.

Engagement Snapshot

We connected with stakeholders and community members through a variety of formats across the county!

4 walking tours

5 open houses

1 virtual open house

3 pop up events

57 stakeholder engagement attendees

350+ public event attendees

240 online input map comments

826 survey responses

546 project update subscribers

3,870+ project website sessions

2,360+ unique visitors to project website

Figure 10. In-Person Engagement

Promotions & Communications

The project team partnered with the County's RPCA Communications team on the production and distribution of community promotions and advertising. In addition, stakeholders were invited to share and help distribute promotions.

Project Website & Outreach List

A dedicated project website (dekalbgatrails.com) was developed to serve as the project information hub. It included key project information, details about upcoming and past events, and documents for review. As of August 2024, the website had over 3,870 site sessions and over 2,360 unique visitors.

Email Campaign

An email campaign was distributed via the project website to communicate project milestones and promote upcoming events and input opportunities. These email updates provided an accessible way to communicate important project updates to key planning partners and interested community members. Approximately 550 people subscribed to the project outreach list.

Social Media & County Promotions

Social media content series were developed to promote engagement events and online input opportunities. Typically, social media promotions started at least two weeks out from the meeting date and were distributed through the County's social media networks. Each round of engagement was also promoted through the County website, County newsletters, and press releases. In addition, digital and printed outreach materials were distributed to County recreation facilities and libraries.

Website Comment Form & Project Email

Community members were able to provide comments or questions to the project team using the comment form embedded on the project website, or by email the project email address info@dekalbgatrails.com. The comment form and project email were active for the duration of the project and received almost 40 comments.

Targeted Outreach

Targeted outreach tactics were implemented to ensure we heard from a representative population of the County. The online survey collected a relatively low percentage of responses from the Black/African American community. In response, outreach efforts were recalibrated to target areas in the county with higher percentages of Black/African American populations, such as southern DeKalb. In person activities, including one of the Open Houses, a pop up event, intercept surveys, and walking tours took place in this area of the DeKalb. Additionally, direct email communications were distributed to schools, churches and other organizations in these areas in southern DeKalb, with printed flyers also distributed to local recreation centers and libraries to further increase project awareness and participation in these areas.

Project website

Social Media Promo

Social Media Promo

Email Campaign

Social Media Promo

ELEVATING COMMUNITY VOICES

"I would like trails to provide a great place for people and nature"

"I love trails because I like to ride my bike and scooter"

"I do not currently use trails and greenways because of the lack of sidewalks to walk to them"

"I want trails to provide..."

- access to library
- dog walking
- tranquil enjoyment of the natural world
- community connectivity
- exercise
- access to greenspace

"Trails and greenspace are important for my physical and mental health and wellness"

REVIEW

The draft **Vision Network** for the DeKalb County Trail & Greenway Master Plan is ready for review.

Input gathered on this draft Vision Network will help determine how to prioritize different segments of the network.

Keep scrolling to learn about the proposed network and provide comments. The comment period will be open through mid-August.

Sign up for project emails below to stay in the loop and get notified when new documents are available for review!

Draft Vision Network

The **Vision Network** for the DeKalb County Comprehensive Trail & Greenway Master Plan is the proposed trail network that best meets the goals and principles of the Master Plan that have been shaped and defined by public input, key stakeholders, and County staff. The proposed network (shown in pink on the map below) represents potential general corridor alignments for future trails.

The Vision Network reflects the project scope goals, existing conditions, public priorities, and stakeholder input. In addition, it highlights key corridors for connections that meet the Master Plan's network development principles.

The final Vision Network will be determined based on input, professional judgement, and technical criteria, and will also incorporate stakeholder input.

Use the survey link to review a more detailed, web-based version of the map and provide feedback.

We want to hear from you!

TAKE THE SURVEY

Click the blue button above to take a brief survey to share your thoughts or leave comments on the draft Vision Network.

The public comment window will extend through mid-August.

Survey Link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DeKalbTrailsVisionNetwork-Public

Figure 1. DeKalb County Trail & Greenway Vision Network

Open House Series

As part of the initial phase of public outreach for the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan, the project team facilitated a series of **five Open House events** at locations throughout the County. The purpose of these meetings was to introduce the project to the public at large, initiate a public awareness campaign, educate the public about the importance and benefits of trails, and collect input on key concerns, challenges, and desired connections or facilities.

The open houses were designed to have an informal, drop-in setting where participants were able to walk around to each station at their leisure to review boards and ask questions to the project team members.

Event Details

1 & 2 **Redan Park Recreation Center**
September 18 & 19, 2023

3 **Tobie Grant Park Recreation Center**
September 26, 2023

4 **Exchange Park Recreation Center**
September 28, 2023

5 **Mason Mill Park Recreation Center**
October 4, 2023

6 **Virtual Open House (Zoom)**
August 15, 2024

Interactive Input Stations

The Open House events were organized into input stations which enabled participants to provide feedback on key topics.

Project Orientation & Prioritization

Upon arrival, attendees could participate in a prioritization exercise using ping balls to indicate what they value most in a trail and greenway system. They could also review the project background, study area map, and project timeline.

Greenway Benefits

Focused on education, this station highlighted trail benefits for physical, mental, economic, and environmental health. It also illustrated what makes a great greenway, such as an inclusive, connected, activated, and low stress system.

Building the Trail & Greenway Network

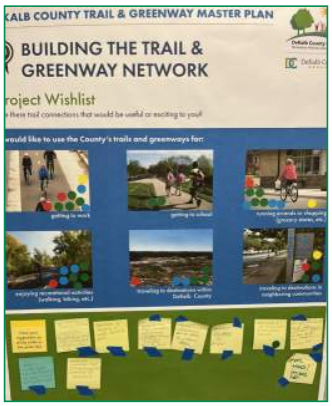
With a deeper understanding of key components of a healthy trail network, participants were asked to identify specific reasons they do or would use trails and greenways in DeKalb. They also provided map-based input to indicate where they would like to see new trails or connections.

Placemaking and Trail Design

This station was both education and interactive, aimed at gaining insight into local perspectives on preferred features or amenities along the trail that would help distinguish the trail network.

Community Input Map & Online Survey

Tablets and laptops were available for attendees to take the online survey and submit feedback via the online map input tool.



Key Findings

Major takeaways from various input activities is synthesized below.

PLACEMAKING

- Participants value **active and protected wildlife** along the trail network.
- **Increased access to destinations and amenities** could draw people to use the trail network more.
- Trail users would like to see **more facility amenities**.
- **Vibrant trails and community spaces** would make participants more excited and likely to use the trails.

BUILDING THE TRAIL & GREENWAY

- Trail users enjoy using the trail and greenway system for **recreational activities and commuting** to run errands or go shopping.
- Participants desire **safety features and accessibility** along the trail network.
- **Connectivity and increasing access to destinations** is important to trail users.

TOP TRAIL BENEFITS

- Most participants (38%) identified **Access to Nature & Preservation of Habitat** as a top benefit of trails and greenways.
- **Recreation & Fitness** was also highly valued among participants (26%)
- Other popular benefits were **Connectivity to Destinations** (14%), **Transportation or Commuting** (12%), and **Economic Development** (10%).

Pop-Up Events

The project team facilitated **three pop up booths** at local events to spread project awareness, promote input opportunities and upcoming events, and provide an opportunity to **meet people where they are** in the community. Pop up events are especially useful for target outreach efforts and interfacing with those who may not typically attend a project meeting.

The project booths were engaging, with large printed input maps, **interactive, educational activities for all ages**, and a fun atmosphere to get people interested in and excited about the project. The project team interacted with **dozens of community members across the county**, hearing from including people of all ages, especially **youth**, about how they envisioned the future of DeKalb County's trail network and what they loved the most about trails. Attendees were also able to sign up for project updates.

Event Details

1. **Fisher Park Trail Event**
   August 19, 2023 | Fisher Trail Park

2. **DeKalb County Fire Rescue Festival**
   October 14, 2023 | Northlake Mall

3. **DeKalb County Commissioner Larry Johnson Annual Tree Lighting**
   November 28, 2023 | Porter Sanford III Performing Arts & Community Center

Key Findings

Through a variety of interactive activities, participants provided insight to their perspectives on why they love DeKalb's trails and greenways.

"I love trails because..."

- I get to see nature and wildlife
- I love walking and jogging
- It's a great way to get outdoors and exercise
- I like to ride my bike and scooter.
- It's a great place to walk and get peace of mind
- You can see animals and nature
- We get to ride bikes and have fun

Walking Tours

Guided walking tours provide an opportunity for the community to see challenges or opportunities with the trail network firsthand and discuss potential improvements to address them.

Four walking tours took place between spring and summer 2024 with a total of **25 community members and stakeholders** in attendance. Three community walking tours took place in May with one stakeholder tour conducted in July. Multiple tour locations were provided, representing different types of trails to give community members and stakeholders a chance to explore a trail most convenient or relevant to them.

While over 50 people registered for a community tour, 12 people attended across the three tour opportunities. The stakeholder tour had 13 participants representing different County Commissioner Districts, County staff, and local trail and greenway organizations.

Key Findings

- More connections or **enhanced connections** are needed **between neighborhoods and destinations or County amenities.**
- **Pedestrian connections over major roadways** can be difficult and too dangerous to be effective; need **innovative solutions to prioritize safety** and improved connectivity throughout the network.
- There is a desire to **prioritize the development and expansion of a soft trail network**, with a perception that it's more environmentally friendly and sustainable.
- As the trail and greenway network is improved and expanded, **sustainable construction and maintenance methods** should be considered.

Stakeholder Interviews

The project team held stakeholder interviews with local leaders including **County staff, elected officials, local municalities, partner agencies and organizations, and representatives of local organizations** involved in advocating for and implementing trail and greenway infrastructure.

These small group meetings were conducted virtually at key points during the planning process to gain insight into perspectives on key challenges and opportunities for the trail network within the various contexts of the stakeholder groups. In addition to these meetings, the project team convened key stakeholders for a walking tour which is discussed in the Walking Tours section.

Stakeholder Representation

Stakeholder coordination is key to ensuring project outcomes that reflect community needs and alignment with close coordination with key stakeholders.

Key benefits of stakeholder engagement include:

- Incorporating different perspectives and providing a more comprehensive understanding of issues
- Increasing project success
- Identifying, assessing, and mitigating potential risks that could impact project outcomes
- Helping stakeholders communicate effectively with each other, share information, and clarify roles and responsibilities.

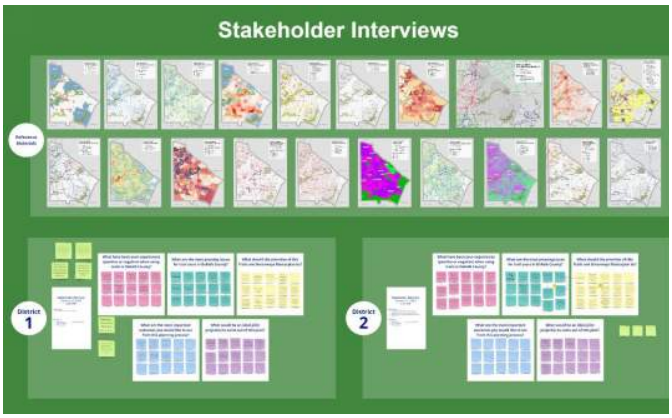
Stakeholder Engagement Snapshot

10 group interviews

44 attendees

18 departments and local organizations

13 municipalities



Key Findings

The following represent key opportunities for improving the County's trail and greenway network.

- **Identifying and securing additional funding** sources for trails projects.
- **Balancing expansion** of the trail network **with maintenance of current assets.**
- Maintaining trails, upgrading security, and improving materials to **increase real and perceived safety of users**.
- **Creating a more connected trail network** by filling in gaps to make more destinations accessible without a car, including jobs, to shift more trips away from cars.
- Pursuing thoughtful and **strategic development opportunities** along trail corridors.
- Using trails to educate users on the **value of natural resources** and importance of **conservation**.

Stakeholder Insights

The following needs and opportunities for improving the County's trail and greenway network were identified through stakeholder engagement activities including individual and group interviews and the stakeholder walking tour. Key themes include Connectivity, Community, Safety & Security ,Implementation, and Construction & Maintenance.

Connectivity

- **Create a more connected trail network** by connecting gaps to make more destinations and activity centers (grocery stores, jobs, schools, parks, entertainment) more accessible.
- **Prioritize last mile connections** to reduce car dependency.
- Balance implementation of **regional and local connections**.

Community

- Pursue thoughtful and **strategic development opportunities,** including housing, along trail corridors.
- Integrate **trail infrastructure and new development.**
- **Enhance wayfinding and placemaking** along the trails.
- Leverage trails to help educate users on the **value of natural resources**, importance of **conservation**, and public health benefits of trails.
- Prioritize **trail-oriented development** as a catalyst for redevelopment.

Safety & Security

- **Prioritize pedestrian safety** at roadway crossings.
- **Increase trail safety** through regular trail maintenance and updates to security features along the trail network.
- **Update security technology** and increase in-person security along trails.
- **Protect existing residential areas** and privacy of homes located along existing or planned trails.

Implementation

- **Identify innovative funding** sources for trails projects, including special service district funds.
- Improve **interdepartmental coordination** and coordination with local municipalities on trail projects.
- **Maintain transparency** in project implementation process.

Construction & Maintenance

- **Balance expansion** of the trail network **with maintenance of current assets.**
- **Improve** trail and construction **materials** and maintain **high construction standards.**
- Integrate **sustainability** and **green infrastructure.**

Surveys

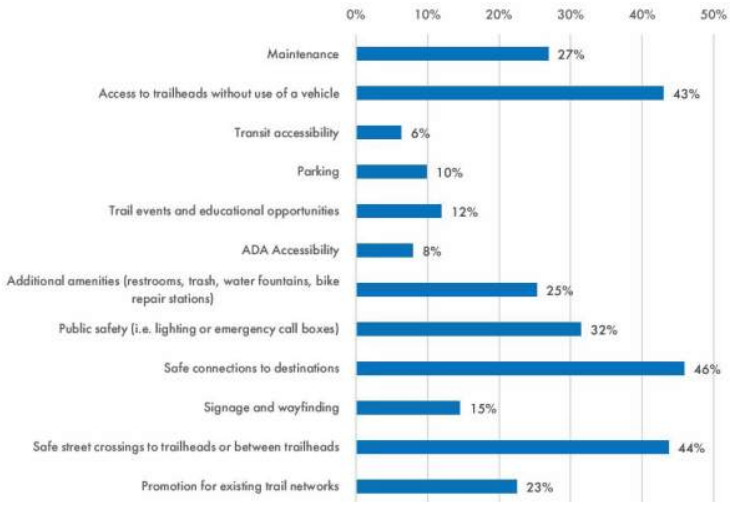
In addition to the online mapping tool, a community survey was circulated throughout the County between September 2023 and March 2024. Intercept surveys were also conducted along certain trail segments in November and December 2024. Both online surveys and in-person input activities collected input focused on similar topics including trail network needs and opportunities, trail priorities, trail user experience and preferences, and trail benefits.

Online Survey

The online survey collected 604 responses from community members who shared their perspective on needs and areas for improvement and provided direction on how trails and greenways in DeKalb could be improved to better serve the community. In addition, they were able to describe why trails and greenways were important to them, with answers reflecting themes such as access to nature, preserving natural habitats and wildlife, exercise, and safety.

Looking towards the future, participants' top priorities are building new connections within the existing trail network and expanding connectivity to new destinations. In addition to using trails for recreation, people want to be able to use them for everyday commutes like going to school, work, or restaurants.

Figure 13. Top Priorities for a Great Trail & Greenway



Intercept Surveys

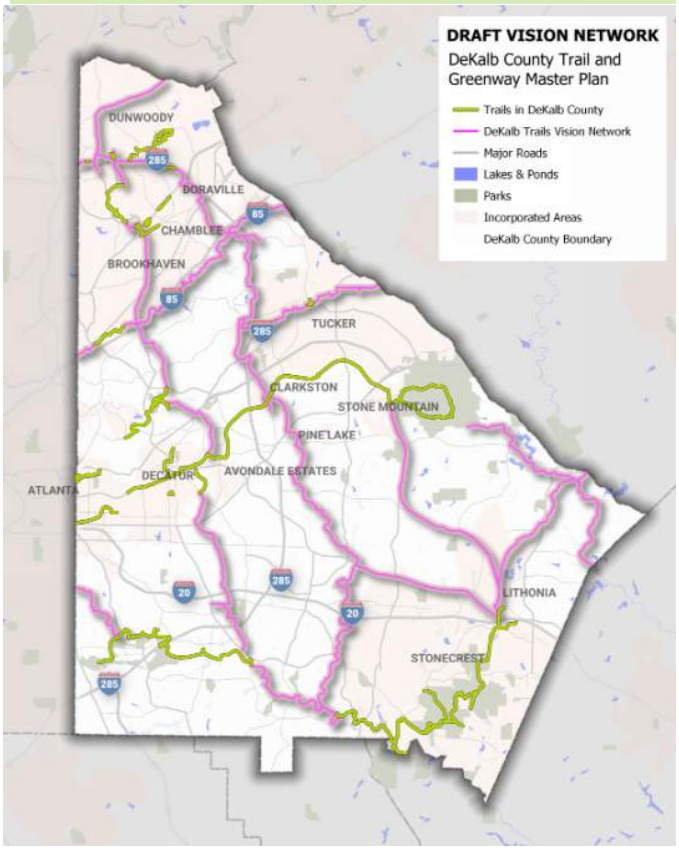
Intercept surveys are a useful way to get quick, on-the-spot feedback from trail users to better understand local needs and challenges around using and accessing the County's trail and greenway network. The project team facilitated intercept surveys over a two week period in November and December 2023 along segments of South River Trail and Stone Mountain Trail, as highlighted in Figure 10. South River Trail surveys were conducted off of the Michelle Obama Trail access, while Stone Mountain Trail surveys were conducted along the urban trail context in the Avondale area.

Vision Network Survey

In the final round of engagement, the Vision Network survey was conducted which sought feedback on the proposed preliminary Vision Network for the Master Plan. The survey was open for approximately one month between July and August 2024, during which time 222 responses were collected. Feedback was collected through the survey, project email, and via the website inbox. Input gathered on this draft Vision Network will ultimately help determine how to prioritize different segments of the network.

The Vision Network represents the proposed trail network that best meets the Plan's goals and network principles and illustrates potential general corridor alignments for future trails. Additionally, a key part of developing the Vision Network was synthesizing all existing plans and considering corridors included in other plans such as DeKalb County's Comprehensive Transportation Plan. Existing trails outside the jurisdiction of the County, such as those owned and maintained by cities or other agencies, were also considered, although they are not depicted on the Vision Network map. Ultimately, the network was shaped and defined by public input, key stakeholders, and County staff, as well as technical analysis, project goals, and public priorities.

Figure 14. Preliminary Vision Network



The Vision Network Survey asked two key questions:

1. Are the proposed corridor alignments (pink lines) reflective of local initiatives and projects?
2. Are any corridors missing from the map?

While the questions were multiple choice, there was also an opportunity to submit open-ended comments. Responses highlighted the need for new or expanded connections to areas such as:

- Neighborhoods and cities
- More areas in unincorporated DeKalb County
- Businesses and employement hubs
- East-west connections
- Southern areas of the County, including south of I-20
- Other trail systems

In addition, other comments indicated a desire to keep trails outside of flood plains and to minimize the location of trails along resident's backyards. A full summary of responses to the Vision Network Survey is provided in Appendix C.

Key Findings

The following list summarizes key needs and opportunities identified in responses across multiple surveys.

- Enhance **safety and security features** along the trails.
- Creating a **better-connected trail network** that can provide recreation and alternative transportation options (i.e. commuter trails).
- Improve internal and external communication between County and other municipalities to **align trail projects with other local planning efforts**.
- **Improve wayfinding and accessibility** to help users navigate the trails and aid in emergency response.
- Minimize impact of trail construction to natural areas and implement **sustainable construction methods and materials;** implement **soft-surface trails** when feasible.
- Provide **safe trail connections** to **community resources and amenities** across the county
- **Improve safety** of connections **across roads**, especially major roadways.
- Connect to transit facilities (i.e., MARTA stations).
- Enhance **connections to cities and neighborhoods**.
- **Minimize** locating **trails within floodplains** and along private residential property (i.e., backyards).
- **Expand and increase connections** to other **local and regional trail systems**.
- Increase **east-west trail connection** opportunities.

Mapping It Out: Community Input Map Tool

Digital input tools served as an effective way to gather input from a broader representation of the County. An online mapping tool (Community Input Map) was active between September 2023 and March 2024.

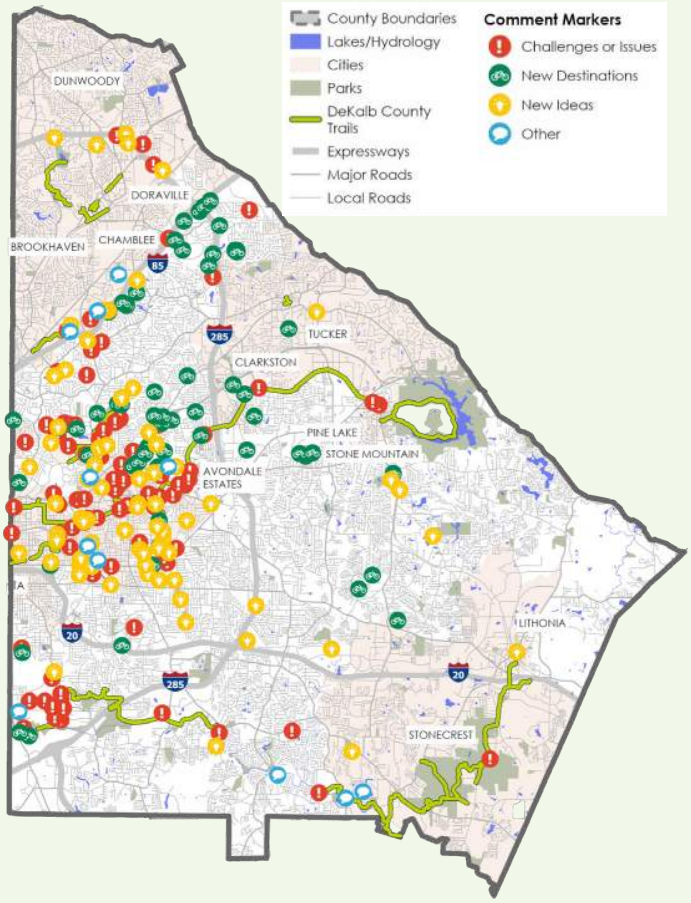
The map tool was accessible through the project website and available at in-person meetings. Over **240 comments were collected** through this tool from across the county, inviting participants to identify specific locations where they experienced challenges or issues, had ideas for improvements, or where they wanted to see new connections to local destinations not currently accessible by the trail network.

The community input map helped the project team to identify key areas of concern and provided insight into local perspectives on key issues, challenges, and areas for improvement.

Key Findings

- The largest barrier to **pedestrian access** is roadways with no safe pedestrian or bicycle crossings. Similarly, trail users indicated distance from their homes to the trail network and **safety concerns** as key reasons they are less likely to use the trails.
- Trails are predominately used for **walking and biking**, as well as to **access key locations** like community facilities and commercial areas.
- Providing **connections** is hugely important, both **at a regional and local scale.**
- Generally, the comment locations were concentrated around the city limits of Decatur and Atlanta, with many of the New Destination and New Idea comments focused on **building new connections** and **expanding connectivity** within the existing trail network to **make the trails more accessible** to residents.

Figure 11. Map Input Tool Summary



39% Challenges or Issues

31% New Ideas

25% New Destinations

5% Other

Figure 11 displays the breakdown of all comments by type.

What Did We Learn?

The following key themes emerged from the many conversations had through public and stakeholder meetings, as well as the hundreds of online input comments. The themes represent key needs and opportunities for improving and expanding DeKalb County's Trail and Greenway Network

INCREASE CONNECTIVITY WITHIN EXISTING NETWORK & TO NEW DESTINATIONS

EXPAND TRAIL ACCESS & ACCESSIBILITY

ENHANCE TRAIL AMENITIES, FACILITIES, & SAFETY FEATURES

PRIORITIZE ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

BALANCE TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS & MAINTENANCE

PRIORITIZE A SAFE AND COMFORTABLE TRAIL USER EXPERIENCE

Impacts on Recommendations

The results of the public engagement efforts had a direct impact on the development of the Vision Network, which is described in the following chapter. Public engagement findings also informed the trail network prioritization process by providing context for the highest needs of communities within DeKalb County.

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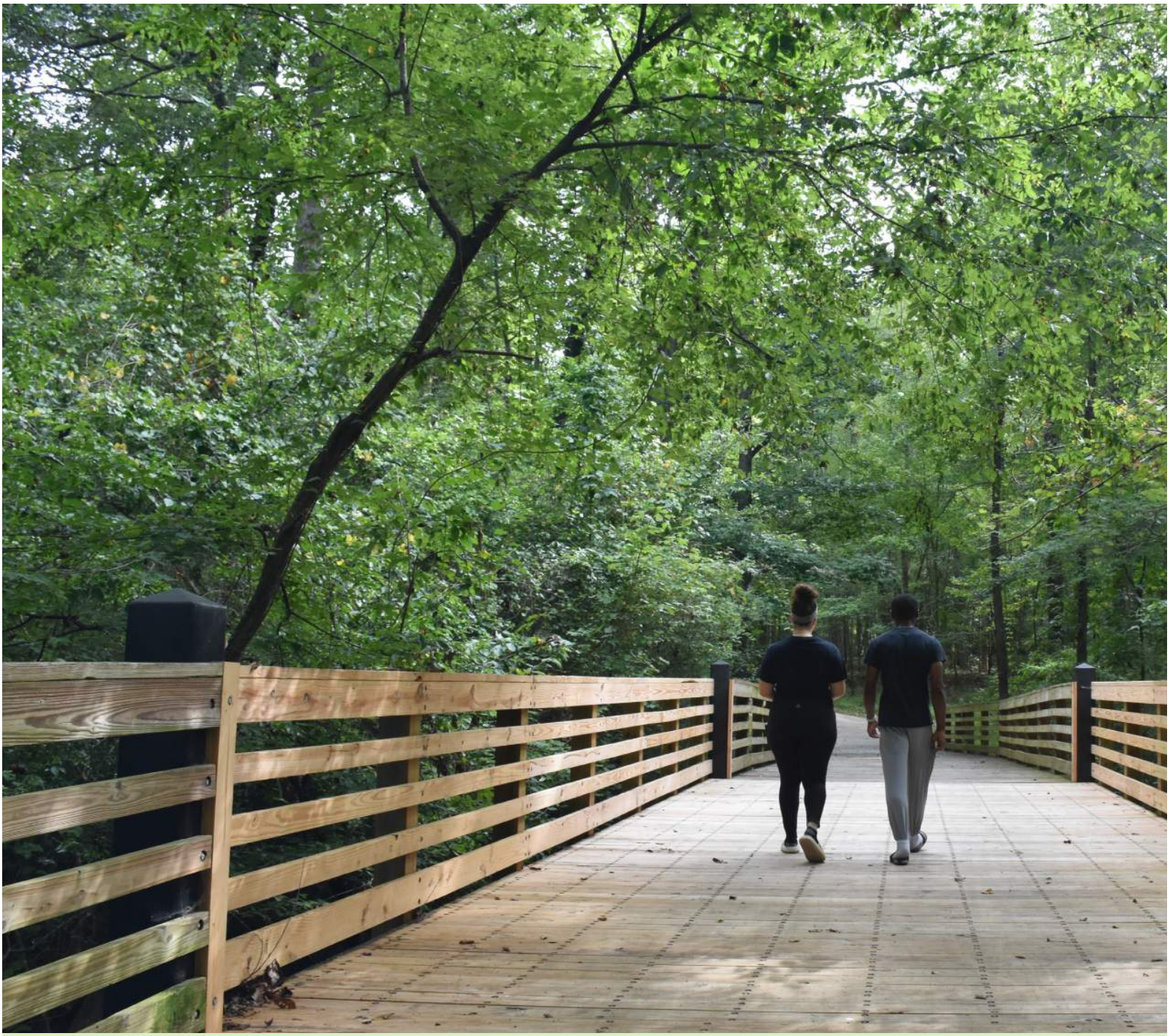


IV. Developing the Network

Introduction

This chapter defines the County's goals and principles that helped inform critical connections within the County's trail network. Using these goals and network principles, the project team defined a **Countywide Greenway Vision Network** which establishes a long-term, connected system that will provide primary connections throughout DeKalb County. Within the vision network, the plan identifies priority projects for short- and medium-term implementation as well as key projects from the County's Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) that will support trail, greenway, and multimodal access throughout the County.

Trail Network Framework

Creating a safe, connected trail and greenway system will provide more travel and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors while knitting the county together. More trails and greenways will support access to a diverse range of daily and regional destinations located throughout the county. An actionable plan must also support a sustainable system that phases County investments over time while prioritizing key sections in the short- and medium-terms. The following goals and principles were identified to provide a framework for the future trail and greenway network.

County Goals

DeKalb County has established three clear goals for the Countywide Greenway Vision Network:

1. Link together a safe, connected system
2. Improve access for residents, visitors, and park patrons
3. Ensure sustainable expansion and maintenance of the system

Network Principles

The DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan uses specific objectives to help achieve the goals established by the County. These network principles help define the scale and shape of the trail and greenway network, clarify potentially competing goals, and define metrics for evaluating the distribution of the network. These were established based on public and stakeholder input and further refined by project staff.

Greenway Network Principles

1) Increase connections between existing network segments

2) Increase access to trails and greenways for all regional residents

3) Provide access to primary local destinations

4) Support inter-county and regional connectivity

5) Limit network to sustainable mileage along primary trails

6) Distribute trail facilities equally and equitably across the county

7) Provide a safe and comfortable experience for trail users

Process of Developing the Trail Network

The DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan uses a methodological process to assess existing conditions, implement the network principles outlined previously, establish a Countywide Greenway Vision Network for long-term connections, and prioritize segments for implementation. The following steps outline this process:

- **Gaps Assessment** - identify where current trails are located and any major gaps between greenways in unincorporated DeKalb County, as well as connections to local cities and neighboring counties.
- **Existing Conditions Assessment** - evaluate the existing conditions in the County to determine areas with primary destinations, barriers to travel, and equitable needs.
- **Planned Segments Assessment** - identify currently planned trails, greenways, and bikeways within DeKalb County, including the County's Comprehensive Transportation Plan, as well as locally-planned trail segments that form a foundation of potential network segments.
- **Vision Network Identification** - identify a Countywide Greenway Vision Network that best meets the network principles to achieve a connected and implementable network.
- **Priority Assessment** - assess priority factors along the Countywide Greenway Vision Networkthat that achieve support plan goals for countywide access, equity, and implementation.

Gaps Assessment

A key goal of the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan is to close gaps in the Existing Countywide Greenway Network while connecting to local destinations and neighboring jurisdictions.

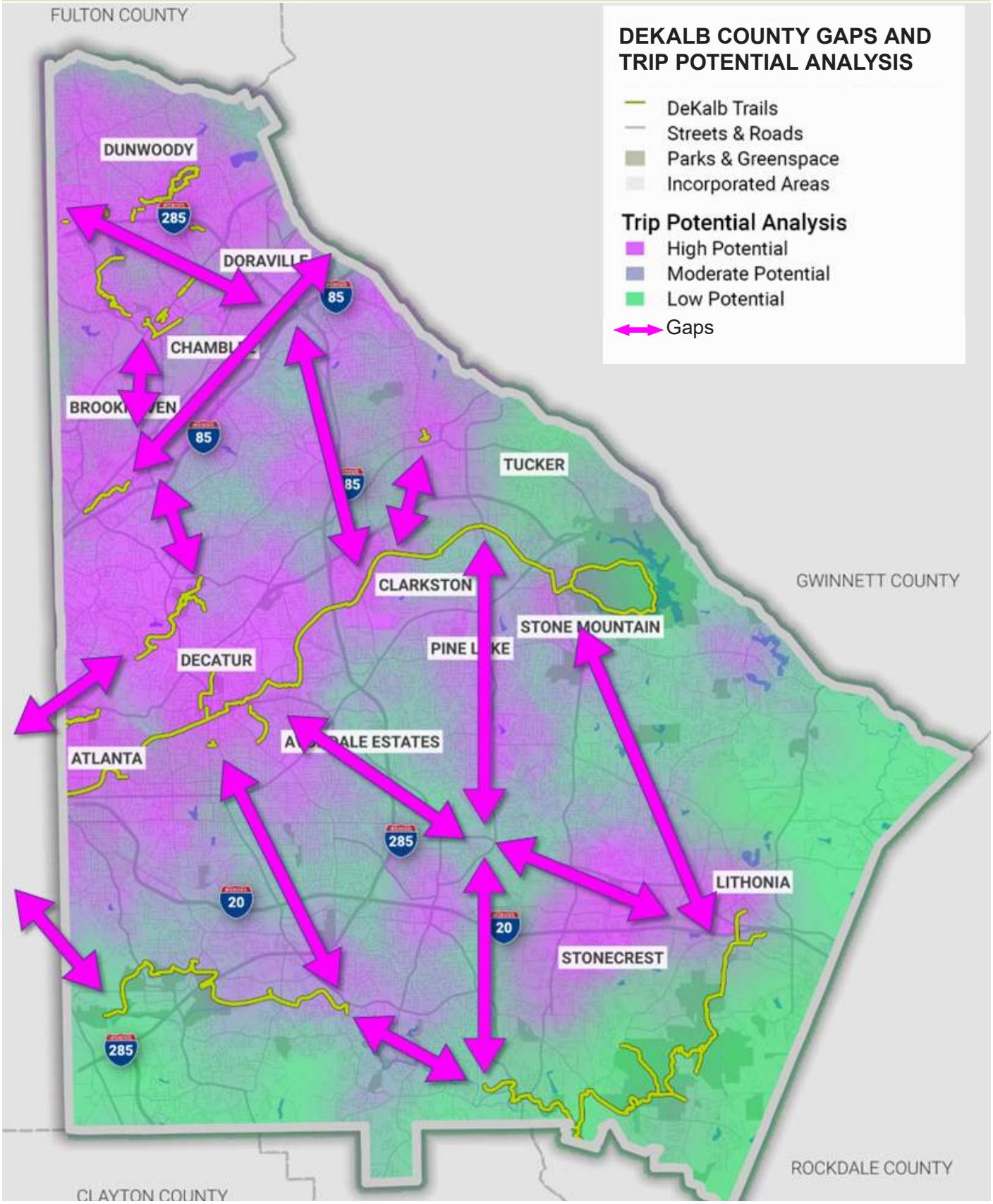
The County is defined by three broad zones of current trails: a cluster of northern DeKalb cities with existing local trail networks and the Peachtree Creek Greenway; a prominent east-west corridor of the Stone Mountain Trail, connecting the Cities of Decatur and Stone Mountain; and two major trails in the southeastern and southwestern corners of the county along the South River and Arabia-Panola Mountain areas.

Identifying trail corridors that provide routes through the unincorporated portions of these areas is a key goal of the plan. The following map illustrates broad gaps between existing trail segments where trails would provide major connections.

The South Peachtree Creek Trail at Medlock Park connects many neighborhood destinations, but closing gaps between other nearby trails would provide even greater community access.

The western segment of the South River Trail ends at Waldrop Road, leaving a gap between this location and the eastern segment of the trail.

Figure 14. Major Gaps between DeKalb's Existing Trails & Connections to Cities and Neighboring Counties



Existing Conditions/Destinations Assessment

Based on the extensive analysis conducted during the Existing Conditions assessment, the project team developed two primary analyses to understand priority zones of connectivity between existing segments, to local destinations, and between areas of higher and lower residential and employment density.

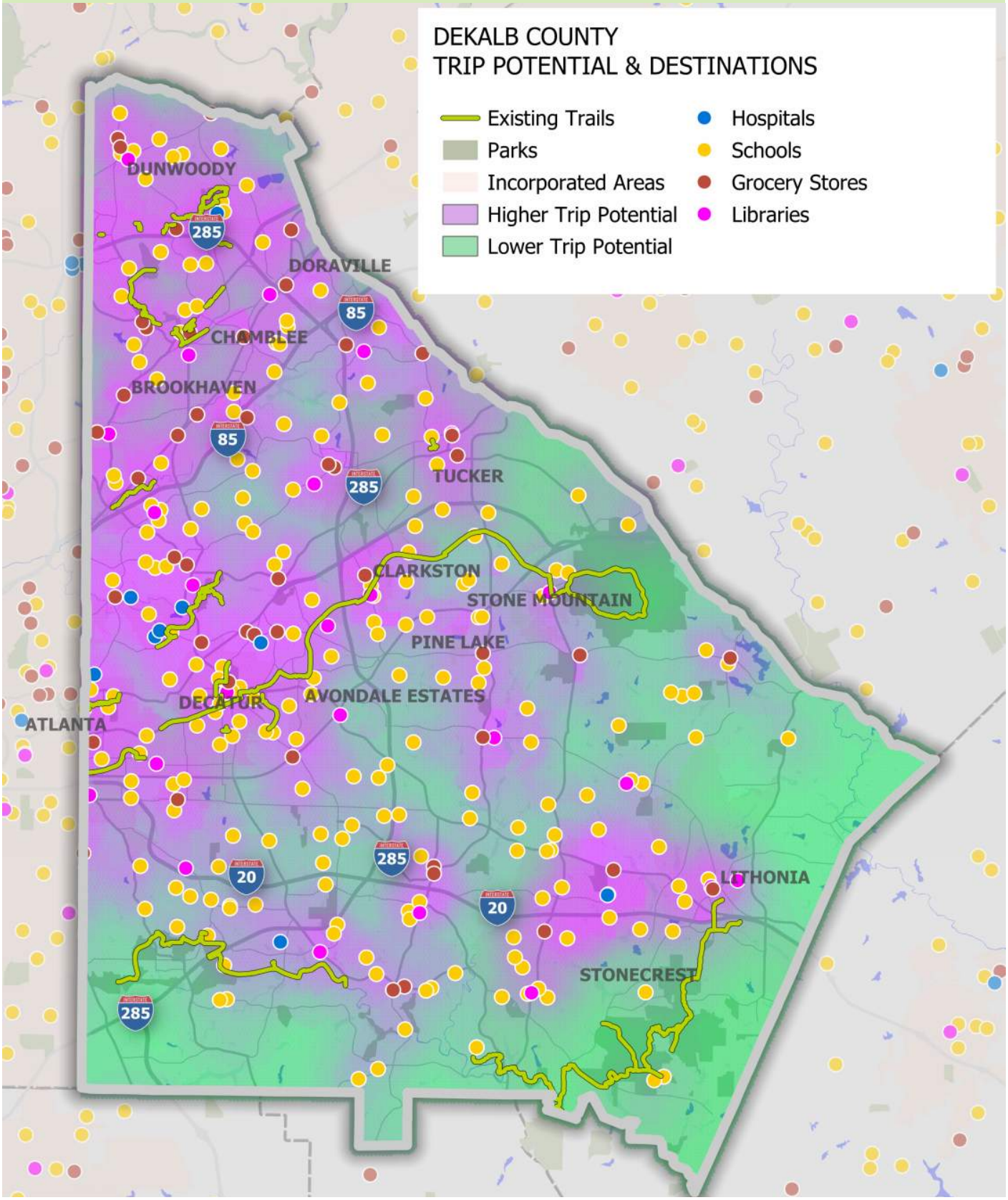
TRIP GENERATION

The Trip Potential Index combines residential and employment densities overlayed with proximity to schools, hospitals, grocery stores, and libraries to assess where new trail corridors would capture future non-motorized trips and provide opportunities to access frequent destinations.

Trip Generation Factors:

- Urban centers
- Neighborhoods
- Primary transportation destinations

Figure 15. Existing Trails, Trip Potential, and Primary Destinations



PRIORITY DESTINATIONS

Within the gaps identified previously, the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan seeks to improve connectivity to urban centers and neighborhoods, parks, bike lanes, employment centers, future connection to the Beltline, MARTA rail stations and bus stops, civic buildings, and historic, environmental, and cultural resources within the County.

Priority Destinations:

- Parks
- Activity/Employment Centers
- Civic buildings
- MARTA rail stations and bus stops
- Historic, environmental, and cultural resources within the County

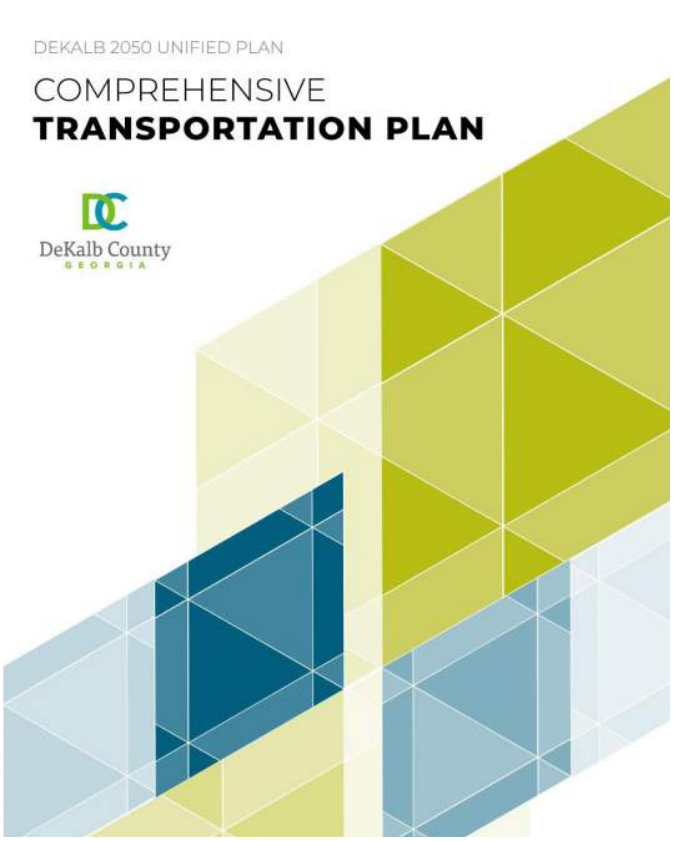
The Stonecrest Library provides a trailhead for the Arabia Mountain PATH

Stone Mountain Village, a historic railroad town, is near several segments of the Stone Mountain PATH

The Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area is a major environmental destination in DeKalb County

Unconstrained Network/Planned Segments Assessment

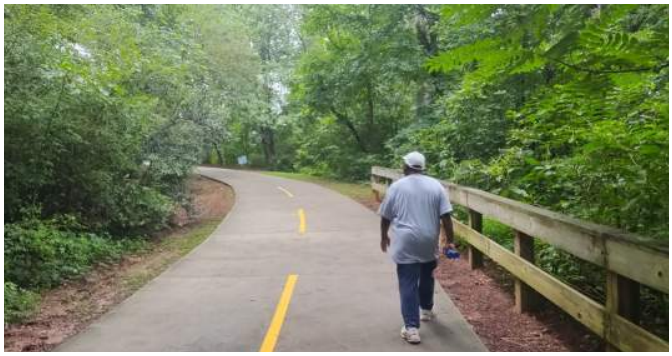
Alongside the existing conditions assessment, the project team collected current County and local plans for trail or bikeway segments. The primary source of plan projects is the County's 2022 Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP), which currently serves as the county's primary transportation and trails plan. As part of this assessment, other local plans adopted by Cities and greenway organizations were reviewed. Within a developed urban and suburban county, these plans already account for most reasonable trail locations and help establish an unconstrained network that can be further evaluated for the Countywide Greenway Vision Network and priority segments.



This Trail and Greenway Master Plan considered planned projects from the County's 2022 CTP along with local plans.

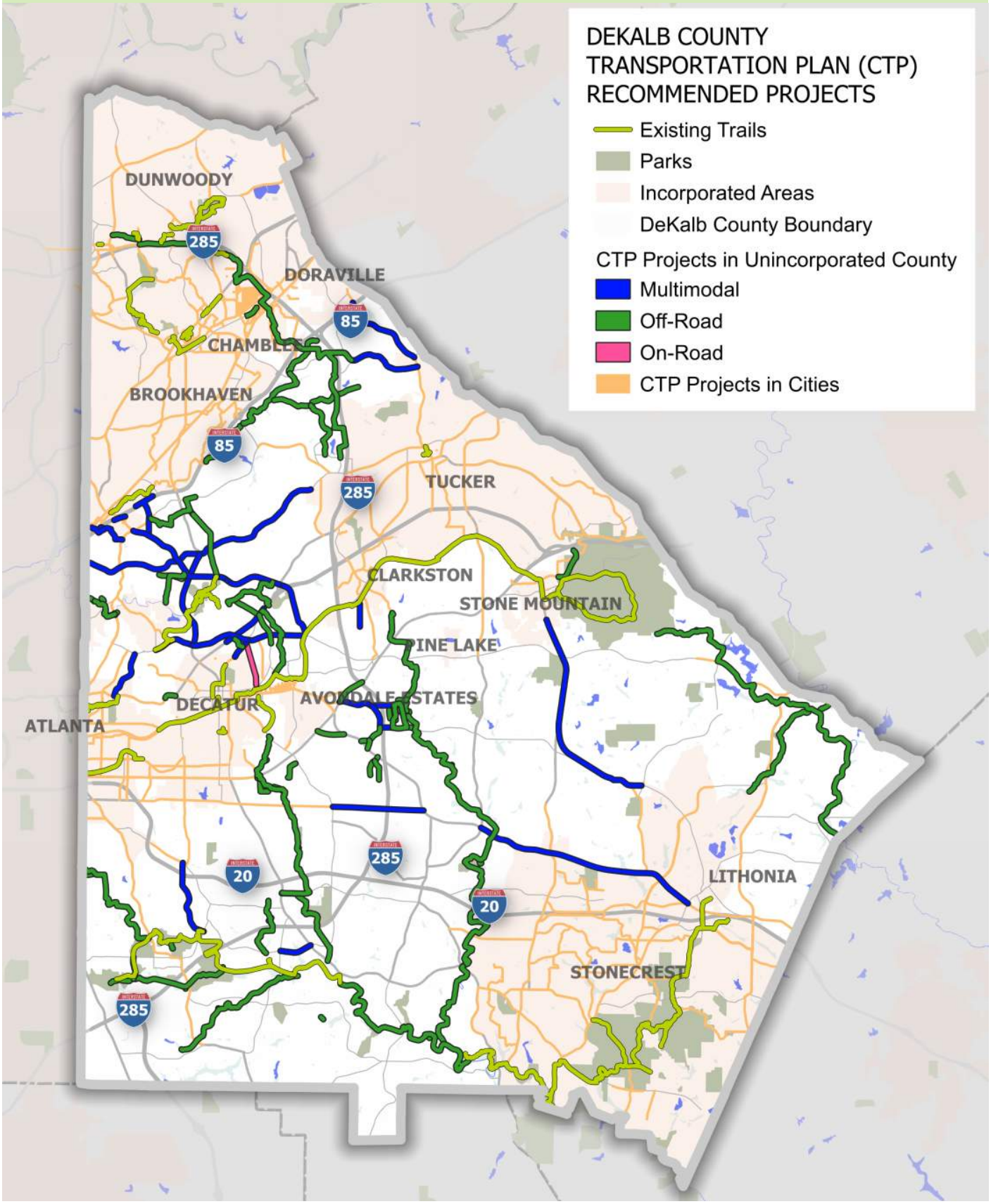
DEKALB CTP RECOMMENDED PROJECTS (2022)

The foundation of the Countywide Greenway Vision Network is currently planned path and bikeway segments within the DeKalb County Transportation Plan (CTP) adopted in 2022. Off-road trails are greenways away from roads; on-road trails are side paths within a road right-of-way; and multimodal projects consist of sidewalks or street bikeway improvements along a road. See examples below.



Recommended projects include off-road trails (top) and side paths (bottom)

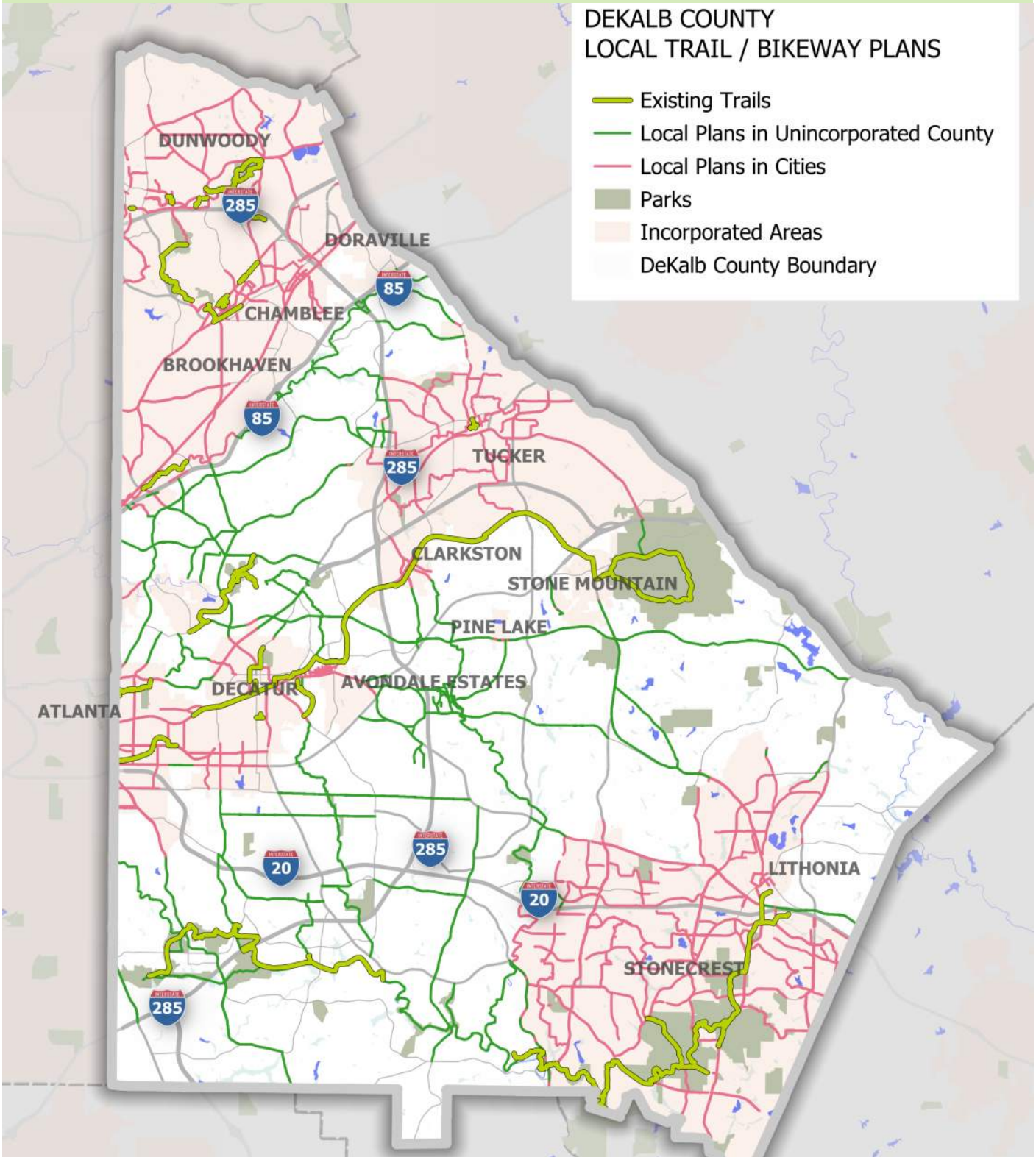
Figure 16. DeKalb County CTP Recommended Projects



OTHER PLANNED SEGMENTS

Other recent plans from the PATH Foundation, greenway organizations, and local trail networks were assessed to determine where previous planning studies identified potentially useful connections.

Figure 17. Trail Projects Planned by Others



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Vision Network Identification

The Countywide Greenway Vision Network is an assessment of the ideal connected trail network that meets the plan's primary objectives of ensuring connectivity to urban centers, neighborhoods, parks, bike lanes, employment centers, future connection to the Beltline, MARTA rail stations and bus stops, civic buildings, and historic, environmental, and cultural resources within the County, as well as to adjacent jurisdictions' trail systems.

Greenway Network Principles

Increase connections between existing network segments

Increase access to trails for all regional residents

Provide access to primary local destinations

Support inter-county and regional connectivity

Limit network to sustainable mileage along primary trails

Distribute trail facilities equally and equitably across the County

Provide a safe and comfortable experience for trail users

VISION NETWORK WORKSHOP

The project team reviewed the existing conditions map, adopted CTP plan, public and stakeholder input, and relevant data to determine core Network Principles and how key connections should be made to best meet those principles. The map at right references CTP segments, relevant data, and public input gathered so far and will form the foundation of upcoming prioritization and cost-benefit analysis.

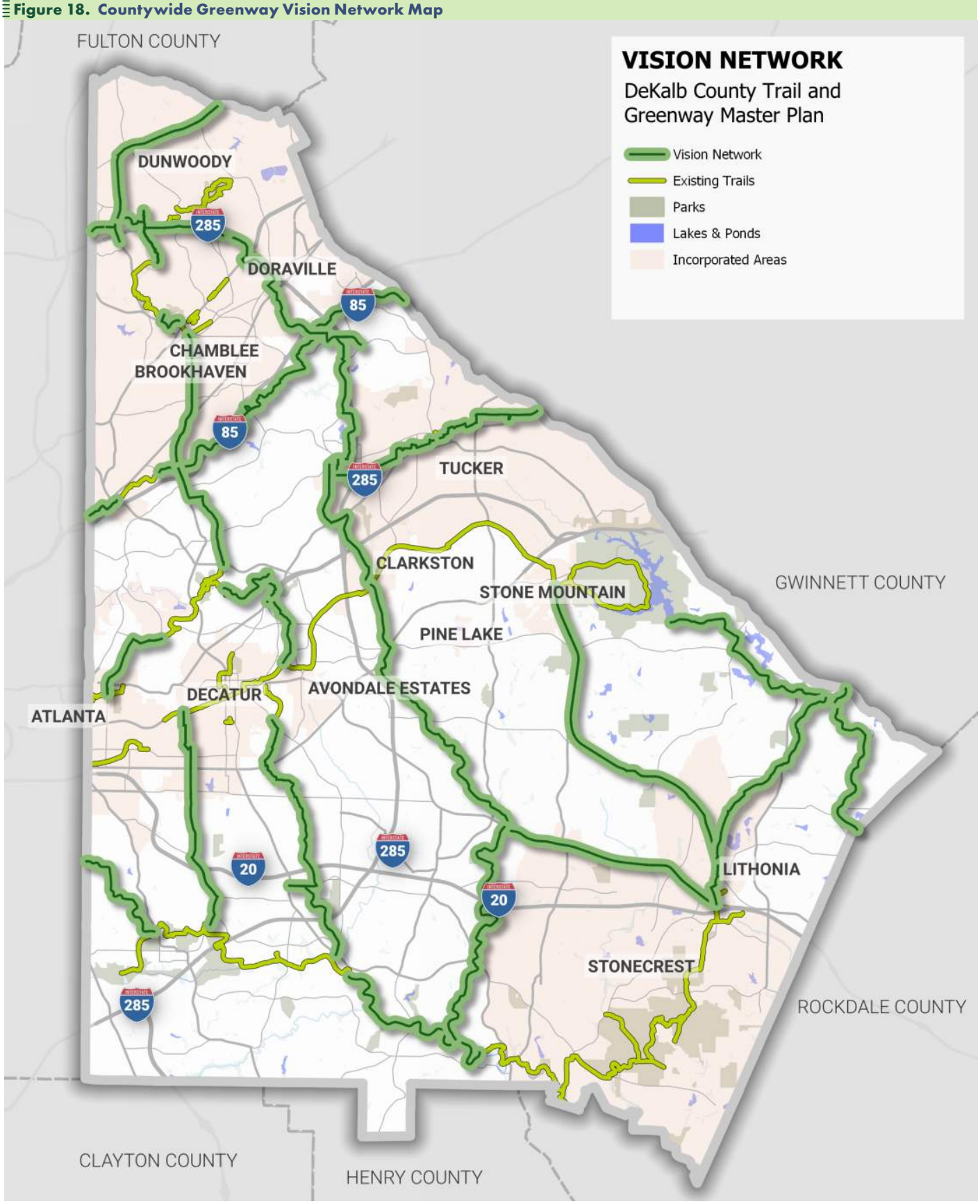
NETWORK PRINCIPLES

As outlined above, the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan's Network Principles help define the scale and shape of the county trail network, clarify potentially competing goals, and define metrics for evaluating the distribution of the network.

VISION NETWORK IDENTIFICATION

The map on the following page outlines the **Countywide Greenway Vision Network**. Specific projects by both the County and local cities will help implement this network but the Vision Network outlines the broad connectivity needed to support a robust countywide network.

Figure 18. Countywide Greenway Vision Network Map



Network Prioritization

The Countywide Greenway Vision Network offers a long-term vision for connecting DeKalb County through a comprehensive trail system accessible to all residents. To guide decision-makers and staff in securing funding and advancing implementation, specific elements of the network must be prioritized. This Plan assigns numerical scores to all Vision Network segments, helping to identify priority projects based on their alignment with the Plan's goals and network principles.

Prioritization Framework

The Plan uses the following inputs to assess the Vision Network, rank distinct segments, and determine a prioritized plan for strategic implementation. For a complete description of criteria and how segments were scored, please see Appendix G.

ACCESS TO DESTINATIONS

- **Community Services:** Trails located near community services allow people to use the greenway system for everyday trips.
- **Activity Centers:** Activity centers are designated by the County as hubs of higher intensity commercial businesses and offices. Trails connecting to these areas will provide access to multiple employment, service, and higher-density residential destinations.
- **Public Transportation:** Greenways that provide access to rail and bus networks help contribute to a more useful county and regional transportation network.

ADDRESSING GAPS & BARRIERS

- **Bicycle Risk Score:** High-speed, high-volume roadways are barriers to people walking and bicycling. Trails provide safe connections along, across, or as alternatives to uncomfortable streets.
- **Trip Potential:** Areas closer to where people live or work, and areas with more common destinations such as schools or grocery stores, generate more trips. Trip potential is a measure of where trails are more likely to accommodate short, every day trips.
- **Connections to Existing Trails:** New trails can close gaps by connecting to existing trails and provide more reach and access to more people throughout DeKalb County.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

- **Equitable Projects:** Everyone in DeKalb County should have access to safe, comfortable greenways. Incorporating demographic factors into the prioritization process is key to ensuring equitable distribution and investment in trails. Trails are prioritized where they benefit people who have been historically disconnected from parks and safe transportation options, and people who are less likely to travel by private vehicle.
- **Public Input:** DeKalb's future greenway system must respond to the needs of the people who use the current system and who live, work, and travel through the County. Trails are prioritized in areas that received significant community support during the planning process.

PROJECT DELIVERY

- **Previously Adopted Plans:** Incorporating previously planned projects honors commitments made by the County and supports the stewardship of local trail champions.
- **Feasibility/Project Delivery:** Higher priority projects should be feasible and ready to be implemented quickly.

Vision Network Prioritization

The map on page 61 shows the Countywide Greenway Vision Network ranked by the Prioritization Framework outlined above. The map illustrates how each segment best meets plan goals while still providing a safe, connected system throughout the County. The prioritization can be used to inform project funding and implementation. Benefits of implementing the Vision Network are described in the following chapter.

Prioritizing Trails in Unincorporated DeKalb and in Incorporated Cities

The Prioritization Map adopts a comprehensive approach to the Countywide Greenway Vision Network by evaluating trail segments in both unincorporated DeKalb County and incorporated cities. Recognizing the importance of connectivity, this plan highlights the value of linking county and city trails to create a seamless network. While DeKalb County is primarily responsible for advancing trail segments within its unincorporated areas, achieving an interconnected system requires strong collaboration with incorporated cities. To this end, the County should work closely with municipal partners to prioritize key connections, establish clear maintenance responsibilities, and ensure high-quality trail design.

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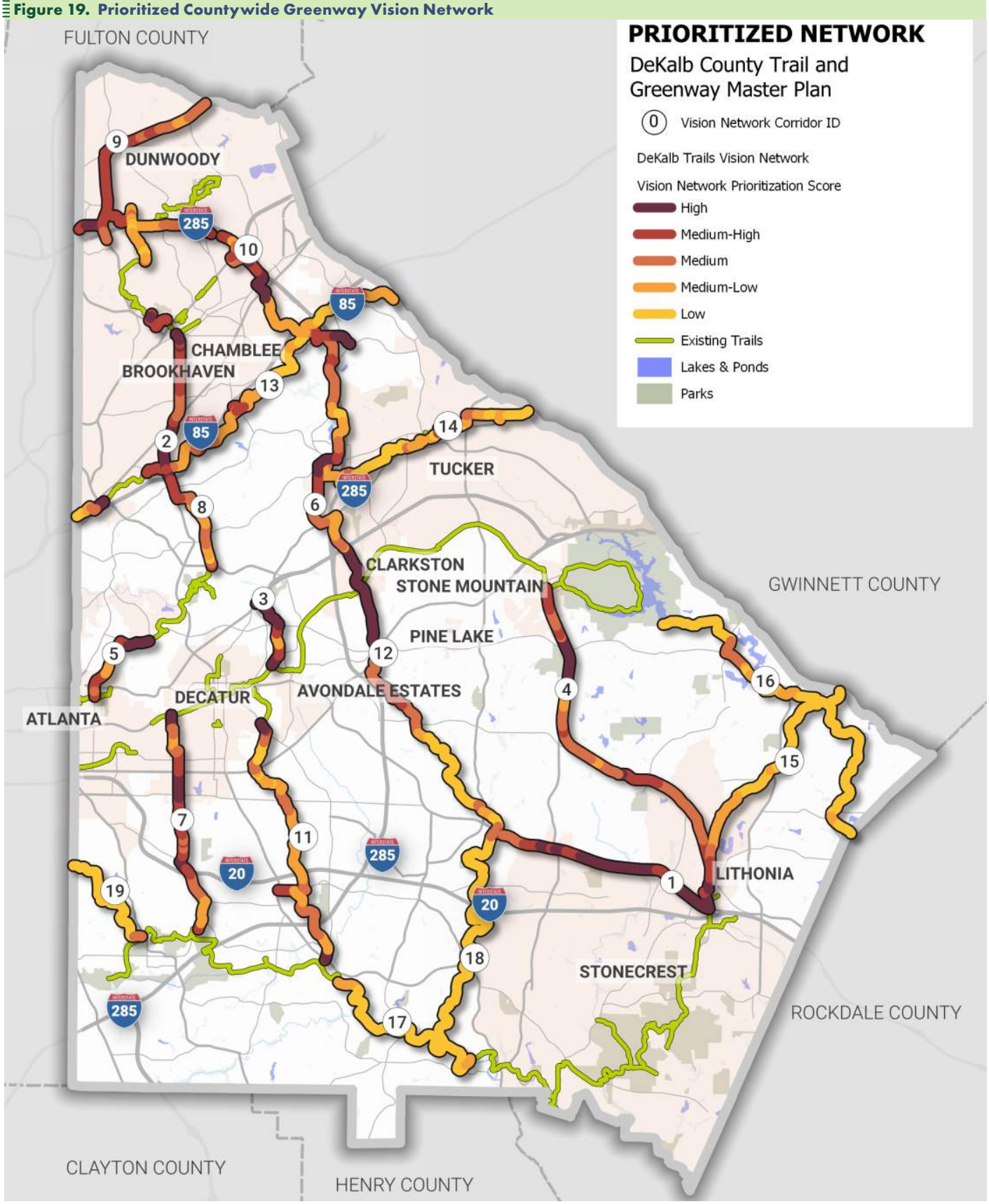
Table 5. Prioritized Countywide Greenway Vision Network

ID	Trail Name	Facility Type	Incorporated Length (mi)	Unincorporated Length (mi)	Weighted Prioritization Score
1	Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector	Sidepath	4.60	0.48	55.6
2	Clairmont Rd Trail	Sidepath	3.82	0.00	48.3
3	Farmers Market Trail	Sidepath	0.00	1.49	45.6
		Off-street	0.00	1.48	
4	Stone Mtn - Lithonia Road Trail	Sidepath	4.16	4.84	44.5
5	Freedom Park Connector	On-street	0.77	1.30	44.2
6	Montreal Rd. Connector	Off-street	0.04	0.04	42.9
		Sidepath	3.23	0.31	
7	Decatur - South River Trail	Sidepath	1.91	3.28	39.8
8	Sagamore Trail	Off-street	0.00	1.56	39.7
		Sidepath	0.17	0.89	
9	Ashford Dunwoody - Mt Vernon Connector	Sidepath	3.90	0.00	37.1
10	Top End 285 Trail	Off-street	4.00	0.49	30.7
		Sidepath	5.38	3.44	
11	Shoal Creek Trail	Off-street	0.00	6.27	29.4
		Sidepath	0.09	0.72	
12	Snapfinger Trail North	Off-street	0.25	7.16	26.6
		Sidepath	0.30	0.25	
13	Peachtree Creek Greenway	Off-street	1.88	6.96	24.2
		Sidepath	0.38	0.25	
14	Tucker Connector	Off-street	5.36	0.00	23.7
		Sidepath	1.01	0.00	
15	Arabia Mtn - Stone Mtn Connector	Off-street	0.70	2.85	15.1
		Sidepath	1.67	0.00	
16	Stone Mountain Creek Trail	Off-street	0.00	7.62	10.8
		Sidepath	0.00	1.28	
17	South River Trail	Off-street	0.00	5.20	9.0
18	Snapfinger Trail South	Off-street	2.31	4.45	6.6
19	Intrenchment Creek	Off-street	0.00	2.80	6.5

Figure 19. Prioritized Countywide Greenway Vision Network



V. Impacts of the Network

Introduction

The success of the updated DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan relies on tools for public agencies, support organizations, and policymakers to get trails and greenways to implementation. Investment in trails and greenways depends in part on demonstrating their value to the communities that maintain them. To make the case for investment in improving and expanding DeKalb County's Trail and Greenway Network, the project team built off of the existing conditions analysis and community and stakeholder engagement to analyze the **economic benefits of investing in trails and greenways** from three perspectives:

1. **Creating Access to Outdoor Recreation and Exercise** Trails and greenways improve public health by supporting outdoor exercise and recreation, yielding long-term savings on health care expenditures.
2. **Attracting and Supporting Residents and Visitors** Trails and greenways are a community asset that enhance quality of life for existing residents and attract new residents and visitors, reinforcing the local tax base and bolstering local economies through trail tourism.
3. **Supporting an Interconnected Transit System** Paired with investments in walkability and transit, trail expansion can support transportation as well as recreation. By making it practical for more people to walk and take public transit, trail expansion can reduce traffic congestion, barriers to employment, and carbon emissions.

Creating Access to Outdoor Recreation and Exercise

Investment in outdoor recreation facilities like trails and greenways yields divedends through improved public health and reduced healthcare costs. Every $1 invested in building and maintaining trails correlates to $3 saved in medical costs because of the opportunities for outdoor recreation and exercise that trails offer.[4] Equitable access to outdoor recreation is key to improved public health, especially in minority and low-income communities.

The Value Today

DeKalb County's current trail network provides access to outdoor exercise. The trail network runs to or through national, state, and local parks, providing residents and visitors access to nature and outdoor recreation. Almost all trail users surveyed by the project team reported that their trip was for exercise or recreation. The DeKalb County Trail Network currently plays a role in providing equitable access to the outdoors, spanning across communities of varying racial and economic backgrounds. Trail and greenway users surveyed by the Project Team were diverse in age and race, though the exact racial makeup of users varied widely from trail to trail.

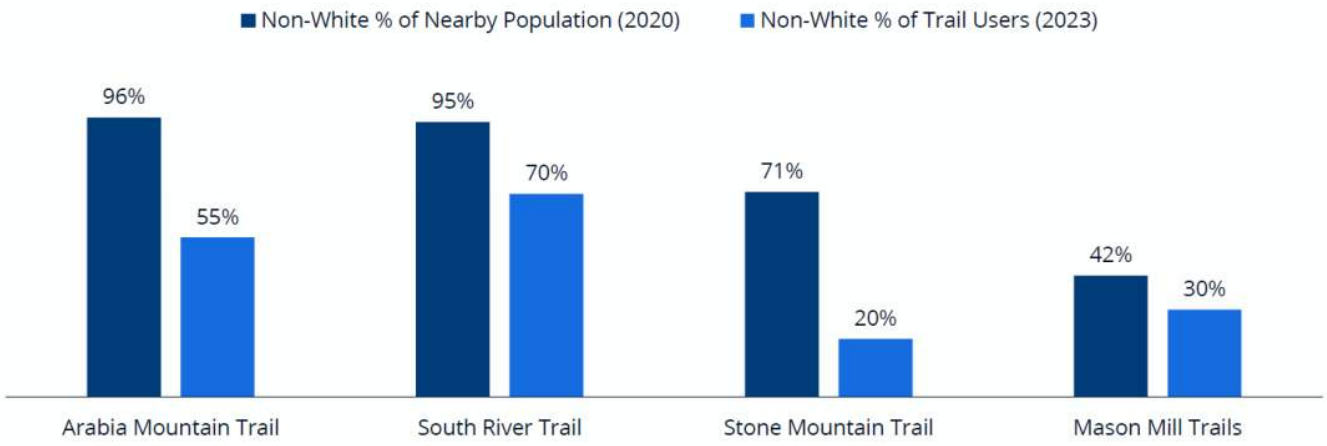
Research suggests green and open space are especially beneficial to minority and low-income communities because they are more likely to lack access to other health resources.[5]

The Need for Expansion

While trail users are racially diverse overall, there are disproportionately few non-White trail users relative to their neighboring communities. The presence of trails alone does not guarantee nearby residents are able to reap the benefits of outdoor recreation. Additionally, the proximity of trails alone has not erased health disparities. Predominantly non-White South DeKalb County has higher rates of physical inactivity and obesity than North DeKalb County, despite trail being present in both areas.

While physical activity is a multifaceted problem, a significant barrier is lack of time. Residents in South DeKalb County may have less leisure time as they are more likely to have long commutes and get fewer than seven hours of sleep than residents in the North.

Non-White Trail Users Underrepresented on DeKalb County Trail Network



Sources: U.S. Census (2020). Nearby population calculated from racial population data associated with Census Blocks that fall within a half mile radius of each trail centerline. Project Team Intercept Surveys. (Additional

4 Health Promotion Practice, "A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Physical Activity Using Bike/Pedestrian Trails" (2005).
5 International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health, "Green Space and Health Equity: A Systematic Review of the Potential of Green Space to Reduce Health Disparities," (2021).

The current trail system does not create opportunities to walk or bike to the destinations residents may need to visit most frequently. By making it convenient for low-income and minority communities to combine outdoor recreation with an errand, commute, or trip to or from school, DeKalb County can make exercise more accessible to all.

Attracting and Supporting Residents and Visitors

Trails are playing a growing role in attracting and retaining residents and drawing in visitors. National surveys consistently report that Americans value trails, and trail are an important factor when considering where to purchase a home. Nationally, trail systems routinely return value to municipalities and residents by increasing both the pase of adjacent development and the rental premium of nearby developments, translating to additional property tax revenues for their associated jurisdictions.

The Value Today

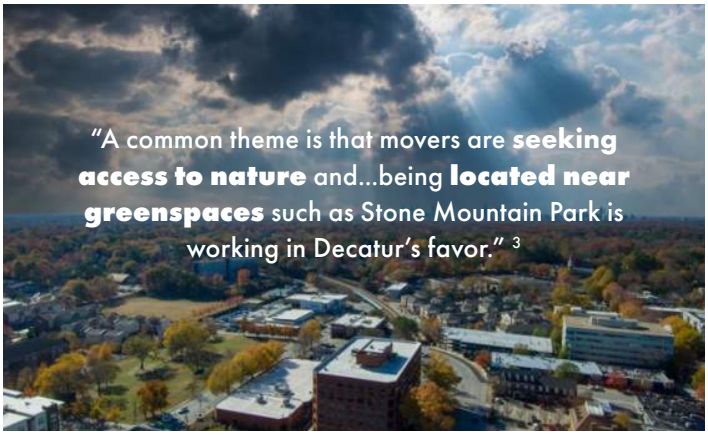
The current trail system is recognized as essential to the quality of life of DeKalb County residents and elected officials. Decatur, a city within DeKalb County, is well-served by trails and other walking and biking infrastructure and was ranked the No. 5 "move-to" city nationally and No. 1 in Georgia in 2024. Trail-adjacent properties in DeKalb County are valued at a premium relative to the countywide average.

The Need for Expansion

DeKalb County is growing more slowly than the metro region overall. To enhance its regional competitiveness as a quality place to live, the County should consider greater investment in the Countywide Greenway Vision Network. While no Covid-related data on the County's trail usage exists, anecdotal reports of increased visitation expanded the public's awareness of the County's trails. The County can also increase visitation and visitor spending, which in turn supports local businesses and employment, by investing in visitor-serving amenities along with trail expansion. These amenity types include wayfinding, welcome centers, bike racks and repair stations, and other public infrastructure that makes trails easy to find and welcoming to visitors.[6]

"Trails and greenspaces are an integral part of DeKalb's future... They are of the utmost importance for enhancing the quality of life for DeKalb County citizens by improving health, promoting clean air, protecting the environment, providing an alternative transportation system, stimulating economic development and creating a renewed sense of community."

-DeKalb County CEO-Elect Lorraine Cochran-Johnson



Trails and Displacement

With the increased desire to incorporate green spaces in urban environments, the intersection of natural spaces, including trails, and housing affordability gives rise to the risk of green gentrification. Specifically, green gentrification is defined as: "The role of environmental discourse and urban sustainability, which includes the planning of parks and trails, in driving up property values and displacing low-income residents."

Tactics to address this issue include tax relief and rent subsidies that can stabilize property assessment taxes. Other tactics for preserving and building affordable housing include housing planning, zoning and rent control, and shared equity homeownership models.

For more information, see Rails to Trails Conservancy's materials on Trail Networks and Housing Stability.

6 Urbanize Atlanta, "Analysis: Decatur among top 'move-to' cities in the U.S." (2024)

Supporting an Interconnected Transit System

If walking and biking is a safe and convenient way to get to work, school, and other destinations, it can encourage these transportation modes and reduce traffic congestion. Furthermore, trail expansions to employment centers and frequent transit service have the potential to link disadvantaged communities via low- or no-cost transportation (walking, biking, transit) to more jobs and facilitate upward economic mobility.

The Value Today

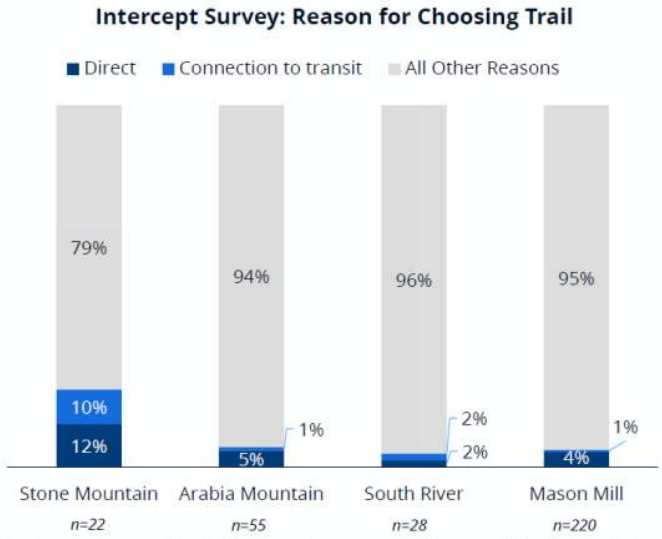
Intercept surveys show that most trail users drove to the trail itself, suggesting that recreation is the primary reason most people visit DeKalb's existing trails. Stone Mountain Trail users were a notable exception to these findings. Stone Mountain Trail users show that if biking and walking infrastructure connects people to walkable destinations and transit, more people will choose trails for transporation as well as recreation.

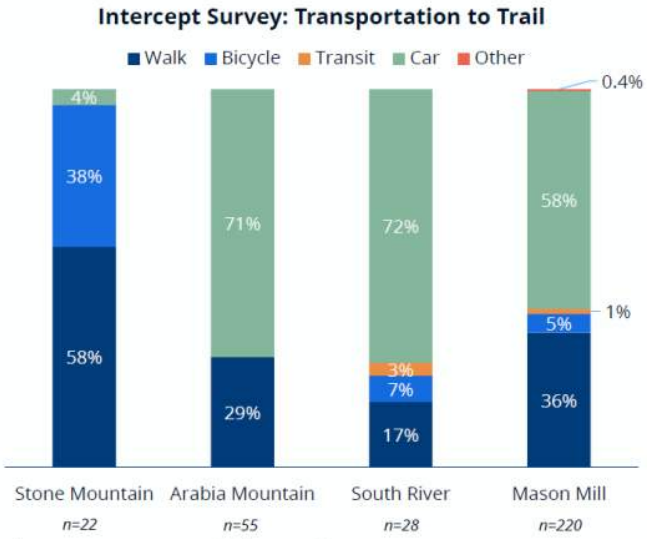
The Case for Expansion

With carefully targeted trail expansions close to walkable areas, frequent bus or rail transit service, and employment centers, DeKalb County can give its residents, workers, and visitors more transportation options than they have today. Most trips in DeKalb County are short enough to walk or bike but only if infrastructure makes it safe and convenient to do so. Expanding the trail network will give people the choice to walk or bike for more trips, reducing carbon emissions.

Majority of trips in DeKalb County could be walk- or bike-able[1]	DeKalb County residents want to walk and bike[2]
30% of all trips in DeKalb County in 2023 were <1 mile long	**60%** of County residents would walk a mile to parks
52% of all trips in DeKalb County in 2023 were <3 miles long	**33%** of County residents would bike 2–5 miles to parks

(1) U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Distribution of Trips by Distance: National, State, and County level (2023).
(2) DeKalb County, Georgia Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2021—2031, pg. 40.





Project Team Intercept Surveys. (Additional information on the survey methodology is available in the Introduction.) Note that percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Additionally, trail expansion can capitalize on new investments in walkable town centers and transit happening now in DeKalb County. These improvements include transit-oriented development (TOD) at Kensington Station and plans for bus rapid transit (BRT) in South DeKalb County.

Figure 20. Kensington Station TOD: As of Nov. 2023, 260 units of housing, 15K SF of office, a parking deck, and other community assets are under development.

Figure 21. South DeKalb Transit Initiative: As of April 2024, MARTA is analyzing six alternatives for BRT service in South DeKalb County to narrow down to one.

Investing in the Network

Investing in the trail network will be an investment in DeKalb County's public health, competitiveness as a place to live and visit, and the mobility of its residents and visitors. High-quality and consistent upkeep is necessary to realize public benefits from trails and greenways and to avoid longer-term deferred maintenance costs.

As estimated in 2024 dollars by County staff, DeKalb County invests $10,800 per mile to contract service providers that maintain trails and greenways each year, totaling nearly $334,800 per year for DeKalb's 31 miles of trails in the unincorporated part of the County. It is estimated that with an upfront estimated investment of $165,000 and annual cost of $6,710 per mile, the County would be able to directly maintain these trails, providing:

- Direct oversight of maintenance
- More frequent maintenance
- Faster response times
- Long-term cost savings

The Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs can phase hiring and training to spread administrative and financial costs associated with this transition.Administering trail and greenway maintenance directly would allow the County to double maintenance frequency for $4,100 less per mile than is currently spent. Making this change for today's Existing Countywide Greenway Network would require:

$165K

Estimated one-time costs

(Trucks, trailers, mowers, small engine equipment, uniforms, etc.)

$208K

Estimated annual operations and maintenance costs

(Weekly maintenance , twice as frequent as the bi-weekly maintenance provided by contractors today)

When fully implemented, the Countywide Greenway Vision Network would add 65 linear miles to the unincorporated areas of DeKalb County. Based on current costs and elevated maintenance standards, full implementation of the Vision Network in unincorporated DeKalb County will require:

$225M - $265M

Estimated one-time capital investment - unincorporated DeKalb County

($3.2M-$4.0M/mile)

$2.3M

Annual maintenance cost at completion year

(Weekly maintenance of 96 miles of trails, assuming 2 miles built per year starting in 2025, 2.5% annual escalation of costs, and 33-year buildout period)

Once the benefits of implementing the Countywide Greenway Vision Network are realized, the County and supporting municipalities must be equipped with tools to finance and then manage the expanded network. Key recommendations for successfully implementing the Countywide Greenway Vision Network are described in the following chapter.

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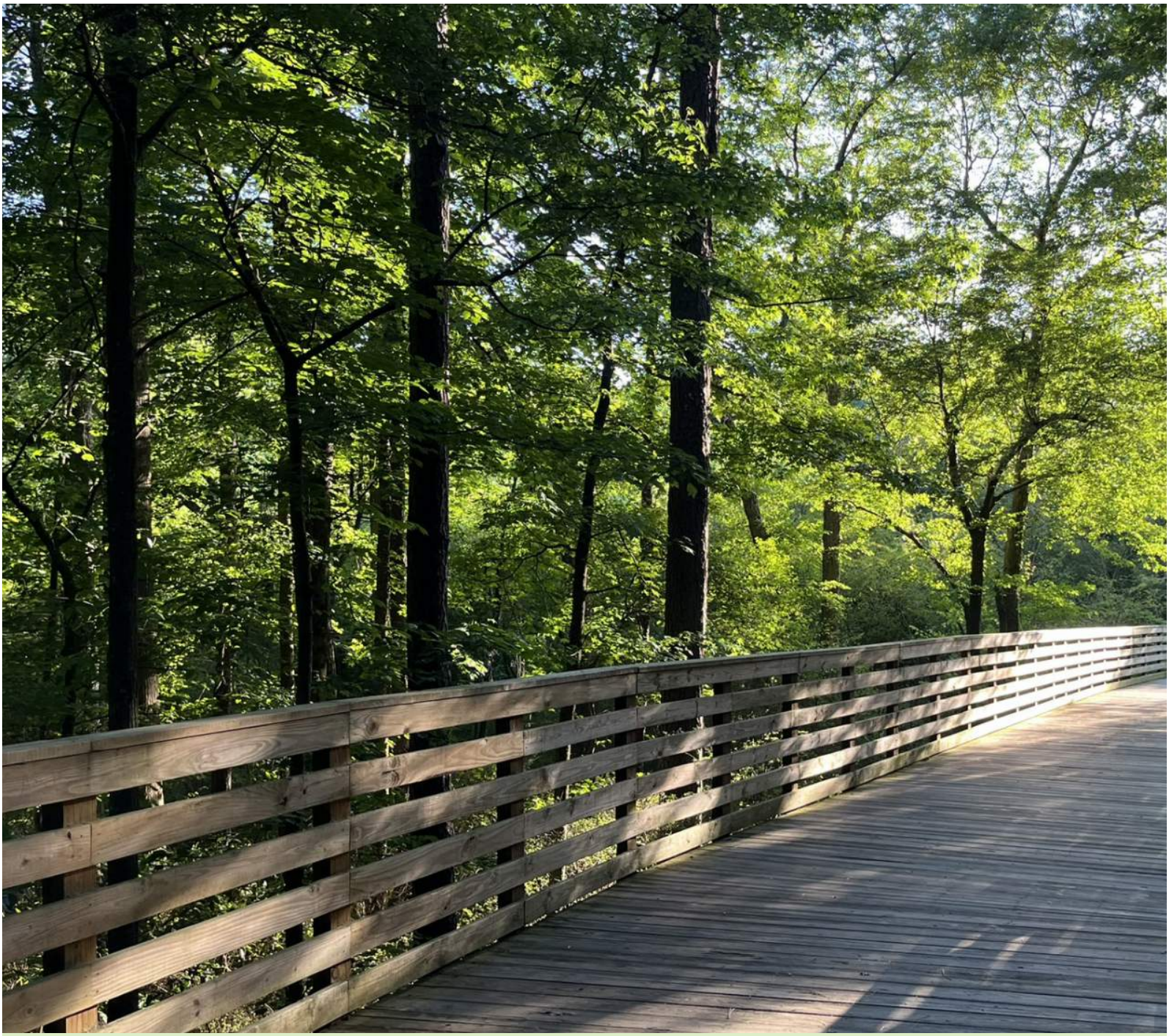


VI. Implementing the Network

Introduction

To succeed in implementing the Countywide Greenway Vision Network, DeKalb County must have a solid understanding of the resources it will take to construct, operate, and maintain the network. This chapter describes opportunities and resources needed to improve the Existing Countywide Greenway Network, funding considerations for implementing the Vision Network, and resources for financing construction and developing partnerships for maintenance.

Enhancing Operations and Maintenance of the Existing Network

Consistent and high-quality maintenance is essential for DeKalb County to maximize the benefits of Countywide Greenway Vision Network and avoid mounting deferred maintenance costs. As of 2021, the County allocated $283,900 per year to contracted service providers to maintain the trail and greenway network. This does not include capital improvements. Accounting for inflation, this is $334,800 in 2024 dollars. To increase the frequency of maintenance, the DeKalb County Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs (DRPCA) could hire and deploy staff to directly manage and maintain trails, which would require $208,000 per year. This would have several benefits, including direct oversight of work, faster response times, doubled maintenance frequency, and long-term cost savings. To accomplish this, DeKalb County could phase hiring and training of staff to spread the administrative and financial costs of this transition. In addition to the ongoing personnel costs associated with DRPCA administering maintenance, it would require a one-time investment of $165,000 for necessary equipment: trucks, trailers, mowers, small engine equipment, uniforms, and other related costs.

Funding the Vision Network

Building the 65 miles of the Countywide Greenway Vision Network in unincorporated DeKalb County will require an estimated $212M to $262M in one-time capital funds. This investment is estimated to result in the one-time creation of anywhere between 3,840 to 4,790 job-years, an economic output of $303M to $379M, and labor income of $144M to $180M. If the Vision Network is partially implemented, only partial benefits will accrue to the County's residents and visitors.

The operations and maintenance cost of the Countywide Greenway Vision Network at the completion year, assuming 2 miles built per year starting next year, 2.5% annual escalation of costs, and a 33-year buildout period ending in 2057, is $2.3M a year in 2057. This figure accounts for routine maintenance and does not include the ongoing capital costs associated with repairing and replacing trail elements such as boardwalks and bridges.

Accomplishing the goal of properly maintaining the existing and expanded Countywide Greenway Vision Network will require tapping into funding and financing sources beyond DeKalb County Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs' (DRPCA) existing and constrained budget. The Project Team identified federal, state, regional and local, and philanthropic funding and financing sources that could be pursued and combined as part of the funding strategy for the capital construction and ongoing operations and maintenance of the proposed trail expansion. For detailed descriptions of these potential funding sources and precedent projects, please refer to Appendix F.

Funding and Financing Considerations

The funding strategy for capital construction as well as ongoing operations and maintenance will likely need to be a layered approach, employing a combination of funding types. Securing the range of funding necessary to employ that approach will require strategic, coordinated planning

Table 6. Federally Funded Atlanta-Area Trails Projects *(source: United States Departmentment of Transportation)*

Project Name *(Capital projects funded)*	Federal Grant Program and Award Year	Federal Funding *(% of total project cost)*	Local Match *(% of total project)*
Westside Park Multimodal Access *(Ped and bicycle improvements)*	2024 RAISE Grant	$16M *(70%)*	$7M *(30%)*
The Stitch Phase 1 Implementation *(Highway cap park)*	2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant	$157M *(79%)*	$43M *(21%)*
Reconnecting Atlanta's Southside Communities: Atlanta BeltLine to Flint River Trail *(Trail Construction)*	2023 Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant	$65M *(41%)*	$94M *(65%)*
Trails to Transit: Reconnecting Atlanta Communities *(Trail Construction)*	2023 RAISE Grant	$25M *(35%)*	$46M *(65%)*
From Tracks to Trails: Reconnecting Atlanta Communities *(Trail Construction)*	2021 RAISE Grant	$17M *(42%)*	$22M *(58%)*

by partner DeKalb County agencies, as well as sustained commitment from County leadership and regional actors like the Atlanta Regional Commission. As DRPCA assesses these potential sources, it should consider the following trail project financing and support options.

Federal Funding

Federal funding is essential to getting significant trail and parks projects built, as demonstrated by the Atlanta-area projects in the table below. Local funding matches are critical to secure federal funding. Federal funding programs often legally require at least 20% of a project's budget to be funded by non-federal sources, and having a higher non-federal share makes a project more competitive. This means that for every 80 cents of federal funding, DeKalb County must commit a minimum of 20 cents from state, regional, or local sources to secure that federal funding.

Federal transportation funding programs prioritize planning for and building walking and biking infrastructure like trails and greenways. This includes standalone programs dedicated to walking and biking infrastructure overseen by the U.S. Department of Transportation, such as the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program. It also includes programs whose mandates also include highways, transit, and other surface transportation infrastructure. For example, the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program rates a project application highly if it "protects non-motorized travelers from safety risks" and "improve[s] public health by adding new facilities that promote walking, biking, or other forms of active transportation," among a multitude of other similar criteria.[7] The DeKalb County Department of Public Works – Transportation Division can make roadway projects' applications for federal grants and financing more competitive by working with DRPCA to incorporate walking and biking infrastructure.

Federal funding for trails and greenways is funded through FY2026 by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, otherwise known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Future federal funding (and the magnitude thereof) is uncertain and will likely depend on potential political transitions in 2024 at the White House, the United States Department of Transportation, and Congress.

7 See merit criteria from the 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity for the RAISE grant program (pp. 29-36).

State Funding

State funding programs for trails and greenways are administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). To ensure eligibility for federally funded, GDOT-administered grants through the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside program, DRPCA should work with the Atlanta Regional Commission to list trail and greenway expansion and improvement projects in the Regional Transportation Improvement Plan.

Regional & Local Funding

In 2023, DeKalb County voters passed the County's second Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, a 1% local sales tax that will raise approximately $500M over six years, including an estimated $19M allocated for 15 miles of bicycle paths, bicycle lanes, and multi-use trails.[8] In addition to advocating for the passage of subsequent SPLOST referenda, DeKalb County could raise additional local funds through means such as a voter-approved bond measure dedicated to trail development, or local "sin taxes" on products such as tobacco and alcohol subject to state enabling legislation allowing DeKalb County to enact them.

Operating and maintaining the fully built Countywide Greenway Vision Network will require funding from regional and local sources, as federal and state programs typically do not offer awards for operations and maintenance expenses. Moreover, operations and maintenance funding must be dependable and regular – something competitive grant programs are not – to maintain state of good repair of the trail and greenway network. This will require the County to provide a higher annual budget so that trail users and visitors know that their experience on DeKalb County's trails will be comfortable, safe, and interesting.

Sources that require voter approval, like establishing a Community Improvement District (CID) or a bond measure dedicated to trails, are more difficult to implement than ones that do not require voter approval, such as general fund appropriations.

Leveraging Partnerships to Acquire Additional Funding and Support Operations and Maintenance

In addition to the sources identified in the Appendix, several programs offer funding and financing awards to trail and greenway projects if trail and greenway work is included as part of a larger eligible project. For example, federal Highway Safety Improvement Program funds cannot fund standalone recreational trail projects, but they can fund trail/highway crossings and intersections. To capture the greatest range of funding sources and ensure efficient expansion of the trail and greenway network, DRPCA should coordinate with the following entities to explore whether trail and greenway work can be included in their capital projects:

- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Atlanta Regional Commission (for inclusion in the Regional Transportation Improvement Plan)
- DeKalb County Department of Public Works
- Private railway companies (for trail-railroad crossings)

Philanthropic Funding and Volunteer Support

Nationally, philanthropy from corporations, foundations, and individuals is closing gaps to fund open space and greenway capital and maintenance. Securing philanthropic or foundation grants requires a nonprofit partner to receive and, in most cases, expend philanthropic contributions, which does not yet exist for DeKalb County parks and greenways. The foundations that supported the Atlanta BeltLine, such as the James M. Cox Foundation, only offer grants to nonprofit organizations.

In addition to facilitating philanthropic contributions to capital and maintenance, DRPCA can also engage parks nonprofits for volunteers to supplement their regular operations and maintenance. For example, Trees Atlanta (an Atlanta BeltLine partner) and Park Pride are two nonprofits that organize volunteers to help with mulching, painting, planting, and more in the Atlanta area.

8 DeKalb County, "Project Categories and Estimated Budget Allocations (Proposed SPLOST II Referendum 6 YR Budget)," 2023.

Sustaining Momentum

Implementing the Vision Network will require a sustained effort on the part of the County, supporting municipalities, and trail advocates. The guidance and resources included in the DeKalb County Trail and Greenway Master Plan are intended to be revisited in the following years of trail and greenway planning, design, and construction. Making incremental progress on trail project implementation can provide tangible wins that sustain interest and support for Vision Network. The following feasibility assessments were completed for the top five priority trail projects in the Vision Network. These high-level assessments are provided to push the most impactful trail projects one step closer to implementation.

Trail Feasibility Assessments

The pages that follow are high-level feasibility studies of five (5) specific trail corridors. These trail corridors were selected based on the prioritization process, which scored all Trail Vision Network segments based on a set of criteria that best meet the goals and principles that have been shaped by public and stakeholder input. These criteria include inputs and rank trail segments based on:

- **Community Services:** Trails located near community services allow people to use the greenway system for everyday trips.
- **Activity Centers:** Activity centers are designated by the County as hubs of higher intensity commercial businesses and offices. Trails connecting to these areas will provide access to multiple employment, service, and higher-density residential destinations.
- **Public Transportation:** Greenways that provide access to rail and bus networks help contribute to a more useful county and regional transportation network.
- **Bicycle Risk Score:** High-speed, high-volume roadways are barriers to people walking and bicycling. Trails provide safe connections along, across, or as alternatives to uncomfortable streets.
- **Trip Potential:** Areas closer to where people live or work, and areas with more common destinations such as schools or grocery stores, generate more trips. Trip potential is a measure of where trails are more likely to accommodate short, everyday trips.
- **Connections to Existing Trails:** New trails can close gaps by connecting to existing trails and provide access to more people throughout DeKalb County.
- **Equitable Projects:** Everyone in DeKalb County should have access to safe, comfortable greenways. Incorporating demographic factors into the prioritization process is key to ensuring equitable distribution and investment in trails. Trails are prioritized where they benefit people who have been historically disconnected from parks and safe transportation options, and people who are less likely to travel by private vehicle. The feasibility assessments account for mileage of the trail project within Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs). QCTs are used to determind eligibility for the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. These tracts must have 50 percent of households with incomes below 60 percent of the Area Median Gross Income or have a poverty rate of 25 percent or more.
- **Public Input:** DeKalb's future greenway system must respond to the needs of the people who use the current system and who live, work, and travel through the County. Trails are prioritized in areas that received significant community support during the planning process.
- **Previously Adopted Plans:** Incorporating previously planned projects honors commitments made by the County and supports the stewardship of local trail champions.
- **Feasibility/Project Delivery:** Higher priority projects should be feasible and ready to be implemented quickly.

The five projects selected for feasibility studies were among the top-ranked trail corridors in the Vision Network. The following feasibility assessments provide a deeper dive into the characteristics of of these projects and identify what considerations should be included as part of detailed design and engineering.

Study Scope and Next Steps

These studies are based on initial site visits and desktop analysis of available data. The routes shown here are schematic, and trail widths have been assumed to be 12-14 ft. Project challenges identified in the assessments are a preliminary list of anticipated encumbrances that may be encountered during the development of the project. For any project that is selected to move forward, a scoping study is highly recommended before proceeding to a detailed engineering feasibility study. During the scoping study, the best alignment will be selected based on environmental constraints, acquisition needs, permitting considerations, and other input. The final trail width and other design details will be determined during an engineering feasibility study and final design based on anticipated capacity and existing conditions.

Planning Level Opinions of Probable Cost

The high-level opinions of probable cost developed for each of the trail feasibility assessments were created using a trail cost calculator. For more informaiton about the process used to develop the planning-level cost opinions and associated assumptions and disclaimers, please see Appendix F.

Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector

Project Description

The Covington Highway Multimodal Connector is located in southeastern DeKalb County. The trail would connect the northern end of the Arabia Mountain Trail in Lithonia and Stonecrest to the future Snapfinger Trail, which would be a key north-south connection between the Stone Mountain Trail and South River Trail. This connector trail is the highest ranked trail from the prioritization process due to its connections to 5 schools, 53 transit stops, the Southeast Athletic Complex, and multiple activity centers.

Project Status

The section of the Covington Highway Multimodal Connector between DeKalb Medical Parkway and Cragstone Court is identified as part of a Tier 1 Operational-Corridor project in the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The project that this section falls within is Project ID R_2001, SR 12/US 278 Operational Improvement.

Project Issues & Challenges

The following key issues were identified through the feasibility assessment and will need to be considered and addressed during subsequent phases of planning and design:

- Challenging topography
  - In some locations along Covington Highway, the existing topography slopes steeply toward the roadway. Providing a shared use path with a sufficient vegetated buffer may require a small retaining wall to hold back the grade.
- Utilities
  - Overhead power lines alternate both sides of Covington Hwy, creating obstacles for the trail and limiting the presence of shade trees.

Project Characteristics

The Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector would be approximately 5.1 miles long with 0.5 miles in unincorporated DeKalb County and 4.6 miles in the City of Stonecrest.

Location and Corridor Type

The Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector would likely be a side path alignment on the north side of Covington Hwy for its entirety. The trail corridor runs east/west from the intersection of Hidden Chase and Covington Hwy at the west end to the Arabia Mountain Trail and intersection of Klondike Rd and Covington Hwy on the east side. The trail would primarily be within the City of Stonecrest expect for 0.5 miles at the west end in unincorporated DeKalb County. The trail runs through and adjacent to neighborhoods with moderately high and high ARC equity analysis scores and would offer a safe corridor for people accessing numerous destinations along Covington Hwy by foot or bike.

Length and Surface Types

The trail is anticipated to have the approximate length and surface materials noted in the table below.

Trail Surface Type	Length (mi)	% of Length
Concrete	**5.1**	**100**

- 2.4 miles/46.7% of trail project within Qualified Census Tracts.

Access Points

The Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector would not have direct access to an existing trailhead, but it would connect directly to the Arabia Mountain Trail where it crosses Covington Hwy at Klondike Rd. Access to the Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector would additionally be available from the 53 transit stops on the highway and the following cross streets with sidewalk infrastructure:

Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector Concept

- Young Rd
- Panola Rd
- Wellborn Rd
- DeKalb Medical Pkwy
- Lithonia Industrial Blvd
- Evans Mill Rd

Anticipated Permitting and Approvals Needs

The following subsections summarize permitting requirements, known environmental encumbrances, and jurisdictional authority for the concept trail route.

Permitting and Land Use Requirements

Permit/Approval Item	Coordinating Entity
Use of Covington Hwy right-of-way for the trail	**GDOT**
Issues requiring internal county department reviews such as stormwater or roads divisions	**DeKalb County departments**
FEMA-regulated flood zone and wetland	**US Army Corps of Engineers (Joint Permit Applications)**
Stormwater flows and quality impacted by additional impervious surface created by the trail	**Georgia Environmental Protection Division**

Property Ownership

The Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector alignment is fully within GDOT-managed road right-of-way in the City of Stonecrest and unincorporated DeKalb County.

Anticipated Acquisition Needs?

No

Additional Concerns and Considerations

The Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector crosses FEMA-regulated flood zone AE at three different locations for a total of 0.25 miles. Additionally, the corridor goes through approximately 150 ft of wetland on the north side of Covington Hwy near Pole Bridge Creek. The trail project timeline may need to account for design reviews and permitting at the county and federal/state level (joint permit application) if the addition of the side path to the road corridor triggers the review and permitting process.

Design and Construction

The following elements have been identified as key challenges that are anticipated for the Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector design and construction phases:

- Grading work and installation of retaining walls will be necessary along some parts of the corridor to fit the side path into existing steep slopes.

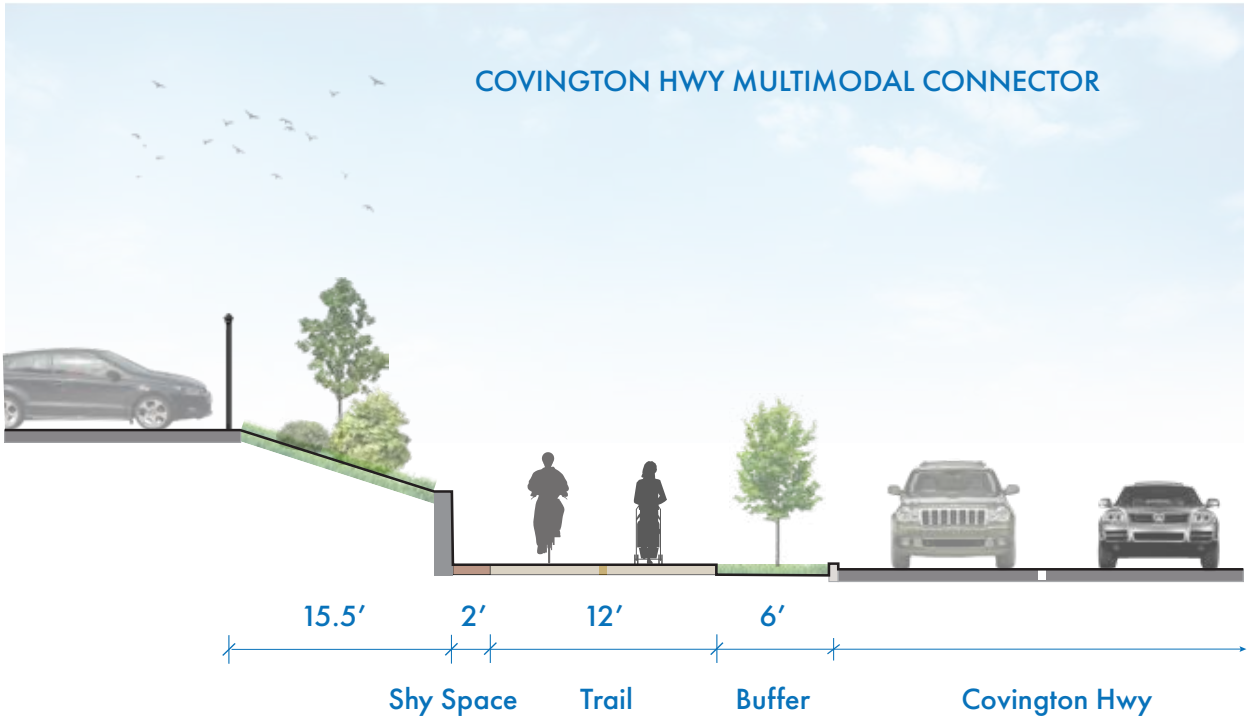
- Crossings at intersections, particularly major cross streets such as Panola Rd and Lithonia Industrial Blvd, will need to be assessed for any necessary safety improvements.
- The trail design will need to accommodate overhead utility poles, or in some cases, poles may need to be relocated.
- MARTA transit stops will need to be integrated into the trail design to accommodate space for people waiting for the bus and people transitioning travel modes between trail and bus.

Opinion of Probable Cost

The opinion of probable cost for the design and construction of the Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector is $19,514,000. This opinion was derived from a trail cost calculator assuming a 12-foot-wide concrete trail. The cost does not account for safety improvements at road crossings that may be needed. Please refer to the cost opinion disclaimers and assumptions in Appendix F for more information about the extent of items included in the cost opinion.

Findings and Recommendations

The Covington Hwy Connector would provide DeKalb County residents with a superb multimodal transportation opportunity. Due to its proximity to numerous MARTA transit stops as well as destinations along Covington Hwy, the side path would be one of the County's first trails with a primary transportation focus. Additionally, the trail's connection to the Arabia Mountain Trail would link the County's existing trail network to this multimodal corridor. The Covington Hwy Connector offers many exciting benefits, but some design challenges are anticipated around grading, accommodating existing utility poles, and possibly environmental permitting. The first step towards design and eventual construction of the trail is to begin communications with GDOT regarding the use of the Covington Hwy right-of-way for the side path.



Farmers Market Trail

Project Description

The Farmers Market Trail, located in the western part of DeKalb County, would link the South Peachtree Creek Trail to the Stone Mountain Trail. The Farmers Market Trail is the second highest ranked trail from the prioritization process for its ability to link these two existing trails as well as its connection to nine transit stops, Medlock and Mason Mill parks, a grocery store, charter school, and its namesake, the DeKalb Farmers Market. The trail would route through several neighborhoods, including communities with high scores in the ARC Equity Analysis.

Project Status

The section of trail between Medlock Park and the DeKalb Farmers Market is identified as part of a Tier 1 short range project in the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The project that this section falls within is Project ID BP_018, South Peachtree Creek Trail, Phase 3.

Project Issues & Challenges

The following key issues were identified through the feasibility assessment, and will need to be considered and addressed during subsequent phases of planning and design:

- Obtaining permission to route the trail along 0.7 mi of George Power's overhead utility corridor
- Obtaining permission to route the trail through Dekalb Farmers Market Property
- Coordinating with GDOT on the use of Scott Ave/78 right-of-way and crossing design

Project Characteristics

Located in unincorporated DeKalb County northeast of Decatur, the Farmers Market Trail would be approximately 3 miles long and would have the following characteristics.

Location and Corridor Type

Starting at the Peachtree Creek Trail crossing of Willivee Drive near Medlock Park, the Farmers Market Trail would run in a southeast/northwest orientation to the corner of DeKalb Industrial Way and E Ponce de Leon Ave where it would connect to the Stone Mountain Trail. The trail alignment would be a combination of side path (1.7 miles) along county and state roads, shared corridor along an overhead utility easement (0.7 miles), and independent alignment through DeKalb Farmers Market property (0.6 miles). The trail would likely cross streams at four locations that would require trail bridges. The Farmers Market Trail would offer a variety of landscapes for trail users including shaded side paths along lower volume neighborhood roads, open utility corridors with stream crossings, and more urban settings where the trail would cross and connect to major roads.

Length and Surface Types

The trail is anticipated to have the approximate length and surface materials noted in the table below. Bridges will be needed to acccomodate this trail alignment. The number of bridges and design details will be determined in a scoping study.

Trail Surface Type	Length (mi)	% of Length
Concrete	**3**	**100**

- 0 miles/0% of trail project within Qualified Census Tracts.

Access Points

The Farmers Market Trail would not have direct access to existing trailheads, but access would be available from the following points:

- Peachtree Creek Trail crossing of Willivee Dr (northern terminus)
- Road crossings at: Wood Trail Lane (with connection to charter school), Woodridge Dr, andScott Blvd/78
- DeKalb Farmers Market
- Stone Mountain Trail at the corner of DeKalb Industrial Way and E Ponce de Leon Ave

Access to the trail would also be available wherever the alignment is a side path paralleling a roadway. Side paths would parallel the following roads:

Farmers Market Trail Concept

- Willivee Dr
- Hunting Valley Rd
- Scott Ave/78
- Jordan Dr
- E Ponce de Leon Ave

Anticipated Permitting and Approvals Needs

The following subsections summarize permitting requirements, known environmental encumbrances, and jurisdictional authority for the concept trail route.

Permitting and Land Use Requirements

Permit/Approval Item	Coordinating Entity
Crossing and use of road right-of-way along Scott Ave / State Route 78	**GDOT**
FEMA-regulated flood zones and streams	**US Army Corps of Engineers (Joint Permit Applications)**
Stormwater flows and quality impacted by additional impervious surface created by the trail	**Georgia Environmental Protection Division**
Issues requiring internal county department reviews such as stormwater or roads divisions	**DeKalb County departments**

Property Ownership

- Georgia Power overhead utility corridor (0.7 miles)
- DeKalb Farmers Market property (0.6 miles)

Anticipated Acquisition Needs?

Yes

Additional Concerns and Considerations

The Farmers Market Trail corridor traverses approximately 0.6 miles of FEMA-regulated flood zone AE and includes four stream crossings. The trail project timeline will need to account for design reviews and permitting at the county and federal/state level (joint permit application).

Design and Construction

The following elements have been identified as key challenges that are anticipated for the Farmers Market Trail design and construction phases:

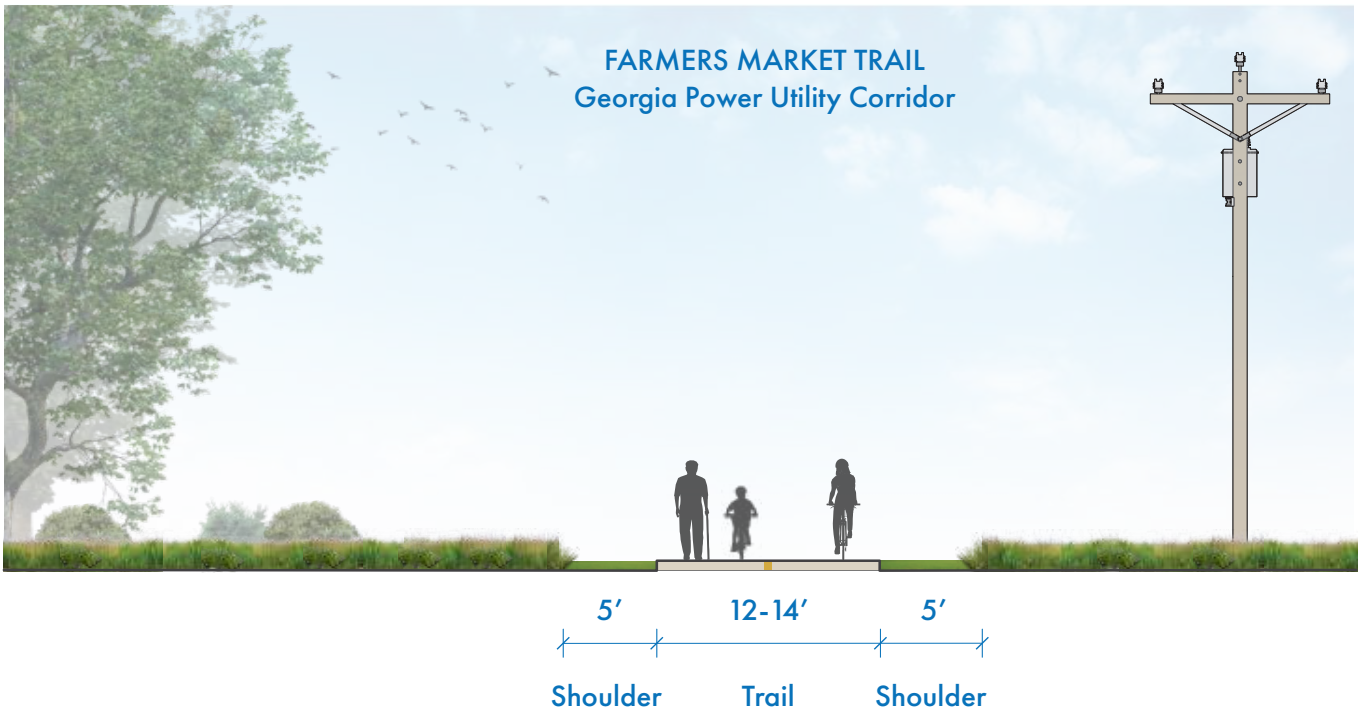
- The design of trail segments through FEMA-regulated flood zones must account for periodic inundation.
- Collaboration with Georgia Power should be initiated early on for the 0.7-mile segment along their overhead utility corridor. The terms of the utility corridor easement should be examined to determine whether it allows for the construction of a trail and what design parameters need to be included to account for access and maintenance of the utility line. From an aerial imagery review, it appears that backyard fences and community gardens are located within the easement.
- DeKalb Farmers Market will need to play an integral role in trail layout and design for the 0.6 miles that would run through their property. The trail design and alignment should account for any planned redevelopment of the site and should establish a strong connection between the trail and farmers market.
- Crossings of Scott Blvd / 78 and a midblock crossing on N Decatur Rd will require analysis and careful design to ensure safety.

Opinion of Probable Cost

The planning level opinion of probable cost for the design and construction of the Farmers Market Trail is $9,752,000. This opinion was derived from a trail cost calculator assuming a 12-foot-wide concrete trail. The cost does not account for the four bridges or road crossing improvements that will likely be needed. Please refer to the cost opinion disclaimers and assumptions in Appendix F for more information about the extent of items included in the cost opinion.

Findings and Recommendations

The Farmers Market Trail presents an incredible opportunity to connect the Peachtree Creek Trail with the Stone Mountain Trail and provide communities with walk/bike access to the Dekalb Farmers Market, transit, parks, and other key destinations. The trail would route through a variety of environments, providing a unique trail user experience. Sections through FEMA-regulated flood zones and stream crossings will, however, require careful design and permit coordination. One of the first steps in the trail project planning effort should be to involve Georgia Power and the DeKalb Farmers Market. These two entities will be essential for routing the trail along the overhead utility corridor and through the farmers market property. Early outreach to GDOT should also be done to coordinate on the use of the Scott Ave/78 right-of-way. Although there are some challenges and a number of coordination efforts associated with the Farmers Market Trail, the benefits it will bring to the surrounding communities would be significant.



Stone Mountain-Lithonia Road Trail

Project Description

The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Road Trail is located in eastern DeKalb County and would connect the Arabia Mountain Trail at the southern terminus to the Stone Mountain Trail at the northern terminus. The trail is the third highest ranked trail from the prioritization process due to its connections to 48 transit stops, 3 libraries, 2 grocery stores, and downtown Lithonia.

Project Status

The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail is identified as a Tier 1 (design only) and Tier 3 project in the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The project is under M_013 Heritage Corridor Multimodal Improvement (Multiuse Path and Operational Improvements). The intersection at Redan Rd and S Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd is also identified in the CTP as a Tier 1 project for safety evaluation. The project can be found under Project ID R_157 Redan Rd at Lithonia Rd Intersection Safety Evaluation.

Project Issues & Challenges

The following key issues were identified through the feasibility assessment and will need to be considered and addressed during subsequent phases of planning and design:

- Rail-with-Trail
    - Further study is needed to determine where the trail needs to be located within the CSX railroad right-of-way. Significant collaboration with CSX will be necessary to determine if a rail-with-trail will be permitted, and if so, what design criteria must be adhered to.
- Redan Rd Railroad Crossing
    - The crossing of the CSX Railroad corridor at Redan Rd is already identified as a priority safety evaluation project in the CTP. Improvements to this crossing will be especially important for the safety of trail users.
- Utilities and limited road right-of-way
    - Overhead power lines are on both sides Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd (sometimes alternating sides) and create obstacles for the trail. In some areas there is limited space within the road right-of-way particularly where private residential property abuts the road.

Project Characteristics

The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail would be approximately 9 miles long with 4.9 miles in unincorporated DeKalb County, 0.6 miles in the City of Stone Mountain, 2.5 miles in the City of Stonecrest, and 1 mile in the City of Lithonia.

Location and Corridor Type

The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail would be a side path, and possibly a rail-with-trail in some sections, along a primarily north/south route. The southern terminus would be at the intersection of Klondike Rd and Covington Hwy, which is a connection point to both the proposed Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector and the existing Arabia Mountain Trail. The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Trail would follow Klondike Rd, Main St, Max Cleland Blvd and Stone Mountain St through downtown Lithonia to the Lithonia/Stonecrest city border where the road becomes Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd. Around this point the GA Railroad, owned and operated by CSX, begins to parallel the road. The trail corridor parallels the railroad for approximately 1.1 miles before they diverge and then come together and cross at Redan Rd. This crossing is at a skewed angle (not 90 degrees) and will need to be assessed for safety

Stone Mountain-Lithonia Road Trail Concept

improvements as is noted in the CTP. The trail corridor continues to parallel the railroad for the remaining 5 miles to the northern terminus at the Stone Mountain trailhead. The trail would ideally stay within road right-of-way for the majority of the corridor, however, there are some segments where industrial driveways, limited space, or numerous cross streets make locating the trail within the CSX railroad right-of-way preferable. The corridor avoids crossing wetlands, streams, and flood zones, which will provide an advantage in permitting. The trail runs through neighborhoods with moderately high and high ARC equity analysis scores and would offer a safe corridor for people accessing transit stops and destinations, including Wade Walker Park, along Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd.

Length and Surface Types

The trail is anticipated to have the approximate length and surface materials noted in the table below.

Trail Surface Type	Length (mi)	% of Length
Concrete	**9**	**100**

- 0.04 miles/0.4% of trail project within Qualified Census Tracts.

Access Points

The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail would have direct access from the Stone Mountain Trailhead at its northern terminus and would have direct connections to the existing Arabia Mountain Trail and proposed Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector at its southern terminus. Access to the trail would also be possible from downtown Lithonia, the 48 transit stops along the corridor, and directly from numerous cross streets and community destinations, including Wade Walker Park.

Anticipated Permitting and Approvals Needs

The following subsections summarize permitting requirements, known environmental encumbrances, and jurisdictional authority for the concept trail route.

Permitting and Land Use Requirements

Permit/Approval Item	Coordinating Entity
Use of railroad right-of-way for rail-with-trail sections	**CSX**
Issues requiring internal county department reviews such as stormwater or roads divisions	**DeKalb County departments**
Use of Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd right-of-way for the trail alignment	**Cities of Lithonia, Stonecrest, and Stone Mountain**
Stormwater flows and quality impacted by additional impervious surface created by the trail	**Georgia Environmental Protection Division**

Property Ownership

The trail corridor would primarily be within the Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd right-of-way, through the jurisdictions of DeKalb County and the cities of Lithonia, Stonecrest, and Stone Mountain. Further study is needed to determine where and for what distances it may be preferrable to use the CSX railroad right-of-way. The cross section included in this feasibility assessment depicts the opiton of a rail-with-trail near Wade Walker Park where it may be more desireable to route the trail in the railroad right-of-way due to a utility corridor and limited space on the east side of the road.

Anticipated Acquisition Needs?

Yes

Additional Concerns and Considerations

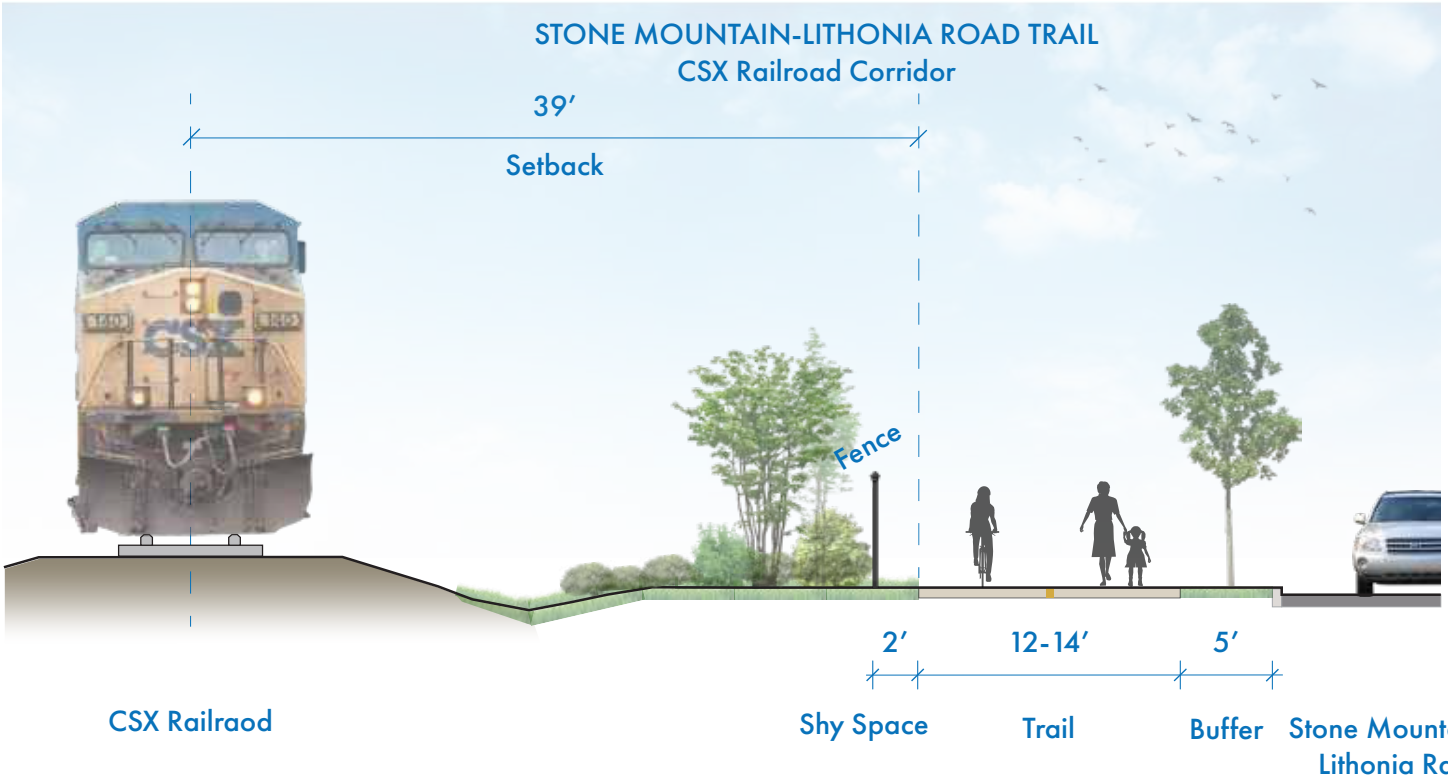
The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail corridor has the advantage of avoiding major environmental features that would present challenges such as stream crossings, wetlands, or flood zones. There are, however, constraints due

to the built environment that are identified in the following Design and Construction section.

Design and Construction

The following elements have been identified as key challenges that are anticipated for the Covington Hwy Multimodal Connector design and construction phases:

- Obtaining permission to use the CSX railroad corridor for segments of the trail will be challenging. Alternatives to siting the trail in the railroad right-of-way should be fully explored.
- Crossings at intersections, particularly major cross streets such as Lithonia Industrial Blvd will need to be assessed for any safety improvements.
- The trail design will need to accommodate overhead utility poles, or in some cases, poles may need to be relocated.
- MARTA transit stops will need to be integrated into the trail design to accommodate space for people waiting for the bus and people transitioning travel modes between trail and bus.



Opinion of Probable Cost

The opinion of probable cost for the design and construction of the Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail is $28,695,000. This opinion was derived from a trail cost calculator assuming a 12-foot-wide concrete trail. The cost does not account for safety improvements at road or railroad crossings that would be needed. Please refer to the cost opinion disclaimers and assumptions in Appendix F for more information about the extent of items included in the cost opinion.

Findings and Recommendations

The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail would provide a significant step forward in linking the existing DeKalb County Trail Network by connecting the Arabia Mountain Trail to the Stone Mountain Trail. This connection would provide access to the trail network to neighborhoods in Stonecrest, Lithonia, and unincorporated DeKalb County that are otherwise outside of easy walking and biking distance from existing trails. The Stone Mountain-Lithonia Rd Trail will require an in-depth alternatives analysis to determine where the trail may need to rely on CSX railroad right-of-way. Planning and designing segments of rail-with-trail will likely be the most challenging aspect of this trail project and will require significant review times by the railroad, collaboration building, and perseverance on the part of trail planners and designers.

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Freedom Park Connector

Project Description

The Freedom Park Connector is located near the western edge of DeKalb County. The trail would link Emory Path to the north with Freedom Park Trail to the south. This connector trail is the fourth highest ranked trail from the prioritization process due to its connections to 5 schools, 11 transit stops, and Emory Village. The trail would also provide a connection between Freedom and Virgilee parks.

Project Status

The section of the Freedom Park Connector between Briarcliff Rd and the city limits of Atlanta is identified as part of a Tier 1 short range project in the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The project that this section falls within is Project ID BP_1482, South Peachtree Creek Trail, PATH, Phase 2 (Section 2).

Project Issues & Challenges

The following key issues were identified through the feasibility assessment and will need to be considered and addressed during subsequent phases of planning and design:

- Designing the trail in constrained corridors along Oakdale Rd and North Decatur Rd; options for bike boulevards and separated bike lanes should be explored further.
- Most of the project corridor is within the Druid Hills Historic District, which may affect proposed designs.
- Coordinating with GDOT on any needed improvements at the crossing of State Route 78.
- Designing modifications for traffic circles at Decatur Rd and Lullwater Rd and Decatur Rd and Oxford Rd to accomodate separated bike lanes.

Project Characteristics

The Freedom Park Connector runs from the eastern side of the City of Atlanta north through unincorporated DeKalb County to the southern edge of the Emory University campus. The trail would be 2.1 miles long and have the following characteristics.

Location and Corridor Type

The Freedom Park Connector would start in the City of Atlanta at the intersection of Oakdale Rd and North Ave. This terminus coincides with the Freedom Park Trail crossing of Oakdale Rd. Continuing northward along Oakdale Rd, the Freedom Park Connector would likely be a bike boulevard and sidewalk alignment from its southern terminus to the intersection of Oakdale Rd and N Decatur Rd (1.4 miles). The trail would transition into unincorporated DeKalb County just south of The by Way NE and route though older neighborhoods with mature trees. At N Decatur Rd, the trail would route east and would likely transition to separated bike lanes with sidewalks until it connects to Emory Path (0.7 miles). The trail would cross Peavine Creek by means of the existing road bridge and would pass by restaurants, a pharmacy, a bank, and the southern edge of Emory University. The Freedom Park Connector would end at the intersection of Decatur Rd and Clifton Rd where the Emory Path begins.

Length and Surface Types

The trail is anticipated to have the approximate length and surface materials noted in the table below.

Trail Surface Type	Length (mi)	% of Length
Bike Boulevard and Sidewalk	**1.4**	**67**
Separated Bike Lane and Sidewalk	**0.7**	**33**

- 0.3 miles/12.1% of trail project within Qualified Census Tracts.

Freedom Park Connector Concept

Access Points

The Freedom Park Connector would not have direct access to existing trailheads, but it would have direct access from existing trails including Emory Path and Freedom Park Trail. Due to the trail's alignment within road right-of-way, access would be available directly from Oakdale Rd and Decatur Rd as well as cross streets. The trail would also be accessible from several community locations including:

- Freedom Park
- Oak Grove Park and Virgilee Park
- Emory Village Plaza
- Emory University Campus

Anticipated Permitting and Approvals Needs

The following subsections summarize permitting requirements, known environmental encumbrances, and jurisdictional authority for the concept trail route.

Permitting and Land Use Requirements

Permit/Approval Item	Coordinating Entity
Use of Oakdale Rd for trail route in City of Atlanta	**City of Atlanta**
Issues requiring internal county department reviews such as stormwater or roads divisions	**DeKalb County departments**
Crossing of State Route 78	**GDOT**
Stormwater flows and quality impacted by additional impervious surface created by the trail	**Georgia Environmental Protection Division**

Property Ownership

The Freedom Park Trail alignment is fully within road right-of-way in the City of Atlanta and unincorporated DeKalb County.

Anticipated Acquisition Needs?

No

Additional Concerns and Considerations

The Freedom Park Connector traverses approximately 0.1 mile of FEMA-regulated flood zone AE along Decatur Rd. The trail project timeline may need to account for design reviews and permitting at the county and federal/state level (joint permit application) if changes to the roadway trigger the review and permitting process.

Design and Construction

The following elements have been identified as key challenges that are anticipated for the Freedom Park Connector design and construction phases:

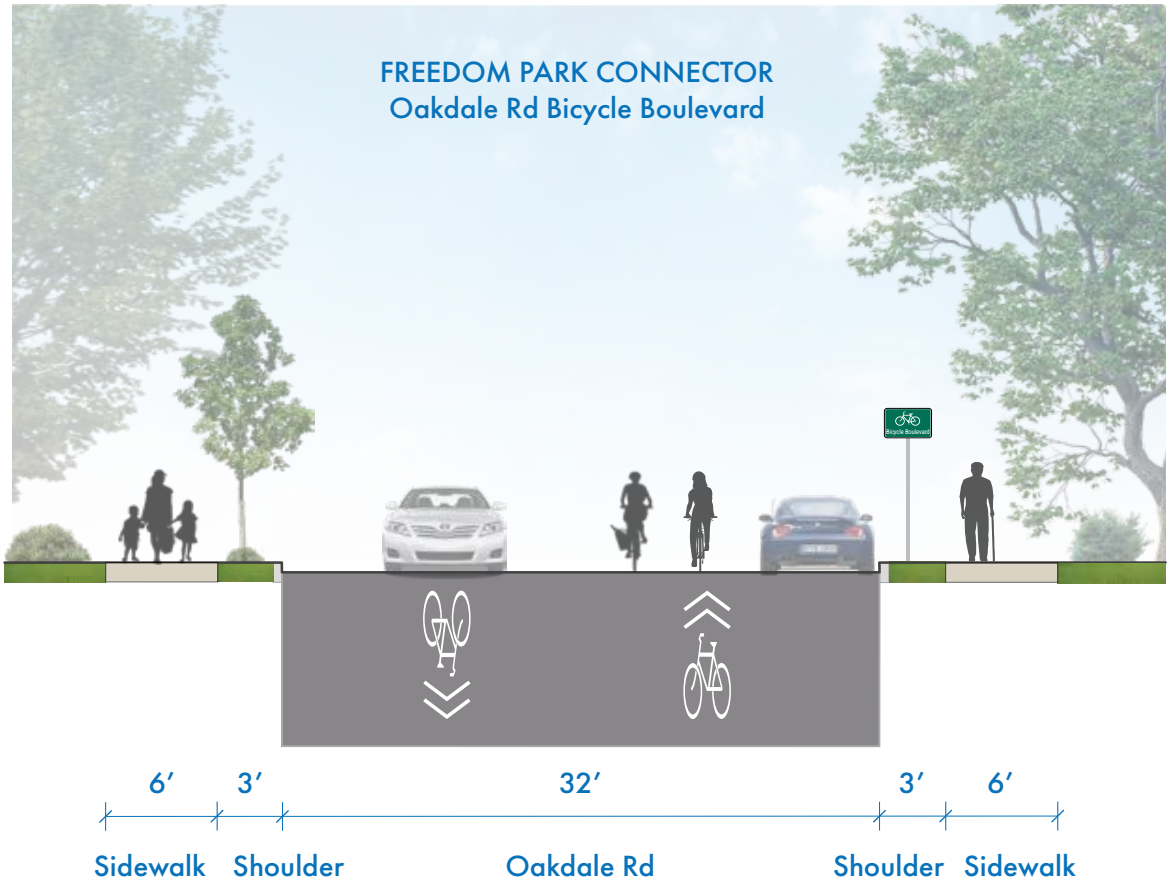
- Traffic circles along Decatur Rd at Lullwater Rd and Oxford Rd intersections will need to be modified to accommodate separated bike lanes
- Crossings of Fairview Rd and State Route 78 will need to be analyzed for any safety improvement needs, especially for on-street bicycle components of the trail.
- The alignment along Decatur Rd will need to be thoughtfully designed to accommodate separated bike lanes while maintaining 11 ft travel lanes for MARTA buses.

Opinion of Probable Cost

The opinion of probable cost for the design and construction of the Freedom Park Connector is $185,000. This opinion was derived from average GDOT bid items assuming 1.4 miles of bike boulevard and 0.7 miles of separated bike lanes. The cost opinion assumes all work occurs within the existing road right-of-way and does not account for any right-of-way acquisition. The cost does not account for safety improvements at intersections or clearing and/or relocating trees or structures within the right-of-way. Please refer to the cost opinion disclaimers and assumptions in Appendix F for more information about the extent of items included in the cost opinion.

Findings and Recommendations

The Freedom Park Connector offers an excellent opportunity to link trails, parks, and neighborhoods with each other and to the Emory University campus. The trail would provide a mostly shaded experience with mature tree canopy, which would offer a welcomed relief during hot weather. As this trail would rely on on-street bicycle facilities, early coordination with City of Atlanta and GDOT on design will be required for applicable sections. Additionally, extra care will need to be taken to design modifications to the traffic circles on Decatur Rd. Although the limited road right-of-way likely precludes side paths, the Freedom Park Connector will offer pedestrians and bicyclists the facilities needed to safely access parks, trails, and community destinations.



Shoal Creek Trail

Project Description

The Shoal Creek Trail is in the southwest quadrant of DeKalb County and would link the South River Trail to the East Decatur Greenway. The trail is the fifth highest ranked trail from the prioritization process due to its connections to 4 schools, 21 transit stops, and Panthersville Activity Center. The trail would also link Exchange Park, Wonderland Gardens, Misty Waters Park, Shoal Creek Parks, and Delano Line Park and runs through and adjacent to neighborhoods with moderatly high and high scores in the ARC Equity Analysis.

Project Status

A section of the Shoal Creek Trail between the South River Trail and Glendale Court are identified in Tier 3 long range projects in the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The projects that this section falls within are BP_1451 Shoal Creek Trail PATH Phase 1 (Section 1) and BP_1454 Shoal Creek PATH, Phase 2 Connection Trail.

Project Issues & Challenges

The following key issues were identified through the feasibility assessment and will need to be considered and addressed during subsequent phases of planning and design:

- Acquisition of the trail corridor where it passes through numerous private properties (3.1 miles).
- Permitting and design of the trail through 1.8 miles of wetland.
- Design of 6 bridges, 2 grade-separated crossings of interstates, and 3 major road at-grade crossings.

Project Characteristics

The Shoal Creek Trail would be approximately 7 miles long with 6.8 miles in unincorporated DeKalb County and the northern 0.2 miles in the City of Decatur. The trail would have the following characteristics.

Location and Corridor Type

Shoal Creek Trail's southern terminus would be at the point where Warriors Path meets Flat Shoals Pkwy/ 155. The trail would follow Shoal Creek northward and would need to route underneath or cross Columbia Dr and I 285 to reach Exchange Park. More analysis is needed to determine whether the trail could be routed underneath existing bridges on these roads, or whether an at-grade crossing (Columbia Dr) or overpass (I 285) is needed. Shoal Creek Trail would continue to parallel the creek through Exchange Park north until it reaches Rainbow Dr.

A trail spur along Rainbow Dr from 155 west to the eastern point where Rainbow Cir meets Rainbow Dr would provide additional access to the trail from the MARTA bus route and destinations along this road. The trail would likely be a side path alignment for the 0.6 miles that it routes eastward along Rainbow Dr, but quick-build separated bike lanes may be an option for the short term. At the eastern point where Rainbow Cir meets Rainbow Dr, the trail would route northward until I 20. The trail would likely require an overpass to cross I 20, but other crossing options including a tunnel or routing under the I 20 bridge/culvert over Shoal Creek should also be explored.

Once north of I 20, Shoal Creek Trail would continue to follow the creek northward through Misty Waters Park and Shoal Creek Parks I and II to Memorial Dr/154. The trail would likely cross the creek or a tributary at least twice in this stretch and would cross McAfee Rd and Glenwood Rd. North of Shoal Creek Park I, the trail would route through residential areas and could likely use a bicycle boulevard/ shared street alignment on local streets.

North of Memorial Dr/154, the trail would follow Oldfield Rd and then turn northeast to parallel a tributary of the creek, crossing Midway Rd and connecting to Columbia Dr. Shoal Creek Trail would follow Columbia Dr north into the City of Decatur to Katie Kerr Dr and the endpoint of the East Decatur Greenway.

Shoal Creek Trail Concept

Length and Surface Types

The trail is anticipated to have the approximate length and surface materials noted in the table below. Bridges will be needed to acccomodate this trail alignment. The number of bridges and design details will be determined in a scoping study.

Trail Surface Type	Length (mi)	% of Length
Concrete	4.9	70
Shared Street/ Bicycle Blvd	0.3	4
Pressure Treated Wood Boardwalk	1.8	26

- 4.3 miles/62.1% of trail project within Qualified Census Tracts.

Access Points

The Shoal Creek Trail would have direct access to the East Decatur Greenway Trailhead off S Columbia Dr and would have access from East Decatur Greenway and the South River Trail. Additionally, the trail would have access from the following cross streets:

- Columbia Dr
- Toney Dr
- McAfee Rd
- Glenwood Rd
- Midway Rd

The trail would also have direct access from the following roads where the alignment would be a side path or bicycle boulevard/shared street:

- Rainbow Dr
- White Oak Dr
- Venture Pt Wy
- White Oak Ln
- Line St
- Oldfield Rd
- Columbia Dr

Anticipated Permitting and Approvals Needs

The following subsections summarize permitting requirements, known environmental encumbrances, and jurisdictional authority for the concept trail route.

Permitting and Land Use Requirements

Permit/Approval Item	Coordinating Entity
Use of S Columbia Dr right-of-way for trail route in City of Decatur	City of Decatur
Issues requiring internal county department reviews such as stormwater or roads divisions	DeKalb County departments
Crossing of State Route 154, I 20, and I 285	GDOT
Stormwater flows and quality impacted by additional impervious surface created by the trail	Georgia Environmental Protection Division
FEMA-regulated flood zones, streams, and wetlands	US Army Corps of Engineers (Joint Permit Applications)
Issues requiring internal county department reviews such as stormwater or roads divisions	DeKalb County departments

Property Ownership

The Shoal Creek Trail alignment would require significant collaboration with private land owners to be successful. 3.1 miles of the trail corridor is through private property, and there are numerous property owners, including home owners associations, individual residential property owners, places of worship, and others. 0.2 miles of the trail along S Columbia Dr are within the City of Decatur road right-of-way and the remaining 3.7 miles are within DeKalb County properties or road right-of-way.

Anticipated Acquisition Needs?

Yes

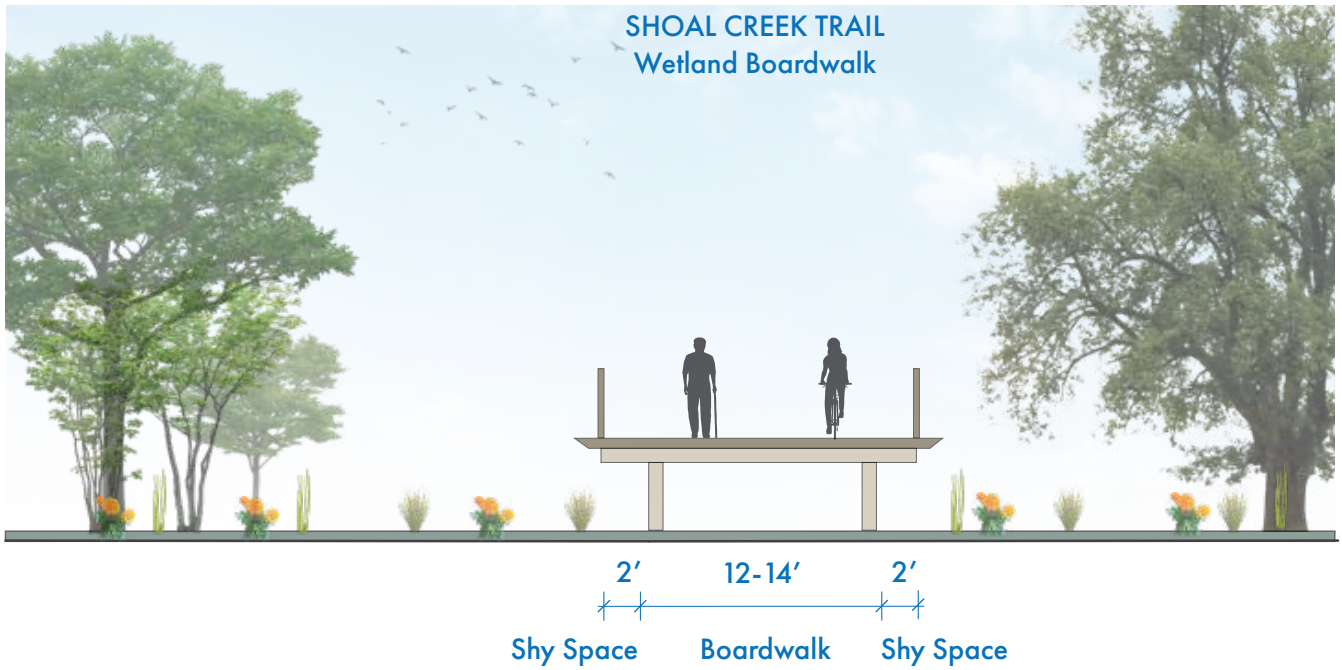
Additional Concerns and Considerations

The Shoal Creek Trail traverse approximately 1.8 miles of wetland, 4.5 miles of FEMA regulated flood zone AE, and will require 6 stream crossings. Designing the trail in these sensitive environments while also making sure that the trail and associated infrastructure is resilient to flooding will take extra care in engineering and construction phases.

Design and Construction

The following elements have been identified as key challenges that are anticipated for the Shoal Creek Trail design and construction phases:

- At-grade crossings at Memorial Dr, Glenwood Rd, and Flat Shoals Rd (southern terminus).
- Grade-separated crossings at I 20 and I 285.
- Boardwalk through approximately 1.8 miles of wetland.
- 6 bridges over Shoal Creek and tributaries.



Opinion of Probable Cost

The planning level opinion of probable cost for the design and construction of the Shoal Creek Trail is $23,961,000. This opinion was derived from a trail cost calculator assuming a 14-foot-wide concrete trail and 1.8 miles of 14-foot-wide pressure treated wood boardwalk. The cost does not account for the six bridges, 2 grade-separated interstate crossings or 3 major road crossings that will likely be needed. Approximately 0.3 miles of shared street or bicycle boulevard along low volume neighborhood streets including White Oak Ln were accounted for using GDOT unit costs. Please refer to the cost opinion disclaimers and assumptions in Appendix F for more information about the extent of items included in the cost opinion.

Findings and Recommendations

The Shoal Creek Trail offers the opportunity for a scenic, shaded trail corridor along a stream with the benefit of linking multiple parks and connectiong to community destinations and transit. Working with appropriate permitting agencies early on in the project planning process will help ensure successful designs through environmentally sensitive areas in wetlands and flood zones. The Shoal Creek Trail will require several structures: 6 bridges, 2 grade-separated crossings of interstates, and approximately 1.8 miles of boardwalk. The structures will need to be designed to withstand flooding and extreme weather events that are occuring on a more frequent basis. Making use of the scenic corridor along Shoal Creek will require land acquisitions or easements with numerous private landowners. Developing a plan to secure the trail corridor and/or develop interim alternatives will be necessary for the eventual success and completion of the trail.