

Submitted By: Friends of the Greenway
Danielle Gillmer
Phone: (857) 719-6393 Alt. Phone: (678) 316-4886
Email: daniellesgn@gmail.com

Project Type: Greenway, Parks, Rails-to-Trails related projects - Leisure Services Department

Previously submitted but not selected: No

Continuation Project: No

Executive Summary: Friends of the Greenway propose a pedestrian bridge connecting the Greenway and Firefly Trails over Oconee Street and the Park and Ride. Referenced in the Greenway Network and MTP plans, the county's first pedestrian highway overpass will improve commuting access to UGA and downtown, providing safer crossings for East Side, East Athens and Carr's Hill residents, avoiding six lanes of traffic. It enhances connections to the Firefly Trail, Winterville, and the site of the new East Side Library. (*See staff comments under Project Description.*)

Project Total Cost: \$ 17,458,000

Total Operating Cost: \$ 114,000

Does this Project require the acquisition of any land? Unsure

Project/Program Description: The Friends of the Greenway propose a pedestrian bridge to connect the Oconee Rivers Greenway and the Firefly Trail over Oconee Street in Athens-Clarke County, creating a safe, efficient route for non-motorized transportation. This bridge, listed as a high-priority "Firefly Connector" in the Greenway Network Plan, will provide essential access between key destinations, including downtown Athens, the University of Georgia, the future East Side Library, and the Park and Ride.

Currently, crossing Oconee Street at this intersection poses significant risks. GDOT's planned reconstruction is widening the road from four to six lanes, further complicating pedestrian and biking/rolling access. By spanning both Oconee Street/US 78 and the Park and Ride loop ramp, this bridge will streamline access to transit services, transforming the Park and Ride into a viable option for university commuters and downtown visitors. Future development of a parking deck and continued Athens Transit service to this location will further support its use.

This bridge is critical to the Greenway and Firefly Trail, both designed as low-stress networks welcoming users of all ages and abilities. Ensuring a safe crossing will increase trail utilization, reduce traffic, and decrease pollution. For residents in East Athens, they will be able to reach the new East Side Library, and for those already on the East Side, the bridge will connect them to the Firefly Trail and Winterville, enhancing overall accessibility. It will also improve safety for Carr's Hill neighborhood residents along Oconee and Oak Streets, who face limited accessibility, especially for wheelchair users requiring nearby stoplight crossings.

This project aligns with the goals of the Athens-Clarke County Greenway Network Plan by promoting active transportation through connected corridors linking parks, schools, and neighborhoods. The plan's objectives include phased trail development, local agency collaboration, and increasing public access to healthy, safe transportation options. Addressing safety at this intersection, the bridge will support these aims, enhancing access to Athens' expanding transportation network.

Similar infrastructure nationwide highlights the value of dedicated pedestrian crossings in urban areas. As the first pedestrian bridge of its kind in Athens-Clarke County, this highway overpass will set a precedent for prioritizing pedestrian safety and community connectivity in future projects.

Staff Comments: *This project would require cooperation from Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to provide easements within the Right of Way for the SR 10 Loop. This cooperation cannot be guaranteed and the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County has no power of eminent domain over GDOT. As such, this project is not recommended as a stand-alone project. This project should only be considered, if it is included with other greenway projects and the project statement should be written to be broad enough to allow funding to be used for other projects if GDOT does not want to participate.*

How is this Project recommended/included in any approved ACCGOV Land Use Plan, Master Plan, Corridor Study, or Service Delivery Plan? Comprehensive Plan, Greenway Network Plan

How is this Project included in the Madison Athens-Clarke County Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS) long-range Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)? In the MTP as TSP-8 "Firefly Trail Flyover Bridge" for MACORTS 2050

Greenway Network Plan: The pedestrian bridge or overpass is listed as one of the top "Priority trails" as "Firefly Connector at 78/10 Interchange:" "This connection provides an important link at the nexus of the Firefly Trail, North Oconee River Greenway Trail and the Park and Ride projects. The project is challenging because it crosses Lexington Road and it may require a pedestrian bridge that crosses over this section of highway."

Comprehensive Plan:

Page 20: Land use, item i:

"Complete the Firefly Trail to the county line at Winterville and continue to develop the Oconee Rivers Greenway trail system. For both trail programs, develop a zoning overlay to encourage compatible adjoining land use and development."

Page 30: Place, item q:

"Support the latest Greenway Network Plan through land use and transportation initiatives"

Page 36: Transportation, item h:

"Embed the Greenway Network Plan into transportation decisions."

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

How will the Project meet the stated Program Goals in the Mayor & Commission Strategic Plan to provide long-term, ongoing contributions to the Sustainable Transportation needs of the Athens-Clarke County?

Goal Area 1; Section D: Drive community transformation with a focus on creating spaces that are respectful and welcoming: The pedestrian bridge will create a welcoming space by connecting the Greenway and Firefly trails- part of Athens-Clarke County's low-stress active travel network- offering safe crossings for all users. It respects the diverse needs of people walking, biking, and rolling, fostering a more inclusive, accessible environment for students, residents, and visitors.

Goal Area 1; Section E: Support & promote healthy lifestyle: moving, eating, forming healthy relationships, physical and psychological care: This bridge promotes a healthy lifestyle by encouraging active transportation like walking and biking. By connecting the Greenway and Firefly Trails, it offers residents a safe, scenic route for exercise and access to parks and community spaces, which can enhance physical and mental well-being. During the covid pandemic, for example, Greenway trails provided a vital space for people to get outside and connect with each other at a safe distance.

Goal Area 5; Section A: Improve, expand, and maintain sidewalks, shared-use paths, and bike facilities to provide greater opportunities for residents to use active transportation safely: The project aligns with expanding bike and pedestrian infrastructure by providing a critical connection between two low-stress trails. It improves safe crossings over six lanes of traffic on Oconee Street, supporting active transportation while enhancing overall safety for non-motorized users.

Goal Area 5; Section B: Pursue inter-city travel options to connect Athens with other cities: While this project focuses on local connectivity, it indirectly supports regional connections by linking Athens residents to the Firefly Trail, which is part of a larger network connecting to Winterville and beyond, fostering opportunities for future inter-city travel. It also makes better use of the Park and Ride, which provides visitor's access to UGA and downtown without having to bring a car into the congested city and campus centers.

Goal Area 5; Section C: Expand multi-modal Transit access to reduce auto dependency and provide greater mobility for Athens residents: By connecting two major trails and enhancing safe crossings, the bridge reduces reliance on cars, encouraging more residents to walk, bike, and roll. By incorporating access to the Park and Ride, residents can more easily access transit buses that stop here. Altogether this contributes to greater mobility for residents, improving access to downtown, the University of Georgia, and the site of the new East Side Library.

Goal Area 5; Section D: Create more usable and aesthetically pleasing corridor connections between residential and commercial areas: The bridge enhances the aesthetic and functionality of

the area by linking residential neighborhoods on the East Side and Carr's Hill with downtown and commercial zones, as well as residents of East Athens to East Side. It will also improve the look of the corridor by offering an attractive, practical, and safe infrastructure addition, which could incorporate signage, bridge art, or other attractive features and serve as the gateway to downtown, which will also function as traffic calming.

Goal Area 5; Section E: Enhance safety for all modes of transportation: Safety is at the heart of this project. GDOT's interchange project has widened the street-level crossing here from four to six lanes. The bridge will provide a safe, dedicated crossing over these six lanes of traffic, reducing accidents and near-misses, especially for pedestrians and people biking, using scooters, wheelchairs, etc. It will allow children, families, and seniors to get to the new East Side Library safely. It aligns with creating a safer transportation network for all modes.

Goal Area 6; Section A: Develop well-planned new infrastructure according to future land use values and framework: The bridge is planned with future growth in mind, accommodating Athens' projected population increase by 2045. It reflects smart land use by connecting vital trails and enhancing access to growing residential areas, aligning with the long-term Greenway Network Plan vision.

Goal Area 6; Section B: Ensure equitable access to infrastructure to enhance safety and identity: This project ensures equitable access for communities like East Athens and Carr's Hill, improving mobility for residents, including those with disabilities. It enhances safety and identity by creating a strong visual and functional connection between neighborhoods, downtown, and UGA.

Goal Area 6; Section C: Provide adequate funding for maintenance of existing and newly constructed infrastructure: The project's inclusion in the Greenway Network Plan ensures that it will be maintained within Athens-Clarke County's existing Greenway system, leveraging ongoing maintenance strategies to keep the infrastructure in good condition and safe for continued use.

Goal Area 6; Section D: Follow through on commitment to 100% Clean and Renewable Energy resolution: The bridge supports clean transportation by promoting walking and biking, reducing the need for car trips and lowering emissions. By encouraging non-motorized travel, this project aligns with Athens' commitment to clean energy and sustainability.

Goal Area 6; Section E: Address ecosystem health, infrastructure sustainability, and resilience: The bridge is designed with sustainability in mind, reducing traffic-related pollution and promoting active transportation. Its alignment with the Greenway Network Plan ensures protection of natural areas, such as the Oconee River floodplain, and strengthens infrastructure resilience.

Project Costs

Detailed project capital budget costs (to be funded from TSPLOST 2026 only):

Project Costs (round to thousand)		Amount
1. Land Acquisition / ROW / Easement:	\$	500,000
2. Design Fees: (Min.12% of New Const.; 14% of reno,; 16% for LEED proj.)	\$	1,500,000
3. Miscellaneous Fees: (Min. Minimum of 3% of Construction Costs – used for permitting, etc. Utilize minimum of 10% if land acquisition if necessary.	\$	500,000
4. Construction:	\$	10,000,000
5. Construction Contingency: (10% of the Construction line item)	\$	1,000,000
6. Testing:	\$	500,000
7. Project Management: (4% of the total budget line items above)	\$	560,000
8. Project Contingency: (10% of the total budget line items above)	\$	1,456,000
9. Public Art: Calculated at 1% of the Construction line item.	\$	100,000
10. Other 1: FHWA Contingency	\$	500,000
11. Other 2: Potential Utility Relocation	\$	500,000
Project Subtotal:	\$	17,116,000
14. Program Management (2% of Project Subtotal):	\$	342,000
TSPLOST 2026 Project Total:	\$	17,458,000

Project Financing

Is the proposed Project to receive funding from source(s) other than TSPLOST 2026? No

Operating Cost

Total Annual Net Operating Costs when Project is complete:

Only identify additional or net operating costs to be paid by ACCGov as a result of this Project. Identify the additional or net costs needed, above ACCGov's current operating budget, to operate the requested project; as well as any additional Project related revenues that would be generated. Provide budget costs for each identified category below.

Operating Costs (round to thousand)	Estimated Impact for Annual Operating Expenditures
TOTAL PROJECTED REVENUES FROM PROJECT	
PROJECTED EXPENDITURES	
1. Personnel Costs: from Appendix A	
2. Annual Utilities:	
• Natural Gas:	
• Electrical:	
• Water:	
• Sewer:	
• Phone:	
• Solid Waste Collection:	
• Other:	
3. Operating Supplies:	
4. Equipment Maintenance:	
5. Facility Maintenance: (Annual Bridge Maintenance)	30,000
6. Other: (Public Art Maintenance)	4,000
7. Other: (Life Cycle Replacement)	80,000
8. Other:	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	
NET OPERATING COSTS OF PROJECT:	\$ 114,000