

**Submitted By:** ACCGov in partnership with Transit, Transportation and Public Works, and Leisure Services Departments  
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**Project Type:** Public Transit related projects - Athens Transit System

**Previously submitted but not selected:** Yes - TSPLOST 2023; 28 - North Athens Corridor Project

**Continuation Project:** No

**Executive Summary:** The Connecting North Athens Sustainably Project creates multiple alternative transportation connections within an underserved part of the north Athens community located along North Avenue, US441 and Boley Drive to downtown, essential businesses, and recreation facilities. The project establishes Micro Transit (on-demand) transit routes, a proposed Park/Bike/Hike parking lot, and multiuse paths and sidewalks that inter-link the north Athens area, critically needed and safe modes of travel.

**Project Total Cost: \$ 16,083,000**

**Total Operating Cost: \$ 694,000**

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**Does this Project require the acquisition of any land?** Yes

**What means of land acquisition will be required?** Fee Simple, Easement, and ROW

**Project/Program Description:** The goal of the Connecting North Athens Sustainably Project is to create a comprehensive system of transportation that connects residents and low income, underserved populations with workforce housing, essential life services, economic and employment opportunities, community service agencies, parks, greenways, and downtown Athens while reducing the environmental impact of fossil burning vehicles. The goals of this initiative are to:

- Provide low-income residents with transit and multi-use path connections to Downtown Athens which includes access to essential services such as a drug store, laundromat, grocery stores, and others located along the route.
- Provide safe and reliable transportation that connects community members to workforce housing and economic and employment opportunities.
- Encourage area residents to use transit and multiuse paths by providing options in the event of inclement weather (I.e. walk/bike to downtown and ride the bus back or vice versa).
- Provide convenient commuter parking to reduce the number of vehicles entering Athens from the north.
- Encourage a safe and healthy lifestyle for families and residents by providing access to Sandy Creek Nature Center, Sandy Creek Greenway, and the North Oconee River Greenway.
- Enhance community ecosystem health through a reduction in use of fossil fuels, avoiding greenhouse gas production, a decrease in particulate matter produced, and noise reduction from maintenance/transit equipment.
- Reducing public and worker exposure to toxic fumes, gases, and particulate matter as well as reducing the potential for toxic fuel and chemical spills.
- Encourage economic health by providing dependable transportation to underserved areas.

- Encourage social health by providing underserved populations with access to groceries, shopping, and community services (ex: Division of Family and Services, Department of Labor, Food Bank (Food Distribution Center for Disabled American Veterans).
- Restore wildlife habitat and travel corridors critical to biodiversity and the conservation of ecosystem services.
- Provide opportunities for people to interact with the natural world and be able to study, photograph, and observe the diversity of plants and animals native to the community.
- Provide for the management of community trees and enhancement of community forest, realizing the benefits such management provides to air, water, pollutant mitigation, and ecosystem services.

Staff Comments:

1. The transit portion of this project is very similar to the submitted Project 44. This project does not specify the exact route by name and is for more of an on-demand micro-route versus a full-time established route that is identified in Project 44 but they serve some common areas. The difference in the cost, between the transit portion of this Project 62 and the full service in Project 44, is that Project 62 would be about \$1.6 million less because of the difference in types of vehicles. The less expensive vehicles could be used because it would be a micro-route versus fixed route.
2. Attachment with overview, mentions the purchase of specific type of vehicles, if selected the description would not include specific type of vehicles. Currently ACCGov does not have in place the infrastructure to support electric transit buses but is working towards that goal.
3. Multi-use Path portion of the project, as described, would depend on ROW from GDOT and permitting for a pedestrian bridge under 441, which could not be guaranteed. There are alternate routes that would not require GDOT participation but would involve a longer route of MUP.
4. The proposed trail along with #53 seems to follow approximately along a previously proposed route for a sanitary sewer main extension into the Sandy Creek Basin. Suggest if installing a sanitary sewer main extension, if a sewer main extension is desirable, at the same time to prevent tearing up the MUP when sewer service is extended.

**How is this Project recommended/included in any approved ACCGOV Land Use Plan, Master Plan, Corridor Study, or Service Delivery Plan?** There are pieces of this plan within other ACCGov plans. This project interlinks these pieces in a comprehensive manner, bringing together proposed transit routes, bike paths, greenway trails and a park and ride facility in a manner that enables north Athens residents to have access to and between US441 (North Bluff), Martin Luther King Parkway, Boley Drive, Freeman Drive, North Avenue and downtown

**How is this Project included in the Madison Athens-Clarke County Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS) long-range Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)?** This project: "closes the gap" between bike paths along North Avenue and Boley (MACORTS and Athens In Motion Plan) and the North Oconee River Greenway (Greenway Network Plan); connects North Bluff to the North Oconee River Greenway concurrent with establishing on demand transit bus stops (Athens Transit Development Plan); and reduces traffic entering

Athens along US441 via a park and ride located somewhere near the Sandy Creek Nature Center/North Bluff area (to be determined).

Additional plans that contain the goals of this project include Sustainability Department's Clean and Renewable Energy Plan, and Leisure Services Master Plan.

## 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:** This project inter-links existing alternative transportation and transit projects and facilities, providing more affordable mobility options. Transit rides, bike paths, and trails create significantly greater opportunities for people to people interactions, promote inclusiveness, and build relationships. This occurs whether the resident is traveling for work related, health, or recreational purposes.

**Goal Area 1; Section E: Support & promote healthy lifestyle: moving, eating, forming healthy relationships, physical and psychological care:** Creating comprehensive connectivity enables area residents to utilize alternative transportation for work, recreation, or shopping. Walking and cycling, especially through natural areas, has been proven to provide significant mental and physical health benefits, reducing blood pressure, heart rates, muscle tension and the production of stress hormones. By providing opportunities for increased physical movement, this project also enhances long-term well-being and mental health.

**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:** This project "closes the gap" between North Avenue (RAISE grant) and the Greenway Path that extends from Sandy Creek Nature Center to Dudley Park and the Firefly Trail. Additionally, by establishing a park and ride facility and extending a multiuse path north to North Bluff, these interconnected paths effectively interlink north Athens (North Ave/Boley/Freeman/US441) with the path system that also connect Winterville, College Station Road, and downtown sidewalk systems.

**Goal Area 5; Section C: Expand multi-modal Transit access to reduce auto dependency and provide greater mobility for Athens residents:** Included in this project are multiuse paths connecting the North Avenue transportation corridor (GDOT RAISE grant) with the US441 transportation corridor, linking underserved populations to downtown, retail, community services, laundry services, groceries, a drug store, and workforce housing. Residents will be able to utilize transit and alternative and safer modes of transportation to meet their needs, reducing their need to and the expense associated with travel by car.

**Goal Area 5; Section E: Enhance safety for all modes of transportation:** Having dedicated and interconnected paths, sidewalks, and transit options enhances safe travel. A traffic signal at US441 and Old Commerce Rd. will significantly enhance vehicular, transit, and pedestrian mobility and safety. This project also results in fewer car trips along with corresponding safety enhancements. Bicycle and pedestrian safety is further enhanced with a path designed to go under the US441 bridge, safely traversing a deadly and dangerous, 4 lane, high-speed road

**Goal Area 6; Section D: Follow through on commitment to 100% Clean and Renewable Energy resolution:** This project encourages the use of electric vehicles and multiuse paths, reducing the need for fossil fuels and the associated greenhouse gas and particulate material created when burning fossil fuels. For every gallon of gas people avoid consuming, 19.6 pounds of carbon dioxide is avoided. For diesel fuel, it is 22.38 pounds.



Further, this project promotes the transition to clean and renewable energy sources for ACCGov by 2035 and the community by 2050.

**Goal Area 6; Section E: Address ecosystem health, infrastructure sustainability, and resilience:** This project: reduces air pollution and the significant health impacts of PM2.5 particulate matter; includes the restoration of native habitat and promotion of critically needed wildlife travel corridors; facilitates enhanced and more sustainable stormwater management; and provides areas for water infusion into the soil, further treating pollution (ex: oils and fluids leaving the road) that normally reach area water ways (note: the US441 corridor is 0.25 miles upstream of ACC's drinking water

## Project Costs

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

<b>Project Costs (round to thousand)</b>		<b>Amount</b>
1. Land Acquisition / ROW / Easement:	\$	700,000
2. Design Fees: (Min.12% of New Const.; 14% of reno.; 16% for LEED proj.)	\$	1,120,000
Miscellaneous Fees: (Minimum of 3% of Construction Costs – used for permitting, etc. Utilize minimum of 10% if land acquisition if necessary.)	\$	274,000
3. Construction:	\$	9,633,000
4. Construction Contingency: (10% of the Construction line item)	\$	964,000
5. Acquisition of Capital Equipment:	\$	550,000
6. Testing:	\$	456,000
7. Project Management: (4% of the total budget line items above)	\$	548,000
8. Project Contingency: (10% of the total budget line items above)	\$	1,425,000
9. Public Art: Calculated at 1% of the Construction line item.	\$	97,000
10. Other 1:	\$	
11. Other 2:	\$	
<b>Project Subtotal:</b>	\$	15,767,000
14. Program Management (2% of Project Subtotal):	\$	316,000
<b>TSPLOST 2026 Project Total:</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>16,083,000</b>

## 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
<b>TOTAL PROJECTED REVENUES FROM PROJECT</b>	
<b>PROJECTED EXPENDITURES</b>	
1. Personnel Costs: from Appendix A	330,000
2. Annual Utilities:	
• Natural Gas:	
• Electrical:	11,000
• Water:	
• Sewer:	
• Phone:	
• Solid Waste Collection:	
• Other:	
3. Operating Supplies:	100,000
4. Equipment Maintenance:	100,000
5. Facility Maintenance:	80,000
6. Other: Public Art Maintenance	1,000
7. Other: Hazard Tree Maintenance (all paths/trails/parking lot)	30,000
8. Other: Native Habitat Maintenance (Sustain. Dept)	42,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	
<b>NET OPERATING COSTS OF PROJECT:</b>	<b>\$ 694,000</b>

**New Staffing**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Hourly Rate</b>	<b># of Hours/ wk</b>	<b># of Positions</b>	<b>Total Annual Expense</b>
Full Time	Transit Vehicle Operator (including Benefits)	25	40	4	208,000
Pat-time	Transit Vehicle Operator	20	25	2	52,000
Part Time	Park Assistant (LS)	19	20	1	20,000
Part Time	Landscape Specialist	19	15	2	30,000
Part Time	Habitat Technician	19	20	1	20,000
Total					330,000

# **Connecting North Athens Sustainably**

## **Project Overview**

The *Connecting North Athens Sustainably* Project creates multiple alternative transportation connections within an underserved part of the north Athens community located along North Avenue, US441 and Boley Drive to downtown, essential businesses, and recreation facilities. The project establishes Micro Transit (on-demand) transit routes, a proposed Park/Bike/Hike parking lot, and multiuse paths and sidewalks that inter-link the north Athens area, critically needed and safe modes of travel. This project includes the purchase of electric vehicles, expanding transit accessibility while avoiding the production of greenhouse gases along with the hazards and cost of using fossil fuels. While the transit route begins as an "on-demand" service, as demand increases it is readily expandable to full, fixed route service without requiring any additional capital investment and only a limited amount of additional operational funding.

## **Community and Community Interest**

The North Athens Corridor Project provides services to multiple HUD designated Qualified Census Tracts. These tracts consist of at least 50% of households with an annual income of less than 60% of the area median gross income. Between 72-78% of the population in these census tracts self-identify as an ethnicity other than white non-Hispanic. As per the 2018 Athens Wellbeing Project, 15% of low-income residents rely on the transit system as their primary form of transportation.

This project is a direct response to the overwhelming number of requests for transit services from the residents Athens Transit Development Plan Update. Residents from north Athens, especially North Bluff neighborhood had a high response rate requesting transit service.

This project proposes to connect Downtown to the North Bluff subdivision, providing low-income neighborhoods with transit services to shopping, businesses, laundry services, grocery stores, a drug store, and community service agencies (ex: Georgia Division of Children and Family Services, Department of Labor). In addition, the construction of Multiuse paths will connect the proposed RAISE project (North Ave. to Boley Drive) and the North Bluff subdivision to the North Ocoee River Greenway, creating a family-safe route that significantly enhances connectivity and opportunity.

## **Project Details:**

### **Transit Route – approximately 8 miles; This project includes:**

- The initial establishment of an approximately 8-mile, round trip micro-transit (“on-demand”) route with a destination that leaves the Multi-modal Center for North Bluff subdivision via North Avenue and US441.

- The acquisition of land and associated connections needed to create a Ride-Bike-Hike parking facility in the general vicinity of Sandy Creek Nature Center for the purpose of establishing a hub/junction connecting the transit system, North Oconee River Greenway, and the proposed multi-use path that connects the North Oconee River Greenway to North Avenue. This parking area and associated connections will accommodate commuter traffic from areas north of Athens in addition to providing key pedestrian, bike, and transit inter-connectivity that serve the Athens Community. Includes use and restoration of native habitat in areas damaged by construction.
- A traffic signal at US441 and Old Commerce Road to facilitate bus safety (re: right turns only and highway crossing with a signal) as well as bike and pedestrian safety. Currently, anyone trying to cross US441 has to cross 5 lanes of traffic- effectively cutting off subdivision such as North Bluff from access to multiuse paths and public facilities except by vehicle. The Georgia Department of Transportation is responsible for US441 but will not install a light until there are a significant enough number of serious traffic accidents and fatalities to justify the installation. However, if ACCGov installs the light, GDOT will maintain the fixture.
- A minimum of 3 “on-demand” bus stops
- Note: As indicated on the map, in the event demand for this route increases to the point that a dedicated route is needed, there is the option of having the bus travel down Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway to return to the Multi-Modal Center, connecting additional neighborhoods.

#### **Multiuse-Path – approximately 2.6 miles of multi-use Path; including**

- 1.8 miles of multiuse path extending from North Avenue along Boley Drive and US441 to the North Oconee River Greenway. This path passes under US441 at the confluence of the highway and Sandy Creek, linking subdivisions on the west side of the highway with the North Oconee River Greenway, Sandy Creek Nature Center, and downtown Athens. The streamside pedestrian underpass/bridge creates a safe passage underneath the 5-lane highway where speeds are in excess of 55 MPH. This project may include the construction of a pedestrian foot bridge across Sandy Creek, providing access to Sandy Creek Nature Center’s 5-mile trail system.
- 0.8 miles of multi-use path extending from the North Bluff subdivision to the Education and Visitor’s Center at Sandy Creek Nature Center where the North Oconee River Greenway currently terminates. In conjunction with the proposed 1.8-mile multi-use path above, this segment creates

transit-bike-pedestrian access that extends from the North Bluff area to downtown Athens as well as facilities located on North Avenue.

**Sidewalk – approximately 600 linear feet**

- This project proposes the addition of 600 linear feet of sidewalk along US441 and Sandy Creek Drive, join “unconnected” segments of existing sidewalk in the process. This addition will connect businesses located on the east side of US441 with the North Oconee River Greenway, providing a safe route to west side businesses, the transit system, downtown, and North Avenue.

**Native Habitat, Hazard Trees, and Ecosystem Services**

This project includes the use of native plants to restore high quality habitat in approximately 20 acres of land around the parking area and along multiuse paths in order to restore habitat to areas damaged by construction, protecting ecosystems services and mitigating damage/erosion.



















