

Cultural and Political Considerations

The student team study areas varied as much in their political and cultural character as in their geographical, transportation, and land development conditions. The north or SRTA group area tends to be better off, more white, a little older, and quite stable. The mid-corridor and AUC MMPT groups have in common the physical, social, economic, and racial divide that Northside Drive has been for decades. The English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods are vulnerable to speculative forces driven by anticipated huge investments across Northside to the east. Here, the continued expansion of the Georgia World Congress Center in the form of a likely new Falcons stadium, the probability of beginning work on the MMPT, and the new private investment likely to be generated provides both an opportunity and a threat to the neighborhoods' stability and quality. Recognizing that major private investment and skill are essential for revitalization, there yet must be defined community benefits incorporated from the beginning and every step of the way. These must be identified and prioritized by the community, acting as one, and, as we have heard, include jobs and job training, infrastructure upgrades, and housing stabilization. Travelling south, much work has been done to strengthen Northside Drive's mixed use character from Castleberry Hill across toward the AUC campuses. Finally, the West End business center anchors the corridor at the south, where direct access from Northside Drive and strengthening the MARTA station as a multimodal hub can complement the emerging Community Improvement District and its efforts to consolidate its disparate assets into a single, actionable vision.

Financial Considerations

The scope of work necessary to achieve a grand transit boulevard is daunting. The financing requirements in aggregate are staggering. Yet, in the framework of the realities placed upon resources in the wake of the TSPLOST failure, incremental work shaped by an overall vision can go forward, and if projects are wisely chosen and effectively carried out, improvements will generate increasing support for the wide range of financial tools necessary, some of which are already in place.

Organizational considerations

There are a number of organizations in the corridor with either geographically or issue defined interests. There is not a single umbrella organization where all affected can find a home. Citizens thus have a hard time finding out all the information that they need to formulate or advance their positions across the wide range of issues that affect their future. Many have expressed mistrust and frustration over priorities and lack of action. Some kind of information sharing forum should be formed, aimed at coalescing around an overall vision of what could be, agreement on priorities across timelines and resources, leading to bases for mutual support for action projects up and down the corridor.

Next steps

This summary is preliminary, an effort to pull out the key findings of the study, and to incorporate early feedback. We invite comment, corrections, additions, and ideas as the work approaches its final report in May. We can be contacted at: www.northsidedrvision.gatech.edu

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Georgia World Congress Center Authority
English Avenue Neighborhood Association
NPU-L
Urban Collage
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and many more...

Northside Drive – the Grand Transit Boulevard

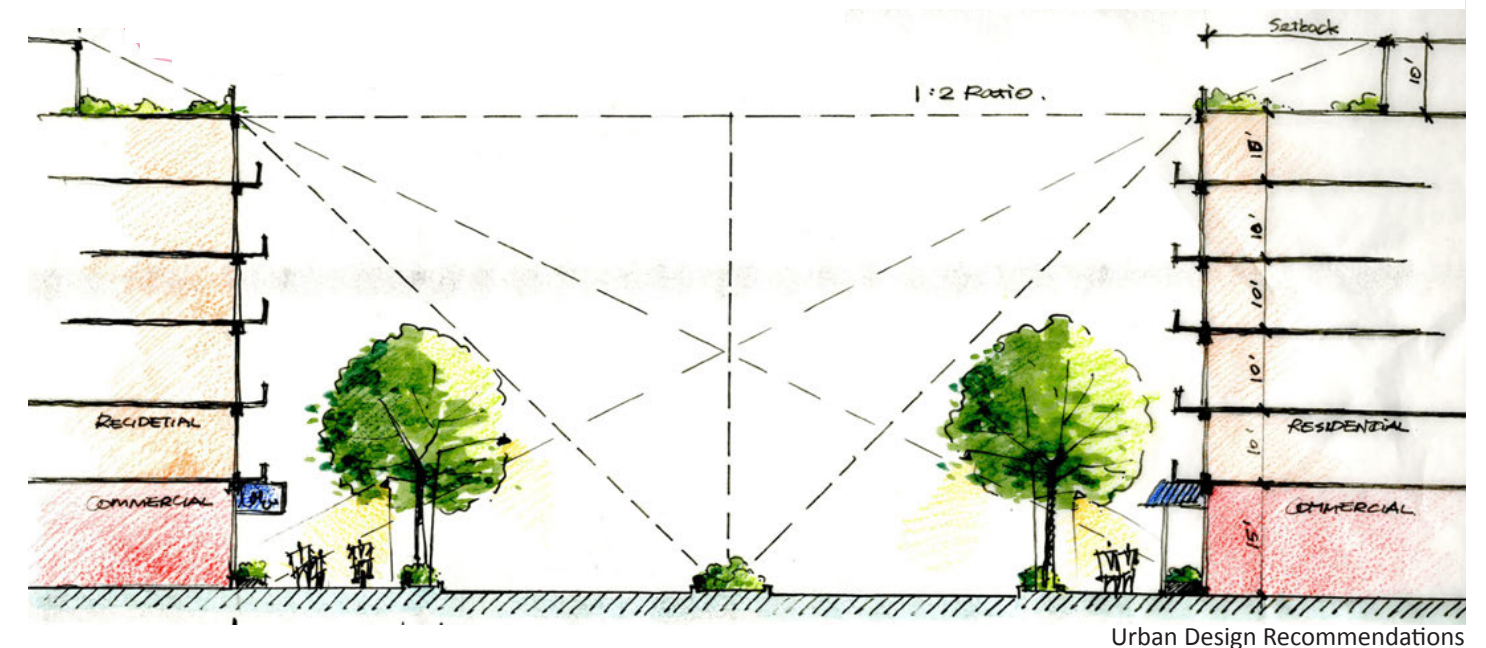
Instructor's synthesis of studio work – key proposals and action assessment

Introduction and Overview

At the behest of Emory McClinton, board member of the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Georgia Tech planning studio explored ways to transform Northside Drive from a dismal, disorganized underperforming corridor that frames the west side of the Atlanta core into a grand transit boulevard. Picture a tree-lined, well-lit boulevard, wide and grand, with medians, and ample accommodation of cars, transit, bicycles, and sidewalks, lined with four to six story residential buildings with as much retail and other ground floor activities as the market will support, over time transforming this now dismal traffic corridor from I-75 to I-20 and West End. Imagine too dissolving the east-west divide that for decades has walled off the low and mid wealth neighborhoods to the west from the robust Downtown and Midtown centers to the east, physically, economically, and socially.

The students' work, their engagement with most of the interested parties for input and guidance, and their diligence in fulfilling their tasks confirmed that such a vision is possible, exciting, and feasible over time. To make it happen requires:

- 1) upgrading Northside Drive into a fully functional multi modal corridor for cars, transit, bikes, and pedestrians;
- 2) adding to and strengthening the east west links so that Midtown flows into West Midtown, Downtown flows into Vine City, English Avenue, and the AUC campuses;
- 3) using the Proctor Creek watershed improvement strategy as a framework for park and greenway connectivity and as a model for environmental stewardship;
- 4) West End taking advantage of its opportunities to strengthen its transit hub and connect better to the AUC and to Downtown; and
- 5) Building provisions and funding for community benefits - jobs, infrastructure, and housing stabilization into the many developments slated to benefit from public expenditure.



Transportation

The project proposes a consistent baseline cross-section for the corridor, including four travel lanes, two variable use lanes, bike lanes, lighted and landscaped sidewalks, and planted medians where right-of-way and adjacent use conditions permit. The variable use lanes would provide the flexibility and opportunity to ramp up their use for ever more robust transit over time, beginning with corridor long bus service during rush hours and parking in the off peak. The proposal anticipates the transit mode share to increase in the corridor, first by actually providing bus service now utterly lacking to the many high intensity destinations that line the corridor. Then as transit demand grows and new residential, institutional, and commercial activities arrive, enhanced transit and ultimately bus rapid transit or rail options have an established travel corridor. Across the corridor (east-west), the students remarked on the divide that the corridor represents, lacking transportation connectivity for all modes, economic and social divides where the resources available and dispensed on the east are great while on the west there is little. Core to many of their proposals is to bridge that divide, physically and programmatically, where the resources on the east can directly support meeting some of the needs on the west. There is much to be improved upon at the Northside Drive intersections. Overall, reducing design speeds, eliminating slip ramps, tightening turn radii, and better accommodating bikes and pedestrians. Combined with pedestrian zoning requirements for new development these improvements would go a long ways toward transforming the corridor.

- 1 Rework the Northside Drive intersections at I-75, Bellemeade, 17th Street, and 16th Street in conjunction with Cobb County's BRT development, the redevelopment of the SRTA site, and the reworking of the railroads' Howell Junction to include the widening of the two railroad underpasses, projects that must be coordinated in their mutual benefit.
- 2 Northside/Hemphill/14th Street: eliminate southbound left turn at Hemphill and instead rework left turn at 14th Street, then eliminate Hemphill's intersection with 14th Street altogether, clearing up an unnecessary proliferation of asphalt and replacing it with safe and friendly environment at and across the Northside Drive/14th Street intersection and yielding considerable land area useful for new development

Establish a new intersection at Ethel Street to improve east-west connectivity

- 3 Establish a new intersection at 8th Street for better connectivity between the growing residential communities to the west and the Georgia Tech campus

Rework the Northside/Marietta/Tech Parkway intersection to realign southbound Northside Drive onto a widened flyover ramp that now accommodates Northside northbound traffic, connecting Tech Parkway into Marietta Street as a car/bike/ped facility, and creating a community park connecting west to east; a first step that could be implemented sooner would be to convert the west lanes of Tech Parkway into a bike/ped trail that would cross Northside into Hampton Street and 3rd Avenue

- 4 Rework the Northside Drive/Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway intersection to reduce speeds, improve safety, provide bike-ped continuity to a reopened Means Street bike-ped bridge, and yield land for jumpstarting new development
- 5 Rework the Northside Drive/North Avenue intersection to eliminate westbound right turn slip ramp and otherwise tighten right-of-way to yield land for development and to establish better bike-ped connectivity to the neighborhoods; as part of project, extend streetscape improvements from the railroad underpass into the English Avenue neighborhood

Rework the Northside Drive/Martin Luther King intersection (project to include Magnolia Street, Maple Street, the Vine City MARTA TOD, and Mitchell Street) in conjunction with either a new stadium or to accommodate multimodal traffic bound for the MMPT or both, creating a gateway transportation/development connecting the Atlanta University Center campuses and the westside with the downtown

- 6 Rework the Northside Drive/Martin Luther King intersection (project to include Magnolia Street, Maple Street, the Vine City MARTA TOD, and Mitchell Street) in conjunction with either a new stadium or to accommodate multimodal traffic bound for the MMPT or both, creating a gateway transportation/development connecting the Atlanta University Center campuses and the westside with the downtown
- 7 Northside/Peters Street: rework intersection so that Northside flows into Peters Street and West Whitehall, thus realigning Northside to give direct access to I-20, to the West End MARTA station and the West End business district

