

introduction



piedmont area transportation study

final report



1.0 Introduction

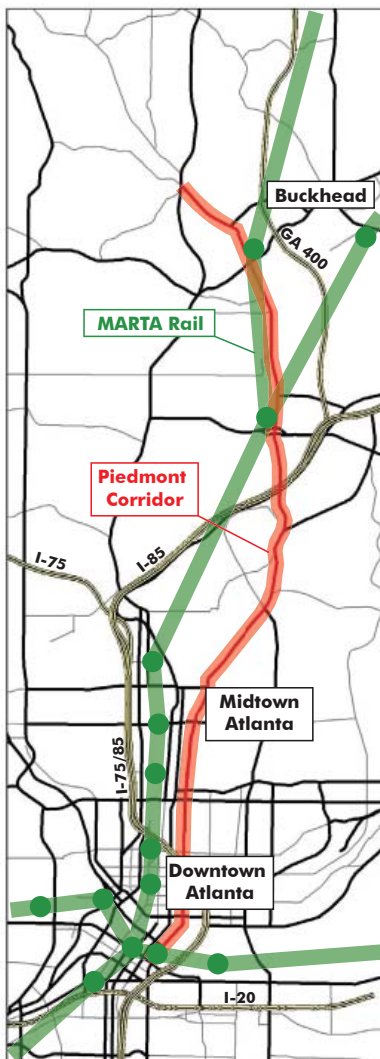
1.1 Background

Piedmont Road (Georgia State Route 237) is one of Atlanta's most important north-south corridors, connecting the State Capitol with important residential, business and visitor sites. It links Buckhead with Midtown and Downtown Atlanta. It parallels the North line of MARTA's rail system, with nine stations located within three-quarters of a mile of Piedmont Road/Piedmont Avenue including the hub of the rail system – the Five Points station. This study focuses on the portion of Piedmont Road located in Buckhead, where it carries up to 45,000 vehicles on a typical weekday, sometimes operating under very congested conditions. With more than 13,000 new residents and 34,000 new jobs projected to move to Buckhead in the next 25 years, the already congested corridor will be clogged

with traffic well beyond normal commute hours unless action is taken. With a strong commitment to progressive development, growth in Buckhead represents an opportunity to capitalize on proven methods to reduce traffic burdens including all of the following and more:

- vertical mixed-use buildings
- multi-family residential homes in walking distance of high-quality transit
- vibrant streetscapes and street retail stores that entice people to walk
- balanced street system that allows access without letting cars dominate the landscape
- proactive employer-based enticements to lure office workers out of single-occupant cars
- a commitment to succeed

Figure 1.1 Corridor Location Map





introduction

Fresh on the heels of its successful completion of the first installment of the Peachtree Road transformation from Maple Drive to GA 400, the Buckhead Community Improvement District (Buckhead CID) and the Buckhead Area Transportation Management Association (BATMA), led by an Advisory Working Group consisting of residents, developers, employers, and property owners, is sharing this study of Piedmont Road to solicit help in changing the status quo on Piedmont Road. The organizations' histories of progressive problem solving, having been the recipient of several transit, pedestrian, and transportation demand management awards given by MARTA, PEDS, and the International Association of Business Communicators over the past several years, provided the all-inclusive guidance and organization to bring together approximately 450 Buckhead residents, commuters, employers, business leaders, and community leaders who created this study's vision for Piedmont Road. This report, the Piedmont Area Transportation Study, captures that vision and shows how public and private investments when added together can be used to realize this community vision.



Peachtree Road Complete Streets Project

1.2 Purpose and Approach of this Study

The purpose of this study is to recommend changes affecting all modes of travel within and around the Piedmont Road corridor and surrounding areas that specifically address the evolving needs of the growing community and region. The study commenced in March 2007 as a partnership between the Buckhead CID and BATMA who identified the need to take a proactive look at the transportation issues that are facing the Buckhead Community's future. Study goals defined early in the process are as follows:



Completed Phase I Peachtree Road Complete Streets project

- Identify measures to improve traffic mobility
- Enhance the pedestrian environment
- Create better access to public transit
- Initiate intra-district transportation alternatives
- Encourage better integration of land uses
- Improve linkages to the region's automobile, transit, and bicycle network.

The approach taken to conduct the study was coupled between ongoing input from members of the community as well as a thorough technical analysis. Data collected through the corridor was used to create an existing conditions model and deficiencies were identified. Future volumes were increased based on historical and projected future growth in the area. These volumes were input into the model and projected future deficiencies were identified. Improvements addressing the identified deficiencies in the transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and roadway systems were then recommended and presented to the public through a series of public meetings. The final list of recommended projects is a reflection of the technical analysis as well as application of the response from stakeholders.

In order to conduct this study in the context of the recommendations of previous work, past planning studies and documents were also reviewed. Several of the documents reviewed are as follows:

- Lindbergh Area Project Concept Report (STP-7626-00(320)), Georgia Department of Transportation (1995)
- Atlanta Commuter On-Street Bike Plan, City of Atlanta (1995)

"Who is the Buckhead CID and BATMA? The Buckhead CID is a Community Improvement District, or branch of the local government, charged with providing improvement initiatives that address the transportation infrastructure for all modes of travel within the Buckhead area. BATMA aims to serve the community by educating individuals on commute alternatives and providing alternative methods of travel within the community."



- Buckhead Community, Urban Land Institute (1998)
- Lindbergh Transportation Urban Design Plan, Carter & Associates, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, City of Atlanta (2000)
- BRT Corridor Identification Study – Technical Report, Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transit Authority (2002)
- Buckhead Interparcel Access Study, Buckhead Community Improvement District (2002)
- Buckhead Action Plan – Livable Centers Initiative Report, Buckhead Action Committee & Atlanta Regional Commission (2002)
- Final Report and Recommendations, Governor’s Congestion Mitigation Task Force (2005)
- Piedmont Road Corridor Study, Georgia Department of Transportation (2005)
- Lindbergh Center Transit Station Area Development Plan, City of Atlanta
- FY07 Service Standards, MARTA (2006)
- Commuter Rail Plan Updated, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce (2007)

While the above studies all address portions of Buckhead, each consists of different study areas and concentrates on different travel modes. Ideas that transcend most or all of the studies are the importance of preserving neighborhoods, the desire to increase street front retail, the desire to improve and create pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and the need to increase traffic capacity by performing projects such as widening portions of the area’s roadways and the addition of turn lanes in several locations. While the recommendations of this study were created by an independent public engagement process and through a technical analysis of roadway operation based on current traffic count data, the ideas and recommendations presented in each of these studies were strongly considered when making the recommendations.

1.3 Community Vision

The transportation plan presented in this study was developed through a comprehensive community involvement process held from March 2007 to January 2008. The process included input from neighborhood groups from over eleven neighborhoods, business and property owners, commuters, City of Atlanta officials, bicycle and pedestrian advocates, transit service providers, and other parties with interests in the corridor.

Early in the study, meetings were held with various groups of stakeholders to prioritize a list of guiding principals. These principles were used to guide the development of recommended projects. In ranked order, from higher to lower priority, they are:

1. Preserve property values and character of existing residential neighborhoods
2. Increase transportation and mobility options in the study area by providing more opportunities for waling, cycling, and transit use

“A complete street is one that works for all travel modes, integrating the needs of bicyclists, pedestrians, transit users, and disabled individuals into every aspect of design.”

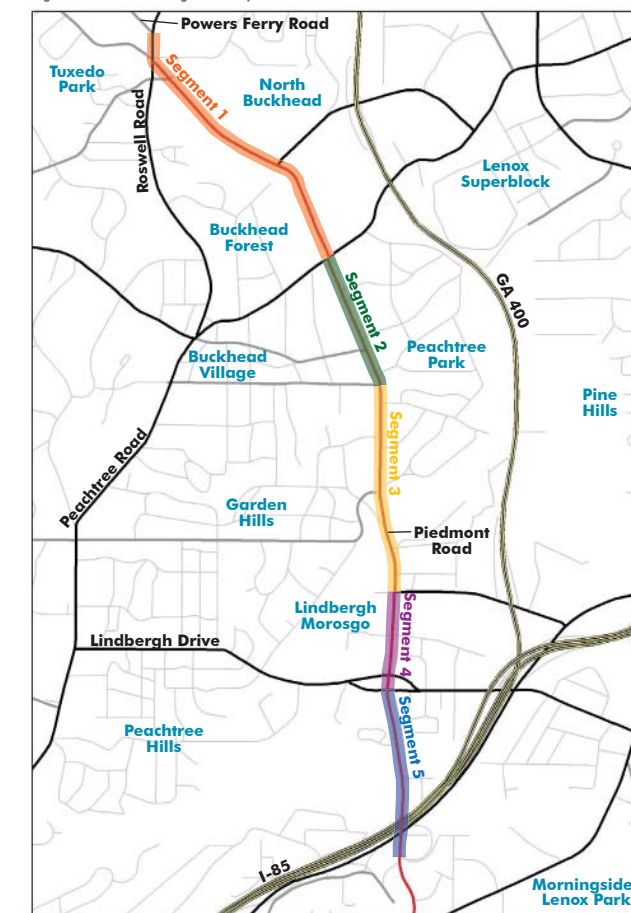
3. Balance traffic flows and eliminate congestion hotspots
4. Provide adequate and appropriate access to businesses and neighborhoods
5. Increase connectivity within the study area and to other parts of the region
6. Manage and optimize the use of the existing transportation system
7. Aggressively pursue high-value transportation improvements
8. Improve safety for users of all transportation modes
9. Improve aesthetics of the public realm
10. Provide opportunities for high-quality redevelopment where appropriate
11. Create a sense of continuity along the Piedmont corridor

The guiding principals above created a vision for the study and guided the development of the 47 recommended projects. Piedmont Road will be transformed into a complete street with an appropriate balance between competing interests in moving people and vehicles. It will carry transit patrons safely, comfortably, and conveniently with quality amenities at strategically located bus stops and rail stations. Pedestrians and bicyclists will be able to safely and conveniently travel along and across Piedmont Road. Cars and trucks will be able to access areas along the corridor with a reasonable and consistent level-of-service. The quality of traffic flow will change from a haphazard stop-and-go condition into a more fluid routine with a degree of predictability in knowing how long a trip will take to make.

1.4 Study Area

The area chosen for study includes the 3.4 mile Piedmont Road corridor from Roswell Road to Interstate 85, including the portion of Roswell Road from Powers Ferry Road to Piedmont Road. The area along and in the vicinity of this corridor consists of pockets of densely packed development, along with several areas with low density commercial parcels and single family neighborhoods. There are over five thousand hotel rooms,

Figure 1.2 Corridor Segment Map





1,400 retail outlets, and 70,000 residents in areas within reach of the corridor. Due to the corridor's vast differences in character and physical attributes the study area is divided into five segments as described below.

- Segment 1 – Roswell Road from Powers Ferry Road to Piedmont Road (0.1 miles) and Piedmont Road from Roswell Road to Peachtree Road (1 mile)
- Segment 2 – Piedmont Road from Peachtree Road to Pharr Road (0.5 miles)
- Segment 3 – Piedmont Road from Pharr Road to Sidney Marcus Boulevard (0.8 miles)
- Segment 4 – Piedmont Road from Sidney Marcus Boulevard to Lindbergh Drive (0.35 miles)
- Segment 5 – Piedmont Road from Lindbergh Drive to Interstate 85 (0.6 miles)

1.5 Public Engagement Strategy

From its inception, the Piedmont Area Transportation Study was conceived of as a community-based inclusive effort. The Buckhead CID and the BATMA jointly developed a scope of services and convened a consultant selection committee consisting of business, property owner, and residential interests. The public engagement plan in each consultant proposal was heavily weighted and the scope of services for the team selected was modified to reflect the strengths of the public engagement plan presented in all proposals received.



1.5.1 Study Leadership

Once the consultant team was selected, an Advisory Working Group was formed to oversee the study. The group was specifically developed to provide a balanced perspective representative of the community as a whole. The group was comprised of seven property owners, four resident representatives, two elected officials, and two employers. It is important to note the inclusion of employers – this group was specifically sought out due to early recognition that commute traffic impacts were a significant factor in the corridor and that commuter interests are vastly different from residents and property owners. The interest group is rarely represented in community planning efforts and balancing the differing perspective and needs poses quite a challenge.

In addition to the Advisory Working Group, an Agency Advisory Committee was established. This group, comprised of all regulatory and advocacy agencies likely to be interested in and involved in implementation, was charged with providing a realistic view of the funding environments to ensure recommendations were consistent with agency desires and best positioned for implementation. Representation on this committee included ten public and private agencies.

1.5.2 General Public Engagement

From the onset, public engagement was an essential approach in the study. While the Advisory Working Group was structured to provide a balanced perspective throughout the process, it remained necessary to engage the broader community at key points in the study as well as to provide a thorough outreach effort that offered a number of opportunities for input as well as a variety of information dissemination channels.

The strategy was to engage the broader public at two main points in the study including:

- 1) At the beginning to shape the study – by defining the guiding principles, to identify the current deficiencies, and provide ideas for potential solutions.
- 2) Once the list of recommendations was formed, to provide reaction and input to the proposed recommendations prior to finalization.

To ensure that the broader public was kept abreast of the study's progress, study updates were provided through a series of BLOGs, continued website presence, monthly reports to the Buckhead CID Board of Directors and to the BATMA Board of Directors. The monthly newsletter distribution included approximately 6,000 direct contacts for commuters and another 5,000 direct contacts for residents.

1.5.3 Calendar of Events

March 1, 2007 – Kick-Off Meeting – An initial meeting was held with both the Advisory Working Group and the Agency Advisory Committee to begin the study effort. At this meeting, the study goals, purpose, approach, and roles of the groups were established and reviewed. With the groups in agreement, the consultant team was released to begin work. A total of 30 people attended this meeting including representatives from almost all agencies.

April 10 – Round 1 Public Meetings – The first round of public meetings was conducted. Invitations were sent to every property owner of record with the City of Atlanta Tax Assessors office (600 individual property owners), emails announcing the meetings were distributed to an estimated 200 stakeholders directly and to an additional 5,000 through neighborhood communications channels. Information was also sent out to more than 6,000 recipients through BATMA's monthly newsletter. A total of 92 people attended these meetings. This series consisted of seven separate meetings, each representing a different geographic section of the corridor or interest (resident and employer), in an effort to target discussions to specific areas. The meetings were used to educate the public about the proposed process of engagement, to discuss existing conditions, to understand perceptions of the corridor deficiencies, and to establish the guiding principles that would lead the entire study effort. The guiding principles developed from these meetings, as listed in Section 1.3, strongly influenced the entire study and in fact became the litmus test for the development of the recommendations included.



March – April 2007 – Individual Property Owner/Neighborhood Meetings – Individual meetings with property owners were held as part of the initial conditions research in order to develop an understanding of development plans underway that would impact the future traffic volumes and patterns of the corridor. Meetings were held with approximately 11 property owners and 3 neighborhood groups.

May 1 – Advisory Working Group /Agency Advisory Committee Meeting #2 – A joint meeting of the Advisory Working Group and Agency Advisory Committee was held to provide committee representatives with an overview of the input received from the Round 1 public meetings conducted the previous month. The consultant team reviewed the problems and issues identified by stakeholders and also presented the guiding principles for the study as determined and ranked by the stakeholders. The second part of the meeting was dedicated to those issues which required agency input and coordination including: Georgia 400 to I-85 Interchange, the Piedmont Road/East Wesley Road intersection, Lindbergh widening project, consolidation of Lindbergh Drive, Express bus service, the Miami Circle intersection, the Buckhead Loop intersection and the Roswell Road/Habersham Road intersection. A total of 24 people were in attendance at this meeting.

June 20 – East Wesley Road/Darlington Road/Baranco Intersection Meeting #1 – Through conversations with stakeholders, concerns over the Darlington Road/East Wesley Road/Baranco dealership intersection were identified as an area in need of further investigation. The study team met with a group of approximately 10 neighborhood representatives as well as the Baranco dealership owners. The goal of the meeting was to discuss the issues for the intersection, its role on the broader corridor project, and to help develop consensus for a solution. At this meeting, the consultant presented its recommendations for the intersection and in response the neighborhood representatives made the team aware of several alternative scenarios to be considered and requested additional analysis. The study team agreed to review the alternatives and provide an analysis of the options back to the group for consideration at a second meeting.

July 20 - Advisory Working Group Meeting #3 – At this meeting of the Advisory Working Group, the consultant team reviewed the corridor deficiencies noted in the Round 1 stakeholder meetings and discussed their list of initial recommendations with the group. The group was asked for input regarding any issues or concerns with the proposed recommendations. The group released the recommendations for presentation in the Round 2 Public meetings. Attendance at this meeting totaled six people, including mostly residential representatives and one property owner.

July 25 – Advisory Working Group Meeting #3 – At this meeting the consultant team reviewed the corridor deficiencies noted in the Round 1 stakeholder meetings and discussed their list of initial recommendations with the group. The group was asked for input regarding any issues or concerns with the proposed recommendations. The committee released the recommendations for presentation in the Round 2 public meetings. Eight group members were in attendance at this meeting including representatives from SRTA, ARC, City of Atlanta planning and public works, and GDOT.

August 8 – Darlington Road/East Wesley Road/Baranco dealership/Peachtree Park Intersection Meeting #2 – The second and final meeting to discuss the Darlington intersection included the study team with 15 neighborhood representatives. The study team presented six options for consideration and reviewed each in detail highlighting the pros and cons of each. The preferred option presented was that which included converting Darlington Road to right-in/right-out operation and reconfiguring Piedmont Road to a cross-section consisting of three southbound lanes and two northbound lanes with exclusive left-turn lanes provided for East Wesley Road and the Baranco car dealership. The preferred option included reconfiguring the intersection geometry to line up the Baranco driveway with East Wesley Road and maintain the signalization. Concerns were raised and the study team indicated that the concerns would be taken into consideration in conjunction with the study goals and comments from the remainder of the study scope.

September 4 and 6 – Round 2 Public Meetings – Approximately 80 people attended a series of meetings each of which focused on different corridor segments and user groups. In this meeting the consultant team presented their findings on deficiencies in the corridor and the initial recommendations for improvements in the corridor. Each attendee received a comment form to help the study team prioritize the recommended projects. Attendees identified the most positive aspects of the plan, missing elements from the recommendations, and any recommendations they opposed.

October 3 – Roswell Road/Habersham Road Intersection Meeting – The initial recommendation for the realignment of Piedmont Road at Roswell Road presented in the September Round 2 Public Meetings sparked a great deal of controversy with several neighborhood groups in the area. These groups requested a meeting with the consultant team to discuss the recommendation specifically and to have the opportunity to present their concerns as well as ideas for potential solutions. Approximately 12 people attended this meeting including all adjacent neighborhoods as well as the City Council representatives for both impacted districts and the at-large council member. The neighborhood organizations presented several ideas which the consultant team analyzed in further detail. Finding that none of the suggested alternative recommendations performed well without transferring the problems to streets outside the study area, it was determined that the long-term recommendation to realign the intersection would be removed from the report and the intersection issues would be presented to the City of Atlanta for system analysis in the Connect Atlanta Plan.

October 22 – City of Atlanta Coordination Meeting – This meeting included six representatives from the study team, the City of Atlanta's transportation planning department and the consultant team recently selected to conduct the Connect Atlanta Plan for the City. In this meeting all issues requiring further analysis by the City were raised and discussed. Topics covered included bike route designation, bus stop spacing and design standards, rail/bus service enhancements, queue jumper lanes, streetscape standards, the Buford Highway/I-85 connection, the Miami Circle connection to Canterbury Road/Burke Road, side-street maximum signal timing policy, Flexcar, the Habersham Road/Roswell Road intersection, SPI changes, and parking charge requirements.

October 23 – Joint Advisory Working Group and Agency Advisory Committee Meeting #4 – A joint meeting of the Advisory Working Group and Agency Advisory Committee was held to review feedback received at the Round 2 public meetings held earlier in the month. The discussion included a review of comments and concerns regarding the recommendations, revisions to the recommendations resulting from the input, and an overview of the proposed format for the public meetings that would be used to release the final recommendations. Committee members raised concerns about triple left turns, coordination with the Buford Highway Bus Rapid Transit program, and the need to link local traffic observation with the regional Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) architecture. Attendance included 12 group members representing SRTA, ARC, City of Atlanta (council and staff), MARTA, North Buckhead Civic Association, NPU-B, the Buckhead Coalition and the development community.

November 28 – Final Public Meetings: Commuter and Resident – Two final public meetings were held to release the final recommendations for the study to the broader public. Comments received at these meetings were considered by the study team and several modifications to the recommendations were made. Following is a description of each meeting:

Commuter/Employer Meeting – This meeting, held during lunch with special transportation service provided to and from the meeting site using the “buc” shuttle, focused on the needs of commuters and employers. The presentation included an overview of the study process, highlights of projected growth in the area, and recommendations that would impact their commute to Buckhead. A total of 42 people attended this meeting. Attendees were provided with a survey to complete and return to ensure their comments were recorded.

Resident Meeting – This meeting, held in the evening, focused on area residents. The open-house style meeting included display boards outlining all study recommendations. Study team staff members discussed individual recommendations with attendees in a series of one-on-one and small group discussions. A total of 66 people attended this meeting and all attendees were provided a survey to help ensure their comments were recorded.

February 2008 – Advisory Working Group and Agency Advisory Committee Meeting #5 – A joint meeting of the steering and Advisory Working Group members was held to review the comments received at the November public meetings and to discuss changes made to the recommendations as a result of the feedback. In this meeting, the study report was released and transmitted to all agencies.