

existing deficiencies





2.0 Existing Deficiencies



*Neglected sidewalks
and faded roadway
striping*



The Piedmont Road corridor suffers from a multitude of deficiencies for all user groups. These deficiencies are a result of local factors as well as regional issues that have been left untouched for decades because of the lack of funds for implementation of transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and congestion mitigation projects. The list below describes the most prevalent problems with the corridor and its surroundings.

2.1 Regional Deficiencies

Southbound Freeway Congestion

Traffic volumes along Piedmont Road vary greatly between the northbound and southbound directions. In the southern portion of the study corridor, on a daily basis over 30 percent more vehicles travel in the southbound direction than the northbound direction. It is believed that this imbalance of traffic is being generated by congestion occurring along

southbound Georgia 400 (GA 400). This congestion stretches sometimes as far as I-20, nearly nine miles to the south of Buckhead, and is the result of heavy traffic volumes along I-75 and I-85. The congestion causes many southbound drivers along GA 400 to “bail out” and exit at the Buckhead Loop and Sidney Marcus Boulevard interchanges. Many of these motorists then use Piedmont Road as a means to travel into Midtown and Downtown Atlanta, or to access Buford Highway or re-enter I-85 further to the south.

Traffic volume data suggest that on an average weekday, approximately 20 percent more vehicles exit GA 400 at the Buckhead Loop and Sidney Marcus Boulevard during the afternoon rush hour than enter during the morning rush hour. This sends over 6,500 vehicles during an average afternoon peak hour southbound on Piedmont Road to avoid traffic congestion along GA 400 and I-85. This “bail out” creates an imbalance in the directional flow on Piedmont Road, with southbound lanes carrying 30 percent more traffic than northbound.

GA 400/I-85 Southbound to Northbound Ramps

Freeway ramps from I-85 northbound to GA 400 northbound and GA 400 southbound to I-85 southbound currently exist; however, no ramps exist to facilitate the movement from GA 400 southbound to I-85 northbound and vice versa. Motorists wishing to make this movement must use surface streets such as Sidney Marcus Boulevard, Buford Highway, and Cheshire Bridge Road to transfer between the two freeways.

Construction of these ramps has been planned for quite some time; however, efforts to make the ramps a reality continue to be hampered by delays and a lack of funding. A preliminary analysis



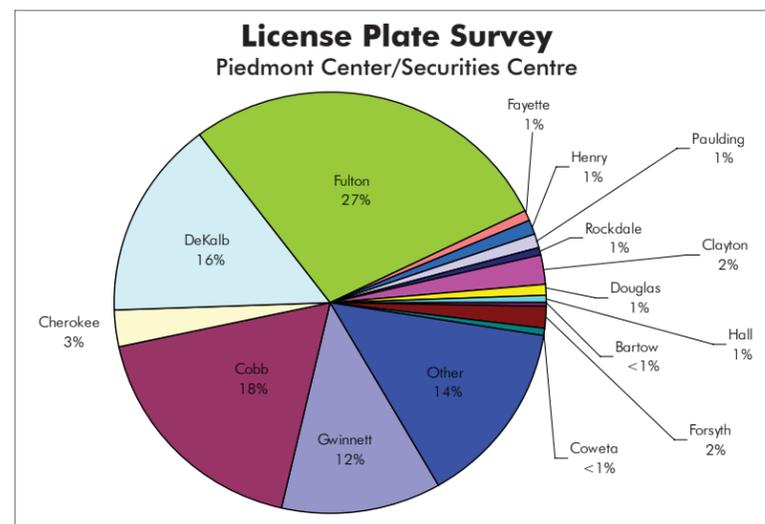
conducted by GDOT forecasts 31,000 motorists each day will use each ramp. These vehicles would otherwise use surface streets such as Sidney Marcus Boulevard to make the transition.

Regional Transit Options

Currently, transportation options for workers living outside the city and commuting to the Buckhead community are very limited. The only regional transportation specifically serving the dense core of Buckhead is MARTA rail service which only reaches to locations in the proximity of I-285 and one GRTA Xpress bus route which travels between Discover Mills Mall in Gwinnett County and the Lindbergh Center MARTA station. No commuter rail exists within the region. MARTA rail does travel outside the dense core of the city; however, many Atlantans live in areas further away from the city than the system serves. Individuals from areas farther out must drive to the farthest stretching rail stations (North Springs, Indian Creek, Airport, Hamilton E. Holmes, or Bankhead rail stations) to use MARTA to travel into and out of the city.

A license plate survey was performed during one day in July 2007 at the Piedmont Center and Securities Centre office park developments to determine where workers live. Of the over 4,100 license plates recorded, the counties with the highest percentage of vehicles represented were Fulton (27%), Cobb (18%), DeKalb (16%), and Gwinnett (12%). The chart below shows the complete results.

As shown graphically (at left), one in three people commute to Buckhead from the northern portion of the region, especially Cobb and Gwinnett counties. Choosing to commute via express bus from



Source: Buckhead Area Transportation Management Association

these areas currently requires transferring to MARTA rail at the Arts Center MARTA station in Midtown Atlanta, then traveling to one of the Buckhead MARTA rail stations. The amount of time this commute alternative takes on a typical weekday is between 1 and 1 ½ hours from Town Center to Buckhead. The same commute by a single occupant vehicle, assuming an average travel speed as low as 30 miles per hour, is less than 45 minutes. Because of the convenience and time savings offered by driving their own

vehicle, most commuters rule out express bus as a viable option. The chart below shows the difference in travel time to Buckhead from Town Center Mall via express bus versus single occupant vehicle.

**Commute Time Mode Comparison
(To Buckhead from Town Center Mall)**



the city and the region continue to grow, this forces any additional vehicles onto the already stressed facility.

Many two-lane roads which were originally designed to process low traffic volumes have evolved into being used as major arterials for the needs of commuters. For example, West Paces Ferry Road is a two-lane facility with a reasonable carrying capacity of just over 14,000 vehicles per day. With many

commuters from the northwest portions of the region using this facility as an alternative to the congested freeways, the facility actually carries over 20,000 vehicles per day. Many facilities near the Piedmont Road corridor experience heavy traffic volumes like this, caused by the need for commuters to enter and leave the city with few travel options to the region's freeway system (especially between I-75 and the Buckhead community).



Figure 2.2 MARTA Service Area

2.2 Local Deficiencies

Local Transit Service

Two major transit services provide local transit within the Buckhead area; MARTA and the "buc." MARTA provides city and regional transit through the corridor with rail and bus serving portions of Piedmont Road. The largest complaint from stakeholders is that MARTA rail and bus service is unpredictable and wait times (headways) are too long. The corridor consists of 32 bus stops, many of which serve only a few people each day. Amenities at bus stops are limited; most stops only consisting of a sign denoting the stop. Fabricated structures are provided at many stops; however, due to right-of-way constraints and narrow sidewalks, many of these structures obstruct the existing sidewalk. The graphic at left shows existing MARTA service in the area.



The “buc” is a free shuttle service which serves the northern portion of the corridor (north of Peachtree Road). Recent funding challenges have required reductions in service, which has resulted in longer headways. Workers in the northern activity center who participated in study meetings are particularly disappointed in recent cut backs to “buc” service in their area. The below graphic shows existing “buc” service in the area.

The lack of convenience, attractiveness, and usability of the available transit in Buckhead has very few people willing to trade in the ride in their car for transit.

Pedestrian Infrastructure

Pedestrians face unsafe and unattractive conditions along most of the corridor. Many portions of sidewalk are cracked and crumbled, with obstructions such as utility poles, and are directly adjacent to the roadway with no buffer from moving vehicles. Many crosswalk markings are faded or non-existent and medians prevent wheelchairs from maneuvering through some intersections. This creates a perception that vehicles “rule the road.”



The roadway network in the areas adjacent to the study corridor stems from Buckhead’s early growth as a suburb of Atlanta. Very few portions of the corridor consist of a street grid system, where streets cross frequently and create short blocks which allow for convenient pedestrian access and the ability to cross busy streets safely.



This lack of a grid network creates conditions making it difficult for pedestrians to walk, sometimes even very short distances. In turn, city streets are often void of pedestrians, thus defining the area as “vehicle only.” All these factors make Piedmont Road an undesirable place to choose walking as a mode of choice.

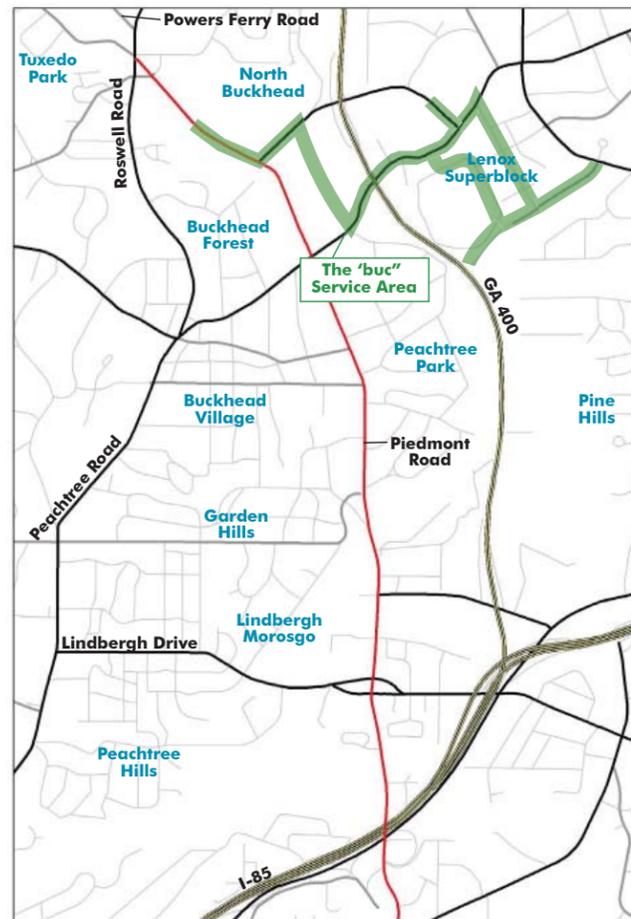


Figure 2.3 “buc” Service Area

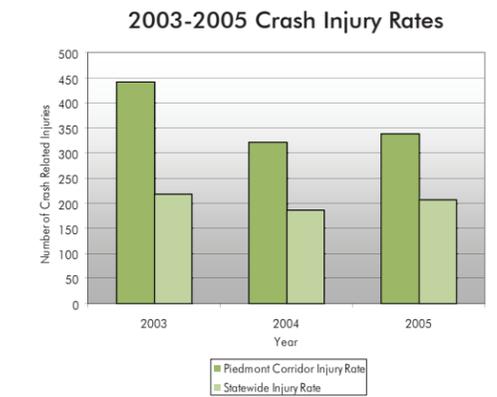
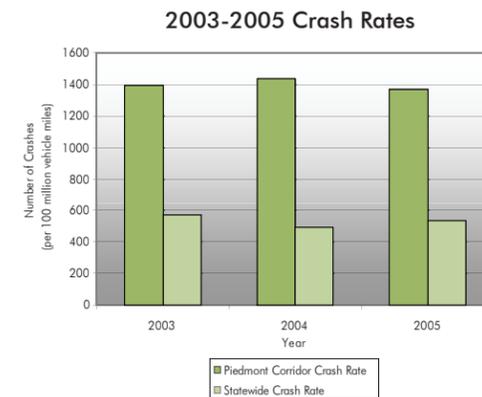
Bicycle Infrastructure

Currently the only bicycle facilities provided in the vicinity of the study corridor are the bicycle lanes recently completed as part of the Peachtree Road Complete Streets project from Maple Drive to GA 400. Piedmont Road and most of its adjacent public roadways are very uninviting for bicycling due to heavy traffic volumes, high speeds, narrow lane widths, and on-street parking. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) classifies Piedmont Road as a facility with “difficult conditions for bicycling.” The limited amount of right-of-way, constraints such as bridges, and insufficient dedicated funding for stand-alone bicycle projects have created an obstacle for implementation of dedicated bicycle lanes along Piedmont Road.



Existing Road Cross-Section

The existing cross-section of most of the study corridor (south of Peachtree Road) consists of three lanes in both the northbound and southbound directions. At most intersections, dedicated left-turn lanes are not provided, creating a situation in which the inside lanes are shared left-turn/through movement lanes. This creates several problems including high rear-end and side-swipe crash rates and reduced roadway capacity by almost one third of that in other parts of the corridor. As a result of the shared lanes, in recent years Piedmont Road has experienced a crash rate on average of 2.6 times higher than the state average, with almost one half of the crashes being rear-end.



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation

Between Sidney Marcus Boulevard and Lindbergh Drive, the inside travel lanes become dedicated left-turn lanes, causing confusion for unfamiliar drivers and reducing the roadway’s capacity through this very congested portion of the corridor. Since the inside lanes become exclusive left-turn lanes,



the roadway capacity for the through-moving vehicles along Piedmont Road is reduced by almost one third in this segment of roadway, creating a bottleneck that stretches in both the northbound and southbound directions along Piedmont Road.

Piedmont Road from Peachtree Road to I-85 also consists of a concrete median which has been degraded to more of a

suggestion than anything else. That is, many motorists drive over the median. Due to the relatively small parcel sizes along this southern portion of the corridor, driveways are spaced very close together. The median does little to prevent motorists from turning left into or out of these driveways, causing angle crashes.

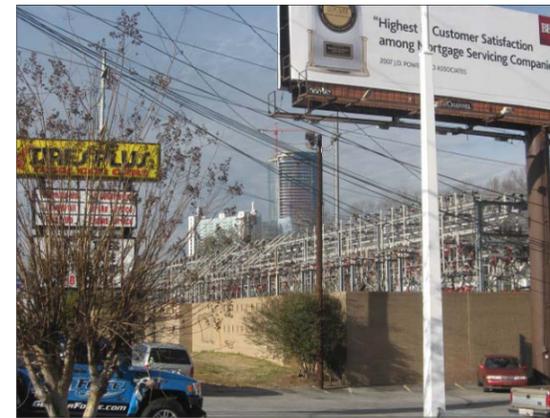
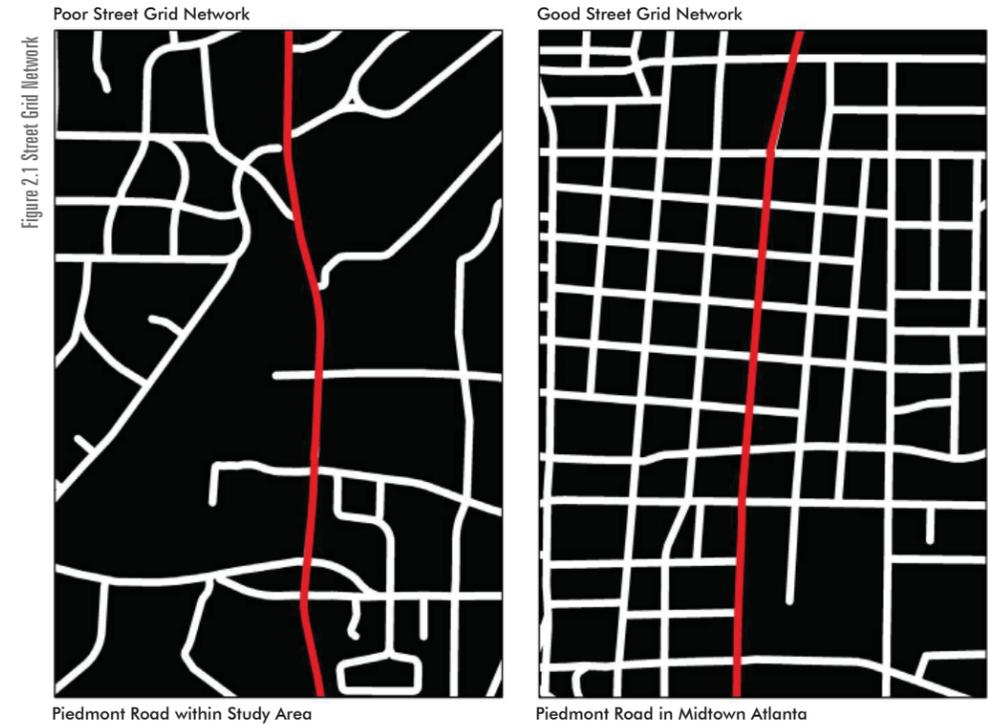
Intersection “Bottlenecks”

Several intersections create “bottlenecks” which cause heavy congestion throughout portions of the corridor. This is mainly due to the large vehicular volumes created by the lack of route alternatives as well as the increase of traffic associated with the growth in the region. Segments within the study corridor that contribute to the chronic congestion problem lie between the Roswell Road/Powers Ferry Road area to just south of the Piedmont Road/Peachtree Road intersection and on Piedmont Road from East Wesley Road/Darlington Road to just south of Lindbergh Drive. Intersection bottlenecks are located at Piedmont Road intersections with Roswell Road, Habersham Road, the Buckhead Loop, Tower Place Drive, Peachtree Road, Sidney Marcus Boulevard, Morosgo Drive, and Lindbergh Drive/Way. Conditions during the afternoon peak hours create the most congestion along the corridor, reducing the average speed along the 3.4 mile corridor to approximately ten miles per hour, compared with the posted speed limit of 35 to 40 mph.

Absence of Street Grid

The Buckhead area consists of surface, collector, and arterial roadways scattered throughout with little organization and lacking of a consistent street grid system. Well defined street grid systems provide high levels of accessibility and mobility by consisting of short block lengths that provide options for transit, short walking distances for pedestrians, low traffic volume streets for bicyclists, and alternative routes for drivers. The area’s lack of a defined street grid system contributes to the high volumes of traffic and congestion on the roadway and high traffic volumes at large intersections which are dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists. Specifically, walking in some areas of the community is extremely difficult. One example of the lack of a grid occurs in the northern portion of the study area. There is no vehicular or bicycle connection between Roswell Road and Piedmont Road from Habersham Road to Peachtree Road. This creates a block that is almost one mile long.

The below graphic shows the lack of a successful street grid network along Piedmont Road within the study area just south of Pharr Road (left) and the presence of a strong street grid network along Piedmont Road in the Midtown Atlanta area.



Aesthetics

Overhead utilities clutter the space over Piedmont Road. A large transmission line travels along the entire corridor, alternating between the east and west sides of the roadway, with poorly screened power substations located at two separate locations. In several areas, specifically between Peachtree Road and Pharr Road and again between Sidney Marcus Boulevard and I-85, private parking lots line the road frontage. These areas also lack pedestrian scale and street front retail development.

Users of the corridor are bombarded with billboards and poorly maintained retail signs. These and other aesthetic attributes reinforce the notion that Piedmont Road is more of a “work-horse” than anything else, not intended for an aesthetically pleasing experience.

piedmont area transportation study final report



Above: Recently completed Phase I Peachtree Road Complete Streets streetscape

Right: Lindbergh Center as a model of good streetscape



Several portions of the corridor, such as near the northern and southern activity centers, do have more consistent and attractive streetscape environments. However, other portions of the corridor have not received improvements during recent years. This creates a disconnected corridor and provides unattractive and difficult conditions for individuals wishing to walk between the areas with nicer aesthetics and well-kept streetscapes. This discontinuity between areas is even more noticeable to motorists who drive along the corridor.

Zoning Structure

Portions of the corridor lie within Special Public Interest (SPI) districts which provide an additional layer of zoning.

These areas are located on the east side of Piedmont Road north of Peachtree Road as well as on both sides of Piedmont Road in the Lindbergh Center area. These overlay districts allow for common goals pertaining to aesthetics, attractiveness to all user groups, and unity of appearance in these locations as development occurs. Several areas that are prime for redevelopment are currently not within overlay districts (along the west side of Piedmont Road south and north of Peachtree Road), making them vulnerable to development that does not support the common goals of the corridor.

“... We have worked with the City of Atlanta very closely throughout this process so that our recommendations can be put directly into the plan they create for the entire city. That gives Buckhead a fast start on making vital transportation improvements.”