

Athens-Clarke County and
The City of Winterville

Community Assessment

Chapter Seven:

Transportation

July 12, 2006

CHAPTER 7: TRANSPORTATION

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7.2 Introduction

Athens-Clarke County has a substantial transportation network that has developed over the past 200 years. While a detailed regional transportation plans exists for the community in the Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS) 2030 Transportation Plan, this section will provide an overview of the existing and planned network.

7.3 Road Network

7.3.1 Roads

In Athens-Clarke County there are approximately 56 centerline-miles of roads that are maintained by the Georgia Department of Transportation (state route system). The vast majority of the roads in Athens-Clarke County (91%) are locally maintained and account for 537 miles. Based on estimates developed by the Athens-Clarke County Transportation and Public Works Department, the replacement cost of these locally maintained roads is approximately \$104,556,000.

Map 7.1 Functional Classification System illustrates the functional class of routes for the Athens area. These classifications include:

- Principal Arterials – Principal arterials are intended to serve as primary routes for travel between areas of principal traffic generation and major urban activity centers.
- Minor Arterials – Minor arterials are intended to serve as primary routes for travel within and between community subareas and augment the Principal Arterial system.
- Urban Collectors – Urban collector streets are intended to serve traffic from local roads to Arterials and are public thoroughfares with a lesser degree of present or future traffic than Arterials.

7.3.2 Highways

Athens-Clarke County has a well-developed highway network; most of which has been constructed primarily since the 1950's. The primary network is based on a network of arterial routes carrying traffic from the suburban sections of the county, and surrounding counties, to the central city / UGA area. Most of these arterial routes have

been widened to four lanes or are planned to be widened in the coming years. A beltway route circles the center of the urban area, including downtown Athens. The Athens Perimeter, completed in the early 1990's, makes Athens one of only two communities in the state of Georgia with a beltway route system circling the center of the urban area.

7.3.3 Bridges

Bridge projects are treated much the same as road projects in the Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study transportation planning process. They are included in the MACORTS Long Range Transportation Study. Please see this study submitted as a Supplemental Plan. Bridge Inspection and maintenance are responsibilities of Athens-Clarke County on all non-state route roadways.

7.3.4 Connectivity

The Athens-Clarke County Zoning and Development Standards (Title 9 of the Athens-Clarke County Code of Ordinances) require the connectivity of new roadways constructed as part of a new development. No cul-de-sacs are allowed with a length in excess of 500 feet or serving more than 19 lots. This encourages the connectivity of internal streets. Multi-family developments that will generate more than 200 vehicle trips per day are required to have 2 access points to encourage connectivity with the existing road network.

7.3.5 Signalized Intersections

Signalized Intersections in Athens-Clarke County are reviewed and maintained by the Transportation and Public Works Department.

7.3.6 Signage

The Transportation and Public Works Department maintains signage of streets in Athens-Clarke County. Street names in Athens-Clarke County are reviewed against the current list of existing streets by the Athens-Clarke County Planning Department as part of the Preliminary Plat review process in order to prevent duplication or confusion between names that are too similar. Coordination with the 911 system and the U.S. Postal Service is also accomplished through this process.

7.4 Alternative Modes

Athens-Clarke County remains committed to the development of alternative modes of transportation as a means to reduce the demands on the current road network.

7.4.1 Bicycle Paths

Bicycle facilities include both on-road and off-road components in Athens-Clarke County. The on-street facilities are located along arterial and other selected corridors and are located in the right-of-way or along easements. The off-street facilities are located off the right-of-way and near residential subdivisions or natural areas.

Over the last several years, Athens-Clarke County and the University of Georgia have put substantial effort into increasing the number and connectivity of bicycle facilities in the County. Current facilities include those along Barnett Shoals Road, Research Drive, College Station Road, Riverbend Road, East Campus Road, Baxter Street, Alps Road, Oglethorpe Avenue, Epps Bridge Parkway, and the Oconee River Greenway System. Some signage reminding drivers to “Share the Road” has also been placed around Athens-Clarke County. The Athens-Clarke County Bicycle Master Plan (approved December 2001) guides the development of bicycle facilities within Athens-Clarke County. The MACORTS Transportation Plan identifies the core routes planned for a bike system as potential projects.

Please see Map 7.2 Existing and Planned Bicycle Network Improvements

7.4.2 Pedestrian Facilities

Pedestrian facilities include both on-road and off-road components. The on-street facilities are located along arterial and other selected corridors and are located in the right-of-way or along easements. The off-street facilities are located off the right-of-way and near residential subdivisions or natural areas.

The majority of the sidewalks in Athens-Clarke County are located in the rights of way adjacent to the roadways across the county. In response to the needs of the community, the governing body has approved a “sidewalk rating plan” and provided the funding to address any existing gaps in the sidewalk network. The Zoning and Development Standards require the construction of sidewalks for new subdivisions as well as for certain commercial projects.

7.4.3 Public Transportation

The Athens Transit System (ATS) is the public transportation provider in Athens-Clarke County. ATS operates nineteen buses along fourteen routes Monday through Friday from 6:15 a.m. to 7:15 p.m. These routes include North Avenue, East Athens, Beechwood/Baxter, West Broad/Atlanta Highway, West Broad/Brooklyn, Prince Avenue, Barber/Chase/Garnet Ridge, Macon Highway/Five Points, Riverbend, East Campus Road/South Milledge Avenue, Georgia Square Mall, Athens Tech, Lexington Road/Gaines School Road, College Station Road/Barnett Shoals Road.

Map 7.3 Athens Transit System illustrates the routes operated by the Athens Transit System.

Athens Transit System also operates a paratransit service known as “The Lift” for persons with disabilities. This service is operated on a one-mile radius from the fixed route, which is $\frac{1}{4}$ mile farther than the federally mandated distance. This service utilizes lift-equipped vans and offers door-to-door service. The Lift operates during the same hours as the fixed routes.

In August 2004, the Athens Transit System implemented the Section 5311 program, “The Link”. The Link consists of three types of service:

1. Demand-Response Or Route Deviation Service
Demand Response is a type of service where individual passengers can request curb-to-curb transportation from one specific location to another at a certain time. Route deviation service operates along a public right-of-way on a fixed route, but which may deviate from route occasionally in order to take a passenger to a destination or pickup from an origin, after which the service returns to a regular route.
2. Contract Or Subscription Service
Subscription service is a type of demand response service in which routes and schedules are pre-arranged to meet the travel needs of riders who sign up for the service in advance. Often these riders are clients of human service agencies, who contract with the transportation operator to provide the service on behalf of the agency. This type of service may be provided by a Section 5311 program only to the extent that it does not violate FTA Charter Bus restrictions.

3. Fixed Route, Fixed Service

Fixed route services operate along a prescribed path on a fixed route, serving pre-established stops and sometimes flag stops.

The Section 5311 program, The Link, provides assistance for the provision of public transportation services. As such, transportation services that use vehicles purchased using the Section 5311 funding or subsidized by Section 5311 operating funds must be open to the general public, and advertised as such. Section 5311 funded services may be designed to maximize use by members of the general public who are transportation – disadvantaged persons, including elderly persons and persons with disabilities. The Link is Athens-Clarke County inclusive and is available 6 days per week: Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. During the first year of service, the Link carried approximately 7,650 passengers and generated approximately \$6,247 in revenue.

7.4.3.1 Transit Ridership

Total revenue for the Athens Transit System has fluctuated during the last five year period (FY 2001 – FY2005) between \$548,586 and \$716,366. Ridership during this same period has fluctuated between 956,327 and 1,478,805. Several factors have contributed to this erratic pattern of productivity. Pass prices were increased in FY 2002. The UGA contract for service was renegotiated in FY 2003 to include faculty and staff as well as students among those who may ride the bus without purchasing a Pass. The FY 2004 and FY 2005 figures directly reflected the lack of parking on the UGA campus and the subsequent opening of three parking decks on the UGA Campus. With increased federal funding, a fare increase in FY 2005 and the opening of the Multimodal Transportation Center, it is anticipated that revenue and ridership will stabilize and will steadily increase in future years.

The Demand Response Service has experienced a steady decline from FY 2001 – FY 2005. Ridership decreased from 11,403 in FY 2001 to 9,361 in FY 2005. This decline is the result of the fact that the fixed route fleet became 100% handicapped accessible in FY 2005. More Demand Response customers now take advantage of the more economical fixed route service.

7.4.4 Areas with limited mode choices

As is commonly found, there is often a spacial mismatch between adequate transportation services and transit dependant populations. The Athens Transit System endeavors to fill some of these ‘gaps in service’ using the 5311 funding to provide “The

Link” Services. Requirements for new developments to provide pedestrian sidewalks will further extend the pedestrian system into new areas of the county. However, there are large portions of Athens-Clarke County, particularly that zoned Agricultural Residential (AR) that do not currently have the population to support any but private automobile.

7.4.5 Effectiveness in meeting community mobility needs

In late 2005, a Transit Development Plan (TDP) was completed for the Athens Transit System. This Plan evaluated the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the transit system and made recommendations regarding the future operation of the system. Recommendations included route modifications, extended service hours, use of ‘superstops’, and the possible inclusion of Park and Ride lots.

7.5 Parking

Providing adequate parking is often a challenge in urban communities. The danger is either providing too little parking, thereby increasing congestion, or having a sea of vacant parking due to misplaced developer optimism. In the Athens Central Business District, on-street parking is available as well as several surface lots, 2 downtown parking decks, 1 attended parking lot and an additional parking deck adjacent to the Classic Center and the Multimodal Transportation Center site. As the University of Georgia campus is adjacent to the Central Business District. UGA has invested heavily in parking on campus. There are five parking decks on the UGA campus and abundant surface parking lots providing approximately 20,000 parking spaces.

The most recent update to the Zoning and Development Standards adopted in 2000 reflected the community opinion that the previous parking requirements were excessive. The parking requirements were modified accordingly and incorporated into the current code. For example, general retail uses before the 2000 code required that a developer provide 1 parking space per 200 square feet of gross floor area. New standards require 1 space per 300 square feet of gross floor area. The code modifications still provide ample parking without being excessive. The maximum number of parking spaces is also established in the current ordinance.

7.5.1 Areas With Insufficient / Inadequate Parking

Lack of adequate parking has not been a general problem in Clarke County. However, with approximately 33,600 students and 9,840 employees of the University of Georgia, parking on the UGA campus is an issue. The University of Georgia has addressed this

issue in their Parking Master Plan and continues to make progress as more parking decks are built.

7.5.2 Surface Parking Facilities In Need Of Retrofitting Or Redevelopment

There are no public parking facilities identified as being in need of retrofitting or redevelopment at this time.

7.6 Railroads, Trucking, Port Facilities and Airports

7.6.1 Freight and Passenger Rail Lines

According to the Georgia Rail Freight Plan – Update 2000, prepared for the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) by Georgia Rail Consultants, the terminating commodities included coal, non-metallic mineral products, lumber/wood products, and stone/clay/glass products. Athens-Clarke County is served by two Class 1 railroads, CSX and Norfolk Southern and one Class 3 railroad, the Athens Branch Railroad.

7.6.2 Major Rail Intermodal Facilities

The State of Georgia, the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County continue to work on the development of Commuter Rail for the Athens region. The preliminary concept calls for the development of a commuter rail line between Athens and Atlanta. The federal and state governments have allocated resources to study this route along with other routes in the state.

The Georgia Rail Passenger Authority (GRPA) is currently coordinating rail planning along the corridor between Athens and Atlanta. Under the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21), \$14 million in funding was awarded to the initial planning phase of the proposed commuter rail corridor. No additional funds have been allocated to the project, however, due to a lack of political support for the Athens-to-Atlanta commuter rail corridor.

In response to the need for a transportation center to coordinate commuter rail, transit, bicycle and pedestrians, Athens-Clarke County has begun construction of the Multimodal Transportation Center (MMTC) located just east of the Central Business District. The MMTC will provide facilities for the University of Georgia and Athens Transit System as well as pedestrian/bike access. Provisions will be made to accommodate a future commuter rail facility at the MMTC site.

7.6.3 Non-rail Freight Operations

Athens-Clarke County is the cultural/economic hub for the region. As such, there are several freight terminals in Athens, including Saia (located on SR 106), Yellow Freight (located on SR 29) and Adams Motor Carrier (located on Athena Drive). Athens is also home to Allied Movers, North American, and Mayflower Moving Company. There are 2 specialized freight terminals, FedEx and UPS. Clarke County is served by several state routes that serve freight movement well.

7.6.4 Seaports

Athens-Clarke County is inland and has no harbors or ports.

7.6.5 Harbors

Athens-Clarke County is inland and has no harbors or ports.

7.6.6 Air Terminals

The Athens-Ben Epps Airport is the regional airport for the MACORTS region. It provides freight and passenger connection service to Charlotte, NC. Passenger enplanements at Athens-Ben Epps Airport for the last twelve months (2005) totaled 10,747 passengers. Airplanes entering and leaving the airport during the same period totaled 69,233. Plans are to enlarge the existing runways as well as provide for the addition and expansion of other amenities. As with all modes of transportation, an important factor to consider when expanding the aviation facilities is the compatibility with the adjacent land uses.

Map 7.4 Ben Epps Airport illustrates the Athens-Ben Epps Airport and its associated runway hazard zone. This runway hazard zone is protected through restricting the placement of certain land uses that could result in the significant loss of life in the event of an accident. The Zoning and Development Standards do so using the Airport Overlay Zone classification making such uses a Special Use requiring the approval of

the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission. An objective of the land use planning process is to limit high-density land uses from this area.

The Airport Authority completed a Master Plan Update in September 2003 outlining future improvements including runway extensions.

7.7 Transportation and Land Use Connection

7.7.1 Areas with Significant Traffic Congestion

Map 7.5 Roadway Segments Either At or Above Capacity illustrates the existing segments of roadways in the community that had volume to capacity ratios greater than 1.0 as of the year 2000. Roadway segments with volume to capacity ratios between 1.0 - 1.29 indicate that traffic conditions during peak hours are likely experiencing congestion problems. Volume to capacity ratios of 1.3 and above indicate that the corridor is likely over capacity and plans should be developed to either increase capacity or reduce demand on the route.

7.7.1.1 Roadways having 2000 volume to capacity ratios greater than 1.0

1. Atlanta Highway (SR 10 Loop to Crane Drive)
2. Chase Street (at SR 10 Loop)
3. Danielsville Road (Boley Drive to Nowhere Road)
4. Lexington Road (SR 10 Loop to Barnett Shoals Road)
5. Macon Highway (S. Milledge Avenue to SR 10 Loop)
6. Milledge Avenue (at College Station Road, at Baxter Street, at Broad Street)
7. Oconee Street (Broad Street to Poplar Street)
8. Old Hull Road (at SR 10 Loop)
9. Riverbend Road (College Station Road to S. Milledge Avenue)
10. Tallassee Road (SR 10 Loop to Vaughn Road)

An evaluation of Map 7.5 Roadway Segments Either At or Above Capacity indicates that the most critical capacity problems exist along Tallassee Road, Danielsville Road and Lexington Road.

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) currently has a transportation demand model which projects traffic conditions for the year 2030. This model uses as input the communities planned population and employment growth and the construction of projects in the MACORTS 2030 Transportation Plan. Based on currently adopted Future Land Use Map and growth projections in the currently approved

Comprehensive Plan, the following segments are expected to have capacity problems by the year 2030:

7.7.1.2 Roadways with projected (2030) volume to capacity ratios between 1.0 and 1.29

1. Atlanta Highway (Oconee County line to Old Cleveland Rd.; Alps Rd. to Market Square)
2. Baldwin St. (E. Campus Road to Williams St.)
3. Barber Street (Cleveland Ave. to Athens Ave.)
4. Barnett Shoals Rd. (Whitehall Rd. to Rockford Dr.)
5. Baxter St. (Milledge Ave. to Bloomfield St.; Newton St. to Lumpkin St.; Rocksprings St. to Paris St.)
6. Broad Street (Milledge Ave. to Finley St.; Hull Rd. to Lumpkin St.; Lumpkin St. to College Ave.)
7. Cherokee Rd. (Morningview Dr. to Beaverdam Extension)
8. College Station Rd. (River Rd. to Riverbend Rd.)
9. Commerce Rd./US 441 (Newton Bridge Rd. to Jackson County line; SR 10 Loop to Pinebluff Rd.)
10. Danielsville Rd. (Walker Dr. to Leann Dr.; SR 10 Loop to Hull Rd.)
11. Jackson St. (Broad St. to Mitchell St.)
12. Jefferson River Road (Jefferson Rd. and South Ridge Dr.)
13. Jefferson Rd. (S. Homewood Dr. to SR 10 Loop)
14. Lexington Rd. (Winterville Rd. to Gaines School Rd.)
15. Macon Highway (Milledge Ave. to Moose Club Dr.)
16. Milledge Ave. (E. Campus Dr. to Davis St.; Broad St. to Baxter St.; Springdale St. and Southview Dr.)
17. Mitchell Bridge Rd. (SR 10 Loop to Woodhaven Pkwy.)
18. North Avenue (Thomas St. to Willow St.)
19. Nowhere Rd. (Freeman Dr. to Cherokee Forest Dr.)
20. Oak St. (Poplar St. to Inglewood Dr.; Carr St. to Old Winterville Rd.)
21. Oconee St. (Broad St. to Willow St.)
22. Oglethorpe Ave. (Hawthorne Rd. to Hollie Street)
23. Old Hull Rd. (Hull Rd. to SR 10 Loop)
24. Oneta St. (N. Chase St. to Barber St.)
25. Prince Ave. (SR 10 Loop to Hawthorne Ave.)
26. Research Dr. (International Dr. and Barnett Shoals Rd.)
27. Riverbend Rd. (College Station Rd. and S. Milledge Ave.)
28. SR 10 Loop (Macon Highway to College Station Rd.; College Station Rd. to Lexington Rd.; Barnett Shoals Rd. to Peter St. (NB side); Danielsville Rd. to US 29 (EB side); Commerce Rd. to Danielsville Rd.; Newton Bridge Rd. to

- Commerce Rd.; Chase St. to Jefferson Rd.; Oglethorpe Ave. and Jefferson Rd. (WB); Oglethorpe Ave. to Atlanta Hwy.)
29. Timothy Rd. (SR 10 Loop to Autumnwood Ave.)
 30. US 29 (Hull Road to SR 10 Loop)

7.7.1.3 Roadways with a projected (2030) volume to capacity ratio of 1.30 and above

1. Atlanta Highway (Old Cleveland Rd. to SR 10 Loop)
2. Macon Highway (SR 10 Loop to S. Lumpkin St.)
3. N. Chase St. (Rowe Rd. to a point just south of Winston Dr.)
4. SR 10 Loop (Ramp from SR 10 Loop to SR 316 – SB; Eastern ramps at Timothy Rd.; Ramp at Epps Bridge Parkway – NB, WB)
5. Tallassee Rd. (Vaughn Rd. to SR 10 Loop)

Map 7.6 Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study illustrates the currently adopted 2030 Transportation Plan for the Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS). This Plan includes projects designed to add capacity to important regional routes in the community such as US 78 to Crawford and Oglethorpe County.

7.7.2 Underutilized Transportation Facilities

There are no underutilized transportation facilities in Clarke County. There are missed opportunities, such as the absence of commuter rail to Atlanta and insufficient funding for transit.