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City of South Fulton Staff:
Shayla Reed, Community Development and Regulatory Affairs Director
Marissa Jackson, Planner

ARC Staff:
Jared Lombard, Project Manager
Byron Rushing, Bicycling & Walking Program Manager
Elizabeth Sandlin, Planner
Holly Vine, Executive Assistant

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2020, the City of South Fulton partnered with the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) to conduct a pedestrian safety study along Washington Road between Roosevelt Highway and North Commerce Drive [see Map 1-1]. The study contains a detailed examination of existing conditions, including the results of a walkability audit, as well as a set of recommended improvements to the corridor.

PURPOSE + GOALS

This study comes at an important time for this community, as the construction of the new Atlanta Job Corps Center at the corner of Washington Road and Roosevelt Highway nears completion. The center will bring new visitors and temporary residents at the Center to the area, and pedestrian activity and transit ridership are expected to increase. A range of infrastructure improvements are needed to transform Washington Road into a Complete Street, ensuring that all roadway users can travel safely and comfortably, regardless of their age, ability, or transportation mode.

The primary goal of this study is to recommend specific changes to increase safety and accessibility for pedestrians along Washington Road. The recommendations are based on needs expressed by the community as well as cost and time to implement. The changes put in place here can, in the appropriate context, be applied to similar aging suburban arterials in South Fulton and across metro Atlanta.

WHAT ARE COMPLETE STREETS?

Complete Streets are multimodal roadways that provide safe and comfortable access for all users. Some Complete Streets may still prioritize one mode over others, such as a bike route or bus priority lane, while still ensuring access for all. The design of Complete Streets must be context-sensitive, prioritizing the needs of the community. Some key changes that can be brought about by Complete Street projects include improving access to destinations, lowering transportation risk, increasing mobility choice, and enhancing transit stops. ARC’s Regional Workbook for Complete Streets contains more information about how Complete Streets should be implemented in an appropriate, context-sensitive manner.
At 64 respondents, 33 live or work on or near Washington Road, and 37 travel the corridor frequently. 9 walk on Washington Road every day or multiple times a week, while 46 travel the corridor only by car.

70% describe the walking conditions on this corridor as being “awful” or having “many problems.”

90% find the walking route and landscaping to be unattractive.

87% find the corridor to have too few and poorly marked pedestrian crossings.

95% find the corridor to lack sufficient opportunities to rest or gather.

85% find that cars and trucks do not obey traffic laws or the posted speed limit along the corridor.

93% find the corridor to be too poorly lit at night.

The most requested improvements for the corridor are continuous sidewalks on both sides of the road, benches or shelters at all bus stops, and improved lighting for pedestrians.
EXISTING CONDITIONS

Understanding current land use and transportation conditions is crucial to providing recommendations for the community in South Fulton. In addition to existing conditions, this chapter discusses two coming developments that will impact the recommendations at the end of this report.

LAND USE CONDITIONS

While this study focuses on infrastructure recommendations for the roadway, understanding surrounding land uses is key because they often drive transportation choices. It is important to identify the types of trip origins and destinations that exist along the corridor, as well as opportunities for land use changes in the future.

EXISTING LAND USES

This segment of Washington Road is characterized in large part by multi-family housing, religious institutions, and undeveloped properties (see Map 2-1). There are some single-family homes in the area, but most are not on Washington Road. In 2019, just over 27% of housing units in the census tract that contains the study area were vacant. The northern and southern ends of the study corridor have some commercial and industrial land uses, but the majority of destinations currently on this segment of Washington Road are residential and religious.

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

The construction of the new Atlanta Jobs Corps Center at the southern end of Washington Road is expected to bring temporary residents and visitors to the area, increasing demand for a Complete Street that allows all users to travel safely. There will be new employees traveling the corridor, as well as students living on-site during their training. The redevelopment of this parcel also provides an opportunity to add sidewalks, bus stop improvements, and landscaping elements around the property, increasing accessibility to the site.

Figure 2-1: Pedestrian crossing Washington Road in front of Vesta Gardens Apartments.

1 American Community Survey, Esri Business Analyst Online (Census Tract 131210113.06)
EXISTING TRANSPORTATION CONDITIONS

TRANSIT
MARTA bus routes 84 and 181 both travel along this segment of Washington Road. Route 84 travels between Camp Creek Marketplace, located just outside I-285, and the East Point MARTA station. Route 181 connects the Cities of Fairburn, Union City, and East Point, also stopping at the East Point MARTA station. The routes provide connections to a wide range of significant destinations, including commercial developments, film studios, industrial parks, and residential neighborhoods. However, as is discussed in the Audit Results section below, the bus stops on Washington Road lack infrastructure to make them safe and comfortable.

TRAFFIC
The annual average daily traffic (AADT) counts on the study corridor have not changed significantly in the past decade. As depicted in the graph below, the lowest AADT count was 8,600 in 2012, mirroring national travel trends after the 2008 economic recession. Since that year, the AADT count on this segment of Washington Road has gradually risen to 10,200 in 2018. This is a low traffic level for a four-lane minor arterial road and provides an opportunity to explore reconfiguring the roadway to give more space for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.

SAFETY
Between 2014 and 2018, there were 343 crashes in this area, one of which involved a pedestrian. The pedestrian was hit by a motorcyclist in 2014 as she was crossing the road in front of an apartment complex (see Map 2-2). The crash resulted in injuries, but no fatalities. The description of the crash notes that there is no crosswalk present:

“Pedestrian 1 was attempting to cross Washington Rd in front of 4590 Washington Rd. There is no crosswalk in front of 4590 Washington Rd. Pedestrian 1 was in the #2 Southbound lane on Washington Rd, causing Driver 2 two strike her.”

While the corridor does not have a particularly high pedestrian crash rate, this is in large part due to low numbers of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. However, the new Atlanta Job Corps Center is expected to increase transit ridership and pedestrian activity in the area, and this necessitates these infrastructure improvements. Particularly in areas with less frequent walking and bicycling, crash histories may not indicate potential future crash sites. Furthermore, safety improvements should not be made only after a crash has already occurred. Solutions limited to past crash sites, such as the installation of a single crosswalk, are unlikely to be effective unless combined with a systemic, corridor-wide approach.

A Complete Streets approach, which addresses a range of safety concerns along a corridor, can improve the experience for all roadway users and drive an increase in pedestrian activity and transit ridership. Corridors like Washington Road, which have limited safety measures in place but are experiencing new development, should be prioritized for Complete Streets.

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT
The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) plans to construct a roundabout at the intersection of Washington Road and Roosevelt Highway. The plans include improvements for pedestrians, such as sidewalks and marked crossings, which mirror similar recommendations in this report. In addition to improving traffic flow, roundabouts provide safety improvements for all roadway users, furthering the goal of Complete Streets.
WALKABILITY AUDIT

PROCESS

In February 2020, ARC staff conducted a walkability audit of this segment of Washington Road using Esri’s ArcGIS Survey123 app (see Appendix A for description and full text of survey). As depicted in Figure 3-1, the survey asks users to stop and answer a list of questions at specific points along the corridor — to report a particular issue, such as an obstacle blocking the sidewalk, to describe an intersection/mid-block crossing or a transit stop, and to detail a cross-section, which should be done every 500 feet, regardless of other stops made. Once a user selects one of these choices, they are presented with a set of questions that help to build a picture of existing conditions at that point.

RESULTS

The maps on the following pages reflect the results of the audit, offering a more detailed look at those conditions and the experience of being a pedestrian on Washington Road.

Based on notes and photos from the audit, a Sidewalk Condition map (3-1) was created. Segments of existing sidewalk are classified as being in good condition, having some cracks, or having serious deterioration and/or impediments.

For the most part, the eastern side of Washington Road lacks a sidewalk of any kind. While much of the existing sidewalk itself is classified as being in good condition, having some cracks, or having serious deterioration and/or impediments.

The Problems Identified map (3-2) depicts specific issues found along the corridor:

- fire hydrants blocking the sidewalk,
- insufficient drainage,
- lack of curb cuts,
- lack of or fading crosswalks at intersections, and
- lack of a pedestrian countdown timer at a signalized intersection.

There are three fire hydrants on the west side of Washington Road that partially block the sidewalk, making it difficult for those with limited mobility to pass.

The sidewalk across from The Christian Plaza is at a lower point than its surroundings, and heavy rains and insufficient drainage infrastructure cause mud to cover multiple feet of the walkway.

There are also two points on the southern end of the corridor that lack curb cuts, making this area inaccessible.

Only one intersection on this corridor has a crosswalk, which is located at North Commerce Drive and is faded, making it more difficult for drivers to see. This intersection, which is one of two signalized intersections on the corridor, also lacks a pedestrian countdown timer and does not provide sufficient time for pedestrians to cross. There are no marked mid-block crossings along this corridor, which causes pedestrians to have to walk up to a mile north to the only crosswalk in order to cross safely.

The audit includes questions about the location and condition of transit stops along the corridor, which are represented on the Transit Stop Evaluation map (3-3). There are nine bus stops between Roosevelt Highway and North Commerce Drive, serviced by MARTA routes 84 and 181. Three of the stops have some amount of information about the routes, whether just the number or a map and schedule. Another three stops have seating, one of which includes a bus shelter, in good condition. Four of the stops are located on a sidewalk, but two of those are missing curb cuts at nearby intersections.

Safety and accessibility improvements for pedestrians, such as curb cuts, lighting, and better sidewalks, will improve the experience for transit users as well.

These results highlight issues facing pedestrians and transit users along Washington Road. Along with the results of the community survey and the summaries of existing land use and transportation conditions, these observations help to form the recommendations at the end of this report.
MAP 3-1: SIDEWALK CONDITIONS

Based on results from walking audit conducted on 2.19.2020

- Good sidewalk condition
- Some cracks in sidewalk
- Significant deterioration and/or impediments in sidewalk
- No sidewalk present

MAP 3-2: PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

Based on results from walking audit conducted on 2.19.2020

- Fire hydrant blocking sidewalk
- Insufficient drainage
- No curb cut
- No or faded crosswalk
- No pedestrian countdown timer
The relatively high levels of truck traffic on Washington Road pose a concern to pedestrians both in terms of safety and comfort.

The lack of marked crossings, both mid-block and at intersections, make it difficult for pedestrians and transit users to safely access their destinations.

The inconsistencies in both quality and presence of sidewalks along the corridor result in great issues of accessibility, particularly for those with limited mobility.

The current traffic volume on Washington Road provides an opportunity to consider alternate street concepts, such as a road diet, that make traveling the corridor safer for all.

There are a number of undeveloped parcels along the corridor that offer opportunities for new development, which can help to improve the pedestrian experience.

The two MARTA bus routes that travel on Washington Road, connecting residential neighborhoods, commercial developments, and employment centers to the East Point MARTA station, expand mobility options for those walking or bicycling on the corridor.

New developments and construction projects bring an opportunity to expand on changes underway at the Roosevelt Highway intersection.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a review of existing conditions, upcoming developments, and feedback from the community, the following improvements are the highest priority recommendations for Washington Road.

Continuous sidewalks should be installed on both sides of the street. These should be free of obstructions, such as fire hydrants, and must have curb cuts at all intersections and driveways. Given the posted speed limit for four lanes of traffic, the sidewalks should be at least 6’ wide with a 3’ buffer.

Crosswalks and signalized crossings should be added at certain points along the corridor. These should be placed strategically to provide connections between destinations such as bus stops, apartment complexes, or churches. Where there is greater demand for a safe crossing, a pedestrian hybrid beacon may be installed.

Lighting should be upgraded to ensure the safety and comfort of pedestrians. When lighting is designed to be at a scale appropriate for pedestrians, it helps ensure visibility of the most vulnerable roadway users. This is particularly important along transit corridors, where pedestrian activity is frequent even when natural light is low.

Benches or shelters should be installed at all bus stops along Washington Road. While ridership data should determine where shelters are most appropriate, some seating, along with features such as route information signage and trash receptacles, should be available at all transit stops.

Beyond these initial improvements, there are a range of additional changes that can be made to the corridor. Further consideration will be required to determine which projects are most appropriate given potential changes in land use or transportation conditions. Future commercial development or transit route changes, for example, may dictate demand for specific infrastructure improvements. Redevelopment offers an opportunity to increase density and creates demand for greater mode choice.

A road diet may be appropriate at some point, giving space for the addition of separated bicycle lanes or a bus-only lane. At midblock crossings, pedestrian crossing islands act as a refuge for pedestrians and lower the risk of motor vehicle crashes. Public art and creative placemaking initiatives, as well as enhanced landscaping, can create a more comfortable and enjoyable walking corridor. Future plans for the corridor and surrounding area will determine which of these recommendations are most appropriate for Washington Road, and each of these recommendations would require further study.

The renderings on the following pages demonstrate the potential implementation of the priority recommendations described above. These are not funded plans for these locations, but rather offer a view of what Washington Road might become once the recommendations here are implemented. Map 5-1 shows the locations of each of the four renderings.
The rendering above illustrates the upcoming changes at the southern end of Washington Road through the construction of the roundabout and the completion of the Atlanta Job Corps Center.
This rendering shows the intersection of Washington Road and Hathcock Road, offering a possible view of improvements that can be made at this destination along the corridor.
This rendering depicts Washington Road at the Vesta Garden Apartments, where a safe crossing to the transit stop is needed.
The rendering above shows the corridor from above, looking north at the intersection of Washington Road and Spring Street. This highlights how the recommended improvements together can create a safer, more comfortable walking experience along the entire corridor.
MOVING FORWARD

Implementation is key for any plan and project. The action steps outlined below will assist the City of South Fulton in implementing the recommendations described above.

- Repaint existing faded crosswalks along the corridor.
- Examine where new crosswalks should be installed, and develop a plan to install them.
- Examine funding opportunities, such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) or Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds, for sidewalk construction on the eastern side of the corridor.
- Repair sidewalks where significant deterioration has occurred and examine options to address impediments.
- Install lighting at a scale appropriate for pedestrians.
- Begin discussions with MARTA about the installation of bus shelters to serve the Atlanta Job Corps Center and other high-use stops.
- Work with GDOT on placemaking elements to be incorporated at the roundabout.
- Work with the City of East Point on sidewalk and crossing improvements at the intersection of Commerce Drive and Washington Road.

Washington Road is a pilot Complete Streets project in the City of South Fulton that will experience transformative developments in the near future. Other corridors within the City can be examined with the same methodology by City staff or community organizations. Ensuring robust data collection on sidewalk conditions within the City is key to providing safe, walkable communities for residents and visitors in South Fulton.
APPENDIX A
Walkability Audit Survey Text

Please stop and answer the relevant questions below when there is a specific problem to report, you arrive at an intersection/mid-block crossing or transit stop, or to detail a cross-section, which should be done every 500 feet, regardless of other stops made. What type of entry is this?

A. Problem: Answer the following questions related to the identified problem.
   1. Take a clear photo of the problem.
   2. What type of problem is this?
      a. Sidewalks
      b. Obstructions
      c. Crossings
      d. Lighting
      e. Transit
      f. Appearance
      g. Other
      i. Please describe.
   3. Please describe the problem.

B. Intersection: Answer the following questions related to this intersection or mid-block crossing.
   1. Take a clear photo of the intersection or crossing.
   2. Is there a signal?
      a. Yes
      i. Estimate the time allowed for pedestrians to cross in seconds.
      ii. Are there pedestrian countdown timers at this signal?
          1. Yes
          2. No
      b. No
   3. Are there marked crosswalks?
      a. On all segments
      i. Rate the condition of the crosswalks.
          1. Good condition
          2. Some cracks in pavement and/or faded paint
          3. Significant cracks and faded paint
      b. Only some segments
      i. Rate the condition of the crosswalks.
          1. Good condition
          2. Some cracks in pavement and/or faded paint
          3. Significant cracks and faded paint
      c. None
   4. Are there curb cuts on all corners?
      a. Yes
      i. Are curb cuts textured or marked for those with visual impairments?
          1. Yes
          2. No
      b. No
   5. Is there a median or pedestrian refuge island?
      a. Yes
      b. No
6. Are pedestrians visible to drivers and bicyclists approaching the crossing?
   a. Yes
   b. No
      i. Why can’t drivers or bicyclists easily see pedestrians?
      ii. Try to capture the impediment to visibility in a photo.

C. Transit: Answer the following questions related to this transit stop.
   1. Take a clear photo of the transit stop.
   2. Are the routes or wayfinding listed at the stop?
      a. Yes
      b. No
   3. List the route[s] that stop here.
   4. Is there a sidewalk at the stop?
      a. Yes
      b. No
   5. Is there a shelter?
      a. Yes
         i. Does the shelter block movement on the sidewalk [if present]?
            1. Yes
            2. No
         ii. Is the shelter well-maintained?
            1. Yes
            2. No
         iii. Take a picture of the shelter.
      b. No
   6. Is there seating?
      a. Yes
         i. Does the seating block movement on the sidewalk [if present]?
            1. Yes
            2. No
         ii. Is the seating well-maintained?
            1. Yes
            2. No
         iii. Take a picture of the seating.
      b. No
   7. How far away in feet is the nearest marked crossing?

D. Cross-section: Answer the following questions related to this 500-foot cross-section.
   1. Take a photo of the cross-section.
   2. Are sidewalks in any condition present?
      a. Yes
         i. Are the sidewalks continuous?
            1. Yes
            2. No
         ii. Are the sidewalks present on both sides of the street?
            1. Yes
            2. No
         iii. How wide in inches is the sidewalk?
            1. 4-15
            2. 15-26
            3. 26-37
            4. 37-48
5. 48-60
iv. Is there a buffer [typically greenspace] between the sidewalk and the road?
   1. Yes
   a. How wide in inches is the buffer?
   2. No
v. Rate the condition of the sidewalk since your last cross-section stop.
   1. Good condition
   2. Some cracks
   3. Significant cracks and impediments
vi. Are there any permanent or temporary obstructions?
   1. Yes
      a. Describe the obstruction.
      b. If reasonable, take a picture of the obstruction.
   2. No
vii. How many driveways have there been since your last cross-section stop?
viii. Are driveways and aprons accommodating to pedestrians? (i.e. narrow turning radii, level crossing, clear sightlines, etc.)
   1. Yes
   2. No

b. No
3. How many lanes are there at this point in the road?
4. What is the posted speed limit?
5. What is the adjacent land use?
   a. Commercial
   b. Single-family residential
   c. Multi-family residential
   d. Industrial
   e. Institutional
   f. Vacant
   g. Other
      i. Please describe.
6. Are adjacent buildings accessible by pedestrians?
   a. Yes
   b. No
      i. Please describe any existing barriers to pedestrian accessibility.
7. Does lighting ensure visibility of pedestrians at night?
   a. Yes
   b. No
8. Are there trees or other shade-providing elements?
   a. Yes
   b. No
9. Is this a comfortable place to walk?
   a. Yes
      i. Please describe why it is comfortable to walk here.
   b. No
      i. Please describe why it is not comfortable to walk here.