

## CHAPTER FOUR – EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing conditions in North Georgia Bike and Pedestrian region include both existing patterns of walking and bicycling and existing physical improvements and programs that support these activities. Bicycle facilities in North Georgia range from established biking roads and paths to serious gaps in connections between communities. The same can be said of pedestrian conditions. While the North Georgia area has several walkable downtowns and neighborhoods, pedestrians must still negotiate streets with sub-standard sidewalks or without sidewalks, and try and cross busy streets with limited protection. One aspect of existing conditions that is difficult to measure but widely identified by the public is the general attitude of people toward bicyclists and pedestrians. Numerous public comments were heard about the lack of courtesy between people using the same roadway, whether they are on foot, bicycle, or car. There are many possible reasons for this and one could speculate that this is a product of increased traffic congestion in the North Georgia region.

### Commuting Statistics

Bicycle and pedestrian usage is difficult to determine in the North Georgia region. U.S. Census journey-to-work data is available and is the most comprehensive measurement of travel to work. However, its weakness is that it measures only the primary mode of travel to work and does not take into account walking and bicycling secondary trips that are not work related.

There are currently no other sources for evaluating bicycle and pedestrian usage in the North Georgia region. Other possible sources include surveys and questionnaires completed as part of transportation plans and actual counts conducted by local agencies.

The following table shows the reported means of commuting to work in the five county North Georgia bicycling and pedestrian planning region as reported on the 1980, 1990, and 2000 U.S. Census. As one might expect in 2000 U.S. Census, of the estimated 85,784 people commuting to work in the North Georgia region, the overwhelming majority report commuting to work by a motor vehicle (82,270 people or 95.9%). This category includes car, truck, or van (drove alone and carpoled) and public transportation. Only 1,158 or 1.3% biked or walked to worked in the entire North Georgia Region. However, this 1.3% is still more than double the number of people who report taking public transportation (including taxis) to work (431 people or 0.5%).

COMMUTING TO WORK IN NORTH GEORGIA (Workers 16 years and over)						
Subject	Number			Percent	Percent Change	
	1980	1990	2000	2000	1980-1990	1990-2000
Car, truck, or van - drove alone	37,978	53,623	66,396	77.4%	41.2%	23.8%
Car, truck, or van - carpooled	11,782	12,784	15,443	18.0%	8.5%	20.8%
Public transportation (including taxicab)	303	182	431	0.5%	-39.9%	136.8%
Walked	1,299	943	1,053	1.2%	-27.4%	11.7%
Bicycled	NA	52	105	0.1%	NA	101.9%
Other Means	609	454	625	0.7%	-16.9%	44.3%
Worked at home	691	1,281	1,731	2.0%	85.4%	35.1%
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	19	20	25	(X)	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	53,489	69,481	85,784	100.0%	29.9%	23.5%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980, 1990, & 2000

The above chart also shows the trends for the last twenty years for walking and biking to work in the North Georgia region. The number of people walking to work decreased from 1,299 to 943 between the years 1980 to 1990, but then increased again to 1,053 people in 2000. Although there is no biking information in 1980, the number of people biking to work increased from 52 to 105 from the years 1990 to 2000. This increase is more than double over the decade. This data seems to indicate trends that once losing popularity, biking and walking to work are becoming more popular means of commuting to work. However, biking and walking still remain a small part of the overall commuting habits for the region.

The following table shows the reported means of commuting to work by county in the North Georgia bicycling and pedestrian planning region as reported on the 2000 U.S. Census. Whitfield County reports having the most people walking and biking to work (51 biking and 638 walking to work). However, they tie with Gilmer County in the percentage of their commuters biking and walking to work (1.8% for both counties report biking and walking to work). They are followed closely by Fannin County who reported having 1.4% of its commuters biking and walking to work. All three of these counties have a much higher percentage of its workforce biking and walking to work than either Murray (0.5%) or Pickens (0.7%) counties. This is mostly due to the location of low skill jobs in the cities of Dalton (Whitfield County), Ellijay (Gilmer County), and Blue Ridge (Fannin County) in close proximity of affordable housing in these cities.

<b>COMMUTING TO WORK BY COUNTY IN NORTH GEORGIA (Workers 16 years and over)</b>					
<b>Subject</b>	<b>County</b>				
	<b>Fannin</b>	<b>Gilmer</b>	<b>Murray</b>	<b>Pickens</b>	<b>Whitfield</b>
Car, truck, or van:	7,646	9,495	16,977	10,677	37,044
Public transportation	26	103	39	46	217
Motorcycle	0	28	8	2	15
Bicycle	5	35	9	5	51
Walked	109	151	77	78	638
Other means	61	68	92	81	270
Worked at home	258	333	239	227	674
Total	8,105	10,213	17,441	11,116	38,909
<b>Percentage Biking and Walking</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000

### Bicycle/Pedestrian Crash Statistics

As indicated, walking and bicycling can be dangerous, especially when facilities such as sidewalks, safe street crossings and bicycle facilities are not present. Although walking and bicycling activities are currently done on a limited basis in North Georgia, there have been a number of reported accidents in recent years. Based upon data provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation, twenty three accidents involving either a bicyclist or a pedestrian were reported in the region between the years 2000 through 2002. Of those, 18 were reported for Whitfield County (the largest county), with 16 accidents involving a bicycle and two involving pedestrians. One of these accidents resulted in a fatality. Only one accident involving a bicycle was reported for Gilmer County. Two accidents were reported in Murray County with one involving a bicycle and the other a pedestrian. Two accidents were also reported in Pickens County with one involving a bicycle and the other a pedestrian, which resulted in a fatality. There were no accidents reported in Fannin County.

## Regional Patterns of Development

The majority of the North Georgia region is rural land and land in conservation. The North Georgia region contains a land area of 1,086,590 acres. Of this total, 84,940 acres (7.82%) are developed, 774,490 (71.28%) acres are considered rural, and 227,121 acres (20.9%) are in conservation (see the following Regional Land Use Analysis Table).

REGIONAL LAND USE ANALYSIS							
County	Total Land Area (Acres)	Developed (Acres)	% of Total Land Area	Rural	% of Total Land Area	Conservation	% of Total Land Area
Fannin	250,964	11,482	4.58%	134,149	53.45%	105,333	41.97%
Gilmer	277,288	14,156	5.11%	208,333	75.13%	54,799	19.76%
Murray	222,210	22,518	10.13%	146,295	65.84%	53,397	24.03%
Pickens	149,585	12,290	8.22%	135,866	90.83%	1,429	0.96%
Whitfield	186,543	24,534	13.15%	149,847	80.33%	12,163	6.52%
Region	1,086,590	84,980	7.82%	774,490	71.28%	227,121	20.90%

Source: North Georgia RDC, 2003. "Developed" consists of significant concentrations of land areas where urban services are already provided. "Rural" consists of areas currently not provided urban services, and areas not expected to require the provision of urban services in the future. The "conservation" category consists of lands currently preserved from development, and areas expected to be preserved in the future.

Developed areas are defined as significant concentrations of land areas where urban services are already provided. Within the region, Whitfield County is the most developed and contains significant urban areas. Murray County is the only other county in the planning area with more than 10 percent developed land. Fannin County has the least amount of developed areas (4.58%), which are contained primarily within a few small cities. Gilmer County has just over 5% to its total land areas in developed land.

According to regional population and land use projections, the region will become significantly more urbanized in the future with an additional 9.17% of the land area allocated to the "developing" category ("developing" consists of areas that will become more intensely developed and will require the provision of new or extended urban services during the planning period). This is more than the 7.82% already designated as "developed". This will increase the need for bike and pedestrian travel and likely the interest among the people of the region in alternative forms of travel.

Rural areas consist of areas, which may have some development, such as very low-density residential or agricultural activities but have not yet been provided a high level of urban services. Within the region, Pickens County is the only county with more than 90 percent of

their land area in the rural category. However, all the counties have more than 50 percent of the land in this category.

The bulk of land utilized for conservation purposes is contained within the Chattahoochee National Forest area. Fannin County contains the largest percentage of its land area within the conservation category at 41.97 percent followed by Murray County at 24.03 %, and Gilmer County at 19.76%. Most of the land in conversation is land in very steep slopes, which is difficult for either bike or pedestrian travel.

Development patterns are significant because they correlate with nonmotorized transportation facilities. Densely developed communities are more reliant on pedestrian and bicycle transportation and can justify the cost of facilities. In dense, mixed-use developments, for instance, residents may find driving unnecessary, while in more typical suburban subdivisions, they will need to use an automobile to reach most destinations. Developed areas make the most sense for practical bike and pedestrian travel to reach employment centers and other services. However, without connected facilities, urban areas can make for very difficult and dangerous bike and pedestrian travel. Rural areas reduce bike, pedestrian, and motor vehicle conflicts but there are less “practical” reasons for bike and pedestrian in these areas. It is worth noting that these rural and conservation areas are the preferred areas for the recreational bicyclists; many of which drive to these areas from developed areas to enjoy the scenic vistas and less road competition with motorists. Often these bicyclists come from highly urbanized areas as far as Chattanooga and Atlanta. However, these outings do not reduce traffic congestion and can contribute to it.

One of the biggest economic influences for development in the region is the carpet industry. The carpet industry, which originated in Dalton and Whitfield County during the late 1950s, has grown significantly over the last three and a half decades. Continual expansion of manufacturing, distribution and support industries has occurred not only in Dalton and Whitfield County, but also throughout many adjoining counties like Murray County in the region. The ever-growing employment opportunities have led to significant residential growth throughout the area. The carpet industry is increasingly consolidating its headquarters and manufacturing facilities in North and Northwest Georgia, and unlike other textile industries (apparel, etc.); which have sought off-shore locations for cheaper labor, it is expected to remain in the area in the future. Although affected by cyclical economic recessions, the industry continues to experience steady but moderate growth, and therefore, will continue to be a stimulus for growth and development in the region. This growth pattern has also provided concentrated employment areas in a fairly close proximity to housing. Some of this segment of the population is using bike and pedestrian travel for economic reasons to reach employment centers. This need is likely to continue in the future. Increasing bike and pedestrian facilities in the area will likely accelerate the use of these modes of transportation.

Interstate 75, which was completed in the 1960's and 1970's continues to be a predominant factor influencing land use patterns in Whitfield County. This Interstate greatly increased accessibility between relatively remote rural areas of Whitfield County and the Chattanooga and Atlanta Metropolitan Areas, which has also caused portions of the county to become "bedroom" communities. The Interstate has also stimulated substantial new commercial and industrial development at various access nodes along their entire length throughout the

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region.

Completion of Interstate 575/Appalachian Development Highway (SR 515) in the early 1980s has also influenced development patterns in Pickens, Gilmer and Fannin Counties. Located in mountainous areas, the new highway greatly improved accessibility between these counties and the Atlanta Metropolitan Region thus improving opportunities for tourism, second home or vacation home development and business and industrial development. A considerable amount of second home/vacation home development has occurred in all three counties, which will likely continue in the future. In addition to the above economic development activity, Pickens County is also beginning to experience the "bedroom community" phenomenon of other suburban counties of the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. As transportation improvements are continually made in the North Atlanta Metro area (such as the proposed Outer Perimeter Highway and Commuter Rail to Canton), this "bedroom community" phenomenon will become more evident in the future. Suburban areas generally are not conducive to bike and pedestrian travel. Increases in this type of development will present more challenges to the bike and pedestrian traveler and commutes to work are generally too long for practical bike and pedestrian travel.

New development patterns can affect roadway design. Arterial streets were primarily designed to move rising volumes of motor vehicles with little accommodation for bicyclists and pedestrians. Incremental development along many of the North Georgia arterials and collectors, with multiple access points for automobiles, resulted in inconvenient and unsafe bicycle and pedestrian linkages. In short, transportation policy was geared more towards economic development than multimodal transportation.

## **Regional Transit Systems**

All five counties have Federal Transit Administration 5311 money for public transportation. Through a Federal Transit Administration 5311 grant, they operate demand-response and route-deviation transportation systems. Service is generally provided Monday through Friday between 6:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and is available to residents for various trip purposes, including medical, nutrition, shopping, education, recreation, etc. This transit services picks people up at their homes and takes them to their desired locations. As such, it does not need any bike or pedestrian connection. Hence, the buses are not equipped with bike racks and none would be needed with this type of system. The County's 5311 program serves the disadvantaged populations, which is the same segment of the population currently biking and walking for mobility. However, bike and walking would provide these people more freedom and they would not have to wait for their transportation.

The City of Dalton Multimodal Transportation Study, completed in January 2003, indicated that fixed-route public transit might be feasible in Whitfield County, particularly in the more densely developed corridors. The City of Dalton has a high concentration of two groups that are typically identified as needing or choosing public transit service – Hispanic and elderly residents. Of the City of Dalton's total population of 27,912, 40% or 11,219 persons are Hispanic and 11% or 3,202 are elderly. Other transit feasibility studies are in the works for Whitfield County and

should be completed by June 30, 2005. If fixed route public transit is instituted in the City of Dalton, bike racks should be placed on the buses and the pedestrian facilities around bus stop should be improved to help serve the most people possible.

### **Challenges that the Regional Land Character Present to Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel (Safety Concerns)**

Breaks in elevation are very common in the North Georgia area along the side of highlands and faces of the ridges. As natural barriers, there are limitations to the formal spread of development and to the circulation of traffic (including bike and pedestrian). These barriers are sometimes positives of the region to mark neighborhoods or to buffer conflicting land uses. As important features, they give character and visual impact to the landscape, which should be taken into consideration in the design of general public planning and in private project layout. The slopes themselves are high in open space potential, particularly since they are typically related to water features and woodlands.

There are a large number of rivers and streams throughout the region and many bridges across them. Many of these bridges are narrow and have little or no shoulder making it difficult for the bicyclist or walker to cross without getting into traffic.

In addition to bridges, which cause dangerous road narrowing for bicyclist and pedestrians, the areas steep slopes can also create narrow roads and road areas in the region. Again, in these areas of steep slopes many times there is little or no shoulder forcing the bicyclist and pedestrian out in the car travel lanes. This situation is not only unsafe for these travelers but causes frustration for motorist if they have to slow down for oncoming traffic to pass the bike and foot travelers safely. With the steep slopes there are also many curves in the roads. These curves can make passing bicyclists especially difficult and sometimes the motorists may have to wait what seems like a very long time, which also breeds animosity from the motorists towards the bicyclist. Many motorist will decide not to wait and they try to squeeze passed sometimes forcing the bicyclist off the road. This is not only very dangerous but also creates animosity from the bicyclist towards the motorists. Lastly, the curvy roads in the mountain areas are dangerous because many times the motorists does not know there is a bike in their lane while coming around a curve until they are on top of the bicyclist.

### **Existing Bicycle Facilities**

In the 1994 report *Selecting Roadway Design Treatments to Accommodate Bicyclists*, the Federal Highway Administration classified bicyclists in three categories to assist in the design of facilities:

**Group A - Advanced Bicyclist:** experienced riders who can operate under most traffic conditions. Experienced bicyclists are best served by direct access to destinations usually via the existing street and highway systems, the opportunity to operate at maximum speed with minimum delays, and sufficient operating space on the roadway or shoulder to reduce the need for either the bicyclist or the motor vehicle operator to change position when passing.

**Group B - Basic Bicyclist:** casual or new adult and teenage riders who are less confident of their ability to operate in traffic without provisions for bicycles. The basic bicyclist prefers comfortable access to destinations, preferably by a direct route, using either low-speed, low traffic-volume streets or designated bicycle facilities and well-defined separation of bicycles and motor vehicles on arterial and collector streets or separated bike paths.

**Group C - Children:** pre-teen riders whose roadway use is initially monitored by adults. They prefer access to key destinations surrounding residential areas, including schools, recreation facilities, shopping, residential streets with low motor vehicle speed limits and volumes, and well-defined separation of bicycles and motor vehicles along streets or separated bike paths.

Typically, bicycle facilities include:

***Paved Shoulders:*** Commonly associated with *Class III Bikeways*, paved roadway shoulders are clearance or safety areas along a roadway. These are typically found along rural roadways where bicycle travel is common. Shoulders may be designated as bicycle facilities by signing and marking them for preferential use.



***Wide Curb Lanes:*** Commonly associated with *Class III Bikeways*, wide curb lanes are traffic lanes greater than twelve (12) feet wide. These lanes provide greater room for maneuvering, increasing the lateral distance between motorists and bicyclists. In many cases where there is a wide curb lane, motorists will not need to change lanes to pass a bicyclist.



***Bicycle Lanes:*** Commonly referred to as *Class II Bikeway*, bicycle lanes are designated sections of a roadway that are signed, striped, and marked exclusively for bicycle use. Bicycle lanes are typically found in large urban areas where



significant bicycle demand is desired or expected on arterial streets and roadways.

**Bicycle Paths:** Commonly referred to as *Class I Bikeway*, bicycle paths are off-street facilities used exclusively by bicycles. They are located within the right-of-way of parallel roadways, are ideal for less experienced bicyclists and provide enjoyable recreational opportunities as well as desirable commuter routes.

**Shared Use (Multi-Use) Path:** Commonly referred to as *Class I Bikeway*, a shared use paths is a multipurpose facility, which is physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space or barrier. Shared use paths can provide recreational opportunities, or in some cases, can serve as a direct commute route if cross flow by motor vehicles is minimized.



**Bicycle Parking:** Bicycle Parking is a dedicated area specifically suited for storing and locking a bicycle. Bicycle parking areas are usually required by large city Land Development Code.

## GDOT State Bicycle Routes

There are two GDOT State Bicycle Routes that travel through the region, State Route 35 – March to the Sea and State Route 90 – Mountain Crossing. Designation as State Bike Routes means that as road improvements occur, signage designating them as bike route will be installed and bike lanes and other facilities will be added in areas as needed for safe bicycle travel.

### *State Route 35 – March to the Sea*

State Bike Route 35 - March to the Sea only serves Whitfield County in the North Georgia. It enters Whitfield County from the north on US 41 & 76 and exits on Lower Mill Creek Road (see below chart for full directions). The whole segment in the region is 11.7 miles in length. The only facilities put into place to date in the region are short segments of bike lanes (1/4 mile on each side of the road) and a few signs at Exit 341 in Tunnel Hill. These facilities were put into place when improvements were made to that interchange. These facilities do not connect to any other facilities and likely get used very little.

#### State Route 35 – March to the Sea Corridor Descriptions in the North Georgia Planning Area

County	Facility	Distance	Reference Point	Direction	Community
Whitfield	US41/76/GA3	1.7	GA201 Intersects to left	Continue straight	Tunnel Hill
Whitfield	US41/76/GA3	2.7	GA 201 Intersects to right	Turn right	
Whitfield	GA201	2.1	Utility Rd. (CR343/678)	Turn left	Mt. Vernon
Whitfield	Utility Rd. (CR343)	0.2	Rattlesnake Rd. (CR355) bears to left	Continue straight	
Whitfield	Utility Rd. (CR343)	0.7	Utility Road bears to right (CR343)	Bear right	
Whitfield	Utility Rd. (CR343)	2.2	Old Morris Rd. bears to left (CR349)	Bear left	
Whitfield	Old Morris Rd. (CR349)	2.0	Mill Creek Rd./Mountain Crossing Route	Continue straight	
Whitfield (1)	Lower Mill Creek Rd. (CR348)	0.1	Walker County Line	Continue straight	

Source: GDOT

## ***State Route 90 – Mountain Crossing***

State Bike Route 90 – Mountain Crossing serves Whitfield, Murray, and Gilmer Counties. This route enters Whitfield County on Lower Mill Creek Road on the same stretch of road that is part of the State Bike Route 35 - March to the Sea route. From there, the route travels secondary roads to Ga. Hwy. 41 and to Ga. Hwy. 52. Once the Mountain Crossing route joins Ga. Hwy. 52 it stays on or near Ga. Hwy. 52 until it leaves the region in Dawson County (see following chart for full directions). This segment of the route is 66.3 miles in length.

The only bike facilities put in place on the State routes in the region to date is a 3.2 mile stretch of bike lanes and signage on either side of Ga. Hwy. 52. These bike lanes start a few miles southeast of the Cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay. This area is well known for apple orchards and there are many shops and restaurants centering around the apple industry. Currently, these facilities are not getting much use despite the beautiful surroundings and popular destination. This is due to a couple of reasons. First, the 3.2-mile stretch is not completely contiguous. These facilities were added with road improvements in the area and were not specifically implemented for the biking facilities. There are short segments without bike lanes and a couple of narrow bridges to cross without bike lanes that make it difficult and sometimes unsafe for the average rider. Ga. Hwy. 52 in this area is a four or five-lane highway and the cars can travel fast. Additionally, these bike lanes begin and end without any connection to other secondary roads or other bike facilities. Ga. Hwy. 52 is not conducive to bicyclists before or after these lanes end.

The part of this route currently getting the most use by bicyclists is Ga. Hwy. 52 as it leaves the western portion of Chatsworth and goes over Fort Mountain into Gilmer County. Even though this stretch does not have any bike facilities, many experienced riders like the challenge of the climb, the incredibly beautiful scenery, and relatively low car traffic counts. It should be noted that the sharp turns of the road still make this segment fairly dangerous for bike/car conflicts. However, this segment continues to gain popularity partially due to this stretch being the first mountain stage of the Tour de Georgia bike race.

### **State Route 90 – Mountain Crossing Corridor Descriptions in the North Georgia Planning Area**

County	Facility	Distance	Reference Point	Direction	Community
Whitfield (1)	Lower Mill Creek Rd. (CR348)	0.1	Mill Creek Rd. (CR349)	Turn right	
Whitfield	Mill Creek Rd. (CR349)	2.0	Rattlesnake Rd. (CR355) bears right	Continue straight	
Whitfield	Mill Creek Rd. (CR349)	3.7	CR349 bears left	Bear left	
Whitfield	Bradberry Hill Rd. (CR349)	0.4	Sam Love Rd.	Turn left	

Whitfield	Sam Lowe Rd. (CR349)	0.9	Old Lafayette Rd. (CR318)	Turn right	
Whitfield	Old Lafayette Rd. (CR318)	0.1	US41	Turn right	
Whitfield	US41	1.6	CR362 (Tibbs Road)	Turn right	
Whitfield	CR362 (Tibbs Rd.)	0.8	CR532 (Walnut Avenue)	Bear right	
Whitfield	CR532 (College Dr./Holiday Ave.)	1.5	GA52	Turn left	
Whitfield	CR532 (Walnut Ave.)	0.1	I-75	Cross over I-75	
Whitfield	GA532 (Walnut Ave.)	1.8	US41 (Thornton Ave.)	Turn left	
Whitfield	US41 (Thornton Ave.)	0.5	CR759/760 (Morris St./Murray Ave.)	Turn right	Dalton
Whitfield	CR759/760 (Morris St./Murray Ave.)	2.3	GA52	Continue straight	
Whitfield	Airport Rd. (CR554)	0.9	Tibbs Bridge Rd. (CR69) bears to left	Turn left	
Whitfield	Tibbs Bridge Rd. (CR69)	2.5	Keith Mill Rd. (CR676)	Turn right	
Whitfield	Keith Mill Rd. (CR676)	0.2	Tibbs Bridge Rd. (CR100) bears to left	Bear left	
Whitfield	Tibbs Bridge Rd. (CR100)	2.0	Murray County line	Continue straight	
Murray	Tibbs Bridge Rd. (CR109)	0.4	Tibbs Bridge Rd. (CR106) bears to left	Bear left	
Murray	Tibbs Bridge Rd. (CR106)	2.5	GA225	Turn left	
Murray	GA225	0.3	GA52 Alternate	Turn right	Spring Place
Murray	GA52 Alternate	3.1	US76/411/GA52	Continue straight	Chatsworth
Murray	GA52	12.1	Gilmer County line	Continue straight	
Gilmer	GA52	13.1	GA52 turns left	Turn left	
Gilmer	GA52	1.3	US76	Cross under US76	Ellijay
Gilmer	GA52	3.4	Lower Cartecay Rd. (CR101) bears right	Bear right	
Gilmer	Lower Cartecay Rd. (CR101)	2.1	Lower Cartecay Rd. (CR105) bears left	Bear left	
Gilmer	Lower Cartecay Rd. (CR105)	0.3	Lower Cartecay Rd. (CR105) bears right	Continue straight	
Gilmer	Lower Cartecay Rd. (CR105)	0.8	GA52	Turn right	
Gilmer	GA52	6.0	Dawson County line	Continue straight	

Source: GDOT

Some of the other rural secondary roads, which are part of this route are adequate for biking without the need of bike lanes and other facilities. However, it is reported by many avid bikers that signage would be helpful. Without the bike lanes and other facilities on the State Highway sections and without much signage, very few are currently using long stretches of these routes because they are “State Bike Routes.”

Most residents do not know the State Bike Route network exists. Those who use bicycles for transportation outside the city areas are confined to the local street network and secondary streets. These bicyclists rely heavily on the existing roadway network to get where they need to go. Throughout North Georgia, avid bikers have a well-developed network of city, county and state roadways that can be used by them for transportation and recreation. Many roadways carry car volume levels so low that they are ideal for bicycling. In addition, some roads have wider travel lanes, making it easy to accommodate bicyclists. Many county roads, however, are not paved or poorly paved, and too narrow making bicycling difficult.

### General Existing Bicycling Conditions and Considerations

Paved local roads with low volumes of vehicular traffic (less than 2,000 vehicles per day) are natural bikeways. Because these roads are often winding, narrow, and tree-lined, they are suitable for only low-speed local vehicular traffic, rendering them ideal for bicycling. It is important that pavement be maintained in good condition.

Arterial roadways in the rural North Georgia area and in most areas pose safety concerns and, in many cases, act as barriers to bicycle transportation. The function of arterial roadways is to move traffic between communities and activity centers and to provide connections to expressways. There is thus a conflict between the need to move high volumes of traffic at high

speeds and bicyclists' desire to travel along these roadways. Typically, significant community, retail, commercial, and industrial facilities are located along arterials to take advantage of visibility and connectivity. Many times on arterials average biker gets uncomfortable being out in the heavy traffic so the bikers will ride on the sidewalks. This is not only a hazard to pedestrians but also to themselves, because cars do not see them well as they turn into the businesses along these arterial streets.

### ***Recreational Trails and Greenways***

Recreational trails such as hiking trails do not make for very good transportation alternatives to the car. Usually these trails are not very straight and travel through rugged territory. They are mostly designed for recreational purposes. Paved "greenways" can sometimes be considered a transportation alternative if they are fairly straight, paved, and connect places people want to travel too. They can be used for both biking and walking purposes. These greenways are good at making connections to other biking and walking facilities, especially in urban areas where it may not be appropriate for bikers and walkers to be on certain roads.

#### **Greenways**

There are really no paved greenways that could make for transportation alternatives in the North Georgia area. There are a few paved loops in the parks and around schools in the cities in Dalton and some of the other cities. These paved loops were built for and are used strictly for exercise and recreation. Near the City of Ellijay in Gilmer County there is a paved greenway in its River Park along the Coosawattee River, which is approximately 1.5 miles in length. However, currently this trail is used strictly for recreation and exercise. There are plans to extend the trail to connect to downtown Ellijay and possibly East Ellijay using a bridge across the Coosawattee River. This project has recently been awarded GDOT Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds.

#### **Regional Trails**

Unpaved hiking trails are in abundance in the five-county North Georgia planning area. There are some in every county but usually in the steep-sloped remote forested areas of the Chattahoochee National Forest. None of them could realistically be used for commuting from one place to other since they are strictly used for recreation.

### ***Lack of Facilities and Rumble Strips***

As noted, the lack of bicycle facilities is a defining characteristic of the North Georgia planning area's transportation network. Paved shoulders, wide curb lanes, bicycle lanes and paths, and bicycle parking facilities are not available. Furthermore, roads that have rumble strips (especially wide ones) along the road make it extremely difficult for bicycle traffic. Bicyclers must either go out into the busy fast-moving traffic or are forced to the far outside portion of the shoulder which can be unsafe due of all the gravel and other debris in that part of the road. Luckily for the bicycle traveler, rumble strips are being used less and less. This plan strongly encourages discontinuing the use of rumble strips on roadways or using the narrow strips that are now being installed.

### ***Attitudes***

As previously mentioned, attitudes will need to change for the North Georgia area to become bike and pedestrian friendly. This problem has been recognized during advisory and public meetings, especially concerning attitudes that many motorists have toward bicyclists. In many places throughout the North Georgia area, roadways used by motorist also function as important bicycle routes. The region's roads have not been designed with bicyclists in mind, resulting in a number of functional issues. Numerous public comments were heard about the lack of courtesy between people using the same roadway, whether they are on bicycle or car.

### ***Intersections***

Intersections are one of the primary collision points for bicyclist and pedestrians. Generally, the larger the intersection, the more complicated it is for bicyclists to cross. On-coming vehicles from multiple directions make it difficult for motorists to see bicyclists. Many bicyclist and motorist are confused about how bicyclist should travel through intersections, especially how they should make left turns. Many people believe bicyclist should dismount their bikes and walk through crosswalks like pedestrians, or try to cross and turn from the far right so they can stay out of traffic. Since bicycles are considered a vehicle according to Georgia Code, they should take left turns like a car – its more predictable than hopping on the sidewalk, which perpetuates he confusion among road users as to whether bikes belong on the road or sidewalk. Turning left from the left lane (like a car) is safer than turning left from the right side of the road where you can be hit by right-turning or through traffic. Safety can be further increased when the cyclists signals their turn and is wearing highly visible clothing, or uses head-lights and tail lights. There are many examples of multiple lane turning situations throughout North Georgia, principally within the larger cities. Again, education of both the automobile driver and the bicyclist will help alleviate accident potential in these circumstances.

### ***Pavement Condition***

Potholes, broken and fractured pavement, steep drop-offs at the pavement's edge, and debris (including road kill) are obstructions and hazards for bicyclists. Beyond causing an unpleasant ride, pavement surface is a major safety issue. For example, gaps between pavement slabs or overlay faults that run parallel to the direction of travel can trap a bicycle wheel and cause a fall,

and holes and bumps can cause bicyclists to swerve into the path of motor vehicle traffic while attempting to avoid these hazards. Residents in almost every county complained of poor pavement condition along county roadways. Rural North Georgia counties and communities do not currently have hazard identification programs. While the responsibility for maintaining State highways is the State's, maintenance of local roads and streets falls on the city and county governments.

### ***Lack of other Bicycle Parking Facilities***

There are very few bike racks in the North Georgia area including at the schools. Bicyclists visiting stores, restaurants, places of employment, and community facilities are largely left to their own devices to temporarily store their bicycles.

The lack of bicycle parking facilities is a result of many factors, including a perceived lack of need and a view on the part of some that bicycle riding is a low priority in their overall transportation policies.

### ***Lack of Signage***

An attractive and effective system of signage encourages bicycling by promoting destinations and directing traffic to them. It is also an effective educational tool for both motorist and bicyclist. When applied consistently, signage can link communities and provide coherent visual indicators to direct bicyclists.

Throughout the region, there is a lack of bike signage. Both at advisory committee meetings and public meetings there were many complaints that the region needs at least "Share the Road" signage but other signage is needed as well. Directional graphics, interpretive signage and cautionary/regulatory signs are important ingredients in the bicycling experience.

### **Local Bike and Pedestrian Plans**

For the most part there is a lack of bike and pedestrian plans for the North Georgia region. Some of the larger cities like Dalton and Jasper are starting to investigate enhancing bike and pedestrian modes of transportation. However, not all of the counties have bike and pedestrian plans. The following is a list by county of the bike and pedestrian planning in the region.

#### ***Whitfield County***

Whitfield County has actively been planning bike and pedestrian modes of transportation since 2003. This planning was accelerated even more when the area was designated a metropolitan area after the 2000 US Census. As part of being designated a metropolitan area, the City of Dalton and Whitfield County are required to do comprehensive transportation planning and studies, which include bike and pedestrian planning.

## 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan for the Dalton – Whitfield County Metropolitan Planning Organization

This plan is currently being developed through the recently formed Metropolitan (Transportation) Planning Organization (MPO). This Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is for the City of Dalton and Whitfield County Urban Area. The plan outlines goals, objectives, policies, and improvements that are needed to maintain a safe and efficient multimodal transportation system for the movement of people and goods throughout the area. This plan is being developed in concert with the North Georgia Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The goals, objectives, and strategies of this plan are being incorporated into the bicycle and pedestrian section of their Long Range Plan. Furthermore, the recommended bike and pedestrian routes and facilities of this plan were developed and approved through the local MPO. These routes and facilities should be the same as those which will be approved in the Long Range Plan.

One of the strengths of the LRTP is that it is going through tremendous public and planning process. Several different committees have been developed to guide the plan and many well-attended public meetings have already been held. This study is also using a large amount of current existing data for 2003 (the base year) such as population, employment, school enrollment, land use, and traffic volumes to develop a travel demand model for forecasting traffic on various road system alternatives for the year 2030. These models are also being used to help select bike and pedestrian routes. Bike and pedestrian improvements and facilities will be added as roads improvement and upgrades are made for the motorist. In this way it may take awhile (at least 25 years) to develop an inner-connected bicycle and pedestrian system that is usable for the public.

Two previous studies, which contributed to the LRTP were the Whitfield County/City of Dalton Multimodal Transportation Study by Greenhorne & O'Mara, Inc., completed in September 2003, and the City of Dalton Multimodal Transportation Study prepared by Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh & Associates, completed January 2003. Many of the recommendations from these two studies were incorporated into the LRTP. These two studies were the first to identify current deficiencies in bike and pedestrian facilities for the area. It did so while realizing the strong need for these types of facilities due to the rapidly increasing Hispanic and Latinos populations being imported to the area for the region's low skill labor force needs. The studies identified specific bike and pedestrian routes and the type of facilities to be used on these routes, which were used as a foundation for the bike and pedestrian routes in the LRTP. As a result of these studies thirty "Share the Road" signs have already been installed in the City of Dalton.

### ***Pickens County***

Pickens County has become more interested in transportation planning due to rapid population growth of the area during the 1990s, which is expected to continue over the coming decades. Based on the recommendations of their Comprehensive Plan, Pickens County and Georgia DOT jointly agreed to develop a long-range transportation plan for the County.

## Pickens County Transportation Study

The study was recently completed by Greenhorne & O'Mara, Inc. in January, 2005. The Transportation Plan identifies potential multimodal transportation improvements through the year 2030. Highways, railroads, transit, airport, as well as bicycles and pedestrian needs were all treated in the study. The study will guide area improvements of GDOT, Pickens County, and other local jurisdictions in implementing future transportation improvement projects.

The plan includes a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian section, which describes specific routes, identifies the type of facilities needed, and gives cost estimates for those improvements. The study includes a wealth of supporting data of existing conditions and suggests improvement until the year 2030. In addition to suggested bike routes along roads and sidewalks, this plan identifies three multi-use paths to link together bike and pedestrian facilities. All of the recommended bike and pedestrian improvements of this plan have been incorporated into the North Georgia Bike and Pedestrian Plan. One additional route has been added by the North Georgia Bike and Pedestrian Plan, which was suggested at PAC and public meetings for this plan.

### ***Fannin County***

When the GDOT State Bike Routes were released to the public, none of the bike routes passed through Fannin County. Several individuals and organization felt that it was imperative for Fannin County's tourism future to be included in these state bike routes. Working with the Fannin County Board of Commissioners, they drafted a plan for proposed routes that would connect the county to the state bike route system. These proposed routes are the Blue Ridge Pedestrian and Bike Way and Tri-City Pedestrian and Bike Loop.

#### Blue Ridge Pedestrian and Bike Way

This route was developed to link Fannin County with the GDOT State Bike Route 90 - Mountain Crossing. It proposes to connect to the Mountain Crossing Route in Ellijay and travel north through Fannin County and the City of Blue Ridge before re-connecting with the Mountain Crossing Route in Lumpkin County. The proposed route consists of a series of bike lanes, bike paths, and sidewalks. The plan consists of some rationale for the project, route descriptions, and a map. This plan was submitted to GDOT in December of 2000.

A strength of the plan is that it links the City of Blue Ridge and Fannin County with the GDOT State Bike Route system as intended. A weakness of the plan is that it does not specify the types of bike facilities that should be installed at various segments along the route.

#### Tri-City Pedestrian and Bike Loop

This plan consists of a letter submitted to GDOT proposing to tie the three cities of Fannin County (Blue Ridge, McCaysville, and Morganton) to each other via a loop route. This route would in turn connect to the proposed Blue Ridge Pedestrian and Bike Way, which would

connect to GDOT State Bike Route 90 - Mountain Crossing. It has also been reported that connections are also proposed to Tennessee (Ocoee Whitewater Center) and North Carolina (via 60 Spur).

Strengths are that this plan also connects the rest of the cities of Fannin County to the GDOT State Bike Route system. The proposed route follows State Highway Routes and would require bike facilities (widened shoulders/bike lanes) along the entire route.

### ***Transportation Enhancement (TE) Grants***

Many counties and cities in the region have applied for GDOT Transportation Enhancement (TE) grants for bike and pedestrian facilities and some have been funded. The following chart is a list of those projects by county and the status of those projects. Projects that have not been funded have been listed to show these communities are planning these bicycle and pedestrian improvements as they obtain funding.

<b>TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT (TE) GRANTS FOR NORTH GEORGIA</b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
Chatsworth/ Murray County	This paved bike trail will link Chatsworth to a Murray County park and the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway.	2001	TE Grant was approved but money was not utilized.
Pickens County	Proposed sidewalk improvements in the City of Nelson.	Submitted November 2003	Funded
City of Ellijay (Gilmer County)	Sidewalk Improvements linking downtown Ellijay to the Gilmer County Park.	Submitted November 2003	Funded
Gilmer County	Proposed extension of existing paved greenway and other sidewalks and trails to connect the Gilmer County Park recreation facilities with City of Ellijay sidewalk system and some Gilmer County schools. Project includes a bike/pedestrian bridge across the Coosawattee River.	Submitted November 2003	Funded
Fannin County	Proposed sidewalk and downtown improvements in the City of Blue Ridge.	Submitted November 2003	Funded
City of Jasper (Pickens County)	The proposed project includes adding bike lanes along two routes. One extends from downtown Jasper to Cove Park in Pickens County. The other loops through the northern part of the City of Jasper.	Submitted 1999 and 2000	Unfunded
Whitfield County	Proposed paved bike lane along the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway connecting the Cohutta Fishery to Prater's Mill.	Submitted November 2003	Unfunded
Pickens County	Proposed sidewalk improvements throughout unincorporated Tate. Part of a plan that would also provide a paved greenway to the Pickens County High School from Tate.	Submitted November 2003	Unfunded

Source: North Georgia RDC