

## **Deliverable 4**

### **Urban Redesign, Economic Development and Jobs**

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**Focus: Midtown Connector Transportation Improvement Project (Midtown Connector Project)**

**Due: Friday, April 30, 2021**

### **History of the Problem**

In 1956, after decades of debate and planning, Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act, and the interstate network was born and then President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 to make it law. The federal government provided 90 percent of the funding—mostly from gasoline taxes—and each state would provide the rest (Behring, 2021).

The Interstate Highway System changed the American landscape. Workers cleared large swaths of land, demolished buildings, built bridges, and blasted through hills. The interstate highways shaped decisions made by individuals, governments, and businesses: roads dictated the location of housing developments, commercial buildings, factories, and truck terminals. Across the country, the interstates contributed to urban decline and suburban growth (Behring, 2021).

From 1956 through the 1960’s Atlanta built an interstate system that divided Midtown into east and west. Currently, east Midtown is dominated by art venues, high rises and office towers, and Georgia Tech Square. West Midtown houses Georgia Tech’s main campus, athletic facilities, and commercial and residential areas associated with the university. This division has resulted in creating accessibility and transportation problems for Georgia Tech faculty, staff and students living in east Midtown, and vice versa for west Midtown residents and employees.

The Midtown Connector Foundation (MCP), a private non-profit organization, was created to evaluate the impact correcting the divide in Midtown created by the highway interstate system in 1956. The Midtown Connector Transportation Improvement Project (Midtown Connector Project) would bridge Midtown’s divide by constructing new commercial real estate, parks and recreational areas, and venues focused on creating new business opportunities and economic growth.. Building a deck and a tunnel over the interstate highway, and diverting traffic away from the Midtown area during peak times, would minimize

congestion by increasing the flow of traffic. The deck would also reduce noise and pollution that emitted from vehicles and improve the air quality in Midtown (Carr, 2021; MCP, 20210).

### **Qualitative Impacts of the Midtown Connector Project.**

The division of Midtown has led to three key challenges: traffic and safety, access and mobility, and green space and the environment. The Midtown Connector Project would bridge Midtown's divide by constructing new commercial real estate, parks and recreational areas, and venues focused on creating jobs and new economic business opportunities. After completion of the Midtown Connector Project feasibility study, the MCP created a video explaining the projects goals and objectives to get the support of key stakeholders:

- Atlanta Midtown Alliance: "Since its creation in 1978, the Atlanta Midtown Alliance has been the driving force behind the revitalization of Midtown." It is a non-profit membership organization and a coalition of leading business and community leaders. There are more than 370 Midtown businesses, commercial and residential partners in the Atlanta Midtown Alliance.
- City of Atlanta (Mayor of Atlanta). The Mayor oversees redevelopment in Midtown and would be a major stakeholder in any project proposed in this area (Office of the Mayor, 2021).
- Chick-fil-A/CEO: The CEO of Chick-fil-A provided funding for the promotion video for the Midtown Connector Project Foundation (MCP), has a philanthropic interest in the project, and has been a supporter of the project since it was first proposed by the Midtown Connector Foundation. (Dagenhart, 2021; Chick-fil-A website; MCP Website).
- Georgia Institute of Technology (President): The President of the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), is responsible for determining the overall strategic direction and priorities of the school.
- Georgia State Transportation Board: "is entrusted with powers that include designating which public roads are encompassed within the interstate highway system; approving long-range transportation plans; overseeing the administration of construction contracts; and authorizing lease agreements.
- Georgia Power: The Connector Improvement Project would affect the energy systems of businesses and residents that Georgia Power oversees. Delays in construction could impact energy needs for both businesses and residents (Subramanian, 2021).
- Midtown Residents: Those of us who live in Midtown and have to cross the interstate highway to attend athletic events, classes or work at Georgia Tech, shop at Atlantic

Station, or any of the stores in Midtown between 10<sup>th</sup> Street and North Avenue, walk or ride a bike to the Atlanta Beltway, Botanical Gardens or Piedmont Park, know how difficult it is to cross the busy streets packed with cars entering and leaving Midtown.

The Midtown Connector Foundation believes that bridging the divide between east and west Midtown, and creating greenspaces, parks and recreational areas, and new commercial and residential buildings from the 10<sup>th</sup> Street bridge to North Avenue, will increase accessibility and mobility to east and west Midtown for residents, and bring more visitors to the City. Building a deck and a tunnel over the interstate highway, and diverting traffic away from the Midtown area during peak times, will also eliminate congestion, and increase the probability of a continuous flow of traffic. This would provide opportunities for the 21,500 students and more than 5,000 faculty and staff members of Georgia Tech to interact more with the Midtown business community. The lack of greenspace, extensive amounts of impervious surfaces and high traffic volumes decrease air and water quality, and increase noise levels, stormwater run-off and provide heat island effects—problems that compromise public health and well-being. The improved conditions created by the Midtown Connector Project would dramatically improve these conditions (Carr, 2021, MCP, 2021).

Midtown Atlanta does not have a lot of diversity in its citizenry because most of the population is white—and those individuals who are minorities, are well educated and have jobs that provide sufficient resources to own or rent in Midtown. One of the goals of the Midtown Connector Project is to use some of the increased tax revenues (estimated of a net positive \$24M) from construction of commercial and residential buildings to build affordable housing that would attract lower income workers to live in Midtown. This would create more diversity and provide housing for workers in retail, wait staff in restaurants, hotel employees, facilities and maintenance, construction jobs, and government, hospital, and administrative support staff—that include RN and LPN nurses, Police Officers and Firefighters. Jobs that are vitally important for Midtown's health, safety, and wellbeing. There would also be additional opportunities for new niche businesses to be created, like various types of franchises; waste disposal and other industrial related businesses; pet stores, salons, office products stores, etc. (Carr, 2021; MCP, 2021).

The above Midtown Connector Project feasibility study benefits to Midtown are speculative and may appear a bit ambitious, but the main stakeholders in the project, the City of Atlanta; the Atlanta Midtown Alliance; Georgia Power; and Georgia Institute of Technology, have a stake in the success of the Midtown Connector Project because it should increase economic growth and job opportunities, as well as the living conditions for residents in the City (Carr, 2021; Dagenhart, 2021).

After spending the past few months focused on secondary research, and participating in three interviews (Dagenhart, 2021; Carr, 2021 and Leous 2021), the team firmly support the Midtown Connector Project. Individuals who live in Midtown and attend classes at Georgia Tech, to shop in commercial building, to go to Piedmont Park or the Botanical Gardens, and to dine in local restaurants and interact socially with family and friends, by walking, riding bikes, or using the MARTA system, find it extremely difficult to traverse Midtown from east to west on the 10<sup>th</sup> Street bridge because of the building construction, lack of adequate pedestrian crossings, and bike paths. The noise and pollution from the traffic on the interstate highway is deafening and the pollution emitted from traffic is a public healthcare problem. After the completion of the Microsoft building across from Atlantic Station—a boon for creation of jobs—traffic problems will increase exponentially because additional employees will be entering and exiting Midtown through peak worktimes in the day. The team believe that Midtown needs more diversity in its residents and workforce, and increasing affordable commercial and residential real estate would support a variety of people from different backgrounds moving to, and working in, Midtown

### **Quantitative Impacts of the Midtown Connector Project**

The Midtown Connector Project feasibility study estimated that there would be between 14,000 to 17,000 project related jobs created during construction, as well as 45,000 to 55,000 created after the project is completed. There will be an estimated \$24M net annual fiscal impact on Midtown. The total economic benefit to the State will exceed \$20B over a twenty-year period. The Midtown Connector Project should provide 14,000 to 17,000 projected construction jobs associated with redevelopment. It is estimated that 45,000 to 55,000 permanent post construction jobs will be (Carr, 2021; Dagenhart, 2021; Leous, 2021; MCP, 2021)

There would be an estimated 20M square feet of commercial and residential development, that would not only provide additional tax revenues, but also boost the value of existing real estate by 15%. There is an estimate of a 6 to 1 direct transportation return of investment over 20 years, and the total economic benefit to the State would exceed over \$20B over twenty years (Carr, 2021; MCP, 2021).

The green industry is thriving in the economy today. Providing a biomorphically designed greenspace and building construction in midtown should contribute not only to public health and minimizing the effects of climate change, but also provide esthetically appealing buildings to the landscape that should attract more tourists to the area (Agkathidis, 2017). It is estimated that the pedestrian foot traffic should increase by 150 percent due to the addition of an eco-friendly park and greenspaces, as well as new construction of restaurants located near the Midtown MARTA. (Carr, 2021; MCP, 2021).

## **Financial Costs and Funding**

The total cost estimate is estimated at \$800 million to 1.2 billion dollars. This estimate is based upon the proposed design of 10 blocks (approximately 25 acres) of greenspace, parks, and the tree canopy that would be built over the expressway (Carr, 2021; MCP, 2021). Funding and Financing will come from federal government, MARTA and TSPLOST funds, and Tax Allocation District bonds. It is estimated that the Federal government will provide \$6-\$25 million; \$20-\$40 million will come from MARTA and TSPLOST funds; approximately \$45 million in Tax Allocation District bonds; 1/4 will come from special services district (property tax); and the remaining cost will be paid for by philanthropies from successful companies (Carr, 2021; Dagenhart, 2021; MCP, 2021).

Additionally, President Biden's \$2 Trillion infrastructure plan not only includes rebuilding and upgrading roads and bridges, but also focuses on home/community care; affordable housing, electric vehicles, high-speed broadband; school construction; power grid/clean energy; and most importantly, public transit. As President Biden recently stated in one of his daily briefings (by tweet), the proposed infrastructure plan is a chance to revisit President Eisenhower's Federal Highway Act of 1956, using Federal funds to improve America's infrastructures (Biden, 2021; Obey and Swasey, 2021).

## **Disadvantages of the Midtown Connector Project**

While there are a plethora of advantages for the Midtown Connector Project, there are also several possible disadvantages to the project's implementation: For example, the project might result in diverting funds for important repairs of infrastructures throughout Midtown, or reduce funds allocated to building affordable housing. The reconstruction may not improve accessibility and mobility through Midtown for pedestrians and bicyclists. The costs of the project may not outweigh the benefits to residents and businesses in Midtown Atlanta. Midtown would also be competing with other Atlanta projects for funding (Carr, 2021; Dagenhart, 2021; Leous, 2021; MCP)).

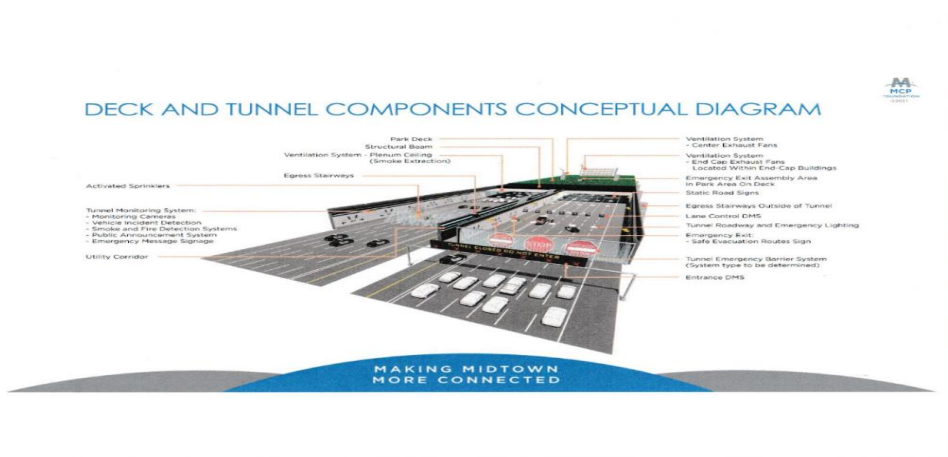
## **Conclusion**

While there is no definitive date for the start of construction on the Midtown Connector Transportation Improvement Project, we believe that sufficient Federal funds will be provided to help the project move forward because of President Biden's focus on supporting infrastructure redevelopment projects and minimizing greenhouse emissions. The President has repeatedly stated that the "greening of America" will not only help the environment but also create jobs focused on sustainability in the auto industry, the energy industry (wind and solar power), and other niche industries related to new and innovative sustainability technology.

As previously stated, bridging Midtown's divide through the creation of greenspaces from the Midtown MARTA station on 10<sup>th</sup> Street to North Avenue should also provide robust, safe and connected pedestrian and cyclists access and mobility throughout the city of Atlanta. Building an overpass to control the noise and vehicle emissions will contribute to better public health (Carr 2021; Dagenhart, 2021; Leous 2021; MCP, 2021).

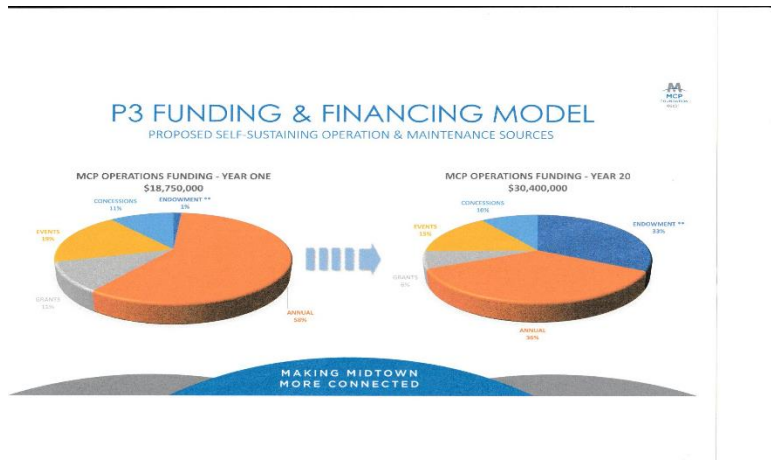
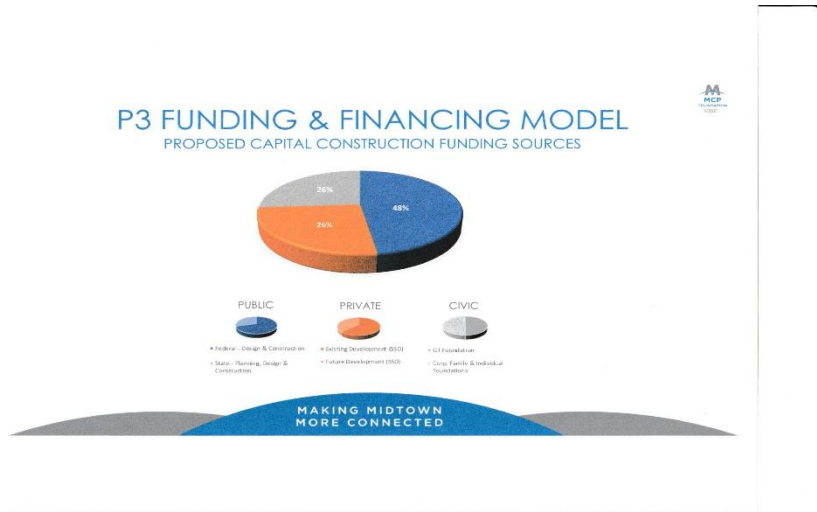
# Appendix A

## Midtown Connector Project Concept and Improvement Plans



# Appendix B

## Financial Costs and Budget Plans



## Appendix C

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