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Case Study: Athens-Clarke County Georgia's Comprehensive Approach to Complete Streets

The Athens-Clarke County Unified Government (ACCGov) demonstrates its Complete Streets planning focus through both policy implementation and project development. ACCGov first solidified its pursuit of Complete Streets with a Complete Streets policy adopted in 2012. ACCGov later released an updated and action-oriented [Complete Streets policy](#) in 2022. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) similarly adopted a [Complete Streets policy](#) in 2012 to inform the design and construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities on State- and Federally-funded roadways in Georgia.

In October 2018, the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission approved the [Athens in Motion \(AiM\) Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan](#). The AiM plan details an overarching long-term strategy and short-term activities to build a robust and equitable multimodal transportation network for the Athens-Clarke County region. This case study highlights the growing portfolio of Complete Streets planning initiatives led by ACCGov.

Background and Demographics

Athens-Clarke County, located in northeast Georgia, is home to the University of Georgia (UGA). It is the smallest county in square miles in the State with a population of approximately 130,000 (ranking it 19th largest in population out of 159) concentrated primarily around the UGA campus and downtown urban center. The greater Athens-Clarke County area is characterized by industrial sites between downtown Athens and the Oconee River with greenway trails like the North Oconee River Greenway Trail.

In late 2022, ACCGov passed a [Vision Zero resolution](#) that includes the designation of an ACC staff person to develop and implement a community-wide Vision Zero plan and associated activities to improve road safety, especially for vulnerable road users like

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- The [Athens in Motion Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan](#) was approved and adopted in 2018.
- ACCGov first established its dedication to Complete Streets-focused planning with a formal policy adoption in 2012.
- ACCGov released and adopted an updated [Complete Streets policy](#) in 2022 that centers safety and accessibility for all users.

IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

- A Vision Zero strategy is a key component to the development and implementation of Complete Streets projects.
- With support from third-party consultants, ACCGov has solicited over 1000 comments on upcoming roadway improvement projects.
- Complete Streets projects are gaining public and local government support, such as the multifaceted [Prince Ave Corridor improvement project](#).

pedestrians and cyclists. ACCGov centers its Complete Streets approach on transportation planning efforts to build out its multimodal network capacity and accessibility and reduce traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries. Recent local Complete Streets projects included adding bike lanes to Hancock Avenue in downtown and installing new crosswalks at the intersection of Baxter and Lumpkin Streets.

Complete Streets in Governance and On the Ground

New Complete Streets Policy

In 2022, ACCGov adopted an updated [Complete Streets policy](#). ACCGov leveraged its original Complete Streets policy as an evaluation tool to identify corridors well-suited for road diets and incorporate this information into the updated policy. As a result, the 2022 updated policy includes considerations for land use, vulnerable users, and performance measures. Under the 2022 policy, ACCGov must measure and report progress to the public and its governing body using quantitative and qualitative performance measures established by the Athens in Motion Commission (AiMC).

The new Complete Streets policy establishes a set of values and guidelines that apply to all new construction and reconstruction projects to ensure travelers of all abilities, ages, and needs are considered in each transportation decision moving forward. ACCGov uses the policy to inform any transportation plan or policy updates. Complete Streets plans and projects are context-specific, customized to corridor and neighborhood needs, with emphasis on distributing system services and benefits to historically underserved low-income and minority neighborhoods.

Athens in Motion Master Plan and Commission

ACC developed the [AiM Master Plan](#) to address a community need to improve safety and accessibility for bicyclists and pedestrians. The final AiM Plan was released in 2018, produced through a collaborative partnership between ACC planners, consultants, and a committee of key stakeholders. The plan details five major goals for transportation improvement: connectivity, equity, more users, education, and implementation. The plan includes an Action Plan outlining short (0-2 years), mid (3-5 years), and long-term (6-10 years) actions and associated success measures to facilitate plan implementation. The plan includes a requirement for a five-year update, which will next be conducted in 2023. Establishing the AiMC and an ACCGov Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator position are success measures included in the plan. The AiMC will oversee implementation of the AiM Master Plan, with implementation facilitated by the ACC Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator.

Prince Avenue Project

A recent Complete Streets pilot project demonstrates improvements along the [Prince Avenue Corridor](#) in Athens-Clarke County. Prince Avenue was built as a four-lane road with two vehicle lanes in each direction. The project alters the corridor to a three-lane road with one lane of traffic in each direction and a center turning lane as well as adds protected bicycle lanes on either side of the street, landscaped or concrete medians, mid-block crosswalks, and sidewalk upgrades.

To gauge public perception and feedback on the project, the ACC hosted a survey period before, during, and after the pilot phase of the Prince Avenue project. Approximately 1600 individuals completed the survey and submitted 1800 location-based comments to an [online interactive map](#). The project's initial 60-day pilot phase began in September 2022 and concluded with a live-streamed Mayor and Commission Work Session to discuss the results of the pilot and the future of the project. The Mayor

and Commission subsequently approved the corridor improvements to remain on Prince Avenue permanently.

Public Engagement & Stakeholder Collaboration

As part of its multi-stakeholder, multidisciplinary approach, the AiM plan identifies potential partners as Athens Transit, Oconee River Greenway Commission, UGA, Clarke County School District, bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups, and the area metropolitan planning organization, Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS). All AiMC meetings are open to the public to allow for continuous community access to and input on plan implementation.

For transportation improvement projects, ACCGov uses a robust public engagement process. ACCGov, in coordination with its consultant, conducted formal public meetings as well as informal pop-up meetings at highly attended community events and busy meeting spaces to solicit input on existing and proposed bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Engaging people using the current transportation facilities allows ACCGov to encourage buy-in for improvement projects. When developing and presenting future Complete Streets-focused transportation projects, gathering quantitative evidence compliments qualitative success measures, like bicycle and pedestrian counts, to demonstrate to the public and decisionmakers the benefits these projects can provide.

Next Steps

In 2023, ACCGov will submit an update to the AiM plan, detailing progress according to the success measures. The update will provide an opportunity for ACCGov planners to demonstrate its accomplishments, like the Prince Avenue Corridor Improvement project, and detail future anticipated projects. Future projects include paving and intersection improvements to accommodate all travelers safely and comfortably. ACCGov also has plans to establish a county-wide definition for equity and develop an equity toolkit to disseminate community standards related to equity. The toolkit will provide guidelines and actionable strategies for incorporating equity across the transportation planning process, with special regard to recalibrating traditionally used metrics that have historically misrepresented community benefits and burdens.

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Resources

[Athens in Motion Master Plan](#)

[Athens in Motion Commission](#)

[Athens-Clark County Transportation & Public Works Department](#)

[Athens-Clarke County Vision Zero Resolution](#)

[Athens-Clarke County Complete Streets Policy \(2022\)](#)

[BikeAthens](#)