



PEACHTREE

SHARED SPACE

DRAFT Illustrative Concept Report | December 2021



Department of
CITY PLANNING

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1.0 BACKGROUND





1.0 BACKGROUND

Exceptionally designed public spaces don't just happen overnight. They are a reflection and a culmination of an area's history, people, and culture. They tell the story of a place and provide a foundation for the future. As Atlanta's main street, Peachtree Street has been at both the forefront of and backdrop to many of Atlanta's successes and challenges; it is the convergence of the city's history, diversity, and promise. The Peachtree Street Shared Space Study sets the direction for an exceptionally designed public space that puts people first, is beautifully designed, and honors our shared history and Atlanta's aspiration to embody the Beloved Community.

The idea of redesigning Downtown Peachtree Street as a shared space emerged from the 2018 Peachtree Shared Street Design Concept produced by the City of Atlanta's Department of City Planning (DCP). At the core of report were two questions:

Why does Atlanta's main street, which has served as the center of activity for decades, not function for people anymore?



How can we re-imagine Peachtree Street to enhance public life and improve private development for a new era?

The high-level findings identified that Peachtree Street lost its focus on putting people first. Historical decisions at all levels and by both public and private entities, put a premium on moving vehicles quickly through the city which had rippling impacts on the quality, safety, and vibrancy of the public realm. The impacts to Peachtree Street in Downtown can be seen in internally facing retail, a lack of neighborhood-focused amenities, minimal pedestrian activity outside of daytime working hours, and an unwelcoming public realm for all Atlantans. The good news was that people acknowledged a need for change and that change could be in form of a shared space— one that puts people first.

The Peachtree Street Shared Space Study builds on the positive momentum of the 2018 document. The scope of this effort focused on three major deliverables:

1. An illustrative concept report to inspire;
2. A draft Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Concept Report to position the project for state funding, if desired; and
3. A demonstration project to test attributes of shared space on Peachtree Street Downtown.

The Peachtree Street Shared Space Concept Report reviewed existing physical and economic conditions of Peachtree Street, engaged community members and key stakeholders, and identified a concept for how a shared space could change the perception of Peachtree Street from a place people move through to a place people engage with. Over the course of the project, the multidisciplinary project team closely collaborated with the City to answer these five questions:



Conceptual rendering of a shared space on Peachtree Street looking toward Hardy Ivy Park from the 2018 concept report



1. Can Peachtree Street become an exceptional public space?
2. Does the broader community support Peachtree Street as a shared space?
3. Where should a shared space happen along Peachtree Street and what does that look like?
4. What are the potential impacts and benefits of shared space?
5. What are key challenges today that can be addressed through design?

PEACHTREE'S ROLE IN OUR GROWING CITY

We're Growing Quickly

Atlanta's vibrancy, diversity, and opportunity continue to draw more people to our city. Our current population of 498,715¹ people is expected to more than double by 2040, reaching about 1.2 million people.²



We're getting ready for
2.37x as many
Atlantans



We're Growing Strategically

Welcoming these new residents while continuing to provide a high quality of life for those who have long called Atlanta home requires a clear strategy. Our region's legacy of

sprawling, car-dependent, suburban development would lead to more trips by car, more congestion and pollution than we can handle, and loss of our urban canopy and natural resources. The City has outlined its strategy to accommodate future growth in a more sustainable way in two major documents: the Atlanta City Design and the One Atlanta Strategic Transportation Plan. They call for organizing growth in areas that have great access to transit, sidewalks, and cycling facilities and everyday essentials like parks, shops, and restaurants nearby, which will maximize our infrastructure and help reduce the need for long trips by car for many future Atlantans.



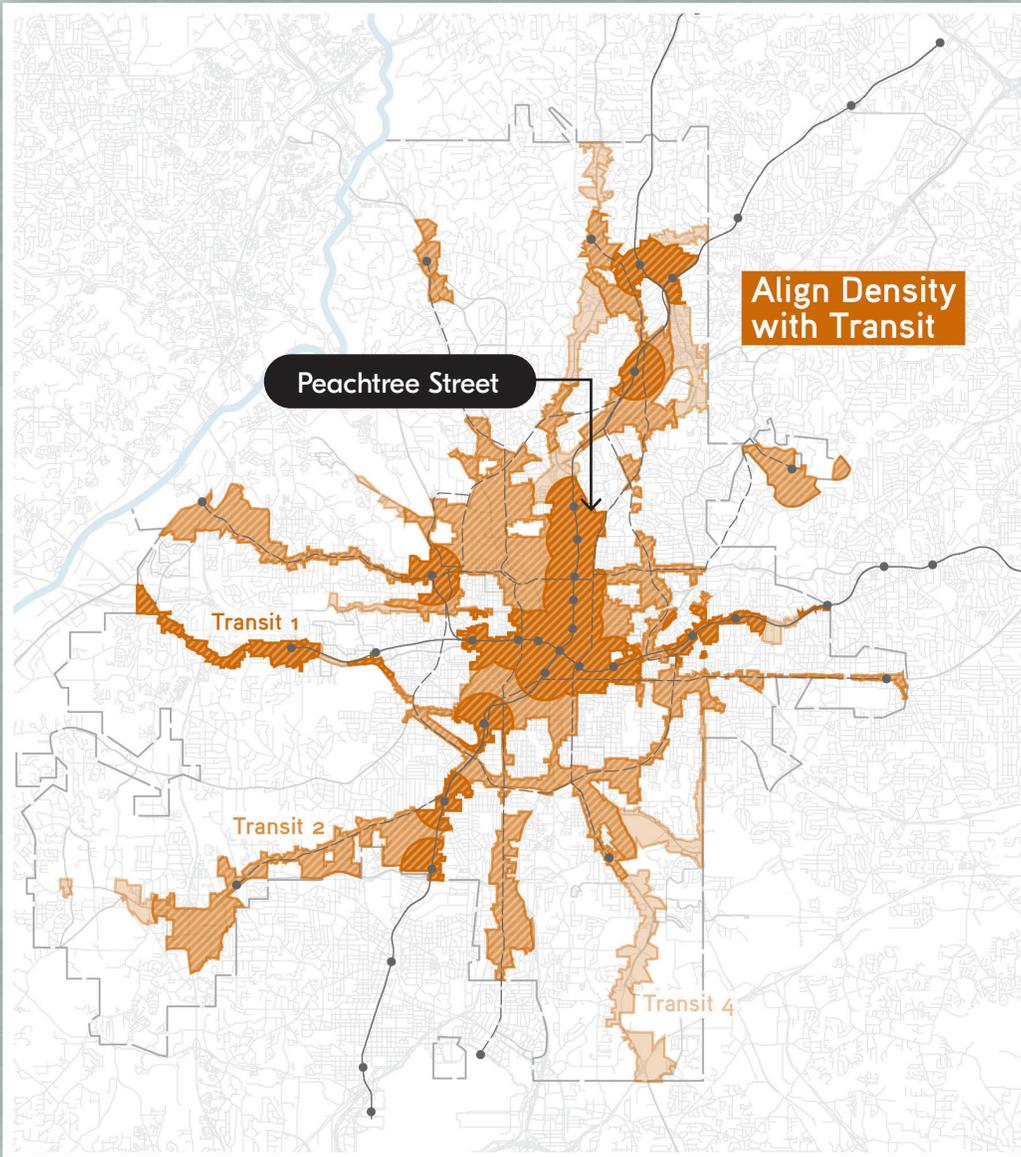
We need
less of this
and **more of this.**



We're Designing for Public Life

If we need a larger share of Atlantans to choose to live in urban areas in the future, those places need

1) U.S. Census, 2020
2) Atlanta City Design



Atlanta City Design map showing locations within designated "growth areas" that are within 1/2-mile of transit stations.

Peachtree Street is the historic spine of Atlanta and its planned future **"growth areas."** This development strategy aligns density with transit service, encouraging much of the future population growth to take the shape of sustainable urban lifestyles and preserving our urban canopy.

to be appealing places to live and work for everyone. They need to be safe and convenient places to get around and full of the delights of city life. They also need to consider that many new residents in growth areas will not have private outdoor space of their own. That's where the Peachtree Shared Space comes in to play. Downtown is already one of the most dense areas of the city, has excellent regional transit

access, and a strong base of job opportunities. This project—along with other ongoing efforts— will add much needed public space in an area with limited and expensive available land; prioritize walking, rolling, biking, and transit in the neighborhood; and help attract more residents and businesses to choose Downtown by continuing to make it a great place to be.

STUDY AREA

While Peachtree Street winds through many Atlanta neighborhoods, this study is focused on Downtown, where an exceptional public space has the potential to foster a dynamic urban neighborhood that delights and serves current residents, workers, and visitors. It is also critical to the sustainable development strategy outlined in the [Atlanta City Design](#), which aims for a higher share of future residents to choose to live in walkable, transit-rich environments like Downtown to reduce the city's auto-dependency, congestion, and emissions.

The study area for this project includes Peachtree Street from North Avenue to Marietta Street, with consideration of the surrounding neighborhood. Within that study area, the Peachtree Center area was selected as the preferred location for the shared space and corresponding demonstration project, and recommendations were made for the remaining segments to create a cohesive corridor with a continuously high-quality, safe experience for people traveling by all modes.

To reflect the unique contexts and character within the study area, it was segmented into subareas for analysis and discussion:

Segment 1

EMORY UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL MIDTOWN AREA (North Avenue to Pine Street)



Segment 2

CONNECTOR CROSSING (Pine Street to Porter Place)



Segment 3

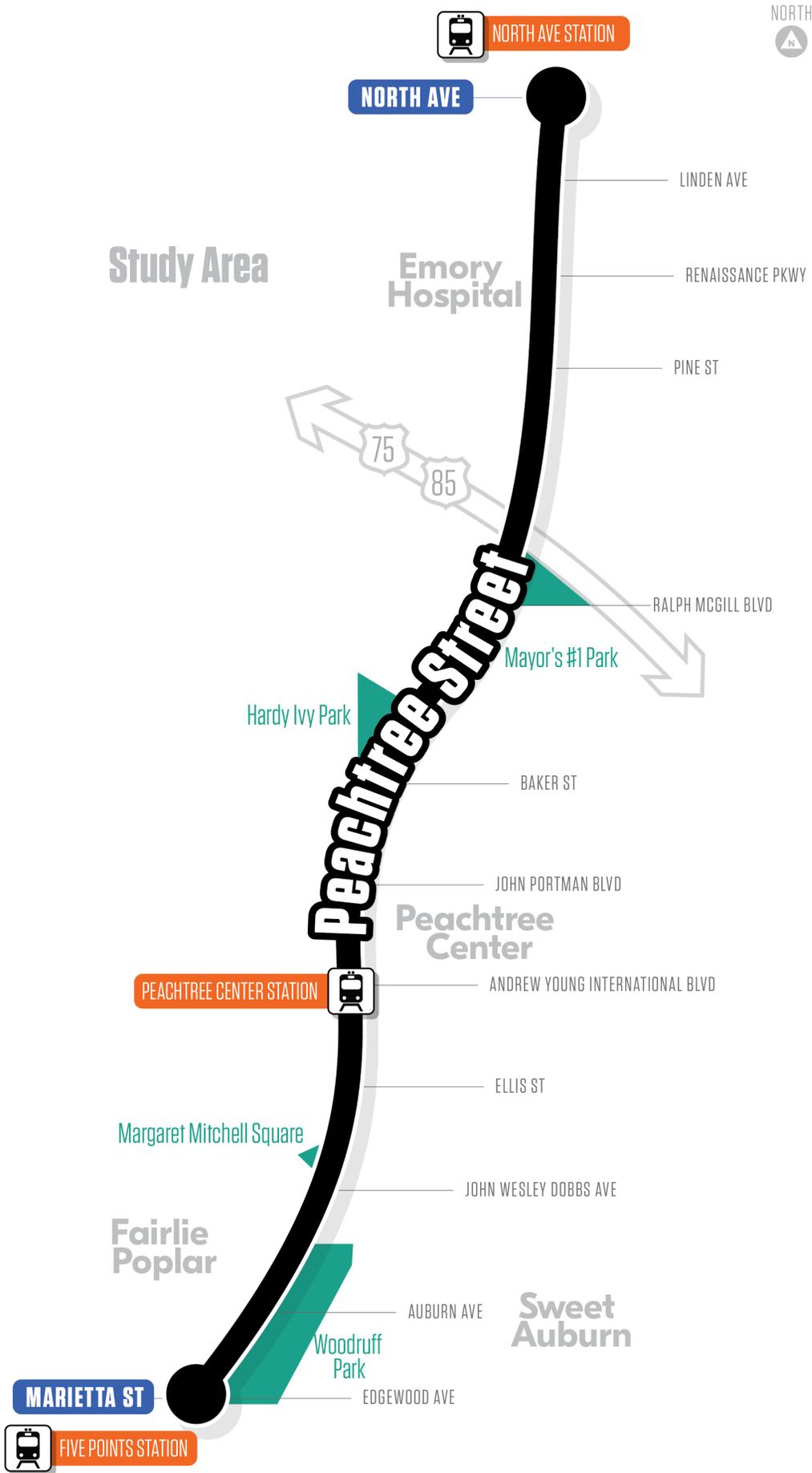
PEACHTREE CENTER AREA (Porter Place to Forsyth Street)



Segment 4

WOODRUFF PARK AREA (Forsyth Street to Marietta Street)





PEACHTREE STREET'S STORY

Yesterday

The story of Peachtree Street mirrors the bigger story of Atlanta, and that of other major American cities.

Peachtree Street has been at both the forefront of and the backdrop to many of Atlanta and the region's successes and challenges, and a witness to its evolution.

Long ago, the Muscogee Creek tribe used Peachtree as a trail, following the ridgeline. Over time, the land along the trail was settled and, as a centrally located place, it lent itself to social and economic exchange. The trail became a cartway, then a street, which evolved into the commercial and residential core

of Atlanta. Horse-drawn streetcar lines were added in the 1870s, providing convenient access to the older, established neighborhoods like the West End and new developments like Inman Park. The streetcars operated within the public realm along with pedestrians and bicyclists, and over time were electrified. The automobile started to become popular in the early 1900s. Unlike today, there was no dedicated space for

each mode. This mixing of modes was a true shared space[1]. Shared space was the norm in cities. In

fact, all the streets in Atlanta were shared spaces and always had been. Over time, due to the relative high

speeds and danger created by

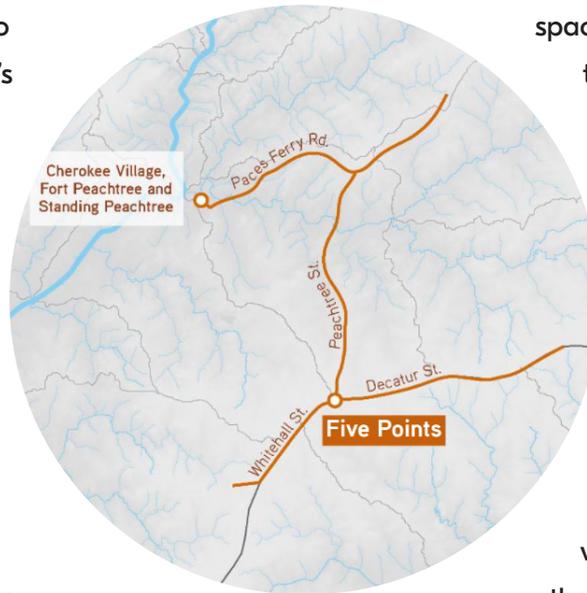
the automobile, the practice of separating the modes began. Pedestrians were no longer

allowed to cross streets freely but were required to cross

only at intersections and walk along the edges. Public policy

and the design focus favored vehicular movement, which began

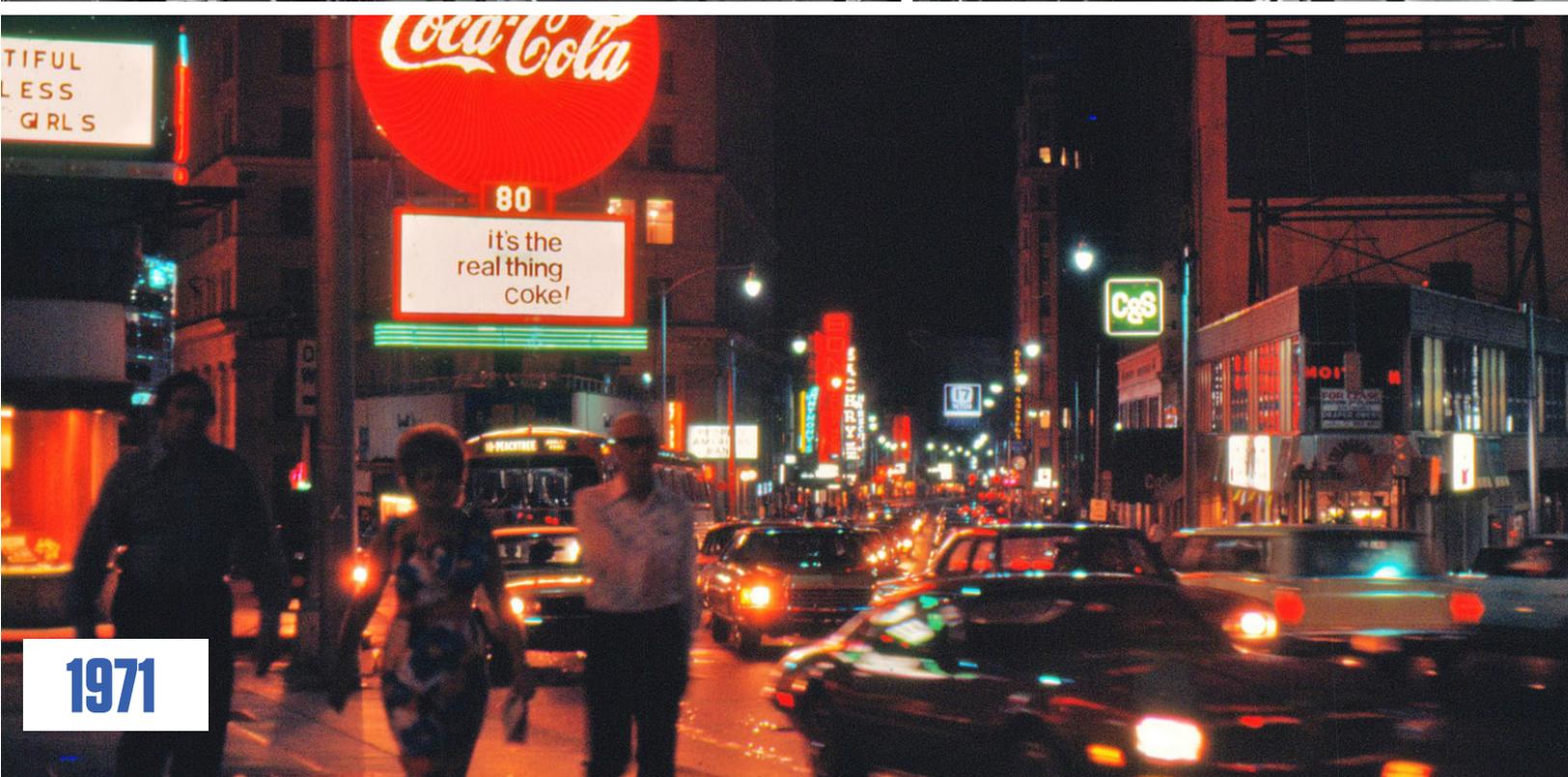
the erosion of the historic qualities and the vibrancy of the public realm.



Trails built by Native Americans set the path for many Atlanta streets, including Peachtree Street. (Source: Atlanta City Design)

“Public policy and the design focus favored vehicular movement, which began the erosion of the historic qualities and vibrancy of the public realm.”

The automobile, oil, and tire industries along with others lobbied successfully for the creation of the Federal Highway Act and highway building in cities began fostering the car-dependent suburbs. It was characterized as “economic development,” even though it eroded the physical, cultural, and historic landscapes of cities, and did tremendous and disproportional damage to Black neighborhoods. The massive highway projects effectively subsidized development of the suburbs for white families and transferred wealth and value from the city to the suburbs. Redlining and other segregation policies at the federal and local levels further eroded the vibrancy of Black neighborhoods and the cities in general. Atlanta was not spared. The construction of the Downtown



Connector (Interstates 75 and 85) highlighted the racist agenda of the highway program. Auburn Avenue, once a vibrant home to Atlanta’s Black community and epicenter of the Civil Rights Movement, bore the brunt of these impacts. Peachtree Street was diminished at the same time.

Recognizing the destructive impacts of these efforts, the long and difficult path forward has begun. Part of the journey is restoring some of the historic roles and qualities of parts of the city. Restoring the dignity and multimodal nature of Peachtree Street is one such step.

Today

Recent policies, plans, and leadership have positioned the Peachtree Shared Space Study for success. While a review of many existing plans and reports was conducted to determine a baseline for this effort, the following plans and initiatives, outside of the 2018 Peachtree Shared Street Design Concept, that were influential in shaping this study:

- **The Atlanta City Design: Aspiring to the Beloved Community (2017)** – [This document](#) is a framework to “articulate an aspiration for the future city that Atlantans can fall in love with, knowing that if people love their city, they will make better decisions about it.” Building on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s concept of the Beloved Community the document focuses on Five Core Values to help guide and prepare Atlanta for growth. They are: Equity, Progress, Ambition, Access, and Nature. The core values are woven into the Peachtree Shared Space Study by designing for and prioritizing people.
 - **Atlanta City Studio** – The mission of the Atlanta City Studio (the Studio) is to, “provide leadership in the design of our city with the goal of creating an exceptional public realm and ultimately, a city that all Atlantans can be proud of.” Since its creation in 2016 as the pop-up urban design studio for DCP, it has engaged Atlanta residents in conversations about design for both citywide efforts and neighborhood public realm projects. It recently launched the City’s new [Tactical Urbanism Guide](#) in partnership with ATLDOT, which along with its [Love Our Places Program](#) have resulted in parklets and other small-scale public space improvements that create more enjoyable places for people on Atlanta’s streets.
 - **City of Atlanta’s Vision Zero Policy** – In 2020, the City of Atlanta formally adopted a [Vision Zero](#) Policy, one of the key pillars identified in the 2019 One Atlanta Strategic Transportation Plan. Vision Zero policies focus on eliminating traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while making walking, bicycling, and other micromobility options safer. The new ordinance also lowered the default speed on local roads to 25 miles per hour, with speed being a key factor that has contributed to traffic fatalities.
 - **Downtown Public Space Initiatives** — Several ongoing and planned projects on the Peachtree Street corridor are doing their part to continue to enhance the public realm Downtown. The Broad Street Boardwalk used a wooden platform and movable outdoor furniture to provide more places to sit and socialize in a favorite neighborhood spot. Around the Connector, a grand vision to cap the interstate with parks, plazas, and new development called [The Stitch](#) would reconnect Downtown and Midtown and is currently being studied for feasibility. The *Downtown Atlanta Master Plan* (2009 and 2017) has repeatedly recommended public realm investments on Peachtree Street as a catalytic project.
- Other public initiatives, private efforts, and individual contributions continue to shape this ever-evolving corridor. Major upcoming initiatives are referenced throughout the Existing Conditions section, including the *Downtown Atlanta Master Plan*, Underground Atlanta redevelopment, *Emory University Hospital Midtown Master Plan*, Georgia State University expansion, new developments in South Downtown, park enhancements, art installations, bus enhancements, and bicycle infrastructure.

