

## FHWA's Livable Communities Case Study Series

### **Atlanta Regional Commission's Livable Centers Initiative—Supporting Plans for a Better Quality of Life**

#### **Challenge**—Concerns for Natural and Human Environment

Urban sprawl has led the Atlanta region to become one of the least dense metropolitan areas in the country; residents tend to have one of the longest average daily work commutes in the nation. As a result of significant growth over the last 25 years, Atlanta's roadway network has become overburdened and congested.<sup>1</sup> Land use and travel patterns have also led to significant environmental impacts, such as poor air quality, that require continuous analysis and attention.

Further impacting the quality of life of Atlanta residents is the rapid loss of green space in the region. From the early 1980s continuing until the early 1990s, the development of green space increased by 38 percent. Low density development is a primary contributor to the loss of green space.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Solution**—Improving Quality of Life

In an effort to reverse this cycle and improve the quality of life of residents, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) established the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) in 1999. LCI is a grant program that supports local planning in the Atlanta metro region to link transportation improvements with land-use development decisions. It emphasizes plans that improve existing corridors and centers while adhering to regional development policies. The awards are distributed to local governments and non-profit organizations through a competitive application process. ARC funded 93 planning studies in the first 12 years of the program (2000 to 2011). The awards are divided among corridors, town centers, and activity centers. LCI encourages partnership and broad public involvement and outreach. The goals of LCI are to:

- Connect homes, shops, and offices;
- Enhance streetscapes and sidewalks;
- Emphasize walkability;
- Improve access to transit options; and
- Expand housing choices.



*The Emory Roundabout in DeKalb County was reconstructed to improve traffic flow, aesthetics, and pedestrian safety.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.atlantaregional.com/transportation/roads--highways>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/environmental/policy-reports/sprawl.pdf>

Creating more livable communities through transportation choices



## Funding—Supporting the Initiative

The ARC Board has approved \$18 million in study funds for the years 2000 to 2017, which equates to \$1 million annually. An additional \$500 million has been committed for implementation of transportation projects that have been identified through the studies. Funding for the program comes from the Federal Highway Administration through the Surface Transportation Program. LCI funds constitute approximately 1 percent of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) funds, and roughly 30 percent of all funds presented in the RTP.<sup>3</sup>

## Results—Implementation of LCI

Since 2004, the ARC has used a biennial survey sent to local staff in participating communities in order to assess the overall effectiveness of the program. At the time of the 2011 LCI Implementation Survey, all but one of the 90 survey respondents reported that the local government had adopted the LCI plan, and 79 reported that the LCI plan was incorporated into the local comprehensive plan.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of funded projects focus on providing non-vehicular improvements. Typical improvements include sidewalks, crosswalks, multiuse trails, roadway operation improvements, and bike lanes, which are considered all-around multimodal improvements. The clear majority of funding goes to pedestrian facility improvements.

The LCI serves as an example of local level initiative, innovative and effective use of funding sources, and the advancement of performance measures for livable communities.



*New sidewalks and pedestrian enhancements within the historical town center of the city of Duluth.*



*Bicycle and pedestrian enhancements to Peachtree Dunwoody Road at the Dunwoody MARTA station.*

<sup>3</sup> 2009 LCI report: [http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Land%20Use/lu\\_Ici2009\\_implementation\\_0809.pdf](http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Land%20Use/lu_Ici2009_implementation_0809.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Land%20Use/LCI/lu\\_2011\\_Ici\\_implementation\\_report\\_06-2011.pdf](http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Land%20Use/LCI/lu_2011_Ici_implementation_report_06-2011.pdf)

