

RECONNECTING EAST GREENSBORO



RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES PILOT PROGRAM | SEPTEMBER 2024



A Partnership Led by the City of Greensboro, N.C.

in collaboration with

North Carolina Department of Transportation *and* Greensboro Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization





RECONNECTING EAST GREENSBORO

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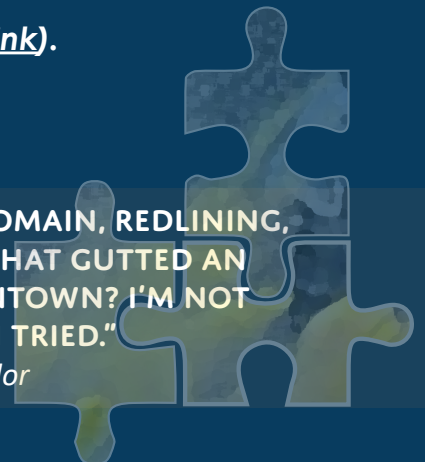
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Supplemental materials are available online ([link](#)).

“CAN YOU UNDO THE DAMAGE THAT WAS DONE BY EMINENT DOMAIN, REDLINING, AND STRUCTURAL RACISM? CAN YOU UN-INSTALL A HIGHWAY THAT GUTTED AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND CUT IT OFF FROM DOWNTOWN? I’M NOT SURE HOW YOU GO ABOUT DOING THAT; FEW CITIES HAVE EVEN TRIED.”

- Respondent to 2023 City of Greensboro survey of residents in US 29 Corridor



Overview

The US Highway 29 study corridor and the City of Greensboro share a remarkable history that is interwoven with fights for racial justice that is a source of pride for the community.

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan is fueled by this legacy and pride in a shared past to comprehensively describe and solve the surrounding communities' connectivity and multimodal transportation needs for a better-connected, safer, wealthier, and healthier future.

Our community-shaped and engagement-driven planning process addresses the long-term redesign of the busy US 29 roadway and access points, and immediate safe crossings at critical intersections, traffic calming to improve conditions for all users of the roadway, filling gaps in the bicycle and pedestrian network, and improving safe and adequate access to enhanced public transportation options. Improving affordable housing options without incurring displacement of the people who have lived here for generations will continue to be integrated with this process. At the core of this strategy is Greensboro's ability to build on past and current working relationships with local businesses, institutions and residents: they know the details and context to frame the questions and provide insights that data alone can't offer.

The final Plan will result in a feasible strategy with tangible, performance-driven recommendations shaped by community involvement to reconnect neighborhoods divided by US 29.

By reconnecting East Greensboro communities through strengthened relationships, multimodal investments, and placemaking, *Reconnecting East Greensboro* will deliver health, mobility, and economic benefits.

Applicants: A Shared Vision by a Reliable Partnership. The City of Greensboro and its regional, state, and federal partners will lead a community-centered Plan to reconnect neighborhoods, churches, schools, businesses, and residents across seven miles of US Highway 29 in the heart of historic East Greensboro.

The City of Greensboro, as the grant recipient (lead applicant), has worked with its long-standing partners the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the Greensboro Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (GUAMPO), to prepare this application for RCP funding to conduct a community-driven study (the "Plan") of how to remove barriers and make safer connections across and along US Highway 29. A municipal agreement will formalize the partnership prior to the Plan's commencement.



The Challenge: An Interstate-to-Interstate Barrier. US Highway 29 in East Greensboro extends from south (Interstate 40) to north (Interstate 840) with another US Highway (US 70) bisecting the study area. The study area is literally encircled and sliced by freeways. The barrier addressed in the Plan is US Highway 29, a 55mph four-to-six-lane freeway. Any freeway would pose a barrier to residents and destinations on the other side of the road, but the few safe (grade-separated) crossings and a fence running the length of the freeway's median seal the corridor and adjacent communities from destinations and opportunities on either side ([Figure 1](#)).





1 NC A&T Campus | 2 High-Speed Design | 3 Fence | 4 Disconnected Residential Area

Figure 1. Across US Highway 29: You Can't Get There from Here. Lutheran Street's high-speed turn into a neighborhood. The "Do Not Enter" sign is ironic, given that the major destination of NC A&T University is seen on the other side of the street but a resident on Lutheran Street would require a 20-minute walk to reach it.¹

Historical Context: Seen and Unseen History of Injustice. While many people recognize the civil rights-era acts of protest like the Woolworth sit-ins by NC A&T students (1960) or the tragedy of the lives lost fighting the Ku Klux Klan in the Greensboro Massacre (1979), few people outside of East Greensboro will appreciate the long-standing or significant impacts that US 29 has had on the surrounding neighborhoods. Even though segregation and disinvestment were the impetus for many black residents to move the east side of the City, the communities they created proved enduring.²

An excellent example of the tenacity of our neighborhoods is the Nocho Park Community, established in 1923. Schools, churches, and hospitals were constructed through the 1930's, including Nocho Park, an important gathering place. The park was named after Jacob Nocho, a past community leader and teacher who had arrived in Greensboro after graduating from Lincoln University, the nation's first Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Funding for the park and community center was due to the persistence of residents like Abraham Peeler, who wrote compelling letters to city leaders who had maintained a white-black divide in resources.

But further success was stifled by changing economic conditions and intentional policy decisions like redlining minority neighborhoods and the implementation of the 1954 Babcock Plan, a thoroughfare plan that would lead to US Highway 29 being located and designed to bisect the Nocho Park Community and many others (Figure 2). Residents could no longer get to the community center or park trails across the freeway, and property values and investments in the area fell.

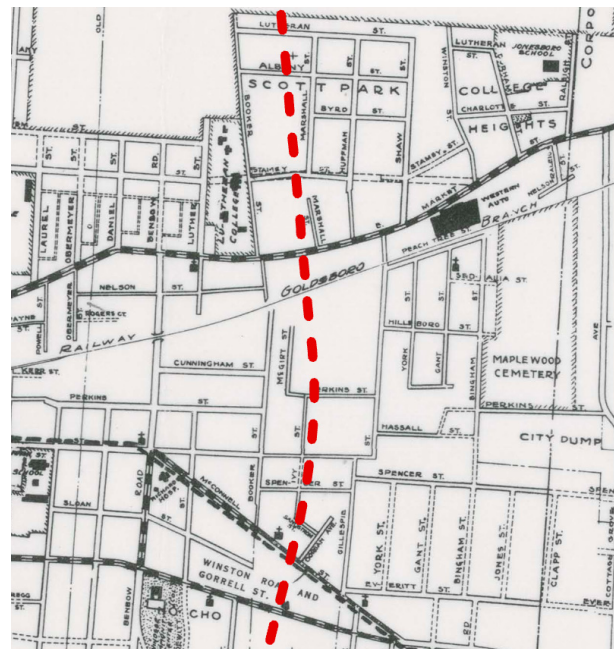


Figure 2. East Greensboro in 1943 with US 29 shown by the dotted red line.

While Greensboro recognizes the plight of the residents in this corridor and has taken steps to redress past actions like conducting several housing revitalization efforts and building a joint library and community center starting in 2025, the economic and mobility disparities are still present. Many neighborhoods in the US 29 Corridor show the ill effects of communities bisected by high-speed roadways cut off from the rest of their city and its social, environmental, and economic opportunities. The corridor does not have ready access to public transportation, although several city bus routes intersect it. Improving existing bus stops (personal security and accessibility) and locating new services and stops will be an integral

part of the Plan and process. Safe pedestrian and cyclist crossings are infrequent now; part of this Plan will prioritize making crossings safer, easier to use, and more numerous.

The barriers and challenges created by US 29 are a persistent legacy directly impacting East Greensboro residents. The factors that make this project unique, historically significant, and important also make it complex. Historical wrongs have eroded the trust that the Plan must help re-establish to properly frame the impacts of US 29 and develop a new collaborative vision for the corridor that reconnects the communities it has severed. The following defines our study area then explains how the Plan will accomplish these challenging but vital tasks.

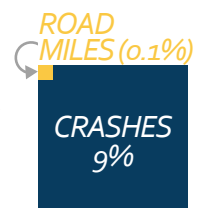
Location and Map

Physical Context: A *One-Dimensional Corridor*. The seven-mile US 29 corridor is between I-40 and I-840 in Greensboro, the third most populous city in North Carolina (Figure 3, next page). The study area within a mile of the corridor contains four elementary schools, two prominent historically Black colleges and universities (NC A&T and Bennett College), two grocery stores, parks, and historically significant neighborhoods.

US 29 serves as one of the few north-south highways in the city, carrying large volumes of trucks (part of the National Highway Freight Network)

as well as through traffic between I-40 and I-840. Historically, moving freight and automobiles at high speeds has been the priority along the corridor at the expense of other users, including people of varying mobility options, public transportation patrons, pedestrians, and cyclists. Despite this narrow focus, the corridor design has not successfully limited crashes or prevented fatalities for motorists. While the roadway makes up less than 1/10th of one percent of the roadway miles in Greensboro, it accounts for 9% of all crashes (Figure 4), with a rate of fatal crashes 25% higher than similar roads in the rest of the City or North Carolina.

Figure 4. US 29 Corridor Share of City-Wide Crashes and Roadway Mileage. While only **0.1% of roadway miles** happen on US 29, it accounts for **9% of all crashes** in the City.



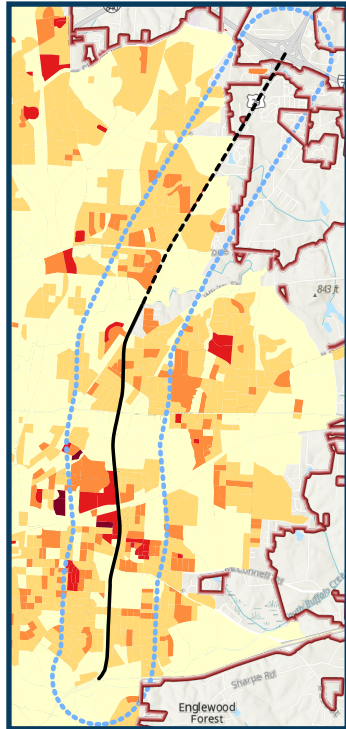
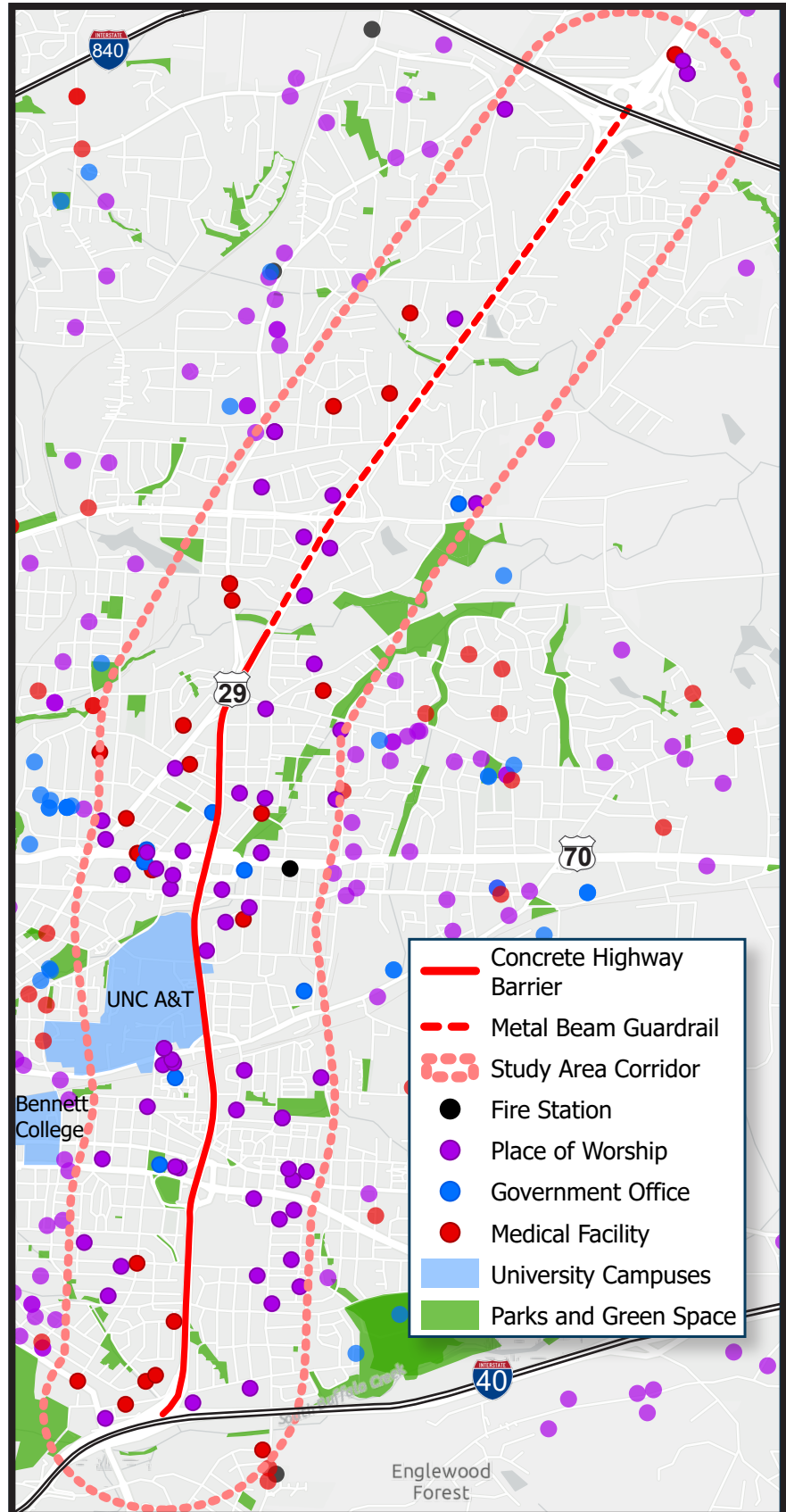


Figure 3 . Location Mapping. Spread of destinations (main location map at right) and density of minority populations (above). Many people on both sides of US 29 are separated from key resources like grocery stores, medical, institutional, and educational resources on the other side.



- OPPORTUNITY ZONE
- HUD CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD (30%-100% POVERTY)
- DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY:
 - POVERTY (95 PCTL)
 - UNEMPLOYMENT (85 PCTL)
 - HIGH SCHOOL EDUC. (20%)
 - UNDERGROUND TANKS (96 PCTL)
 - ASTHMA (96 PCTL)

Responses to Merit Criteria

The ongoing legacy of this corridor is one of debilitating disconnects: workers from employers, students from teachers, patients from doctors, drivers from safely reaching their destinations, and residents from green spaces.

The Plan will be created and driven by affected communities in the US 29 Corridor to realize the merits of the RCP in ways tailored to the local context. Each criterion is addressed, followed by a discussion of how the Plan will implement specific actions that address and measure performance.

Merit Criterion 1. Equity and Justice⁴⁰

Initiative: *Origin of the Modern Civil Rights Movement Seeks Justice.* The US 29 Corridor is a model in many ways: owner of a proud history, a diverse workforce, and an integral part of a city working to repair past damages. As described in the historic context section, this community has faced discrimination not only in public practices but also in private actions, including property redlining ([Figure 5](#), next page), disinvestment, and planning processes that led to severing communities by US 29's routing.

There is a high degree of confidence that over 90% of the benefits from the development and eventual execution of the Plan and its recommendations will accrue to traditionally disadvantaged and persistent poverty communities present throughout the corridor and study area ([Figure 6](#)).

An established majority-minority population persevering in the face of disconnection and prolonged decades of public and private disinvestment has built their lives here.

The diversity of residents living within one mile of the corridor is described in data obtained from EJScreen ([Figures 7a-g](#) and [8](#)). Some challenges they face include airborne toxins, traffic, lead paint, hazardous waste, and low access to broadband internet. High rates of diabetes, asthma, and heart disease contribute to low life expectancy, often more than 90% of the national percentile for most Census tracts in the US 29 Corridor.³

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: The Plan will comprehensively analyze the historical context and current issues associated with practices like redlining, urban renewal, and segregation to ensure that the recommendations equitably benefit those most harmed by the impacts of past decisions. Research on the community's history will call on subject experts and local resources like the Greensboro History Museum and community organizations like Preservation Greensboro to gain a comprehensive and community-centered understanding of the area's history to inform the Plan, including cumulative impacts such as Bingham Park, a 12-acre site that was formerly an unregulated landfill and incinerator.

Merit Criterion 2. Access: Not Safe to Travel On or Cross. The corridor encompasses some of the area's largest employers, including NC A&T, Moses Cone Hospital, retailers like Lowe's Home Improvement and Walmart, and the concentration of manufacturing and commercial businesses at the intersection with US 70. These employers provide over 7,000 jobs. These important destinations

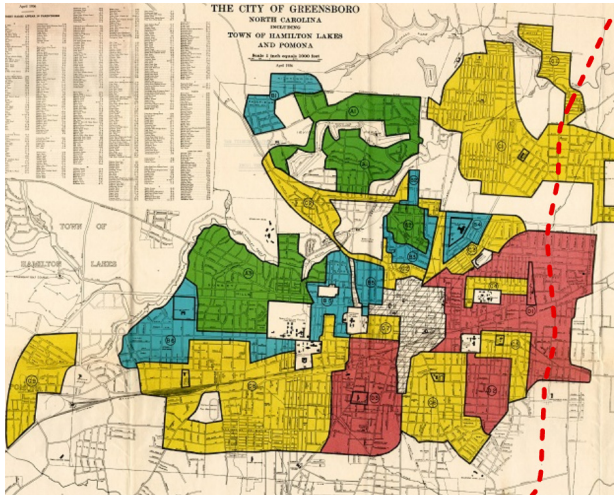


Figure 5. Home Owners' Loan Corporation "Residential Security" map of Greensboro. Red-outlined neighborhoods and US 29 shown by the dotted red line on the right. (source: Preservation Greensboro)

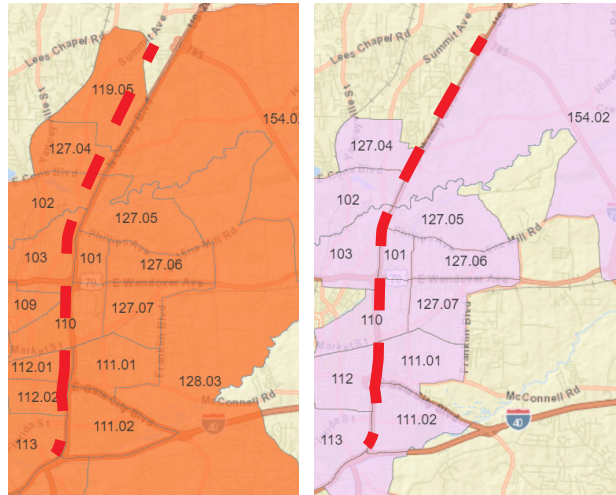
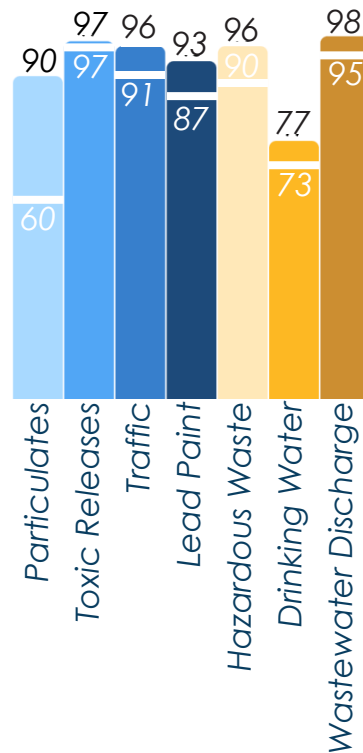
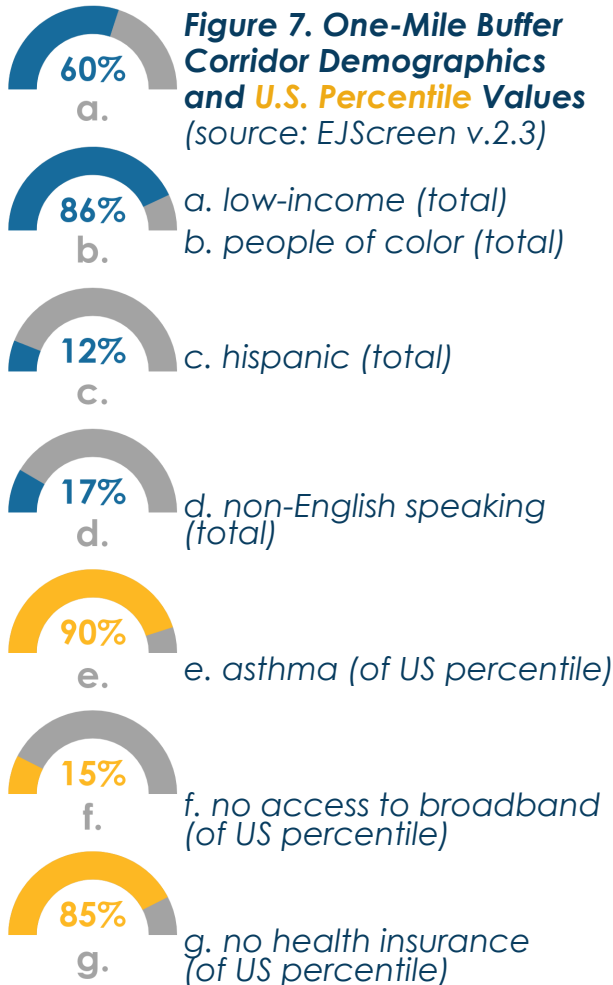


Figure 6. Persistent Poverty (left) and Historically Disadvantaged Census Tracts (right) Surrounding the US 29 Corridor. This is a legacy of the redlining and other practices that disadvantaged these communities.



are accessible only by car crossing a 55mph four- or six-lane highway.

The people living in this study area are disproportionately without an automobile, yet have to navigate a freeway that has a large number (50,000-60,000 per day) of cars and

designs, and aesthetic enhancements that complement existing land uses.

Merit Criterion 3. Facility Suitability:

A Strong Case. This application has outlined several aspects of the US 29 Corridor that make it a hardened physical barrier to the people who live,

THE SPEED LIMIT IS TOO HIGH. THERE AREN'T ENOUGH TREES. FEW IF ANY AREAS WHERE ONE SIDE IS CULTURALLY CONNECTED TO THE OTHER. THIS IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF HOW ROADS TORE UP COMMUNITIES [IN THE] LAST CENTURY. -SURVEY RESPONDENT, 2023

trucks traveling well over the 55 mph speed limit. The few and typically unsafe pedestrian crossings result in residents stating that sidewalks are a top priority in a 2023 survey.

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: To identify access improvement needs, the connectivity to each major destination determined by the community will be analyzed by overlaying the location of transit routes, bus stops, sidewalks, greenways, and the distance between residential areas, and these amenities to understand where providing safety improvements will also enhance multimodal connections. High-crash locations for pedestrians/cyclists and motorists have already been identified and countermeasures will be proposed and assessed, modified, and prioritized in concert with our Community Steering Committee and focus groups to ensure design solutions respect the first-hand insights that only our communities can offer. Potential solutions include removing infrastructure to facilitate lower-speed, safer accommodations for all users; Americans with Disabilities Act-compatible accessibility improvements; and linear trails, buffered walking/biking trails will be included in the Plan. The Plan will include intersection treatments, land use code changes, climate resiliency

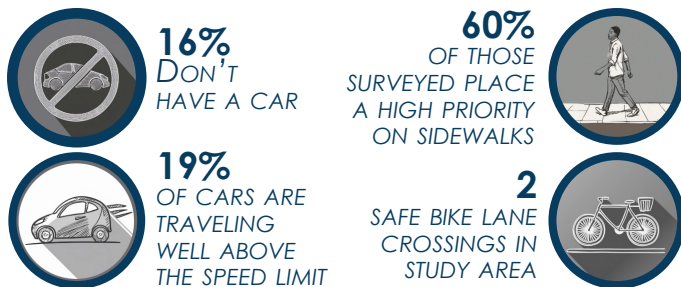
work, and recreate along the seven-mile length of the study area:

- *Design:* US Highway 29 is a high-speed (posted at 55mph) freeway design with high-speed turns into small neighborhoods that line the corridor; a fenced or railed median is a hardened barrier to crossing.
- *Inadequate and Unsafe Crossings:* The crossing opportunities along the corridor are few and often far between, greatly increasing the time and effort needed to cross the roadway while ADA-accessible treatments are often missing or in poor repair.
- *Historic Disinvestment:* Our communities in this corridor see poorly maintained or missing sidewalks; broken, missing, or inappropriate lighting; and a hardscape environment with absent or inaccessible green spaces for them and their children.

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: The Plan will inventory inadequate facilities and maintenance issues throughout the seven-mile-long, two-mile-wide corridor and work with the Community Steering Committee and two rounds of focus groups to identify and refine our understanding of what's missing or broken in their



communities. This is “planning with a sharp pencil,” requiring the integration of GIS mapping, field inventories, and input from local citizens to form solutions. Lighting, streetscaping, parking, signage, and security recommendations need to be investigated with care since pedestrian travel is more sensitive to unsafe or unwelcoming conditions.



It's important we assign tangible performance measures established with the community, such as route directness and the number of jobs, health facilities, and other community-identified destinations accessible by a 15-minute walk.⁴

Merit Criterion 4. Community Engagement, and Community-based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships: More than a “Voice” in Decision-Making. The planning process acknowledges the importance of the community at every step (Figure 9). In the development of these solutions, the Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan will empower residents and community groups through active participation in the development, prioritization, and selection of improvements. Engaging residents, institutions, and business owners in this effort is crucial because they understand their environment and context far better than anyone else, and they will have insights that need to drive the Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan forward after the planning process is done. Our

engagement will be measured by outcomes, not outputs such as tracking how input was used in the Plan and how participants felt about their impacts.⁵

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: Six planning stages are shown in Figure 9 (next page) to engage the affected East Greensboro communities from conception to implementation. Key concepts include the development of a Community Steering Committee (CSC) with representation from local institutions and relevant divisions of the City, State, and MPO like safety, land planning, sustainability, economic development, and housing. An engagement firm that is DBE-certified by the City of Greensboro will help conduct our outreach process, further establishing a trusted, local presence on our team and in our planning process. Community representation in a corridor of this size necessarily means activating leaders from NC A&T, churches, homeowner associations, businesses, and service providers.

Input from the CSC meetings will be mapped in the same database as traditional inventories of traffic, safety, and state of repair data to create a holistic, meaningful well of information for the CSC and staff.

To realize meaningful solutions, we need to ensure our public sessions are accessible in both time and place for our communities, so we'll propose two rounds of three public forums to develop input (“Visioning”) and develop/refine solutions (“Prioritizing”). Focus groups will refine key issues like housing, public transportation, emissions reductions, pedestrian/biking, and economic development to ensure the CSC has good information to create integrated solutions.

To create solutions that integrate transportation with affordable housing, safety, economic development, and other concerns, a five-day charrette process will produce specific ideas and a concept plan while inviting people from the community to drop in and participate. NC A&T, Bennett College, the City's Economic Development Office, East Greensboro NOW, and local businesses will provide more local understanding of how to implement solutions along the corridor. A second round of open public forums and focus groups will be utilized to refine these concepts.

The Plan we are preparing with the RCP Program is our beginning; the ultimate goal is to implement feasible strategies to make lasting changes in the community. To complete the recommendations requires long-term commitment tied to specific performance measures, such as those in the Guidebook for Measuring

PROCESS GOALS
USE QUALIFIED DBE FIRMS
LOCAL INPUT AT EVERY STAGE
COMMUNITY PRIORITIES
INTEGRATIVE SOLUTIONS
PERFORMANCE MONITORING



DISCOVERY

- Data collection and the first round of engagement are completed.
- conduct field inventory
 - conduct first round of focus groups
 - conduct open meetings (3)
 - develop draft performance measures



CREATING

- The Team collaborates with housing, transit, land use, policy, and economic development interests.
- prepare for and advertise charrette
 - conduct charrette (w/CSC)
 - concept design completed
 - post multi-lingual mailers & online



DOING+CHECKING

- The results are presented, modified, and adopted along with reporting and monitoring requirements.
- present/refine draft
 - adopt performance monitoring
 - pursue implementation resources

RECONNECTING EAST GREENSBORO FLOW

SCOPING

- The Community Steering Committee (CSC) is formed to help set out scope deliverables, milestones, and goals.
- establish CSC
 - CSC & staff develop scope
 - consultant procurement finalized



VISIONING

- The Team takes stock of the first round of engagement to refine issues and gather more data if needed.
- develop preliminary list of issues
 - refine data based on issues
 - CSC to review input

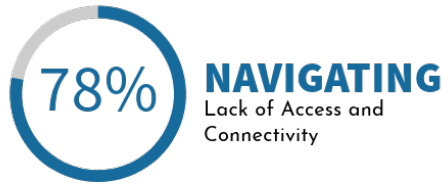


PRIORITIZING

- The CSC has a one-day work session to refine priorities from the charrette; second round of engagement.
- one-day CSC worksession
 - three focus groups conducted
 - three open forums conducted



Figure 9. Planning Process Steps and Engagement Actions.



IN 2023 GREENSBORO CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF EAST SIDE RESIDENTS TO HELP CREATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF KEY ISSUES AND BENEFITS. THE SURVEY GENERATED OVER 780 RESPONSES AND 1,150 COMMENTS



KEY ISSUES CITED UNSAFE WALKING CONDITIONS IN THE US 29 CORRIDOR, AND DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING IT. RESPONDENTS SAID **THE PLAN SHOULD FOCUS ON** REDUCING STRESS, TRAVEL COST, AND TRAVEL TIME.

Multimodal Network Connectivity (2018). These will be reviewed with the CSC to mesh performance with monitoring of specific action steps, responsibilities, and scheduling.

Merit Criterion 5. Equitable Development: *Fighting Displacement.*

To effectively meet this criterion the community, local economic development, historic preservation groups, and other interests will be involved in all aspects of the Plan. By investing in placemaking and leveraging the area's local assets to reimagine a corridor with more equitable development, the Plan will align with the state's goals for equitable development.

As described above, the Plan will support the structural rehabilitation and beautification goals of the GSO Housing Plan and align with the following goal of GSO2040.

"Building Community Connections describes our quality of life, the culture, arts, and places that make Greensboro unique and memorable, and the ties that bind us together as a community. This Big Idea includes strategies to improve livability, strengthen neighborhoods, increases our public safety, expand housing affordability, and build Greensboro's identity as a University City."⁶

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: Equitable begins before the Plan even starts, including procurement of services and scoping. Each part of the Plan will prioritize the utilization of Disadvantaged, Minority, and Women-Owned Business Enterprises. DBE participation language used in procurement aligns with the City's Minority/Women Business Enterprise Program Plan and meets 13 CFR Part 121. NCDOT supports workforce development efforts of the project through its Business Opportunity and Workforce Development (BOWD) services to DBEs and On-the-Job Training to help minorities, women, veterans, and disadvantaged individuals enter the workforce.

Our Plan will contract with local people to canvas the neighborhoods and help craft the actual scope of work, deliverables, and process to ensure full buy-in and community representation. Partners like the Greensboro History Museum, Preservation Greensboro, East Greensboro Now, and the Neighborhood Arts Program will help drive placemaking recommendations to ensure the improvements are in harmony with the community and use the corridor's history to reimagine public spaces in ways that promote local pride and community cohesion. Placemaking strategies will align with

Greensboro's Housing GSO Plan ([link](#)) to rehabilitate and beautify structures in these communities.

Merit Criterion 6.1. Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation & Resilience:

A Community that has Proven Its Adaptability. The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan and process will incorporate green infrastructure solutions, multimodal improvements, and strategies to leverage emerging technologies to address climate change and environmental justice disparities. Harmonizing climate resiliency planning with environmental justice objectives, such as measuring and increasing tree canopy and green space around transit stops and pedestrian travelways, is an example of how our Plan will integrate multiple objectives in the *National Climate Resilience Framework*.⁷ The City of Greensboro has a strong track record in sustainable practices, having earned a LEED Silver Certification in recognition of its sustainability efforts. To do even better, the City knows that reducing emissions in corridors like US 29 can be achieved with connectivity strategies for all of the transportation network's users, regardless of age or ability.

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: Providing alternatives to trips made by automobile assists zero-car households and decreases greenhouse gas emissions generated along the corridor, aligning with local, regional, statewide, and federal carbon reduction goals. The Plan will utilize stormwater, streetscaping, and other green infrastructure solutions such as living swales to harmonize climate resiliency and active mode travel options and reduce pollution impacts to surrounding communities. Inadequate crossings, transit stop improvements, signalization, aesthetic, land use, maintenance, and other

challenges to using active modes will be explored to understand how filling gaps or increasing service could directly impact modal shares and sustainability in the short term, while land use policy and redesign opportunities will be prepared as part of a conceptual planning effort. Performance will be measured in mode shift to active modes, vehicular stop-start emissions (including from non-recurring congestion causes like crashes), connectivity indices, and percent green space adjacent to transit and pedestrian/bicycle paths.

Merit Criterion 6.2. Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity:

Removing the Barriers. Barriers aren't only physical; the long-standing isolation that US 29 has created requires active and personal engagement to overcome. Our approach to this criterion is straightforward: the Plan will include opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the recommendations that they will help develop, but also employ a local DBE firm and residents to gather information.

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: The Plan will use one or more MBE/DBE firms prequalified by Greensboro and/or NCDOT to conduct outreach and coordinate community events (i.e., participants in the Community Steering Committee and focus groups). Second, the process will actively employ local residents and students from NC A&T and Bennett College to help us conduct in-person awareness and engagement. Lastly, the focus groups and week-long planning charrette will engage economic and development professionals in commercial development, job creation, and business support and incubation service providers.

Merit Criterion 6.3. Planning Integration:

It's About More than Transportation.

The application was developed in concert with many agencies like the Greensboro Housing Authority (affordable housing integration and current projects) and Planning Department (supportive land use policies), which have long designated East Greensboro as planning priorities, provided input to our application. The City of Greensboro has implemented revitalization plans in the study area for years, many of which focus on stabilization of ownership to fight against displacement forces.

- Bembow Park is at the historical forefront of civil rights, where the City leveraged tax credits and other means to preserve character as the community transitions
- Gate City Blvd./Nocho Park has a plan for more and more-accessible transit stops, a new recreation center and library, and incorporation of specific policies fighting displacement
- Willow Oaks has seen about 10 new homes each year get created through HOPE VI grants and a locals-first marketing strategy for mixed-use, walkable living

- Jonesboro/Scott Park Neighborhood had a plan adopted in 2008 that incorporated both stabilization efforts and improving the existing housing stock

The community connections and lessons learned that were forged in these processes are crucial to the success of the *Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan*.

The Reconnecting East Greensboro Plan: An integrated visioning process, our Plan is inclusive of the perspectives of those agencies that work in local, regional, and state transportation but also that are responsible for implementing past and current housing projects, transportation improvements, transit services, and economic development initiatives in the US 29 Corridor. The Lead Applicant has worked with federal grants and programs numerous times executing similar projects (including compliance with ADA, Buy American, and other federal compliance regulations) for decades with its partners GUAMPO and NCDOT. The planning, administrative, engagement, and engineering capabilities and capacities of the Lead Applicant are well-suited to carry out this project.



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