

May 31, 2019

RE: Response to On-line Comments/PI# 0015019 15<sup>th</sup> Street Extension from SR 9/West Peachtree Street to CS 673/Williams Street

Thank you for your comments concerning the 15<sup>th</sup> Street Extension project from SR 9/West Peachtree Street to CS 673/Williams Street. We appreciate your participation and all the input that was received as a result of the online outreach effort. Every comment received will be made part of the project's official record.

A total of 26 people responded to the request for project input. Of the 26 respondents who formally commented, 13 were in support of the project, zero were opposed, zero were uncommitted, and 13 expressed conditional support. Comments were received via an online comment form and via email.

We have prepared this response letter to address all comments received so that everyone can be aware of the feedback provided and the project team's responses. Some commenters provided multiple comments across several topics. To reduce redundancy across the letter, comments have been combined, as appropriate, to ensure a clear, transparent response. The comments are summarized below (in italics) along with our responses.

- *Comments were received in support of the project:*
  - *A great idea!*
  - *It looks great! I am glad to see bike lanes and pedestrian-focused streetscape elements.*
  - *I'm very excited about this project!*
  - *I love that it provides more separation between cars and people on bikes.*
  - *I love this update. It should be extended east to Peachtree, too!*
  - *Yay for methods to get from the Connector to the Garden District other than 10th and 14th.*
  - *Great idea! Midtown needs more small-block scale.*
  - *I think the updated project design would make a great addition to Midtown!*
  - *Looks great and will hopefully help the flow of traffic on W Peachtree.*
  - *Happy to see the addition of protected bike infrastructure. Should be a model for the whole city.*
  - *I support it no matter what. More street connections are important to making Midtown more walkable. I don't have a car, so car traffic isn't that important to me, but long blocks without crossings are. I live in AMLI Arts Center and go to the gym on Spring Street. This connection will make those trips much easier, not to mention the congestion relief it could provide on West Peachtree and Spring.*
  - *Nice revision!*
  - *Get it done!*
  - *I support fully!*
  - *I support the extension of 15th Street. Consider traffic calming on 16th after 15th is extended.*

Response: Thank you for your comment and interest in the proposed project. We are glad that you support this project.

- Comments were received about the sidewalk-level bike lanes:
  - *I'm sure there's a reason, but why not put the bike lanes in the road instead of on the sidewalk? It makes more sense to me that they be in the road where they are more easily accessible to future developments like West Peachtree/Spring complete streets. It's awkward to have to ride bikes up and down curb cuts rather than just continue with the flow of traffic at road level. Cars will probably also be travelling slowly on 15th, since there's such a short distance from light to light, making more sense to also have the bikes in the road.*
  - *While I like the on-sidewalk design in theory, it seems like Atlanta has made the choice to keep bikes and scooters at street level and I'm a big fan of consistency. If you proceed with this, please move the furniture to separate the bikes and the pedestrians and the let the curb serve to separate bikes and cars.*
  - *Why are the bike lanes proposed in-between the furniture zone and sidewalks?*
  - *Why must pedestrians cross the bike lane to get to the benches?*
  - *Why is the bike lane on the same level with the sidewalk (no vertical separation between the sidewalk and the bike lane)?*
  - *The lack of vertical separation will increase the likelihood that scooters will use the sidewalk, ride at a slower pace, or ride side by side.*
  - *People riding bicycles may ride side by side and infringe into the sidewalk area.*
  - *It's a bad idea to have bikes running over pedestrians.*
  - *There is not enough separation between the bike lane and pedestrians.*
  - *The paver does not provide enough demarcation and high-speed bike and scooter traffic is dangerous to pedestrians.*
  - *Effective separation between the sidewalk area and the bicycle lane is essential.*
  - *Sink the bike lanes back like normal*
  - *That the pedestrian and biking space be clearly delineated, to protect people walking or in wheelchairs.*
  - *Must have a protected bike lane, going in both directions.*
  - *I do not support the design.*

Response: The bike lane placement will be at the sidewalk level barring any findings that require us to deviate from the current proposal as we further design it. The revised bike lane design resulted from public feedback we received during our first round of public outreach in November 2018. We heard from the public that there is a demand to design the bike lanes to the “gold standard” of safety. This preference was echoed by partners at the City of Atlanta’s Office of Mobility and Planning.

When considering how to revise the original design to provide a safer experience, we referenced the Atlanta Transportation Plan and Streets Atlanta Manual, which were adopted by the City in December 2018. The Streets Atlanta Manual sets standards for street design and uses nationally recognized guidelines as the basis for its standards. Specifically, the Manual references National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) guidelines, which are considered the “gold standard” for streetscape design in the United States. NACTO guidelines, and the Streets Atlanta Manual, state that

roadways with posted speeds of 25 MPH and carrying over 6,000 vehicles per day should provide protected bike lanes – street level bike lanes are not considered safe in this context. Since 15<sup>th</sup> Street will have a posted speed limit of 25mph and is expected to host over 9,000 vehicles per day, the design team elected to design a protected bike lane by placing it at sidewalk level. Protected bike facilities improve user comfort and safety by providing a dedicated space; are attractive to a wider range of cyclists at all comfort levels and ages; encourages use of the bike lane rather than bikes using the sidewalks. With the increased number of scooters on our roadways now, too, it is important to create dedicated bike facilities so that scooters are encouraged to ride in the bike lanes (as dictated by City ordinance) rather than the sidewalks.

Finally, we recognize that differentiation between the sidewalk and bike lane is critical. One of the best means of keeping all users safe is to ensure that each user has a dedicated space for either walking, biking (or scooting), or driving. As we move into preliminary design, we will consider the comments received and determine how to design the sidewalks and bike lanes to mitigate potential conflicts.

For more information, please visit the following websites:

- Atlanta's Transportation Plan:  
<https://transportationplanatl.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/transportationplanatlsite/ATPPlan.pdf>
  - Street Design Manual/Streets Atlanta:  
<https://transportationplan.atlantaga.gov/factsdata.html>
- *I love the updated safer bike lanes, but 5 feet seems really narrow. NACTO recommends 6.5 feet and in this case that would be very appropriate. Cities like Copenhagen build similar lanes typically at 7 feet. Consider doing some sort of demonstration of green pavement (rather than painted) as well, so that pedestrians can recognize that it is bike infrastructure rather than sidewalk.*

Response: In order to move forward with this project sooner and at a reasonable cost, the project area was defined by the existing GDOT right of way (ROW). Confining the project area to GDOT ROW allows us to build the project without having to incur costly land purchases or agreements, and reduces the overall project schedule by avoiding those negotiations. The 5-foot bike lane was determined to be the maximum width that could be constructed within the constraints of the ROW and without reducing the proposed 10-foot sidewalk. While NACTO recommends 6.5-foot bike lanes, 5-foot bike lanes are acceptable.

The bike lane design will be further developed during the next phase of design. We appreciate the feedback and agree that it will be important to ensure that the bike lane and sidewalks have different treatment so as to clearly delineate the two areas to mitigate potential conflicts.

- *Comments were received about the bike lane network:*
  - *As a cyclist, I like the concept of adding bike lanes here; however, they don't go anywhere. Biking on Spring St. is currently insane. Some drivers drive 50+ MPH in the morning ~8am. Without bike lanes off Spring St, the bike lanes proposed on 15th St. won't likely be used.*

- *It looks great, very spacious, but I'd expect less use of bike lanes than planned.*
- *I would support IF bike lanes were added to Spring St.*
- *Extend to Peachtree!*

Response: We acknowledge that the proposed bike lanes will not connect to existing bike lanes. However, the proposed project design anticipates Midtown's bike network being built out further in the near future. Indeed, this project is just one of several complete street projects that are currently in progress. Midtown Alliance, the City of Atlanta, and others are currently in the early phases of several projects that would expand the bicycle network, including complete street projects along Spring Street and West Peachtree Street and the 10<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Multi-modal Enhancement Project, which proposes a bike lane on segments of Williams Street. Once implemented, these projects would connect to the 15<sup>th</sup> Street bike lanes. Combined, these projects create a bike network that will facilitate higher usage of the proposed 15<sup>th</sup> Street bike lanes.

Further, this project is unique for central Atlanta in that it is a "green field" opportunity. Rather than renovating an existing roadway confined to existing conditions, we are able to create from scratch and, thus, see this as an opportunity to build a world class bicycle and pedestrian facility.

- *Comments were received about intersection design:*
  - *Better bike design at the intersections (where bikes are at their highest degree of danger!)*
  - *Love the bike box at 15<sup>th</sup> and W Peachtree. Is it possible to put one at 15<sup>th</sup> and Spring so that cyclists can safely turn left onto Spring? Otherwise, I don't see how cyclists are supposed to turn left onto Spring if their lane is up on the sidewalk. It just makes a whole lot more sense to put the bike lanes in the road to me.*
  - *GDOT Type D ramps are inappropriate where shown in walking area. They do not meet ADA requirements for slope of a walkable surface. Use Type A ramps or raised crosswalks. Make sure to use a different material / pavement color for the bike lane at sidewalk level, as well as a tactile separator. See best practices from Cambridge, MA and others. Remove the trees at the bike lane termination to increase sight lines / visibility of bicyclists entering the roadway. Use curbs and bicycle signals at the intersections to create protected bicycle intersections, especially where tying in to other future facilities along Spring and W Peachtree. Need to have the facility usable for all ages and abilities - connecting to Arts Center MARTA station with a protected facility is key. Use of bike box is not ideal where shown - no way for bikes to get in front of queued vehicles on red. On green, bikes would be making a dangerous merge into an active vehicle lane. Use a protected intersection "bend out" concept to keep the bike lane to the right of the vehicles. Coordinate with developer on the southeast corner of the intersection of 15<sup>th</sup> and W Peachtree to include appropriate curb work there. Use planted median separator in yellow hatched area west of Spring St. Provide accommodation or positive guidance for westbound bikes approaching Williams St.*
  - *The updated project design looks okay, but a few things are very confusing. First, where do the bike lanes go at Spring Street? The concept shows they just*

*start in the middle of the sidewalk, which is not useful. I think the lanes should be extended all the way to the intersection. Second, why do the bike lanes turn back into the regular travel lanes at West Peachtree? They should go to the edge of the intersection. With the current configuration on the intersection with West Peachtree, the bike protection would disappear at the intersection (which is the most dangerous place for bicyclists). The bike lanes should be extended across the street to the actual MARTA station for enhanced safety.*

- *Finally, I think these intersections should be a little better designed for the eventual construction of the Spring and West Peachtree Complete Street projects. Bike lanes should receive protection throughout the intersection, especially when these other complete street projects will also have bike lanes. What good is it to have the bike lanes that don't connect?*

Response: We appreciate the comments on safety of bicyclists and pedestrians within the 15th Street Extension project limits. We agree that intersection design is a critical component of the bike lane design. One important note is that Midtown Alliance, in partnership with the City of Atlanta, is in the early phase of designing protected bike lanes along West Peachtree and Spring Street within the Midtown District. When developing the bike lane designs for the 15th Street extension project, the design team is thinking critically about how the 15th Street bike lanes will eventually connect with the Spring and West Peachtree bike lanes and ensuring that the design of the 15th Street bike lanes do not preclude specific designs on Spring and West Peachtree.

In the interim, the 15th Street bike lanes are being designed to provide safe connections to existing infrastructure. At the project's limits at Williams Street and West Peachtree Street, there is not currently protected bike lanes so cyclists will be merging with vehicular traffic. At both ends of the projects, the sidewalk-level bike lanes will drop down to connect with the roadway before the intersection in order to provide more visibility to the cyclists before they traverse the intersections with vehicular traffic. At the intersection of West Peachtree Street a bike box is currently being proposed to facilitate the merge with traffic and increase visibility. Meanwhile, the design of the Spring and 15th Street intersection will require different considerations as cyclists will have a "receiving" protected bike lane to re-enter after crossing Spring Street when traveling east/west. This intersection will also have to accommodate southbound turn movements, which does not currently offer a connection to a protected bike lane. While there are many examples of how to design such intersections, the design team is still exploring different methods for maximizing protection of cyclists while mitigating impacts to pedestrians and vehicles. This intersection, along with the Spring and West Peachtree intersections, will become more detailed as the design progresses. Midtown Alliance will conduct additional public outreach later in the design phase to share updated design proposals.

The use of handicap ramps are important in allowing pedestrians to traverse the project area safely and the proper ramps that are ADA compliant will be utilized. All intersections are properly designed and meet the expectations for future construction on complete streets projects in the area.

- *This is a great plan and will alleviate a lot of traffic congestion on West Peachtree where cars are jogging over from 15th to 16th Street. I wonder if there could be some*

*traffic calming implemented on 16th Street after the extension of 15th since it will not be utilized as it is now.*

Response: 16<sup>th</sup> Street is outside the project area and, thus, improvements to this street are not currently being considered.

- *One building owner voiced concern concerning how the project could affect their agreement with another building to provide valet parking. The commenter also noted the gridlock that occurs during special events.*

Response: The proposed project is currently in conceptual design and coordination with stakeholders will continue until the project moves forward to construction. It is the goal of the project team to meet the project's purpose and need while avoiding and minimizing impacts to adjacent property owners. One way we've done that is to limit the project to the existing GDOT ROW, which is limited to the blocks between Williams and West Peachtree Street and will, thus, not directly impact the commenter's property. Also, the extension of 15<sup>th</sup> Street will provide an additional access point to the interstate which will relieve pressure off streets with the Midtown Atlanta grid network.

- *The city can't adequately take care of the infrastructure it has now – crumbling sidewalks and streets, aging waterlines and sewers to name a few. What is needed in this town is parking and that property used to be parking. We should encourage developers to establish parking garages so that people who work here have some choice.*

Response: The purpose of the proposed project is to provide relief to 14<sup>th</sup> Street as it is one of only three access points to the interstate for Midtown Atlanta. In addition, this project serves as an infrastructure improvement as it will provide a safer facility for multiple modes of transportation. The establishment of parking garages or additional parking facilities is outside the scope of this project.

Again, thank you for taking the time to participate and for your comments. Community input is essential to these projects. Should you have further questions, comments or concerns, please contact Emily Schwimmer, Project Manager, via email at [emily@midtownatl.com](mailto:emily@midtownatl.com) or by phone at 404-892-0050.

Sincerely,



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Midtown Alliance  
Director of Capital Projects

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PDF for Project File;