SYMPOSIUM BRIEF

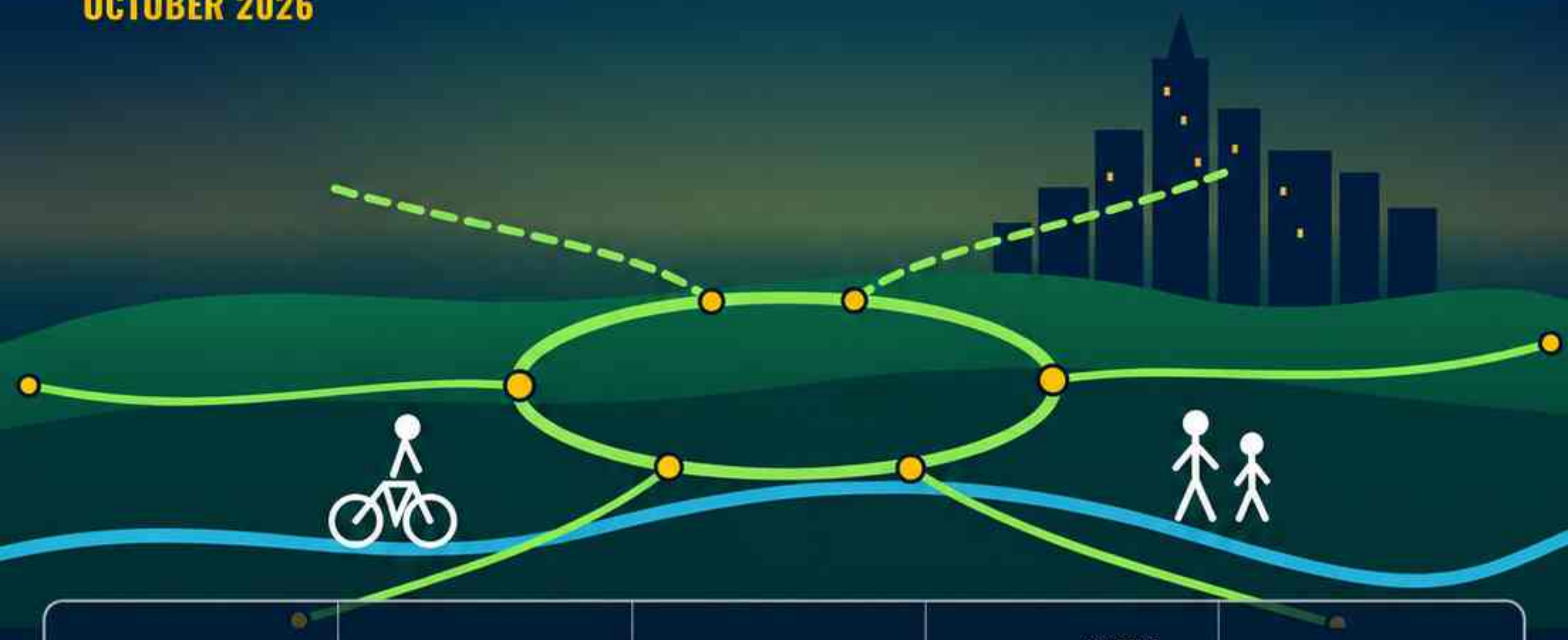
# TRAILS IN THE ATLANTA REGION

*One Region, Connected: Trails & Bicycle Facilities*

Prepared for the
**Atlanta Regional Trails Symposium**
Convened by the Atlanta Regional Commission
and the Center for Urban Research

**OCTOBER 2026**

- ATLANTA BELTLINE
- REGIONAL GREENWAYS
- E-BIKES & MICROMOBILITY
- SAFE STREETS & CROSSINGS
- GROWING TOGETHER
- GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **770** MILES OF EXISTING TRAILS | **26** MILES OF PROTECTED BIKE LANES | **16.7** CONTINUOUS BELTLINE MAINLINE MILES | **3.7M** SHARED E-BIKE & SCOOTER TRIPS IN 2025 | **$3.9B** BIKE-PED INVESTMENT IN MTP |

### ECONOMIC MOBILITY
Safe routes connect people to jobs without requiring a car.

### E-BIKES + NETWORK
Electric assist widens reach: safe routes make it usable.

### NETWORK, NOT PATCHWORK
Connecting the trails we have to the places we go.

### SAFETY
Every trip should end safely at home.

### FUNDING & STATE ROLE
Options for stable support, from local to statewide.

Georgia Tech • Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts
Center for Urban Research

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING SYMPOSIUM BRIEF

# Trails and Bicycle Facilities in Metro Atlanta and the City of Atlanta

Connectivity, Access, and Implementation

Georgia Tech Center for Urban Research and Atlanta Regional Commission | October 2026

## 1. Introduction and Regional Context

Metro Atlanta is investing in trails and bicycle facilities at a scale few U.S. regions match. Signature projects such as the Atlanta Beltline, PATH400, the Silver Comet, the Chattahoochee RiverLands, and the South River Trails have changed how residents and visitors experience the region, and cities and counties across metro Atlanta have adopted plans to extend them.[1] At the same time, the region faces rapid growth: the 11-county region is projected to grow from 5.3 million residents to nearly 8 million by 2050.[2] How walking and biking networks are connected, funded, and maintained will shape how that growth affects household costs, safety, health, and access to opportunity.

Planning activity is unusually concentrated in the next few years. The City of Atlanta is implementing its citywide trails plan and the Moving Atlanta Forward infrastructure program; ARC is preparing regional and subregional trail and bicycle plans; the Georgia Department of Transportation is developing separate rural and urban statewide active transportation plans; and several counties are updating comprehensive transportation plans.[3][4][5] The Metropolitan Transportation Plan directs $168 billion through 2050, including nearly $4 billion for walking and biking facilities.[6]

| Planning effort | Lead | Scope and timing |
|---|---|---|
| Trails ATL | City of Atlanta | 525-mile citywide trail network by 2052[7] |
| Moving Atlanta Forward | City of Atlanta | About $304 million for active transportation[8] |
| Neighborhood Reinvestment Initiative | City of Atlanta | TAD-funded investment in south and west Atlanta, including trails and transit[9] |

[1] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

[2] 2026 Regional Development Plan. Population figures refer to the 11-county region; the $168 billion MTP figure refers to the 20-county MPO area.

[3] City of Atlanta, Trails ATL: Atlanta's Citywide Trails Plan (2025).

[4] ARC, Riding Forward trail and bicycle planning materials (2026).

[5] Georgia Department of Transportation, Rural Statewide Active Transportation Plan (with Georgia Bikes) and Urban Active Transportation Plan.

[6] Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison. The 2050 MTP programs a minimum of $3.9 billion for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, about 2.3% of the total.

[7] City of Atlanta, Trails ATL: Atlanta's Citywide Trails Plan (2025).

[8] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026): about $304 million for active transportation, roughly $196.5 million for sidewalks and trails and $108 million for protected bike infrastructure.

[9] City of Atlanta, Neighborhood Reinvestment Initiative announcement (Sept. 2025) and Atlanta City Council action (June 2026), as reported by local media. Program cost estimates have varied across sources.

| Planning effort | Lead | Scope and timing |
|---|---|---|
| Regional, South Metro, and Flint Riverway plans (Riding Forward) | ARC | 19-county network, 6-county South Metro, and Flint River corridor; adoption 2028[10] |
| Rural Statewide Active Transportation Plan | GDOT | Areas outside metropolitan planning areas[11] |
| Urban Active Transportation Plan | GDOT | Metropolitan areas; kickoff late 2026, adoption 2028[12] |
| Comprehensive Transportation Plans | Counties (e.g., Clayton, Fayette, South Fulton) | Local networks and project lists[13] |

*Table 1. Selected current trail and bicycle planning efforts affecting metro Atlanta.*

**AT A GLANCE**

**907.5 miles** of trails, sidepaths, and protected bike lanes across 19 counties — **29.5 miles** of them protected bike lanes[14]

**16.7 continuous miles** of the 22-mile Atlanta Beltline mainline open; land for the full loop secured[15]

**3.7 million** shared e-scooter and e-bike trips in the City of Atlanta in 2025, a record[16]

**11,000+** applicants for 579 City of Atlanta e-bike rebates in 2024[17]

**1.3%** of commuters walk or bike, the lowest among five peer regions[18]

**50th of 50** — Atlanta's rank among large U.S. metros for upward mobility[19]

This brief provides a fact-based foundation for symposium participants from across the region, the City of Atlanta, and the active transportation field. It reviews the link between active transportation and economic mobility; the role of e-bikes and shared micromobility; the existing network, the demand for it, and how it compares with peer regions; the evidence on benefits; connectivity, equity, safety, and data; and the governance, funding, and state roles that shape delivery. It closes with strategic planning considerations for symposium discussion.

[10] ARC, Riding Forward trail and bicycle planning materials (2026).

[11] Georgia Department of Transportation, Rural Statewide Active Transportation Plan (with Georgia Bikes) and Urban Active Transportation Plan.

[12] Georgia Department of Transportation, Rural Statewide Active Transportation Plan (with Georgia Bikes) and Urban Active Transportation Plan.

[13] ARC staff briefing materials (Aug. 2026).

[14] ARC regional active transportation inventory (Oct. 2026), 19-county MPO area.

[15] Atlanta Beltline, Inc. (June 12, 2026), mainline trail milestone announcement; Site Selection, Investor Watch (Oct. 19, 2026), on completion of land assembly.

[16] Center for Urban Research and ARC, Micromobility in the Atlanta Region: Symposium Summary (May 2026).

[17] ARC, "City of Atlanta E-bike Rebate Recipients are Riding Often and Driving Less, Report Shows" (Feb. 24, 2025); GPB (Feb. 28, 2025).

[18] Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison. Peer mileage comparisons use 703 miles of multi-use path in the 11-county region; commute shares are ACS figures.

[19] Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Kline, P., and Saez, E. (2014), Quarterly Journal of Economics 129(4); Opportunity Insights (2024) metropolitan rankings. The commuting relationship is correlational.

## 2. Active Transportation and Economic Mobility

Transportation's contribution to economic mobility is access: whether people can reach jobs, education, and services reliably and affordably. The most recent Opportunity Insights rankings place Atlanta 50th of the 50 largest U.S. metros for upward mobility, and the underlying research finds commute length among the neighborhood characteristics most strongly associated with children's chances of moving up the income ladder. That relationship is a correlation, not proof that any single investment will change a family's prospects, but it points to access as part of the problem.[20] Nearly 187,000 young people live in poverty across the 11-county region, and half of all workers commute across county lines.[21]

It is useful to distinguish economic mobility — changes in the prospects of people and households — from economic development, which concerns the vitality of places, such as business activity and property values. Trail investment can advance both, but not automatically: a trail can transform a corridor's real estate and still leave a nearby resident no better able to reach a job if the route ends at a hostile intersection.[22]

| Household type | Share of income on transportation | Implication |
|---|---|---|
| All U.S. households | ~15% | National baseline |
| Lowest-income quintile (all) | ~30–32% | Nearly a third of the budget |
| Lowest-income, no car | ~5% | Low cost, but limited reach without safe alternatives |
| Lowest-income, one or more cars | ~36–38% | More than a third of the budget |

*Table 2. Transportation cost burden by household type. Sources: BTS (2023); BLS Consumer Expenditure Survey.*

Atlanta-area households spend 44% of income on housing and transportation combined — the highest among comparable U.S. regions — and 19% on transportation, about $16,000 a year.[23] Nationally, the lowest-income households spend 30.6% of before-tax income on transportation, against 9.6% for the highest.[24] Most households have few alternatives: ARC's 2025 Regional Commuter Survey found that driving alone rose from 80% to 82% of primary commute trips since 2019, and that the most common barriers to other modes were longer trip times (47%) and lack of transit access (44%).[25] Transit expansion faced setbacks in 2024, including unsuccessful referenda in Cobb and Gwinnett counties, reduced Xpress service, and a pause on Beltline Eastside rail.[26] Safe walking and biking connections address both commuter barriers directly — shortening trips to transit and replacing short car trips outright — and complement transit by extending the reach of stations and stops.

[20] Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Kline, P., and Saez, E. (2014), Quarterly Journal of Economics 129(4); Opportunity Insights (2024) metropolitan rankings. The commuting relationship is correlational.

[21] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

[22] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[23] Center for Neighborhood Technology, Housing + Transportation Affordability Index (2022), as reported in Task 4.1.

[24] U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Transportation Cost Burden by Income (2024), as reported in Task 4.2.

[25] ARC, "ARC's 2025 Regional Commuter Survey Reveals 'New Normal' for Metro Atlanta Commutes" (Feb. 11, 2026).

[26] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

# 3. E-bikes, Shared Micromobility, and the Network

Electric-assist bicycles change the practical geography of the bicycle. A conventional bicycle is most attractive for trips of two to three miles; with electric assist, trips of five to ten miles become realistic for many more people, regardless of hills, heat, age, or fitness. Many everyday trips fall in that range: shopping, errand, and school trips average roughly 5.8 to 8.6 miles, and lower-income workers tend to commute shorter distances than the national average of 13.4 miles.[27] In Denver, residents who bought e-bikes with city rebates averaged 3.3 miles per trip, about twice the 1.6-mile average on shared bikes, and 44% of all trips by Denver residents are under five miles.[28] E-bikes are not a substitute for transit, but they can extend its reach and serve many short trips that fixed routes cannot.

## Owned and shared access

**Ownership.** The City of Atlanta launched an e-bike rebate program in 2024 with $1 million, administered by ARC with Propel ATL. More than 11,000 residents — about 2% of the city's population — applied for 579 rebates; redeemed rebates generated about $1.2 million in sales at a dozen local bike shops, and recipients reported riding often and driving less.[29] The City renewed the program with $1 million in 2026, offering $1,600 to households below 60% of area median income, $1,100 for 60–80%, and $550 for 81–140%; nearly 5,500 residents applied within days.[30] The Regional Development Plan lists potential regional expansion.[31] Denver offers a benchmark for scale: in nine months of 2022, 4,734 residents bought e-bikes with rebates; recipients rode an average of 26 miles a week, replaced 3.4 round-trip car trips weekly, and 71% reported driving less. Denver funds its rebates through a dedicated 0.25% sales tax for climate programs.[32]

**Shared micromobility.** Shared e-scooters and e-bikes in the City of Atlanta reached a record 3.7 million trips in 2025, more than one million above 2024 and nearly four times the 2020 level. In early 2026, Lime riders alone were taking more than 200,000 trips a month, with e-bike use up 105% year over year.[33] But shared devices largely stop at the city limit: Decatur caps its fleet at 75 scooters, Marietta has banned e-scooters, and most suburbs have never had meaningful deployments. Atlanta's docked system, Relay Bike Share, operated from 2016 to 2022; ATLDOT is now completing a Docked Bikeshare Plan, and smaller docked systems operate in the Town Center and Cumberland Community Improvement Districts and at Kennesaw State University.[34]

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[27] FHWA, 2022 National Household Travel Survey; Blumenberg and King (2019).

[28] City and County of Denver, Denver's 2022 Ebike Incentive Program: Results and Recommendations (2023); Smart Cities Dive (March 2023); Grist (March 2024).

[29] ARC, "City of Atlanta E-bike Rebate Recipients are Riding Often and Driving Less, Report Shows" (Feb. 24, 2025); GPB (Feb. 28, 2025).

[30] ARC, "City of Atlanta E-Bike Rebate Program Returns with $1 Million in New City Funding" (Sept. 3, 2026); Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Sept. 2026).

[31] 2026 Regional Development Plan, active transportation policy and Regional Work Program items SI.1 (regional trail plans) and LC.14 (City of Atlanta E-Bike Rebate Program, potential regional expansion).

[32] City and County of Denver, Denver's 2022 Ebike Incentive Program: Results and Recommendations (2023); Smart Cities Dive (March 2023); Grist (March 2024).

[33] Center for Urban Research and ARC, Micromobility in the Atlanta Region: Symposium Summary (May 2026).

[34] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026); ARC Regional Active Transportation Roundtable, "Micromobility and ARC's Trail & Bike Plans" (June 3, 2026).

| | Owning an e-bike | Sharing an e-bike or scooter |
|---|---|---|
| Serves best | Daily riders, commuters, families with cargo needs | Occasional riders, visitors, people without secure storage |
| Atlanta today | City rebate program (2024; renewed 2026), City residents only | Permitted vendors; 3.7M trips in 2025; City of Atlanta only |
| Main barriers | Up-front cost, secure parking, theft, maintenance | Per-trip cost, coverage ends at city limits, availability |
| Regional questions | Should rebates extend beyond the City? | Docked, dockless, or hybrid? Regional coordination? |

*Table 3. Two ways onto an e-bike in metro Atlanta, 2026.*

### Infrastructure as the precondition

Neither owned nor shared e-bikes overcome an unsafe route. A person may be willing to ride six miles and still refuse to cross one high-speed intersection. Research presented at the 2026 micromobility symposium found that new bike infrastructure drove ridership in Baltimore more than 200% above baseline, and that new lanes in Nashville and Phoenix outperformed older lanes by 39% and 35%.[35] Benefits depend on comfortable, connected facilities; secure parking at homes, stations, and destinations; and designs that accommodate cargo bikes, adaptive cycles, and devices traveling at different speeds.[36] Speed is a growing issue: so-called "e-motos," electric motorcycles marketed as bikes, exceed Georgia's 28 mph and 750-watt limits for e-bikes, cannot be registered, and are not legal on streets or trails.[37] Network reach also matters: in Milwaukee, only 40% of residents could reach an employment center within two miles on a comfortable route.[38]

## 4. The Existing System

### The regional network

The 19-county region has 907.5 miles of facilities on the ground: 747 miles of greenways, 131 miles of sidepaths, and 29.5 miles of protected bike lanes, with another 283 miles of unprotected bike lanes and 228 miles of programmed trails.[39] Much of this network was built by local governments and nonprofit partners. The Regional Development Plan describes the network as fragmented and concentrated in the urban core, with gaps in sidewalks, unprotected bike lanes, and unsafe arterial crossings limiting its use for everyday travel in the suburbs.[40]

| Trail or system | Location | Status (2026) | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Atlanta Beltline | City of Atlanta | 16.7 continuous mainline miles open; 4.7 to go | 22-mile loop due 2030; ~2.5M visits a year |

[35] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026), summarizing research presented by Lime.

[36] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[37] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026), summarizing GDOT's presentation.

[38] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[39] ARC regional active transportation inventory (Oct. 2026), 19-county MPO area.

[40] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

| Trail or system | Location | Status (2026) | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| PATH Foundation network | Metro Atlanta and statewide | 342+ miles built since 1991 | Includes Silver Comet, Arabia Mountain, Stone Mountain trails |
| Silver Comet Trail | Smyrna to Alabama line | 61.5 miles | Links to 33-mile Chief Ladiga Trail in Alabama |
| Big Creek Greenway | Alpharetta, Roswell, Forsyth | About 20–26 miles | Suburban spine |
| Gwinnett trail network | Gwinnett County | 145+ miles reported | Countywide master plan; Western Gwinnett Bikeway |
| Chattahoochee RiverLands | Buford Dam to Coweta County | Cobb showcase segment under construction | 100–125 mile vision; ~25 trailheads planned |
| Flint River corridor | South Fulton and Clayton | Planning; federal grant rescinded | 40-mile Flint Riverway plan underway |

*Table 4. Selected signature trail assets in metro Atlanta, 2026. Mileage definitions vary by source.*

## The Atlanta Beltline

The Beltline is the region's signature project. In June 2026 it opened Southside Trail Segments 2 and 3, creating 16.7 continuous miles of mainline trail, plus the 1.6-mile Westside Beltline Connector and 10.3 miles of connector trails. In October 2026 Atlanta Beltline, Inc. announced that it had secured all the land needed for the full 22-mile mainline, after two decades and more than $200 million in purchases across 270-plus acres; the remaining 4.7 miles are scheduled for 2030.[41] The Beltline draws about 2.5 million visits a year.[42]

## The City of Atlanta

The City of Atlanta contains the region's densest network. Its planning includes the 1992 citywide greenway plan; Cycle Atlanta 1.0 (2013) and 2.0 (2018), which focused on connected street routes and MARTA access; ATLDOT's 2019 Strategic Transportation Plan, which called for expanding the on-street network and partnering with GDOT on state routes; and Trails ATL (2025).[43][44] Trails ATL counts 80 miles of existing trails and 25 more funded by 2029, and proposes 420 additional miles — 140 miles of greenways and 280 miles of protected street trails — for a 525-mile network that would place 94% of residents within a 10-minute walk of a trail by 2052, up from 37%.[45] The Moving Atlanta Forward program has committed about $304 million to active transportation — roughly $196.5 million for sidewalks and trails and $108 million for protected bike infrastructure — and ATLDOT plans 8 to 10 more

[41] Atlanta Beltline, Inc. (June 12, 2026), mainline trail milestone announcement; Site Selection, Investor Watch (Oct. 19, 2026), on completion of land assembly.

[42] Atlanta Beltline, Inc. / Econsult Solutions, Inc., Atlanta Beltline Economic Impact Analysis (May 2026), as reported by WABE, the AJC, and SaportaReport. Figures include direct, indirect, and induced effects and reflect all activity in the planning area, not only effects caused by the trail.

[43] City of Atlanta, Cycle Atlanta: Phase 1.0 Study (2013); Cycle Atlanta 2.0 (2018).

[44] Atlanta Department of Transportation, Atlanta Strategic Transportation Plan (2019).

[45] City of Atlanta, Trails ATL: Atlanta's Citywide Trails Plan (2025).

miles of protected bike facilities in 2026.[46] In south and west Atlanta, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Initiative approved by City Council in 2026 adds a further funding source.[47]

### Plans and data

Dozens of county and city plans propose additional networks, and many are not yet reflected in regional datasets.[48] The region has no network-wide count program.[49] The share of residents 65 and older is projected to nearly double by 2050, from 11% to 20%, increasing the importance of accessible design.[50]

## 5. Deep Demand

Demand should not be judged only by how many people ride today. Where the network feels unsafe, observed use reflects the infrastructure on offer, not the underlying interest. In Atlanta, the evidence of pent-up demand is strong:

- More than 11,000 residents applied for 579 e-bike rebates in 2024, and nearly 5,500 applied for the renewed rebates within days in 2026.[5152]
- Shared micromobility trips grew by more than one million in 2025, as the Moving Atlanta Forward program added protected lanes.[53]
- Where facilities connect, use is high: the Beltline draws about 2.5 million visits a year.[54]
- Elsewhere, new protected facilities have produced rapid ridership gains, as in Baltimore, Nashville, and Phoenix.[55]

The gap between this demand and current mode share — 1.3% of commuters walk or bike[56] — suggests that the network, not public interest, is the binding constraint.

## 6. Peer Region Comparison

A comparison with five regions known for mature networks — Seattle, Minneapolis–St. Paul, Denver, Austin, and Montréal — places Atlanta's network in context.[57] Atlanta has the largest population and job

[46] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026): about $304 million for active transportation, roughly $196.5 million for sidewalks and trails and $108 million for protected bike infrastructure.

[47] City of Atlanta, Neighborhood Reinvestment Initiative announcement (Sept. 2025) and Atlanta City Council action (June 2026), as reported by local media. Program cost estimates have varied across sources.

[48] ARC, Task 3.1 Plan Review Table (Aug. 2026).

[49] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

[50] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

[51] ARC, "City of Atlanta E-bike Rebate Recipients are Riding Often and Driving Less, Report Shows" (Feb. 24, 2025); GPB (Feb. 28, 2025).

[52] ARC, "City of Atlanta E-Bike Rebate Program Returns with $1 Million in New City Funding" (Sept. 3, 2026); Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Sept. 2026).

[53] Center for Urban Research and ARC, Micromobility in the Atlanta Region: Symposium Summary (May 2026).

[54] Atlanta Beltline, Inc. / Econsult Solutions, Inc., Atlanta Beltline Economic Impact Analysis (May 2026), as reported by WABE, the AJC, and SaportaReport. Figures include direct, indirect, and induced effects and reflect all activity in the planning area, not only effects caused by the trail.

[55] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026), summarizing research presented by Lime.

[56] Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison. Peer mileage comparisons use 703 miles of multi-use path in the 11-county region; commute shares are ACS figures.

[57] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

base of the group, the lowest median household income among the U.S. peers, the highest combined housing and transportation burden, and the highest pedestrian and cyclist fatality rates.

| Measure | Atlanta region | Leading peer |
|---|---|---|
| Share of commuters walking or biking | 1.3% | 6.2% (Montréal) |
| Share commuting by bike | 0.1% | 1.0% (Seattle) |
| Share of network on signature trail | 3% (Beltline) | 36% (Denver) |
| Annual delivery on signature network | ~0.8 Beltline mainline miles | ~26 protected miles (Montréal) |
| Recurring regional funding source | None | All five peers |
| Regional plan standing | Advisory | Binding in Minneapolis–St. Paul and Montréal |
| Network-wide usage counts | None | Minneapolis–St. Paul |

*Table 5. Atlanta compared with the leading peer on selected measures. Source: Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison.*

Atlanta has the most trail mileage of the six regions but the lowest active commute share, which suggests that connectivity, rather than total mileage, is the binding constraint. The peers differ from Atlanta less in ambition than in structure: dedicated funding, delivery capacity, plan standing, and measurement. At a median cost of about $5.4 million per mile, completing the remaining 600 miles of the regional trail vision would cost roughly $3.2 billion.[58]

## 7. Economic, Health, and Environmental Benefits

The research literature on trail investment is extensive, and the Beltline provides some of its most cited evidence.

| Benefit | Evidence | Considerations |
|---|---|---|
| Private investment | $14.2B in private investment in the Beltline Planning Area since inception; 318 completed private projects, 93 in the pipeline[59] | Reflects all activity near the corridor |
| Output and jobs | $23B in annual output and 91,000+ jobs in 2025; $31M in city and $100M+ in state tax revenue; 26,000 new residents[60] | Direct, indirect, and induced effects |
| Public investment | Nearly $1B through the Tax Allocation District, grants, and philanthropy[61] | Leverage ratio varies by method |

[58] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

[59] Atlanta Beltline, Inc. / Econsult Solutions, Inc., Atlanta Beltline Economic Impact Analysis (May 2026), as reported by WABE, the AJC, and SaportaReport. Figures include direct, indirect, and induced effects and reflect all activity in the planning area, not only effects caused by the trail.

[60] Atlanta Beltline, Inc. / Econsult Solutions, Inc., Atlanta Beltline Economic Impact Analysis (May 2026), as reported by WABE, the AJC, and SaportaReport. Figures include direct, indirect, and induced effects and reflect all activity in the planning area, not only effects caused by the trail.

[61] Atlanta Beltline, Inc. / Econsult Solutions, Inc., Atlanta Beltline Economic Impact Analysis (May 2026), as reported by WABE, the AJC, and SaportaReport. Figures include direct, indirect, and induced effects and reflect all activity in the planning area, not only effects caused by the trail.

| Benefit | Evidence | Considerations |
|---|---|---|
| Property value | 3–5% premium typical near trails; Beltline TAD parcels grew ~9% a year vs. 2.5% assumed[62][63] | Supports value capture; raises affordability concerns |
| Local retail | City e-bike rebates generated ~$1.2M in sales at 12 local shops[64] | Small but direct |
| Health | 9/11 Trail: ~$103M a year in health care savings; Northwest Arkansas: ~$137M a year in economic and health benefits[65] | Limited Atlanta-specific data |
| Use | +1% low-stress streets associated with +7% bicycle counts[66] | Connectivity drives use |

*Table 6. Selected evidence on trail and bicycle network benefits.*

These figures describe activity near trails, not necessarily effects caused by trails alone. Benefits tend to be larger where trails connect to networks, destinations, and transit.[67] Facility type also matters: on the Empire State Trail, off-road segments generated about four times the economic output of on-road segments.[68] Trails along streams and floodplains can also serve as green infrastructure, supporting canopy, habitat connections, and flood resilience when designed for those purposes.[69]

## 8. Network Connectivity and Access

Practitioners increasingly evaluate networks on connectivity rather than mileage: a short segment that closes a gap between existing facilities can add more value than a longer segment that dead-ends, and a route interrupted by an uncomfortable intersection may not function as a route at all.[70][71] Two scales are commonly distinguished. **Regional corridors** carry longer trips across jurisdictional lines and require coordination among multiple governments. **Local networks** in town centers, neighborhoods, and activity centers — calm streets, short crossings, and path connections through large blocks — make short daily trips practical. The connection between the two often determines whether either is well used.

### Measuring access

Plans in the region measure access in different, complementary ways. Proximity measures, such as the share of residents within a 10-minute walk of a trail, are easy to communicate and track.[72] Destination-

[62] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[63] Center for Urban Research, Georgia Trails Forward: A Proposal for a Statewide Multi-Use Trail System and Revolving Capital Fund (discussion draft, July 2026), Executive Summary and Sections 5–7.

[64] ARC, "City of Atlanta E-bike Rebate Recipients are Riding Often and Driving Less, Report Shows" (Feb. 24, 2025); GPB (Feb. 28, 2025).

[65] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

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[68] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[69] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[70] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[71] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[72] City of Atlanta, Trails ATL: Atlanta's Citywide Trails Plan (2025).

based measures, such as the number of jobs, schools, groceries, or health care sites reachable on a comfortable network, capture whether facilities connect people to daily needs, and are increasingly feasible with new data on non-work trips.[7374] How these measures are combined affects which projects rise to the top.

### Barriers, transit, and state routes

Many of the most consequential gaps are crossings of interstates, rail lines, and rivers; protected routes on major arterials; and connections to MARTA stations. These projects are typically costly and difficult for any single jurisdiction to deliver.[75] Many gaps also lie on state routes, where GDOT has reconfigured corridors such as SR 9, SR 139, and SR 8, and where its Urban Active Transportation Plan will guide future investment.[76] Connections between trails and rail transit, as on Chicago's 606 and in Salt Lake City, show how each can extend the other.[77] Ridership is also highest where facilities are paired with land use that places daily destinations within a short walk or ride, making coordination with local land use planning an implementation issue in its own right.[78]

## 9. Equity, Affordability, and Displacement

A trail should improve a neighborhood without making it impossible for the people who live there to stay. In neighborhoods the Regional Development Plan identifies as rapidly changing — including south and west Atlanta and inner-ring DeKalb and Clayton counties — median home sale prices have risen more than 111% since 2018. Across the region, 45% of renters are cost-burdened, and life expectancy differs by as much as 25 years between ZIP codes. Residents report that parks and trails are essential but often inaccessible.[79] Research classifies Atlanta as a "lead" city for green gentrification, while studies in Washington, Memphis, and New Orleans find no universal relationship between trails and displacement.[80]

The region has begun to build tools. The Beltline's Legacy Resident Retention Program pays property tax increases through 2030 for eligible long-time homeowners on the Westside and Southside; 276 homeowners received relief in 2025, averaging about $2,174 a year. Atlanta Beltline, Inc. reports 4,555 affordable units created or preserved in the Beltline Tax Allocation District, 81% of its 5,600-unit goal for 2030.[81] The Neighborhood Reinvestment Initiative directs new resources to south and west Atlanta.[82]

[73] ARC staff briefing materials (Aug. 2026).

[74] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[75] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[76] Georgia Department of Transportation, Rural Statewide Active Transportation Plan (with Georgia Bikes) and Urban Active Transportation Plan.

[77] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[78] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[79] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

[80] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[81] Planetizen (April 6, 2026), citing Atlanta Beltline, Inc.; Atlanta Beltline, Inc. (2025); Site Selection (Oct. 19, 2026).

[82] City of Atlanta, Neighborhood Reinvestment Initiative announcement (Sept. 2025) and Atlanta City Council action (June 2026), as reported by local media. Program cost estimates have varied across sources.

The Flint River corridor shows both promise and fragility. In 2024 the region won a $64.9 million federal Reconnecting Communities grant to build parts of a 31-mile trail network linking College Park, East Point, Hapeville, Clayton County, and the Beltline. After the grant was rescinded in July 2025, ARC cancelled 14 Flint River Gateway projects and folded the alignments into its master planning so they can compete for future funds. The new Flint Riverway plan includes a displacement prevention plan as a core deliverable, and public engagement began with "Flint Week" events in October 2026.[83] Communities with fewer resources need implementation paths that do not depend on a single grant.

## 10. Safety

A network is only as safe as its most dangerous crossing. Georgia's pedestrian deaths nearly doubled in a decade, from 163 in 2014 to 310 in 2023, and the state recorded 280 pedestrian deaths in 2024, the fifth-highest total in the nation. An average of 25 people riding bicycles were killed each year in Georgia from 2018 to 2022, and 55% of bicycle crashes occur at intersections.[84] The League of American Bicyclists found that 54% of people killed while bicycling in Georgia since 2015 died on roads owned by the state DOT,[85] and Georgia ranks 46th among states for bicycle commuter safety.[86] Adjusted for exposure, risk to Atlanta-area bicycle commuters is roughly five times that in Seattle or Minneapolis–St. Paul.[87]

Risk is concentrated. In the City of Atlanta, 6% of roadways account for 42% of injuries and 72% of fatalities.[88] There is progress: traffic deaths in the City fell from a peak of 101 in 2021 to 54 in 2025, a 45% decline, though still far from the City's Vision Zero goal.[89] The region has adopted Vision Zero and the Safe System approach, which assumes people will make mistakes and designs streets so those mistakes are not fatal: lower speeds where people mix, physical separation on faster streets, safer intersections and protected crossings, lighting, and maintenance.[9091] ARC's Safety Risk Factors tool maps intersection, bicycle, and pedestrian risk on every road segment in the region, giving planners a basis for putting protection where danger is greatest. Crash data undercount risk on roads people avoid, so perceived comfort matters alongside crash history.[92]

## 11. Data and Performance Measurement

Miles built and dollars spent measure delivery, not usefulness. Data capacity to measure usefulness has improved substantially. ARC's Regional Bike Network Model combines the activity-based travel model,

[83] SaportaReport (Oct. 2025), "ARC cancels 14 Flint River trail projects, pivots to smaller scale"; Stateline (March 12, 2026); ARC Regional Active Transportation Roundtable (April 20, 2026); ARC, "'Flint Week' Kicks Off Flint Riverway Planning" (Oct. 2026).

[84] Hoodline (Aug. 2026), citing the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety (2014–2023) and the Governors Highway Safety Association (2024); GOHS, 2022 Non-Motorist Pedestrian and Bicyclist Georgia Traffic Safety Facts (2024).

[85] Georgia Bikes (2023), citing the League of American Bicyclists' 2022 Bicycle Friendly State report card for Georgia.

[86] Georgia Bikes, Rural Statewide Active Transportation Plan announcement (April 2023).

[87] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

[88] Atlanta Department of Transportation, Atlanta Strategic Transportation Plan (2019).

[89] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026), p. 5.

[90] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

[91] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[92] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

the Polaris simulation, and Replica data with observed data from GDOT signal push-buttons, Lime trip records, and Strava Metro, assigning routes and volumes across a network classified by facility type and comfort.[93] New point-of-interest data describe where people travel for non-work purposes,[94] and the 2026 Household Travel Survey with GDOT will refresh the regional baseline.[95] The principal gap is counting: among the peer regions, only Minneapolis–St. Paul counts its full network, while Montréal uses bikeshare data as a proxy.[96] Shared definitions, permanent counts, and before-and-after evaluation would let jurisdictions compare results and learn from what is built.[97]

## 12. Governance, Delivery, and Funding

Responsibility for the network is distributed. GDOT owns state routes; cities and counties build and maintain most facilities; the City of Atlanta and Atlanta Beltline, Inc. lead in the core; community improvement districts and nonprofit partners such as the PATH Foundation deliver many trails; and ARC plans and programs federal funds regionally. No single entity is responsible for cross-jurisdictional corridors, and regional trail plans are advisory.[98] Approaches under discussion include designating accountable sponsors for regional corridors, protecting alignments before funding, offering shared technical capacity to smaller jurisdictions, and requiring maintenance commitments as a condition of funding.[99]

Funding draws on several sources, each with different strengths and constraints:

- **Federal funds** programmed through the TIP and MTP, the largest source; in 2026, $16.1 million of ARC's TIP call went to trails. Federal awards are subject to rescission, as the Flint River grant showed.[100]
- **Local funds,** including special-purpose sales taxes and bonds such as Moving Atlanta Forward.[101]
- **Value capture,** including tax allocation districts and community improvement districts.[102]
- **Development contributions,** including easements and connections built with new development.[103]
- **Philanthropic and nonprofit funding,** which has built much of the existing trail system.
- **State funding,** currently limited in Georgia (Section 13).

[93] Center for Urban Research and ARC, Micromobility in the Atlanta Region: Symposium Summary (May 2026).

[94] ARC staff briefing materials (Aug. 2026).

[95] Atlanta Regional Commission, 2026 Regional Development Plan: Growing Together for 2050 (Aug. 2026).

[96] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

[97] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[98] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

[99] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

[100] ARC, Riding Forward trail and bicycle planning materials (2026).

[101] Micromobility Symposium Summary (May 2026): about $304 million for active transportation, roughly $196.5 million for sidewalks and trails and $108 million for protected bike infrastructure.

[102] ARC, Task 4.2 Literature Review (preliminary draft, Sept. 2026), and sources cited therein.

[103] ARC, Regional Trail and Bicycle Facility Network Plan, Policy Framework (draft Rev. 3.2, Oct. 2026).

Peer regions use additional models, including dedicated shares of federal funds and regional sales taxes.[104] Several current planning efforts, including ARC's regional plans, are developing funding strategies over the next two years.[105]

## 13. The State Role

State government has a distinct role where trails cross county lines, meet state highways, or serve small jurisdictions without specialized staff. Several Southeastern states have adopted statewide trail plans, and some states fund trails directly.

| State | Statewide plan or program | Funding and features |
|---|---|---|
| Florida | Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan; SUN Trail program (2015) | $50M a year from vehicle registration fees plus $200M one-time (2023); ~$700M allocated; local maintenance commitment[106] |
| North Carolina | Great Trails State Plan (all 100 counties); Great Trails State Program (2023) | $25M initial; additional 2025 funding; matching grants scaled to county need[107] |
| Alabama | Sweet Trails Alabama (all 67 counties) | Alabama Trails Commission (2010)[108] |
| Tennessee | Tennessee Greenways and Trails Plan (2008) | Local Parks and Recreation Fund[109] |
| Maine | Maine Trails Program (2024) | $30M available through 2034; matching funds required[110] |
| California | Active Transportation Program | Consolidated state and federal funds; 85% to disadvantaged communities[111] |
| Georgia | Rural and Urban Active Transportation Plans in development | No dedicated state trail program |

*Table 7. Statewide trail plans and programs.*

Greater state involvement could provide funding stability when federal priorities shift; help smaller and rural jurisdictions that lack staff to compete for grants and meet match requirements; support statewide connections between metro areas, small towns, and state parks — such as the 211-mile Georgia Hi-Lo Trail and the 39-mile Firefly Trail, which together would form a 250-mile paved route from Athens to Savannah; and strengthen Georgia's competitiveness as neighboring states invest in trails.[112] Georgia's constitution restricts motor fuel tax revenue to roads and bridges, which shapes the options available.[113]

[104] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

[105] ARC, Riding Forward trail and bicycle planning materials (2026).

[106] Florida DOT, SUN Trail Program; Florida Senate Bill 106 (2023); Georgia Trails Forward (2026).

[107] N.C. State Parks, Great Trails State Program; NCDOT, Great Trails State Plan; Business North Carolina (Dec. 2025).

[108] Sweet Trails Alabama, Alabama Statewide Comprehensive Trails Plan; Alabama Trails Commission.

[109] Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, 2008 Tennessee Greenways and Trails Plan; Local Parks and Recreation Fund.

[110] Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Maine Trails Program.

[111] Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (Aug. 2025), "Funding for Multiuse Trails"; California Transportation Commission, Active Transportation Program.

[112] Georgia Trails Forward (July 2026), Sections 4 and 8.5; Georgia Hi-Lo Trail; Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (Fall 2024), on the Firefly Trail.

[113] ARC, Task 4.1 Peer Region Comparison (preliminary draft, Aug. 2026).

GDOT's Rural and Urban Active Transportation Plans, the latter due in 2028, could provide the analytical foundation for a statewide trail plan.[114]

## 14. Conclusion

Metro Atlanta has assembled one of the country's largest trail networks and produced some of the strongest evidence of what trails can do for neighborhoods and local economies. Demand for more is evident in rebate applications, record micromobility ridership, and crowded trails. The region's challenge now is less about building miles than about connecting them — to one another, to transit, and to the jobs and daily destinations residents need — while keeping facilities safe, maintained, and beneficial to the communities around them. E-bikes, owned or shared, extend what a connected network can offer, particularly for households seeking alternatives to the cost of car ownership. With the City of Atlanta, ARC, GDOT, and local governments all planning in the same window, and new ideas for state participation emerging, the coming years offer an unusual opportunity to align efforts. This symposium is intended to inform that work.

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[114] Georgia Department of Transportation, Rural Statewide Active Transportation Plan (with Georgia Bikes) and Urban Active Transportation Plan.