

## Corridor Study

### What is it?

A study of the improvement needs for a particular roadway corridor. This study will help build consensus among stakeholders in support of corridor improvements and can save time and money in the later planning, design, and construction of upgrades to the corridor.

### How to do it

1. **Determine the corridor boundaries.** Your study area should at least include all land parcels that border the roadway corridor. Your tax assessor's records should provide the information you need to define these boundaries.
2. **Assemble a design team.** This team of professionals will guide the corridor study process and prepare the final study report. The team should include representatives of disciplines such as traffic engineering, urban planning, civil engineering, landscape architecture, urban design, and architecture.
3. **Involve key stakeholders.** Include business leaders or property owners directly impacted within the corridor, the general public, major landowners, leaders of civic/beautification clubs, elected officials who represent the area, utility providers, and any other affected government agencies or interest groups.
4. **Identify the problems of the corridor.** Start identifying problems by reviewing citizen complaints, requests for enhancements by businesses in the area, or encourage creative discussion among your stakeholders. In this step you should also inventory all physical impediments in the corridor, including curbcuts, poor quality sidewalks, overhead utility lines, large signs and billboards, etc.
5. **Define needed improvements for the corridor.** Involve stakeholders in deciding a vision for the future of the corridor and specific improvements needed to achieve this vision. It may be useful to use one or more of the following workshop approaches here:
  - *Visit or study corridors in other communities.* Involve stakeholders in identifying and investigating successful corridors in other jurisdictions that provide ideas for needed improvements to your local corridor.
  - *Use a visual preference survey.* A visual preference survey (not yet available) utilizes conceptual drawings or photographs to present various improvement alternatives for reaction by stakeholders. This is a useful tool for understanding which improvements are most important to stakeholders.

- *Conduct a design charrette.* A design charrette (refer to GQGP quality growth tool: Design Charrette) involving the key stakeholders can be very useful for developing a consensus vision for the future of the corridor. The design team should lead or facilitate the charrette, where all stakeholders play an active role in actually redesigning the corridor, as they would ideally like it to be.

Use these workshops to identify desired enhancements to the corridor and to develop a priority list for your project budget. These workshops are your best opportunity to achieve consensus on corridor redevelopment needs in advance, thereby avoiding the need to make major design changes once construction has begun.

6. **Prepare a report of your study findings.** This should present the overall vision for the corridor, including conceptual drawings of streetscape improvements and an implementation strategy detailing the funding, design and construction phases of the project.

### **Things to consider before using this tool**

- Budget for a thorough planning study, including costs of the stakeholder meetings/workshops and hiring of a qualified design team that can prepare a quality, detailed action plan for improving the corridor.
- Plan your implementation strategy considering how much time the improvements will take to complete, and their disruptive effect on area businesses. You can start working on both long-term and short-term improvements simultaneously, but these may also need to be phased to minimize the level of construction-related inconvenience during particular time periods.

## **Additional Information on Improving Strip Commercial Corridors**

### **Background**

- Does your community have roadways that are rather unattractive due to cluttered commercial development and excessive signage?
- Have some of your roadways become congested and dangerous due to the character of development along the road?
- Are some of your once-thriving commercial strip corridors declining as businesses move on to newer areas?
- Does your community have commercial areas that are not very accessible for pedestrians, bicyclists, or transit riders?

Many communities in Georgia have grown in ways that have left major roadways in disarray. A typical example is a five-lane road with a variety of roadside uses, numerous overhead utilities, commercial strip centers, a clutter of signs (varying in size and style), and little to no accommodation for walkers and bicyclists. These strip corridors typically exhibit the following characteristics:

- "Seas" of parking that degrade the looks and function of the corridor
- Traffic congestion or speeding through the corridor
- Inconsistent or poor street and pedestrian lighting
- Advertisements, road signs or pavement markings that clutter the roadway with an inconsistent look
- Lack of architectural or landscape continuity
- No speed restraints to slow motorists in places where you might want to encourage more pedestrian use
- Uncontrolled driveway cuts and inconsistent sidewalk placement and condition, which limit walking and bicycling

### **Before Embarking on A Corridor Improvement Strategy**

#### ***Technical Assistance Needs***

For most corridor improvement projects, you need the expertise of a design team. Whether in-house, hired consultants or a combination, the team should work closely with local planning staff, stakeholders, utility providers, the district engineer for the Georgia Department of Transportation, and other groups that may play a role within the corridor. The design team should be selected based on qualifications that include:

1. Experience with other corridors of similar land uses and size, including demonstrated understanding of local development styles that need to be preserved

2. Abilities in: project management, traffic operations, civil engineering/road design, utility design/coordination, land use planning, landscape architecture, urban design, and architecture.
3. Having a creative and communicative project manager and key personnel available to interact frequently with and effectively present alternatives to planning staff and stakeholders.
4. Experience conducting community involvement workshops, opinion surveys, and stakeholder meetings. Experience using computer imaging or other techniques to present alternatives is also helpful.
5. Creativity in developing new approaches and ideas to improve a corridor.

**Relative Costs and Funding**

Most of the early costs will be related to design team fees and expenses, but the majority of the total expenses will occur during construction. The following table provides a common range of costs for the various approaches and phases:

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Typical Cost Range</b>
Corridor Study	\$15,000-\$100,000 depending on length
Design of Improvements	7-9% of construction costs
Construction of Above Grade Improvements	\$400-1,750 per linear foot of roadway
Utility Relocation/Below Grade Improvements	Varies - dialogue with utility provider is key
Prepare Overlay District Ordinance	\$15, 000 - \$50, 000 plus local attorney fees depending on size of area and amount of consensus building sessions with stakeholders
Prepare Sign Ordinance	\$5, 000 - \$20, 000
New Development Templates	\$10, 000 - \$25, 000
On-Street Traffic Improvements	\$5, 000 and up for each improvement
Redeveloping Property within Targeted Corridors	Typical construction costs by local contractors for renovation work

An important thing to remember is that your entire project does not need to be implemented at once. Phasing activities allows for better budgeting and time to check into additional funding sources.

1. Funding may come from your general revenues, special purpose local option sales tax, development authority financing, State, and Federal grants.
2. The merchants and interested committee members may be interested in working together to raise money to fund project activities.
3. GDOT has an extensive program to fund qualifying local improvements through the TEA (Transportation Equity Act) program. Local matches (20%) can provide the early planning and design, while GDOT reimburses the

remainder of the design and the construction of improvements. Applications for TEA funding may be submitted every two years, beginning in January.

4. Another option is to form a Community Improvement District, wherein an additional property tax levy is used to fund improvements to the streets, sidewalks, and other surrounding facilities.

### ***Political Considerations***

Improving commercial strip corridors may sound on the surface like a no-lose situation: the appearance of the corridor is improved, more customers will visit merchants, blighted buildings will be renovated or removed -- everyone will seemingly benefit. Unfortunately, the reality is that many well-planned projects are never implemented, and political challenges are one of the most common reasons. The typical sources of controversy might include:

1. Perception that too much money is being spent for "appearances," at the expense of more important needs.
2. Perception by major business owners that the improvements will have greater harm than benefit to their businesses.

It is important to work towards a consensus of the stakeholders and elected officials on needed corridor improvements. You can avoid political pitfalls if you have a well-established advisory/stakeholder group, and work diligently to keep local elected officials well informed about the project.

### ***Legal Considerations***

The primary legal questions focus on right-of-way and infringement on private property. Here are two important points to remember:

1. GDOT owns right-of-way along all corridors that are on the state road system. No construction, landscaping, or other use is permitted inside the right-of-way as a general rule. Any creative use of the right-of-way, such as landscaping improvements, would require close involvement by GDOT and prior approval.
2. Cities and counties have condemnation powers, but their actual use for corridor enhancements must be carefully justified, because these projects may be viewed as being more for beautification than for improving the general health, safety, and welfare of the community.

### ***Know your goals***

Your project goals should be clearly developed then communicated to affected parties. Be sure to make it clear that the project is intended to make your street environment a distinctive "place," not merely a generic strip commercial roadway. It is important to keep the improvement project moving, once underway. Loss of momentum and support will occur if immediate improvements are not visible, or the project is perceived as moving along erratically, with lots of starts and stops.