

**Submitted By:** ACC Rails to Trails Committee  
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**Project Classification:** Social Well-Being  
**Project Focus:** Quality of Life  
**Project Type:** Bicycle or Pedestrian Improvements (Includes Greenway and Rail to Trails)

**Previously Submitted and Rejected:** No  
**Continuation Project:** No

**Project Total Cost: \$ 17,203,000**

**Total Operating Cost: \$ 266,000**

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**Project Description:** The proposed project is to develop a unique multi-use trail opportunity that provides connectivity to existing traditional non-motorized transportation networks (rail-trails, bike lanes, sidewalks, greenways, etc.). The preferred route will generally follow the portion of the north-south rail line that runs from College Station Road to the Oconee County line. Although the main part of the line runs from Center, in Jackson County, to Athens, the tracks extend as far south as Madison, with a spur line through Watkinsville to Bishop (see Map). Turning the part of the rail line that runs from College Station Road to the Oconee County line into a rail with trail (RWT) facility will serve to complement the present east-west Firefly trail by adding a new, north-south connecting link to ACC's existing trail network, thereby providing the opportunity for a regional trail amenity.

**Project Mission Statement/Goals & Objectives:** Mission Statement: The project will provide a north-south addition to the present east-west (Firefly) R2T facility. In so doing, not only will it provide infrastructure for non-motorized transportation that links the county's southern and northern segments, but it will also provide greater connectivity for alternative transportation by allowing for individuals coming from southern ACC to transit into campus and downtown without needing to use motorized vehicles. The proposed RWT line will also connect to several of ACC's greenways, thereby further facilitating non-motorized transportation in this area of the county. If the history of ACC's Firefly Trail and other communities' R2T/RWT conversions is any indication, improving this interconnectivity should also spur economic development adjacent to the line, especially in the South Milledge/ Whitehall Rd area.

Goals & Objectives:

- Goal: Add a second R2T/RWT to expand the existing trail network in ACC.
  - Objective: Develop the trail segment from College Station Road to the Oconee county line, just south of Whitehall Rd.
- Goal: Provide residents and visitors with a safe and healthy transportation and recreation option

- Objective: Increase prevalence of walking and bicycling for work and play
- Objective: Foster healthier lifestyles for young people, families, individuals, and seniors
- Goal: Enhance economic vitality of ACC at a value greater than the cost of trail construction and operation
  - Objective: Raise nearby property values
  - Objective: Increase sales-tax collections
  - Objective: Create an exceptional, attractive facility that will be a resource for tourism promoters and attract visitors
- Goal: Provide a means of non-motorized vehicular connectivity to the southern part of ACC, with the potential to link all the way to Watkinsville and beyond
  - Objective: Reduce motorized traffic congestion on roads from the southern part of ACC heading towards UGA's campus, including Whitehall Rd and South Milledge Rd.

**Projected Useful Life of Project:** The projected life of the facility is 50+ years.

**To meet the Project Goals & Objectives, when should this project be completed?** There is no particular time frame per se for completion, in that this project - although complementing the Firefly Trail - is a stand-alone project, not reliant upon any other project to be completed before it is started and not needing to be finished before other projects may be started. Having said that, due to sensitive property considerations, there is a narrow window of opportunity to bring this project to fruition. At this time, the current owner of the preferred corridor has indicated his willingness to partner on this project. However, if this opportunity is not pursued now, it may well be lost forever.

**The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building System compliance:** The proposed project, though an outdoor facility, will be built following all ACC stormwater requirements. No other LEED requirements apply to this project.

**How will this project help meet the Public Safety, Basic Facilities/Infrastructure, and/or Quality of Life needs in Athens-Clarke County?** The proposed project will provide new infrastructure that will have several positive effects.

1) By offering a safe, direct, and topographically fairly level off-road route, the planned new RWT will help to fulfill short- and long-range county plans to increase bicycle/pedestrian commuting within and between the neighborhoods along the trail, linking them to downtown Athens and southern ACC and to other natural, recreational, cultural, and educational facilities, including the existing Oconee Rivers Greenway network.

2) Rail-trail projects across the country have been shown to have important impacts upon local economic development. In a recent study, Dr. Shatakshee Dhongde, an economics professor at Georgia Tech, projected an annual impact of more than \$14M for the entire 39-mile Firefly Trail. She indicated that for every dollar spent in construction, on average some \$1.33 can be expected in return. Furthermore, given that the route of this new proposed trail follows South Milledge Avenue, we can expect that it may drive some level of retail development in the area of the about-to-be-constructed roundabout at the Whitehall/ S.

Milledge intersection. Already there are several retail outlets (Peppinos pizza; a Dollar Store), and this project has the potential to add to this through, perhaps, other food establishments. The development of this rail trail facility should also be helpful to the shops at the South Milledge/ Macon Hwy area, given that the trail would run approximately 500ft to their east. The trail will also facilitate access to the State Botanical Garden and a variety of other publicly accessible UGA sporting and agricultural facilities.

3) It will build upon over 20 years' worth of plans and capitalize on previous and pending expenditures to expand ACC's rail trail network. This will complement existing and planned bicycling and walking investments by establishing a main north-south corridor where none presently exists, linking to the Athens Transit and UGA Campus Transit systems. In so doing, it will reduce vehicle-miles traveled, traffic congestion, automobile emissions, and the threat of air quality non-attainment impacts on the local economy. By taking vehicular traffic off the road, this has the potential to extend the lifetime of existing road surfaces and other infrastructure.

4) The project has the potential to help children and others develop safe and healthy transportation habits that will last throughout their lives.

**How is this Project recommended/included in any approved ACCGOV Land Use Plan, Master Plan, Study, Service Delivery Plan, Envision Athens, etc.?** The Greenway Network Plan shows rail trails, specifically the preferred corridor as outlined in this application. Recent real estate discussions have revealed a unique opportunity to secure this route. This route would complement other alternative transportation infrastructure options already included in several ACCGOV plans (MACORTS, Envision Athens, Mayor & Commission budget goals).

The Northeast Georgia Plan for Bicycling and Walking references the preferred corridor as the main north-south connection between Athens and the City of Madison.

### Triple Bottom Line Impacts

**Positive Benefits for the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County:** ACCGOV has already invested substantial funds into building out its rail-trail network. This is already bringing economic benefits to the county. The Firefly Trail is estimated to be having a multiplier on construction expenditures alone of approx \$1.33 returned for every dollar spent (see above). This does not include additional revenues brought in to the county through increased sales tax from outsiders coming into the community to ride the trail and spending money here, and increased property tax revenues from enhancements to properties along the trail line (property values along the Silver Comet Trail running 62 miles from Smyrna to the GA/AL line increased by 4%-7% for homes within one-quarter mile of the trail in the first few years of its operation, and we expect similar increases here in ACC). Other communities (e.g., Atlanta, with its Beltline project) have seen significant redevelopment along many of their rail-trail routes and we expect that the project proposed here would provide similar benefits. Already, in February 2017, the owner of a Quik Trip store announced plans to build a new store adjacent to the Firefly rail-trail section presently being constructed off Oconee Street, as well as to provide a patio and other amenities aimed specifically at rail-trail users. The proposed north-south RWT route would likely have similar impacts as the Firefly Trail and trails in other communities.

Communities with a good quality of life are known to be communities which the kinds of creative knowledge industries (e.g., biotech) which Athens has been seeking to attract find appealing. Having a well-developed network of greenways and rail-trail facilities adds to our community's ability to attract young entrepreneurs by improving our quality of life.

In addition, by diverting use from vehicle to alternative transportation, this project is anticipated to extend the life of more expensive roadways, thereby saving tax dollars that might be better spent on other activities, such as funding economic development projects or various social welfare activities.

**Detrimental Impacts to the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County:** None are anticipated.

**Positive Benefits for our Citizens and Visitors:** Completion of this project will increase overall livability for ACC residents by providing improved infrastructure for exercise and walking, as well as expanding alternative transportation options. This latter will help reduce traffic congestion and provide some geographical equity to the network of alternative transportation options because much of its length is outside the loop.

The proposed RWT should serve to attract visitors (and their money) to ACC by providing a state-of-the-art facility that links to the Greenway and Firefly Trail. When completed, then, the Firefly Trail and this proposed RWT will allow users to travel all the way from Union Point to downtown Athens and then onwards to Watkinsville.

This project provides a safe and family-friendly opportunity to access the State Botanical Garden, UGA Soccer and Softball Complex, UGArden, intramural fields, and beyond.

**Detrimental Impacts for our Citizens and Visitors:** There are none.

**Environmental Benefits, including but not limited to Positive impacts on existing Infrastructure/Systems:**

The project will encourage commuters to leave cars at home by providing safe and pleasant off-road corridors that run from the Oconee County line into Athens. Additionally, the path will attract thousands of walkers, joggers, cyclists, and others interested in health, fitness, and recreation. The project will also link to numerous other recreational, cultural, and educational facilities and commercial centers.

Air quality will be improved by the reduction of automobile emissions as people make non-automotive transportation choices. According to the US EPA, a typical passenger vehicle emits about 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year (assuming a fuel economy of about 22.0 miles per gallon and that the car is driven around 11,500 miles per year). This equates to approx. 0.9lbs of carbon dioxide produced per mile driven. The distance from downtown Watkinsville to College Station is approximately 14 miles r/t, meaning that for every car not driven this distance approx 13lbs of carbon dioxide is not emitted into the atmosphere. As such, the project will aid ACC's efforts to address some imminent (and ultimately expensive) air quality non-attainment issues, as well as to help reduce the warming of our local micro-climate through the non-production of some of the greenhouse gases responsible for atmospheric warming. Not only is this good for

the environment generally, but by not exacerbating the heating up of our local micro-climate we can help residents save on their cooling bills during the summer.

**Detrimental Impacts for the Environment, including but not limited to Negative impacts on existing Infrastructure/Systems:** Any potential stormwater impacts would be negligible, due to built-in stormwater capacity. There are no known other negative impacts, as the project is essentially making use of a facility that has been in place for over a century.

**Positive/Negative Impacts on ACCGOV Departments, Agencies, or other Organizations, if not covered in one of the above questions:** Operating costs are outlined in the budget.

## Project Costs

**Detailed project capital budget costs (to be funded from SPLOST 2020 only):**

Project Costs (round to thousand)	Amount
1. Land Acquisition / ROW / Easement:	\$ 500,000
2. Design Fees: (Min.12% of New Const.; 14% of reno.; 16% for LEED proj.)	\$ 1,683,000
3. Miscellaneous Fees: (Min. Minimum of 3% of Construction Costs – used for permitting, etc. Utilize minimum of 10% if land acquisition if necessary.)	\$ 316,000
4. Fixtures, Furniture, and Equipment (for a facility): A detailed estimate is preferred – but dependent upon the specific project, utilize at a minimum \$15 to \$20 per square foot.	\$ -
5. Construction:	\$ 10,518,000
6. Construction Contingency: (10% of the Construction line item)	\$ 1,052,000
7. Acquisition of Capital Equipment:	\$ 120,000
8. Testing:	\$ 316,000
9. Project Management: (4% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 581,000
10. Project Contingency: (10% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 1,509,000
11. Public Art: Calculated at 1% of the Construction line item.	\$ 106,000
12. Other 1:	\$ -
13. Other 2:	\$ -
<b>Project Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$ 16,701,000</b>
14. Program Management (3% of Project Subtotal):	\$ 502,000
<b>SPLOST 2020 Project Total:</b>	<b>\$ 17,203,000</b>

## Operating Cost

### Total Annual Net Operating Costs when Project is complete:

Only identify additional or net operating costs to be paid by ACCGOV. Identify the additional or net costs needed above ACCGOV's current operating budget to operate the requested project and any additional project related revenues that would be generated. Provide budget costs for each identified category below.

Operating Costs (round to thousand)	Estimated Impact for Annual Operating Expenditures
<b>TOTAL PROJECTED REVENUES FROM PROJECT</b>	-
<b>PROJECTED EXPENDITURES</b>	
1. Personnel Costs: from Appendix A	215,000
2. Annual Utilities:	
• Gas:	-
• Electrical:	-
• Water:	-
• Sewer:	-
• Phone:	-
• Solid Waste Collection:	2,000
• Other: Hazard Tree Felling	3,000
3. Operating Supplies:	4,000
4. Equipment Maintenance:	10,000
5. Facility Maintenance:	8,000
6. Fuel:	14,000
7. Other: Ecological Restoration	10,000
8. Other:	-
9. Other:	-
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	266,000
<b>NET OPERATING COSTS OF PROJECT:</b>	<b>\$ 266,000</b>

## Project Financing

Is the proposed Project to receive funding from source(s) other than SPLOST 2020? No

**New Staffing**

Position	Title	Hourly Rate	# of Hours /wk	# of Positions	Total Annual Expense
Full Time	Maintenance Worker II			1	\$55,410
Full Time	Grounds Crew Leader			1	\$64,048
Full Time	Grounds Worker I			1	\$50,183
Part Time	Park Assistant	\$15	29	2	\$45,240

**Maintenance Worker II** – Responsible for all facility maintenance of the trail segment including - sign maintenance, amenity maintenance, path maintenance, vandalism mitigation, etc.

**Grounds Crew Leader** – Leads a landscape crew that will be responsible for all landscape maintenance for the trail - including mowing and edging, seasonal blowing, tree & landscape maintenance

**Grounds Worker I** – Responsible for all landscape maintenance for the trail - including mowing and edging, seasonal blowing, tree & landscape maintenance

**Park Assistant** – Responsible for trail inspection, minor trail and amenity maintenance, litter pickup, guest services, ecological restoration, and nature programming

## Project Site

**Will the proposed Project require any land, whether existing sites, new site, easements, or Rights of Way?** Yes

**Will the proposed Project be on a site currently owned by ACCGOV?** No

**Approximately how many acres is available or will be needed for the new facility or Park?**

**Project Location/Address (Existing or Proposed):**

Varies

**Will the Project require fee simple additional land acquisition?** No

**Will the Project require Rights-of-Way or Easement acquisition?** Yes

## Site Criteria and Standards

**Current Property Owner (if applicable):** Yes

**Minimum acreage necessary for Project.** approximately 4 mile long corridor

**Topography:** varies

**Estimated cost per acre:** Total cost of easement acquisition is approximately \$500,000.

## Location/Accessibility

**Define location relative to the Project's service area that best meets the Goals and Objectives.**

The preferred route will principally serve the southern part of ACC but will be accessible to residents from all parts of ACC.

**If necessary to meet the Goals and Objectives, describe what types of vehicular access will be required.**

There are numerous parking facilities along the preferred route.

**If necessary to meet the Goals and Objectives, describe what types of pedestrian access will be required.**

There are numerous points of access for pedestrians.

**If necessary to meet the Goals and Objectives, describe what types of Bicycle access will be required.**

There are numerous points of access for cyclists.



# Project Cost round to thousand)

## RWT Project Conceptual Estimate

	Original #	Rounded #
1. Land Acquisition / ROW / Easement: Estimated value of property.	\$500,000.00	\$500,000
2. Design Fees Minimum of 12% of Construction costs for New Construction, 14% for renovations, and 16% for LEED designed projects.	\$1,682,772.20	\$1,683,000
3. Miscellaneous Fees: Minimum of 3% of Construction Costs – used for permitting, etc. Utilize minimum of 10% if land acquisition if necessary.	\$315,519.79	\$316,000
4. Fixtures, Furniture, and Equipment (for a facility): A detailed estimate is preferred – but dependent upon the specific project, utilize at a minimum \$15 to \$20 per square foot.	\$0.00	\$0
5. Construction: Provide a detailed cost estimate of this component.	\$10,517,326.28	\$10,518,000
6. Construction Contingency: Calculated at 10% of the Construction line item. If additional Construction Contingency is needed, use one of the "Other" fields below.	\$1,051,732.63	\$1,052,000
7. Acquisition of Capital Equipment	\$120,000.00	\$120,000
8. Testing Minimum of 3% of construction costs for projects whose construction component is over \$1 million and 5% for those whose construction component between \$1 million and \$500,000 and 10% of construction costs for projects less than \$500,000.	\$315,519.79	\$316,000
9. Project Management Calculated at 4% of the total budget line items above.	\$580,114.83	\$581,000
10. Project Contingency Calculated at 10% of the total budget line items above. If additional Project Contingency is needed, use one of the "Other" fields below.	\$1,508,298.55	\$1,509,000
11. Public Art: Calculated at 1% of the Construction line item.	\$105,173.26	\$106,000
12. Other	\$0.00	\$0
13. Other	\$0.00	\$0
<b>Project Subtotal:</b>	\$16,696,457.33	\$16,701,000
14. Program Management (3% of Project Subtotal):	\$500,893.72	\$501,000
<b>SPLOST 2020 Project Total:</b>	\$17,197,351.05	\$17,202,000