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MEMORANDUM

TO: Jason Dozier, Chair, Community Development/Human Services Committee
FROM: Doug Young, Director, Office of Design, Department of City Planning *DY*
SUBJECT: 23-O-1254/CDP-23-008 for Freight ATL: Northwest
DATE: July 11, 2023

PROPOSAL:

An ordinance to adopt the *Northwest Atlanta Industrial Area Freight Cluster Plan (Freight ATL: Northwest)*, to amend the 2021 Comprehensive Development Plan to incorporate by reference said plan.

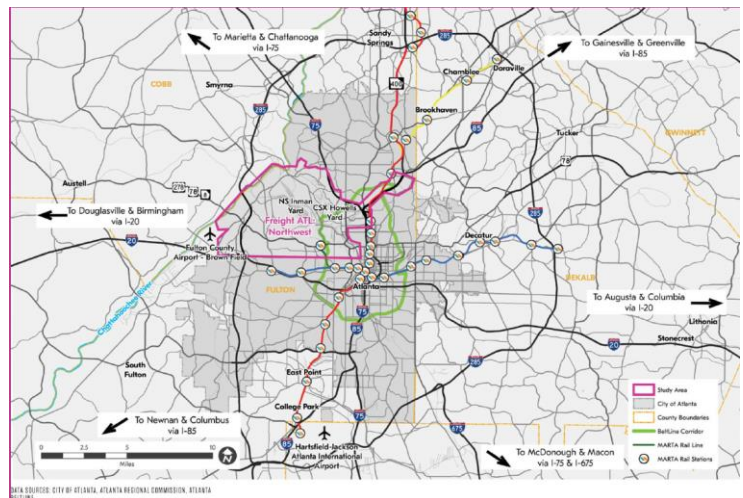
SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:

The Office of Design recommends adoption of *Freight ATL: Northwest* and its incorporation into the 2021 Comprehensive Development Plan through 23-O-1254.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Planning Area

Atlanta was built and designed around the railroad system. By the 1960s, Northwest Atlanta was a significant location for truck terminals moving goods throughout the booming Southeast. Today, Atlanta has robust freight rail and truck infrastructure that plays a significant role in the state and regional economies. The *Freight ATL: Northwest* study area includes roughly 10,000 acres of land zoned to support a variety of industrial uses—over half of all land area currently zoned for industrial uses across the city. Furthermore, the study area includes 7,000 acres of land designated for Future Industrial Land Use in Atlanta’s Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP), and areas that have been designated as “Production Conservation Areas” by *Atlanta City Design*. The Production Conservation Areas encompass the Atlanta Industrial Park, a portion of Fulton Industrial Boulevard, and areas around Inman Yard and the Chattahoochee Industrial District. There are 12 Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU) within the study area (B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, and M).



Plan Purpose and Support of City Policies

Freight ATL: Northwest addresses goods movement, traffic operations, and related planning needs in northwest Atlanta. The study is supported by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), Atlanta City Councilmember Dustin Hillis (District 9), and Invest Atlanta. Atlanta Department of City Planning has been leading the study, with assistance from its Project Team partners, Gresham Smith consultants and Atlanta Department of Transportation (ATLDOT), to ensure that Atlanta’s transportation system can sustain the area’s competitive industrial sector and quality of life in the neighborhoods that support it.

The 2016 update to the *Atlanta Regional Freight Mobility Plan* identified the need to conduct local, small area freight planning that addresses transportation issues related to this key part of the region’s economy. Based on this need, ARC started the local freight cluster plans a few years ago, and the City was an early grant recipient. *Freight ATL: Northwest* also builds on and updates the city-wide freight study, *Cargo Atlanta*, completed in 2015. From the beginning, the core values of *Atlanta City Design* and guiding principles of ATLDOT served as guideposts, centering Equity, Progress, Ambition, Access, and Nature. The Project Team grounded the research and analysis in ATLDOT priorities of safety, mobility, and equity, and the plan’s recommendations reflect these priorities.

Freight ATL: Northwest provides guidance to City staff, leadership, and decision-makers for implement projects that will improve mobility for all travelers while preserving industrial businesses and jobs in Northwest Atlanta. This plan provides guidance to pursue and implement capital projects, policies and strategies. Capital projects focus on capital investments and studies to support infrastructure and other types of improvements—many of these are ongoing or already identified as City priorities in other plans and studies. Policies and strategies focus on initiatives and activities City staff, leadership, and partner agencies can undertake to improve conditions, procedures, coordination, and help set the stage for continued improvements.

Plan Recommendations

In total, the plan recommends 54 transportation-focused Capital Projects and Studies along with 44 Policies and Strategies. In the Recommendations Report, recommendations for Capital Projects and Studies are divided into three timeframes for implementation: a 10-year Short-Term Action Plan, which is further divided into Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects, and a Long-Term Vision Plan. The timeframes were identified through the project prioritization process along with the anticipated availability of revenue and funding. Freight Cluster Plans are required to include a financially-feasible short-term action plan that can be implemented within a 10-year period based on reasonable projections of anticipated revenue and planning level cost estimates. The *Freight ATL: Northwest* Financially Feasible Short-Term Action Plan includes higher priority and several “quick-win” projects recommended for the first 5-year period (Tier 1) and relatively lower priority or slightly more costly projects recommended for the second 5-year period (Tier 2). In addition, projects that are not anticipated to be able to be funded within the first 10 years based on projected revenues are placed into a Long-Term Vision Plan.

Tier 1 Capital Projects and Studies

The 17 Short-Term Tier 1 projects include corridor improvements, intersection improvements, and workforce access/multimodal improvements. Specifically, Tier 1 includes:

- Corridor improvements along W Marietta Street and Chattahoochee Avenue (to be coordinated with planned projects in the Capital Improvements Element (CIE)).
- Nine intersection improvements, including several along Bolton Road, Chattahoochee Avenue at Collier Road and at Ellsworth Industrial Boulevard, and others.

- Installation of new sidewalk and upgrades of bus stops along Huff Road, Hollywood Road, Browntown Road and others where bus routes serve industrial districts and job centers.

Tier 2 Capital Projects and Studies

In total, there are 18 projects in Tier 2, including corridor and intersection improvements, workforce access/multimodal improvements, studies, and transportation technology projects. Specifically, Tier 2 includes:

- Corridor improvements along Bolton Road, Johnson Road, and Parrott Avenue.
- An intersection improvement at W Marietta Street and Joseph E Lowery Boulevard.
- Several sidewalk and bus stop upgrades along James Jackson Parkway, Marietta Boulevard, Armour Drive, and Defoors Ferry Road, and others.
- Studies of James Jackson Parkway, multimodal operations within the Armour-Ottley Industrial District, and prioritizing freight access to I-285 along key corridors in the study area.

Long-Term Vision Plan Capital Projects and Studies

Projects under the Long-Term Vision Plan:

- 3 bridge and rail crossing projects.
- 4 intersection improvements.
- 10 sidewalk and bus stop upgrades.
- 2 transportation and technology projects.

Policies and Strategies by Type

Policies and strategies focus on initiatives and activities City staff, leadership, and partner agencies can undertake to improve conditions, procedures, coordination, and help set the stage for continued improvements. The 44 recommendations are grouped as follows:

Business Development: Recommendations in this category relate to supporting industrial and manufacturing businesses in Northwest Atlanta, particularly M/WBE businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises. Strategies include the expansion of funding opportunities, coalition building initiatives, and strategies to encourage and promote innovation in industrial and manufacturing sectors.

Workforce Development: To improve career pathways for good and promising jobs in Northwest Atlanta, these recommendations aim to improve inter-agency collaboration, build and maintain relationships with anchor institutions, and effectively communicate training opportunities, job postings, and financial assistance.

Real Estate Development: These recommendations aim to promote development and redevelopment of industrial space in Northwest Atlanta, by supporting the marketing of available sites, leveraging publicly owned land, and expanding financial assistance for industrial development projects that supports the city's goals for equitable economic development.

Land Use and Zoning: Zoning has long been a tool in cities to mitigate conflicts between land uses. Recommendations related to zoning attempt to preserve and support industrial and manufacturing land users in Northwest Atlanta while allowing for mixed-use districts and conversion of industrial sites where appropriate. The plan does not include recommendations to change future land use classifications or zoning categories on specific properties.

Wayfinding and Signage: Recommendations in this category aim to streamline and improve truck route signage throughout Northwest Atlanta, establishing standards for truck prohibition signs and routinely installing “No Truck” signs when new prohibitions are approved, as well as regular use of overhead and pavement marking signs to aid with wayfinding and routing to interstates.

Planning Support: Recommendations are offered to help streamline coordination between and across city departments, planning efforts and projects, and with other agencies to ensure continuity. They will also guide timely updates to data sources and planning tools.

Transportation and Truck Routes: Transportation related strategies encompass a variety of activities related to changes to the city’s designated truck route network, aligning truck routes at various levels (local, state, national), addressing issues and opportunities around truck parking, improving curb management, and more. These will likely involve collaboration between Department of City Planning, ATLDOT, and other agencies.

One of the key recommendations of *Freight ATL: Northwest* is to update the city-designated truck route network to better align with existing legislation, including ordinances adopted since *Cargo Atlanta* was completed in 2015, and to better align with community priorities, changing development patterns, and anticipated future land use.

Freight ATL: Northwest recommends removing the following street segments from the City of Atlanta designated truck route network, as shown in the Ordinance’s Exhibit B.

- Jefferson Street (between Marietta Boulevard and J.E. Lowery Boulevard)
- Huff Road (between Marietta Boulevard and Howell Mill Road)
- Ellsworth Industrial Boulevard (between Chattahoochee Avenue and Huff Road)
- Elaine Avenue (between Marietta Boulevard and Ellsworth Industrial Boulevard)
- Collier Road (between Chattahoochee Avenue and Howell Mill Road) and to prevent a spur north of I-75, remove the segment of Howell Mill Road between I-75 and Collier Road
- Howell Mill Road between Chattahoochee Avenue and W. Marietta Street, and so as to prevent creating any dead-end spurs, remove the segments on 17th, 14th, and 10th Streets between Howell Mill Road and Northside Drive

Planning Process

The Project Team started research and analysis in early 2022. Deliverables from this early work included reports on best practices from other cities, an inventory and assessment of existing conditions of the study area’s freight transportation system, an industrial development and job analysis in the area, and a traffic study focused on key intersections and corridors along the study area’s truck routes.

Beginning in May of 2022, the Project Team conducted virtual and in-person events, including Study Advisory Committee (SAC) meetings, community insight sessions, walk and talk tours, virtual public open houses, industry insight sessions, community pop-up events, and presentations and updates to Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU). The project website, www.FreightATL.com, was the main tool to communicate updates and announcements, but the Project Team also used social media, yard signs, calls and texts, NPU agenda notices, emails to NPU chairs and Councilmembers, and word of mouth for community outreach.

The community was invited to review and provide feedback on draft reports and recommendations during the public comment period from February 2 through March 13. Draft reports were accessed through the

project website. During the review and comment period, the Project Team hosted a virtual public open house on March 1 which highlighted key findings and proposed recommendations and provided a forum for the community to ask questions. The Department of City Planning presented at the 12 NPUs in the study during their regular monthly meetings in May and June. The Department received few comments which were primarily focused on following through with implementing the recommendations for safety improvements at highly trafficked intersections, communicating local truck route designations to truck drivers and on third party mapping applications, and enforcing traffic laws, particularly to prevent truck drivers from speeding, cutting through residential neighborhoods, and parking illegally.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ADOPTION of *Freight ATL: Northwest* and amendment to the 2021 Atlanta Comprehensive Development Plan by incorporating this plan by reference.

NPU Recommendations:

The 12 Study Area NPUs (B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, and M) Recommended to Approve at their May or June regular monthly meetings.

cc: Jahnee Prince, Commissioner, Department of City Planning
Janide Sidifall, Deputy Commissioner, Department of City Planning
Nate Hoelzel, AICP, Office of Design, Department of City Planning
Project File