

**FY23 Rebuilding American
Infrastructure with
Sustainability and Equity
Grant Application**

Submitted by City of Atlanta
in partnership with Atlanta Downtown
Improvement District

**Reconnecting a
Torn Urban Fabric**

THE STITCH

**PROJECT
DESCRIPTION**

thestitchatl.com

View northwest across Energy Park toward Peachtree Green

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

THE STITCH

A Transformational Transportation Investment

The Stitch will build a cap over Interstates 75 and 85, (I-75/85, known locally as the “Downtown Connector”), reconnecting the disrupted street grid and the neighborhoods surrounding north Downtown Atlanta. The cap will improve the overall transportation network in Downtown Atlanta by transforming existing car-oriented streets into complete streets, developing an off-street bus facility for local and commuter buses, and renovating an existing heavy rail station. The cap structure will spur the development of a new urban neighborhood with affordable housing, direct access to heavy rail, and a 14-acre park where an interstate and vacant and underutilized land sits today.

The Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program funding is crucial to advancing engineering of the Stitch. RAISE funding will support preliminary design and engineering of the structure, transportation systems, and park elements, as well as supporting environmental permitting approvals and detailed cost estimates. This work is anticipated to produce project approvals and design development that will advance the project to a shovel-ready state.

Site History: A Once Vibrant Community Destroyed by Highway Building and Urban Renewal

The 7.4-mile Downtown Connector opened in September 1964 after 16 years of construction. Intended to bring predominantly white commuters from the suburbs into the Central Business District (CBD), the interstate intentionally wove around the CBD and through the “depressed” neighborhoods where it was most “feasible to purchase suitable rights-of-way.” **The construction of the Connector and other “urban renewal projects” displaced an estimated 24,000 people and separated the historic Black neighborhoods of Buttermilk Bottom and Butler Street from jobs and services in Downtown Atlanta. Urban renewal programs in the neighborhoods surrounding the Connector further displaced an estimated 17,000 individuals, resulting in 41,000**



FIGURE 1. Housing stock in Buttermilk Bottom before the Interstate Highway System

¹Report on the relocation of individuals, families and businesses [to the] Atlanta Community Improvement Program: sections one and two, City of Atlanta, Georgia

²Potteiger and Purinton, 1998

displaced individuals. By 1967, the Buttermilk Bottom and Butler Street communities no longer existed.¹ As a corollary to the interstate system, city planners converted many of the streets in Downtown from two-way to one-way to better aid traffic flow. In the 1980s, the Connector was widened, further disconnecting Atlanta's Downtown core from surrounding neighborhoods and increasing the commuting workforce.

Over the decades, the physical barrier created by the Connector significantly stymied development. Increased vehicular access to Downtown resulted in increased demand for parking, and much of Downtown's historic fabric succumbed to demolition to make space for parking lots and garages. Compared to nearby areas, Downtown's land and real property values have lagged for decades.

Project Location and Map

The Stitch is in the heart of Downtown Atlanta; it is centered on Atlanta's historical 'Main Street'—Peachtree Street. Running along a ridgeline through the heart of the city, Peachtree Street has been a hub of commerce since pre-European settlement, and it continues to be the epicenter of

major cultural events and civic gatherings for the region. In the core of Downtown, the Stitch will strengthen both the City of Atlanta and the entire metro economy by bolstering the regional center for jobs, housing, entertainment, recreation, and culture. Figure 3 shows the site of the Stitch within the Downtown Atlanta, which is in the center of the Atlanta Metro Region.

The Stitch site is within a disconnected Downtown street grid and directly on top of a ¾ mile segment of I-75/85 between Ted Turner Drive and Piedmont Avenue. The 14-lane interstate separates Old Fourth Ward, Midtown, and Downtown, creating a physical impediment to accessing transit, jobs, healthcare, and education. The roads crossing the Stitch also create a maze of barriers. All seven roadways within the Stitch footprint are currently 4-lanes or wider, and the only bike lane that exists today is non-protected and stretches for one block along Peachtree Street.



FIGURE 2. The construction of the Downtown Connector and other “urban renewal” projects eliminated the Buttermilk Bottom and Butler Street communities. (Photo: Russell Stough Miller)



¹ Report on the relocation of individuals, families and businesses [to the] Atlanta Community Improvement Program: sections one and two, City of Atlanta, Georgia

The MARTA Civic Center Heavy-Rail Transit Station sits above the Downtown Connector and is the primary transfer point for metro Atlanta regional commuter bus service, serving nearly 1,000 commuter-bus-to-MARTA transfers each day. Despite this, it is in the bottom third for station ridership for the entire MARTA system, and it has the second lowest ridership among Downtown transit stations due to its poor connectivity to surrounding destinations. The bus queuing and loading at Civic Center Station occurs on-street along West Peachtree Street as there is currently no off-street bus facility in Downtown Atlanta.

The Stitch will also provide the missing link in Atlanta's growing network of off-street, protected bicycle trails. To the east, at Piedmont Avenue along Stitch, the Baker-Highland Connector Trail and the Freedom Park Trail connect Downtown Atlanta to the Atlanta Beltline just two miles away. Ultimately this network extends to the Stone Mountain Trail even further east. To the west, a trail beginning at Centennial Olympic Park connects Downtown to the Atlanta Beltline on the Westside and further to the Procter Creek Greenway, with plans to connect all the way to the Silver Comet. These two trails—and the broader regional network with Downtown Atlanta at its hub—bring cyclists to Downtown jobs, entertainment, and housing.

Parks

Currently, Downtown Atlanta only has seven acres of parkland per 1,000 daytime residents, with the largest parks located on the edges and a severe lack of green-space amenities in the center. The current parkland falls short of Project Greenspace's goal of 10 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents citywide, a goal that matches the

National Recreation and Park Association's open space goal. Approximately 42% of Downtown must walk five minutes or more to access open space.

Surrounding Land Use

Today, due to the interstate, the area surrounding the future Stitch site is comprised of mostly underperforming sites straddling the 13-lane wide Downtown Connector. Within ½ mile of the Stitch site, 43% of property is surface parking lots, parking garages, and streets (including the Interstate), 27% is buildings, and only 0.65% is tree canopy coverage and open greenspace.

Housing and Jobs

Only 3% of Atlanta's population lives in Downtown Atlanta, despite being one of the most density permissive areas in Atlanta. Comparatively, Downtown has 111,512 jobs, approximately 19% of the City's total jobs. Only 1.5% of Downtown employees live and work Downtown, while the remaining 98% of workers commute from outside the submarket, the majority via single-occupant vehicles. Approximately 83% of employed Downtown residents leave to work outside of Downtown.²

The low housing-to-jobs ratio brings adverse transportation patterns in the region and threatens Atlanta's overall economic competitiveness. Affordable, transit-adjacent housing for employees is essential to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. Without it, employers add unsustainable cost burdens on their workforce and lessen their quality of life.

Affordable Housing

Within half a mile of the Stitch, there are currently around 876 units of affordable housing, including 90 units of permanent supportive housing units for those exiting homelessness.

Looking ahead, there is opportunity to build 3,000 or more units of affordable housing within this same geography. Most notably, the 19-acre former Civic Center site, just one block from the Stitch, will include over 1,300 units of new residential housing, 50% (525 units) of which will be set aside as affordable for those making less than 80% of the area median income. Faith-based landowners like St. Luke's Episcopal Church and Atlanta First United Methodist are also advancing plans to deliver significant affordable housing developments on their land. In addition to these faith-based and public agency landowners, there is an additional 55 acres of vacant and underutilized land that will be targeted for affordable housing development.

Surrounding Area Population and Demographics

The Stitch is located in an Area of Persistent Poverty (Fulton County, Georgia census tracts 18, 19, and 28) and a Historically Disadvantaged Community (Fulton County, Georgia census tract 18). Within project census tracts, 23-31% of residents are below the poverty line. This is approximately double the rate in Fulton County as a whole. The per capita income is \$28,127, which is approximately three-fifths of the amount in the City of Atlanta (\$47,424)³. While the most direct benefits of the project will be felt in census tracts 18, 19, and 28, the project, which spans between Downtown Atlanta and Midtown Atlanta, will impact the entire City of Atlanta, the metropolitan region, and beyond.

As the City of Atlanta's population continues to surge (it is predicted to more than double from 500,000 to 1.2 million people by 2040⁴), density will need to be strategically concentrated in already developed areas with transit connectivity,

such as Downtown⁵. This densification should foster the mode shift to biking, walking, and taking transit that is envisioned for Atlanta's future.⁶

Mobility, Accessibility, and Transportation Safety Improvements

Transit Access and Efficiency

In addition to closing the connectivity gap, the Stitch will support the City of Atlanta's ambitious goal of reducing drive-alone trips from 54% to 35% by 2040⁷. To achieve this goal and deliver residents to job centers, much of the travel will need to be by transit, specifically by bus. However, Downtown's current infrastructure is not supportive of large local or regional bus volumes and an off-street loading and staging facility is needed. The Stitch will include an inter-modal connection with direct interstate high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane access and platform-level heavy rail access with transit-oriented development (TOD) on top of the Civic Center MARTA Station.

Multimodal Safe Streets

The Stitch will include the re-design of all existing roads in the project footprint—including two on Atlanta's high-injury network—as more complete multimodal streets to support the new urban fabric. This will slow speeds and improve safety for those traveling to and through Downtown in cars, on bikes, and on foot. Identified street design elements include converting one-way arterials to two-way streets with dedicated turn lanes, wider sidewalks buffered with street trees and green infrastructure, as well as dedicated, protected bike lanes. One historic street connection over I-75/85 (Alexander Street) will also be re-established by the Stitch.

³ Atlanta Transportation Plan: <https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/48083/637353603332230000>

⁴ Atlanta City Design: <https://www.atlcitydesign.com/city-design>

⁵ Atlanta City Design: <https://www.atlcitydesign.com/city-design>

⁶ Atlanta City Design: <https://www.atlcitydesign.com/city-design>

⁷ Atlanta's Transportation Plan: <https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showdocument?id=48083>

Mainline Interstate Components

The area of I-75/85 that will be capped by the Stitch is the most congested road in Georgia and one of the most congested corridors in the country. A national report in 2015 estimated that the 1.3 mile stretch of the Downtown Connector between North Ave. and the Freedom Parkway produces 1.2 million hours of delay annually at a lost value of \$27 million⁸. High volumes of local traffic, closely-spaced interchanges, significant flooding, and sub-standard shoulders all contribute to the severe congestion issues. The following proposed Stitch improvements will result in the improved safety and operations of the interstate:

- 1** Complete streets improvements to the local street grid to encourage the use of non-motorized modes for local trips.
- 2** Upgrades to the Civic Center MARTA rail station and bus operations to improve local and regional transit connectivity and facilitate a higher transit trip mode-share.
- 3** Catalyzing a high amount of residential development around the Stitch, which will reduce the demand for long single-occupancy vehicle commutes into Downtown.
- 4** Widening the shoulders and rehabilitating the drainage system.
- 5** Potentially improving the current Williams/Spring interchange, as well as closing the Peachtree/Pine and Courtland Street exit ramps.

Furthermore, rehabilitating or replacing the aging retaining walls along the I-75/85 Stitch corridor will contribute to the interstate's state of good repair.

Stormwater Quality and Runoff Reduction

The topography of the area combined with highly impervious land cover and minimal tree canopy (Downtown has a 3% tree

coverage compared to 48% citywide) has led to an overburdened stormwater system that often floods the Interstate during rain events. Furthermore, Atlanta's downtown is served by a combined-sewer overflow system which exacerbates water quality issues during flooding events.

The Stitch will reintroduce permeable surfaces to Downtown, and the 14-acre park will capture and filter stormwater runoff falling on site. The park is estimated to potentially capture, filter, and slow the peak runoff rate for 19 million gallons of rainfall a year. A portion of this stormwater will also be stored in cisterns and reused for irrigation and other greywater uses in the park. Preliminary feasibility work suggests that the Stitch can reduce the peak stormwater flow rate between 11% and 33%.

Project Development

In 2015 the City of Atlanta and its partners completed a Vision Study for the Stitch, followed by technical feasibility study and implementation strategy study in 2018, which found no "deal-breaking" issues with the project. Additional "advanced" planning and extensive community engagement began in early 2023 to ensure the infrastructure on top of the cap structure is thoughtfully conceived to fulfill the promise of a connected and livable urban neighborhood. Concept (10%) Engineering and NEPA studies are anticipated to begin in the spring of 2023.

Design and construction of the Stitch is anticipated to have a ten-year duration, with an anticipated project completion by the end of 2032. This assumes that project funding needs and approvals are met according to the proposed schedule. Previous technical feasibility work also determined the possibility of implementing the Stitch in discreet phases.

⁸ www.highways.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/unclogging-study2015-hi-res.pdf



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MERIT CRITERIA

SAFETY

Existing Conditions

The Stitch will extend for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile above Interstate 75/85, also known as the “Downtown Connector.” The Downtown Connector is one of the most heavily-utilized and most congested roadways in Georgia and saw an Average Daily Traffic value of 345,000 Vehicles Per Day in 2021. The Downtown Connector has significant safety issues due to sub-standard shoulders and geometry, closely-spaced entrance and exit ramps, and high traffic volumes. In the last five years there were 2,285 total crashes, 64 serious injury crashes, and 7 fatality crashes on the Downtown Connector within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the Stitch.

The 14-lane Downtown Connector separates Old Fourth Ward, Midtown, and Downtown, creating a physical impediment to accessing transit, jobs, healthcare, and education. Five bridges (Piedmont Avenue, Courtland Street, Peachtree Street, West Peachtree Street, and Ted Turner Drive from east to west) are the only north-south connections over the 14-lane Downtown Connector. Each of the bridges were designed to move cars quickly through Downtown rather than to provide safe, multimodal streets. The streets across the interstate are signed for twenty-five miles per hour; however, the typical speeds of Piedmont Avenue, Courtland

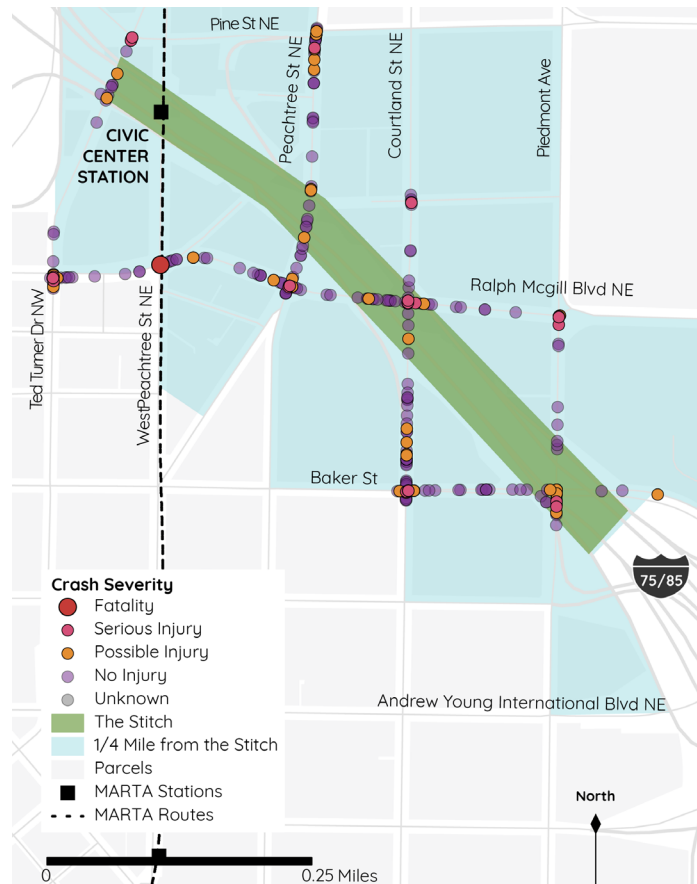


FIGURE 4. Reported crashes on surface streets 2017-2021

Street, West Peachtree Street, and Ted Turner Drive are well above twenty-five miles per hour due to their one-way condition, multiple lanes, and straight geometries. In the past five years, there were 1,065 crashes on surface streets within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the project, 8 being serious injury crashes, and 1 fatality.

The MARTA Civic Center Heavy-Rail Transit Station sits above the Downtown Connector and is the primary transfer point for metro Atlanta regional commuter bus service, serving nearly 1,000 commuter-bus-to-MARTA transfers each day.

MOBILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Multimodal Safe Streets

The Stitch will retrofit the existing one-way streets, making them slow speed complete streets that

are safe for bicyclists and pedestrians. This planned reduction in speed is the most effective way to reduce fatalities and severe injuries as “there is a direct correlation between higher speeds, crash risk, and the severity of injuries.”

As they run through the study area, all five existing streets will be converted to safer conditions that facilitate slow speeds and better mobility for bicyclists and pedestrians. This includes a two-way conversion of both Ted Turner Drive and West Peachtree Street and a capacity reduction on Courtland Street, Peachtree Street, and Piedmont Avenue. The extra space resulting from capacity reduction on these streets will be utilized for more multimodal uses such as protected bicycle lanes, wider sidewalks, transit waiting areas, and/or dedicated bus lanes.

Ted Turner Drive would also include a reversible peak period bus-only lane for access to the proposed off-street bus facility. All five streets will undergo road diets, a proven Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) countermeasure. These roadway reconfigurations may result in an overall crash reduction of 19% to 47%. In total, the Stitch proposes applying seven or more crash modification factors to surrounding streets resulting in an expected safety benefit of nearly \$30M.⁹

New Safe Street Connections

In addition to retrofitting the existing streets, the project proposes at least one new multimodal-focused street connections within the existing Downtown grid: Alexander Street between Ivan Allen Jr. Boulevard and Peachtree Street, which was removed during the construction of the Interstate. Four additional potential new street connections have been identified that will reduce the block sizes of the large, underutilized blocks currently surrounding

the Stitch cap. The Stitch team is committed to working with future developers to advance these new street connections and promote pedestrian-scaled complete street designs that allow multiple safe and comfortable options for movement to and through Downtown.

Mainline Interstate Components

The area of I-75/85 that will be capped by the Stitch suffers from significant flooding and has sub-standard shoulders. The Stitch will mitigate these deficiencies and contribute to the state of good repair of the existing roadway and structures. The Stitch aims to widen the shoulders and rehabilitate or replace aging retaining walls along the I-75/85 Stitch corridor. The Stitch is also evaluating the potential to modify the current Williams/Spring interchange, as well as modify or close the Peachtree/Pine and Courtland Street exit ramps, which will reduce conflict points and traffic friction resulting in reduced vehicular weaving and related crashes. A major benefit of the Stitch infrastructure to the mainline interstate is that it shifts the preference away from using I-75/85 for short local trips, which comprise up to 60% of interstate traffic. Instead, the reconnected local-street grid or other, non-motorized modes will become a more favored way to

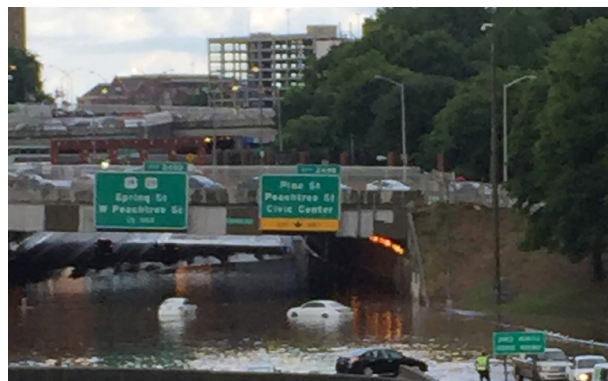


FIGURE 5. Flooding of I-75/85 closed all lanes of traffic, bringing Atlanta to a standstill

⁹ 2022 Stitch Reconnecting Communities Grant Application Benefit Cost Analysis: https://thestitchatl.com/_files/docs/stitch-proposal-app-b.pdf

move through this area.

The Stitch will capture the majority of stormwater falling on its 14 acres of park space, slowing down the peak runoff velocity and storing a significant portion

of the captured stormwater for reuse in the park. This will in-turn reduce persistent flooding that occurs on the interstate within the project limits and related traffic and safety issues.

Summary of Transportation Safety Features

Protects non-motorized travelers and communities from safety risks and reduces fatalities and/or serious injuries in underserved communities in the following ways:

- Applies the following National Roadway Safety Strategy proven safety countermeasures, resulting in an expected safety benefit of nearly \$30M¹⁰:
 - Setting appropriate speed limits for all road users
 - Improved roadway lighting
 - New high-visibility pedestrian mid-block crossings
 - Added or enhanced pedestrian walkways
- Implementing road diets on cross streets, adding dedicated left turn lanes
- Installing four miles of new separated bicycle lane connections
- Converting four one-way streets to two-way travel with dedicated turn lanes and multimodal enhancements
- Considers removal of two interstate ramps and reconfiguration of a major interchange, reducing conflict points along the interstate and surface streets
- Adds more than a mile of shoulder upgrades on the Downtown Connector
- Reduces persistent Interstate flooding
- Introduces five local street reconnections

Environmental Sustainability

The construction of the Stitch will significantly increase Downtown’s total green space through the introduction of a 14-acre park. The green space is expected to improve mental and physical health outcomes, particularly for marginalized and underserved populations. Similarly, the reconnected grid will improve access to active transportation infrastructure.

Emission Reduction

Through the introduction of safer streets for bicycling, walking, and improved access to the heavy rail transit system, the Stitch will reduce emissions through the mode shift away from single occupancy vehicles, as well as

help reduce overall local trip generation.

The off-street bus facility introduced as part of the Stitch will play a critical role in the Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (ATL)’s electrification of the region’s commuter bus fleet. The proposed off-street bus facility would allow significantly more flexibility regional bus operators to charge their fleets near Downtown destinations.

Stormwater Quality and Runoff Reduction

The topography of the area combined with highly impervious land cover and minimal tree canopy (Downtown has a 3% tree coverage compared to 48% citywide) has led to an overburdened stormwater

¹⁰ 2022 Stitch Reconnecting Communities Grant Application Benefit Cost Analysis: https://thestitchatl.com/_files/docs/stitch-proposal-app-b.pdf

system that often floods during rain events, as seen in Figure 5. Furthermore, Atlanta’s downtown is served by a combined-sewer overflow system which exacerbates water quality issues during flooding events.

The Stitch will reintroduce permeable surfaces to Downtown, and the 14-acre park will capture and filter stormwater runoff falling on site. The park is estimated to potentially capture, filter, and slow the peak runoff rate for 19M gallons of rainfall a year. A portion of this stormwater will also be stored in cisterns and reused for irrigation and other greywater uses in the park. Preliminary feasibility work suggests that the Stitch can reduce the peak

stormwater flow rate between 11% and 33%.

Electrification

The off-street bus facility introduced as part of the Stitch will play a critical role in the electrification of the commuter bus fleet. The Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (ATL), the largest commuter bus operator in metro Atlanta, is beginning the process of electrifying their Xpress bus fleet. Electrifying the Civic Center off-street bus facility to be built in conjunction with the Stitch would allow significantly more flexibility for Xpress and other bus operators to charge their fleets near Downtown destinations.

Summary of Environmental Sustainability Features

- Reduces 12,000 tons of CO₂ and reduces exposure to elevated air pollution
- Aligns with Atlanta Climate Action Plan goals of greenhouse gas emissions reduction, energy reduction, increasing the amount of parkland, and increasing access to parks
- Implements transportation-efficient land use and design by catalyzing dense, mixed-use development near existing mass-transit access
- Reduces vehicle miles traveled through multimodal enhancements and land-use changes
- Promotes low-energy and low-emission transportation options
- Incorporates a new bus transfer center with capacity for electric transit vehicle charging
- Captures, filters, and reuses up to 19 million gallons of stormwater via the 14-acre greenspace
- Replaces up to 45 acres of impervious parking lots with new development
- Improves resilience of at-risk stormwater and roadway infrastructure

Quality of Life

The Stitch seeks to reconnect downtown residents with opportunity and resources, advance equitable development practices, and foster shared, community wealth building. The 2021 RAISE Planning Grant is funding a robust, community engagement plan premised on inclusive and equitable principles that respect the historic context of the community. While this specific work is underway and helping to refine design elements

and supporting programs of the Stitch, the project’s work to-date is grounded in two decades of planning and community input that has established the need, vision, and major design elements such as the Stitch’s structural limits. Similarly, the forthcoming strategy will undoubtedly leverage existing policies, funding, and the City’s overall vision for the future that centers around economic inclusion and a culture of equity.

Increased Affordable Transportation Options for Underserved Individuals and Families

Access to the MARTA 48-mile heavy rail network provides mobility to the larger metro Atlanta area. The Civic Center MARTA Station is currently located on top of a highway overpass, separated by four lanes of high-speed traffic in each direction. Due to this isolated location, Civic Center is one of the least utilized MARTA stations in the system despite its location in Downtown. The Stitch will provide high quality, direct access to the Civic Center MARTA Station via complete streets improvements and station upgrades that will significantly improve the customer's experience accessing the station. This will improve transportation choices for all current and future residents and visitors within walking or biking distance of the station and create direct pathways for the approximately 38.6 acres of new affordable and transit-oriented residential development that will be catalyzed by the Stitch.

In addition to closing the connectivity gap, the Stitch will support the City of Atlanta's ambitious goal of reducing drive-alone trips from 54% to 35% by 2040¹¹. To achieve this goal and deliver residents to job centers, much of the travel will need to be by transit, specifically by bus. However, the current transit infrastructure near the Stitch is currently neither well-connected to residents and destinations nor designed to effectively handle the bus volumes required to meet this demand. To address this, the Stitch will include an intermodal connection with direct interstate high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane access and platform-level heavy rail access with transit-oriented development (TOD) adjacent to the Civic Center MARTA Station.

Integrated Land Uses with Affordable Housing and Community Restoration

There is approximately 80 acres of underutilized land within a half mile of the Stitch which could conservatively yield 14 million square feet in new redevelopment potential. With the right mix of zoning, public policy, and funding mechanisms, the Stitch could catalyze between 3,000-3,400 units of affordable housing. The 2021 RAISE Planning Grant is currently supporting the development of site-specific criteria, housing typologies, and housing policy needed to meet such an ambitious, but necessary, goal and that builds on the 2019 City of Atlanta Housing Affordability Action Plan.

Currently, the Stitch sits within a tax increment financing district (TIF) that provides value capture revenue to incent redevelopment. Most recently, the tool has been prioritized for affordable housing development targeted at residents making between 50-80% of the area median income. Invest Atlanta can also issue tax-exempt bonds to make below-market interest rate mortgage loans to developers for rental housing. The Stitch sits within an eligible geography for the tool. Invest Atlanta also administers a host of homebuyer assistance programs and legacy owner-occupied rehabilitation grants to ensure the goal of homeownership remains both attainable and maintainable within the City of Atlanta, further mitigating displacement.

Lastly, the project's adjacency to the Civic Center MARTA station will provide for location-efficient housing to be built, which in turn drives down the costs of transportation and overall household expenses, as residents gain improved accessibility to jobs, services, and other everyday travel requirements. Investment in the Stitch means investment in safe and multimodal streets and access to transit and parks space. In

¹¹ Atlanta's Transportation Plan: <https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showdocument?id=48083>

turn, this will catalyze a host of transit-oriented development sites that improve overall affordability.

The Stitch will advance a policy framework inclusive of targeted regulatory changes, strategic infrastructure investments, and other tools needed to achieve the Stitch's vision for an inclusive and diverse urban neighborhood. The plan will be developed in close coordination with the City of Atlanta, the Atlanta Housing Authority, Invest Atlanta, the Atlanta Land Trust, foundations, community development financial institutions, HouseATL, and nonprofit and/or mission-aligned developers.

Improved Access to Anchor Institutions and Jobs

The Stitch will create a connection to education, jobs, and healthcare by bridging the gap between Downtown and Midtown. The project is flanked by two of the region's largest healthcare facilities and two major institutions of higher learning. In addition to improving access to these locations, the Stitch will connect the City of Atlanta's two largest job centers (totaling approximately 200,000 jobs) and foster broader regional connections to job centers using the existing heavy rail network and commuter bus service enhanced by a new off-street passenger facility.

Improving Access to and Demand for Neighborhood Services

The Stitch has potential to attract over 20,000 new residents with a half mile of the Park through the 14 million square feet of redevelopment opportunities. This would double Downtown's existing population, and would provide a much-needed demand boost for retailers considering the area. Currently, there is only one full-service grocery store on the periphery of the Downtown Atlanta planning area. While neighboring

FIGURE 6. Rendering of Potential Parkspace Created by the Stitch. The Stitch will help to increase access to Parks for Downtown residents, 42% of which have to walk more than 1/4 mile to access a park.



submarkets like Midtown Atlanta, Buckhead Atlanta, and Atlanta's Old Fourth Ward have been able to support multiple grocery chains, Downtown Atlanta has not had the residential density or the median incomes to attract a more centrally located grocer. The same can be said for a host of other neighborhood services like daycares, schools, health clinics, and more locally owned businesses and restaurants. The Stitch will improve connections to existing community assets, strengthening the quality of life for existing and future residents.

Reduced Mortality Benefits for New Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Societal benefits of increased physical activity from active transportation modes and access to recreational centers like parks include increased productivity, decreased absenteeism, and decreased health care costs. Activities such as bicycling, walking, and running provide health benefits and decreased mortality benefits that accrue to individuals and society.

The decreased mortality risk will apply to new bicyclists and pedestrians who take up active transportation as a result of the Stitch. Decreased mortality risk is anticipated to result in a reduction in annual fatalities. These benefits can be monetized using the Value

of Statistical Life (VSL) of \$10.9 million provided in the U.S. DOT BCA Guidance.¹²

Urban Heat Island Effect Reduction

Downtown Atlanta is a significant urban heat island. The Stitch will reintroduce green space and needed mid-story and overstory tree canopy in Downtown, reducing the urban heat island effect. This will help reduce cooling-related energy costs and make walking in Downtown more comfortable and accessible in the warmer months.

Summary of Quality of Life Features

- Reconnects the community with a new 14 acre park and affordable, multimodal transportation options
- Reduces transportation and housing cost burdens by catalyzing 14M square feet of potential transit-oriented redevelopment, including 3,000 to 3,400 new affordable housing units, in an area well-served by affordable transportation and access to jobs and resources
- Supports 30 acres of publicly owned and nonprofit-owned land for affordable development
- Enables improved, safer access to the 145,000 jobs within a 10 minute walk of the site, as well as to healthcare assets like Emory Midtown Hospital
- Attracts 19,500 to 23,400 potential new Downtown residents generating demand for more neighborhood serving retail and services including grocery stores and quality schools
- Improves the health and wellbeing of the surrounding community through the introduction of parks and opportunities for active transportation
- Reduces urban heat island effect by replacing 14 acres of impervious land-cover with new greenspace

Improves Mobility and Community Connectivity

Today’s largest barrier to opportunity in Downtown Atlanta—the Downtown Connector—is tomorrow’s mobility opportunity. The Stitch will provide multi-modal connections over the interstate via multi-use paths, an improved surface transportation network, and enhanced transit amenities.

Improve System-wide Connectivity and Increase Accessibility

The Stitch will modify the existing surface street network to include safe, complete street amenities that aid community connectivity. Today, five bridges are the only north-south connections over the 14-lane highway. Each of the bridges was designed to move cars quickly through Downtown rather than to provide safe, multimodal streets. The streets across the interstate are signed for twenty-five miles per hour; however, the design characteristics of Piedmont Avenue, Courtland Street, West Peachtree Street, and Ted Turner Drive encourage speeds that are much higher.

The Stitch will retrofit existing one-way streets into two-way streets, making them slower speed complete streets that are safe for bicyclists and pedestrians. It will also strive to introduce five new local street connections—including re-establishing Alexander Street where it was removed by the interstate. Together, these new local streets will close important gaps in the network. Like the five existing bridges that will be retrofitted through the Stitch, the new street connections will prioritize safe and comfortable multimodal movement within Atlanta’s urban core.

The Civic Center MARTA Station is located on one of the bridges within the Stitch area. However, the station is sig-

¹² Atlanta’s Transportation Plan: <https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showdocument?id=48083>

nificantly underutilized due to disconnected land uses, and is in need of significant rehabilitation and operational upgrades to bring it up to a state of good repair. The Stitch will deliver user improvements to the station and thousands of new users via new mixed-use development, with a high focus on residential and affordable housing.

Finally, ADA deficiencies within the project extents will be brought up to current standard as a part of the scope of work. The project team is currently incorporating universal design principles in both the design of transportation facilities and the design of the park features.

Aligned with and Implementing Local Plans

The Stitch is both included in and in full alignment with the community vision set out in 2017 Downtown Atlanta Master Plan. A year-long collaborative process that engaged more than 2,250 individuals, the Downtown Atlanta Master Plan put forth an ambitious roadmap to deliver a more equitable, thriving, and resilient Downtown for all to enjoy. The Stitch is also working to implement elements such as proven safety countermeasures and separated bike lanes

that are included in the City of Atlanta’s Strategic Transportation Plan, Transportation Master Plan, and Cycle Atlanta Plan.

Remove Physical Barriers to Create a New, Livable Community Center

The Stitch will remove the physical barrier of the Downtown Connector and replace it with a new park space and reestablished two-way street grid. The cap will become a bridge to opportunity for neighborhoods separated from Downtown by the interstate. Residents will have safe access directly to jobs in Downtown and to the wider metro region through the Stitch’s direct connection to the MARTA heavy rail system.

With a previously awarded 2021 RAISE Planning Grant, the project team is advancing a park and open space plan to define and shape the design and programming of the Stitch’s 14 acres of urban green space. The design will consider the inclusion of passive and active spaces, greenspace, hardscape areas, playgrounds, performance areas, and public art. The design will outline potential programmatic approaches to the park with a focus on the history of the area, while recognizing all aspects of operations and maintenance needs and costs.

FIGURE 7. The Downtown Connector and other “Urban Renewal” projects ripped through and destroyed historic downtown neighborhoods. The negative impacts of these projects have left a visible scar on the urban fabric of Downtown Atlanta.



Furthermore, the project’s location within a Community Improvement District will allow for additional private resources to go towards events and programming, curation of public art, and the celebration of the history and legacy of the more than 24,000 individuals—notably in the Buttermilk Bottom and Butler Street neighborhoods—who were displaced in the construction and subsequent widening of the I-75/I-85 Downtown Connector.

Directly increases intermodal and multimodal freight movement

The project is anticipated to improve operations and safety along the interstate through the delivery of widened shoulders, potential access management improvements, and flood mitigation along the I-75/85 corridor. As a significant corridor for freight movement, these improvements will also improve long-distance and last-mile goods delivery by reducing delay and ensuring the reliability of the system.

Summary of Mobility and Community Connectivity Features

- Develops regional bus-transfer center at the Civic Center MARTA station for improved operations
- Rehabs the Civic Center MARTA station for better user experience
- Introduces five local street complete street reconfigurations
- Adds four miles of new protected bike connections
- Applies universal design principles across park and transportation elements for users with disabilities
- Reconnects the community by catalyzing over 14M square feet of equitable development surrounding a new 14 acre park
- Improves operations of Interstate 75/85 in support of efficient freight movement

Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity

The Downtown Connector was intentionally planned through established low-income Black communities. These activities were racially charged methods of ridding Downtown of “blighted” areas in favor of new commercially focused development centered around the automobile. This resulted in the displacement of more than 40,000 individuals, erasing wealth and well-being for the members of those communities.

While there is no bringing back the Buttermilk Bottom, Butler Street, and other lost communities, the Stitch strives to recreate north Downtown Atlanta into a thriving and connected community with an equitable development ethos that yields and retains a diverse population. This will be achieved

by providing new residents with access to affordable housing, low-cost transportation, parks, jobs, healthcare, and other resources while at the same time improving local air quality, noise pollution, water quality, and flooding.

Preliminary engineering feasibility work for the Stitch shows that the construction of the Stitch is not expected to permanently harm or displace families or business. Rather, this project will help to mitigate the previous harm that the construction and subsequent widening of the interstate through Downtown caused. There will be temporary closures of roadways and transit from construction, but these will be planned so that their impact is minimized. No full closures of

the Downtown Connector are anticipated during construction. Also, measures will be taken to minimize impacts to potential historic resources within the project area, including eligible historical, cultural, and environmental resources. Existing vacant land around the Stitch will provide multiple low-impact options for construction staging and crane placement, and current noise and pollution resulting from the interstate will reduce the impact of noise and debris levels from construction activities. Community outreach will inform construction and detour plans for the Stitch that will strive to minimize community impacts.

The Stitch's new 14 acre park and programming will contribute to the health and well-being of City of Atlanta residents, as well create an added draw for tourists and a location for major cultural events in Atlanta. The park design is anticipating the inclusion of performance areas, public gathering spaces, and public art. The park will help to uncover and celebrate the history and legacy of the more than 24,000 individuals—notably in the Buttermilk Bottom and Butler Street neighborhoods—who were displaced in the construction and subsequent widening of the I-75/I-85 Downtown Connector.

Inclusive Economic Development

The Stitch is anticipated to generate 800 construction jobs and 12,230 permanent Downtown jobs. The Stitch project development team is committed to securing resources and partnering with organizations to ensure that the local workforce is ready to take full advantage of these jobs through a combination of training programs and outreach. Specifics on these target programs will be detailed through the Stitch RAISE-funded planning work, currently underway.

Additionally, the 14 million square feet of

redevelopment expected to be catalyzed by the Stitch will deliver new storefront and office space, a portion of which will be set-aside as affordable so that entrepreneurs—particularly minority and women-led businesses—can grow their businesses in the neighborhood. Similarly, the newly created park space will allow additional locations for vending for everyday users as well as larger, special events. Lastly, the Stitch's direct access to the Civic Center MARTA Station provides future residents with access to the more than 415,000 primary jobs within a 10-minute walk of a heavy rail transit station, as well as providing direct and low-cost transportation access from the region to support new businesses surrounding the Stitch. This coupled with the historic investment in affordable housing that the Stitch will create supports wealth building and long-term economic growth in an area of persistent poverty.

Invest Atlanta offers a host of grants and loans targeted to all segments of the small business ecosystem. These resources are an extension of the City's 2020 Economic Mobility and Resiliency Plan that centers underrepresented entrepreneurs in a comprehensive strategy to combat Atlanta's income inequality and promote comprehensive, community wealth building.

Atlanta is home to a host of nonprofit technical assistance and funding partners that deliver resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses within the Stitch. These partners ensure that homegrown Atlanta businesses have the capital, community, and technical support needed to grow and remain in Atlanta. These partners include but are not limited to Georgia's Small Business Development Centers, LISC Atlanta, Access to Capital for Entrepreneurs, Atlanta Emerging Markets Initiative, Center

for Civic Innovation, Russell Innovation Center for Entrepreneurs, and the Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative.

North Downtown Redevelopment

Within a 10-minute walk of the Stitch, there are nearly 80 acres of vacant or underutilized land in addition to the 14 acres of land consumed by the interstate right-of-way. The Stitch is expected to promote wealth building by physically mitigating the negative impacts on property value caused by the I-75/85 Connector through both noise reduction and the introduction of new urban green space. Properties within 300 meters of an urban freeway have experienced a decline of 3.6% in value due to noise

pollution¹³. The projected mix of new land uses spurred by the Stitch on adjacent and nearby sites includes approximately 12.5M square feet of residential space and 1.5M square feet of commercial and hotel uses. Cumulatively, this represents between \$2 and \$3 billion in private investment yielding an estimated \$21 to \$58 million in new annual property tax revenue. All new development will be transit-oriented given its location adjacent to the Civic Center MARTA Station. This influx of residents will create a new neighborhood in north Downtown where one hasn't existed for decades, helping grow Downtown's labor market and economic competitiveness.

Summary of Economic Competitiveness Benefits

- Creates regional and national tourism draw with the creation of a new highly-programmed 14-acre park
- Creates more than 13,000 new construction and permanent jobs
- Creates \$21-\$58 million property tax revenue for the City of Atlanta annually
- Creates \$2-\$3 billion in private investment
- Eliminates the barrier and community harm created by the past construction of the Downtown Connector
- Repurposes and revitalizes underutilized assets, including the air space over the Connector, the Civic Center MARTA Station, the streets currently solely dedicated to vehicular throughput, and more than 66 acres of nearby vacant private land
- Focuses investment on an area of Atlanta with a persistent value gap due to the interstate
- Improves low-cost access to jobs and community resources
- Supports equitable wealth building and long-term economic growth in an area of persistent poverty

State of Good Repair

Surface Street Network

The Stitch will rehabilitate and transform the roadway network in the area surrounding the project from one that is currently oriented to moving cars quickly to and from the interstate to one that is focused on providing safe transportation options and accessi-

bility for pedestrians, bicyclists, shared-mobility device users, transit users, and vehicles. This will be completed through a series of road diets along the seven streets that currently cross the Stitch project limits and the interstate. In addition, the Stitch proposes to add a new multimodal-focused

¹³ Lekovich, et al. (2015). "The effects of highway development on housing prices". Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11116-015-9580-7>

street connection at historic Alexander Street, which was removed for construction of the Downtown Connector.

Civic Center MARTA Station

The current Civic Center MARTA Station has not seen significant upgrades since it opened in 1981. The Stitch will upgrade the facility to enhance operations and user experience, and bring the station into a state of good repair.

Interstate System

The Stitch will enhance stormwater management. The reduction in interstate flooding and protection from ultraviolet rays will improve the longevity of the current interstate pavement and reduce the required frequency of drain maintenance.

The Stitch project can widen the shoulders and enhance the retaining walls along the I-75/85 Stitch corridor. Planning

analysis for the Stitch is also analyzing the potential to modify the current Williams/Spring interchange, as well as close closely spaced interchanges in the project area, including Peachtree/Pine Street and Courtland Street interchanges.

Stormwater Infrastructure

Like many Cities, Atlanta suffers from overburdened and aging stormwater infrastructure. The Stitch will alleviate this infrastructure by capturing the majority of stormwater that falls on-site and storing a portion of it for reuse as greywater uses in the park. Preliminary feasibility work suggests that the Stitch can capture and divert 19 million gallons of stormwater a year and reduce the peak stormwater flow rate between 11% and 33%. Furthermore, the construction of the Stitch will result in the replacement of much of the existing stormwater infrastructure in the surrounding area.

Summary of State of Good Repair Benefits

- Rehabilitates and transforms the surrounding surface street network
- Rehabilitates aging interstate infrastructure
- Rehabilitates aging transit infrastructure, including the MARTA Civic Center station
- Upgrades interstate infrastructure for better environmental resiliency, leading to lower long-term maintenance requirements
- Reduces demand on the local stormwater and potable water systems

Partnership and Collaboration

Community Engagement and Involvement

Effective community involvement is critical to ensuring that the Stitch benefits as many citizens as possible, especially underserved stakeholders. The Stitch’s planning work, currently underway, includes a diverse set of community input and involvement strategies, inclusive of the following:

1 Broadly publicized virtual public information open houses, meaningful online and

in-person input opportunities, and project updates via the forthcoming website and newsletter

2 Targeted and equity-focused outreach to engage current residents living in the area and potential future residents who would benefit from affordable development components of the Stitch. This includes engagement strategies that meet community members where they are and

enlisting and compensating current community leaders to help obtain input from their neighbors

- 3 The creation of a project steering committee comprised of members who have strong ties to the community and who can provide input and oversight on the engagement and design of the Stitch
- 4 Programs to generate awareness of the Stitch, its features, and its benefits through partnerships, pop-ups at community events and in high-traffic locations, and an engaging social media presence

As the Stitch proceeds, a new dedicated 501(c)(3) organization will be formed to guide the design, development, programming, operation, and management of the park. The governing board of the Stitch will include representatives of relevant stakeholders (City of Atlanta, councilmember(s), adjacent property owners, affordable housing representation) and key civic-minded individuals from the neighborhood. In the development of the board, special attention will be given to ensuring a diverse, inclusive, and equity-focused membership that is representative of the community. This board—alongside extensive community and stakeholder engagement—will drive the Stitch’s commitment to community-development.

Coordination with Partner Organizations

Partnership and community are cornerstones of the Stitch. The reconnection of local streets above the interstate and the development of a new park space provides an opportunity to collaborate with multiple levels of government. Both the City of Atlanta and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) are committed project partners, bringing a variety of expertise as the project advances. Invest Atlanta, the City of Atlanta’s economic development arm, com-

mitted \$10 million in funding to advance engineering on the Stitch. The Atlanta Regional Commission has also awarded funding for Stitch engineering development through the regional call for transportation projects. As the project advances, the City of Atlanta is prepared to support the Stitch through value capture funding and future infrastructure bond programs. GDOT is a committed technical partner in the advancement of the Stitch and is supporting the project through the federal aid process.

Beyond government, the Stitch benefits from neighborhood mission-driven partnerships that demonstrate a commitment to the project and a unified vision for the neighborhood. A sizable portion of affordable housing spurred by the Stitch will be delivered by long-standing community-based organizations and anchor institutions in the area such as Atlanta Housing, Atlanta First United Methodist Church, and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church. Ongoing partnership with ingrained institutions ensures the Stitch will center equity and affordability as the project advances.

Similarly, Emory University Hospital Midtown has significant land holdings near the Stitch. As indicated by a letter of support, Emory is committed to the Stitch and will benefit directly from the project. The recently announced closing of Wellstar Medical Center—just east of the Stitch—places increased importance, visibility, and overall patient volumes on Emory University Hospital Midtown. The proposed transportation improvements delivered by the Stitch will improve access to healthcare for patients, and the affordable housing delivery will provide opportunities for Emory’s workforce to live adjacent to work.

Lastly, the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District has dedicated approximately

\$3 million to the Stitch to date. With a board of private- and public-sector leaders and long-standing relationships with property owners, ADID’s commitment to the project and strong ties to the area will foster private sector partnerships with developers and institutional landowners. ADID will continue to be an important partner in the effort and will ensure ongoing community support.

Labor Practices and Workforce Development Partnerships

The City of Atlanta is committed to following its local Title VI policy and federal requirements for wages and encouraging strong labor standards and practices. The project will adhere to workplace standards set forth by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Georgia Department of Labor, ensuring a safe and supportive work environment. The Stitch will

provide new opportunities for good-paying jobs, particularly in the building and construction industries. The City of Atlanta has integrated their Workforce Development Board, WorkSource Atlanta, within Invest Atlanta, the City’s economic development agency, to unify economic and workforce development strategies. Together, the agencies can better serve the workforce needs of the city’s business community and help more Atlantans build wealth through good, middle-income jobs. In addition, collaboration with Career-Rise, a public-private workforce intermediary and other workforce development partners like Atlanta Technical College, Urban League of Greater Atlanta, and the Fulton County Office of Workforce Development will be vital to the economic success of this project, from conception to completion.

Summary of Partnership and Collaboration Benefits

- Deeply engages with and involves the community to ensure the long-term success of the project
- Broad support and coordination with multiple-partners aligned with the Stitch’s vision and committed to its successful implementation
- Brings together the downtown community, including major institutions, affordable housing partners, governmental agencies, and businesses
- Partners with workforce development partners to help connect underserved communities with quality jobs

Innovation

Technology

The Stitch will take advantage of innovative engineering practices and technologies to help reconnect Downtown Atlanta, including creating an interstate cap which will bridge ¾ a mile of the Downtown Connector. The cap will essentially function as a green roof over the interstate recapturing 14 acres of greenspace and delivering a wide array of societal and environmental benefits to the Atlanta region. The project team is incorpo-

rating several technologies and considering several more that can be integrated in the construction and design of the Stitch to contribute to greater sustainability and efficiency. These include electric vehicle charging for zero-emission busses, construction material recycling, use of locally-sourced materials, greywater capture and reuse, connected park and transportation infrastructure.

Delivery

The Stitch will be delivered and maintained

through a P3 between the City of Atlanta, the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District, and the Georgia Department of Transportation. Due to the complex nature of the project in-terms of engineering, materials/resource sourcing, and air-rights agreements, delivery of part or all the Stitch is likely to utilize an alternative delivery method such as Design Build, or Design Build Operate Maintain for a portion or all of the project. Once the Stitch is constructed, it will remain a P3 with GDOT as owner of the interstate and in-charge of construction oversight, the City – the primary public partner as owner of the improvements, and a newly formed third party 501(c)(3) tax exempt entity as the private partner responsible for operating and managing the park. This will leverage GDOT’s experience and knowledge with large public infrastructure project delivery and leverages the ability of a private non-profit entity to efficiently and effectively manage the long-term operations of the park.

Funding & Financing

Design and implementation of the Stitch will rely on a number of federal and local funding sources. Following funding of project

engineering, the project team plans to apply for one or more USDOT discretionary grant programs, such as MEGA or Neighborhood Access and Equity grants, to fund a major portion of construction funding.

Local public sources to fund the Stitch include a value capture strategy for deriving revenue from both a Tax Allocation District (TAD) and a Special Assessment District (SAD). Through tax increment financing and bond issuance, increased real estate values of \$2 to \$3 billion are projected to generate funds of approximately \$112.5 million for development of the Stitch and supporting programs such as affordable development gap financing.

Additionally, the Stitch will rely on several financing sources to provide capital costs for construction. The team is considering programs such as TIFIA, as well as currently investigating innovative financing sources such as Environmental Impact Bonds given the significant green infrastructure components and projected environmental benefits of the Stitch.

Summary of Opportunities for Innovation and Collaboration Benefits

- Incorporation of innovative technologies such as interstate capping and connected infrastructure
- P3 type project delivery ensures the needs of the community are closely met, and that all partners receive benefits from the project
- Alternative delivery approach will lean into the strengths of GDOT and the infrastructure construction industry to efficiently deliver this complex project
- Independent 501(c)(3) conservancy governance model allows for the Stitch to fund and execute its own operations and maintenance, supporting effective and efficient upkeep of the Stitch
- Value capture mechanism will ensure that a portion of the economic benefit from the project is reinvested in the community
- High opportunity for innovative financing sources such as Environmental Impact Bonds



FY23 Rebuilding American
Infrastructure with
Sustainability and Equity
Grant Application

Submitted by City of Atlanta
in partnership with Atlanta Downtown
Improvement District

Reconnecting a
Torn Urban Fabric

THE STITCH

PROJECT
READINESS

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View northwest across Energy Park toward Peachtree Green

PROJECT READINESS

The Stitch was first envisioned in 2001 as a concept for a new, expanded “Mayors Park” to honor Mayors Maynard Jackson and Ivan Allen Jr. who had recently died. In the subsequent years, the initial vision evolved, grew in scope, and gained momentum.

Building on the momentum of these studies, ADID funded the development of the Stitch Vision Plan. Completed in 2015, the vision plan more completely illustrated the opportunity, described the potential benefits, and explored the technical considerations of advancing a capping project. The resulting plan expanded the vision geographically and in intention by “re-stitching” the urban fabric of Downtown Atlanta with a new name and brand: the Stitch.

During 2017 and 2018, the Stitch Existing Conditions, Constraints and Opportunities Report re-searched and validated the Stitch concept by reviewing the project for fatal engineering, design, and constructability flaws. Following this technical feasibility effort, the development of The Stitch Implementation Plan further advanced the predevelopment effort. The Implementation Plan recommended strategies for stakeholder engagement, governance, funding



FIGURE 8. Several studies have been completed on the Stitch to-date which have determined its technical feasibility and galvanized support for the project

and financing, delivery, and approvals.

This work provided the following information that is informing in-progress planning and engineering work:

- A project **vision, goals, and guiding principles** for the Stitch informed by case studies and stakeholder input
- A detailed technical feasibility report finding no “deal breaking” **existing conditions** constraints
- Engineering **concepts** for constructing the cap, park, and transportation features
- **Desktop environmental screening** of conditions (historic buildings, endangered species, noise, ecology, environmental justice populations) that would impede project development
- Order of magnitude **cost estimates** for planning, engineering, design, and operations/maintenance of

the cap structure and park

- Identified potential **funding sources** with estimation of funding potential (public and private)
- Estimated value-capture **funding projections** for project construction and long-term operations
- Defined **delivery approach** with Georgia DOT and FHWA processes and permits
- Recommended a 501(c)(3) foundation **governance structure** for the operations of the park
- Estimated construction **delivery schedule** and potential project **phasing strategy**

Additional detailed planning and extensive community engagement is underway to ensure the infrastructure on top of the cap structure is thoughtfully conceived to fulfill the promise of a connected and livable urban neighborhood. This work includes:

- Robust **community engagement** premised on inclusive and equitable principles that respect the historic context of the community
- A **multimodal transportation analysis and plan** for reconnecting the grid and creating a safe street network
- A **land use, zoning, and affordable housing strategy** for the anticipated affordable development around the cap
- A **sustainability framework** for the Stitch, including innovative stormwater capture elements and climate mitigation strategies such as carbon capture technology
- A **park and open space master plan** advanced through community involvement in defining and shaping conceptual design and programming ideas

FY21 RAISE-funded advanced-planning work in development will inform the design of Stitch transportation components, the park's master plan, project goals, and sup-

portive policies and programs, but it is not expected to substantially alter the project vision, limits, and required major infrastructure components of the project, which have been detailed in previous technical feasibility work and vetted by implementation partners including ATLDOT, GDOT, and other stakeholders.

The Stitch was added to the Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) TIP upon the award of RAISE grant funds in 2021. The project has also been assigned a GDOT project manager and Project ID number (0019180). Since the project's inclusion in the TIP, ARC has recommended additional funds to advance concept engineering of the Stitch, as described in the budget narrative section.

Delivery of the Stitch

FY 2023 RAISE Grant Program funding is crucial to meeting the funding and schedule needs of the Stitch. RAISE funding will support preliminary design and engineering of the park structure, transportation systems, and park elements, as well as supporting environmental studies and detailed cost estimates. This work is anticipated to produce project approvals and design development to advance the project to a shovel-ready state.

The City of Atlanta will be the lead entity in delivering the Stitch project and managing Federal grant funding sources. The City has decades of experience managing Federal grant funds, including USDOT funding, to implement major infrastructure improvements throughout Atlanta. The Stitch has dedicated project managers both within the Atlanta Department of Transportation and Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) who are actively advancing the project. The City will work closely with necessary implementation partners, including

GDOT, who is supportive of the Stitch vision and is actively coordinating on the development of the project's design.

Design and construction of the Stitch is anticipated to have a ten-year duration, with an anticipated project completion by the end of 2032. Previous technical feasibility work also determined the possibility of implementing the Stitch in discreet phases. If project funding to implement the entire Stitch project is not initially obtainable, the project development team plans to pursue this project delivery approach. In this case, preliminary engineering of the complete project is still desirable to ensure design coordination among project phases.

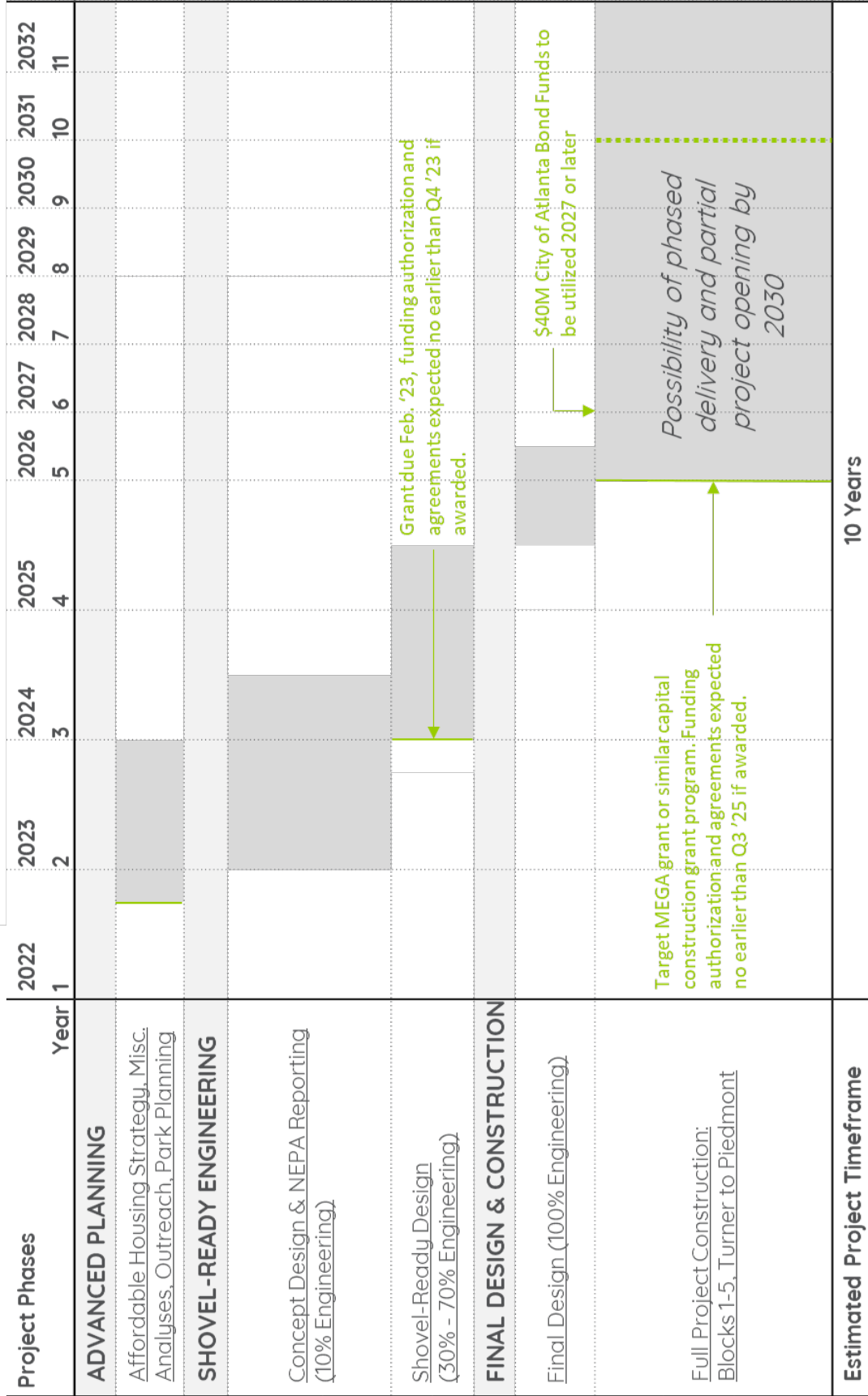
The next steps and major milestones for the Stitch include the following:

- **RAISE “advanced planning” (2023):** Work is currently underway, funded through a successful 2021 RAISE planning grant application submitted by the City of Atlanta. This work includes critical community outreach and master-planning activities to refine the design, programming, and partnership needs for the Stitch.
- **Concept Design (2023-2024):** Concept Design for the Stitch is planned to begin in 2023. Concept Design will include up to 10% concept engineering for the Stitch, concept report documents and studies required by GDOT, NEPA studies/approvals, cost estimate updates, and critical path scheduling. Previous technical feasibility and visioning work for the Stitch will provide a foundation for this work.
- **Establishing Governance structure and Value Capture Mechanism (2023-2024):** A nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization will be established to manage the implementation and long-term operations of the Stitch and to help raise and manage funding for the project. Another critical component

of implementing the Stitch is to establish a value-capture mechanism for a portion of the future tax revenue generated by the Stitch to help fund the construction and long-term operations of the project. A Special Service District for the Stitch is one such feasible tool and has the support of the City of Atlanta. Financial analyses have been conducted for value-capture mechanisms that confirm their viability as a major funding source for the project. See Figure 10 for more information on value capture analysis results.

- **Preliminary “Shovel Ready” Design/Engineering (2024-2025):** RAISE funding will fund preliminary design, which is expected to begin near the completion of Concept Design and provide technical documentation that will be the basis of ATLDOT, GDOT, MARTA, and FHWA engineering and permitting approvals, detailed cost estimates, and a detailed understanding of construction impacts. This work will also help inform discussion of construction procurement mechanisms and operational roles and responsibilities among partners.
- **Final Design/Engineering (2025-2026):** This stage of the project will provide approved ROW plans, final NEPA clearances, utility coordination, and approved construction drawings and specifications. It is anticipated that this stage will not commence until construction funding for one or all phases of the Stitch is secured.
- **Construction (2026-2032):** Construction of the Stitch could break ground as soon as 2026 assuming all required funding sources and project approvals fall in line with the project's schedule. Construction of all phases of the project is expected to take up to eight years, with the possibility of opening sections of the project by 2030 or sooner.

FIGURE 9. Estimated Stitch Schedule



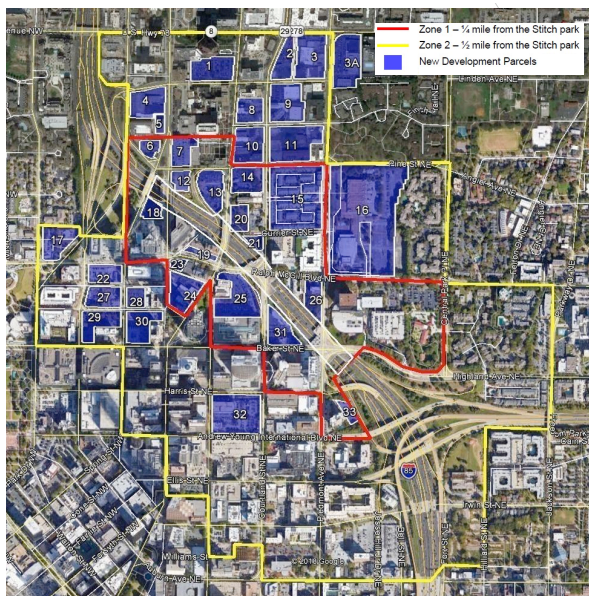
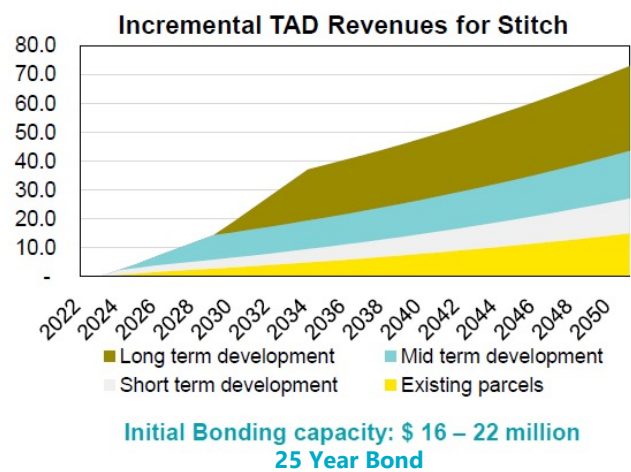
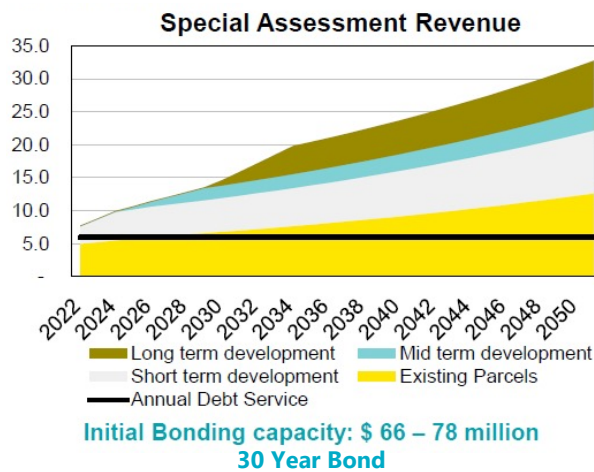
Environmental Risk & Anticipated NEPA Class of Action

In 2022, ADID hired a team of NEPA planning experts to evaluate technical feasibility reports and provide guidance on the likely NEPA class of action and the project schedule. **The team concluded that based on information available, the Stitch meets the criteria for a Categorical**

Exclusion (CE) class of action.¹⁴ This conclusion is based on the definition of the CE class of action in 40 CFR 1508.4 and similar projects across the country. In addition, the team anticipated that the 18-month duration for environmental surveys, documentation, reviews, and approvals in the Stitch schedule would be sufficient given a CE class of action.

FIGURE 10: Value Capital Mechanism

- Previous financial analyses conducted in 2018 conservatively estimated between \$82M and \$100M in combined SSD and TAD revenues that could be bonded against for park funding.
- While this analysis needs updating to confirm, ADID believes \$112.5M is achievable given recent property value increases.



Tax revenue assumptions

Assessed value growth*	3% p.a.
Park premium** – Zone 1	15%
Park premium – Zone 2	7.5%
Assess value for new residential development (2018 base year)	\$150 per SF
Assessed value for new commercial development (2018 base year)	\$110 per SF
Special assessment rate – Zone 1 (2017)***	5 mill
Special assessment rate – Zone 2 (2017)***	3 mill
Millage rate for Eastside TAD (2017)***	21.45 mill

¹⁴ This report is included in Appendix A of the 2022 Stitch Reconnecting Communities Grant: https://thestitchatl.com/_files/docs/stitch-proposal-app-a-project-readiness.pdf



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THE STITCH

**PROJECT
BUDGET**

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View northwest across Energy Park toward Peachtree Green

PROJECT BUDGET

Stitch RAISE Project Budget at a Glance:

(a) Total Project Costs for the FY 2023 RAISE project
\$21,000,000

(b) FY 2023 RAISE grant funding request;
\$16,800,000

(c) Specific source, amount, and type (grant, loan, etc.), of funds to be used for eligible project costs;
\$16,800,000: USDOT FY 2023 RAISE Planning Grant Funding

(d) Specific sources and amounts of non-Federal funds, if included, to be used for eligible project costs;
\$4,200,000: Combination of committed local-match funds from Invest Atlanta and the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District

(e) Documentation of funding commitments for those non-Federal and other Federal funds: Refer to file: 04_STITCH RAISE 2023_Funding.pdf

FY 2023 RAISE Grant Budget

Future phases of the Stitch have a variety of local and federal funding sources that have been secured to date on the project. This includes \$4.32 million of federal funding and \$11.43 million of local funding. If awarded, FY2023 RAISE funding would provide an additional \$16.8 million in federal funding to fund shovel-ready preliminary engineering for the Stitch, totaling \$32.55 million of combined funding secured for the project to-date. Documentation of local match funding commitment for the RCP grant is provided in the grant package. Details on RAISE Grant budget and proposed activities are detailed below:

FY 2023 RAISE Grant Budget Details:

Preliminary Engineering Total Budget: \$21M

FY 2023 RAISE Planning Grant Funding Request Amount: \$16.8M (80%)

- Anticipated Authorization: 2024 (if awarded)
- Expiration Date: Funds to be obligated prior to September 30, 2025
- Funding Use and Restrictions: To be used for preliminary engineering and design support services of the Stitch. Funding requires a 20% local match
- Funding Recipients: Project and funding to be managed by Atlanta Downtown Improvement District on behalf of City of Atlanta under a project management agreement

Local Matching Funds: \$4.2M (20%)

Invest Atlanta Eastside Tax Allocation District Funds

- Funding Amount: \$3.7M (17.6%)
- Anticipated Authorization: Funding authorized (see attached commitment documentation)
- Expiration Date: None
- Funding Use and Restrictions: To be used for preliminary engineering and design support services of the Stitch
- Funding Recipients: Project and funding to be managed by Atlanta Downtown Improvement District on behalf of City of Atlanta under a project management agreement

Atlanta Downtown Improvement District

- Funding Amount: \$500,000 (2.4%)
- Anticipated Authorization: Funding authorized (see attached commitment documentation)
- Expiration Date: None
- Funding Use and Restrictions: Funding to be used for preliminary engineering and design support services of the Stitch

Stitch FY 2023 RAISE Grant Preliminary Engineering Activities:

Complete 30% design plans for parks, bridges, interstate, and surface streets including, but not limited to:

- Preliminary bridge plans
- Preliminary park building/structure architectural plans (including waterproofing membrane)
- Preliminary park plans (including waterproofing membrane)
- Preliminary pavement design
- Updated ROW impact analysis
- Roadway plans and profiles
- Roadway cross sections
- Roadway lighting plans
- Signing and marking plans
- Grading plans
- Signal plans
- ITS plans
- Retaining wall design
- Cap support system plans (electrical, water/sewer/plumbing, fire life safety, ventilation, etc.)
- Erosion, sedimentation, and pollution control plans (ESPCP)
- Utility plans
- Drainage design including cisterns and MS4, if applicable
- Construction staging detailed concept

Preliminary Design (60-70% Design)

- Bridge plan advancement
- Preliminary ROW plans
- Preliminary roadway plans and profiles
- Preliminary roadway cross sections
- Preliminary roadway lighting plans
- Preliminary driveway plans
- Preliminary grading plans
- Preliminary signal plans
- Preliminary ITS plans
- Preliminary retaining wall plans, and profiles
- Preliminary cap support system plans (electrical, water/sewer/plumbing, fire life safety, ventilation, etc.)
- Preliminary erosion, sedimentation, and pollution control plans (ESPCP)
- Preliminary utility plans
- Preliminary drainage design including cisterns and MS4, if applicable
- Construction detour modelling and preliminary detour plans
- Draft project standards and details package (for all design disciplines)
- Draft project construction specifications package (for all design disciplines)
- Preliminary Field Plan Review (PFPR) participation, report, and responses

Design Support Services

- GIS data collection and mapping
- Flown topographical survey with ground control
- Stormwater system survey
- ROW boundary survey
- Parcel boundary survey and ownership research
- SUE Level-B Survey (overhead and underground utilities)
- Geotechnical and bridge foundation surveys
- Pavement condition survey
- Utility relocation coordination, including

- MARTA infrastructure
- Quantity take-off's and Cost Estimates for each design phase.
 - Design development scheduling, tracking, and progress reporting in Primavera P6
 - Concept of Operations document development, GDOT Go-Live support, and related agency/stakeholder coordination.

TABLE 1. FY 2023 RAISE Grant Proposed Budget per US Census Tract

Census Tract	Project Costs per Census Tract	Stitch Project Linear ft. per Census Tract
13121001900	\$ 11,052,631.58	1500
13121001800	\$ 7,368,421.05	1000
13121002800	\$ 2,578,947.37	350
Totals	\$ 21,000,000	2850

TABLE 2: FY 2023 RAISE Grant Proposed Funding per Project Component

Funding Source	30% Design Plans	60-70% Design Plans	Design Support Services	Total Funding
	Funding Amount			
RAISE Funds	\$4,000,000	\$9,600,000	\$3,200,000	\$16,800,000
Other Federal Funds	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-
Non-Federal Funds	\$1,000,000	\$2,400,000	\$800,000	\$4,200,000
Total	\$5,000,000	\$12,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$21,000,000

Stitch Total Project Budget

Cost estimates for the Stitch were developed by engineering and construction consultants and are derived from quantity take-off cost estimates for the entire project. Generous contingencies and appropriate escalations have been added since these costs were based on early schematic designs and first published in 2018. Future unsecured funding for the Stitch is anticipated to come from a variety of local and federal sources. If awarded \$16.8M in FY 2023 RAISE funding, an estimated \$680,975,000

in additional funding will be needed to complete final design and all construction phases of the Stitch. Availability of future funds may affect the phasing and schedule of the project. However, design and engineering of all phases of the Stitch is needed regardless of future phasing plans.

The table on the following page details the estimated costs and funding sources for design and construction of all phases of the Stitch:

Phase/Scope	Funding Program	ADID	SOURCES				Total	Status
			COA / Invest Atlanta	Other Local/State	Federal			
SPENT or IN-PROGRESS*								
Stitch Vision Study and Technical Feasibility/Implementation Study	ADID	\$930,000				\$930,000	Studies completed	
Development Manager	ADID	\$200,000				\$200,000	Anticipated annual expense, not to exceed and subject to escalation	
Advanced Planning	FY 2021 RAISE Planning Grant	\$350,000			\$900,000	\$1,250,000	In-progress, expected completion January 2024.	
COMMITTED								
Concept Engineering (10%) & NEPA	ARC TIP	\$290,000			\$1,160,000	\$1,450,000	Awarded, expected start date Q2 2023	
	Community-Designated Project Grant (HUD)	\$290,000			\$1,160,000	\$1,450,000	Awarded, expected start date Q2 2023	
	Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program Grant		\$275,000		\$1,100,000	\$1,375,000	Awarded, awaiting grant agreements.	
PENDING (Unsecured)								
Shovel-Ready Preliminary Engineering (30-70%)	FY 2023 RAISE Planning Grant	\$500,000	\$3,700,000		\$16,800,000	\$21,000,000	Applied, awaiting grant award	
Final Engineering & Construction/Procurement Support Services	Misc. Funding (Example - future TIP funding cycles)		\$3,500,000		\$3,500,000	\$7,000,000	Expected 2024 or later. ARC TIP Potential Federal Funding Source	
FUTURE (Unsecured)								
Construction [Major Federal funding source(s) such as MEGA w/ local match]	Local Philanthropy and/or State Funds			\$112,500,000			Expected 2025 or later	
	Value Capture Mechanism			\$112,500,000		\$680,000,000	Establishment of SSD and/or TAD, expected 2025 or later	
	City of Atlanta		\$40,000,000				COA Bond and/or other City sources	
	MARTA/The ATL Authority		\$30,000,000				2025 or later. Potential combo. of More MARTA, station rehab, & ARTP	
REMAINING TOTAL COSTS*		\$1,430,000	\$77,475,000	\$270,000,000	\$364,620,000	\$713,525,000		

*Cost Estimate Totals do not Include Spent Costs