

DEKALB COUNTY 2050

EXISTING CONDITIONS & **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

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EXISTING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DEKALB COUNTY 2050 UNIFIED PLAN:

COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

PLAN OBJECTIVES

The DeKalb 2050 Unified Plan combines two of the County’s long-range strategic documents into one:

- An update to the County’s 2014 **Comprehensive Transportation Plan** (CTP) that identifies priority transportation projects and policy recommendations
- A **Comprehensive Land Use Plan** (CLUP) that establishes the framework for future growth and development.

Transportation and land use investments have a direct impact on one another, so the combined plan will create a more consistent, unified strategy for the County. **Figure 1** lists the elements that will be included in the CTP and CLUP.

Figure 1. Unified Plan Elements



The mission is to make the priorities of the residents of DeKalb County the priorities of the County government by creating a safer DeKalb County, building stronger neighborhoods, creating a fiscally accountable and more efficient County government, and uniting the people of DeKalb County.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The DeKalb 2050 Unified Plan Existing Conditions and Needs Assessment analyzes and assesses demographics, economics, current and future land use patterns, environmental features and constraints, and transportation conditions in DeKalb County. This report also includes a review of previous plans, policies, and regulations that are related to the future growth of the communities of DeKalb County. Following the completion of these baseline reviews, the final element of the document includes an assessment of needs for transportation and land use both now and for 30 years into the future.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

DeKalb County is situated in the center of the Atlanta region, with the City of Atlanta split between DeKalb County and its western northern and northern neighbor, Fulton County. DeKalb County is also bordered by Gwinnett County to the northeast, Rockdale County to the east, and Henry County and Clayton County to the south. DeKalb County is also at the core of the region's major transportation infrastructure. The eastern half of the I-285 Perimeter and its intersections with major roadways like I-85, I-20, US-78 and I-675, are all within DeKalb County, and connect the center of the region to the outlying suburban areas. Furthermore, all four MARTA rail lines have at least one station in the County. **Figure 2** shows DeKalb County's position within the Atlanta metro region.

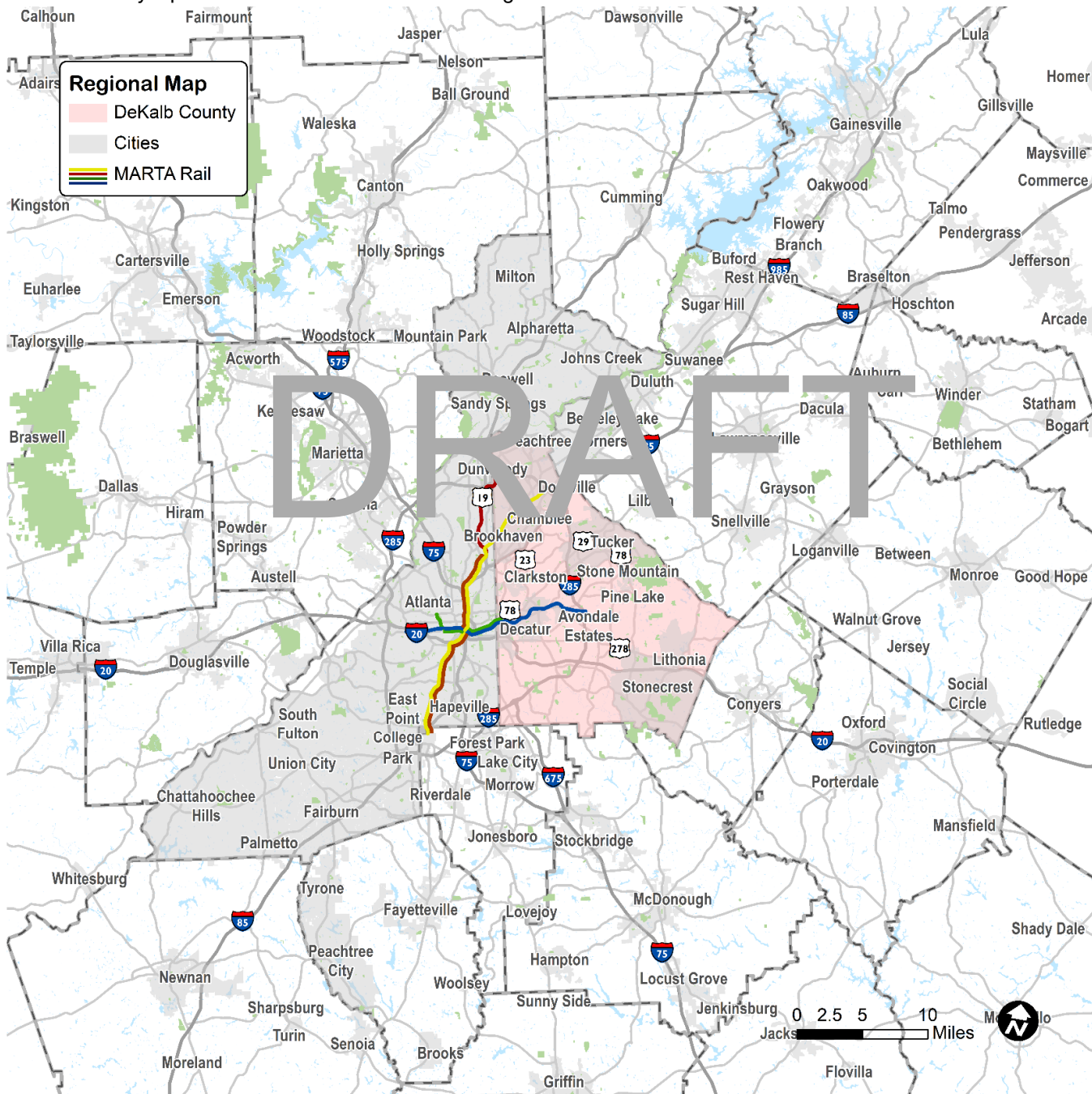


Figure 2. Regional Context

STUDY AREA

DeKalb County includes many unincorporated areas, the easternmost neighborhoods of the City of Atlanta, and 12 other cities: Avondale Estates, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, Dunwoody, Lithonia, Pine Lake, Stonecrest, Stone Mountain, and Tucker (Figure 3). Major Atlanta regional transportation infrastructure such as the MARTA heavy rail system and the regional freeway system support the movement of people, goods, and services in, out, and around DeKalb County. With a current population of 793,208 and a projected population of 985,721 by 2050, the DeKalb 2050 Unified Plan will guide future investment to meet the goals of the DeKalb community.

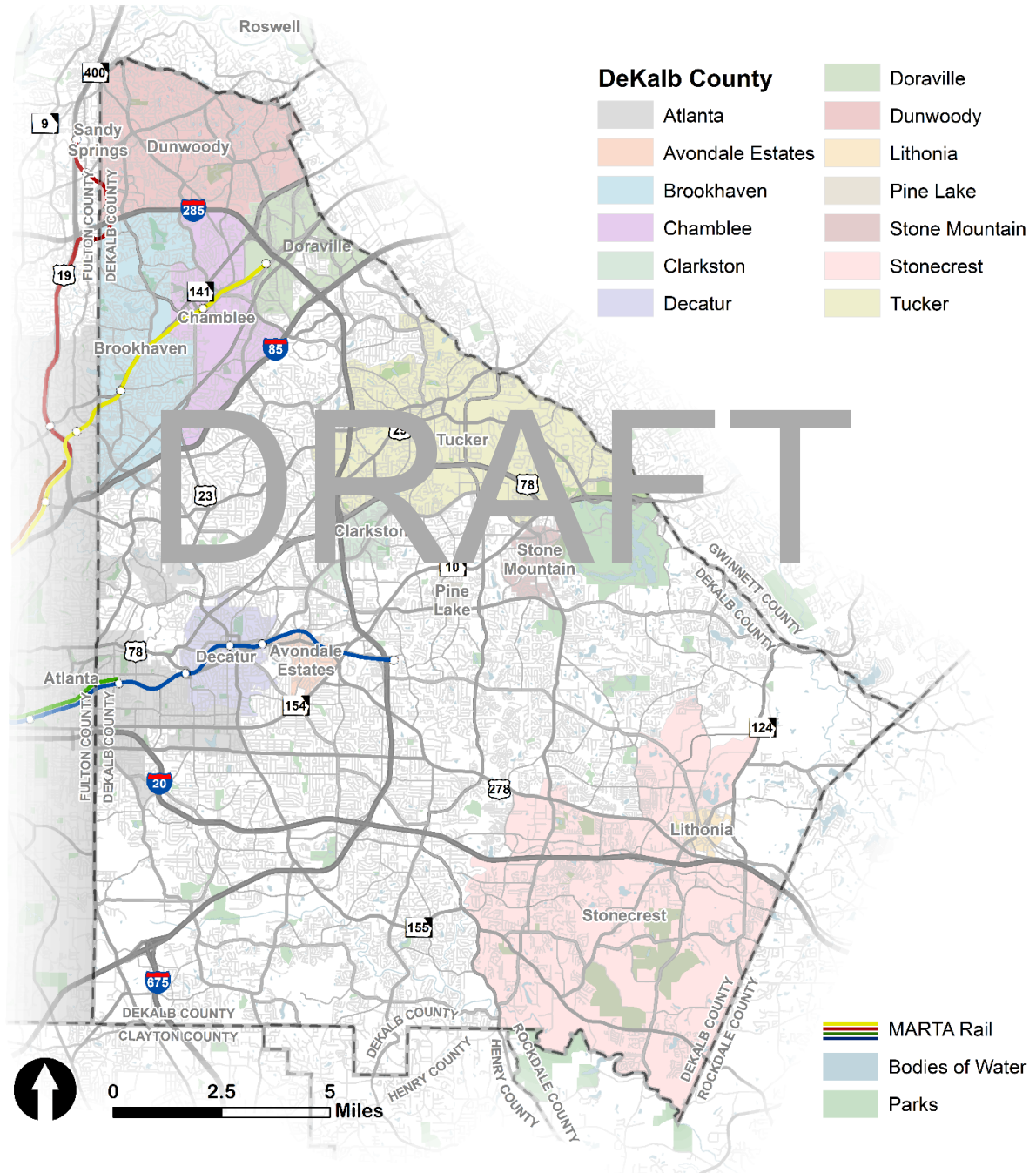


Figure 3. DeKalb County Context

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DEKALB COUNTY 2050 UNIFIED PLAN:

COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES

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PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES

It is critical that planning processes consider the extensive work has been completed before and build upon it. As a part of the Unified Plan, the team reviewed over 60 previous plans and studies, particularly since the completion of the 2014 Comprehensive Transportation Plan. **Table 1**, covers the general themes of each of the plans, followed by topical summaries and key takeaways that are providing guidance to the Unified Plan.

ZONING AND FUTURE LAND USE

Land use goals center on mixed use development, managing transitions between high intensity and lower intensity uses, clustering new development in nodes and strategic growth near transit. Most plans identify the need for greater variety of housing options, allowing for a mix of smaller lot single-family, attached product and multi-family. In some areas, zoning changes may be needed to protect existing single-family neighborhoods and provide for infill housing. High design standards are needed to promote economic development and protect the character of neighborhoods. Some of the master plans such as the Belvedere Master Active Living Plan recommend the creation of an overlay so future development includes active living principles.

Zoning and Future Land Use Studies	
2012	Kensington LCI TOD Plan
2013	Belvedere Master Active Living Plan
2013	Gresham Road Study Area Master Active Living Plan
2013	Panola Road/Salem Road Master Active Living Plan
2014	Medline LCI Plan
2019	Memorial Drive Revitalization Corridor Plan
2020	Briarcliff Road/Clairmont Road Small Area Plan
2021	DeKalb Comprehensive 5-Year Plan
2021	North Druid Hills at Briarcliff Node Update

REDEVELOPMENT

Corridor redevelopment focuses on establishing high densities at the nodes (major intersections) and creating a greater network of connectivity. Each Livable Center Initiative (LCI) includes a transportation street network plan. Most LCIs and small area plans identify goals for establishing a complete streets network. Plans explicitly make the case for public investment in streetscapes and public space as a strategy to fuel re-development and new development. Most plans also

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Redevelopment Studies	
2012	Kensington LCI TOD Plan
2013	Covington Highway Corridor Master Active Living Plan
2013	Indian Creek MARTA Station – Master Active Living Plan
2013	Gresham Road Study Area Master Active Living Plan
2013	Belvedere Master Active Living Plan
2013	Covington Highway Corridor Master Active Living Plan
2013	Gresham Road Study Area Master Active Living Plan
2014	North Druid Hills LCI
2014	Medline LCI Plan
2014	Dunwoody 2020-2040 Comprehensive Plan
2014	Buford Hwy Improvement Plan and Economic Development
2016	Doraville Comprehensive Plan
2016	2040 Clarkston Comprehensive Plan
2019	DeKalb Development Plan
2019	Clairmont Road Corridor Study
2019	Memorial Drive Revitalization Corridor Plan
2019	One Chamblee Comprehensive Plan Update
2019	Decatur Legacy Park Master Plan
2019	I-20 East Transit-Oriented Development Community Plan
2021	DeKalb County Zoning Ordinance
2021	Glenwood Road & Columbia Drive Area Redevelopment Plan

recommend inter-parcel connectivity, which is already a development standard in County ordinances.

Redevelopment recommendations highlight the need for public investment in the public realm as a way to incentivize private development. Redevelopment needs to replace existing aging and underutilized commercial properties along corridors like Covington Highway and Memorial Drive. Corridor redevelopment focuses on establishing higher densities at the nodes (major intersections) and creating a greater network of connectivity. The 2035 Comprehensive Plan Update includes design guidelines for concentrating development at nodes with height and buffering transitions between the highest intensity to lower intensity land use. Corridors like Buford Highway need improved accessibility and the high number of commercial destinations make the safety for non-motorized modes a pronounced issue. Each of the corridor

plans addresses crosswalks, safety and pedestrian improvements. Access to the interstate makes several of the corridors strategically important for redevelopment such as Glenwood Road and Memorial Drive. Scott Boulevard is characterized

by large acreages of vacant parcels (Medline Study), and all the corridors identified as Redevelopment Corridors have parcels that are underutilized, although growth pressure from the City of Atlanta is slowly leading to pockets of redevelopment.

HOUSING

Most plans identify the need for greater variety of housing options, allowing for a mix of smaller lot single-family, attached product and multi-family. Increasing housing options can be a useful strategy to increase affordability, particularly for households earning low- to moderate-incomes. Housing studies for DeKalb County clearly demonstrate that housing prices are rising faster than the median income, which is exacerbated by declining federal housing assistance options. Not only does the County have an insufficient supply of subsidized or otherwise affordable housing units, but the existing supply is at risk of loss over the next ten years. This is particularly true in areas of DeKalb County that offer the easiest connections to jobs, services, and multi-modal transportation options.

Housing Studies	
2010	New Roadmap for Workforce Housing in DeKalb
2018	DeKalb County Housing Affordability Study
2019	DeKalb 2019-2023 Consolidated Plan for HUD Programs

Local action to address housing need, particularly efforts that foster collaboration, cross-sector cooperation, and community-based partnerships, will be essential to make meaningful progress to provide a wide range of housing types for people of different incomes and ages. Recommendations highlight the need for DeKalb County to take a leadership role, particularly in the provision of affordable housing options by establishing a county housing officer, creating advisory committees, enhancing data and information system tracking, and connecting with other initiatives across the Atlanta region. Future action items should involve expanding resources and tools to support housing provision in DeKalb County.

Future housing needs in DeKalb County will require leaders to think comprehensively about opportunities and challenges. Addressing the County's needs will be more nuanced than simply expanding the supply of units. The County should also proactively consider ways to support economic development opportunities to increase incomes of residents to enhance housing choice, review land use plans to stabilize the affordability of housing options that have easy access to jobs, services, and transportation options, and preserve areas that offer naturally-occurring affordable housing units, particularly those areas that are in danger of gentrification, neglect, or disrepair.

PLACEMAKING

Placemaking goals focus on urban design, streetscapes and creating safe, inviting bicycle and pedestrian connections (note: a way to assist implementation may be to excerpt out the streetscape typical sections from all the plans and maintain a directory or compendium by street name and segment). Plans that promote new development should

Placemaking Studies	
2018	Make East Lake MARTA Yours – LCI Plan
2019	Arts, Culture, and Creative Placemaking Strategic Plan
2019	Decatur Legacy Park Master Plan
2020	ARC Regional Development Plan
2021	DeKalb Comprehensive 5-Year Plan
2021	Glenwood Road & Columbia Drive Area Redevelopment

incorporate greenspace and neighborhood parks to cultivate a sense of place. The plans reviewed indicate that very few dedicated bicycle facilities exist in the County, although some plans identify using sharrows to address this gap. The 2035 Update's five-year work program identifies a comprehensive parks expansion project list as well as an expanded greenway program financed through SPLOST and bonding. A sidewalk prioritization plan is included in the Work Program,

which will address the gaps in sidewalks identified in several of the plans (North Decatur Road, Scott Boulevard, DeKalb Industrial Way, Redan Road, segments of Clairmont Road and Covington Highway, etc.). Most plans recommend maximizing the existing and programmed trail network by identifying spurs or tie-ins to nearby trail segments. Some like the Kensington Study identify internal loop trails that connect to near-by trail system and others like the Medline LCI link major destinations like medical facilities and commercial amenities through new trails as a major step toward placemaking.

At the regional level, placemaking is further promoted through the ARC Arts and Creative Placemaking Plan, which offers a framework to engage creatives in traditional planning efforts and recommends ways to establish programs for public art.

Each LCI includes a transportation street network plan. Most LCIs and small area plan identify goals for establishing a complete streets framework. Plans explicitly make the case for public investment in streetscapes and open spaces as a strategy to fuel re-investment and new development. Most plans also recommend inter-parcel connectivity, which is already a development standard in County ordinances.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Part Placemaking, part quality of life, Arts and Culture elements of planning efforts help ensure a community’s vitality and create vibrant places for appreciation, creative outlets, and learning opportunities on the area’s heritage and composition.

DeKalb County has a rich cultural heritage, beginning with settlements by the Creek and Cherokee Indians. Named after Baron Johann DeKalb, a Revolutionary War hero, the County became home to colonialists

from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina after the Indian Springs Treaty of 1821, which removed the Creek and Cherokee people from their land. In 1823, the county seat was designated in Decatur, named after Commodore Stephen Decatur, who was a War of 1812 hero. This location is still the county seat today. DeKalb County—largely near the railroad line and in Decatur’s square as well as in the City of Atlanta and Stone Mountain—was the site of the Battle of Atlanta, a major Civil War campaign. DeKalb County of the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County was established in 1853, but the County was primarily agricultural until the 1960s, with a focus on dairy farms and quarries.

Arts and Culture Studies	
2009	City of Decatur Cultural Arts Master Plan
2011	Metro Atlanta Cultural Assessment – DeKalb Summary
2018	Create Dunwoody: Arts & Culture Master Plan
2019	ARC Arts, Culture, and Creative Placemaking Strategic Plan
2020	City of Brookhaven Arts + Culture Strategic Plan
2020	City of Dunwoody Public Art Implementation Plan
2020	Downtown Tucker Grid Plan (LCI Study)

The DeKalb of today has evolved from its farming and mining roots to a robust and diverse county with more miles of interstate than any other Georgia county and is home to the most diverse square mile in America in the City of Clarkston, which has become an example of what successful integration can look like due to influxes of immigrants and refugees since the 1990s.

The rich cultural history that DeKalb offers is celebrated and exhibited in the many arts and culture locations found in the County. Although the County itself does not have an Arts and Culture Plan in place (similar to Gwinnett County—which also does not have an Arts and Culture Plan but does make significant arts and cultural investments; Fulton County does have a countywide Arts and Culture Plan), several cities in DeKalb have developed Arts and Culture and/or public art Master Plans of their own, and the County is included in the Atlanta Regional Commission’s (ARC’s) Regional Arts and Culture planning efforts. Cities with their own Arts and Culture or public master plans, or with an arts organization, include Brookhaven, Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, Dunwoody, and Tucker.

In addition to the city-focused arts and culture organizations, DeKalb’s arts and cultural resources are also supported by other organizations throughout the County, such as We Love BuHi and the DeKalb History Center (DHC)—for instance, DHC spent \$1.6M to renovate the DeKalb County Courthouse, which is home to a County history museum/archives, and also maintains three additional structures in Decatur (the Benjamin Swanton House, the Biffle Cabin, and the Barber Cabin). Beyond organizations, DeKalb is home to numerous higher education institutions with a focus or concentration in arts and culture, as well as museums, studios/galleries, and more than 50 National Register of Historic Places locations.

There are many components to Arts and Culture planning, including transportation access to arts and culture destinations, housing and workspace affordability for artists and the creative community, support of the arts through adequate funding and awareness, inclusion of a broad range of cultural identities through various arts programs. While the Unified Plan may not include a deep dive into each of these elements, a big picture focus on accessibility of arts and cultural resources—

both in the transportation sense as well as ensuring adequate dispersion of these resources throughout the County—can position the County for future arts and culture efforts.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

DeKalb’s network of parks and trails represents a unique and solid foundation for a system with immense potential.

The County’s Parks Department is in the process of completing a new long-range comprehensive plan, creating a vision for how to expand and improve their system within a changing environment. DeKalb’s two large nature preserves—Panola Mountain State Park and Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve—are prime resources that have seen

Parks and Open Space Studies	
2013	Belvedere Master Active Living Plan
2013	Covington Highway Corridor Master Active Living Plan
2013	Panola Road / Salem Road Master Active Living Plan
2014	Dunwoody Parks Master Plan
2016	Chamblee 2040 Comprehensive Plan
2016	Doraville Comprehensive Plan 2022-2042
2020	Tucker Downtown Master Plan
2021	DeKalb Comprehensive Plan 5-Year

significant investment over the last decade, particularly in terms of paved trails. And Stone Mountain Park—owned by the State—remains one of the area’s top tourist destinations, as discussions around its complicated cultural legacy continue.

With population growth and development expected to continue, acquiring new parkland will become increasingly difficult. This challenge highlights the need to explore every opportunity and consider creative ways to offer public greenspace. Multi-use trails represent one of

the best options for creating greenspace linkages, connecting parks, schools, and neighborhood, and providing access to spaces that might otherwise go underused.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Ensuring all new development and transportation investment considers DeKalb’s environmental challenges and leverages its resources are crucial to ensuring the built environment can grow sustainably into the future.

DeKalb County runs a performance contracting initiative for energy audits; the program logs buildings in EPA’s database for tracking energy use, green-house gas emissions and project improvements.

Through the EPA Green Power Partnership, the County has powered the Gregory A. Adams Juvenile Justice Center with 100% renewable energy. The County’s facilities management office has also invested in a white roof program (also known as “cool roof”) which reduces the amount of electricity needed to cool government buildings. Several cities have sustainability plans including Dunwoody, Decatur, and Chamblee. These plans commit to reducing the environmental impact of transportation systems, promoting alternative modes of transportation, establishing alternative fuel source stations, reducing waste, and improving water-quality through low-impact development techniques.

Environmental Sustainability Studies	
2012	Decatur Environmental Sustainability Plan
2013	DeKalb County Green Energy Partnerships
2014	Dunwoody Sustainability Plan
2019	One Chamblee Comprehensive Plan Update
2019	Tucker Recreation and Parks Master Plan
2019	Pine Lake City Council Project List

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Understanding and embracing DeKalb County’s diversity will be critical to the success of the 2050 Unified Plan.

DeKalb’s substantial racial and ethnic diversity is well documented, but diversity in the community also extends

to the landscapes, incomes, employers, and, ultimately, the opportunities and challenges that exist in the future. The diversity represented in DeKalb County should be celebrated as an asset to attract and promote future economic development initiatives.

Economic Development Studies
2019 DeKalb County Strategic Economic Development Plan

Although population and job growth are well-documented, DeKalb is growing at a slower rate than peer counties across the Atlanta region. Job growth in DeKalb between 2010 and 2016 was less than half the rate seen in Cobb, Fulton, and Gwinnett counties. However, there is a strong and continued increases in office space, especially in Dunwoody and Brookhaven, have benefitted from positioning in a growing regional market with a renewed focus on access to multi-modal transportation options, quality housing, retail services, and amenities.

DeKalb County’s improving real estate and economic development market signals that companies, investors, and residents are increasingly noticing and taking advantage of the County’s strengths. This is particularly true in connected, urban areas of the County. However, growth and opportunities are not distributed equally, as there are areas of DeKalb with aging commercial structures and low-density residential patterns that have struggled to attract new investment. As such, economic development tools, marketing strategies, and initiatives will not be uniform across the County and should be specific to the local landscape and dynamics.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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Health and Wellness Studies

- 2013 Belvedere Master Active Living Plan
- 2013 Covington Highway Corridor - Master Active Living Plan
- 2013 Gresham Road Study Area - Master Active Living Plan
- 2013 Indian Creek MARTA Station - Master Active Living Plan
- 2013 Panola Road/Salem Road- Master Active Living Plan
- 2014 Medline LCI Plan
- 2020 ARC Live Beyond Expectations: Regional Strategic Plan Framework 2020-2025

Plans focused on providing pedestrian and bicycle facilities with better connectivity to residential areas for access to walking and active recreation. Several plans include recommendations related to wellness such as promoting options for accessing fresh food.

These plans attempt to reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers by incorporating healthy active lifestyles. Emphasis is placed on promoting accessibility, pedestrian connections,

cycling infrastructure, civic space, parks, and trails to support physical activity. While these plans outline methods for a path towards better health, there is an absence of coordinating efforts within the county to realize these goals.

ROAD CAPACITY AND SAFETY

Transportation improvements are a crucial component of the DeKalb Unified Plan, as the County’s roadways are the primary infrastructure for connecting neighborhoods and goods and services alike.

Road Capacity and Safety Studies
2014 DeKalb County Transportation Plan
2021 GDOT Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan
2021 Strategic Statewide Transportation Plan

Roadway capacity improvements are increasingly more complex than simply adding lanes. Often, road diets or removal of automobile lanes can be effective at increasing and diversifying roadway capacity, by providing more space for medians and turn lanes as well as the safe circulation of bicyclists and pedestrians.

The land use – transportation nexus emerges throughout the various plans as most recommend shorter, walkable blocks and new roadway connections in areas characterized by traditional, suburban development patterns and large parcels. Corridors like Buford Highway need improved accessibility and the high number of commercial destinations make the safety for non-motorized modes a pronounced issue.

TRANSIT

In recent years, significant transit planning efforts have been conducted in DeKalb County. This includes the development of the DeKalb County Transit Master Plan (TMP) and MARTA studies related to expansion, autonomous vehicles, and last-mile connectivity.

Several key themes were consistent throughout the transit planning efforts. Overall, the need for transportation alternatives to driving was identified. This is largely due to heavy congestion on arterial roadways and major corridors that are relied upon for commuting. The same roadways often play a huge role connecting activity centers and town centers throughout DeKalb County, which reinforced the need for transit. Addressing service gaps in specific areas was also identified as a need in the County, more specifically the southern and eastern parts of DeKalb.

Transit Studies	
2018	MARTA Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative
2019	DeKalb County Transit Master Plan
2019	MARTA I-20 East Transit Initiative
2019	More MARTA Technical Study
2020	South DeKalb Transit Hub Site Feasibility Study

The absence of first- and last-mile connectivity was widely identified as a barrier to increased transit use. Recommendations to mitigate first-and last-mile barriers included improved coordination between roadway and active transportation planning with transit services, as well as circulator-type shuttle services within major local communities. Details were offered particularly regarding each of DeKalb County’s MARTA rail stations through associated master plans that aim to increase

overall density near stations and improve general walkability and bikeability. The strategies offer focus to characteristics that contribute to transit-like populations, such as car ownership. An example is Kensington station, where about 20% of the households in the subarea do not own a personal vehicle. Indian Creek, as another example, is a station that has extremely limited pedestrian infrastructure.

Strategies to increase transit ridership and mode share were identified through incentivizing transit-oriented development (TOD) and placemaking strategies at nearby MARTA rail stations and promoting mixed-use development within major transit corridors. In DeKalb County, there were opportunities identified both at Indian Creek and Kensington MARTA rail stations to use underutilized areas for new or redevelopment opportunities. Service improvements were also viewed as a strategy to increase transit usage including service expansion to underserved areas and corridors, reducing bus headways, improving the rider experience, and increased access to transit stops/stations via walking, cycling, and driving.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN

There are many examples of trails—both within DeKalb and around the region—built along utility corridors, floodplains, and on abandoned rail lines. In recent planning efforts across the region, multi-use trails have consistently been one of residents’ most requested investments. The example of Atlanta’s BeltLine, as well as many other trails, are inspiring communities to consider the power of active transit and the appeal of pedestrian-scaled urban design. Currently, DeKalb County has a disjointed network of trails. Cities, including Decatur, Chamblee, Lithonia, Tucker, and Brookhaven, have begun implementing local systems. There are other major regional trails such as the Stone Mountain Trail, Arabia Mountain PATH, and the Rockdale River Trail that individually are significant but have much to offer in terms of creating a truly connected, Countywide trail system.

Most of the recommendations from previous plans for DeKalb County recommend maximizing the existing and programmed trail network by identifying spurs or tie-ins to nearby trail segments to create a more connected network. For example, the Kensington Study identifies internal loop trails that connect to the near-by trail system and the Medline LCI identified gaps and missing links to major destinations like medical facilities and commercial amenities through new trails.

Despite these efforts, there are still large swaths of DeKalb County that are underserved, however, particularly when considering overall demand for walking and cycling. Closing the gaps that separate the County's existing network could lead to significant increases in trail use, particularly if connections to and from activity centers and transit are seamless and user-friendly.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Studies	
2013	Belvedere Active Living Plan
2013	Covington Highway Corridor Master Active Living Plan
2014	North Druid Hills LCI
2016	Hammond Drive Corridor Study
2017	Dunwoody Last Mile Connectivity Study
2017	ARC Envisioning a Regional Trail Network
2017	ARC Bike to Ride
2019	One Chamblee Comprehensive Plan Update
2019	<i>Seguridad Alimentaria</i> – Food Security in Atlanta's Latinx Community
2019	Chamblee Rail Trail Phase 3 Concept Design Study
2020	Town Center Streetscapes Concept Plan
2020	ARC Regional Trail Vision Update

FREIGHT

The Atlanta region is a global leader in freight and logistics, and its development as a freight rail and air hub is central to its economic base. Several of GDOT's Statewide Designated Freight Corridors pass through DeKalb County, including I-285, I-20 and I-85.

Freight Studies	
2015	The Region's Plan Policy Framework
2016	Freight Mobility Plan Update
2019	Chamblee Mobility – Multimodal Transportation Plan
2020	Regional Development Plan
2021	GDOT Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan
2021	GDOT Strategic Statewide Transportation Plan
2021	DeKalb 2035 Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Update

Freight corridors in the County come together with freight-related land uses – and as DeKalb looks to continue as a home to freight and logistics uses, transportation and land use plans need to work to better integrate industrial areas into residential and commercial land uses. More specifically for transportation uses, DeKalb County should consider how to support both long-distance freight trucking trips as well as more localized distribution trips that connect directly to freight-related land uses. Transportation improvements, such as improvements to turning lanes, enhanced signal timing,

and other ITS developments can help to support safe interactions between freight and general-purpose travel. Continued asset management of freight rail facilities and roadway infrastructure is also crucial for a continuing industrial presence in DeKalb.

Previous Plans and Studies

Study Name	Geography / Organization	Year Completed	Comprehensive Land Use Plan										CTP			
			Zoning and Future Land Use	Redevelopment	Housing	Placemaking	Arts and Culture	Parks and Open Space	Sustainability/ Environmental	Economic Development	Market Analysis	Health and Wellness	Road Capacity and Safety	Transit	Bike/Ped	Freight
DeKalb County Sustainable Design Assessment Team Report	DeKalb	2011	○			○			●			○		○		
Kensington LCI TOD Plan	DeKalb	2012	○	●	●		○	○	○	●	●	○	●	●	●	
Belvedere Master Active Living Plan	DeKalb	2013	●	●	○		○	●	○			●	●	○	●	
Covington Hwy Corridor - Master Active Living Plan	DeKalb	2013	●	●	●			●	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	
Green Energy Partnerships	DeKalb	2013							●							
Gresham Rd Study Area - Master Active Living Plan	DeKalb	2013	●	●	○				○			○	●	○	○	
Indian Creek MARTA Station - Master Active Living Plan	DeKalb	2013	●	●	●			○	○	●	○	○	●	●	○	
Panola Road/Salem Road- Master Active Living Plan	DeKalb	2013	○	○	●		○	●	○	●	○	●	●	○	●	
North Druid Hills LCI	DeKalb	2014	●	●	●	○		○	○	●		○	●	●	●	
Medline LCI Plan	DeKalb	2014		●	●		○	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	●	
Clifton Corridor Initiative	DeKalb	2014												●		
DeKalb Development Plan	DeKalb	2014		●	○			○		●			○	○	○	
DeKalb County Transit Master Plan	DeKalb	2019												●		
I-20 East Transit Oriented Development Community Plan	DeKalb	2019	●	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	●			●	●	
2019 Annual Development Report	DeKalb	2020	●	○	●					●						
South DeKalb Transit Hub Feasibility Study	DeKalb	2020												●		
2021 DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan: 5-Year Update	DeKalb	2021	●	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	○
DeKalb 2035 Comprehensive Plan 5- Year Update Executive Summary	DeKalb	2021	●	○	●			○	○	●				●	○	○
DeKalb County Zoning Ordinance	DeKalb	2021		●	●					●						
Glenwood Rd & Columbia Drive Area Redevelopment	DeKalb	2021		●		○		○	○			○	○	●	●	
DeKalb 2035 Comprehensive Plan 5- Year Update Executive Summary	DeKalb	2021	●	○	●			○	○	●				●	○	○
Sustainability Plan	Dunwoody	2014		●				●	●	○		○	○	○	●	
Comprehensive Plan	Dunwoody	2015	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●		○	○		○	
Winters Chapel Rd Area Study	Dunwoody	2015		○	○			○					●	○	●	
Hammond Drive Corridor Study	Dunwoody	2016								○			○		●	
Dunwoody Last Mile Connectivity Study	Dunwoody	2017											●	●	●	
Major Component / Focus			●													
Included in study			○													

Previous Plans and Studies

Study Name	Geography / Organization	Year Completed	Comprehensive Land Use Plan										CTP			
			Zoning and Future Redevelopment	Housing	Placemaking	Arts and Culture	Parks and Open Space	Sustainability/ Environmental	Economic Development	Market Analysis	Health and Wellness	Road Capacity and	Transit	Bike/Ped	Freight	
Agnes Scott College Climate Resilience Plan	Decatur	2021			○			●		○		○	○			
Comprehensive Plan 2022-2042	Doraville	2016	○	●	●	○	●	○	●		●	●	○			
GDOT Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan	GDOT	2021									●		○			
2021 Strategic Statewide Transportation Plan	GDOT	2021									●	○	○			
I-20 East Transit Initiative	I-20 Corridor	2012									●					
More MARTA	MARTA	2018									●					
Pine Lake City Council Project List	Pine Lake	2019				●	○	●	●							
Tucker Downtown Master Plan	Tucker	2010		○		○	●	○			○		○			
Recreation and Parks Master Plan	Tucker	2010			○		●					●				
Tucker PATH Trail Master Plan and Implementation Strategy	Tucker	2013														
Major Component / Focus Included in study			●										●			

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EXISTING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DEKALB COUNTY 2050 UNIFIED PLAN:

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ONGOING AND UPCOMING PROJECTS

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A decorative background pattern consisting of various shades of purple triangles and hexagons arranged in a complex, overlapping geometric design. The pattern is centered on the page and extends towards the bottom and sides.

ONGOING AND UPCOMING PROJECTS

MAJOR MOBILITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM

GDOT oversees the Major Mobility Investment Program (MMIP) which invests in large transportation projects in the state. MMIP transportation projects aim to create additional capacity, improve freight movement, enhance safety, and improve mobility for travelers. These can include major interchange, major express lanes, major interstate widening, commercial vehicle lanes, and general interstate route improvement projects. The I-285 Top End Station Segment Plan is an MMIP project in DeKalb County that includes express lanes and bus rapid transit (BRT) service (**Figure 4**).

I-285 TOP END STATION SEGMENT PLAN

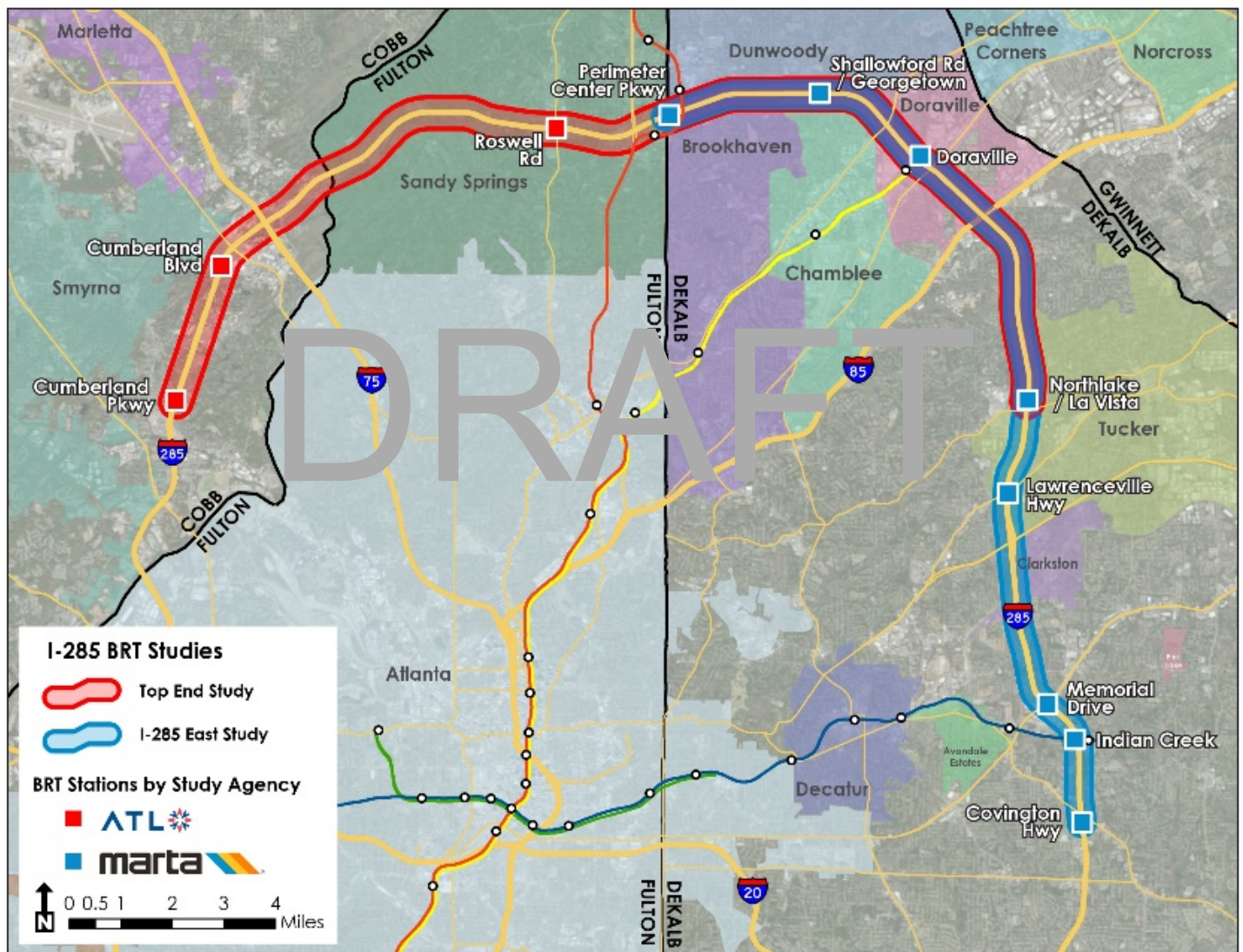


Figure 4. I-285 BRT Studies

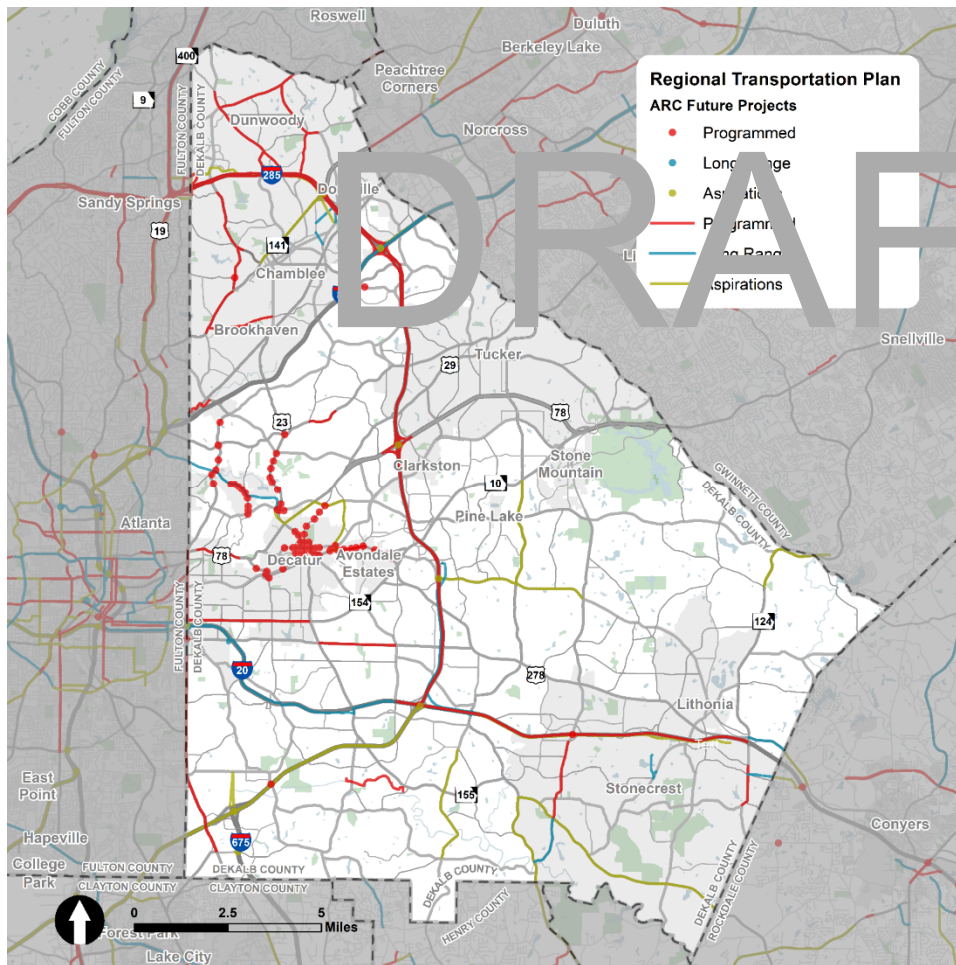
The I-285 Top End Station Segment plan is the third phase in a series of projects to study, design, and implement bus rapid transit along I-285 from Cumberland Parkway in Cobb County to Covington Highway in DeKalb County. The study is being conducted by two agencies, with MARTA responsible for the I-285 East Study, which includes all of the project limits within DeKalb County, and the ATL responsible for the I-285 West Study. This project phase -- from Spring 2020 through 2021 -- includes agency coordination, an analysis of existing conditions, and the development of conceptual designs and

service plans. This will be followed by a modeling and analysis process and will conclude with the development of an implementation plan. The project will link to stations on the existing MARTA rail systems and will have major implications for both mobility and development within DeKalb County, particularly in areas adjacent to future stations. GDOT’s Managed Lane System is slated to include not one, but two fully-separated managed traffic lanes through from I-285 Top-End to I-285 East, as seen in **Figure 5**. The two lanes will be constructed in both directions, and will be barrier-separated, indicating a major structural investment along the corridor.

ADDITIONAL REGIONAL PROJECTS

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) developed the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) which was approved in February 2020 and has since then had periodic amendments. The RTP proposes transportation investments that are crucial to the 20-County region with a horizon year of 2050. Short-term recommendations (six fiscal years) that have identified funding are included in the region’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a subset of the full RTP. The RTP’s future projects are categorized as Programmed (TIP), Long-Range, and Aspirational. Future projects identified by the ARC are shown below in .

KEY IMPACTS TO DEKALB COUNTY



DeKalb County is just one piece of Metro Atlanta; therefore, coordinated planning efforts are critical for future success. GDOT and ARC have a history of state and regional planning efforts that impact activities within DeKalb. Meanwhile, local city initiatives need to be considered as a part of the County’s planning efforts. As a part of the Unified Plan process, DeKalb is tasked with identifying high priority, high performing projects that can compete well at a regional level for state and federal funding. Consideration of national, state, and regional goals will position DeKalb for future implementation.

Figure 5. Regional Transportation Plan

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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PEOPLE

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PEOPLE

DeKalb County is considered one of the five central counties of Metro Atlanta, and with a 2020 population of 764,382 is the fourth largest County in both the metro region and the State of Georgia. This accounts for approximately 12.5% of the Metro Atlanta population, which recently surpassed 6 million. DeKalb has a widely diverse population that presents unique opportunities and challenges, as a broad array of issues must be addressed through services and policies in order to meet the various needs of its citizens.

Since the year 2000, the County has grown at a rate slower than the region as whole, particularly as compared to some of the more exurban counties. The County is a minority-majority community, with African Americans making up the largest demographic group at 54.8%¹ of the population. The age structure of the County is similar to that of the region, with those under 18 making up 23% of the population and seniors making up another 12.9%. As with the rest of the Atlanta region, the population of older adults is expected to grow much faster than overall population, presenting new challenges related to healthcare and mobility. Additionally, the County has slightly lower household incomes and a higher poverty rate than the region as a whole.

HISTORICAL AND CURRENT POPULATION DENSITY / GROWTH TRENDS

DeKalb County experienced explosive population growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s (**Figure 7**). Though the great recession caused a sharp slowdown during the 2000s, growth has since bounced back strongly. Nevertheless, the long-term growth trends show gradually slowing growth as the County’s population approaches 1 million people by the year 2050.

While DeKalb County has traditionally experienced continuous population growth that growth has not been distributed evenly. In 1990, the densest portions of the County were concentrated in western and central DeKalb, including areas within or adjacent to the Cities of Atlanta, Decatur, and Clarkston, or places located near transportation routes, particularly Buford Highway, Memorial Drive, and Glenwood Rd. (**Figure 6**) Since then, population growth has dispersed across most of the County, with notable increases in density in northern DeKalb County along I-285, and south-central DeKalb County along the I-20 corridor. This trend is expected to continue through 2050, with only the far eastern and southern portions of the County remaining largely low-density (**Figure 8**).

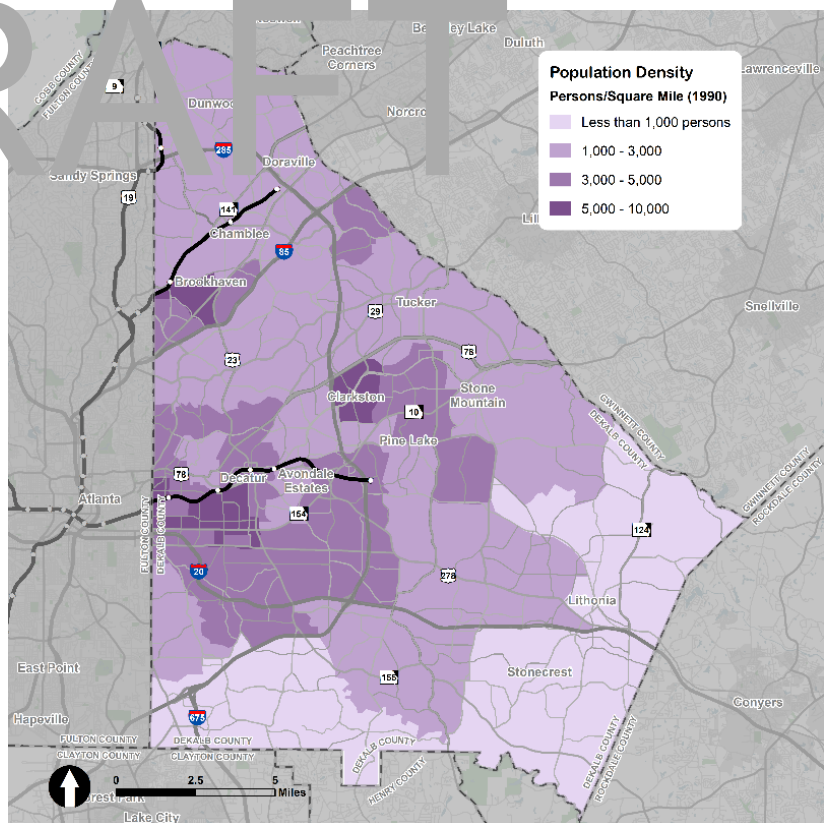
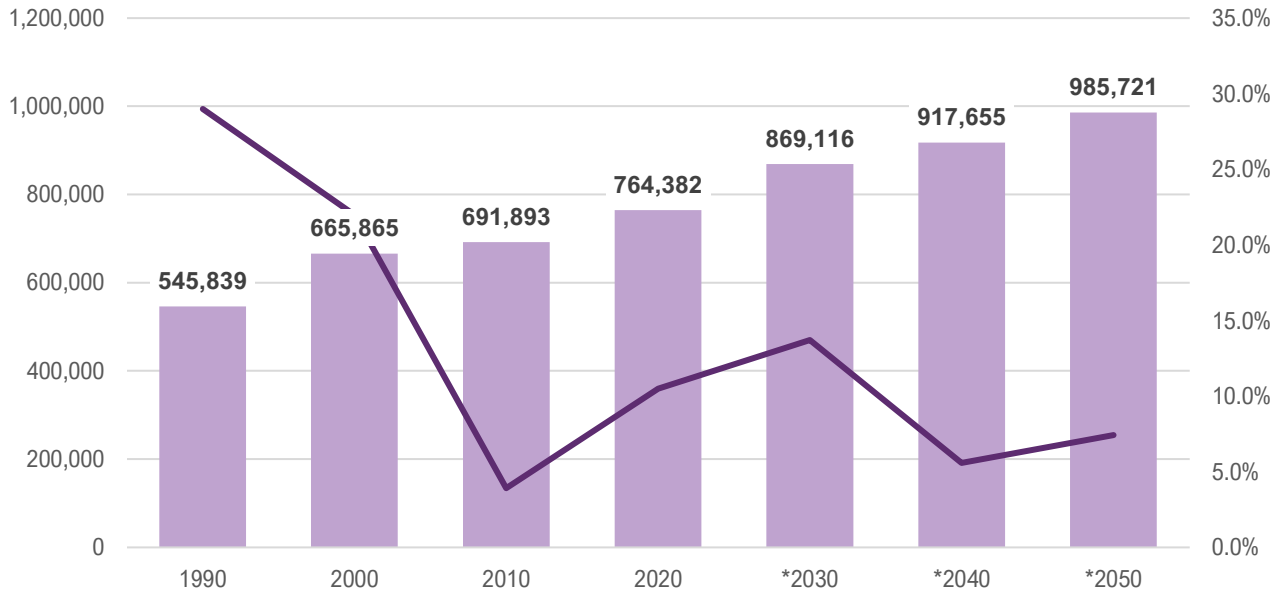


Figure 6. Population Density in 1990

Figure 7. Population Growth



Percent Growth

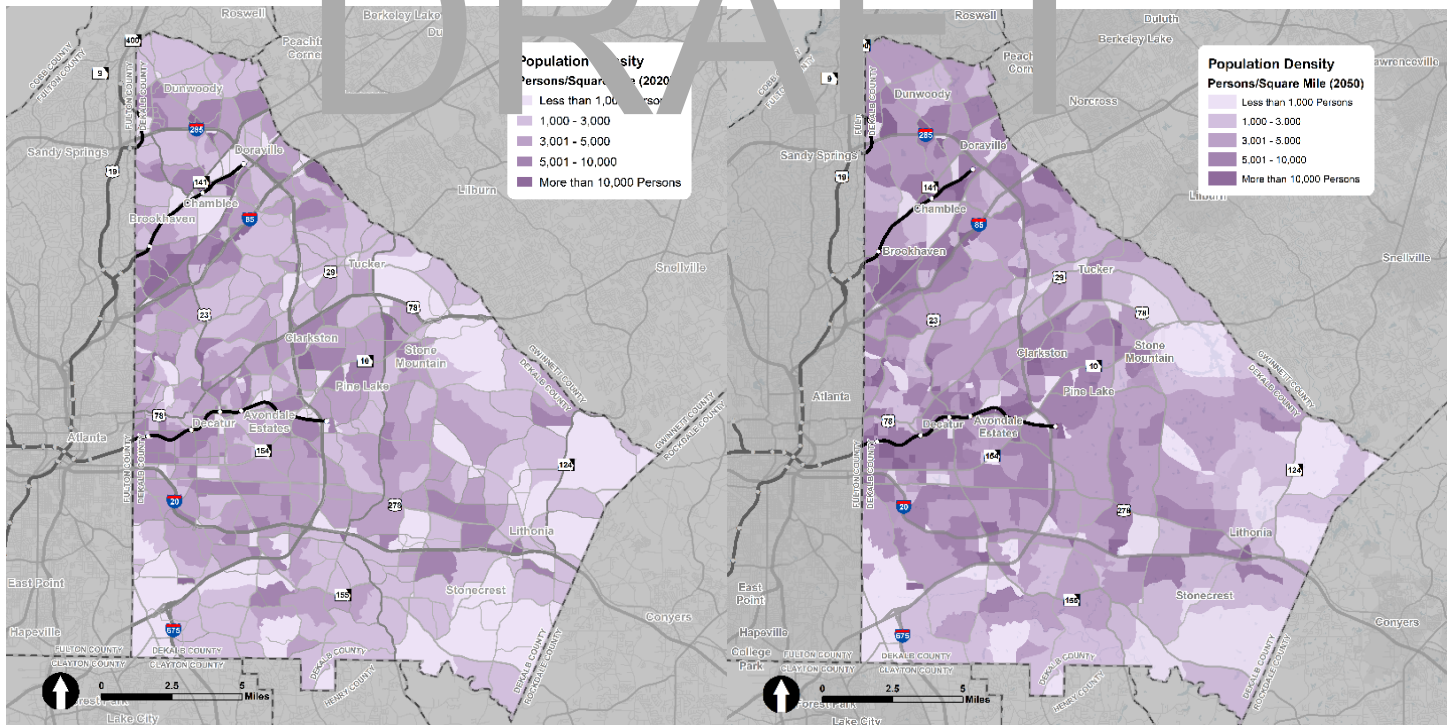


Figure 8. Population Density Comparison

Age Cohorts

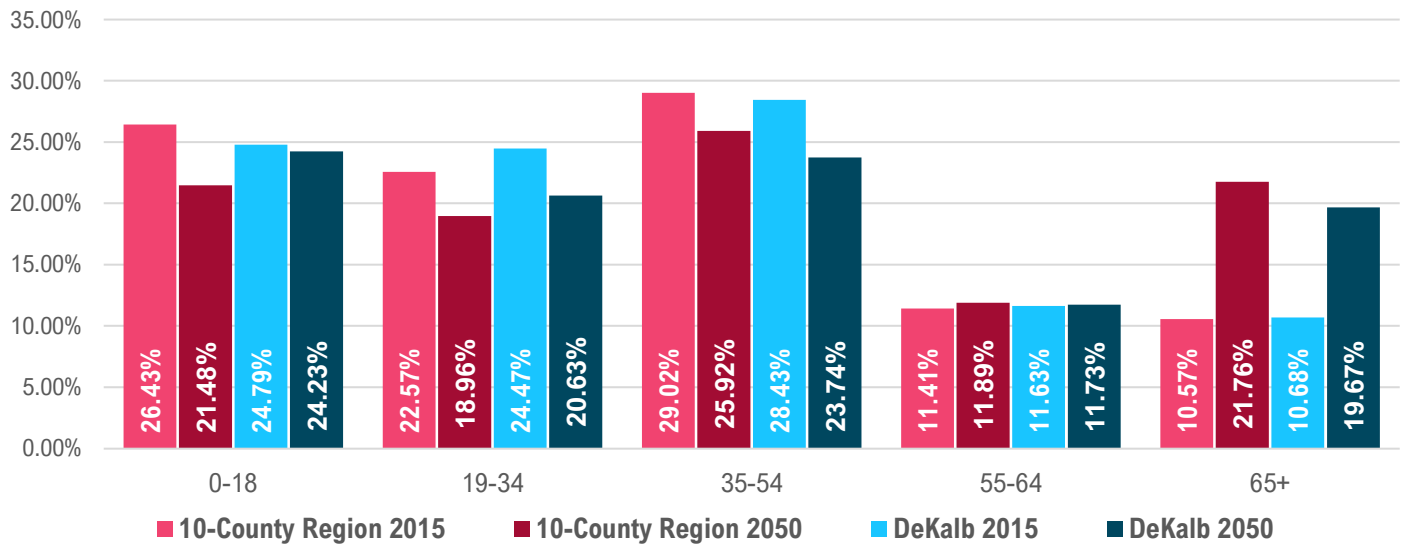


Figure 9. Age Cohorts

AGE COHORTS

The age demographics of DeKalb County are fairly similar to the Atlanta 10-County region average. Around a quarter of residents are 18 and under, while just over one million are considered seniors. The median age is currently estimated at 36.4, which is just slightly below the regional median age of 36.6.

While all age groups in the Metro Atlanta region are expected to expand over the next 30 years, the share of the population over age 65 is expected to grow much faster than any other group, doubling as a percentage of the population. DeKalb County is expected to see similar aging trends in the population, with seniors expected to make up nearly one in five residents by 2050, as shown in the chart above (**Figure 9**). However, unlike the rest of the region, DeKalb’s 18 and under cohort is expected to remain stable relative to the rest of the population. With the County’s population is expected to expand to nearly one million residents by 2050, this stability has important implications for future infrastructure investments. The County will need to invest heavily in education to support this demographic, as well as continue to invest in transportation, parks, and recreational infrastructure.

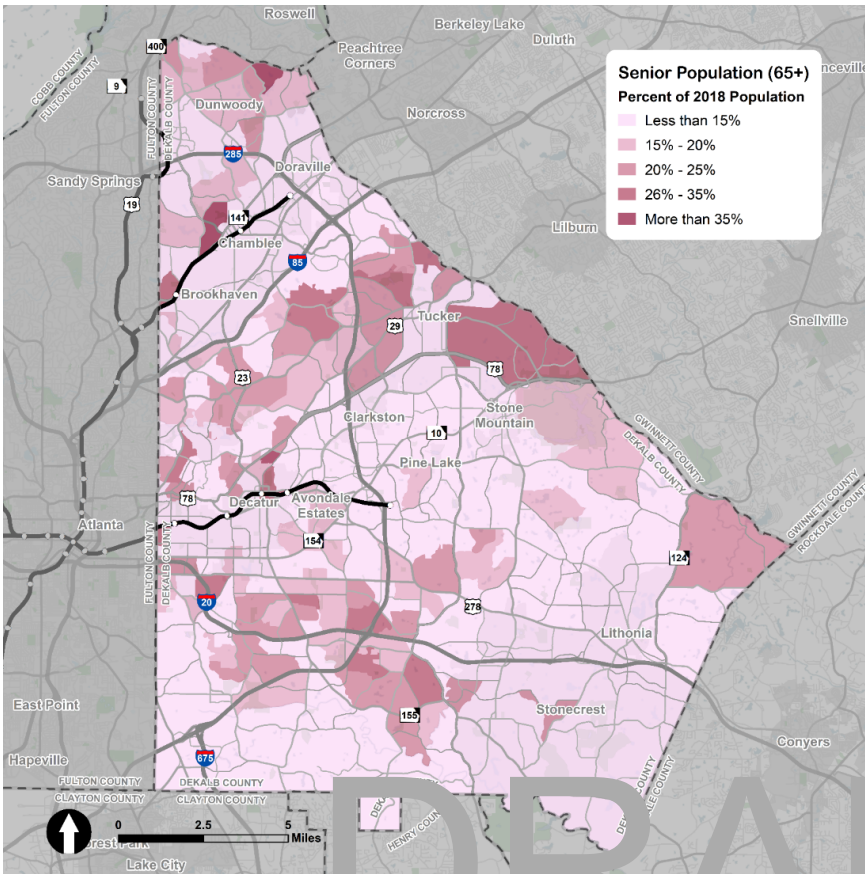


Figure 10. Senior Population

SENIOR POPULATION

Seniors will be the fastest growing age group over the next 30 years, with the population projected to rise from nearly 102,000 in 2020 to over 199,000 by 2050. **(Figure 10)** shows the distribution of seniors in the County as a percentage of the overall population, illustrating that many of the areas with the highest percentage are in areas with more limited access to rapid, high-capacity public transportation (heavy rail). The County will need to proactively plan for the needs of the rapidly growing senior population, including additional transportation and housing options and age-in-place supportive developments, to help this segment of the population maintain a high quality of life.

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DIVERSITY

RACE / ETHNICITY

DeKalb County is one of the largest and most diverse counties in the Metro Atlanta region, and is the most populous county with a majority black population **(Figure 11)**. Over the next 30 years, DeKalb County is expected to continue its trend of increasing diversity as Asian and Latinx/Hispanic communities in DeKalb County are projected to grow faster than other groups, comprising over 25 percent of the County’s future population **(Figure 12)**.

The trend in DeKalb County is replicated in demographic forecasts for the larger metro area with no specific community making up an absolute majority of the population **(Figure 13)**.

Diversity in DeKalb 2019

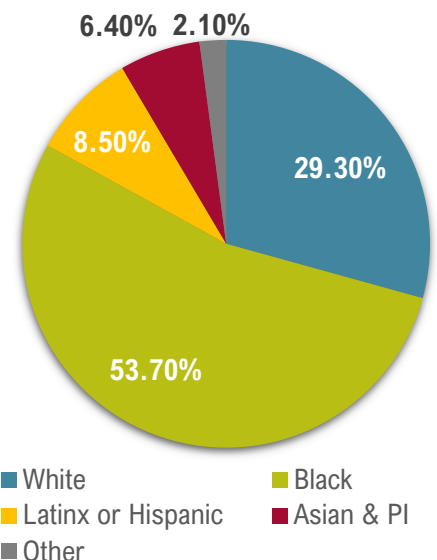
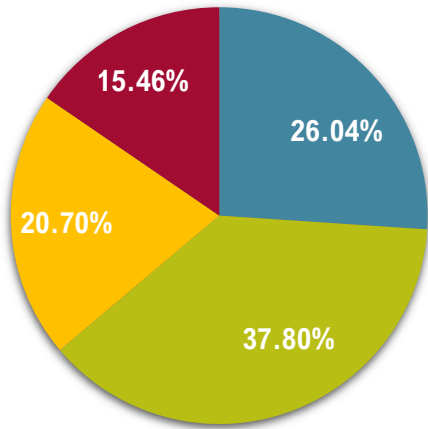


Figure 11. DeKalb Diversity (2019)

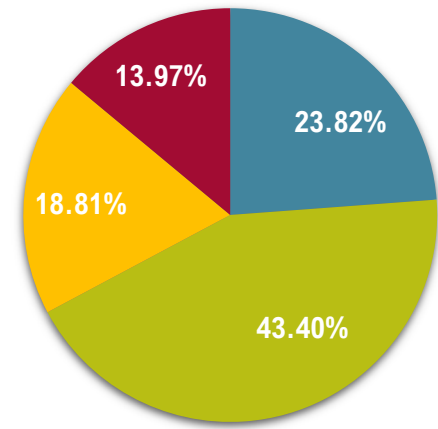
10-County Region 2050



- White
- Black
- Latinx or Hispanic
- Asian/PI & Other

Figure 13. Regional Diversity (2050)

Diversity in DeKalb 2050



- White
- Black
- Latinx or Hispanic
- Asian/PI & Other

Figure 12. DeKalb Diversity (2050)

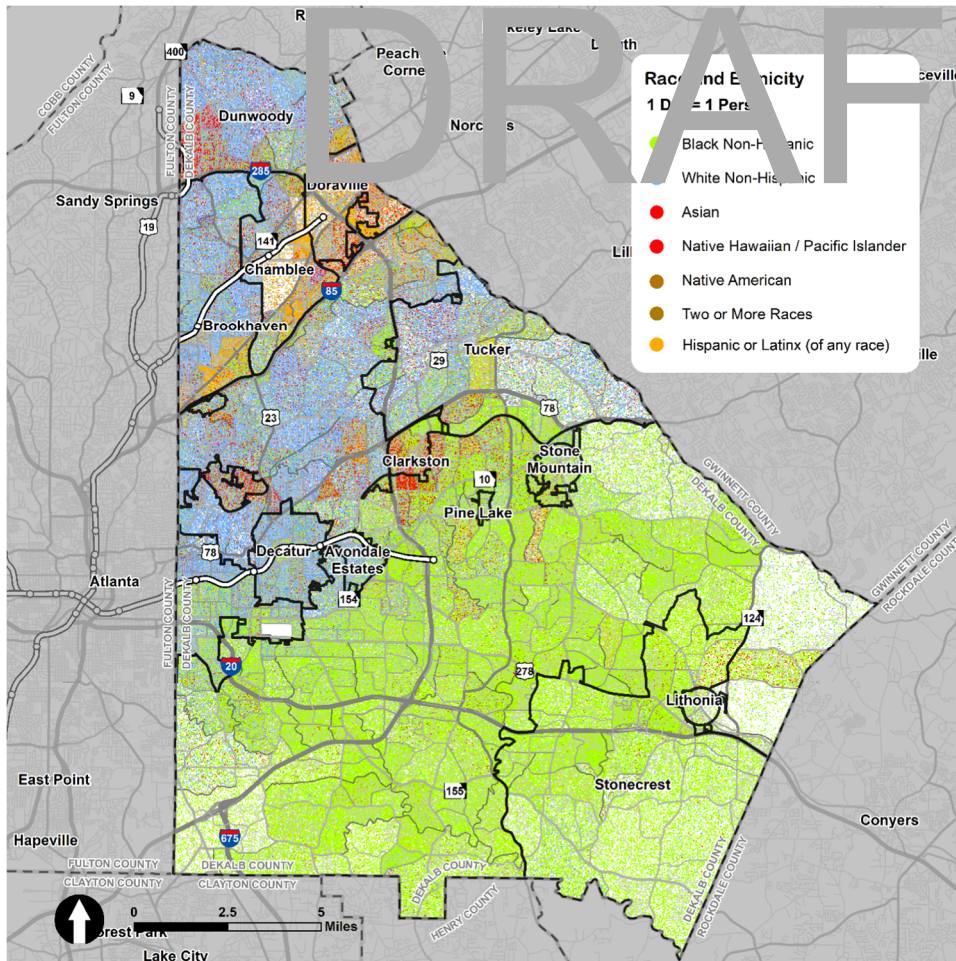


Figure 14. Race and Ethnicity

Looking a closer look at the level of racial segregation in DeKalb County, **Figure 14** illustrates that although the County is diverse, there are areas in the County that are relatively integrated and other areas where clearer delineations between black, white, Asian, and Latinx/Hispanic communities exist (2018 American Community Survey).

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

LEP is a category reported by the Census that indicates people who are English learners and are fluent in a language other than English. English learners can encounter barriers and limitations to goods and services due to lack of adequate translation services. This can lead to challenges in mobility and general quality of life. DeKalb County is considered home to many diverse families including those who do not speak English. In DeKalb County, 42% of English learners speak Spanish as a first language, and an additional 23% speak a language that is Asian or Pacific Islander. The two largest concentrations of English learners in DeKalb County are in the Clarkston area and along the Buford Highway Corridor (**Figure 15**).

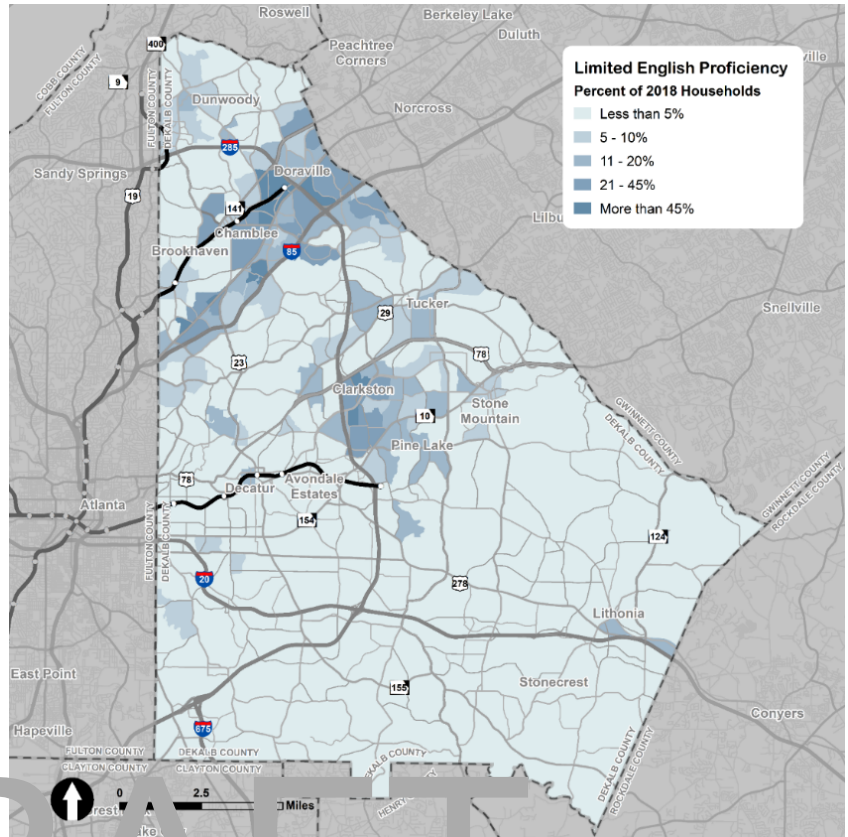


Figure 15. LEP households

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Approximately 10 percent of DeKalb County's population identifies as having a disability (). Disability data is self-reported as part of the American community survey, which asks about six types of disability difficulties: hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living. Program goals supporting people living with disabilities emphasizes supporting independence and promoting involvement in all societal aspects to maintain a high quality of life. The map above illustrates where transportation options should be considered to address different mobility needs that may exist. Additional services and accommodations may be needed in areas with higher percentages of residents with a disability.

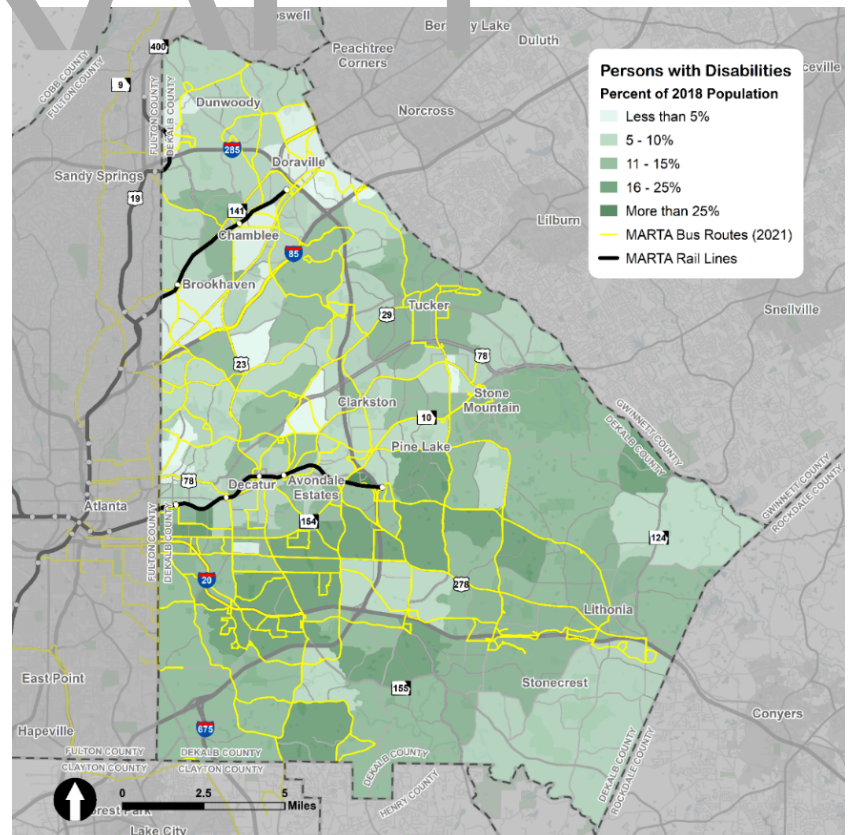


Figure 16. Persons with Disabilities

CAR OWNERSHIP

Car ownership can indicate where people in the community rely on other modes of transportation to access public goods and services. Ensuring that communities have alternative transit options to driving can help to promote quality of life and reduce barriers to equitable access to community resources. In DeKalb County, 8.7% have no vehicle available at home. There are areas, such as south of Rainbow Drive, where transit access does not exist, but there are higher numbers of the community who do not have access to a vehicle in their households, as shown in **Figure 17**.

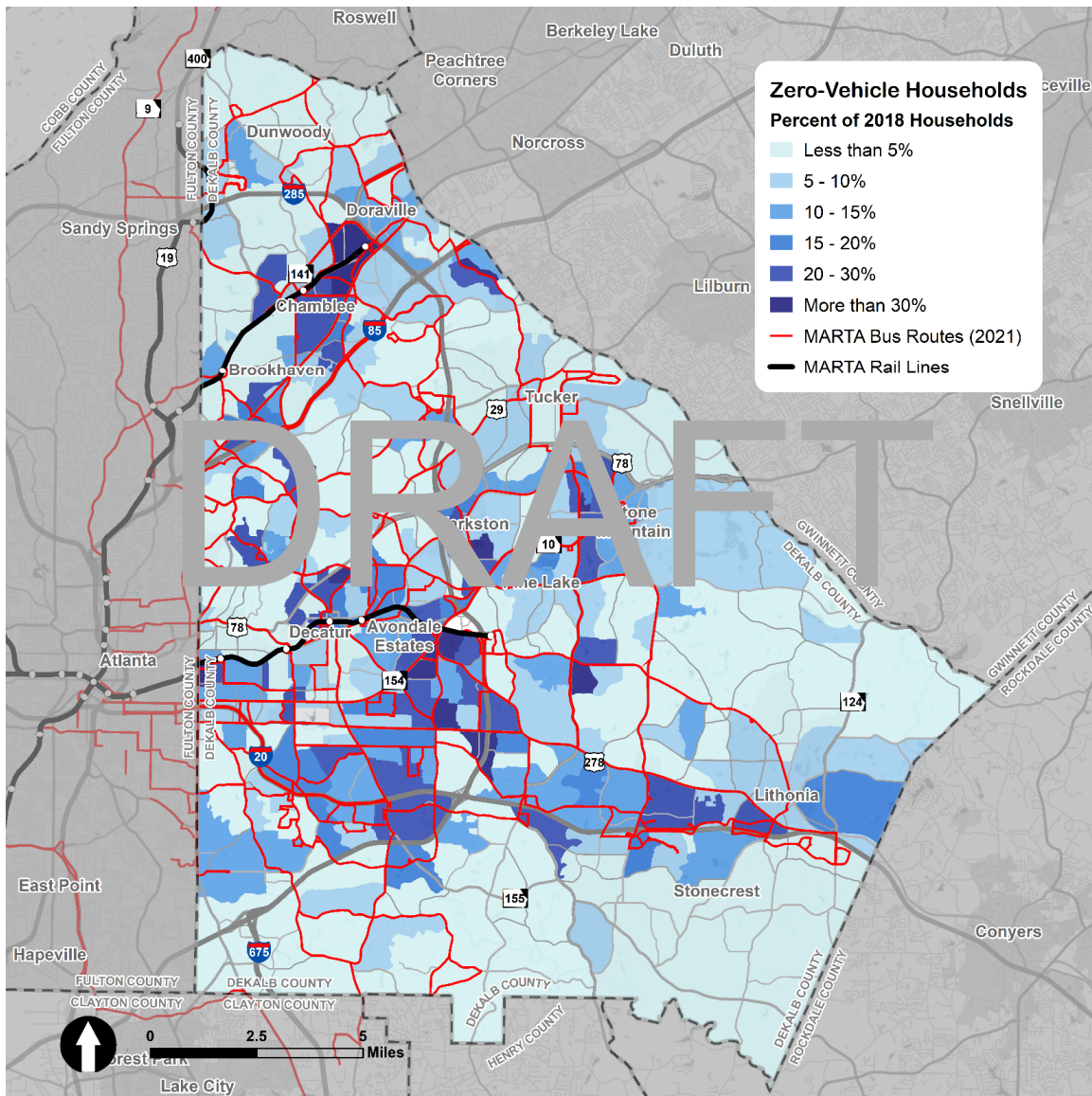


Figure 17. Zero-Vehicle Households

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational attainment is tied closely to income and the skills and opportunities that are available to people to be able to live healthy lives in their communities. The relationships between education, socioeconomic status, and social mobility are complex but have a strong influence on the overall health of individuals. Education can often provide people with opportunities for better health that include better jobs and higher earnings, general resource availability (e.g., grocery stores, trails, parks, etc.), and healthy behaviors and health-learning opportunities.

In DeKalb County, 90 percent of people over 25 have a high school diploma or higher. Just under half of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher (includes numbers of high school graduates). Larger concentrations of people who have attained a bachelor's degree or higher live north of the MARTA Blue and Green lines and inside of the I-285 corridor. The County's educational attainment is roughly similar to the overall region, but with a slightly higher rate of graduate or professional degree attainment. The County school system, however, has the second lowest high-school graduation rate in the region at 73.4%. The tie of educational attainment to income is evident when comparing **Figure 18**, and additional investments in public schools may be necessary to maintain the County's strong educational attainment.

Educational Attainment (2019)

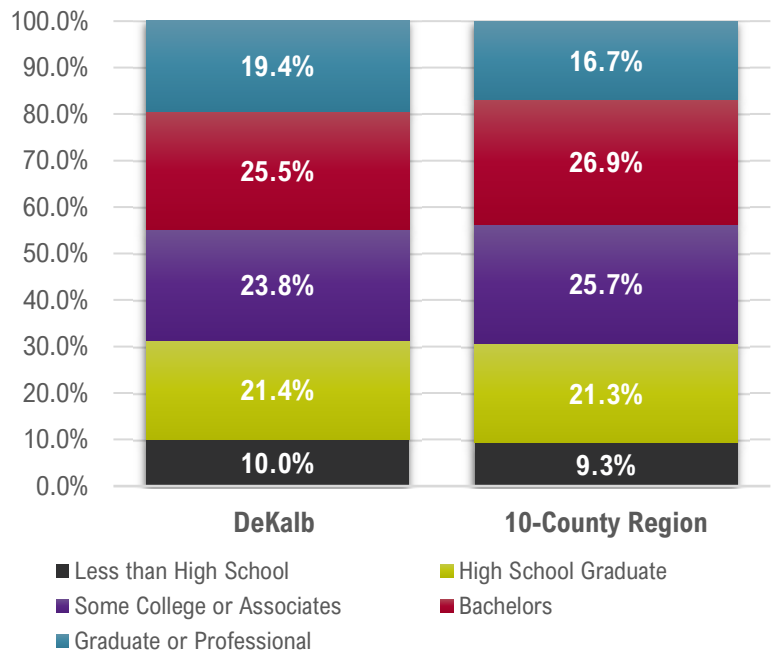


Figure 18. Educational Attainment

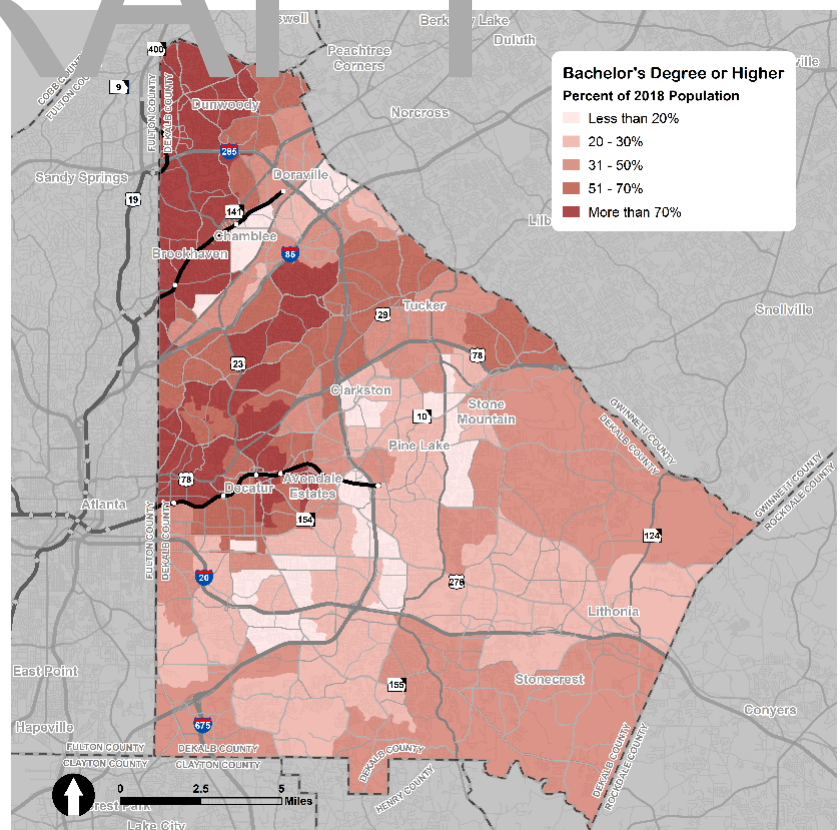


Figure 19. Educational Attainment

INCOME

The highest household incomes are primarily concentrated in the northern and northwestern segments of the County, as shown in **Figure 20**. Median incomes are generally lower along the I-285 corridor south of Highway 78 and along I-20. Just under 15 percent of the households in DeKalb are considered low-income, and high concentrations of lower income households can result in reduced educational achievement, lower social mobility, reduced health outcomes, and a lower quality of life for residents of these neighborhoods. Increased investments in transportation connections to provide access to jobs and education could expand the prosperity more prevalent in north DeKalb throughout the County.

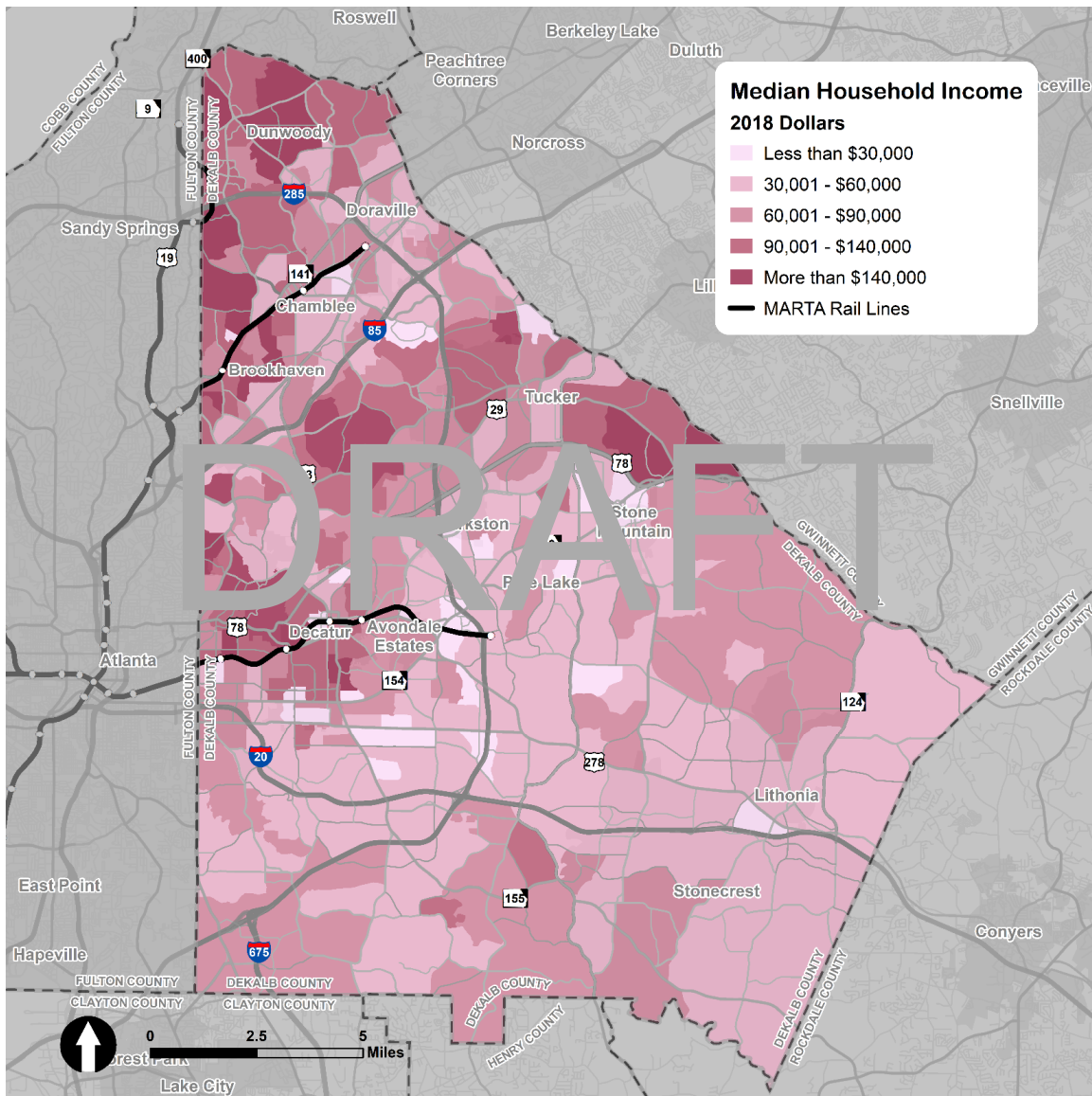


Figure 20. Median Household Income

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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PLACES

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PLACES

LAND USE AND CHARACTER

DeKalb County has seen enormous transformation over the last several decades thanks in part to its position at the heart of one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing urban regions in the nation. Spanning over 271 square miles, the County is diverse in terms of the built and natural environment, and includes walkable urban neighborhoods, major employment centers, colleges and universities, aging commercial centers, a diversifying housing stock, large state and county parks and rural areas, each with their own unique needs and goals.

Development in DeKalb has historically progressed outwards from the central and western edge of the County near the cities of Atlanta and Decatur. This development was accelerated by the construction of the interstate highway system, particularly Interstates 85, 20, and 285. This has resulted in a land use pattern that is primarily suburban in character, with major activity and job centers clustered along highway corridors and at major intersections. The western edge of the County has gradually transitioned to a more urban development pattern as growth from Atlanta has spread east and north, with clusters of walkable mixed-use, apartments and townhomes, and dense job centers developing around the historic downtowns and MARTA rail stations, particularly in downtown Decatur and the Perimeter Center area.

As growth pressures have continued to push eastward and the County has approached being built-out, new residential infill development has begun to be proposed and built in existing single-family areas as well as industrial or rural areas. There has also been increased attention on activity centers and how they transition from higher densities to lower densities found within surrounding residential areas. Additionally, the County has experienced significant disinvestment in some suburban strip retail centers leading to high vacancies in these areas and disparities in goods and services between different portions of the County.

The County has identified a number of activity centers that have not seen significant investment in many years and may need to be revisited in response to changing industry and development trends. Refinements to the County's land use plans, focused investments in key areas, and continued investments in County services, cultural assets, and sustainability initiatives across the County will ensure that DeKalb maintains a high quality of life for all its diverse communities.

EXISTING ZONING AND LAND USE PATTERNS

The predominate land use within DeKalb County is residential, with the most common residential zoning categories being R-100, R-75, R-60, and RSM. Higher density residential is found mostly inside I-285 with lower density residential located mostly outside I-285 to the south and east. Office and commercial land uses are located mostly within I-285, in activity centers or along major roadways. Industrial uses are found in the southern and eastern areas of the County. The zoning and land use patterns are displayed in **Figure 21** and **Figure 22**. Zoning designations are as follows:

RE	Residential Estate	MU-1	Mixed Use Low Density
RLG	Residential Large Lot	MU-2	Mixed Use Low-Medium Density
R-100	Residential Medium Lot	MU-3	Mixed Use Medium Density
R-85	Residential Medium Lot	MU-4	Mixed Use High Density
R-75	Residential Medium Lot	MU-5	Mixed Use Very High Density
R-60	Residential Small Lot	NS	Neighborhood Shopping
MHP	Mobile Home Park	C-1	Local Commercial
RNC	Neighborhood Conservation	C-2	General Commercial
RSM	Small Lot Residential Mix	OIT	Office Institutional–Transitional
MR-1	Medium Density Residential-1	OI	Office Institutional
MR-2	Medium Density Residential-2	OD	Office Distribution
HR-1	High Density Residential-1	M	Light Industrial
HR-2	High Density Residential-2	M-2	Heavy Industrial
HR-3	High Density Residential-3		

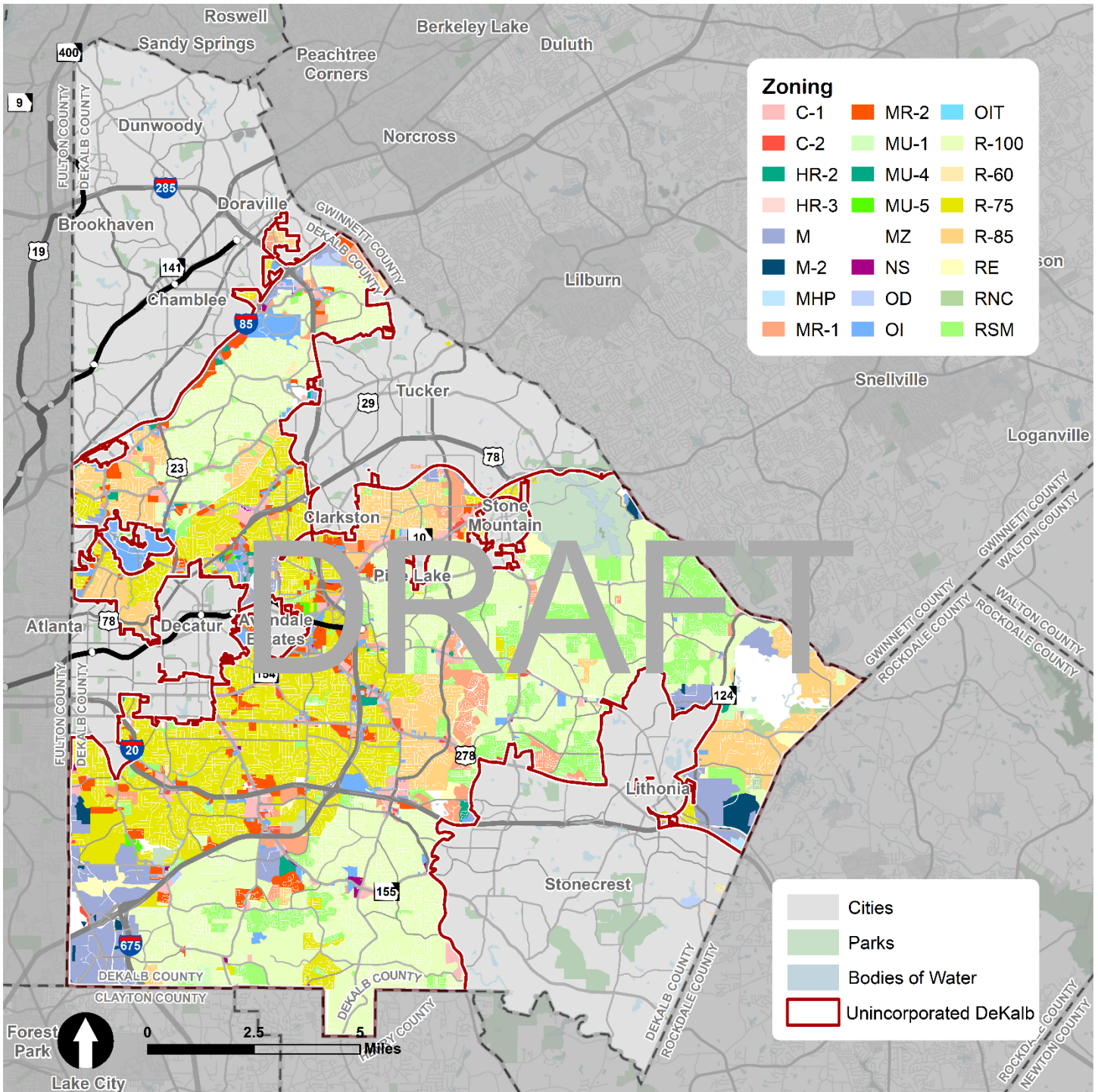


Figure 21. Current Zoning

FUTURE LAND USE / CHARACTER AREAS

The previous Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map envisions the majority of unincorporated DeKalb County as suburban residential. This includes detached single-family homes, town homes, senior and assisted living, neighborhood retail, schools, libraries, parks, health care, and civic spaces. When comparing current zoning with the Future Land Use Map, there are several areas that may represent an opportunity for better policy alignment.

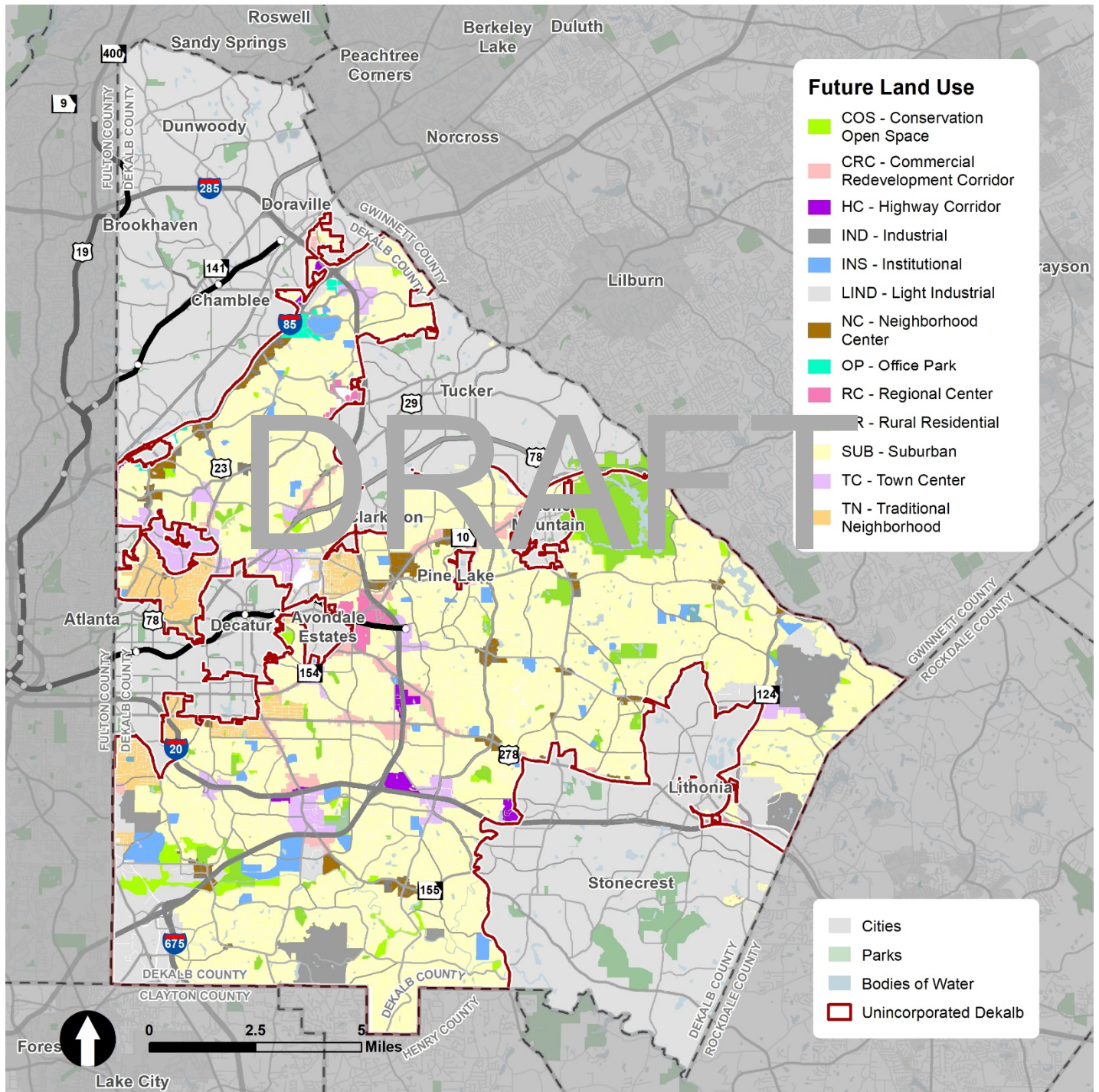


Figure 22: Future Land Use

For example, the area designated as “Suburban” on the Future Land Use Map presents a single land use for a large area of the County. The location and type of residential zoning within the County present a more varied land use pattern, with higher density residential located in one area and lower density residential clearly located in other areas. While DeKalb county’s Future Land Use Map guides development decisions in unincorporated areas, each of the cities within the county maintain and amend their own Future Land Use Maps within their municipal boundaries, which can be seen in Appendix B. Thus, coordination between these future land use maps could lead to more cohesive and organized development outcomes over the long term.

LAND USE TRENDS

Sometimes zoning changes are necessary to approve new development in the county. However, when the new zoning is not aligned with the zoning categories allowed in the character areas designated on the land use map, the land use map must be amended to keep the land use and zoning designations in alignment. Tracking amendments made to the county’s land use map can identify changes to the character of the community, as well as track trends in these changes over time.

Table 2 below illustrated changes to the county’s land use map since 2007 following the great recession. Changes to the map over the last 14 years show a transition away from suburban land uses towards town center and commercial redevelopment corridor. This could be interpreted as a by-product of the county’s growing population and trend towards urban development, with nodes of denser, walkable development emerging around the county.

Table 2: DeKalb County Land Use Map Changes, 2007-2020

Initial Designation	New Designation												Amendments From	
	COS	RR	NC	TC	RC	OP	LI	IND	CRC	HC	INS			
Conservation / Open Space (COS)	1												1	
Rural Residential (RR)														
Suburban (SUB)			1	3	8			1	1	8		2	24	
Traditional Neighborhood (TN)					1								1	
Neighborhood Center (NC)					1									
Town Center (TC)														
Regional Center (RC)														
Office Park (OP)					1								1	
Light Industrial (LI)							1						1	
Industrial (IND)														
Commercial Redevelopment Corridor (CRC)		2											2	
Highway Corridor (HC)								1					1	
Institutional (INS)				1									1	
Amendments To	-	-	3	1	4	11	-	1	2	1	8	-	2	34