

2016 Bike/Pedestrian Plan Town of Cohutta

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
TOWN OFFICIALS	3
MAP OF TOWN OF COHUTTA, GA	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
INTRODUCTION	6
STATISTICS	8
GOALS	<u>C</u>
Goal 3.0 (Transportation)	<u>C</u>
Goal 6.0 (Land Use/Sense of Place)	<u>C</u>
CURRENT CONDITIONS	10
Town Center	10
Road Conditions in Town Center	12
Outside of Town Center	13
Cohutta Varnell Road	14
Red Clay Road	15
Wolfe Street, Mt. Olivet Road	19
State Route 71/Cleveland Highway	20
Chattanooga Road	20
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	22
SHORT TERM SOLUTIONS	28
LONG TERM SOLUTIONS	32
COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM	37
FUNDING SOURCES	38
CONCLUSION	42
APPENDIX	ΛG

All photos and graphics created by NWGRC unless otherwise noted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan was made possible through funding from the Georgia Department of Transportation. The plan was prepared by the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission.

No prior Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan existed.

Initially, this project began by meeting with the Mayor of Cohutta in an effort to gain a better understanding of the town of Cohutta's bicycle and pedestrian vision, followed by a review of the goals and policies the town made while creating its current Comprehensive Plan.

Next, an assessment was performed of the current road conditions, an inventory of existing facilities and locations of interest around town.

During this process it was discovered that the town has a large following of cyclists who ride through town on a regular basis as a part of various routes in and around Whitfield County. Many cyclists leaving from Dalton, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee include the Town of Cohutta in their route.

The attractiveness is likely due to the scenic beauty, coupled with low volume and low speed traffic. However, the town's streets are narrow and connect to winding country roads, with hills and curves. The town's scenic beauty has even been formally recognized as the Cohutta – Chattahoochee Scenic Byway starts within the town limits on Red Clay Road.

Cohutta currently has very limited pedestrian facilities, including less than 200 feet of sidewalks, narrow shoulders, no crosswalks or pedestrian assistance at intersections. Despite these conditions local residents can frequently be seen walking to the town post office and Shugart Park.

The town and cyclists from the surrounding area were gracious enough to provide input about their biking and pedestrian habits in the form of an online survey posted to the town's Facebook page. Respondents expressed a desire to walk and bicycle more often, but are hindered due to the current road conditions and lack of facilities like sidewalks, bike lanes and trails.

Planners then created a list of short and long term solutions to help promote the walkability and bike-ability of Cohutta. These solutions included things as simple as increased police presence on the roads and as intricate as the construction of bicycle lanes. Cost estimates and potential sources of funding were included for each of the potential solutions.

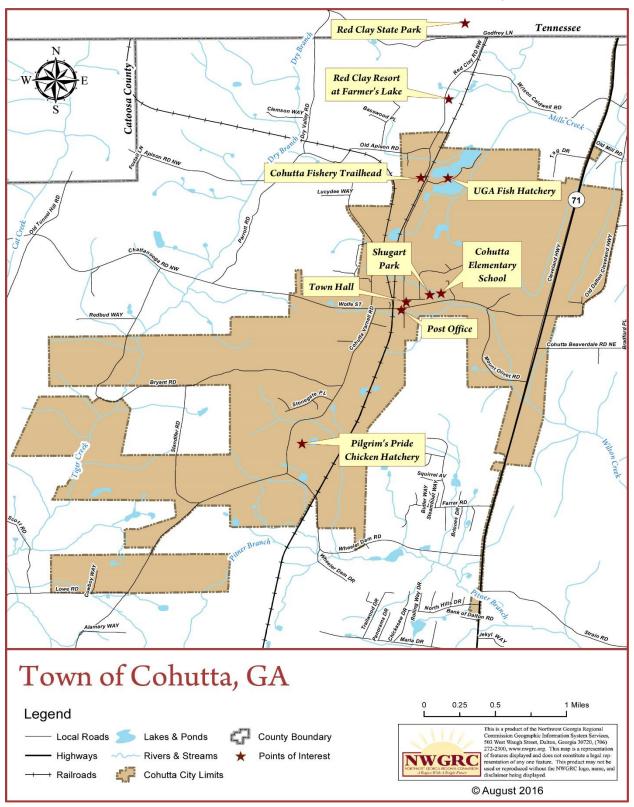
When the plan document was completed, city leadership assisted in evaluating the recommendations for the purpose of creating a set of five-year work items, also referred to as a community work program. These work items are considered to be an opportunity for achievement and progression. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission will continue to assist the Town of Cohutta with needs associated with meeting their chosen goals.

TOWN OFFICIALS

Ron Shinnick, Mayor

Donna Henderson, Town Clerk

MAP OF TOWN OF COHUTTA, GA



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan has been created as a result of an expressed interest by the Town of Cohutta while updating its Comprehensive Plan in 2015. During that planning process members of the stakeholder committee listed multiple goals related to promoting a more bike-able and walkable community. The current lack of facilities were also repeatedly cited as an issue in multiple categories, including: economic development, transportation and community facilities & services. With that in mind the Georgia Department of Transportation contracted with the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission to prepare a bike/pedestrian plan for the Town of Cohutta. Once again the town rose to the occasion. The Mayor of Cohutta is a wealth of information relating to the current facilities and issues the town is facing. With the help of the Mayor and the community, the Regional Commission took an inventory of existing facilities, road conditions, traffic patterns and traffic volume. Existing facilities may include, but are not limited to: sidewalks, bike racks, crosswalks, bike lanes and trails. The Regional Commission then created an online survey to identify the citizen's current pedestrian habits, understand any and all barriers to additional pedestrian activity and gauging the level of interest in various pedestrian activities, to include: walking, running or jogging and biking or cycling. The Mayor's Office was gracious enough to help promote the survey by sharing it amongst his constituents via the town's Facebook page, which is widely followed by the citizens of Cohutta.

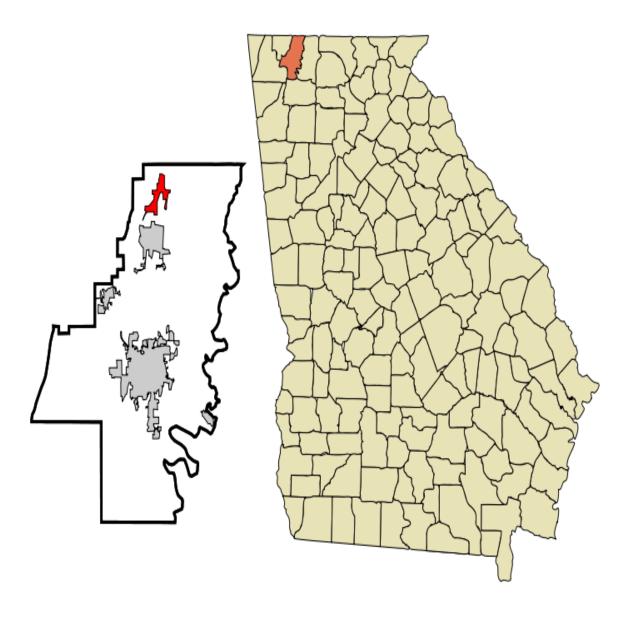
All of the information contained here-in is the result of the town's commitment to promoting the quality of life and economic vitality of their community. The Regional Commission was excited to have the opportunity to work with a community so dedicated to their future.



Cohutta Town Hall

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Cohutta is located in Northwestern Whitfield County, near the Tennessee State Line. The U.S. Census Buearu reported that the population of Cohutta in 2010 was 661 and was estimated to be 631 in 2015. The town is 53.5% female, versus 46.5% male. Cohutta is 95% white, 2.3% black, 2% Hispanic and .07% other, per the 2010 census. The median resident age is 40.5 years. The



Map of the State of Georgia, Whitfield County and Town of Cohutta, created by Arkyan

2013 estimated median household income was \$31,402. Geographically, the town covers approximately 2.5 square miles.

The town began as a railroad stop on the route between Cleveland, Tennessee and Dalton, Georgia. This rail line is still active and intersects the town from north to south; however the trains now carry freight instead of passengers and no longer stop in Cohutta.

Cohutta is a rural community filled with single family homes, low volume traffic, narrow, winding roads and scenic views. The town is home to Cohutta Elementary School, Shugart Park, Cohutta Fish Hatchery and Pilgrim's Pride Chicken Hatchery. The Cohutta – Chattahoochee Scenic Byway also begins in Cohutta. The



Town Clerk's Office

area is known for natural springs so the town created a small park around one of the many springs, where people come to bottle their own water, fresh from the Earth.



Community Center



UGA Fish Hatchery

STATISTICS

Multiple local, state and federal agencies compile crash data within their respective jurisdictions. Local police departments collect the data from accident reports within their jurisdictions. In Georgia that data is then submitted by each agency to the Georgia Department of Transportation, who in turn provides accident data to various federal agencies like The Federal Highway Administration (FHA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

The NHTSA reports that in 2013 there were 4,735 pedestrians killed in traffic crashes – a 2% decrease from 4,818 pedestrian fatalities in 2012. On average, a pedestrian was killed every two hours and injured every eight minutes in traffic crashes nationwide. Georgia accounted for 10.6% of all pedestrian fatalities in the United States, which amounted to 130 deaths.

According to the NHTSA, in 2013:

Total Fatalities and Pedestrian Fatalities in Traffic Crashes, 2004 - 2013

Year	Fatalities	Pedestrian Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities
2004	42,836	4,675	11%
2005	43,510	4,892	11%
2006	42,708	4,795	11%
2007	41,259	4,699	11%
2008	37,423	4,414	12%
2009	33,883	4,109	12%
2010	32,999	4,302	13%
2011	32,479	4,457	14%
2012	33,782	4,818	14%
2013	32,719	4,735	14%
Source: NHTS	SA, Traffic Safety F	acts, 2013 Data	

- 69% of all pedestrians killed were male.
- 69% of pedestrian fatalities occurred at non-intersections.
- 73% of those pedestrian fatalities occurred in urban areas.
- The highest weekday percentage (25%) of pedestrian fatalities occurred from 6 p.m. to 8:59 p.m., followed by 19% from 9 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.
- The highest weekend percentage (28%) occurred from 6 p.m. to 8:59 p.m. and 9 p.m. to 11:59 p.m., followed by 17% from 12 a.m. to 2:59 a.m.

GOALS

The Town of Cohutta came up with the following goals while creating its current Comprehensive Plan. The goals relating to this plan include:

Goal 3.0 (Transportation): Support and participate in the county-wide transportation planning that can serve residents and enhance area economic development. This led to the creation of policy statements: 3.1 and 3.2.

Policy Statement 3.1: The design and construction of new or rebuilt streets, sidewalks and trails can help create efficiency and connectivity in the community.

Policy Statement 3.2: Alternative transportation options, like bicycle and pedestrian systems, including trails and sidewalks, can work in our community and provide physical, social, and economic benefits for local residents.

Like all jurisdictions, Cohutta is actively pursuing economic development, specifically attracting additional businesses. Cohutta currently has a very limited commercial business, particularly in the historic town center. The town has also expressed an interest in tourism as an additional source of revenue. However, the town currently has no eateries and retail is limited to a Dollar General and a Kangaroo Express gas station on the edge of town, away from the town center.

Goal 6.0 (Land Use/Sense of Place): Maintaining the rural, historic community atmosphere is an important quality of life issue for local residents. This led to the creation of policy statement 6.2.

Policy Statement 6.2: Enhance features that make Cohutta walkable and improve pedestrian access to the core of the community surrounding the school, park, and business services.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Town Center

Cohutta currently has very limited pedestrian facilities. Pedestrian facilities can be anything from sidewalks, crosswalks, trails, bike lanes, bike racks, etc. The town currently has less than 200 feet of sidewalk. The existing sidewalks are in the town center on Wolfe Street and alternate between opposing sides of the street. This problem is exacerbated throughout the center of town by the fact

that many of the homes and buildings sit adjacent to the street, preventing the further installation of sidewalks, bike lanes, etc. Many of these structures are also historic in nature. Nearby residents can frequently be seen walking along Wolfe Street and Red Clay Road to the post office, Town Hall, Shugart Park and the community center.

Cohutta also currently has no trails of any kind but has expressed a desire for them in their current Comprehensive Plan. The Mayor of



An example of one of the multiple historic homes and buildings on Wolfe Street that sit close to the road

Cohutta repeated this sentiment during our meetings. The Town of Cohutta currently owns multiple properties around town but they are separated by privately owned property, some of which are historical in nature.

The town center is the area where Wolfe Street meets Cohutta Varnell Road and Red Clay Road. Within eyesight of this area you can see the railroad tracks, post office, Town Hall/Police Station/Fire Station, Cohutta Elementary School, the community center and Shugart Park. Shugart Park sits adjacent to Cohutta Elementary School. Shugart Park includes a ½ mile walking track with covered benches, playground equipment, baseball/softball fields, pavilions and a

basketball court. The track is fortunate to have shade during the summer months due to mature tree cover.

This area is used by the town for outdoor community events, including 4th of July Celebrations. The park and surrounding area currently only has access to water

fountains and restrooms when Cohutta
Elementary School is open. Parking is very limited too. The entire town currently only has 90 marked parking spots, per information from Town Hall. Parking is definitely an issue for all community events.

Cohutta currently hosts multiple outdoor recreational, pedestrian events in the town center. These events



Shugart Park from Wolfe Street

include an annual cycling event to support the Cohutta Volunteer Fire Department and a five kilometer running group. The cycling event is the annual Firehouse Ride, which has been happening and growing for the past 14 years. The ride occurs on the 2nd Saturday of every April and currently has approximately 130 – 140 riders. Multiple courses have been planned out for riders of various skill levels. The event is currently maxed out in terms of size due to the lack of available parking and restrooms needed. The town is eager to continue to grow the event in an effort to bring more tourists to town and raise more money for the volunteer fire department.

The 5k running group is organized through First Baptist Church and is affiliated with www.runforgod.com. This is a 14-week course designed to build the strength and stamina needed to complete a 5 kilometer (3.1 miles) run. The

group meets three times per week and ends up participating in Run for God events located in Dalton or Chattanooga, Tennessee.

In addition to the conditions listed above, Cohutta was recently blessed to receive eight park benches from a local Boy Scout, who built and donated them for his Eagle Scout Project. As of now the benches are periodically placed around town when outdoor events are being held.

The town also reportedly has a Fall Festival, where Wolfe Street is blocked in front of Shugart Park and Cohutta Elementary School. The event features live music and local vendors.

Road Conditions in Town Center

Traffic in the town center is naturally light in volume and is kept to slow pace thanks to a 30 mile per hour (mph) speed limit. Speed is also limited due to the

presence of the railroad tracks and the Town Hall, which includes the Cohutta Police Department. There is also a nearby school zone on Wolfe Street thanks to Cohutta Elementary School. Traffic volume temporarily increases during the early morning and afternoon

hours due to



Town Center, intersection of Wolfe Street and Red Clay Road

school traffic. In addition to cars, the low volume/low speed traffic also includes the occasional tractor or other farm equipment. The town currently has no bike lanes and no pedestrian assistance measures at intersections (crosswalks, flashing

lights, etc.). The streets are narrow, two lane roads, averaging about 20 feet in width and only offering about three inches of paved shoulder. The streets are made of asphalt and are currently in moderate-to-good condition.

Outside of Town Center

Just outside of the town center, houses become further separated by larger lots,

including some family farms. The presence of mature trees provides plentiful amounts of shade during warm summer months. The streets continue to be asphalt and are in moderate-to-good condition. The topography features gentle, rolling hills and scenic views. There is the occasional blind

Speed limits typically range from 25 to 40 miles per hour and traffic volume remains

curve or steep hill.



Wolfe Street near SR71/Cleveland Highway

low, ideal conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. The town streets remain narrow and winding, averaging about 20 feet wide, with an average of about three inches of paved shoulder, if any at all. The occasional sharp curves and sudden steep inclines/declines create dangerous blind spots where a motorist could easily come upon a pedestrian or cyclist and have minimal time to react, especially if said driver was speeding, distracted or intoxicated. This issue is made worse by the fact that some of the streets have deep ditches, drop-offs, steep hillsides, trees or fence posts adjacent to the shoulder, providing few options if a pedestrian or cyclist needed to quickly move out of the way of an unexpected motorist.

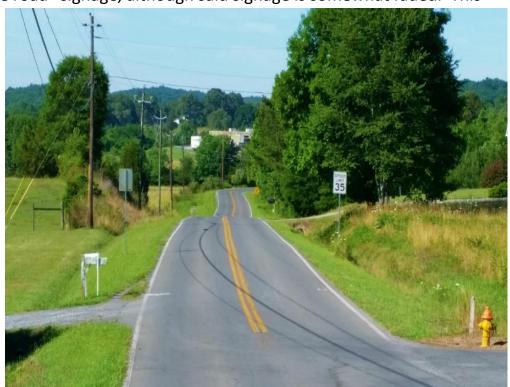
Cohutta does experience significant traffic in the form of cyclists from neighboring areas, including Dalton and Chattanooga. The riders reportedly appreciate the

challenging ride, lack of traffic and the scenic views. The town has expressed an interest in nurturing and supporting this as a possible source of tourism and economic development.

Cohutta Varnell Road

Cohutta Varnell Road is the main road running from the south end of town to the town center. The road also provides acceptable conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. The speed limit ranges from 25 – 35 mph, traffic volume is low and the asphalt is in moderate to good condition. Cohutta Varnell Road also already includes "share the road" signage, although said signage is somewhat faded. This

particular road currently only has about three inches of paved shoulder but it tends to have a flat, grassy roadside for pedestrians or cyclists in the event they should have to quickly maneuver out of the way of a vehicle in an emergency. Houses on



Cohutta Varnell Road at Baker Street, facing south

Cohutta Varnell Road also typically sit further from the road, on larger lots, allowing for possible future installation of sidewalks or bike lanes. This was identified by survey respondents as the third most commonly used road in the

Town of Cohutta at 52%.

Red Clay Road

Red Clay Road leaves the town center heading north, and includes the start of the Cohutta – Chattahoochee Scenic Byway. Red Clay Road features 25 – 35 mph speed limits and is predominantly straight and flat, ideal for pedestrian use.



Red Clay Road facing north towards fish hatchery

Local residents and area cyclists seem to agree with this assessment as 70% of survey respondents listed Red Clay Road one of the roads they use when they walk or bike. This was the highest percentage of roads in the Town of Cohutta. Red Clay Road averages about three inches of paved shoulder but does have relatively flat, grassy land beyond the paved shoulder.

Red Clay Road is also home to the Cohutta Fisheries Center, owned and operated by the University of Georgia. The school's websites says: "Cohutta Fisheries Center is a 65-acre research and extension facility located in Northwest Georgia. The facility operates 36 ponds and 5 raceways with various demonstration and research projects including experimental koi breeding, pond production of channel catfish, and recirculating sturgeon aquaculture. Throughout the years, the facility staff host numerous school groups, and non-profit organizations including 4-H, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts for educational tours and activities focusing on conservation, aquatic ecology, and the importance of sustainable aquaculture." – www.warnell.uga.edu

Sitting directly across Red Clay Road is a small park, including one of the area's many natural springs. The park is popular with people seeking to bottle their own water. The park includes designated parking spaces, picnic tables, charcoal grills and a bike rack. The natural spring in the park runs under a small bridge to the fish hatchery across the street, which would create an issue with any attempt to install a bike lane, sidewalk or trail.



Town park across from fish hatchery

Less than a quarter mile beyond the town limits on Red Clay Road lies the Red Clay Resort at Farmer's Lake. This attraction is a pool created by the excavation of an underground spring that was filled with concrete to create a privately owned community pool, affectionately known as "the cement pond". The spring is continually filling the pool with natural spring water. Red Clay Resort also



Red Clay Resort at Farmer's Lake, photo by Red Clay Resort

features a snack bar, game room, pavilion and charcoal grills. This location is popular among local residents and area tourists alike, particularly those with children.

Approximately one mile beyond the town limits and just across the Tennessee State Line lies Red Clay State Historical Park. The park is 263 acres and includes: Native American history, a natural spring, picnic tables, charcoal grills, hiking trails

and a pavilion. The park also includes: parking, restrooms, water fountains and vending machines, making it a popular stop for cyclists as well as tourists. All of these features and destinations make Red Clay Road appealing to pedestrians and cyclists. Citizens of Cohutta also report that they regularly attend events held at Red Clay State Historical Park.



Red Clay State Historical Park



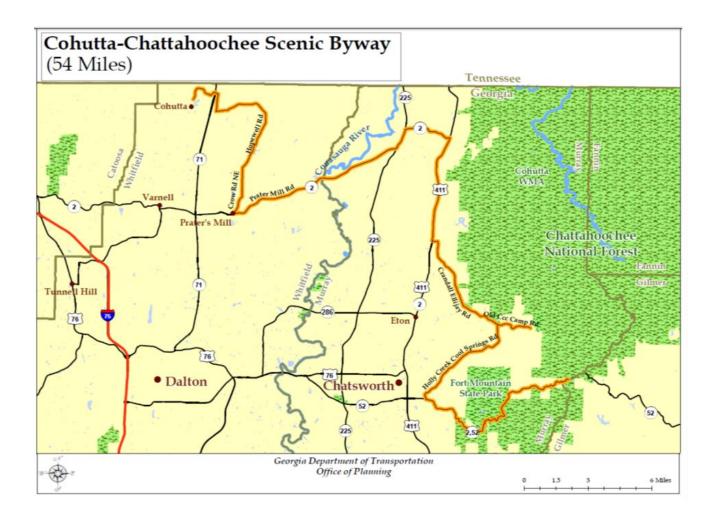
Red Clay State Historical Park

Cohutta – Chattahoochee Scenic Byway

The Cohutta – Chattahoochee Scenic Byway starts on Red Clay Road less than a quarter of a mile north of the town center on Red Clay Road and runs north, away from town. This byway features 54 miles of farmland and nature and ends near Fort Mountain State Park in Murray



One of the Cohutta - Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Signs on Red Clay Road



County. The route features low volume traffic, although it does cross multiple highways.

Apison Road

You can also travel to the northwest, away from the town center on Apison Road. Apison Road leads back towards Chattanooga, Tennessee, where a significant number of Cohutta's cyclists originate from. Apison Road is appealing in that it has plenty of natural shade due to



Apison Road at Pleasant Valley Road, facing south

the mature tree cover on both sides of the road. The Apison Road speed limit within the town limits is 40 miles per hour, one of the higher speed limits in town. Apison Road is a two lane, winding country road with moderate rolling hills and the occasional blind curve. Traffic volume is light but the curves and constant hills promote speeding among motorists. The road consists of asphalt that is in moderate to good conditions and features an average of about three inches of paved shoulder. Thick vegetation adjacent to the road creates an issue for pedestrians hoping to stay off the road and sometimes creates obstructed sight lines for pedestrians or cyclists hoping to see or be seen by motorists on some of the sharp curves.

Wolfe Street, Mt. Olivet Road

To the east of the town center of Cohutta you have Wolfe Street and Mt. Olivet Road. Both roads are two lane asphalt roads, averaging about 20 feet in width. The asphalt is in moderate to good condition. Both have 35 mph speeds limits and lead from the town center to State Route 71/Cleveland Highway. Both also have minimal shoulder width for pedestrians, averaging about three inches. Both roads are also winding. Mt. Olivet Road has multiple blind curves and a steep

incline, causing a blind spot as drivers crest the top of the hill. Traffic volume is low on both streets, although the hills and curves on Mt. Olivet may lead to driver's driving too fast for conditions. Wolfe Street tends to be more flat and has no dangerous curves. These factors make it appealing to pedestrians and cyclists, who can frequently be seen along this street. Survey respondents identified



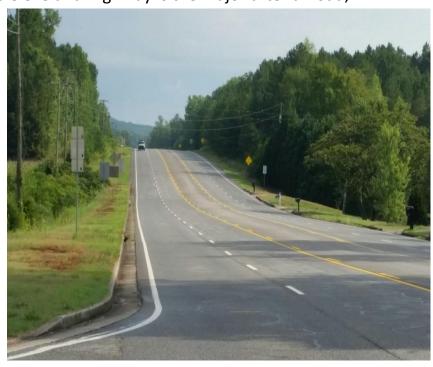
Wolfe Street at Mt. Olivet Road, facing west towards Cohutta Elementary School

Wolfe Street as the second most commonly used road in town for walking and biking, at 62.7%.

State Route 71/Cleveland Highway

State Route 71, also known as Cleveland Highway is the major arterial road,

connecting Dalton, Georgia to Cleveland, Tennessee. This highway has two lanes traveling north and two lanes traveling south, separated by a turn lane. The speed limit within the town limits is 55 mph and experiences heavy traffic, including commercial truck traffic. Rumble strips and curbs have been installed on the north and southbound shoulders of the highway in various places. Sidewalks have been installed on



SR71/Cleveland Hwy at Wolfe Street, facing north

Cleveland Highway south of Cohutta and leading towards Dalton. Unfortunately, they do not extend all the way to the Town of Cohutta. Pedestrians might be tempted to attempt to walk along this highway in an effort to reach the Dollar General or the Kangaroo Express Gas Station. Low income, disabled or elderly pedestrians who do not drive would be more inclined to attempt to walk to these destinations out of necessity. The increased speed and high traffic volume make this a dangerous route for pedestrians and cyclists.

There is a small sliver of land to the east of State Route 71 that is still within the town limits of Cohutta. This area includes small portions of Old Dalton Cleveland Highway, Kelly Drive, Mike's Drive and Cohutta Beaverdale Road. The combined length of these roads would be less than a mile. Kelly Drive and Mike's Drive are actually dead end roads. The roads are two-lane rural and residential. The streets average about 20 feet wide and experience low traffic volume.

Chattanooga Road

Wolfe Street turns into Chattanooga Road if you leave the town center headed west. Chattanooga Road averages about 20 feet wide with asphalt that is in

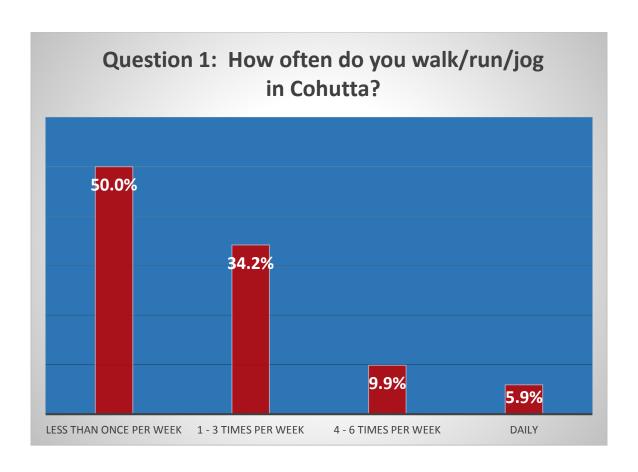
moderate to good condition, however the street has multiple steep inclines and declines. There are also multiple sharp curves just beyond the town limits. Traffic volume is low and the speed limit goes from 35 – 45 mph. The speed coupled with the road conditions makes this a dangerous road for pedestrians and cyclists. The street has an average of about three inches of paved shoulder and there are multiple points along the street where there are steep drop-offs, potentially forcing pedestrians and cyclists to remain in traffic or risk serious injury in an emergency situation.

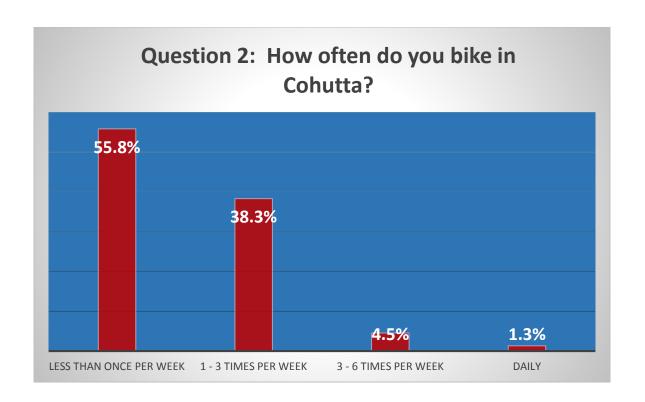


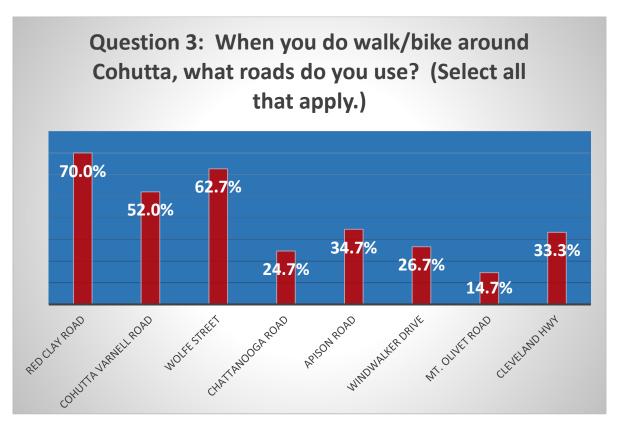
Steep roadside drop-off on Chattanooga Road, facing west

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A community survey was created to provide the citizens and area cyclists an opportunity to voice their opinions. The survey was created through www.surveymonkey.com and was posted to the town's Facebook page, which is widely followed by residents and non-residents who cycle through Cohutta. 155 people took the survey over the course of a month. 155 people is roughly 25% of the town's population, although some of the respondents were reportedly cyclists from neighboring communities. The survey consisted of six multiple choice questions. The questions and results are as follows:



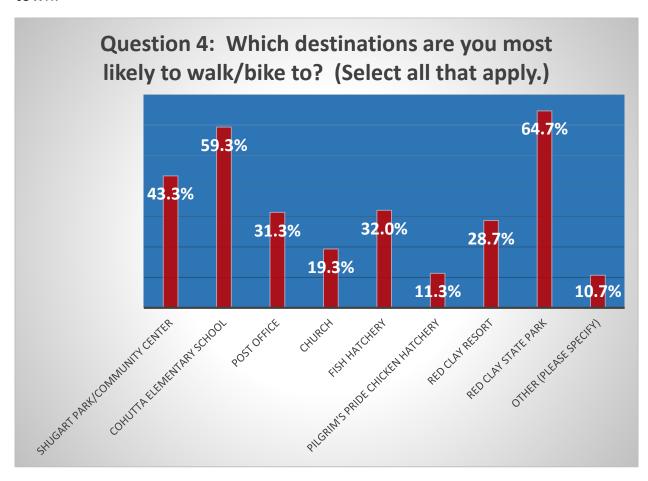




As discussed earlier, the traffic and road conditions on Red Clay Road, Cohutta Varnell Road and Wolfe Street are the most ideal for pedestrians and bike riders.

The respondents to this survey seemed to have noticed this as well as those three roads were most listed as the most commonly used roads.

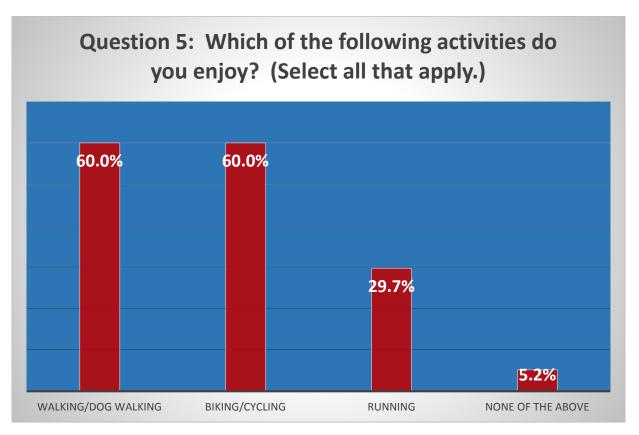
The biggest surprise was the number of people using Cleveland Highway. One possible explanation for this was located on www.ridewithgps.com. This site allows users to create maps of their cycling routes by using the GPS feature on their smartphones. Users can then upload their routes for other users to see. A quick search of this site found more than 150 rides through the Town of Cohutta. One of the more commonly seen routes showed riders entering town on Cohutta Varnell Road, then turning right onto Wolfe Street. They would then cross Cleveland Highway and continue on Cohutta Beaverdale Road as they head out of town.



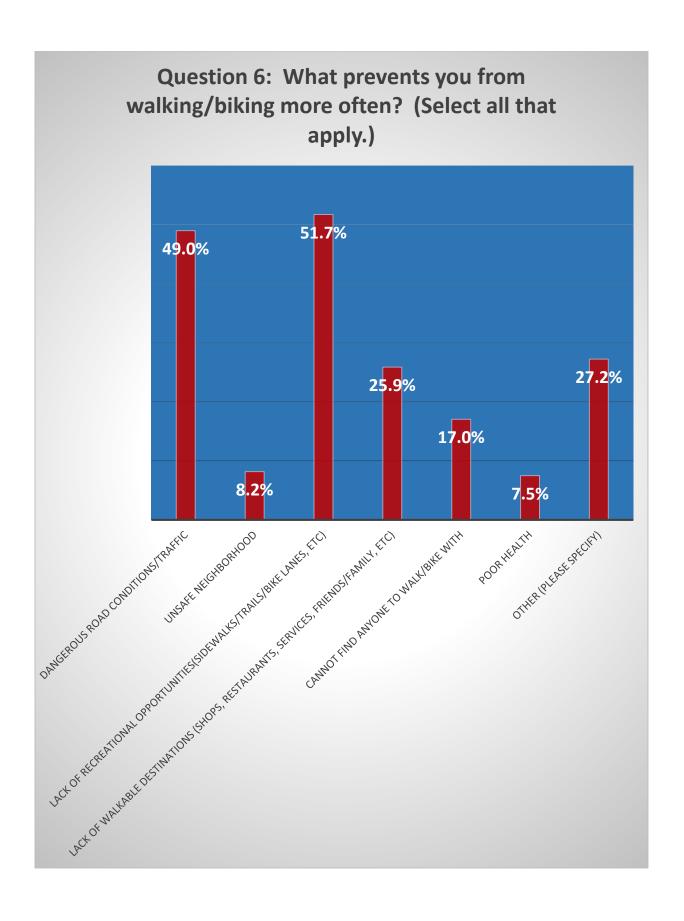
As seen above, Red Clay State Park was the most popular destination, although probably not a final destination. As previously mentioned, Red Clay State Park is technically about a mile north of the town limits of Cohutta and is actually in the

State of Tennessee. Cohutta Elementary School and neighboring Shugart Park were the second and third most commonly picked destinations, respectively.

Out of the respondents to question four, half of those who selected the "other" option stated that they had no particular destination in Cohutta, but were simply passing through as a part of their regular bike rides. Cyclists also reportedly use Red Clay State Park as a stop to use the restroom and refill water bottles.



Question five is interesting because it shows that there is an interest in being active within the town of Cohutta but that it currently is not happening on a regular basis as evidenced by the results to questions one and two regarding the frequency with which respondents are actually engaging in these activities. The next question, question six, asked participants what prevents them from engaging in these activities on a more regular basis. See the following page for those results.



The two most common responses to question six were: lack of recreational opportunities (sidewalks, trails, bike lanes, etc.) and dangerous road conditions/traffic conditions. These two answers were expected due to the current lack of pedestrian and biking facilities, combined with the blind curves and hills.

Question six provided a big surprise in that the third most selected option was the "other" option. Respondents who selected the "other" option were prompted to enter an explanation. The most common explanation for choosing this option was that respondents did not like being chased by dogs that are allowed to run freely. Cohutta currently has no ordinance preventing people from allowing their pets to run freely. In Cohutta's defense, multiple respondents said that unrestrained pets were a countywide problem, not just a problem in the Town of Cohutta.

A small number of respondents selected the "other" option and then cited other issues for not being more active in Cohutta, like a lack of free time for exercise or the heat/humidity commonly associated with Georgia summers, things that Cohutta has no ability to change.

A lack of walkable and bike-able destinations was a close fourth. This category included: shops, restaurants, services, friends and family, etc. This is important because the Mayor's Office expressed an interest in getting the area cyclists that ride through the area to stop as a possible source of tourism. However Cohutta currently has no restaurants and its retail is currently limited to the previously discussed Dollar General and gas station on SR71/Cleveland Highway. Economic Development is and will continue to be another priority for the Town of Cohutta, as with all jurisdictions.

SHORT TERM SOLUTIONS

Visible Police Presence/Traffic Enforcement

The community survey showed that 49% of the survey participants felt that Cohutta had dangerous road and/or traffic conditions. Cohutta is currently blessed to have low volume traffic and acceptable speed limits of 25 – 45 mph, with the exception of the 55 mph speed limit on Cleveland Highway. Speed limits averaging around 35 mph are consistent with what one would expect to see in a rural residential area. It is recommended that Cohutta continue to maintain a visible police presence, particularly in and around the town center, including: Cohutta Elementary School, Shugart Park, Town Hall, the community center and the post office. It is also recommended to continue to have a visible police presence on the main roads through town, including: Wolfe Street, Cohutta Varnell Road, Red Clay Road, Apison Road and Chattanooga Road.

Numerous studies have shown that simply maintaining a continuously visible police presence is an effective deterrent to dangerous driving behaviors like: speeding, tailgating, distracted driving, driving under the influence, etc. For those rare individuals who will not be deterred by police presence there are corrective measures that can be taken. These measures include vehicle pullovers, leading to the issuance of warnings and/or citations and possibly even arrests for severe violations like driving under the influence. This constant presence will also create a sense of safety among pedestrians and cyclists.

Some communities like Birmingham, Alabama have even been known to periodically take worn out police cars and park them around town on sharp curves or streets known for speeding or reckless driving and leave them as a deterrent. Approaching drivers will inevitably slow down, unaware that the patrol car is empty. The cars will be moved around town every few days in an effort to keep drivers guessing. This also has minimal costs in terms of man power or fuel costs as the car is not running and there is no one inside.

Reducing the Speed Limit Through Town

The survey showed that 49% of respondents do not walk or bike more often in the Town of Cohutta due to road and traffic conditions. The majority of the speed limits through town currently run between 20 – 45 miles per hour, with the exception of State Route 71/Cleveland Highway and its 55 mph speed limit.

Multiple studies have shown that the likelihood of survival for pedestrians involved in car accidents increases at lower speeds. One particular study by the United Kingdom Department of Transportation, called Killing Speed and Saving Lives showed that there was a 5% chance of death at 20 mph, a 45% chance at 30 mph and an 85% chance of death at 45 mph. The curvy and hilly streets around the Town of Cohutta also increase the likelihood of motorists hitting a pedestrian or cyclist. The Mayor of Cohutta expressed an interest in lowering the speed limit throughout Cohutta to 35 mph. This suggestion is considerably wise given the lack of traffic congestion and the potential for young children being in the roads due to the school, the park and the overall residential nature of the town.

Running at Large Ordinance for Pets

The community survey showed that 27.2% of participants selected the "other" option as one of their reasons for not walking or biking more often in Cohutta. 75% of that 27.2% cited being chased by dogs as a deterrence to not being more active in Cohutta. They cited this as a distraction from monitoring surrounding traffic and that some animals were aggressive. The town currently has no ordinance requiring pet owners to restrain their animals from roaming freely beyond their property. It is recommended that the town create a "running at large" ordinance, similar to ones used by other area cities and counties.

Here is a sample of ordinance language frequently used by other cities and counties: "It shall be unlawful for the owner of any animal, or any person having an animal in such custody, to allow it to run at large unattended on or about the streets and highways of the county, or on the property of another person without permission of the owner of that property, or of the person in possession of that property."

Although possibly unpopular with local residents, the financial cost associated with the creation and adoption of a town ordinance is minimal.

Signage

Cohutta currently has "share the road" signage as seen on the cover of this plan. This signage is currently limited to Cohutta Varnell Road and Red Clay Road and the signs are in useable condition. The town also currently has signage around Cohutta Elementary School, designating the area as a school zone with a reduced 20 mph speed limit. This is helpful because the school is located in the town center where residents are more likely to travel on foot or by bicycle. Signage can also be used to improve the safety of intersections and crosswalks or to alert motorists to the presence of pedestrians or fastapproaching road hazards like sharp curves. Standard street signs and installation typically cost around \$500 each. Custom signs will inevitably cost more.

Bike Racks/Bike Repair Stations

Cohutta currently only has a single bike rack located at the small park on the north end of town. Bike racks are a welcoming site for cyclists and can be



An example of signage designating a bike route, www.pedbikeimages.org, photo by Adam Fukushima



Bike repair station in Ridgeferry Park, Rome, GA

purchased and installed for around \$500. Some communities even work with local artists like welders to create customized pieces in exchange for the recognition and exposure of their work to the public.

Bike racks are commonly accompanied by bike repair stations. The stations typically feature a bike stand, air pump and the tools needed to tune up or repair a bicycle. The price for these averages around \$1,100 and are most commonly sold by http://www.dero.com/.

Water Stations/Restrooms

Cohutta would benefit from restrooms and water fountains, particularly in Shugart Park. Cohutta currently has no public restrooms for pedestrians or cyclists. This, combined with the lack of parking has prevented the town from continuing to expand its annual cycling event to raise money for the volunteer fire department. This is also an issue during community events like the 4th of July celebration and block parties. Cohutta Elementary School will usually allow use of their restroom facilities inside the school during major events but the nearest restroom facility available on a daily basis is about a mile north of town, in Tennessee at Red Clay State Park. The Mayor of Cohutta expressed an interest in



Current pavilion in Shugart Park



Pavilion at park in Ringgold, GA

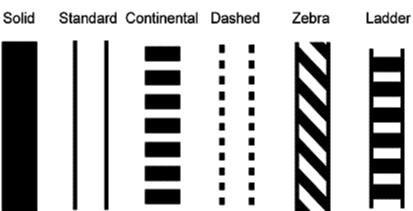
possibly renovating an existing park pavilion in Shugart Park to match a park pavilion in nearby Ringgold, GA. The pavilion in Ringgold includes restrooms, water fountains and vending machines.

Pavement Markings

Pavement markings are relatively cheap and quick to install. Pavement markings could include anything from crosswalks to messages about fast approaching conditions like sharp curves or intersections requiring a driver to stop. These can also be done on a temporary basis through the use of washable paint, allowing the town to test markings in different areas to see which are most effective.

There is also a new trend called "sharrowing," where a street not wide enough for a bike lane can include a message and/or symbol letting motorists know to expect cyclists along popular routes.

Sharrowing routes would be a good idea for Cohutta given the currently light traffic volume and the lack of space for a true bike lane. These would be especially effective on Cohutta Varnell Road, Wolfe Street and Red Clay Road as



Examples of crosswalk patterns, www.pedbikeinfo.org



An example of a bike sharrow, www.pedbikeimages.org, photo by Carl Sundstrom

the survey respondents chose these three roads as the ones they use most often.

The cost for temporary markings is limited to the price of paint at a nearby hardware store and the cost of a piece of cardboard large enough to make a stencil. The cost for permanent, professionally done markings averages around \$340, per marking, according to www.pedbikeinfo.org. Crosswalks may cost more depending upon the width of the road and the intricacy of the chosen pattern.

Walking/Cycling in Groups

As everyone knows there is safety in numbers, whether working out or traveling. Large groups of pedestrians are more likely to be seen by motorists and are less likely to be harassed by aggressive motorists. Walking or cycling with others also means that there will be someone present in the event of an emergency to call 911 and provide first aid if necessary. There is also a natural competitive aspect and a comradery amongst people who participate in similar interests. Human beings are also social creatures so there is a natural desire to want to belong to a group. In addition to safety and exercise this could be a great way to bring the community closer together. These type groups can be organized by any influential member of the community and typically have little to no cost.

The town has already reported that it hosts an annual bike ride to raise money for the volunteer fire department. One of the churches in town has also already reportedly created a running group to help residents train for a 5k run as a part of a New Year's resolution initiative.

These don't necessarily have to be exercise groups either. A group could be nothing more than a group of kids who walk to school together, under the watchful eye of a parent. There is a no trend calling "walking school buses." This involves a parent walking their kid(s) to the neighbor's house and picking up their kid(s) on their way towards the school. The group continues to grow until it reaches the school. Parents can alternate days of the week to fit their schedules.

LONG TERM SOLUTIONS

Bike Lanes/Widened Shoulder

Cohutta currently has no streets that are wide enough to create a bike lane, however the streets are typically in good condition. It would be fiscally irresponsible to damage a street in good condition solely for the purpose of adding a bike lane. It is recommended though that as the streets age and need to

be replaced that the town lobby for the addition of bike lanes, particularly on the arterial roads through town like: Cohutta Varnell Road, Red Clay Road, Apison Road and Wolfe Street. Bike lanes are typically four to six feet wide, although some cities simply widen the shoulder by two to three feet.

The cost of a five-foot bicycle lane can range from approximately \$5,000 to \$535,000 per mile, with an average cost

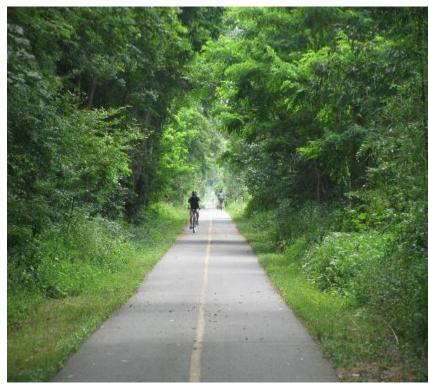


Example of a bike lane, www.pedbikeimages.org, photo by Carl Sundstrom

around \$130,000, according to the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. The costs can vary greatly due to differences in project specifications and the scale and length of the treatment.

Bike Trails

Cohutta has expressed an interest in one day having a trail or trail network. The town currently owns multiple properties but the properties are not connected. It is recommended that the town work with its residents to determine where they would like the trail to go and what it should connect. The town should then begin speaking with landowners along that route about possibly donating a portion of the land or a mutually



Example of what a trail could look like, www.pedbikeimages.org, photo by Laura Sandt

agreeable sale price. Given that the Town of Cohutta currently only encompasses 2.5 square miles of land it would be wise to work with neighboring jurisdictions like Whitfield County, the City of Varnell, City of Dalton, Catoosa County and the City of Ringgold in Georgia. It would also be wise to work with the City of Cleveland, Tennessee, City of Ooltewah, Tennessee, and Hamilton and Bradley Counties in Tennessee, as these are also neighboring communities. Connecting to neighboring communities would vastly increase the number of trail users and allows for the possibility of joint funding. A wider network of trails would also universally benefit the communities involved in terms or tourism and economic development.

Trails or separated bikeway projects typically cost between \$536,664 and \$4,293,320 per mile, depending on site conditions, path width, and materials used, according to www.pedbikeinfo.org.

Sidewalks

As discussed earlier, Cohutta currently has a severely limited amount of sidewalks, limited to Wolfe Street within the town center. The sidewalks

alternate between opposing sides of the street. Sidewalks would be difficult to expand on parts of Wolfe Street due to buildings and houses that sit adjacent to the street, however connecting the town center with Shugart Park and Cohutta Elementary School would be a great start. As the town continues to grow and traffic volumes increase the need for sidewalks will only increase. It is recommended that these be included in future repaving efforts or road projects.



Example of what sidewalks could look like, www.pedbikeimages.org, photo by Dan Burden

This may not be a priority issue now due to the small population and low volume traffic but if the Town of Cohutta continues to grow and plans to bring in new business to the town center then this will inevitably become an issue.

Sidewalks typically cost an average of \$35 per linear foot, according to http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/. This of course varies due to materials used and condition of the ground upon which the sidewalk will be placed. A solid surface is generally preferable over pavers as pavers are more inclined to shift due to the ground settling and roots from nearby trees. Interlocking pavers also become an issue if a utility provider like a sewer or water department need to dig. In many cases they will not take the time and effort to re-create the previously arranged pattern of pavers.

COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM

COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM, 2016-2020 Town of Cohutta Cost **Funding Activity Description** 2017 2018 2019 2020 **Responsible Party** 2016 **Estimate** Source Lowering the speed limit within the town Χ \$500/sign **General Fund** Town of Cohutta limits to 35 MPH Installing bike signage on Cohutta Varnell Town 2 Χ \$3,000* Town of Cohutta Road, Wolfe Street Fundraiser and Red Clay Road Installing "sharrowing" pavement markings Town Χ \$8,840** along Cohutta Varnell **Town of Cohutta** fundraiser Road, Wolfe Street and Red Clay Road Retrofitting Shugart Dependent Park pavilion to add Χ \$75,000*** Town of Cohutta upon grant restrooms and a water funding station Installing bike lanes on Dependent Cohutta Varnell Road. X Χ \$84,000**** Town of Cohutta upon grant Wolfe Street funding

All costs estimates are rough estimates. Final costs will vary depending up materials used and various other factors.

^{*}Assuming two signs per street (one at each end).

^{**} Assuming a pavement marking every quarter of a mile at \$340/marking, could also be done every half mile at half the cost.

^{***} Estimate based on cost of larger Ringgold pavilion built from scratch versus cost of retrofitting existing pavilion.

^{****}Assuming a price of \$16,000 per mile.

FUNDING SOURCES

Like all jurisdictions the Town of Cohutta has strict budget based on the amount of revenue expected to be generated versus the amount of anticipated expenses. Naturally budgets are formed with the understanding that top priority will be given to things like operational costs for the local government, including services that citizens expect (town management, police, fire, infrastructure, etc.). Funding for recreational and economic development projects tend to become secondary and thus tend to require some additional financial assistance in the form of grants and low-interest loans through various government agencies, non-profits and private foundations, to name a few. Below are some possible options for additional funding sources.

Local Sponsorship Programs

A local sponsorship program allows for local residents who are likely to use the facility to take a sense of ownership of it. This is done through local sponsorship drives, similar to the "adopt a mile" campaign seen on roadways. This is also a way of attracting attention and soliciting donations for local residents and businesses. Soliciting corporate donations is also a way for local businesses to show their commitment by reinvesting in the community. Local participation also goes a long way in helping the chances of grant applications for larger amounts of funding.

Tax Based Funding

S.P.L.O.S.T.

S.P.L.O.S.T. is an acronym that stands for "special local option sales tax." This is a situation where the local governments within a county get together and create a list of projects. The projects typically include anything from infrastructure improvements like roads or sewers, to equipment purchases like fire trucks or police cars. They can even include the creation or rehabilitation of parks or

buildings. The governments then present these projects to their respective jurisdictions and allow the citizens to vote on whether or not to temporarily raise the local sales tax rate in an effort to fund these projects. The down side is that the local government is raising taxes, but the citizens are allowed to decide whether to tax themselves additionally. The upside is that the burden of paying the tax is also spread to people who might not necessarily live in the jurisdiction but might just be traveling through or visiting, who happen to stop and buy something and pay the increased sales tax.

S.P.L.O.S.T.s have become increasingly common in recent history. Now there even E.S.P.L.O.S.T.'s for education funding and T.S.P.L.O.S.T.'s for transportation funding. Some jurisdictions like the City of Atlanta may even have multiple S.P.L.O.S.T.s being collected simultaneously.

Property Tax

An increase in property taxes is one way to generate additional revenue locally. This increase directly applies to anyone who owns real estate within the local jurisdiction and indirectly affects tenants of rental properties as it typically results in an increase in rent. Property tax increases have been more popular with voters in some areas of the country than others.

Government Grants/Low Interest Loans

Government agencies at the state and federal level frequently offer grant opportunities related to their respective fields. Federal funding is typically offered through State agencies to local jurisdictions in the form of grants or direct appropriations. Grants typically require a "match." The amount of the required match varies depending upon the agency and the amount of money requested.

Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act)

The FAST Act funds surface transportation programs. The FAST Act builds on the changes made by MAP-21(Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), enacted in 2012). The FAST Act converts the long-standing Surface Transportation Program into the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program. These set-aside funds include all projects and activities that were previously

eligible under the TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program), encompassing a variety of smaller-scale transportation projects such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities. These funds require a 20% funding match.

Recreational Trails Program

Georgia's Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides funding for trail construction, trail maintenance and trail education. The Recreational Trails Program awards grants to city governments, county governments, federal agencies, authorized commissions, as well as state agencies. RTP is a federal program managed by the Federal Highway Administration, but it is administered at the state level by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The purpose of Georgia's Recreational Trails Program is to provide and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities identified in, or that further a specific goal of, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program is a federal program authorized by Congress for the purpose of acquiring federal lands and assisting states and local governments with funds to acquire lands and develop outdoor recreation facilities. This program is administered at the state level by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Eligible applicants for the local government share of the funds include incorporated municipalities, counties, and legally constituted recreation authorities and commissions. In Georgia, the funds are allocated with 25% of funds going to acquisition projects, 25% of funds going to development of new parks, and 50% of funds going to rehabilitation of existing parks. One possible opportunity would be submitting an application for the addition of restrooms and a water station to the existing pavilion in Shugart Park.

Partnership for Sustainable Communities

This is a program is through partnership between the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Transportation. This partnership is based upon five Livability Principles, one of which happens to be the need for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. This is done in hopes of "reducing family transportation costs, reducing our dependence on foreign oil, reducing greenhouse emissions,

improving air quality and promoting public health." This partnership lead to the creation of the TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grants.

http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/

TIGER

TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grants by DOT (U.S. Department of Transportation) can fund Bicycle and Pedestrian projects. Through a **very** competitive process, DOT funds applicants that exceed eligibility criteria and demonstrate projects that surpass their peers. TIGER can fund projects that have a local match as low as twenty percent of the total project costs.

Private Foundations

In addition to government grants, there are private foundations that also provide grant funding for certain projects. Many of these groups will either provide funding or assist in fundraising campaigns to solicit donations. One such example in Northwest Georgia is The Lyndhurst Foundation.

The Lyndhurst Foundation

"The Lyndhurst Foundation identifies and invests in initiatives, institutions, people and programs that contribute to the long-term livability and resilience of the greater Chattanooga region." - http://www.lyndhurstfoundation.org/. The Lyndhurst Foundation has funded multiple projects in the Chattanooga and Northwest Georgia area, including the Thrive 2055 endeavor.

CONCLUSION

While creating its current Comprehensive Plan the Town of Cohutta formally expressed a commitment to working towards increased connectivity with the other jurisdictions within Whitfield County for the purpose of shared economic development. Cohutta indicated that it understood the many positive benefits of being a more bike-able and pedestrian friendly community, benefits like increased health and wellness and increased social interactions with neighbors. The Town of Cohutta also acknowledged the value of the steady stream of cyclists constantly riding through town. They recognized this as an opportunity to promote themselves to neighboring communities. They even harnessed this resource through the creation of an annual bike ride to help financially support their local volunteer fire department. The town also recognized this as a potential economic development opportunity to potentially increase tourism.

With the assistance of the Mayor's Office, the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission was able to prepare this report identifying the Town of Cohutta's current resources, including its lack of traffic, its quality roads, its scenic views and its terrain that allows for a challenging ride for cycling enthusiasts. The citizens of Cohutta, as well as the many area cyclists also assisted us by offering their opinions for the community survey we created. This outpouring of support further demonstrates their commitment to the future of their community.

Using this information, we were able to prepare this plan and be able to offer both short term and long term solutions to assist the Town of Cohutta in continuing its effort to become increasingly bike-able and pedestrian friendly. Our suggestions ranged from simple town ordinances to the proposed construction of bike lanes. Town leadership then created an aggressive list of goals in the form of a Community Work Program. This kind of ambition and commitment is what is necessary to achieve goals and progress.

APPENDIX

Road Condition		destrian	s for Pedestrian/Cycling Use	Use				
	Factors							
Street	Road Width	Road Suface	Road Condition	Speed Limit	Sharp Curves	Hills	Shoulder	Traffic Volume
Wolfe St.	20,	Asphalt	poog	30 - 45 MPH	plim	plim	3"	wol
Chattanooga Rd	20,	Asphalt	boog	30-45 MPH	plim	severe	3"	low
Mt. Olivet Rd.	20,	Asphalt	poog	35 MPH	moderate	moderate	3"	low
Red Clay Rd.	18'	Asphalt	boog	25 - 35 MPH	plim	plim	3"	low
Cohutta Varnell Rd.	20,	Asphalt	good	25 - 35 MPH	moderate	moderate	3"	low
Wheeler Dam Rd.	20,	Asphalt	good	25 - 35 MPH	moderate	plim	none	low
Standifer Rd.	20,	Asphalt	good	40 MPH	moderate	moderate	none	low
Bryant Rd.	20,	Asphalt	good	40 MPH	moderate	moderate	none	low
Long St.	12'	Asphalt	good	not posted	none	plim	none	low, dead end
Henderson Dr.	14'	Asphalt	good	not posted	none	auou	none	low, dead end
Apison Rd.	20,	Asphalt	good	not posted	moderate	moderate	3"	low
Quill Gordon Way	14'	Asphalt	moderate	not posted	severe	severe	none	low
Pleasant Valley Dr.	12'	Asphalt	moderate	not posted	severe	moderate	none	low
Fish Hatchery Way	private road							low, dead end
Old Apison Rd.	20'	Asphalt	good	35 MPH	mild	mild	none	low
Trout Ln.	private road							low, dead end
King St.	18'	Asphalt	good	not posted	none	auou	none	low
Windwalker Dr.	24'	Asphalt	good	not posted	severe	severe	none	low
Oconee Dr.	24'	Asphalt	good	not posted	none	mild	none	low, dead end
Eagle Bend Dr.	24'	Asphalt	good	not posted	mild	mild	none	low, dead end
Peach Orchard Rd.	18'	Asphalt	good	not posted	mild	mild	none	low, dead end
Rogers Ln.	14'	Asphalt	moderate	not posted	mild	mild	none	low, dead end
Old Dalton Cleveland Hwy	22'	Asphalt	good	25 -45 MPH	mild	mild	3"	low
Kelly Dr.	20,	Asphalt	good	not posted	none	mild	none	low, dead end
Mike's Dr.	20,	Asphalt	good	not posted	none	mild	none	low, dead end
Cleveland Hwy/SR71	5 lanes	Asphalt	boog	55 MPH	none	severe	2", rble strip	moderate
Cohutta Beaverdale Rd.	20'	Asphalt	boog	45 MPH	none	mild	3"	moderate

All units of measurement may vary at different points along the road.

