

Blueway Trail Planning Feasibility and Concept Design Study Overview

The City of Atlanta, in partnership with Livable Buckhead, the Blue Heron Board, Chastain Park Conservancy, and the North Buckhead Civic Association, has been tasked with conducting a feasibility and concept design study exploring a potential connection between PATH400, Sarah Smith Elementary School, Blue Heron Nature Preserve, and Chastain Park. Funded through the Moving Atlanta Forward Bond, the study is currently in progress and targeted for completion by Spring/ Summer of 2026.

This phase of work has identified a preferred corridor—a “fat line” on the map—showing where the trail could reasonably be located based on factors such as topography, environmental impact, and user experience. This is not a final alignment. The next phase of design will refine exactly where the trail would be placed within that corridor, including details such as buffering near homes and protection of sensitive natural areas.

Preliminary findings of this feasibility and concept design study support a split trail at the Blue Heron with the bike path and the pedestrian path following different routes to PATH400. The study group deemed a combined trail would compromise the character and environmental requirements of the Blue Heron Nature Preserve. The bike path would mainly make use of existing streets and the pedestrian path through Blue Heron. Further, the path, made from appropriate materials, would generally follow the existing pathway, with a narrow enough width to be in keeping with the character of a nature preserve.



This has been an engagement-driven process, with input from homeowners’ associations along the corridor, the North Buckhead Civic Association, City Council, City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation, the City of Atlanta Department of Transportation (ATLDOT), Blue Heron Nature Preserve, Inc., and other stakeholders. That input will continue to shape the project as it evolves.

At its core, this effort is about thoughtfully and sensitively connecting some of Buckhead's most significant assets—PATH400, Sarah Smith Elementary School, Blue Heron, and Chastain Park—into a more cohesive system. Done properly, it expands access to nature and recreation while respecting the character of surrounding neighborhoods and the preserve itself.

Funding for this project supports development of the feasibility and concept report only. The resulting concept will serve as a foundation for future engineering and design. The "Engineering/Design" phase as reported on the ATLDOT website is an internal designation to indicate that this project is undergoing Concept Report development. Construction design plan development is not included in this project scope.

For more detail on the study, design approach, and next steps, please see the project overview below.

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Project Overview

- **What:** Exploration of a potential trail connection between PATH400, Blue Heron Nature Preserve, and Chastain Park
 - **Lead:** City of Atlanta Department of Transportation
 - **Partners:** City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation, Livable Buckhead, Inc., Blue Heron Nature Preserve, Inc., Chastain Park Conservancy, North Buckhead Civic Association
 - **Goal:** Evaluate the feasibility of an environmentally sensitive connection linking key Buckhead green spaces
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A Process Grounded in Engagement

This phase is both a technical and engagement-driven process, shaped by input from neighbors, civic groups, and City partners.

Engagement to date has included:

- Multiple **homeowners' associations** along the corridor
- **North Buckhead Civic Association**
- **Blue Heron Nature Preserve, Inc.**
- **Chastain Park Conservancy**
- **Livable Buckhead, Inc.**
- Local **City Council office**
- **City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation**
- **ATLDOT** and agency partners

Engagement is ongoing and will continue as the project becomes more defined.

Current Phase: Feasibility and Concept Design

- Funding for this project supports feasibility and concept report only. The resulting concept will serve as a foundation for future engineering and design; however, that phase is not part of the current scope.
- Establishes whether and how the connection could occur
- Defines a general corridor—a “fat line” on the map—showing where the trail could reasonably be located
- Evaluates constraints, opportunities, and overall viability
- Positions the project for future study, design, engineering, and funding

Key Distinction:

- **Concept Phase:** Identifies *where the trail could go* (corridor), which is still a working document and will be available for public review Spring/ Summer 2026
 - **Design Phase (next):** Determines *exactly how and where it could be built* (alignment, buffering, details)
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Alignment Evaluation

Multiple potential routes were studied using standard trail design criteria:

- Slope and accessibility
- Right-of-way availability
- Topography and constructability
- User experience
- Environmental impact

Outcome:

- A preferred alignment corridor has been identified that separates the trail with bicycle facilities going along Lakemoore Road and a pedestrian only, ADA facility that is sensitively designed and upgrades existing boardwalks in the Preserve that would navigate through the Blue Heron Nature Preserve
 - The corridor represents a potential path forward, but is not a final alignment
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Key Design Principles (To be Explored in the Next Phase)

- **Protect natural areas first**
 - Minimize environmental impact
 - Preserve the character of Blue Heron as a natural experience
 - **Separate bikes and pedestrians to protect the preserve**
 - Keeps faster-moving bike traffic outside sensitive areas
 - Allows pedestrians to more directly experience natural areas
 - **Use sensitive design and construction methods**
 - Exploring design strategies that are sensitive to the natural environment
 - Exploring top-down implementation to minimize environmental disturbance
 - **Respect adjacent neighborhoods**
 - Future design will address buffering, alignment adjustments, and compatibility near homes
 - **Comparable examples to visit**
 - Mason Mill Park, DeKalb County
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Why This Connection Matters

This effort is about **thoughtfully and sensitively connecting three four of Buckhead's most significant assets:**

- PATH400 (regional spine)
- Sarah Smith Elementary School
- Blue Heron Nature Preserve (unique natural environment)
- Chastain Park (Buckhead Park)

Together, they create the opportunity for a more **cohesive system of parks and trails**—expanding educational opportunities and access to nature and recreation while respecting the character and requirements of each place.

Key Considerations

- Blue Heron is a City-owned park, requiring coordination across public and community stakeholders
 - Adjacent neighborhoods are an important factor in future design refinement
 - The potential redevelopment of the Sarah Smith Old Ivy campus may influence alignment opportunities
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Next Steps

- Deliver concept report with detailed planning analysis
 - Seek federal grant funding for engineering and design
 - Refine alignment within the preferred corridor
 - Continue community engagement
 - Identify and pursue construction funding, likely including federal sources
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Bottom Line

- The project is in an early, exploratory phase
- A preferred corridor has been identified, but no final alignment is set
- Ongoing work will continue to balance:
 - Connectivity
 - Environmental stewardship
 - Neighborhood context