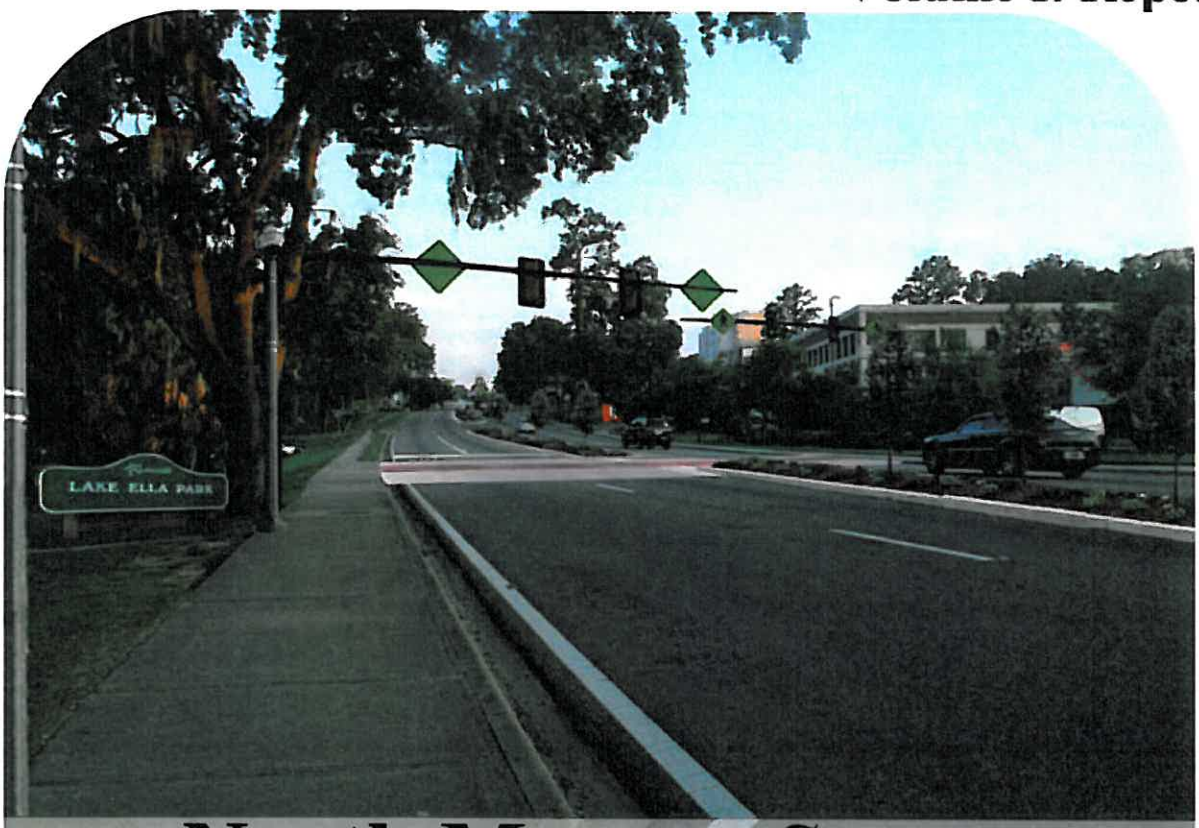
Volume I: Report



North Monroe Street Design & Safety Study

Florida State University
Department of Urban & Regional Planning
Summer Studio 2010
Prepared for the CRTPA

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Executive Summary

Cities across the country have come to recognize the importance of integrating alternative modes of transportation that enable citizens to make short trips without relying on automobiles and gas consumption. Newly developed policies signed by United States Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood state that "Increased commitment to and investment in bicycle facilities and walking networks can help meet goals for cleaner, healthier air; less congested roadways; and more livable, safe, cost-efficient communities." In states such as Florida where automobile accidents are among the lead causes of death, increasing pedestrian safety is paramount and the state's Capital City is an ideal place to create good examples of transportation policies that balance the various transportation needs in the community.

Recognizing the opportunity to integrate pedestrian facility improvements within the identified multi-modal transportation network, the Capital Regional Transportation Planning Agency (CRTPA) conceived a project along the North Monroe Street corridor from Tharpe Street to First Avenue in Tallahassee, Florida. The project's goals included the identification of pedestrian and bicycle improvements along the North Monroe corridor and urban design recommendations to create a "sense of place." The CRTPA engaged the Florida State University Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) to produce a study to serve as the foundation for the community's improvements to this thoroughfare which leads to the state's Capitol in the downtown area.

The following report is a summary of findings from a study of the North Monroe corridor. This project was completed by graduate students from Florida State university's Department of Urban and Regional Planning as the summer 2010 studio project for capstone credit. It has been determined that in a low-cost to high-cost range, estimated from approximately $466,000 to $6.2 million, the corridor's safety, mobility, aesthetics and economic development potential can be greatly increased while creating a "sense of place" for citizen enjoyment while not negatively affecting the area's level of service for automobile below an acceptable threshold. This conclusion was reached by evaluating the existing conditions and service levels and developing strategies to improve the corridor.

Methodology

The North Monroe corridor study area is comprised of several blocks just outside downtown Tallahassee connecting the Capitol complex to Lake Ella Park, a major local destination for locals and visitors. Within the corridor, there are unique functions and characteristics which enabled the DURP study group to divide the area into three distinct *districts*:

- **Lake Ella District** Characterized by Lake Ella Park providing space for exercise and leisure activities.

- **Midtown Connector District** Creates a connection of North Monroe to the Midtown area on Thomasville road and is characterized by similar features such as restaurants, bars and boutique shops.

- **Commercial/Office District** Characterized by various law offices and small service businesses.

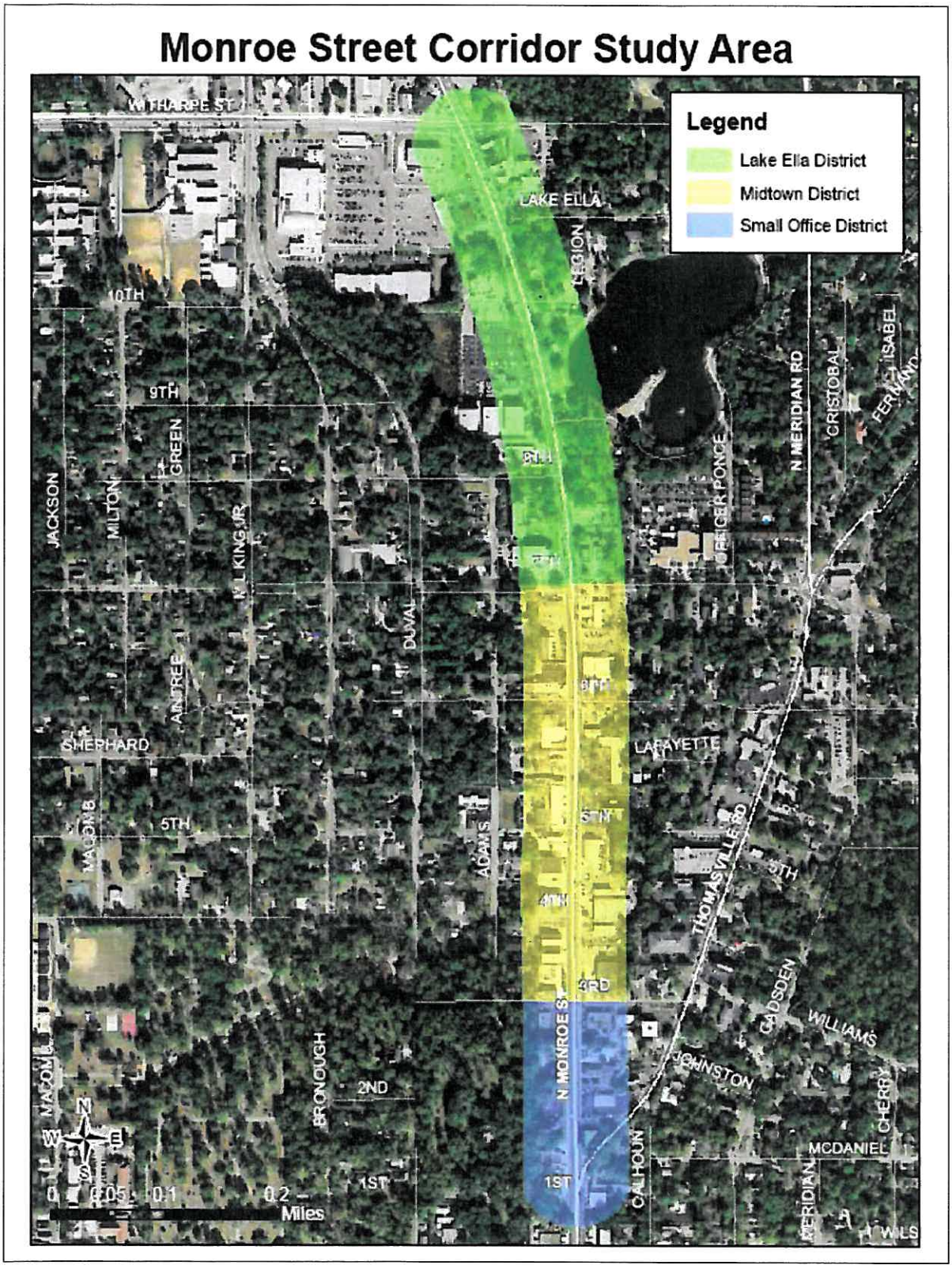

Figure ES.1: North Monroe Street study area districts

To support the project team's findings and subsequent recommendations the studio planners conducted a Roadway Safety Audit (RSA) and two public meetings. The RSA is among the first conducted in Florida and is designed to be an outside evaluation of safety conditions by qualified professionals. The report found there are several low-cost solutions the CRTPA could implement to make the area both ADA compliant and generally safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Further support and qualitative information was gained through the public input process. Two public meetings were conducted as well as two public surveys. Generally the public desired lower effective traffic speeds and safer crossing opportunities throughout the corridor. In addition to the study group's own field analysis of the study area, the outside input from professionals and citizens helped identify problematic areas contained in the Existing Conditions (Section 4) of this report.

Existing Conditions Highlights

- Outdated driveway designs do not allow sidewalk construction behind turnout;
- Dual left turning lanes (center turning lane) cause hazards for pedestrians and drivers;
- Front-in parking blocks pedestrians' access to sidewalks and cause issues when the vehicles are backing out over sidewalks into oncoming traffic;
- Various obstacles in the sidewalks including signal boxes, light/utility poles, drainage grates and manholes pose hazards for walkers and especially for people in wheelchairs;
- Narrow sidewalks can be unsafe for pedestrians and do not accommodate future growth in the area; large cross-slope affect ADA accessibility because too much cross-slope and ADA curb ramps are missing in many intersections;
- Bus stops without pedestrian shelter expose bus riders to the elements and prevent drivers from noticing pedestrians standing at bus stops.
- Lack of crosswalks at almost every side street in the area, including the Lake Ella entrance, reduces connectivity for pedestrians;
- Long stretches between traffic signals and lack of pedestrian crossing distance between some intersections;
- Lack of human-scale lighting, particularly along the Midtown Connector district;
- Lack of mid-block crossing to Lake Ella increases risk of pedestrians being struck by automobiles when trying to access the park between Tharpe and 7th Avenue;
- Location of bicycle lane on Tharpe Street is dangerous and can lead to fatalities;
- Missing crosswalks and timers at various intersections along the corridor;
- Outdated traffic signals at 7th Avenue have exceeded expected life and pose risks;
- Overhead street signs worn out and old need replacement.

Recommendations

Coupled with the RSA and input from the public meetings conducted during the study timeframe, the DURP study group developed recommendations to address safety issues along the corridor while creating a better balance in the *level of service* for both vehicles and pedestrians. These recommendations can be found in the Planning Alternatives (Section 5) of this report and include:

- Reduce automobile lanes from 12-feet to 11-feet to accommodate medians, buffers and sidewalk width improvements;
- Remove sidewalk barriers such as signal boxes, light/utility poles, drainage grates and manholes to reduce hazards for walkers and especially for people in wheelchairs;
- Repave driveways where needed and increase sidewalk width to 5-feet throughout the corridor to accommodate increased use anticipated with future growth in area;
- Improve ADA curb ramps at every intersection and reduce curb radii for safety;
- Provide minimum 3-foot buffers throughout corridor to better protect pedestrians on sidewalks and include trees for shade where appropriate;
- Raised medians with landscaping to improve safety and aesthetics;
- Pedestrian mid-block crossing at Lake Ella;
- Reduce drop-off distance between sidewalk and road asphalt at shoulder;
- Signage to warn drivers parked at front-in spots about pedestrians on street;
- Improve crosswalks at every intersection by reducing curb radii where necessary and using faux red brick to increase drivers' awareness of pedestrian presence and aesthetics;
- Coordinate with StarMetro to improve bus facilities;
- Incorporate human-scale signage and lighting along the Midtown Connector district;
- Move bicycle lane on Tharpe Street to the left of the right turn lane to reduce danger to bicyclists and motorists;
- Improve crosswalk timers and increase timing at intersections to provide appropriate crossing time for pedestrians;
- Replace outdated traffic signals with mast arm poles;
- Replace overhead street signs with larger reflective signs to increase their visibility;
- Feasibility study for an alternative bicycle lane along Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

Implementation

To help guide the recommendations into an implementable plan the team further evaluated existing and potential funding and administrative options to facilitate an achievable process. Creating an interagency partnership will facilitate project feasibility while actively involving stakeholders in the development and future administrative process. Furthermore, creation of a business support network akin to a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) will further economic development and regulate the aesthetic quality for the area beyond the CRTPA's, City of Tallahassee's or Leon County's involvement.

Safety, mobility, aesthetic and economic development are favorable improvements for the area. These conclusions are supported by the DURP study group's analysis throughout this report consisting of the following sections:

- Road Safety Report
- Traffic and Level of Service
- Existing Conditions
- Planning Alternatives
- Economic development and Funding Alternatives
- Implementation Plan
- Appendices

Additionally this plan will support the CRTPA's goal to create a "sense of place" within the corridor, while achieving the improved safety and transportation goals for the area.