



Cover photo source: Muscle Shoals Natural Heritage Area (MSNHA)

FY 23 Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Application: Project Narrative

Dr. Bill Sims Hike-Bike Way on the Singing River Trail: Reconnecting Old Town to Decatur's Riverfront

Applicant:
City of Decatur



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This is such an important project for our City. The investment will help our once thriving Old Town community, providing transportation, connectivity, quality of life, and economic development opportunities.

DANIELLE GIBSON
President/CEO Decatur Morgan County Tourism

”

01 OVERVIEW

Project Snapshot

This 8.77-mile trail project reconnects the historic, once-thriving Black community of Old Town Decatur to essential destinations within the city, and regionally to the Singing River Trail—a 220-mile collaborative effort spanning Northern Alabama.

 **Project Location:**
CITY OF DECATUR, AL

 **Total Mileage:**
8.77 MILES

 **Estimated Completion:**
2028

 **Project Cost:**
\$18.4 Million

92% *Disadvantaged Communities*
Source: CEJST

Project Description

Located within disadvantaged communities, many of which were harmed by the urban renewal efforts of the 1970s, the project provides a high-quality route for everyday active transportation travel and recreation. The project builds upon the existing, community-driven Dr. Bill Sims Hike-Bike Way (Bill Sims Trail), that currently lacks adequate, dedicated space for comfortable and safe walking, rolling, and biking. The project design includes new shared use paths, streetscape improvements, separated bicycle lanes, mid-block crossings, sidewalks, and new streetscape elements like lighting and landscaping. Finally, through robust community engagement, partnerships, and place-based economic development, the trail will play a key role in reviving the economy of the predominantly Black neighborhood of Old Town Decatur.

Project Website
<https://www.cityofdecatur.com/RCN>

Barriers and Burdens Posed by the Corridor: Highway 20 and the Railroads

The project seeks to address two dividing and burdening facilities, Highway 20 and the railroad, by improving crossings. Proposed projects include **enhancing an at grade crossing of Highway 20 at Oak Street, directing pedestrians and cyclists to an existing pedestrian bridge over the railroad, and improving conditions of an existing tunnel under Highway 20.**

Alabama State Route 20/U.S. Route 72 Alternate (Highway 20), a five-lane highway, is a dividing facility that separates Old Town in two and cuts off access to grocery and convenience stores, other shopping, services, recreation, the riverfront, and important historical sites. Before it was expanded into Highway 20 in the 1970s, Highway 20 was known as Wilson Street, a low traffic road that could be crossed

by pedestrians. Today, Highway 20 is no longer safe for people walking, rolling, biking, or taking transit. Despite the lack of safe facilities, residents often try to cross Highway 20 on foot, with a mobility assistive device, or by bike to access convenience stores as the Old Town neighborhood does not have other access to grocery stores. As a primary route for truck traffic, Highway 20 is also a burdening facility that contributes to air pollution, diesel particulate matter, and traffic noise in the project area communities.

The railroad is a historic division of these communities. CSX and Norfolk Southern railroads line much of Decatur's riverfront and separate Old Town Decatur from the rest of the city. Residents speak of inaccessible crossings over railroad tracks caused by the tracks and loose gravel. An existing pedestrian bridge over the railroad at the

end of Railroad Street NW has steep steps where the bridge has settled, making it difficult to travel via bicycle and inaccessible to those in a wheelchair.

Character of the Community Most Impacted

Prior to the 1970s and the City's urban renewal efforts, Old Town Decatur was a primarily African American, thriving, walkable, and mixed-use community with family-owned businesses. If asked about that time, Old Town residents reflect fondly and recount the core community destinations like grocery stores, dress shops, barber shops, a fish market, and theaters that once lined Vine Street—the heart of the Old Town. These historic buildings were removed during the Urban Renewal period to make room for new single family residential development. Since that time, some new homes have been erected, but nearly half of the neighborhood remains vacant and has suffered from decades of disinvestment. Today, while still a predominantly Black community, the area has high rates of poverty, a significant number of zero vehicle households, high rates of disabilities, and limited access to jobs, stores, and the riverfront.



Intersection of Vine Street and Sycamore Street photosimulation of recommended project: *The streetscape improvements will create a gateway into Old Town and foster a walkable and thriving community that was once in place along Vine Street. Improved sidewalks, new crosswalks, lighting, and new landscape will create a comfortable environment for residents and visitors.*

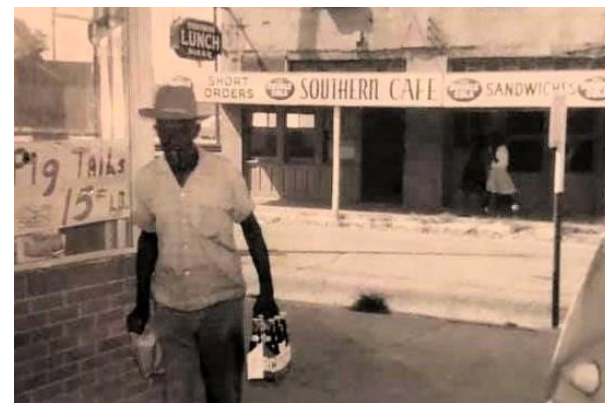


Many Old Town residents rely on walking and biking to access everyday destinations. Photo source: MSNHA

Old Town History

Several key historic events happened in Old Town Decatur that should never be forgotten, and this trail seeks to educate users on many of those events, including the Trail of Tears, Civil War, racial segregation and integration, and the Scottsboro Boys Trial. The trail crosses the physical locations of many key historical events. For example, the trail follows Vine Street in Old Town where pivotal events of the Scottsboro Boys Trial, along with other Civil Rights cases, took place and will be preserved in a new museum. The Scottsboro Boys Trial spurred *Powell vs. Alabama* and *Norris vs. Alabama*—two pivotal Supreme Court trials that led to the right for legal counsel and due process according to the Fourteenth Amendment. Celebrating Early Old Town Through Art (CEOTA) is currently working on establishing a museum that preserves the history

and tells the story of the Scottsboro Boys Trial. CEOTA recently received \$890,000 in funding to relocate the home of Judge James Horton, the judge who presided over Haywood Patterson's second trial, to the new Civil Rights museum and future legal learning center at 212 Church Street. The museum will be immediately alongside the proposed trail. The trail also takes visitors and residents to the First Missionary Baptist Church, a church designed by Wallace A. Rayfield who was America's second African American architect. With so much pivotal Civil Rights history, the community seeks to establish Old Town, Decatur's oldest neighborhood, as a Civil Rights district. The proposed project will work in tandem with the museum development and support existing community-led historic preservation efforts.



HISTORIC VINE STREET

Before urban renewal, Vine Street was home to family-owned markets, eateries, and shops that provided Old Town residents with their everyday needs. Since these buildings were removed and roadway connections were cut off, the neighborhood-scale mixed-use development has not been able to re-establish.

Project Goals and Merit Criteria

EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

By adding safer walking and bicycling infrastructure into Old Town and along the riverfront, the proposed project will remove transportation barriers caused by Highway 20 and the railroad, addressing equity and justice in disadvantaged communities that have faced transportation disparities caused by urban renewal and decades of underinvestment.



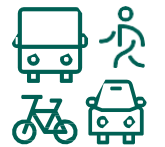
ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

The proposed project provides convenient, ADA-accessible, and safe walking and bicycling infrastructure for Decatur residents of all abilities and connects them to schools, places of worship, high-paying jobs, recreation, green spaces, and the riverfront. The improved facilities provide affordable transportation to the over 500 households without a vehicle.



FACILITY SUITABILITY

The facilities address transportation burdens caused by the railroad and Highway 20 that currently restrict Old Town residents from accessing jobs and everyday needs. The proposed facility provides separated walking and bicycling facilities along with safer intersections that reconnect and improve transportation within Old Town, Decatur, and the riverfront.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

The project will meaningfully engage with diverse community members and a community advisory board to build trust. Letters of support from a variety of agencies and organizations have been submitted. Existing relationships between the City of Decatur and CEOTA continue to support this project.



EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

Through its streetscape improvements and context-sensitive elements, the project celebrates local culture, preserves history, and immerses residents and visitors in storytelling of significant Civil Rights events and pivotal American history. By creating a thriving community and streets, the project fosters economic revitalization and restoration of Old Town Decatur.



CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

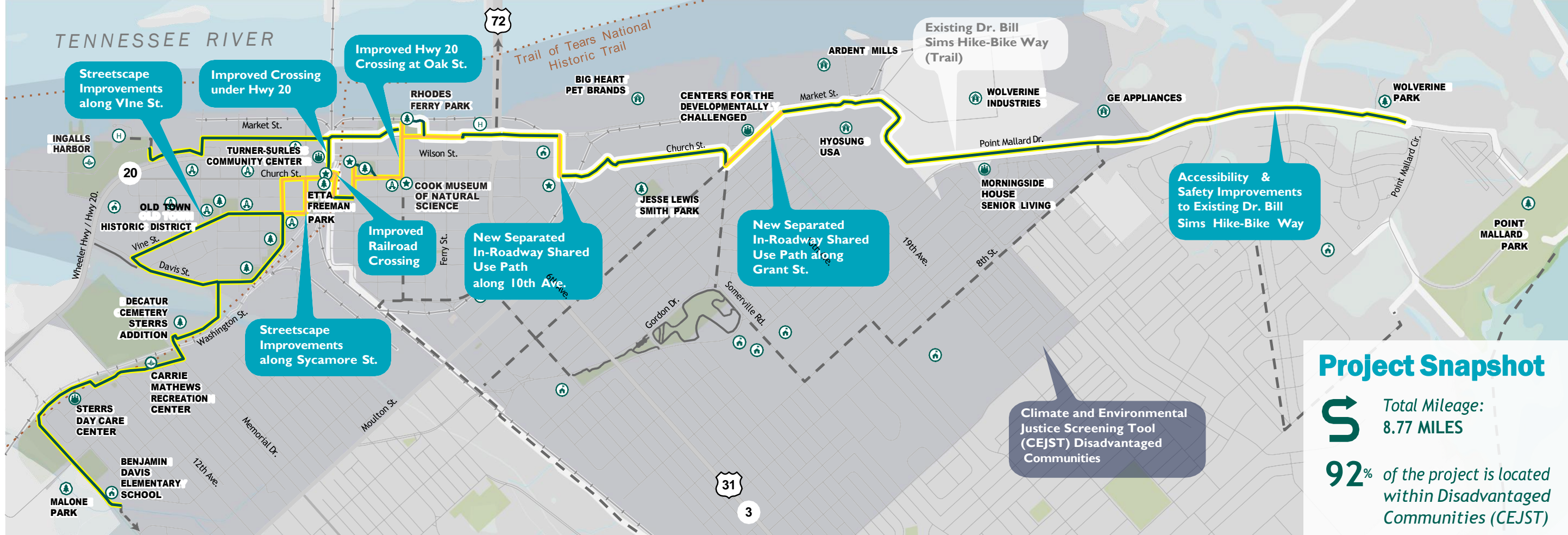
The proposed project creates convenient walking and bicycling facilities to connect residents to everyday destinations, providing an attractive alternative to driving and reducing vehicular trips and emissions. Through street redesign, the project incorporates new street trees and replaces pavement with new permeable landscaped areas to capture stormwater.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Decatur area has a long history of supporting local workforce development through a variety of existing partnerships and collaborative efforts. The proposed project will work in tandem with existing workforce development programs with a focus on underserved communities. The project's facilities provide access to many high-paying jobs along the river.

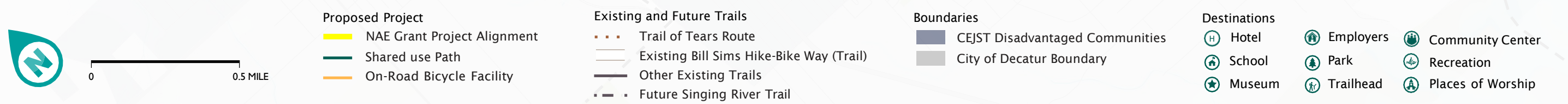




Project Snapshot

S Total Mileage: 8.77 MILES

92% of the project is located within Disadvantaged Communities (CEJST)



02 LOCATION

The proposed project extends and enhances the existing Dr. Bill Sims Hike-Bike Way (Trail) and brings the Singing River Trail (SRT) to Decatur. The SRT establishes a vision for a 220-mile connected trail network from Bridgeport, AL, at the northeast corner of the state to Florence AL, the gateway to the Natchez Trace Parkway. Decatur is located approximately at the center of the SRT trail alignment and is well positioned to serve as a catalyst for regional trail development and to spur local entrepreneurship.

The project area is located within the City of Decatur on the south side of the Tennessee River. The route is 8.77 miles long, extending from Point Mallard Park to Benjamin Davis Elementary School in Northwest Decatur. The proposed project adds new safety enhancements to the existing Dr. Bill Sims Trail and extends the trail into Old Town Decatur for the first time. The proposed project increases access to parks and commercial redevelopment along the Tennessee River and creates safer and more connected walking and bicycling facilities in Old Town and along the riverfront.

The project includes the following facilities and improvements:

- **6.64 miles of shared use paths, comprised of**
 - (3.34 miles of new trail and 3.3 miles of improvements to the Bill Sims Trail)
- **1.08 miles of streetscape improvements**
- **0.64 miles of separated bicycle facilities as two-way cycletracks and separated bicycle lanes**
- **0.41 miles of bicycle boulevards**
- **33 improved intersections with crosswalks or new pedestrian signals**
 - Safety improvements: stop bars, yield markings, and signage
 - New sidewalks and replacement of deteriorated sidewalks
- Accessibility improvements, new or improved curb ramps, accessible sidewalk grades, and detectable warnings
- Lighting and wayfinding
- Planted tree islands to reduce the urban heat island and create a protective barrier between trail users and vehicles
- Improved pedestrian bridge over the railroad at Railroad Street NW and enhancements to the existing tunnel under Highway 20
- New pedestrian signals at Highway 20 and Oak Street

03 RESPONSE TO MERIT CRITERIA

1: Equity and Environmental Justice

Equipping Disadvantaged Communities with Resilient Infrastructure

The proposed trail and streetscape improvements bring safer and affordable transportation options to Decatur’s disadvantaged and historically underserved communities, most notably Old Town Decatur.

Before the City’s urban renewal efforts of the 1970s, Old Town Decatur was home to a bustling mixed-use community and considered a thriving hub of the Black community. Long-time residents remember family-owned businesses of grocery stores, markets, a barber shop, and a theater before the Urban Renewal period. **It was a place of commerce, socialization, and community building.** In the 1970s, Old Town’s historic buildings along Vine Street, the major commercial corridor, were demolished, and the land was converted to single family residential land use. While some new residences have been constructed, **much of the land today is vacant and hasn’t seen reinvestment in decades.** With the removal of Vine Street’s commercial destinations, residents are forced to rely on services and shopping outside of their neighborhood.

Wilson Street, now Highway 20, was once a neighborhood-scale roadway that was a part of Old Town Decatur. Today, it is a five-lane highway that sees nearly 30,000 annual average daily trips and significant freight truck traffic. Highway 20 physically divides the Old Town neighborhood and disconnects residents from riverfront green spaces,

stores, services, and places of historic and cultural significance.

The long-lasting effects of the Urban Renewal period, historic disinvestment in the community, and the **barrier of Highway 20** have created significant barriers to economic opportunity and access to essential community destinations (a list of destinations the project will improve access to is provided on page 11).

Consequently, today, Old Town Decatur and the surrounding neighborhoods experience high rates of poverty and environmental burdens. According to the Climate and Environmental Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) and the EJ Screen database, **92% of the project corridor is located within disadvantaged communities.** The communities within the project corridor are predominantly low-income and have high rates of asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and low life expectancy. All tracts experience significant climate change and environmental justice burdens, **reporting over the 90th percentile for projected flood risk and expected population loss.** See Table 1 for selected CEJST tract information and Table 2 for EJ Screen demographics.

The proposed project brings active transportation infrastructure as an affordable and convenient transportation option to some of Decatur’s most historically underserved and disadvantaged communities facing environmental, health, economic, and transportation disparities.

Table 1. CEJST Indicators of the Project’s Disadvantaged Communities

FACTOR	INDICATOR	TRACT INFORMATION (2010 CENSUS BOUNDARIES)		
		OLD TOWN COMMUNITY	WESTERN RIVERFRONT	EASTERN RIVERFRONT
		01103000600 Population: 2,538	01103000400 Population: 3,920	01103000100 Population: 4,069
Transportation	Transportation Barriers	92nd Percentile	15th Percentile	89th Percentile
Climate Change	Projected Flood Risk	96th Percentile	92nd Percentile	92nd Percentile
	Expected Population Loss	95th Percentile	95th Percentile	95th Percentile
Income, Poverty, and Living Costs	Low Income	98th Percentile	66th Percentile	83rd Percentile
	Housing Cost	96th Percentile	49th Percentile	69th Percentile
	Poverty	93rd Percentile	42nd Percentile	90th Percentile
Health	Asthma	94th Percentile	52nd Percentile	86th Percentile
	Diabetes	98th Percentile	72nd Percentile	93rd Percentile
	Heart Disease	94th Percentile	67th Percentile	96th Percentile
	Low Life Expectancy	97th Percentile	87th Percentile	98th Percentile
Legacy Pollution	Proximity to Risk Management Plan Facilities	98th Percentile	90th Percentile	79th Percentile

Source: <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov>

Table 2. Demographics (EJ Screen EPA Region 4)

ATTRIBUTES	BLOCK GROUP AND NEIGHBORHOOD				
	WEST OLD TOWN	SOUTH OLD TOWN	NORTH OLD TOWN	RIVERFRONT (MARKET ST NE)	RIVERFRONT (RHODES FERRY PARK)
	011030006001	011030006002	011030004003	011030001001	011030004004
People of Color Population	85th Percentile	91st Percentile	98th Percentile	75th Percentile	34th Percentile
Less than High School Education	97th Percentile	91st Percentile	52nd Percentile	89th Percentile	74th Percentile

Source: <https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper>

2: Access and Connectivity

The trail, either as a shared use path or separated on-street facility, will provide Decatur residents and visitors of all ages with a comfortable trail to travel to destinations such as Ingalls Harbor, Point Mallard Park, schools, multiple neighborhood parks, places of employment, places of worship, and community services. Old Town Decatur and the nearby Moulton Heights neighborhoods are majority African American with a high percentage of aging populations in Old Town Decatur (22% in Census Tract 6), residents with disabilities (15% in Census Tract 6), and **over 500 households without a vehicle** in Census Tracts 1, 4, 6, and 7. According to American Community Survey results, **one of the most common disabilities reported was ambulatory in nature**, meaning many disabled residents have difficulty walking or moving around. Sections of Old Town Decatur are part of a naturally occurring

retirement community with many long-time residents aging in their homes. Many of the project roadway corridors lack safe multimodal transportation options for residents who lack a car and otherwise rely on accessing transit, walking, or using a wheelchair or other assistive device.

Residents of Old Town Decatur do not have access to public transportation as buses do not provide service within Old Town.

The hundreds of households without access to a vehicle are left to rely on walking and biking to get around their community. The lack of safe intersections and accessible walking and biking infrastructure make it difficult for residents to access education, grocery stores, and recreation. The Moulton Heights and West Decatur neighborhoods are also in a food desert with little access to healthy food options.

The project includes an enhanced crossing of Highway 20 at Oak Street, improvements to the existing pedestrian bridge over the railroad, shared use paths, Universal Design improvements, and accessible and safe walking and bicycling facilities that connect residents directly to Benjamin Davis Elementary, numerous churches, convenience stores, parks, jobs, and riverfront destinations. The project will provide increased access to Ingalls Harbor, which includes plans for a \$30 million residential and commercial development that will become a future employment center. The proposed infrastructure provides inclusive walking and biking improvements that provide new access and improved connectivity to everyday needs and services. Upgrading these roadways with active transportation facilities also provides an opportunity to address challenging and

inaccessible intersections and sidewalks. The project will develop improved signalization, safety measures, paving, and lighting. **The separated walking and biking facilities, Universal Design elements, and streetscape improvements combine to offer safer transportation options.**

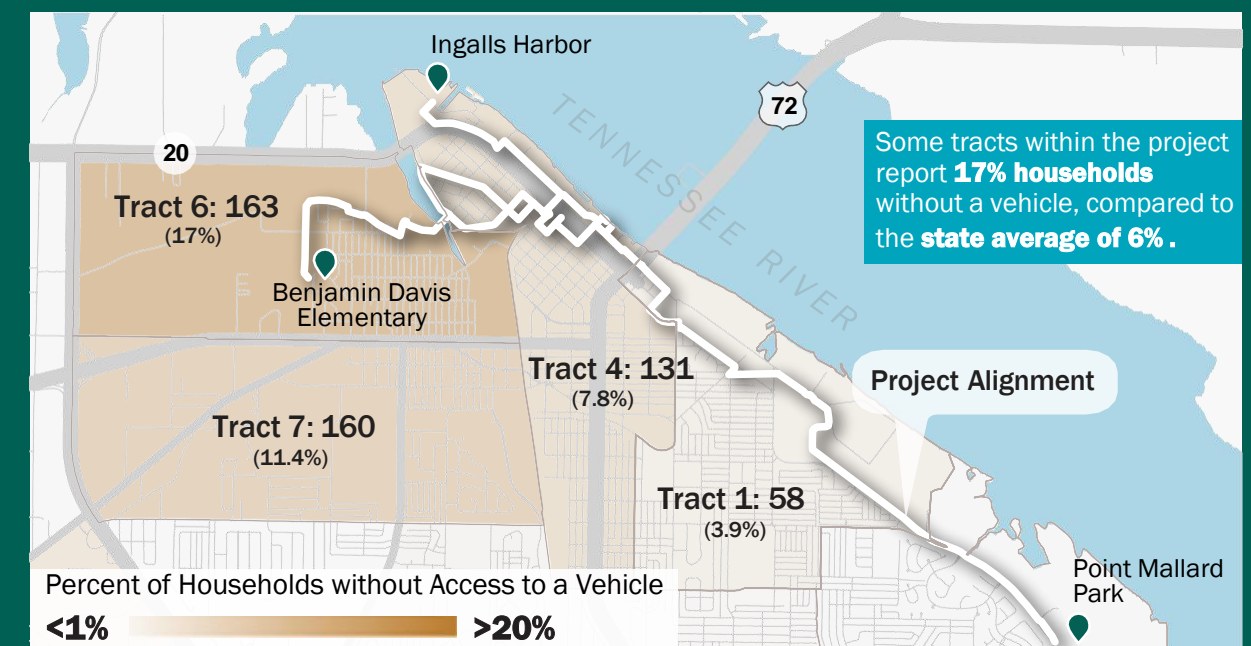


A bicyclist is pictured here crossing Highway 20 to access a convenience store on the north side of the street. All along Decatur's riverfront, Highway 20 poses a threat to cyclist and pedestrian safety.



Improvements to the Bill Sims Trail include new landscaped separation from the roadway to increase safety and comfort for those walking, biking, or rolling to riverfront destinations.

Number of Households without Access to a Vehicle by Census Tract



Source: ACS 2021 5-year estimates. Census Table B08201

3: Facility Suitability

The expansion of Highway 20 divided the Old Town community and is now a major barrier between Old Town and destinations, jobs, recreation, and the riverfront. Residents often try to walk or bike across Highway 20 to access destinations along the riverfront. Additionally, many of the roadways internal to Old Town, like Vine Street and adjoining roadways, **lack walking and bicycling facilities and accessible active transportation options**, creating significant burdens to accessing commercial, recreational, employment, and educational destinations throughout Decatur. Many of the popular recreation amenities that are used by the local community, like Point

Mallard Park and Rhodes Ferry, are on the north side of Highway 20.

As Old Town residents do not have public transportation options, residents without vehicles rely on walking and bicycling. Sidewalks exist in sections, but many are **not accessible and in need of repair**. These are significant barriers to all residents, but most significantly to the elderly and disabled population who may rely on mobility assistive devices for daily transportation needs. **Bicycle lanes, bicycle boulevards, crosswalks, and signage are not in place to support residents getting around by bicycle. If left unimproved, the lack of walking and bicycling facilities and**

Destinations along the Project



- Point Mallard Park
- Wolverine Park
- Jesse Lewis Smith Park
- Rhodes Ferry Park
- Founders Park
- Etta Freeman Park
- A.C. Banks Baseball Field
- William "Butch" Matthews Field
- Elizabeth "Sister" Johnson Park
- Carrie Matthews Pool
- Decatur Cemetery Sterrs Addition
- Malone Park



- Cook Museum of Natural Sciences
- Scottsboro Boys Civil Rights Museum
- Carnegie Visual Arts Center
- Historic Decatur Rail Depot
- Old State Bank



- Ingalls Harbor
- Jimmy Johns Tennis Complex
- Point Mallard Campground
- Point Mallard Golf Course
- BCBS Bike Share: Rhodes Ferry and Point Mallard



- Decatur Housing Authority
- Riverside Senior Living
- City Center Village Senior Community
- Boys and Girls Club of Decatur
- Boys and Girls Club of Morgan County
- Sterrs Day Care Center
- Turner-Surles Community Resource Center
- First Baptist Church Decatur
- Carnegie Visual Arts Center
- Centers for the Developmentally Challenged
- Decatur Youth Enrichment
- Morningside of Decatur Senior Living



- Wolverine Industries
- Building Construction Associates
- AMP Quality Energy Services
- Hyosung
- GE Appliances
- Gobble-Fite Lumber Company
- Market St NE businesses
- Alabama Farmers Co-op
- Plastic Recyclers SE
- Bunge Packaging Plant
- Decatur Utilities Water Treatment Plant
- Ardent Mills Decatur Mill
- Doubletree Hotel
- Home2Suites
- Future hotel on riverfront



- Benjamin Davis Elementary School
- Leon Sheffield Magnet Elementary
- Horizon High School
- Eastwood Elementary School



Using space between existing curbs, this improvement to the existing Bill Sims Trail will upgrade bicycle lanes to provide a high-quality, safe, and separated walkway and bikeway.

accessibility improvements will continue to limit safe transportation options for the hundreds of residents without a vehicle.

The proposed project includes the development of a **multimodal corridor with walking and biking facilities** along with accessibility improvements to increase access for residents of all ages and abilities, especially to essential services like food and healthcare. The improved intersection at Highway 20 and Oak Street NE will include new accessible pedestrian signals and high visibility crosswalks. The trail will also improve the current undercrossing of Highway 20 at Railroad Street NW near the historic Dancy-Polk house. **These improvements will create two accessible crossings of Highway 20 and improve safety conditions for residents traveling from Old Town to riverfront destinations.**

In working with CEOTA and local stakeholders, the project will incorporate context-sensitive design elements through signage, wayfinding, lighting,

and streetscape features that reflect the character of the community and meet the community's needs. New trees and landscaped islands will be added to reduce the urban heat island and capture stormwater.

Additionally, the Decatur MPO is undergoing a feasibility study for a new bridge to alleviate congestion on the "Steamboat Bill" Memorial Bridges, the existing Highway 20 bridges that provide the main access between the Huntsville Metropolitan Statistical Area and Decatur. One of the project's goals is to alleviate the congestion on Highway 20/Wilson Street as it travels along Decatur's riverfront and allow Wilson Street to serve as a city street again. The planning study is currently assessing new potential bridge locations and will be complete by the end of the year. **The proposed trail project works in tandem with this effort** and will coordinate efforts to transform Wilson Street back to a human-scale riverfront streetscape.

4: Community Engagement and Community-Based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships

As part of the grant application process, community and stakeholder engagement played a key role in defining the project scope and will continue to be an essential part of informing the project moving forward. A **grant application steering committee** comprised of stakeholders from the City of Decatur, Decatur MPO, and the Old Town community was formed to understand the community's needs and met weekly to ensure the plan reflected the community most impacted. Moving forward, this project will be guided by a **Community Advisory Board**.

In past planning efforts, most notably the One Decatur Comprehensive Plan, the City of Decatur engaged residents through a variety of outreach efforts including small group listening sessions, public meetings, project summit, project website, interactive map, and surveys. Together, these events engaged over 1,000 residents. Project announcements were made via newspaper, radio, and social media. Currently, the Decatur MPO has engaged hundreds of residents through the recent Tennessee River Bridge Feasibility Study. The community engagement plan for this project will include robust engagement to mirror One Decatur, informed by best practices from that effort.

The project team will work closely with local stakeholders, especially Old Town residents. Old Town community members, alongside local historians, have created the CEOTA nonprofit to preserve Old Town's history and educate the public. These leaders have collected oral histories, placed historical markers, created over 300 paintings of Old

Town's historic buildings, and established a walking tour around Old Town. **This proposed project will coordinate closely with CEOTA to engage local residents and build trust.**

Ongoing community partners in this project will include CEOTA, Dr. Bill Sims, the Singing River Trail, Decatur Morgan County Tourism, Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority, the City of Decatur, Tennessee RiverLine, the Housing Authority, and The Scottsboro Boys Civil Rights Museum. The committee will continue to reach out to local businesses, nonprofits, youth programs, and underrepresented groups to gather feedback. As part of this project, a Community Participation Plan will be developed that includes the following initiatives:

- **Engage** with CEOTA and Old Town stakeholders through working and listening sessions and community meetings.
- **Work** closely with a community advisory board that provides feedback on project development and helps facilitate meaningful local engagement.
- **Coordinate** closely with existing workforce development programs that are part of the Morgan County Economic Development Association, Decatur Youth Services, Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce, Decatur City Schools, and Calhoun Community College.
- **Foster** partnerships with private, public, and nonprofit entities listed above and continue to identify new project partners.

5: Equitable Development

The City of Decatur has a long history of supporting affordable housing, mixed-use/mixed-income development, placemaking, recreational green space, and the preservation of historic sites. The following are opportunities provided by this trail project to advance equitable development.

Foster Public and Private Investment to Support New Jobs

The Decatur-Morgan County Entrepreneurial Center (E-Center) is an existing program that provides space at a reduced rate to people seeking to start micro-enterprise businesses on the condition that they make every attempt to employ residents from the City's target areas. The current target areas as identified by the City of Decatur Community Development Department include Northwest Decatur and Old Town, two underserved communities. This project will provide an opportunity for new trail-oriented businesses through the E-Center's Incubator program.

In addition, the trail and site improvements along the riverfront and into Old Town will encourage the establishment of new businesses and new private investment. A \$30 million-dollar commercial project is already planned for Ingalls Harbor. The active transportation facilities and new site improvements will encourage continued public and private investment along the project corridor and provide access to new jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Additionally, streetscape improvements along Vine St encourage **new commercial development within Old Town, providing residents with new economic opportunity and community wealth building.**

Celebrate Local History and Culture

The project will celebrate local history and culture through the trail and placemaking along the corridor. The streetscape along Vine Street will be enhanced with new sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, and accessibility improvements, providing opportunity for historic interpretation, educational signage, and local art to tell the history of the once thriving and vibrant Black commercial district in Old Town.

Specifically, the trail effort will work in concert with local partners and efforts to tell the Civil Rights history in Decatur. Local stakeholders and members of CEOTA are working to make Old Town a **UNESCO historical site and Civil Rights district**. CEOTA is looking to extend the Civil Rights trail from where it ends in Birmingham to Decatur. In coordinating with CEOTA, the project will work with the **Scottsboro Boys Civil Rights Museum**, which lies along the future trail corridor. An example of preservation, Judge James Horton's home is currently being moved to Old Town to be part of the museum. The house will tell the story of the Scottsboro Boys Trial of Haywood Patterson, which Judge Horton presided over amid heavy pressure from a racist court system and stopped the second death penalty. Trail users, both visitors and residents, will be connected directly to this museum as well as the historic First Missionary Baptist Church, a meeting place for several Civil Rights cases.

Leverage Existing Partnerships to Foster Equitable Development

The City of Decatur receives a Community Development Block Grant, \$600,000 per year, to improve the quality of life for low- to moderate-income residents. The target areas for the block grant include Northwest Decatur and the Old Town community. The proposed project incorporates Vine Street redevelopment and public facility improvements, which were identified as top priorities in the latest Community Development Department Action Plan FY 23-24. The Community Development Block Grant program also offers down payment assistance to promote home ownership and foster neighborhood stability. Significant recent accomplishments include the development of Seville Homes, 24-home single family affordable housing development for low- to moderate-income Decatur families in partnership with the Community Action Partnership of North Alabama. These existing relationships, partnerships, and successful initiatives demonstrate the City's commitment to equitable development.

The Decatur Housing Authority and the City of Decatur work together on several projects and support each other's efforts in making Decatur a better place to live for all.

Decatur Community Development Action Plan FY 23-24

Provide Opportunities for Affordable Housing and Commercial Business

The investment of this trail project will generate development interest – in fact, developers are already taking an interest in Old Town. The City has a long tradition of providing affordable housing and mixed-income opportunities for housing and small businesses. One example is the nearby Kings Estate that provides home ownership opportunities for low-income residents. The City will work with developers to provide a diversity of housing and commercial opportunities.



Photo source: MSNHA

Frances Tate of CEOTA

Local stakeholders and members of the CEOTA organization are working to make Old Town a UNESCO historical site and Civil Rights district. CEOTA is advocating to extend the Civil Rights trail from where it ends in Birmingham to Decatur and establish the Scottsboro Boys Civil Rights Museum. Frances Tate will be part of the community advisory board for this project.



6: Climate and Environment

The roadways in the study area have been designed and maintained to accommodate cars, especially for commuting and industrial traffic. Residents are exposed to significant levels of transportation-related air pollution from freight truck traffic and Highway 20. Per CEJST, census tracts surrounding the project area rank among the **highest (94%) for asthma, which can be worsened by air pollution.**

The high amount of pavement in these wide roads creates heat island zones that are disproportionately affecting low income and underserved communities. The significant amount of impervious surfaces and lack of stormwater infrastructure in places has caused flooding in the Moulton Heights Neighborhood. With continued extreme weather events, intense heat waves and large rain events threaten these communities. Per the Trust for Public Land, **all of the project area is located in a moderate to severe urban heat island zone.** The majority of the area is also ranked in the highest national percentile for flood risk (EJScreen).

The proposed facilities provide residents with a safe, convenient, accessible, and high-quality walking and biking route. The shared use paths and sidewalks create a walkable community with more attractive green space. The proposed facilities will create safer and more convenient active transportation walking and biking facilities, **reducing and replacing vehicle trips, improving air quality in underserved communities, and reducing carbon emissions.** Having more walking and biking opportunities encourages fewer car trips, which minimizes air and noise pollution,

since residents could more easily walk or bike to everything they need on a day-to-day basis.

Decatur's Comprehensive Plan calls for improved aesthetics on city streets on public and private property, particularly near city gateways. Part of this is executed as a tree planting and street tree replacement program, with particular attention to tree preservation and the installation of shade trees. Both Benjamin Davis and Butch Matthews Ballparks have bleachers that lie along the route of the proposed trail. By including shade trees in the corridor planting plan, this proposed project will aid in reducing solar radiation on key park facilities that are in need of shade in hot summer months. Trees and new landscaped areas will be provided along new and improved trail facilities.

With the opportunity to redesign the roadway corridor with low-impact design techniques and green infrastructure, **the project will add more permeable surfaces and new stormwater infrastructure to capture and control water from flood events.** Where possible, the streetscape will be lined with trees and native plantings, addressing shade equity, adding cooling elements to the urban center, and providing green infrastructure. Planted islands with native shrubs and trees will be located along separated bicycle facilities. The above-mentioned factors improve resilience to extreme storm events and reduce the urban heat island effect.

7: Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

The City of Decatur has a long history and tradition of manufacturing jobs. The City seeks to expand upon this and diversify its workforce through this project by bringing increased tourism, outdoor recreation, arts, and small business-entrepreneur opportunities. The City will continue working with existing workforce development programs, including those with a focus on underserved communities. The City is committed to the use of DBEs, WBEs, and MBEs in the selection of the design consultant and construction contractor for this project. The following key areas are opportunities to address workforce development and economic opportunity through this project.

Leverage Existing Workforce Development and Entrepreneurship Programs

Through a variety of initiatives, the City of Decatur and its partners support workforce development programs. Decatur Youth Services supports youth services and workforce development through a workforce development class. Additionally, Calhoun Community College supports workforce development programs with many of the industries along the river. These workforce development programs actively train and place workers in skilled and well-paying positions. The proposed trail project will support continued riverfront development and the creation of more jobs in Decatur. Additional workforce development programs that will provide opportunities for engagement with this project are provided in Table 3 on the following page.

Many of the people have to walk to work, and this means they can walk or ride their bike to work safely.

Wylheme H. Ragland, Scottsboro Boys Civil Rights Museum Board of Directors member and Old Town historian

Provide Better Access to High-Paying Jobs and Economic Opportunity

With new walking and biking facilities and improved railroad and Highway 20 crossings, Old Town residents can more easily access new jobs along the riverfront. Several hotels are in the planning stage and will be developed along the riverfront area. In addition, there are good and high-paying industrial jobs along the riverfront. By connecting these underserved communities directly to these new major employment centers, those without automobile access will have safe and accessible routes to jobs in these areas as well as entrepreneurship opportunities in the tourism industry.

Project Website

Additional project information including past plans, list of community partners, and current initiatives can be viewed at the project website:

<https://www.cityofdecatur.com/RCN>

Table 3. Workforce Development Programs

LOCAL ORGANIZATION	PROGRAM DESCRIPTION
Calhoun Community College	The Workforce Solutions department provides training for individuals, particularly for local industry opportunities. Provides free adult GED preparation and employability skills courses. Registered apprenticeships are provided.
Alabama Community College System's Innovation Center	The "Skills for Success" program provides free industry-recognized training to help prepare residents for the workforce (new center just opened in Decatur in 2023).
Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce	Provides a Diversity Development Program and Workforce Development Board, ensuring that every member of the community has access to the knowledge and skills to succeed in the workplace.
Decatur-Morgan County Entrepreneurial Center	Based in Decatur, assists with business incubation, expanding/diversifying economy, business coaching, and leadership development. Assists with Launch Tank, annual entrepreneur competition with focus on Singing River Trail.
Decatur-Morgan County Minority Development Association (DMDA)	DMDA provides students with information about jobs available, training opportunities, and job placement. DMDA and partners focus on diversity and inclusion for a healthier work environment.
Cook Museum of Natural Science	Provides STEM program and provides free options for low-income communities, preparing children for tech and STEM workforce.
NARCOG Accelerate Business Growth Fund	Supports local business and economic diversification through funding and loan options.
Decatur Youth Enrichment	Enriches children's knowledge through academic tutoring, art, music, and drama towards becoming productive workers in their community, with a focus on serving minority communities.

Regional Workforce Development Efforts – Annual Launch Tank



Selah's Acres Luxury Camping

The Singing River Trail (SRT) nonprofit works with Launch 2035 to host annual events through the SRT Launch Tank to support local entrepreneurs with coaching, financial support, and mentorship. In 2022, the winner established Fellows Faith Enterprises, an African American and family-owned business that offers camping and recreation through Selah's Acres Luxury Camping.

04 PROJECT READINESS

Overview

The City of Decatur and its project partners have a demonstrated history of implementing significant infrastructure projects and delivering federally funded projects. In addition, a significant amount of planning and concept development has already been completed for this project. The 2022-2023 Singing River Trail Master Plan, which included significant stakeholder and public involvement, identified this project corridor as a priority and provided detailed project cut sheets and pre-engineering estimates. **In addition, the Decatur MPO is committed to adding this project to its Metropolitan Transportation Plan and ultimately to the State of Alabama TIP list (please see the attached Decatur MPO letter of support).**

Technical Assessment

The City of Decatur and its project partners have a demonstrated history of successfully planning and implementing significant federally funded infrastructure projects. The City has the capacity and experience to deliver this project to meet Federal requirements. The City will lead the administrative requirements of grant management and will conduct reviews during the design and construction submittal process. The City will also oversee the CEI process. For day-to-day management, a project manager will be assigned for all construction-related issues and a grant coordinator assigned for grant-related tracking and compliance.

As described, the City has managed multiple federal grants and large infrastructure projects in recent years. As of this writing, the City’s grant group has overseen or is overseeing 23 grants totaling over \$30.5 million. For example, the City received and successfully delivered a \$14.2 million FY 2018 BUILD grant for an overpass bridge at Highway 20 and Bibb Garrett Road. Other successful federal grants that the City has or is managing include:

- \$14.2 million BUILD grant
- \$414,000 Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Grant
- \$2 million Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Bridge Feasibility Study
- \$10.8 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- \$600,000 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) annual funding
- \$413,000 Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)
- \$524,572 Department of Homeland Security Port Security Grant Program (PSGP)

The City will follow all federal requirements on this project, including procurement, Title VI/Civil Rights requirements, and compliance with design and service standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Department of Justice and DOT implementing regulations. The project is mostly in existing right-of-way and will not require relocation of any commercial or residential properties.

Financial Completeness Assessment

The project is estimated to cost \$18,407,687.76. This proposal requests 100% of the project cost (\$18,407,687.76) in NAE grant funding to implement project improvements that would reconnect Old Town and increase equity, safety, sustainability, quality of life, and health in Decatur. Cost estimates were developed, through conceptual design and use of the most recent ALDOT bid tabulations, by a national engineering firm with extensive experience designing and overseeing roadway and trail infrastructure projects. Projected construction costs were calculated based on 2027 dollars, and 7% inflation over four years was added to reflect the anticipated construction timeline. Costs for project administration, full design, permitting, construction, and CEI are provided with contingency and inflation factors to prevent cost overruns. Given the continued impact of the COVID-19

pandemic on construction costs, the costs were updated again for this application and were verified by the engineers who have been in the field. The full engineering cost estimate can be provided upon request by the reviewers.

Environmental Risk (see Appendix A for more comprehensive documentation of environmental risk)

Assuming a notice of NAE award in early 2024, the schedule projects that design and permitting would be completed in mid-2026, and construction completed in late 2028. See the schedule below for more specifics.

NEPA – It is anticipated that the project merits a Categorical Exclusion (CE), which will be completed alongside project design. Thus, no delay associated with NEPA is expected. The vast majority of construction will be occurring within the roadway right-of-way, with limited impacts.

Permits are anticipated to be required, with no delays. **See “Appendix A: Environmental Risk” for list of anticipated permits.**

Project Schedule

	2024				2025				2026				2027				2028			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Notice of Award	█																			
RCN Grant Agreement Contract	█	█	█	█																
Design + Engineering					█	█	█	█												
NEPA Documentation/Permitting					█	█	█	█												
Acquisition/Easements					█	█	█	█												
Construction Bidding											█	*								
Construction and Construction Administration											█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

*FY23 Obligation Deadline - Sept 30, 2026