

A Wayfinding and Signage System for Atlanta, Georgia

Program Document

Final Submittal

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This is a project of CAP and the Midtown Alliance in conjunction with DACID and MID. GDOT, GRTA, MARTA, ARC and the City of Atlanta will also participate.

● Introduction

Wayfinding can be defined as the orderly structuring of information required to enable people to comfortably and successfully access an environment. Signage, when designed in an aesthetic appropriate to the surroundings, provides an effective method to communicate wayfinding information to specific audiences. Such signage can be thought of as both a practical necessity and a public relations tool. But signage alone cannot always solve difficult wayfinding problems in man-made spaces. User-intuited wayfinding is best achieved when all the elements of landscaping, streetscapes, architecture and signage reinforce each other.

This project was envisioned as the design and implementation of a multi-level wayfinding and signage system, modeled on successful urban systems in other cities.

The system will be designed to improve the access and connectivity within the Atlanta area (as defined approximately from the I-75/I-85 split north of Midtown to Turner Field to the south, the Carter Center to the east and the Atlanta University Center to the west). The system will also be designed to direct pedestrians effectively within a select group of districts or areas (Downtown, Midtown, Fairlie-Poplar, and Sweet Auburn, for example). The project will include both pedestrian and vehicular signage.

● Project Goals

The following is a list of goals that should be achieved with the development of a wayfinding and signage program for the city of Atlanta.

- Provide wayfinding which considers primarily the first-time visitor to Atlanta;
- Improve access, identification and connectivity to the six AREAS in Downtown and Midtown and the destinations within them;
- Further enhance Atlanta's public image through distinctive, helpful graphics, to make Downtown and Midtown Atlanta more "user friendly";
- Reflect Atlanta's structure and vision;
- Improve vehicular, pedestrian and cycling safety by better informing visitors;
- Create a memorable experience;
- Provide the information people need to comfortably access area businesses, attractions, parks, historic buildings and meeting venues;
- Provide better and timelier information and reduce misdirected travel;
- Increase the number of people who visit/use Downtown and Midtown Atlanta;
- Provide pedestrian signage in various areas to increase pedestrian traffic;
- Help drivers locate and identify parking convenient to their destination;
- Improve the connection between MARTA and destinations in a defined area;
- Address ADA legibility guidelines in the design of the program;
- Serve as a potential model for wayfinding throughout the Atlanta Region and State.

● Existing Wayfinding & Signage Analysis

The project areas, while varying in environmental, architectural and visual character, are by and large inviting. Wayfinding and signage along the key I-75/85 corridor does support by name access to the majority of primary vehicular streets as well as a number of the named destinations. As far as existing wayfinding to larger named geographic areas, there is some acknowledgement of the terms "Midtown" and "Downtown," but it is spotty and inconsistent.

The sign systems that were implemented during the Centennial Olympic Games remain in evidence primarily in the pedestrian map kiosks. There are 15 to 25 of these existing units in the project area. Georgia-Pacific has committed to the cost of updating the mapping information. It would be our desire to see such an effort coordinated with the resulting pedestrian map design work anticipated as part of the new program.

One also sees the usual array of directional signs that have been erected to direct visitors to the major traffic-generating destinations. It is unfortunate, however, that the signs that have recently been erected vary widely in their design, and are too small and too complex to be effective in directing people. It would be our intent that the signs designed as part of this program replace these existing directional signs.

The following items contribute to **wayfinding difficulties** in Atlanta:

- The apparent lack of a consistent street grid;
- Interstate highways that meander through the City, disorienting the visitor's reference to the cardinal directions;
- Many of the city streets themselves meander and are often misaligned at intersections, or take off at slightly different angles.
- The vast majority of parking venues in the study area are privately owned.
- Recognizing that Atlanta is positioning itself as the "Gateway to the Americas," considerations should be made in the program for those whose first language is other than English.

The following items are unique characteristics of Atlanta that **assist wayfinding**:

- Atlanta already has established areas or districts whose names, if not relative locations, are well recognized.
- The high number of exits from the three Interstate highways (I-75, I-85, I-20) concentrated within the central area affords numerous opportunities to introduce and reinforce the wayfinding system.
- MARTA is an effective mass transit system with many stations well located in the area. MARTA's use should be reinforced.
- The City would like to consider reusing and possibly expanding the use of the pedestrian maps and/or their structures that were put in place during the Centennial Olympics.
- Peachtree Street provides a continuous point of reference within the study area, running through its entirety, north and south.

● Concepts

It is important to keep in mind that the new program will be designed primarily for first-time visitors, bike and transit users. Thus, the management of information and the design concepts are directed primarily to this audience. The concepts that will guide the design of the program are these:

- Structure a formal information hierarchically starting with geographic AREA names that are already in use (such as "Midtown" and "King Historic District"); moving next to the names of specific DESTINATIONS; and ultimately calling out PARKING related to each. Also provide wayfinding information necessary to easily exit each AREA to access the Interstate highways or a limited number of primary arteries "leaving town".
- Provide vehicular signage along a limited number of major streets: streets that lead from freeway exits; streets that extend the entire length or breadth of the Downtown and Midtown AREAS; or streets that lead to a number of public DESTINATIONS or parking for them.
- Direct people first to a geographic AREA before directing them to specific DESTINATIONS and PARKING within the AREA.
- Consistently use the AREA names in supporting wayfinding.
- Acknowledge the AREA location of each parking venue.
- Prioritize the public DESTINATIONS, creating three "classes" of destinations:

Primary Destinations are destinations that are of the greatest importance to first-time visitors. Destinations typical of this class are the Georgia Dome and the High Museum. (Directions to AREAS and primary destinations will be supported on vehicular as well as pedestrian directional signage and maps.)

Secondary Destinations are destinations that are also important to visitors. Destinations typical of this class are the State Capitol and the Auburn Avenue Research Library. MARTA stations are considered secondary destinations, in that they are primarily of interest to pedestrians. (Directions to secondary destinations will be supported on pedestrian directional signage and pedestrian maps.)

Local Destinations are of interest to residents and repeat visitors as well as first-time visitors. They include commercial destinations of interest to all, such as hotels and major buildings. Other destinations typical of this class are churches, schools and theaters. (The location of local destinations will be provided on pedestrian maps only.)

● Areas and Destinations

Initial team meetings defined as many as twelve potential "named" AREAS:

Downtown	Georgia Tech
Midtown	Sweet Auburn/King Historic District
Carter Center	Centennial Olympic Park Area
Government Walk	Capitol Hill
Fairlie-Poplar	Sports/Convention Venues
Georgia State University	Atlanta University Center

Upon further consideration, some of these AREAS were seen more as singular DESTINATIONS rather than as geographic areas. Further, in our experience, calling out twelve top-level wayfinding "targets" for a first-time visitor could be overwhelming. (A reasonable test that might be used to decide if an area "nameable" is whether or not a taxi driver would know where to take someone who asked for an area by that name.)

The geographic AREAS were ultimately defined as follows: (Boundaries of these AREAS are illustrated on an accompanying map)

Downtown
Midtown
King Historic District
Sports/Convention Venues
Government Walk
Atlanta University Center

Still at issue is the name for the Sports/Convention Venues AREA. Several alternatives have been discussed.

Centennial Olympic	Centennial Olympic Park Area
Centennial	Olympic Center
Olympic Park	Westown

The term "Westown" fits well with the terms "Downtown" and "Midtown" and gives the first-time visitor a certain point of reference to the location of the AREA, however it could easily be confused with the West End, already in use.

Any of the terms based on the word "Olympic" fit well with the recent heritage of the area, Centennial Olympic Park being preserved from the Olympic events. The fact that many of the DESTINATIONS in this area are, themselves, event related, provides a certain fit as well. It seems logical that the City of Atlanta could forever celebrate the 1996 Olympics by using some form of this term to name this important and busy area of Downtown Atlanta.

Both Olympic Park and Olympic Center seem to garner the most support. For the moment, it was decided to use **Centennial Olympic Park Area**. This was the name given much of this area during the Centennial Olympics. (*We recognize that the City may have to ask permission from the International Olympic Committee to use the word "Olympic" in naming this area.*)

We invite other suggestions for naming this AREA, but feel strongly that the AREA as drawn does warrant a distinct name for the purposes of aiding wayfinding. Further, that name must not favor one venue over another by borrowing terminology from the name of a particular venue. And, lastly, we suggest that the name of the MARTA station serving this area be changed to match the name selected for the AREA.

Since the names suggested for the six AREAS are strong and, for the most part, already in common usage throughout many media, we do not believe there would be any advantage to developing unique symbols, or icons, for each AREA. We believe there is merit in developing a color palette that assigns a unique color to each AREA to support wayfinding.

These color "assignments" have been suggested:

Teal Downtown
Dark Blue Midtown
Gold/Copper... Government Walk
Red..... Centennial Olympic Park Area
Brown King Historic District
Purple Atlanta University Center
Forest Green .. (reserved for Buckhead's participation at some future date)

As a note of clarification, wayfinding will not support destinations within the Atlanta University Center District. However, the Atlanta University Center District will be directed to, from neighboring districts. Georgia Tech and Georgia State campuses will be treated in a similar fashion.

As previously noted, there is a strong argument to establish a three-level hierarchy for all public destinations supported in the program: Primary, Secondary and Local. The enclosed listing of Wayfinding Destinations is a preliminary compilation of all the destinations that have been identified at this time. Working with the Task Force, a consensus should be established to finalize the list and position each destination within the hierarchy.

The accompanying map also identifies and locates the destinations that have been identified to date.

● **Primary Vehicular Routes**

Recognizing there will be further debate and evaluation as to which are the most important vehicular routes for the program, it is our objective to define a reasonable number of city streets along which the vehicular wayfinding elements will occur.

Peachtree Street will be viewed as the strongest axis or organizational route in the system. We feel there is benefit in the final design solution to distinguishing this route from the other primary routes through the use of special hardware or design elements. This concept is illustrated in the conceptual signage designs included in this document.

Apart from the three Interstate highways (I-75, I-85, I-20), an accompanying map defines six primary north/south arteries and seven east/west arteries in addition to three secondary, but key, east/west routes we believe will figure prominently in this program. They are:

<i>Primary North/South</i>	<i>Primary East/West</i>	<i>Secondary East/West</i>
Peachtree Street	14th Street	Ponce de Leon Avenue
Piedmont Avenue	10th Street	Freedom Parkway
Spring Street	North Avenue	Simpson Street
Juniper/Courtland	Auburn Avenue	
Williams/Cent. Olympic Pk. Dr.	International Blvd.	
Northside Drive	Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive	
	Central	

West Peachtree remains a somewhat debatable corridor for inclusion. While it is an often-used thoroughway, we believe promoting it for the purposes of wayfinding to first-time visitors may present the common problem of understanding the difference between Peachtree Street and West Peachtree Street. Our observation is that West Peachtree Street becomes a learned access route to the repeat visitor. Similarly, we recognize that Spring Street may be considered a less-desirable access route to the first-time visitor, but, for the moment, we've included it.

● **Parking**

Privately owned parking facilities are the primary venues for public parking. As such it will be a challenge to establish and communicate consistent signage and wayfinding standards among them, as well as administer ongoing signage maintenance costs. We do believe that private parking owners would see a value to incorporating into their private identification signage a standard visual component (a graphic and/or panel component) that would present a consistent parking message to the public while displaying visual consistency with the wayfinding program.

● **Early Design Considerations**

The City has indicated its desire to reflect a “timeless” aesthetic in the design of the signage and its hardware, leaning toward the contemporary as opposed to the historic. As part of that aesthetic, we will consider the use of the Resurgence symbol (Phoenix) as a visual metaphor in the design solution.

As noted, there are approximately 15 to 25 Centennial Olympic Pedestrian Map/Information Kiosks located in the study area. The design, size, construction, hardware and component detailing of the structures are elegant, appropriate to their surroundings and, in many cases, in good shape. It may be desirable to allow these elements to inform the sign type design vocabulary.

● **Sign Types**

A number of sign types are under consideration for the system. The system will be comprised of many, if not all, of these sign types:

Vehicular signs will be of several types:

Signs at selected Freeway Off-ramps

G Gateway/Directional Off-Ramp Sign

This sign type would introduce the AREA terminology, and welcome visitors to the AREA at hand. They would also direct visitors to key DESTINATIONS in the immediate vicinity. These are freestanding signs.

Signs along City Streets

DV_F Vehicular Directional Sign (for use on faster speed traffic streets)

This sign type would direct visitors first to nearby primary DESTINATIONS in the vicinity, and, where possible, to adjacent AREAS. Where space allows, these signs would also direct visitors to secondary DESTINATIONS, but only at the last opportunity(ies) to reach these DESTINATIONS, or parking for them. Typography on this sign will have a larger letter height than typography used on DV_S. Larger letters will provide proper legibility for faster moving traffic.

DV_S Vehicular Directional Sign (for use on slower speed traffic streets)

This sign type would direct visitors first to nearby primary DESTINATIONS in the vicinity, and, where possible, to adjacent AREAS. Where space allows, these signs would also direct visitors to secondary DESTINATIONS, but only at the last opportunity(ies) to reach these DESTINATIONS, or parking for them. Typography of this sign will have a smaller letter height than that used on DV_F. Smaller letters will be appropriate to provide proper legibility for slower moving traffic.

IP_1 Parking Identification Sign - Freestanding

This sign type would identify certain major public parking surface parking venues or structures. These signs are seen as separate signs on their own signposts. It is possible that these signs may list DESTINATIONS for which the parking venue is convenient, and may direct users to additional parking (if the parking venue is full). Since the vast majority of public parking in metropolitan Atlanta is privately owned, we need to explore ways that these owners, at their expense, can be encouraged to participate in the wayfinding program.

IP_2 Parking Identification "Augmenting" Sign

Alternatively, this sign type would be an additive element, attached to the parking venue's existing commercial parking identification sign. The "look" of these signs should be similar for all parking venues, and should reflect the "look" of the overall Wayfinding Program. These signs would serve to prominently identify the venue as a participant in the system and as an available public parking venue. As with the Ip.1, we will need to explore ways that the owners, at their expense, can be encouraged to participate in the wayfinding program.

B AREA Banners

These banners would carry the AREA name and could be located along the primary city streets that are determined to be key vehicular routes into the area (and concentrated near the entry points to the various AREAS). Banners, if used, would need to be funded via a cooperative effort among supported venues within the AREA. The design of the banners could be developed as part of the wayfinding program, or could be accomplished by local artists working within carefully defined parameters.

Pedestrian Signage will be of the following types:

DP Pedestrian Directional Signs

These signs would direct visitors to all defined DESTINATIONS using word messages and arrows. They are designed as a much smaller version of the Vehicular Directional signs to promote recognition.

K Pedestrian Map Kiosks

In addition to "placing the viewer within the City" with a more comprehensive map, these signs would illustrate the immediate area (four to six blocks) in detail, including: all public DESTINATIONS; all building names; hotels; parking venues; MARTA stations; ATMs, telephones, government and police facilities. (It is this sign type that may build on the existing pedestrian kiosks left standing from the Centennial Olympic Games.)