



Firefly Trail: A Spark for Athens-Clarke

The Firefly Trail in Athens-Clarke County will connect downtown Athens with Winterville and all the neighborhoods in-between. It will be a 7.7-mile transportation and recreation powerhouse that generates millions for our local economy by enhancing economic opportunities, health, safety, and tourism. Everybody wins!

- The Firefly Trail in Athens-Clarke County (ACC) is part of a bigger trail that will stretch **39 miles** to Union Point and attract a projected **1.1 million users** per year.
- With an estimated **economic impact** of \$14.7 million a year when complete, the Firefly Trail is an investment that will pay for itself many times over.
- The \$16.7 Firefly Trail TSPLOST* project builds on ACC's **current investment** in the trail, funded primarily by previous voter-approved SPLOSTs.
- Trails are a **proven engine** for economic growth, as seen in Traveler's Rest, S.C., where the Swamp Rabbit Trail has spurred major revitalization.
- Because it will be **wide, level, and off-road**, the Firefly Trail will be great for walkers, runners and cyclists of all ages and abilities.
- The Firefly Trail will **improve health** by helping people fight diabetes, obesity, heart attack and stroke.
- By **connecting Athens to Winterville**, the Firefly Trail will serve people both inside and outside the Loop. 84% if the trail in ACC lies outside the Loop.
- With up to **40% of revenue** from out-of-county residents, TSPLOST is like a 40%-off sale for property taxpayers – especially for projects like Firefly Trail that ACC has committed to build.
- Trails can **save lives**. Three cyclists have been killed and a fourth seriously injured since 2014 on roads in the area served by the Firefly Trail.
- Trails can **improve traffic flow** by making active transportation more attractive and reducing the number of cars and bikes on the road.
- Trails may **reduce crime**, as shown in a Rails-to-Trails Conservancy study of 372 trails across the U.S.
- The corridor is under development pressure and won't last forever. **Action now is critical.**



Crews pour concrete for the first segment of the Firefly Trail in Athens-Clarke.

About the referendum

The TSPLOST referendum will be held Tuesday, Nov. 7. Polls will be open from 7 am to 7 pm.

All citizens age 18 and over who are registered to vote in Athens-Clarke County, including the City of Winterville, may cast a ballot. Bring photo ID.

The referendum is a simple "yes" or "no" vote on the entire TSPLOST package.

You must be registered in ACC by Monday, Oct. 10, 2017, to be eligible to vote.

You can check the status of your registration at <https://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov/MVP/mvp.do>.

Early voting will be held at the Athens-Clarke County Board of Elections office, 155 E. Washington St., Monday – Friday from Oct. 16 – Nov. 3 during normal business hours.

If you cannot vote in person, you can request an absentee ballot by contacting the Board of Elections office at 706-613-3150. Don't wait: ballots are mailed on Oct. 16.

* Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax

What is a rail-trail?

A multi-use path for car-free pedestrian and bicycle transportation and recreation.

- *May be any width.* The Firefly Trail is expected to be at least 10 feet wide in rural areas and up to 14 feet wide in high-volume locations.
- *May be paved or unpaved.* Surface materials include packed dirt, crushed cinders/stone, asphalt and concrete. Athens-Clarke is using concrete for the first mile and plans to use either asphalt or concrete for the rest. Outside of ACC, asphalt will be the preferred surface. Some rural segments may use packed crushed stone, and unpaved side paths are proposed for some locations for mountain biking, natural-surface running, and horseback riding.
- A converted rail corridor of any length -- from one-half mile to more than 100. Currently, the longest is Missouri's Katy Trail at 240 miles, but the East Coast Greenway, now under development, will reach more than 3,000 miles from Maine to Florida.
- A linear park/upland greenway connecting neighborhoods and towns. When finished, the Firefly Trail will stretch 39 miles across three counties, connecting Athens, Winterville, Arnoldsville, Crawford, Maxeys, Woodville and Union Point.

Frequently asked questions

What do we get for our \$16.7 million investment?

All rights-of-way for the Firefly Trail in Athens-Clarke County, a railroad-grade bridge over Trail Creek in Dudley Park, and a continuous path through Winterville to the county line.

Can I vote for some projects but not for others?

No. By state law, all projects are part of a single package. It's all or nothing.

I thought trail funding was already approved.

Approval was to include Firefly Trail in the TSPLOST package. Now TSPLOST must be approved by voters before the Firefly Trail can receive any funds. Also, Athens-Clarke County will build and own the trail; Firefly Trail Inc., will continue to serve in an advisory and advocacy role as a partner with ACC.

Are trails a good use of money?

Yes! By creating opportunities for economic development, enhancing health, improving safety, boosting tourism, building community spirit, and fostering active transportation, trails are an excellent investment. We are already hearing from

people who are interested in moving to and/or creating businesses along the trail route.

Why does the biggest share of TSPLOST go to routine roadway maintenance?

During the recession, the State of Georgia cut taxes by canceling funding for local road maintenance and improvement programs. TSPLOST is the tool the state created to help local governments make up for the shortfall and invest in other transportation priorities without raising property taxes.

How long does TSPLOST last?

5 years or until it raises the limit of \$109.5 million, whichever comes first.

Do sales taxes hurt the poor?

People who have low or fixed incomes may struggle with sales taxes. However, multiple projects within TSPLOST benefit people with low incomes, especially improvements to ACC's bus system and the creation of trails, sidewalks and bike lanes that provide safe routes for people without automobiles.

Will TSPLOST drive businesses out of Athens?

TSPLOST will cost shoppers only \$1 for every \$100 spent, so Athens-Clarke residents who leave the county to shop are likely to spend more on gas than they save. Other counties no doubt would welcome business relocations, but most lack the population base and road, water, sewer, police and fire infrastructure to support them. Many other counties in Georgia are also working on TSPLOST packages for the same reasons as Athens-Clarke: they have major infrastructure needs and no other way to pay for them.

What happens if the referendum doesn't pass?

There is no other funding mechanism for projects in TSPLOST, including the Firefly Trail and Trail Creek bridge ("Murmur" trestle). Rejection of TSPLOST would delay completion of the trail in ACC by years.

How can I help?

- Visit our webpage at fireflytrail.org
- Follow us on Facebook and Instagram
- Contact our volunteer coordinator, Shialoh Wilson, at Shialoh@fireflytrail.com
- **Vote YES for TSPLOST on Nov. 7!**