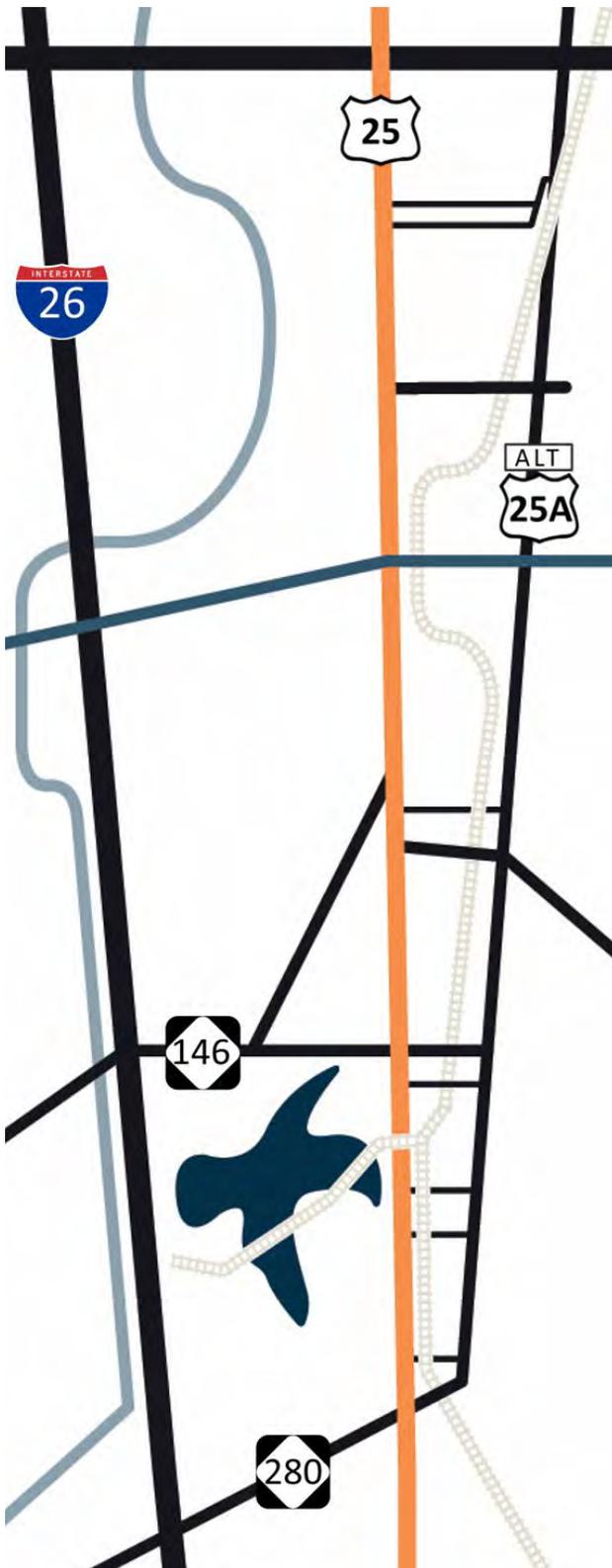


# BACKGROUND & CONTEXT **01**

# Purpose & Process



Hendersonville Road, or US Highway 25, functions as a major north-south corridor in South Asheville. In this region of Buncombe County, the corridor is flanked by two parallel north-south roads, Interstate 26 to the west, and Sweeten Creek Road (US Highway 25 Alt) to the east. These three corridors interact with each other to funnel vehicle traffic southward, and are directly impacted the amount of traffic and development that occurs along each. The Hendersonville Road Corridor Study will examine the central corridor of this area and make recommendations for improvements to the roadway itself and continued development in this region.

## Why this Plan, Why Now?

South Asheville has grown exponentially, with a large increase in residential population driving complementary commercial growth in the past decade. This development has centered on the Hendersonville Road corridor, the principal thoroughfare and anchor of South Asheville. This recent growth has placed significant pressure on the corridor, which cross-section has not changed in several decades. Among the thoroughfares above, traffic volume have increased by nearly 50,000 vehicles per day since 2010, and Hendersonville Road has disproportionately carried this increase in volume, accounting for nearly half of this increase. Crash rates are 148% that of similar five-lane urban primary roadways in North Carolina and congestion is rife throughout the corridor. For Hendersonville Road to accommodate this sustained growth, its design throughout the study area must change.

Compounding these current pressures, future transportation improvements will exacerbate pressures. Interstate 26 is in the early days of a major construction update – a 16.9 mile widening project from Brevard Road in Asheville to US 64 in Hendersonville (*STIP Number: I-4400, I-4700*). Construction began in October 2019 and is slated for completion in 2024. Nearby Sweeten Creek Road will see changes as well (*STIP Number: U2801A*). Anticipated to begin in 2027, this project will see Sweeten Creek change dramatically from Rock Hill Road to Hendersonville Road, potentially to include a wide shared-use path. No completion date is yet listed.

Figure 1.1: The Hendersonville Road corridor.



## Project Process & Timeline

The Hendersonville Road Corridor Study was completed within a 12-month time frame, divided into four distinct phases:

### Phase 1 - Visioning

The first phase centered on data collection, preliminary study of the corridor, and developing the public engagement process. The French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO), in working with the consultant and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), established a steering committee of community stakeholders, as well as local and state planning agencies, to guide the development of the plan while ensuring all interests were represented. The team worked with community representatives, local, regional, and state planning agencies, to define the Project's purpose, goals, and establish the framework for the Plan's development. The project website, survey, and online maps were launched to begin collecting public sentiment.

### Phase 2 - Investigation

The second phase, focused on analysis. The project team analyzed plans, policies, data and qualitative feedback from online engagement to conceptualize the Corridors strengths, problems, opportunities and constraints. The first major public event, the Project Symposium, was held during this phase, and stakeholder interviews conducted both to present the results of initial analyses and obtain further feedback. Key take-aways derived from this phase culminated in the development of the Preferred Access Plan, the foundation for future design work.

### Phase 3 - Design

The third phase, begun immediately following Investigation. The team condensed data, public input, and background information to inform preliminary planning, engineering, and design recommendations. Many of these recommendations were developed during the Design Workshop, a large, interactive planning event that provided stakeholders and the general public opportunities to review and influence concept designs in real-time. During this phase, the concept design for the corridor was first developed and refined.

### Phase 4 - Reporting & Adoption

The final phase, documenting the whole of the planning process. Using plans, materials and designs produced throughout the Study, this final planning document was prepared to reflect both the design recommendations, the data and analysis informing the recommendations, and the planning process itself. This document would guide the MPO and the NCDOT in subsequent design and engineering phases on the path to a constructed, Complete Street. The Open House, presenting the final recommendations to the public, was held during this period to close the project and celebrate the productive collaboration between the community and local planning agencies.



# Guiding Principles

Hendersonville Road is a vital north-south gateway into the Asheville region. More than just a commuter route, the roadway has evolved over time into a destination for shopping, banking, employment, restaurants, and entertainment. To this end, all streets serve a combination of functions, all of which are intimately tied to the travel-way, pedestrian, and building realms. These basic context zones help define the role of the street and its design throughout its life cycle. Through stakeholder outreach, project symposia and committee collaboration, the following Guiding Principles were developed to lead the design team's thought during the planning and design process. The following were derived from the continuous input, opinions, and directions provided by the Hendersonville Road community:

## Principle #1: Safety for All

Whether on two feet or two wheels, the notion that the corridor should be safe for everyone to move across and through is essential. Many of the comments received from the public invoked congestion and safety-related issues, whether it be for a lack of lighting, intersection treatments, speeding vehicles, or poor accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing the street. The most outstanding example of this is that **over 65% of the Project Symposium respondents felt that Hendersonville Road is "unsafe" today.** As we redesign this important corridor entering into the Asheville region we must be cognizant of key safety design features like "built in" traffic calming features, site lines, lighting and access management best practices.



## Principle #2: Choices for All

Although automobile travel is substantial, the corridor is heavily used by visitors and residents of the surrounding communities. Nearly 45% of the public identified a lack of sidewalks, bike facilities and quality transit as the most critical transportation issues to solve. Missing or inadequate bicycle and pedestrian design elements make traversing Hendersonville Road difficult and undesirable. The vulnerability of these users is high compared to automobile drivers and passengers. This process seeks to **create an environment where walking and biking are not only encouraged but are the priority.**



### Principle #3: A Better Fit for All

Hendersonville Road was once a farm-to-market road providing access for travelers to the City. Over time, this facility was simply paved and widened to a 5-lane road with a two-way left turn lane. The function of this road and who it serves has changed as well. **Today, it caters to fast-moving cars and trucks.** In fact, congestion relief accounted for the highest issue (37% of votes) to address by survey participants followed by safety and crashes. These safety and congestion issues can be attributed to decades of population growth without adequate planning. Uncontrolled driveways, lack of cross access between complimentary uses and signals that are not coordinated all contribute to fast speeds and driver confusion. With limited right of way and a desire to create a safe environment while maintaining traffic flow, Hendersonville Road can be transitioned into a Complete Street through re-purposing asphalt, better access management and development standards.



### Principle #4: A Place (and Space) for All

Hendersonville Road serves many land uses including residential, light industrial and commercial/retail development. This corridor is more than moving cars to and through the City of Asheville: it gets people to jobs, connects residential neighborhoods, supports civic uses, upholds land values, and through its design favors or disfavors redevelopment strategies. Creating an aesthetically-pleasing environment and enhanced beautification through the use of improved streetscaping details, repair and maintenance is vital to this objective. Just as important is creating attractive and convenient destinations along the corridor through placemaking and quality urban design.



The recommendations and the action items to implement these endeavors will be detailed in the final chapters of this plan and further support the principles that have guided the Complete Streets approach to Hendersonville Road.



# Community Context



Hendersonville Road was built over the existing trading and navigation paths established by Native Americans, and provided connections between farmers to the south of Asheville with markets in the city center. These connections would grow through the early to mid-19th century with the completion of the Buncombe Turnpike, the Greenville to Asheville Plank Road, and most important to regional growth, the Southern Railway. Small inns popped up alongside the corridor to support travelers, which would grow with the region to become the neighborhoods of South Asheville.

While the Great Depression brought financial hardship to the city, it also brought the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which has a significant impact on the corridor today. South Asheville began to grow in the mid 1960s to early 1970s as suburban development began to draw new business growth. As the residential population began to grow and new businesses appeared, roads were constructed in accordance with modern planning and development code requirements.



## Shiloh

Shiloh, one of the area’s oldest Black neighborhoods, has been continuously inhabited since the late 19th century. Shiloh is generally considered as the area bounded by Hendersonville Road, Sweeten Creek Road, Rock Hill Road and I-40, though nearby neighborhoods may be considered part of the modern Shiloh. Gentrification has been a longstanding concern of the community, as well as equitable access to the region’s transportation network. Shiloh’s Neighborhood Plan calls for improved infrastructure, greater connectivity with sidewalks and pedestrian facilities, and greater neighborhood economic vitality.



## Biltmore Forest

Situated at the northern end of the study area, Biltmore Forest is home to a population of just over 1,500. The town was formed from land purchased by a private group in the mid-1920s, with a vision for a residential community embodying the Biltmore Estate’s ideals.



## Skyland

Skyland is an unincorporated community near Long Shoals Road (NC 146), with a mixture of business, residential, and community services (schools, post office, library, and fire department).

## Arden

Arden is also an unincorporated community near the southern end of the corridor, with fewer residential developments and larger parcels for manufacturing or light industrial businesses.

*Hendersonville Road community assets*



## Demographic Overview

Hendersonville Road is the economic and residential anchor for the South Asheville community. Over the past decade, the study area alone has grown by nearly one-third in population, swelling to a total daytime population of around 12,000. Projections for 2024 show this growth continuing, and the corridor's total daytime population growing by 2.65% annually to 14,000. Expanding the housing supply and transportation options to keep up with this growth will be critical to ensuring the vibrant vision for Hendersonville Road.

These residents and workers are not just getting by, however; taken as a whole, the Hendersonville Road economy is thriving. Employment within the corridor is high, and only 1.6% of workforce is considered unemployed. Wages are increasing as well: median household income is projected to increase by nearly \$4,000 in the next five years, and median home values to surpass \$270,000. This growth, however, may not be equally distributed; upper-class neighborhoods such as Biltmore Forest and the Ramble mask challenges faced by those in many working class neighborhoods along the corridor.

Residents and workers along Hendersonville Road are car-dependent, and it reflects in transportation metrics for the corridor. Within a half-mile of Hendersonville Road, 85% of workers commute by car, alone, a further 6% carpool, and 1% choose to commute via motorcycle. Only 2% of workers commute by other means of transportation, whether public transit, bicycle, or walking. This likely reflects insufficient infrastructure or transportation alternatives along the corridor, as a smaller proportion of Asheville residents commute by car (82%), and a greater proportion commute via public transportation or walking (5%).

Source: Esri Business Analyst, US Census, American Community Survey Estimates (2013-2017)

## Population

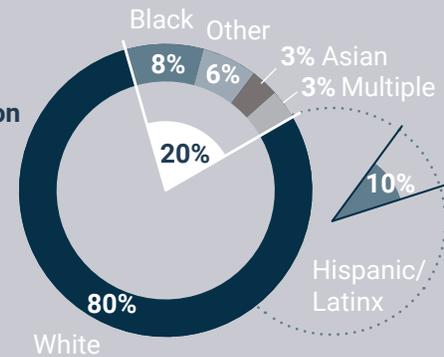


Disability Households  
**20%**



Population: **11,000**  
Daytime Population: **18,000**  
Number of Households: **5,700**  
Housing Units: **6,300**  
Average Household Size: **1.91**  
Median Age: **43**  
Workers over 16: **5,200**

## Racial Composition



## Households



56% of the population along this corridor rents. State and metro averages are 35% and 34%

Median Home Value  
**\$240k**

Median HH Income  
**\$52k**



Households with No Vehicle

Renter Occupied  
**56%**

Renter Occupied  
**6.1%**

Owner Occupied  
**0.2%**

Owner Occupied  
**34%**

## Commuting Modes



Drove Alone  
**85%**



WFH  
**6%**



Carpool  
**5%**



Transit  
**1%**



Walk  
**1%**



Bike  
**<1%**



# Existing Plans & Policies

Asheville, like all cities, has established policies and procedures that assist in their planning and development activities, public and private sector alike. These policies articulate a vision for Asheville as a community and are often encoded as adopted plans; others are reflected in written and unwritten ordinances, as well as the plans and policies of partnering agencies. High-level policies from the State or Federal government may play a role in shaping the community, but the most influential plans are found here, at the local level.

As a vital component of Asheville's infrastructure, Hendersonville Road and its surroundings are featured within several of Asheville's adopted plans. These plans have been reviewed, and documented herein, for prior recommendations, policies or concepts that may bear upon this corridor study. As the selected past plans are discussed, common themes will be noted that relate back to the principles, goals, and vision of this plan that will have shaped the design and recommendations. While each plan centers on a certain aspect of mobility, environmental management, or a certain area, it is important to note that these have all influenced this planning process.

The vision for Hendersonville Road presented by previous plans is a bright one, placing Hendersonville Road as the anchor for a vibrant, transit-supportive South Asheville. Plans call for a truly multi-modal workhorse corridor, moving users to and throughout South Asheville and the city-at-large through balanced means including motor vehicles, transit, bicycle and pedestrian. With walkable, higher-density communities lining the corridor, Hendersonville Road facilitates the connections between people and place that will realize Asheville's greater community vision.

## Plans reviewed and documented herein:

- Living Asheville: Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2018)
- French Broad River MPO 2020-2029 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)
- French Broad River MPO 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan: Roadway Projects
- French Broad River MPO 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan: Bicycle & Pedestrian Projects
- Asheville In Motion: Mobility Plan (2016)
- City of Asheville Transit Master Plan (2018)
- French Broad River MPO Congestion Management Plan: Hendersonville Road

## Other plans reviewed:

- Asheville Pedestrian Plan (2005)
- Buncombe County Sustainability Plan Update (2017)
- Buncombe Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2013)

## French Broad River MPO 2020-2029 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)

The TIP for the 2020-2029 period calls for two major improvement projects impacting the corridor:

- TIP #U-2801A, planned for construction in 2027, will see Sweeten Creek Road widened to four lanes, with a landscaped median, sidewalks and a shared-use path intersecting Hendersonville Road at this corridor's southern terminus.
- TIP #U-5834, planned for construction in 2024, will see Mills Gap Road widened to four lanes, with a landscape median and sidewalks intersecting Hendersonville Road just south of Gerber Road.



*Mills Gap Road intersection*



## French Broad River MPO 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan

The 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan lays out programmed transportation projects through 2040. Apart from the aforementioned TIP projects, no new roadway projects impacting the corridor are planned through 2040. However, the plan does call for construction of the Bent Creek Greenway Phase I, the southern extension of which is planned along Long Shoals Road (NC 146), and reaching into the study area.

## Living Asheville: Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2018)

Asheville’s recently updated Comprehensive Land Use Plan is a visionary document that seeks to provide guiding themes and high-level strategies for a future Asheville’s land use and transportation, in furtherance of a broad array of community goals. Hendersonville Road features prominently in these plans.

Living Asheville’s goals pertaining to Hendersonville Road include:

- Increased mixed-use development along transit corridors;
- Enhance parking management strategies;
- More walkable, comfortable and connected streets;
- Increased access to safe bicycling;
- Improved multimodal transportation system;
- Improved transit service;
- A robust, built-out greenway network.



## LIVING ASHEVILLE A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE

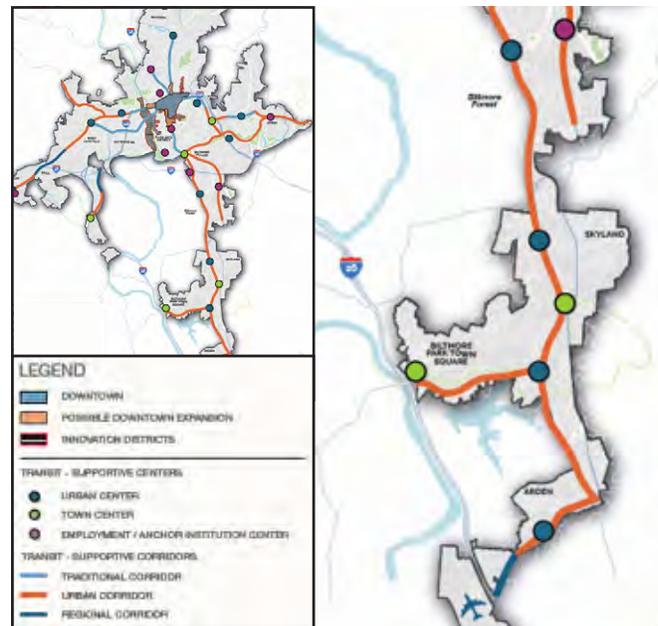
Adopted June 2018

Living Asheville Report Cover

Living Asheville leans into the connection between development and transportation. It calls for a new zoning category of “Transit-Supportive Center” featuring higher densities and walkable development patterns, with incentives for redevelopment within these established centers. **Hendersonville Road is identified as a transit-supportive Urban Corridor with Town and Urban Centers in the Gerber Village area, Long Shoals Road (NC 146), and Mills Gap Road.** The Plan calls for Hendersonville Road to shift to a multimodal, attractive urban boulevard, with bicycle and pedestrian connections between centers. Development along this corridor should encourage multi-story structures, with multi-modal access and transit facilities.

Other recommendations in the Plan include:

- Locate park-and-ride lots in strategic locations, proximate to high-frequency transit routes.
- Add pedestrian infrastructure at street crossings on major streets and where there are high volumes of traffic and pedestrians.
- Create dedicated bicycle lanes, preferred buffered or separated lanes where feasible.
- Encourage cross-access between parcels.
- Increase park-and-ride spaces throughout the corridor.



Living Asheville Preferred Growth Scenario Development Map



## Asheville in Motion

Asheville In Motion focuses specifically on transportation and mobility throughout Asheville and provides targeted strategies to improve overall accessibility for all residents through multiple modes. The plan breaks transportation into three modes and one typology: pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and greenways, providing a framework for facilities growth and development supporting each class.

Recommendations from the Plan pertaining to Hendersonville Road include:

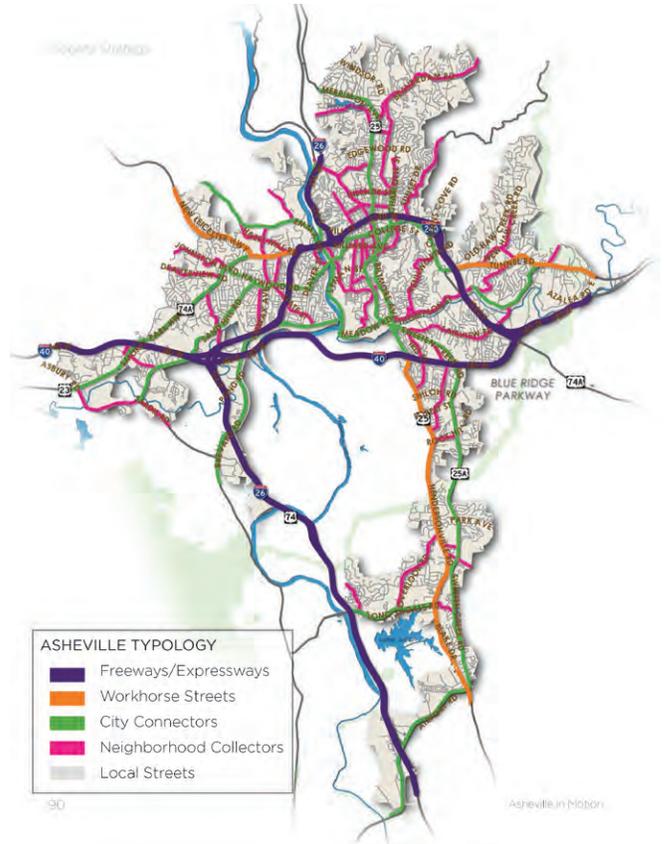
- Designation of Hendersonville Road as a Workhorse Street;
- Improved pedestrian access to bus stops;
- Designation of Long Shoals Road as a secondary route for bicycles, with buffered bicycle lanes the recommended facility type;
- Prioritization of faster transit service, and development of a transit service with BRT-like frequencies and performance.

Asheville in Motion sets out a typology of bicycle facilities for installation in accordance with its recommendations; in addition to the striped shoulders along Hendersonville Road, it recommends a climbing lane for Overlook Road, intersecting with Hendersonville, as well as shared lane markings at Rock Hill Road and along the Blue Ridge Parkway. In the vicinity of Long Shoals Road, it also highlights the future connection with the Lake Julian Greenway.

### City of Asheville Transit Master Plan (2018)

The Transit Master Plan provides specific routing recommendations for service in the short-term, as well as a long-term vision for new services, expansion, and improvements. Currently two routes operate in the corridor study area, the S3 and S6 lines, shuttling riders between Asheville Regional Airport, South Asheville, and Downtown.

The Transit Master Plan does not call for service changes along the corridor area; however, changes to routes operating along Hendersonville are recom-



Asheville in Motion Street Typology Map

mended. The Plan calls for the S6 route to be extended beyond the Biltmore Town Square at Long Shoals Road, and for headways to be reduced to 60 minutes from its current 90 minute headways.

Furthermore, the Plan follows the recommendations of Living Asheville and Asheville in Motion, and proposes park-and-ride and super stop locations within the corridor:

- Park-and-Ride:
  - Publix Supermarket adjacent to Gerber Village;
  - Skyland Plaza.
- Super Stop:
  - Rock Hill Road and Hendersonville Road;
  - Hendersonville Road north of Long Shoals Road.



## French Broad River MPO Congestion Management Process (2018)

The Congestion Management Plan specifically addresses corridor issues along Hendersonville Road. Recommendations highlight the need for multimodal facilities improvements and favor TDM strategies where feasible. Recommendations for congestion management include:

- Implementation of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS);
- Access Management;
- Encouragement of transit- and walk-friendly activity centers;
- Encouragement of transit service usage through creation of Park-and-Ride lots;
- Adoption of further travel demand management strategies.

## Buncombe County Health Assessment (2018)

The Buncombe County Health Assessment provides a different look at transportation needs and performance throughout the county. Asheville and Buncombe perform well with regards to transportation and access, 7th on the list of critical needs to address. The Assessment notes that the southern portion of the study corridor has a higher percentage of households without access to a car (7%), elevating need for transit service here.

## Blue Ridge Bike Plan (2013)

The Land of Sky Council of Government's counterpart to the Asheville Bicycle Plan, the Blue Ridge Bike Plan laid out the vision for a connected network of regional greenways and bicycle facilities for the enhancement of the quality of living of regional residents and visitors. The Plan identified Hendersonville Road as a regional priority corridor for bicycle facilities improvements; likewise, it called for construction of the Lake Julian Greenway, which intersects with Hendersonville Road just south of Long Shoals Road.

## Asheville Comprehensive Bicycle Master Plan (2008)

A precursor to the Asheville in Motion Plan, the 2008 Comprehensive Bicycle Master Plan represented Asheville's coordinated, strategic effort to develop safe, accessible bicycle facilities throughout the community. Goals for the plan included enhancing residential quality of life and increasing the safety and mobility of bicyclists through creating continuous, linear connections and providing a range of facilities for all users.

The plan called for improvements to Hendersonville Road as a medium-term priority and highlights a range of improvements to be included in future projects.

Improvement specifics include:

- Paved and striped shoulders of minimum 7' width;
- Widened sidewalks;
- Access management for driveways and adjacent parcels.

The plan specifically noted the suburban, commercial nature of the roadway as the reason for additional improvements being necessary to become a "comfortable place to ride a bicycle."



# Key Takeaways

Hendersonville Road has evolved over time to meet the needs of residents and industry along the corridor. As Asheville prepares for another transformation along this corridor, the vision articulated in its plans differs dramatically from its current configuration, as revealed in this chapter. From the review of plans and policies documented herein, there are three key takeaways that will guide and inform the development of the Corridor Study, highlighted below:

## Multimodal

The future Hendersonville Road accommodates expected residential and commercial growth as a multimodal corridor that a) provides for all modes of transportation, b) creates safe spaces for bicyclists and pedestrians, and c) supports transit as a Complete Street. Transit-oriented development at critical junctures, including a new town center at Mills Gap Road, will create a deeper user base for improved transit service, while new greenways, bicycle lanes and shared-use paths connect South Asheville to a robust bicycle and pedestrian network. While this multimodal vision is bright, the current configuration and operations of Hendersonville Road are in stark contrast to this vision, with many of the envisioned facilities currently missing in their entirety. Paramount to achieving these goals is an executable plan for Hendersonville Road reimagined as a Complete Street.

## Mixed Use

Hendersonville Road features prominently in both Living Asheville and Asheville in Motion, the foundational comprehensive plans for the city and its transportation network, and the envisioned Hendersonville Road is one of mixed uses and increasing density to support and attract residents and businesses alike. Mills Gap Road and Gerber Village are the anchor for a new town center in South Asheville, with higher-density residential development, bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly amenities, walkable shopping and entertainment and proximity to improved transit service linking South Asheville with downtown and the broader Asheville community. Established neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the corridor provide housing options for different populations and connect to nearby parks, such as Jake Rusher Park or Lake Julian, through the aforementioned bicycle and pedestrian network.

## Out of character with current City plans

Hendersonville Road is already an active and critical anchor for the South Asheville communities. Employment rates are high along the corridor, and median property values and household incomes are projected to continue their growth into the future. The residential population along Hendersonville Road is slightly older and slightly more affluent than Asheville as a whole, and household sizes are smaller. With large commercial centers along the corridor, the corridor is a center for employment in Asheville as well, and looks to continue in this role as the Gerber Village area develops as a new town center for South Asheville.





