INCIDENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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INCIDENTAL URBANISM

Our studio had modest aims in the big debates about contemporary architecture and urban design. We were not interested in the current nostalgia for tradition or the desire to aestheticize the past, sanitizing the American small town or elevating the city's public realm to a new level of importance equal to its practical decline. We were not interested in the comforting nostalgia for an architectural avant-garde or the desire to aestheticize the fragmentation, disjunction and flows of the contemporary city. Debating Seaside and Bilbao seemed sort of beside the point when we looked at, walked around, and drove back and forth on the Downtown Connector.

Midtown and Georgia Tech were once part of a simple framework of interconnected blocks and streets and lots, stretching over the Peachtree Ridge down to Peters Park and then back up again. This simple framework – the city's infrastructure – enabled individual buildings and spaces and places to be built incrementally, even when the framework itself changed with the growth of the Georgia Tech campus. The Downtown Connector changed that. The interconnected framework became disconnected, leaving Georgia Tech on one side and Midtown on the other. Only three street connections remained of the original eight: North Avenue, Fifth Street, and Tenth Street.

The challenge to the studio was to reconnect Georgia Tech and Midtown. We thought the best approach to explore was infrastructural, since it was the city infrastructure that was severed by building the highway. Often infrastructure is thought of as an overall framework for building a city, and sometimes it is. James Oglethorpe's design for Savannah laid out the infrastructure of blocks, streets and lots for building and expanding the city. William Penn's Philadelphia, the Commissioner's Plan for Manhattan, and many other examples across America are familiar. They are sometimes called plats or plans but are always the framework - *infrastructure* – for building cities.

The conditions along the Downtown Connector prohibit simply replacing the framework that existed before or just covering up the highway to make it disappear underground. Two features eliminate that possibility. First are the hills and valleys of the highway itself as it moves under the three bridges and then returns to the surface in between. Second is the sloping ground that results in the Midtown edge of the highway being much higher than the Georgia Tech side. The old infrastructure – and the city that it enabled – can't be put back together again. Re-connections must be *incidental* – a condition of what happened, what was left over, what might be possible.

With a little more time and some willing sponsors, we might make the Downtown Connector into

The first exercise in the studio was to assign one part of the highway to each of the students. We drew assignments out of a hat - one for each original crossing (North, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Peachtree Place, and Tenth) and one for each of the four highway faces. (Georgia Tech from North to Fifth, Georgia Tech from Fifth to Tenth, Midtown from North to Fifth, and Midtown from Fifth to Tenth). Each student investigated his or her luck of the draw highway crossing or highway face to determine if it could become incidental infrastructure – a partial addition to the severed framework based on what happened, what was left over, what might be possible.

For the remainder of the studio, each student selected one of the possible connections, excluding one crossing that was impossible to reconnect – Eighth Street – and one face that needed only careful protection and completion, not rebuilding – Georgia Tech from North to Fifth. A brief description of each project is included below, along with its location and one of the images from the student's work. Four of these projects are presented in full on the adjoining panels. These are *the Third Street Promenade, the Fourth Street Student Housing Bridge, the Fifth Street Big Box Bridge, and the Fifth Street Student Street.*

The floorboard superimposes the site plans of all thirteen student projects on a recent aerial photograph of the Downtown Connector. Each student worked independently, so some of the site plans are overlaid or combined or modified to fit together, because they ended up occupying the same territory. But there was no attempt to force the projects into some pre-conceived idea or to combine them together into an overall framework or master plan. Each student just investigated his or her specific incident at the highway and then designed incidental infrastructure that intends to enable an *incidental urbanism* for Georgia Tech, Midtown and the Downtown Connector.

This idea of *incidental infrastructure – incidental urbanism* is not exactly new. The Ponte Vecchio is one example. The oldest bridge across the widest part of the River Arno enabled a boisterous city street to be built on top of it and then enabled the secret passage, the Vasari Corridor leading from the Palace to the Uffizzi, to be built on top of that, which then enabled the back-shops to be added by projecting them over the river. And others: The Spanish Steps – the Piazza di Spangna - in Rome; Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. Urban projects must do more than one thing: a bridge is more than a bridge, steps are more than steps, and a building is more than just a building.

Atlanta's 21st Century version of the Ponte Vecchio, the Spanish Steps, and Rockefeller Center.

NORTH AVENUE STREET-BRIDGE
Alvin Bobo

The North Avenue Bridge is part of one of the busiest pedestrian paths in Atlanta. Georgia State students travel back and forth downtown by classes and to their off-campus housing. Tech students walk down from MARTA to and from classes – and back and forth to the Varsity or to the Gourmet 99¢ Station. Coke employees walk too. Others walk around or hang around night and day. But the North Avenue Bridge is hostile with 5 lanes of traffic plus the exclusive Varsity left turn lane stretching all the way across the bridge. Pedestrians are forced to share the sidewalk with vehicles on grid-locked vehicle fumes, noise and magnified heat or cold depending on the season. **Go take a walk.**

This project proposes an **inhabited bridge** – think of a 21st century Pulitzer Fountain – of shops opening out onto the sidewalk. The bridge becomes the place where The Peach Avenue bridge becomes the infrastructure to build a street. a Street-Bridge. The housing would be taller on the south side to provide shade for the street and take advantage of the views to downtown, more importantly, building on both sides reduces noise and makes a near street-like ambiance. The bridge would be a place where students would go to BP – the **North Avenue Street-Bridge** might become a destination for even more pedestrians and a center of student life. Maybe Junior's could even be relocated to its rightful place on North Avenue between Georgia Tech and Midtown.

NORTH AVENUE HIGHWAY LANDSCAPE
Domenick Treschitta

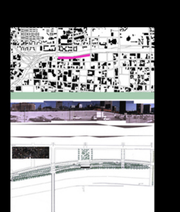
The Olympic-side Georgia State dormitories are designed about half right. Half of the rooms, maybe a little more than half, face the Olympic Stadium, or North Avenue. The other half, maybe a few less, face the highway. We have not been in any of those rooms, but we imagine that when the windows are open the rooms are noisy most of the time and sometimes just plain stink. The highway – up close – is not too friendly. This half of the dorm rooms needs a landscape to look at not a highway. **Go take a look.**

This project proposes making a **landscape** – think of making a hill, making new ground, making a park. This landscape can include a lot of different things. An amphitheater – think about the Santa Fe Opera with Downtown Atlanta substituted for the Sangre de Cristo Mountains – a place for the Varsity to cater to a different users – Georgia Tech by day concert goers by night. Varsity overflow all the time get out of that left turn lane on the bridge). Recreation spaces for GSU and GT students: basketball, tennis, volleyball, even climbing walls or BMX trafficards. This Highway Landscape could stimulate other projects. Urbanize the Gourmet 99¢ Station. Make it a place where people want to come to the Varsity to compliment North Avenue and also turn its face to Spring Street. Force de Leon, and especially the highway itself. And, eventually, open up the GSU Village courtyard so students can flow easily though the **Highway Landscape** to the North Avenue Bridge and the sidewalks leading to the North Avenue MARTA Station.

THIRD STREET PROMENADE
Glendall Rodriguez

When we listened to descriptions of Georgia Tech's Fifth Street Bridge, we imagined a "Third Street Bridge" (a street project) when the Third Street Tunnel is the smartest thing along the highway. It is the shortest and easiest walk from the Georgia Tech campus to MARTA, the Varsity – an important destination - and the emerging restaurants in Midtown near the Fox and Georgian Terrace. It often gets a wash job and fresh coat of paint and is well-lit and well-patrolled. It is safe. It is not a place of crimes. It's dark and it's scary and it's tunnel. And the entry or exit spaces are just as bad. No one uses it unless they have to. **Put on boats and ease clips and take a hike.**

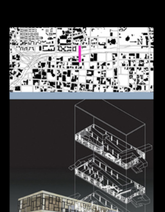
This project proposes making the tunnel into a destination. Think of Times Square – the Times Square MARTA Station. Of course the tunnel would be improved, but after all, a tunnel is still a tunnel. What makes the difference between the Callahan Tunnel in Boston and one in the Swiss Alps is not the tunnels themselves, but what is on either side. We do not propose making mountains at each end of the Third Street Tunnel. But we do propose that the tunnel be designed, marketed, branded and operated as the tunnel is just one episode on a sequence leading from the Campus to MARTA and back. It is a brief park on the Georgia Tech side to be a threshold between the campus and the tunnel. A commuter rail-operated plaza – for initiation and detention - and shopping court for the tunnel. Food, drink, and entertainment – for people, and shops and restaurants – back to GSU, village, and any new on-the-edge loft residents in Midtown. The tunnel itself could be dotted with conventional equipment into a mosaic-like telescope traversed by an elevated walkway with lighting, ventilation, and music, too. The Third Street tunnel is the infrastructure for the **Third Street Promenade.**



MIDTOWN HIGHWAY TRAILS
Ted Hitch

Highways are sometimes like railroads. They slice through cities, separating one part from another, and along the highway there are lots and lots of little, left over, city streets that connected to the surrounding city and region the other side faced the tracks for dead ahead – rail siding, platforms, warehouse doors, and storage yards. This second face was a working landscape, perhaps not considered a thing of beauty by most people, but it was busy and occupied and important. The highway has sliced through Midtown and separated Georgia Tech from what is now known as Midtown. But the land along the highway has never had a second face. Except for what remains before the highway was built – the old Georgia Tech Dorms – the face of the highway is just left over, ignored, wasted, a no man's land of weeds, garbage, discarded furniture and occasional car parts. It is a place where people don't want their children to see the back of either things whether they are already built or getting ready to be built – like new Fifth Street Project. **Take a trash bag and walk along the edge.**

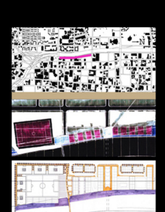
This project proposes to make a **path**, similar to Rails to Trails, for the edge of the highway from North Avenue to Fourteenth Street. The path would be for bicycles and purpose paths. This project will not replace the Downtown Connector, but it will make an edge of multi-purpose trails – walking, biking, roller-blading, running - that in the future might be extended north and south and connected to the paths and trails being built throughout Atlanta by the Path Foundation. The trails would be at different levels, sometimes on the edge of the highway, sometimes on the edge of Midtown, creating a landscape along part of the Downtown Connector. The **Midtown Highway Trail** is a way to make an attractive and useful edge to the Highway encouraging Midtown – and Georgia Tech – to treat the highway as a new front yard instead of a back yard.



FOURTH STREET STUDENT HOUSING BRIDGE
Chris Hanshaw

Long ago, the Downtown Connector stopped Georgia Tech from expanding to the east. Georgia Tech's housing was on the north side of the campus. Fifth Street crossing the highway is just a back road – a unpaved parking lot and unkept vacant lots. For a long time, campus expansion only moved west, most recently the new student housing built for the 1996 Olympics. However, the best part of the campus is the old part. It feels like a real college campus – the Tech Tower, brick buildings built close together, Bobby Dodd Stadium, Grant Field, Tech Square, Tech Square is built as an collegiate quadrangle. Expanding the campus east across the highway makes sense – it connects Georgia Tech to Midtown and it builds around instead of way away from, the historic core of the campus. But the Fifth Street Campus is just a half-campus. **No student housing in our new campus.**

This project proposes a **bridge of student housing** to extend across the highway. The housing would make new quads that are just as good as the old ones. The first section would extend to Fourth Street and then all the way to Fifth. More student housing would be built across the highway. A bridge would connect the two parts, as part of the new quads. The housing would be designed as a collegiate quadrangle. Because of the sloping land from the Peachtree Ridge down to Georgia Tech, the bridge would be designed as a path winding from the ground through the new student center and then across the highway and then wind down through the building on the other side. This bridge is different from Fifth Street. It connects student housing on both sides, entering the building from the Fourth Street Campus and exiting on the East Campus, and becoming a bridge above the highway for students to occupy, to study, and just hang out. The **Fourth Street Student Housing Bridge** would replace that goofy Georgia Tech brick billboard, which would be a better way to advertise the school.



MIDTOWN HIGHWAY CITY
Sergio Sarmiento

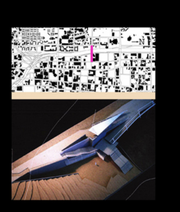
The Fifth Street Project extends Georgia Tech across the highway to Midtown. Fifth Street is the highway exit ramp, the right of way and half but it is not a street. It is not a place. It is likely continue to be the back of midtown. **Imagine the highway lined with leading docks, parking decks, and dumpsters.** The Georgia Tech frontage between Fifth and North is almost ok: old dorms, lawns, trees and a street (that becomes an off ramp) in front. Midtown's frontage is not. Fifth Street is the back door. Visitors will still have to cross the Fifth Street Bridge. All Midtown Just like Georgia Tech's brick billboard should be replaced with dormitories and activities and places. Midtown's Goofy Olympic Torch should be replaced with buildings and activities and places, too.

This project proposes making a city from Spring Street to the highway and from Force St/ Fourth Street and beyond. One possibility for this **highway city** is a soccer stadium with office buildings or housing or Georgia Tech buildings surrounding the field – learning from Camden Yards or old baseball parks. Soccer, office buildings, housing, student housing. Georgia Tech buildings, along with Fifth Street Bridge, could make a neighborhood. Or maybe a **Midtown High-rise City** that would make a Midtown edge to the highway or by foot in midtown. Midtown's front yard facing Georgia Tech's front yard might be the best way to make connections across the highway.

FIFTH STREET BIG-BOX BRIDGE
Steven Brown

Expanding Georgia Tech across the Downtown Connector into Midtown is underway, and it will have a diverse mix of Midtown and Student. The Campus and the North Avenue Apartments, Fifth Street Bridge, and the visitors will still have to cross the Fifth Street Bridge. All Midtown Just like Georgia Tech's brick billboard should be replaced with dormitories and activities and places. Midtown's Goofy Olympic Torch should be replaced with buildings and activities and places, too.

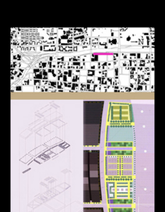
This project proposes to convert the Fifth Street Bridge into a **Big Box Bridge**. One version of the Midtown Blueprint envisaged a Big Box District along the highway. The Big Box Bridge would be a place where people go to bar – maybe a grocery store that serves Midtown and Georgia Tech. Make it a Big Box Bridge with parking on top – like the new Publix in Miami Beach – with active pedestrian related spaces on the first floor – like is common in other cities with grocery stores below or above street level – and with the street becoming an extension of the sidewalk. The Big Box Bridge would be above the highway, for example, **The Fifth Street Big Box Bridge** is a Publix Supermarket, parking on top, a Student Athletic Center Annex on the street level, and a theatrical space across the street. The big box becomes a street – a scientific connection between Georgia Tech and Midtown – active, diverse, interesting, and a great walk to the new Georgia Tech East Campus.



FIFTH STREET STUDENT STREET
Brian Whitfield

Will the Fifth Street Project weave Georgia Tech into Midtown? Will it be a connection or just a bridge? Will The Fifth Street Project – at least from the pictures/ renderings – looks like a corporate campus: ordered, efficient, manicured, business-like, nothing out of place, nothing left over. Every building, every tree, every bench, every brick in the sidewalk carefully cultivates an overall image, much like the corporate campus of Georgia Pacific or Coca-Cola. The Fifth Street Project looks like the office park or the high-rise parking garage on West Peachtree. A college campus is, or should be, something else: buildings scattered across a field, lots of left over spaces along with manicured special places, never very business-like, and always accommodating to casual, unpredictable, and informal activities. Students will make a Fifth Street project vibrant, but it will be a different kind of vibrant, with different people. One campus is for the world of business and work, the other is for the everyday life of students. Georgia Tech doesn't have many student places on the campus now. **It needs more.**

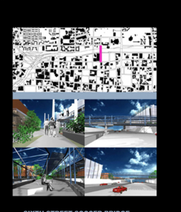
This project proposes to make a **student street**, made up of several independent small projects, to overlay on the new corporate street Fifth Street. It would reach from Technology Drive to Velvi Peachtree. Each one would have a purpose: alternate routes to the bridge with ramps or steps, benches, drinking fountains, shade, a kiosk or two. Each one would be accessible to everyone. Each one would be a place to sit and people watch. Some would be a little more than ones – passing out leaflets urging others to vote for him or her, doing calculus homework, kissing a lover, talking to moms on cell phones, passing out invitations to a band's Friday night gig. Instead of being part of a "master plan," the places would be designed to be improvised, adapted, and used. Instead of being an impossibly ordered, efficient, business-like infrastructure for everyday life of students – the **Fifth Street Student Street.**



FIFTH STREET BIG-BOX BRIDGE
Ross McCoin

Water runs downhill. All the rainfall on the Midtown-West side of the Peachtree Ridge flows toward the big highway ditch. This stormwater runoff is a problem for the property owners, but it is also a problem for the city because it is built on vacant land. It is a problem for the City because it must be diverted from the sanitary system. And it is a problem for DOT because highways are supposed to be high ways and dry ways through the city. **Go watch the water flow on a rainy day in Midtown.**

This project proposes **a stormwater utility district** for Midtown. Stormwater runoff regulations currently require on-site retention, which in high-density areas like Midtown end up being invisible and expensive underground cisterns. Instead of building individual cisterns, property owners could contribute their share of the total cost and ongoing maintenance to a common facility. The Fifth Street Big Box Bridge would be a prime site for the big ditch serving the land from Fifth Street to Tenth Street west of the Peachtree ridge. This stormwater management facility would be new park for Midtown. Like Olmsted's Emerald Necklace in Boston, this project is infrastructure that would contribute to Midtown, Atlanta, Georgia Tech and the highway. Part would be for people: a pedestrian/bicycle/jogger path would run through. Other parts would be cliffs/cut-backs or gardens. Wetting vegetation and soil help clean water from parking lots, sidewalks and streets. A small lake would be used for retention when required but always operating as part of the park. There would be lanes for active and passive forms of recreation, which could change over time. The **Fifth Street Stormwater Gardens** would be Midtown's new front yard on I-75/85.



SIXTH STREET SOCCER BRIDGE
Eric Barnes

Sixth Street used to be one of many streets that connected Midtown to Georgia Tech. It was not very important. It was just another way to move through the Midtown gridiron of streets to and from Peachtree and Techwood. Now there are only three connections over the highway, instead of eight. The Sixth Street Bridge would be a place where the 7 Georgia Tech and Midtown are to benefit from each other. In the recent past there was no need to connect – who would spend money on a bridge that led nowhere. But this may change. Soccer is becoming a big deal in Atlanta. The Atlanta Beat played for the national championship. Atlanta is the Atlanta Host City of the Olympics. Soccer is the Olympic sport. Atlanta is the Host City for the Women's Olympic Soccer Team. A soccer stadium has been suggested for Atlanta. Georgia Tech and Midtown could be a part of that. In addition, Georgia Tech is building a new baseball park that will seat 5000 people on Technewt Drive between Fifth and Sixth. **Go stand by the highway and listen to the sound of soccer fans and baseball fans.**

This project proposes an athletic connection – **a soccer bridge** – over the highway at Sixth Street. The connection would join the new baseball park and other athletic activities along Technewt Drive, with a new soccer stadium on the other side. The bridge would connect Sixth and Eighth. Sixth is an important connection. Fifth Street, which is an automobile bridge and an increasingly important transportation link for busses. The Sixth Street bridge would be for pedestrians, bicycles, blades, joggers – another way to move around easily. just like Sixth Street used to be. The bridge itself would not just be a bridge. It would be a place. Instead of the **Fifth Street Soccer Bridge** would have connected the Sixth new soccer stadium – no people on the bridge would look down into the field – and it would extend all the way to Techwood Drive on the other side to make an easy walk to the baseball park.

THE O'KEEFE LAWN
Ryan McKibben

Before the Downtown Connector, O'Keefe School served the surrounding neighborhoods. Old maps show a semi-circular drive in front of the school, with the building itself facing a broad lawn, which may have been a playground at one time or another. The school grounds must have been a pleasant place to walk to and from the surrounding neighborhoods by the highway, then by the car, then by a Georgia Tech parking lot and an overgrown and littered edge on the highway. The nature school building is still there, but the landscape that made it a landmark is gone. The most interesting thing about the site now is a small clearing hidden in the weeds at the highway edge, where two curvy paths meet. Maybe it's a place where a member of the Georgia Tech student or two on campus might to sit and watch the cars go by, talk, drink a beer or two, and dream. **Go out there and dream sometime.**

This project proposes to make a **new front yard** for Georgia Tech along the highway from the Coliseum to Fifth Street. The O'Keefe Lawn would be cleared and be removed to make way for a new lawn extending from the O'Keefe front door to the edge of the highway. With careful infill of new buildings around its seat – especially student housing – and the conversion of O'Keefe to student lofts or studios – the lawn could become an important and memorable place on the Campus. With the Coliseum, Technology Square, and the new Georgia Tech the Campus. Assuming O'Keefe to the older dorms and the stadium making the front yard to Georgia Tech usable for students, gone-by visitors and visible from the highway and Midtown. The new **O'Keefe Lawn** would be a great place for students to go sit, watch the cars go by, talk, (no beer right?) and dream.

THE PEACHTREE PLACE WALK
Venuss Gervin

The Midtown MARTA Station will become increasingly important as Midtown becomes more densely built with offices and residences. Its connection to Georgia Tech is more tenuous. It is popular for access to athletic events especially, but not much else. The walk from the station to Georgia Tech – that is to class or dorms – is a hike. And an awful hike because the route is Tenth Street, the Tenth Street Bridge, and then around the parking lots at the Coliseum. **Go take that walk sometime.**

This project proposes a **walk** from the Midtown MARTA Station across the highway along Peachtree Place. Imagine making out the south side of the Station and then entering a walkway that is mostly level – no hills and valleys – all the way across the highway. Along the way, the walk would be lined with buildings – maybe a Georgia Tech parking lot and an overgreen and littered edge on the highway. The nature school building is still there, but the landscape that made it a landmark is gone. The most interesting thing about the site now is a small clearing hidden in the weeds at the highway edge, where two curvy paths meet. Maybe it's a place where a member of the Georgia Tech student or two on campus might to sit and watch the cars go by, talk, drink a beer or two, and dream. **Go out there and dream sometime.**

Peachtree **Place Walk** into the campus and along technology Drive would be a place where the Third Street Promenade could also connect.

TENTH STREET PARK-BRIDGE
Cory Benson

Tenth Street is a tough street. It is busy, hostile to pedestrians, topographically difficult, blazing hot in the summer and freezing cold in the winter. From West Peachtree to the Tech Tower it has no trees, narrow sidewalks, congested traffic, vacant or inaccessible land, and buildings that make no contribution to the life of the street. The street needs to be more pedestrian oriented for Georgia Tech students and faculty, visitors to athletic events, Tech employees in their ever expanding campus, and the growing number of Midtown residents and students who live and work in Midtown and Tech Square. – Now Georgia Tech to Tech Peachtree needs to be re-imagined. Small fixes won't work. **Tenth Street is so bad, you should drive by, not walk, to look it over.**

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