



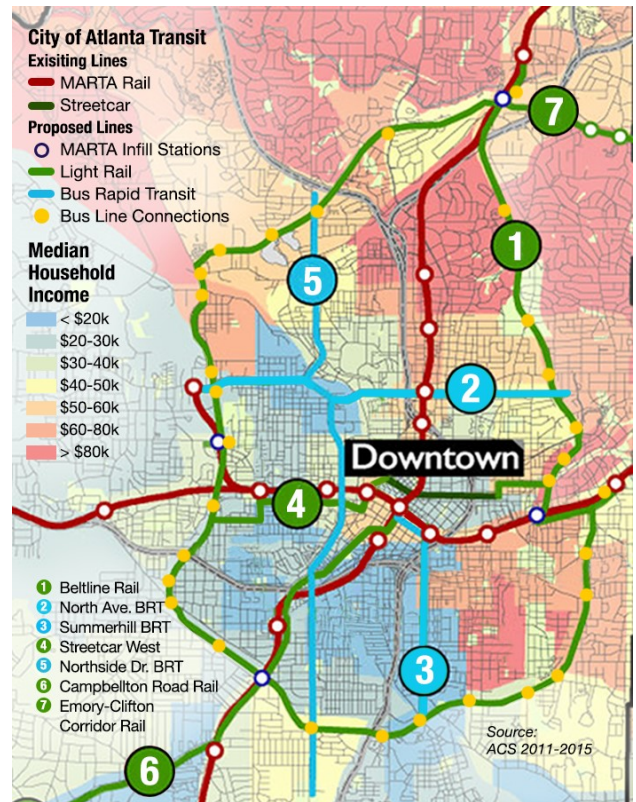
The fierce urgency of BeltLine rail

Linking mobility, equity and housing affordability

Atlanta is stalled at a crossroads. For the first time in decades, we have land, money and a plan to expand reliable transit to dozens of neighborhoods and get ahead of the wave of growth on the horizon. At the same time, Atlanta is losing affordable housing at an alarming rate.

Yet we are being told to wait. To be patient. To sit calmly in traffic and trust that tomorrow, an equitable solution will come.

Just as the Atlanta City Design speaks of building Martin Luther King’s “Beloved Community,” our transportation policy must take into account what King called “the fierce urgency of now.” With Atlanta’s population booming and housing costs skyrocketing, tomorrow has to be today.



Upon learning MARTA’s plan fails to make any significant progress on BeltLine rail for another 15-25 years, more than 450 people asked the Atlanta Regional Commission to speed up construction.

BeltLine rail’s critical role: access, expenses and anti-displacement

- ◆ MARTA estimates the BeltLine would carry more people than any other rail project in the More MARTA expansion plan. About 18,000 of the 27,000 daily boardings would happen on the south and southwest corridors, between Bankhead and Cabbagetown, where more people depend on transit.
- ◆ After housing, owning a car is the second-biggest expense in a family’s budget. In Atlanta, car payments, fuel, parking and insurance can cost between \$500 and \$1,000 a month. Having reliable transit that takes people everywhere they need to go would enable them to ditch the expense of car ownership.
- ◆ Only BeltLine rail can connect 45 neighborhoods around the core of Atlanta, filling in the gaps between existing MARTA rail lines. It can connect to several new and proposed MARTA rail stations and crosses dozens of existing bus lines. That would reduce dependence on cars – cutting carbon emissions – and expand opportunities for car-free living.
- ◆ BeltLine rail can help restrain rising housing costs by spurring construction of new transit-oriented housing, easing pressure on supply in the face of growing demand. Public policy should address the shortage of affordable housing and ensure revenue generated by new development pays for revitalization, rather than tax increases.

Making the connection between transit, affordability and opportunity

Households in communities with access to transit and a mix of jobs and services spend just 9 percent of their household budgets on transportation, compared with a national average of 19 percent.

Low-income households can spend as much as half their income on transportation, compared to less than 10 percent for high-income households.

Employers are increasingly interested in transit and housing. In recent years, Atlanta has benefited from companies moving into the city seeking better access to MARTA and shorter commute times for workers.

A different approach:

The BeltLine is already beginning to choke on its own success. We're seeing uneven outcomes — including rapid gentrification — because we've only built part of it.

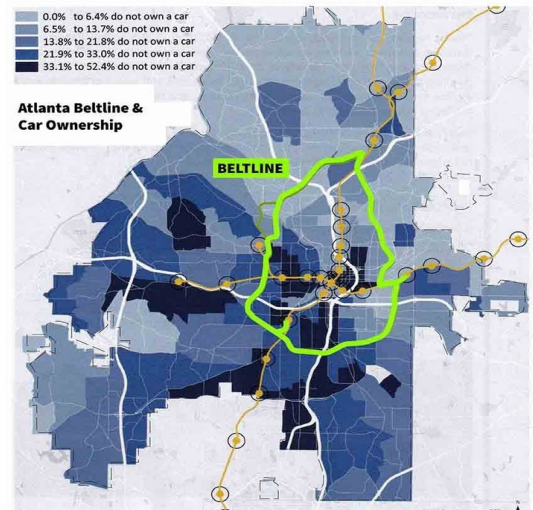
We must choose a different path. We can, and should, fast-track construction of BeltLine rail.

- ◆ The urgency of a comprehensive approach that includes both transportation and housing policy is undeniable. We need more support for affordable housing — but the City also needs more transit to accommodate an expected 700,000 new neighbors in the next 20 years.
- ◆ Managing that change means we have to put our transportation investments in service of a larger vision: achieving the equitable and lasting improvements detailed in the One Atlanta transportation and housing plans and the Atlanta City Design.
- ◆ After more than a decade with little progress on transit and affordability, accelerated construction of BeltLine rail would demonstrate a commitment to the principles outlined in the One Atlanta strategy. It would also benefit transit-dependent residents and commuters looking for environmentally sensitive alternatives.
- ◆ And while MARTA's expertise is extensive and valuable, Atlanta taxpayers have put their trust in our mayor and City Council to deliver results.
- ◆ BeltLine rail will serve as the cornerstone of future transit in Atlanta and far beyond — a legacy others will build upon.
- ◆ Failure to act now punts the mess to the next generation to solve.
- ◆ Transit and housing are also related to other equity issues, including health, education, pollution and public space. Only by advancing these issues together, can we build a truly equitable city.

We can't keep waiting for this train

Without immediate investment in transit, the BeltLine will become what everyone fears — a beautiful greenway flanked by gentrified neighborhoods, limited to people who can afford them. That's not what Atlantans wanted. That's not what people have supported in years of community engagement and a 2016 tax referendum.

It's time for vigorous and positive action. Tomorrow is today, and we must not let "too late" become our legacy.



People in the most transit-dependent parts of Atlanta have some of the longest commutes, often to jobs north of I-20. Transit planned for the BeltLine and Campbellton Road would extend reliable rail transit to more of those neighborhoods — but under current MARTA plans, they'll be among the last connected.

"Between 2011 and 2017, rents have gone up 35% and average home sale prices have increased a whopping 60%, while wages have only increased 15%. About one in three residents in metro Atlanta are now considered 'cost burdened' — that is, they spend more than 30% of their income on housing."

— Atlanta Regional Commission



The BeltLine has been designed for light rail to be built next to the sidewalk trails used by pedestrians, cyclists and others.

"We need to build BeltLine transit now because we're already 10 years too late."

— Ryan Gravel, urban planner and author of the city's comprehensive design plan