

2021 Atlanta Candidate Full Survey Responses



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GRADE: A SCORE: 97

ATLANTA CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 6

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1. Do you mention BeltLine rail or other mass transit on your website?

"Yes"

2. I have a transit-transportation advisor on my campaign staff.

"No"

3. I consider light rail along the BeltLine.....(check as many as apply.)

"long overdue., a vital part of Atlanta's transit plans., a solution to traffic and air pollution., one of the ways we can slow and ease displacement of existing residents., the way we can increase density and affordable housing., a way to focus density and new development in areas designed for density and transit., part of the solution to reducing parking around the BeltLine., crucial to bringing transit equity to historically under-served communities."

4. Atlanta's Streetcar Plan (including the BeltLine light rail loop) is seen as the start of a comprehensive light rail network. Is building that network -- including the BeltLine -- a top transportation/transit priority for you? How high on your list of priorities is it?

"Among my Top 5"

5. The Streetcar East Extension currently in engineering evaluation by MARTA will result in the first build of rail on the BeltLine. What are the most important fixes to the streetcar that you would urge MARTA to make as it is extended and travels 1.4 miles of Beltline to Ponce City Market?

"Increase frequency of service (15 minute intervals are current service headway), Improve and create access to MARTA rail stations in both directions., Install priority signalization technology so that the streetcar is prioritized over other traffic."

6. MARTA's current timetable calls for completing the 2.25 mile streetcar extension to Ponce City Market in 6-7 years. What best describes your position?

"I'd like to see this happen in 3-5 years."

7. The 2019 More MARTA Program names both the transit projects and their type (light rail, bus rapid transit, rail station improvements, etc.) Do you support implementing the More MARTA Program?

"Yes"

8. Do you agree with MARTA's timeline of sometime in the 2045-2050 range to complete More MARTA?

"No"

9. When should light rail on the city-owned parts of the BeltLine, often referred to as the "J", be completed? These are sections A, G, D, B, and C in the More MARTA map.

"2030-2035"

10. The right of way for the 6.5 mile remainder of the 22-mile loop on the NW side of the BeltLine is not yet acquired by the city. What best states your thoughts on closing the loop? Check all that apply.

"We need to reach agreement to secure the right of way with the railroads as soon as possible., The Mayor needs to lead on this., We need state DOT and legislators to broker a deal with the railroads., Without this northwest section, the BeltLine won't reach its full potential."

11. Please feel free to elaborate on your answers above to more fully reflect your thoughts and your vision for transit in Atlanta and specifically for BeltLine rail.

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12. The BeltLine rail project gained international attention because of its potential benefits while connecting communities, delivering a world-class transit system and reduce car dependency. Critics say The City of Atlanta and MARTA deliver too little, too late. Can you paint us a picture of the vital role BeltLine rail will play in helping Atlanta deal with its anticipated growth and other significant challenges?

"With the projected increases in population forecast for the City of Atlanta over the next decades, it is critical that we wait no longer on building the infrastructure needed to support our new residents. While many focus on housing (which is important), we must concurrently plan for how those who live, work, and play in our city will get around.

The reality is that we cannot pave our way out of this challenge. The answer does not lie in more streets with larger throughput. Rather, we need to aggressively pursue alternate modes of transportation other than cars to build the needed capacity.

Transit must be at the top of that list.

The Atlanta BeltLine offers the most "ready" transit projects before us. Its build out also enhances our current MARTA system through improved connectivity and expanded transit options. The project also has the opportunity to help address such other important issues as housing affordability and furthering thoughtful conversations about density and commercial nodes/corridor placement throughout the city. Additionally the BeltLine will also improve our long-term sustainability initiatives."

13. In your view, how does reliable transit, and specifically BeltLine rail, improve quality of life?

"Reliable transit - and BeltLine rail - improves quality of life through enhanced connectivity. By providing a more efficient and environmentally friendly option to get to and from destinations, it relieves reliance on automobiles and helps unclog street congestion through our neighborhoods and business corridors. Transit also spurs economic development, bringing amenities, revitalization, and other resources to traditionally under-resourced communities. Transit also helps connect the work force to business locations, thereby improving economic opportunity and mobility."

14. Wherever the BeltLine trail is completed, property values rise dramatically, causing displacement of long-time residents at an alarming rate. BeltLine rail was imagined to be built simultaneously to the trail, and envisioned to help residents stay where they are. On the east side it is too late, but most of the rest of the trail is not yet built. We can still accelerate transit construction, particularly on the south and west sides. Do you see yourself as leading on this issue?

"Yes"

15. In addition to transit, what zoning and housing policies are needed to reduce the rate of displacement?

"First we need to aggressively hold the BeltLine to the affordable housing goals originally set forward when the project was first initiated. There are several tools that should be funded and deployed, including (1) property tax support or abatement for low-income and legacy residents; (2) assistance for home repairs and maintenance; and (3) land acquisition and contribution to development projects in exchange for affordable housing units. Requirements for affordable units with any public funding assistance must continue, and we should explore further inclusionary zoning layers where appropriate."

16. More MARTA is the largest transit expansion program in the city's history. Will you press for re-examination of ridership estimates using industry-standard best practices that include a variety of ridership models?

"Yes"

17. If not, why not?

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18. What have you done to champion BeltLine rail? When? What will you do next?

"I have always been a loud, vocal supporter of BeltLine rail, both while I served on the City Council and since, including when I was a candidate in 2020 for another position. I was a sponsor of the City legislation that authorized the More MARTA referendum and supported the TSPLOST initiative, and in both instances, championed allocation for the BeltLine rail to be included in the project list.

If I am elected to this position, I will continue to be an advocate for BeltLine rail. I want to revisit the funding prioritization for the project as well as push to accelerate the implementation timeline from what is currently proposed. While I do see the Mayor being the best leader for this project, City Council must keep the pressure on

moving this project forward through its committee oversight, its control of the City's financial resources, and its position on Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. We also need to insert ourselves into the MARTA governance process to ensure that our transit (and BeltLine) objectives are prioritized.”

19. Adding four Infill MARTA stations to the existing rail network would maximize efficiency and connectivity and spark transit-oriented development. Though MARTA studied them in 2007 and ABI includes 3 of the 4 in its 2018 BeltLine sub-area master plans, they are not in the More MARTA plan. These proposed stations are at Boone Blvd. (W), Hulsey Yard (E), Murphy Crossing(S), and Amour (N). Should funding be prioritized to study them again?

“Yes”

20. How does Transit Equity figure into your candidacy? Will you urge MARTA to demonstrate a commitment to it by conducting the engineering study required to build rail on the south and west Beltline segments as soon as possible?

“When I ran for citywide for the Council President position in 2017, I was disappointed and surprised by the lack of connectivity and public transportation options throughout south and west Atlanta. I continued to follow this during my tenure on the Atlanta Regional Commission as we discussed transportation initiatives for the region. The long-term economic and social impact of that neglect continues to bother me, making transit equity an important priority for me going forward.

I absolutely would urge MARTA to conduct the engineering study required to build rail on the south and west BeltLine segments as soon as possible.”

21. How will you ensure the entire BeltLine vision -- which features light rail transit, trail, and green railbed set in a greenway of trees and plants -- remains intact? What steps will you take so Atlanta's residents -- not just developers-- get the maximum benefits?

“District 6 residents have long been supporters of the Atlanta BeltLine vision, and we were fortunate to have had the Northeast segment be the first to be built out with the understanding and expectation now of what the final product will be. While part of my job on City Council will be to ensure the oversight we and the City bring to the project focuses on maintaining that vision, I also know that I can rally my neighbors into keeping a very public and vocal eye on this as well.

This also applies to maintaining the balance between all stakeholders and making sure that all benefit equitably. Public input, the various governing boards associated with the BeltLine project, reporting and accountability are among the tools that we must continue applying to assess and correct to maximize the benefits felt by all.”

22. How will you ensure that Atlanta Beltline Inc., which understands the entire BeltLine vision, has both enough decision-making authority and accountability to achieve it?

“ABI was created and resourced essentially to be the project manager for the City on this project, even to the point where governance includes the various financial stakeholders in the tax allocation district (TAD) to maintain authority and accountability. The City - through the Mayor and City Council - must assert that

authority into project decisions, period, and not cede that to any other authority. After all, the City still maintains control of the key, local funding mechanisms to support the project - TAD, sales tax - which gives the right and responsibility to do this."

23. How can the city council Transportation and Community Development committees do a better job advancing BeltLine rail? Do you hope to serve on one of these committees? Please elaborate.

"Quite frankly, the committees just need to make it a priority at every opportunity where the BeltLine comes up in our proceedings. That is the only way to continue shining a light on the status and progress of BeltLine rail and to continue advocating for its acceleration. We need to make sure there are BeltLine rail champions appointed to both committees (don't forget Finance Executive Committee too with the funding side of this equation!) appointed to each that will consistently ring the bell. I have served on both committees before, and would welcome the opportunity again."

24. In 2016, voters overwhelmingly approved the More MARTA tax to complete BeltLine rail and other transit projects by a historic margin of 71%. More than \$250 million has been collected in More MARTA sales tax so far. In addition to no progress on actual transit construction, the public hasn't seen leadership, accountability or transparency from the City Council and the Mayor's office. What do you think the reasons are for this? (Check all that apply)

"MARTA did not understand the project's urgency and put it on the back burner., MARTA did not apply for grant money to begin construction as soon as they could., The Council needed strong mayoral leadership to advance BeltLine Rail and didn't get it., There were not enough champions for BeltLine rail in the City Council., There was not enough cooperation among the council, Mayor, ABI, and MARTA."

25. Is an accelerated delivery of transit under More MARTA primarily a leadership issue or a money issue?

"Some of both, but more a leadership issue."

26. Please explain what you would do to resolve this?

"Continue to apply pressure and attention!

During my City Council tenure, it became a running joke that I would always bring up "funded vacant positions" as a way for the administration to commit and then trap excess budget dollars they could later apply to their initiatives. But because I would always bring it up, over time, they realized that it had to get addressed, and we made significant progress in eliminating that padding. That's what it will take on this. Just consistently and steadfastly raising the issue and not letting the administration or agencies dodge them."

27. What additional sources of local funding would you support?

"Amend the BeltLine SSD to use funds for BeltLine rail construction., Renew the TSPLOST with specific funds designated for BeltLine rail., Change state law to allow Impact Fees paid in the City of Atlanta to be used for transit., Lobby the ARC, State Legislators & others for (flexing) of federal highway funds., Create new special assessment districts around future infill MARTA stations."

28. The Biden Administration has made funding transit a priority. Atlanta could see hundreds of millions in federal transit funding. Do you agree that building light rail on the south and west sides should be the next BeltLine build priority? (The yellow highlighted areas on the map) Why or why not?

"YES! I mentioned transit equity in an earlier response, and that principle holds for my response here."

29. Why do you think Atlanta and MARTA are not in line to receive billions in federal funding from the Biden Administration that cities like Phoenix, Los Angeles, St. Paul, Washington DC, San Jose, will in the 2022 budget? How would your leadership ensure Atlanta doesn't miss these opportunities?

"I speculate that this was not as "hot" an priority during our leadership's discussions with the Biden Administration."

30. Do you believe the More MARTA-Atlanta IGA should be amended to require approval by the City Council?

"Yes"

31. If yes, please outline legislation that you would introduce if elected. If no, please explain your position.

"We need to mimic the appointment process we use for other agencies like Invest Atlanta, which require City Council vetting and approval. That way City Council will get a chance to assess a candidate's qualifications and hear his/her vision and priorities to ensure that they are aligned with the City's."

32. Is BeltLine rail the City's Project or MARTA's? Who should determine the priorities, timeline and sequencing? Check all that apply.

"MARTA, Atlanta BeltLine Inc. (ABI), The City Council, The Mayor, The City DOT"

33. Please explain your response.

"I think BeltLine rail is the City's project, but managed/operated by MARTA. I think all of the stakeholders listed must be given voice in setting priorities, timeline, and sequencing."

34. Since others have failed, what would be your approach to make those negotiations successful? And who needs to be at the table?

"The proposed Armour infill station and the proposed Emory Clifton Corridor are both in District 6, so the success of these negotiations would be of particular interest to me and would give me standing in engaging in this dialog.

The reality is that we are going to need some enticements - financial or otherwise - for the rail operators to help the project solve these problems with plans that are comprehensive and effective. While I don't know right now what the source(s) of those enticements would be, I have relationships with the various agencies - as well as with Norfolk Southern (I provided assistance to them when they were doing work on their offices in Midtown!) - to encourage the exploration. More importantly, I will

work with my colleagues and with the new administration to push MARTA to the table, and, if needed, pursue engagement from the state as well.
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35. What will convince the freight railroads to grant rights of way for BeltLine Rail, the Emory Clifton Corridor, and MARTA infill stations so that they can connect to existing transit?

“As I mentioned in the previous answers, we are going to need financial and other resources to fund solutions to the challenges that the railroads are facing with our implementation plan. This might include reconstructing the pinch points or re-configuring/rebuilding their real estate assets or operations that are causing the conflict.”

