

# Atlanta BeltLine doesn't need the streetcar, former Jamestown executive says

*Tyler Wilkins*

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The Atlanta BeltLine played a crucial role in the success of Ponce City Market. But adding transit along the trail won't help the redevelopment, said [Walter Brown](#), who contributed to the project during his tenure with Jamestown Properties.

Brown is one of several real estate professionals against a [controversial plan to extend the Atlanta Streetcar along the Eastside Trail](#). The Atlanta native says the city needs to tackle car-dependency by reducing parking in the urban core and expanding transit in the region. But he lacks faith that the BeltLine streetcar route would attract enough riders to outweigh potential side effects.

"We're forcing ourselves into a solution that may not make sense," said Brown, who now works as a consultant and policy advisor, while speaking at Thursday panel organized by a group hoping to halt the streetcar project.

## **Streetcar opposition**

The streetcar extension is poised to connect Downtown Atlanta to Ponce City Market. Some [business owners and residents are hesitant to embrace the route](#). A few concerns include the effect on pedestrian activity, access to properties divided from the trail by tracks and loss in retail sales during construction. Low ridership for the existing service also casts doubt on the need for an extension.

"Don't pour money on top of a mountain of success," said Georgia Tech professor [Hans Klein](#), who is pushing to add a dedicated lane for bikes, scooters and skateboards instead of rail, during the Thursday panel.

The BeltLine is a catalyst for economic development. The multi-use trail now serves as a boardwalk of businesses and landing strip for companies, which are willing to [pay some of the steepest rents in the Southeast](#) to be near the lively environment. Real estate developers aren't banking on rail to boost the value of their real

estate projects, Brown said.

"I don't think it'll make one iota of difference," said Brown, who was senior vice president of development and sustainability at Jamestown. "Developers are worried it'll change the feeling and the value that they have already experienced and the reasons that they're developing there."

### **Advancing transit**

The popularity to live and work by the BeltLine has exacerbated rising housing costs, resulting in displacement. Advocates are [counting on rail to improve equity and help manage the city's growth](#). Transit can bolster the corridor's function as a commuter route, connecting car-free residents to jobs, supporters say. Walking or biking several miles isn't possible for everyone, nor is it feasible on days with intense weather.

"The whole viability of the city as a quality place to live is at stake," [Matthew Rao](#), chair of advocacy organization BeltLine Rail Now, previously told Atlanta Business Chronicle.

The debate over the extension may be futile. MARTA is entering the final design process in hope of starting service by 2028. It's one of [nine projects prioritized under the More MARTA Atlanta program](#), the transit expansion funded by a half-penny sales tax approved by voters. Rao hopes the streetcar serves as "proof of concept" for adding even more rail to the 22-mile loop.

Atlanta BeltLine Inc., the nonprofit guiding the build-out of the corridor, is [pushing for a well-crafted design](#) with greenspace preservation, approachable stations and subtle safety measures. MARTA plans to solicit feedback during final design efforts, according to a spokesperson.