

Atlanta BeltLine: MARTA chooses firm for streetcar design - Atlanta Business Chronicle

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MARTA will soon have a final design prepared for the first set of tracks along the Atlanta BeltLine's Eastside Trail, a [controversial project facing pushback from residents, business owners and developers](#).

On Thursday, the MARTA Planning and Capital Programs Committee tapped architecture and engineering firm HDR to take the lead on designing the eastward extension of the Atlanta Streetcar. MARTA's board will have to issue a final approval. The agency hopes to break ground on the project in 2025 and begin operations in 2028.

HDR has provided engineering, architectural, environmental and construction services for streetcar projects in more than 30 cities across North America. The Nebraska-based firm will partner with Axis Infrastructure, VHB, The Collaborative Firm, C2G, Aulick, Facet, Lumenor, PCS, Accura, Perez Planning and Sycamore Group throughout the design process.

The \$230 million extension is poised to connect Downtown Atlanta

to Ponce City Market. The route will run along Edgewood Avenue to Randolph Street, flow up Auburn Avenue and enter the BeltLine corridor at Irwin Street. It's one of [nine projects prioritized under the More MARTA Atlanta program](#), the transit expansion funded by a voter-approved sales tax.

Advocates hail the [potential for rail to help manage the city's growth with equity in mind](#). Lining the path with transit can bolster its function as a commute route, connecting car-free residents to job opportunities, supporters say. [Ryan Gravel](#), who had the idea for the BeltLine in his 1999 Georgia Tech graduate thesis, envisioned the trail as a passenger rail network to revitalize communities.

The quality of the streetcar extension design is a major point of contention for nearby property owners. [Opponents are wary of the project's effects on the ambience of the BeltLine](#), access to properties divided from the trail by tracks and business sales during construction. Low ridership for the existing service also casts doubt on the viability of the project. A [petition against the extension](#) has garnered more than 1,000 signatures.

"I am afraid we will execute something that we regret," Mike Greene, vice president of development at Portman Holdings, previously told Atlanta Business Chronicle. [Portman is building an office district](#) along the proposed route.

MARTA moved forward with HDR in large part for its experience in conducting public engagement for streetcar projects, said [Abhay Joshi](#), director of expansion program management. In addition to hosting one-on-one sessions and events, the firm plans to open an office along the corridor to spread awareness of the project and garner feedback, he said.

