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STOP RAILROADING A TRAIN THROUGH THE BELTLINE

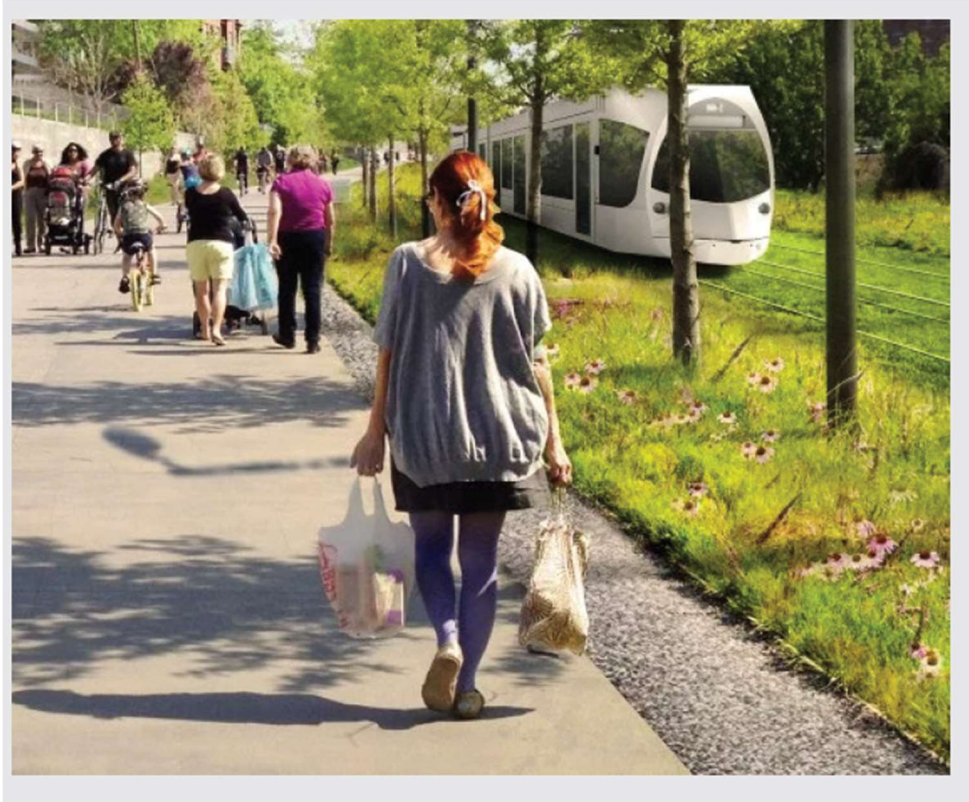
The City of Atlanta, MARTA, and the Beltline Inc. plan to run rail through Atlanta's beloved linear park, the Beltline. This little-known plan is already underway, and the public is only being consulted on details rather than whether we should do it at all. Rail on the Beltline will **cost \$1.3 billion**, and **construction will last 3 years**. How anyone will enjoy the Beltline during construction -- or afterwards -- remains unknown.

According to this plan, a train would run adjacent to the Beltline path from Irwin to Ponce City Market. Concrete barriers would prevent people from crossing the train tracks. There would be few places to cross to the west side of the path, significantly reducing connectivity and forever and irreversibly changing the park and transportation corridor where many of us love to walk, run, bike, scoot, or skateboard.

We believe that this plan, conceived of 22 years ago, needs re-thinking. We need public dialogue and deliberation, open debate, and democratic input. The images that have been produced by Beltline Inc. and the advocacy group "Beltline Rail Now!" do not accurately represent what is planned.

This image below misleadingly excludes concrete barriers, pedestrian crossings, and overhead powerlines. This plan minimizes safety issues inherent with placing a train, expected to travel 30 mph, through a crowded pedestrian corridor. We think that there are alternatives that better serve today and tomorrow's needs. Below we list key reasons we think that this plan needs to be reconsidered and some potentially viable alternatives.

*Inaccurate representation of Beltline rail
without safety barriers or power lines*



- Do not implement light rail until all 22 miles of multi-use path are completed, connected, and open to the public (currently planned for 2030).

The Beltline Inc. never recognized how popular the multi-use path would be. The multi-use path has been transformative as a transportation corridor and as a linear park. Thousands of people commute, exercise, and recreate daily along the Beltline. It provides scarce urban habitat and greenspace. And yet it hasn't even seen its full potential as an innovative and revolutionary transportation corridor – allowing us to bike and use Light Individualized Transportation (e-bikes, e-scooters, etc.) (LIT) to easily access neighborhoods all over the city. We believe that the

Beltline Inc should finish the full 22-mile multi-use path and then allow the public to decide whether to implement rail through this amazing park / transportation corridor or whether other light transit might be more effective.

- Instead of a closed off train track, implement a new LIT lane that separates wheeled transportation from foot traffic.

The Beltline has become a victim of its own success. Congestion has grown on the multi-use path as a diverse group of families with children, dog walkers, bikers, and scooters all compete for a narrow width of sidewalk. People complain about safety and congestion, and collisions are common. Adding a train to the existing congested space will be potentially catastrophic for safety¹, along a corridor that many students use to commute to Howard Middle School. Building another sidewalk for wheeled transportation can separate LIT transportation from walkers and runners and improve the safety of the Beltline, and allow the Beltline to become more effective as a transportation corridor. Nobody predicted the innovation in battery and GPS technology that enabled the rise of light individualized transportation and rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft. These technologies solve the “last mile” problem and cheaply get people where they want to go, when they want to go there. Changing technological realities require us to re-think public transportation approaches compatible with the demand for Light Individualized Transit.²

¹ The Houston light rail system was an attempt to implement rail in a way that was at grade and open for the public to cross in many places. [Between 2004-2018, over 500 collisions with pedestrians and motorists have occurred, with dozens of people dead.](#) There is a clear tradeoff between safety and connectivity, and MARTA officials recognize and readily admit that they do not know how to solve all of the safety concerns.

² Electric golf carts, electric wheelchairs, or even a [“trackless tram”](#) might be safer, more cost-effective, and meet the needs of mobility-limited citizens.

- There are cheaper, superior, viable alternatives to rail on the Beltline.

While construction of the multi-use path proceeds at a snail's pace, and [Beltline Inc scrambling for an estimated \\$350 million to finish the multi-use path](#), the Beltline, the City of Atlanta, and MARTA are planning to spend \$1.3 billion on extending the Atlanta streetcar. Building a sidewalk for a trackless tram or for LIT transportation would be far more fiscally responsible and would not lock us into an unpopular rail network. At the very least, a trackless tram would allow adaptation to changing technological realities. The Atlanta Streetcar has been a colossal failure, with daily ridership of under 1,200 people (before COVID!), and even fewer of them paying. In contrast, the Beltline estimates that just the 2-mile segment known as the Eastside Trail gets more than 2 million users each year.³ If light rail expansion is desirable, let's at least put it on the streets, rather than through the most popular park in the city.

- There are more urgent goals for \$1.3 billion that promote equity and justice

The Beltline has failed to deliver on its promises to deliver affordable housing. Adding rail along the wealthiest corridor of the Beltline will not help it address equity issues or help improve transportation options for lower income individuals. Just \$12 million has been allocated for affordable housing and a meager 2,133 “affordable” units have been built to date, with a total goal of only 5,600 units by 2030.⁴ The target of 5,600 units by 2030 simply fails to meet the scope of the affordable housing problem. Expansion of the existing MARTA subway and bus network

³ <https://beltline.org/flipbook/2020-annual-report/>

⁴ <https://beltline.org/flipbook/2020-annual-report/> (p 20)

can allow for the development of increased affordable housing, as was originally promised but has failed to come to fruition. Funding should be used to finish the transportation corridor and the help the Beltline meet affordable housing targets. Not to double down on a light rail pipedream.

Conclusion:

The plan to put rail on the East Side Trail is a boondoggle of a project that is expensive, will destroy the BEST thing Atlanta has ever done for improving quality of life and access to greenspace, and will double down on the Atlanta Streetcar, a colossal failure of a project. It will create safety issues, connectivity issues, and by putting in concrete barriers and overhead electric wires, will destroy the character of the Beltline as we know it. The process which this has occurred has been undemocratic – with key decisions made without direct public input. Before committing to rail, we ask that the city, MARTA, and the Beltline stop and ask the citizens of Atlanta if this project, conceived of over 20 years ago, is the best thing for Atlanta today and for the next 30 years.

About Us:

We are unconnected to any political party, any commercial entity, or any organization. We are citizens who use the Beltline for transportation and exercise, who support public transit and improved non-automotive transportation, but think that the idea to run light rail on the Beltline is fraught with problems. Please join our nascent group of thoughtful individuals to help provide superior options for public transit.

Contact us here:

Potential alternatives to light rail on the Beltline:

- LIT lanes on the Beltline
 - Possible expansion of services for disabled / elderly
 - Fulfills alternative transportation mission for Beltline by embracing 21st century technologies.
 - Builds on success of existing Beltline sections.
 - Increases safety.
 - Cheap to complete.
- A trackless tram on the Beltline
 - Avoids technological lock-in.
 - Is much cheaper.
 - Is potentially compatible with other wheeled transportation infrastructure.
 - Is likely safer than light rail.
- Light rail on surface roads
 - Avoids running rail through parks, while providing increased connectivity. Connects to more existing MARTA lines.
 - (Cons): Creates potential conflicts with automobiles.
- Expansion of MARTA as a subway service
 - Builds on successful MARTA subway routes, potentially adding routes or stations in much needed areas.
 - Allows for the opportunity for new development with affordable housing accessible to MARTA network
 - Enhances equity
 - Avoids conflict with pedestrians, cyclists, and cars.
 - The Boring Company has been able to vastly reduce construction costs associated with tunneling under a city.