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Atlanta businesses wary of extending streetcar to BeltLine

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Members of Atlanta's business community aren't sold on the potential benefits of [running the Atlanta Streetcar up the BeltLine's Eastside Trail](#).

At a Thursday forum, local business leaders and neighborhood advocates questioned MARTA's plan to lay new streetcar tracks in Old Fourth Ward, sharing concerns over the livelihood of office buildings and retailers. Their faith in the extension is soured by low ridership for the current service Downtown and financial hurdles businesses faced during previous construction for the existing route.

Community members — and [even MARTA board members](#) — have asked the agency to reconsider the transit mode and route for the project. But the current plan is set to move forward, said [Bryan Hobbs](#), a project manager for the agency. It's entering final design with completion expected in 2027.

Transit on BeltLine

The eastward extension is poised to connect Downtown Atlanta to Krog Street Market, Ponce City Market and other notable developments on the Eastside Trail. The \$230 million project is part of the [More MARTA Atlanta program, the historic transit expansion](#)

[funded by a half-penny sales tax approved by voters](#).

A map of the stops planned for the east extension of the streetcar.

MARTA

The streetcar often gets stuck in traffic or blocked by other vehicles, which MARTA hopes to resolve by installing barriers or expanding curbs. The project will add the [first segment of high-capacity transit to the BeltLine, originally envisioned as a rail corridor](#) around Atlanta.

Atlanta BeltLine Inc. favors adding transit to the path, as it will provide access to people unable to make long distances by foot, bike or scooter. It also offers a more palatable way to use the corridor on days with unfavorable weather. Supporters of the extension view it as a way to help the city manage population growth in coming decades.

"Is what we want a city full of more traffic and parking? I say no," said [Matthew Rao](#), co-chair of advocacy organization BeltLine Rail Now. "We want the original vision of the BeltLine, which is to unite the community."

Pedestrian activity, construction woes

Some of those opposed to the plan worry about changes to the ambience of the BeltLine corridor. Companies, restaurants and residents have flocked to the Eastside Trail for its ability to gather people in a lively, car-free environment.

"What attracted us to the BeltLine — and I think you'd find this to be true of most investors — is the pedestrian activity," said [Mike Greene](#), senior vice president of development at Portman Holdings. "What I'm focused on is making sure the execution of the streetcar doesn't sacrifice the activity."

Portman is building Junction Krog District with [plans to extend the](#)

[office hub over to a 1-acre block along the Eastside Trail](#). Greene is concerned about the frequency of crossings and how pedestrians will access the path from his firm's future development. He's cautious of those effects on BeltLine-adjacent retailers, which help drive office leasing in the area.