

Atlanta Development Authority Beltline Transit Panel Public Hearing - June 7, 2005 - 2:00 PM

Dr. Ross, Dr. Meyer and Professor Dobbins:

Thank you for allowing the public to express their thoughts and concerns regarding the issue of the proposed Belt Line Transit as it relates to the entire Belt Line Project.

My name is James Strack; I am a registered Architect; and I graduated in 1971 from the Georgia Institute of Technology with a degree in architecture. I have lived in Morningside since 1974 and currently serve on the Board of the Morningside Lenox Park Association as the NPU-F Representative. I have also served for the past three years as the Chair of the City of Atlanta's Cheshire Bridge Task Force.

As we begin to refine and interpret all of the elements of the transit component that is to be implemented in the old abandoned railroad right-of-way to become the Belt Line, it is most important that we remember the **original vision** of this great endeavor.

There is a vision of the Belt Line which has inspired all of us - a vision of linear parks, trails, and greenways; an emerald necklace with new opportunities for transit and recreation which will enhance and strengthen our intown communities.

The original vision was proposed by **Ryan Gravel**; reinforced and heralded by the **Friends of the Belt Line**; and then professionally refined by **Alex Garvin**.

Ryan Gravel's vision, as found on the Friends of the Belt Line website, is expressed as being a transit line with sufficient stops linking mixed-use developments along the way with parallel bicycle and walking paths added to create a **22 mile linear park**.

The vision of the **Friends of the Belt Line**, as published on their website, is a 22 mile transportation **greenway** that includes transit and pathways. It is described as a low-impact transit designed for neighbors to gather on foot, and as quiet and environmentally friendly in a park-like setting, similar to the **St. Charles Avenue trolley** in New Orleans. And, unlike MARTA stations, there will be no escalators or parking lots. You can walk easily across the tracks at any point.

Alex Garvin, in his report: "The Belt Line Emerald Necklace: Atlanta's New Public Realm" expresses the project as "The Belt Line Emerald Necklace of Parks." He also calls attention to the "Omstead Emerald Necklace" in Boston as a splendid "**linear park**." He refers again to this linear park as a "23 mile beltline trail." And, he further reinforces it as, "A great park made up of railroad right-of-ways that circles the city's inner neighborhoods."

With regard to the scale and width of this great park, Alex Garvin stipulates:

On page 54, the Belt Line trail by itself is shown to have a minimum of 30' width, but that is when it is between existing buildings. However, he makes full use of the 130' right-of-ways for the linear park and trail when it is available.

On page 66 when the trail is combined with the transit right-of-way, the trail and transit are shown to have a minimum of a 60' width when existing buildings are present. However, again he makes full use of the 180' right-of-way for the linear park, trail and transit when it is available.

The widths of 130' to 180' were all proposed in this manner because of the Belt Line's linear park concept.

In fact, the “Omstead Emerald Necklace” linear park in Boston is shown to actually have widths of 195' and 200'.

This is the primary physical feature of the Belt Line. The Beltline is a wide linear park greenway. Without the linear park concept, the original vision is lost.

What now appears to be compromising that vision?

Narrow right-of-ways crowded with 5, 10 and 40 story development.

In our zeal to make the promise of the Belt Line happen, it appears that we have confused the means with the ends.

Development appears to have replaced both public infrastructure and transportation as the driver and organizer of the plan.

Protection and extension of existing parks and green space appear to be compromised by a desire to appropriate every useable acre for development.

One-size-fits-all mantras about density have replaced appropriate safeguards to protect existing neighborhoods.

Therefore, in order to recapture the promise of the Belt Line, we must prioritize the core values of the Belt Line to be:

a linear park;

a continuous trail;

a reinvigoration of existing parks;

and a creation of new green space.

The Belt Line must have a plan that **strengthens, protects and preserves** the neighborhoods through which it passes.

It should have new development based on **transit** and **sustainability** principles.

Our group of beltline neighbors proposes a reaffirmation of six clear design principles to guide the planning for the Belt Line:

1. **Maintain a clearly defined public greenway along the entire length of the Belt Line, with adequate width to create a true linear park** that can also accommodate trails and future transit options.
2. **Retain the Belt Line property along our parks, including Piedmont Park, as green space.** The Belt Line should enhance and expand our existing parks, not wall them in with linear development.
3. **Respect and reaffirm the CDP land use plan for neighborhoods around the Belt Line.** The years of work that neighborhoods have invested into planning for future growth should be the basis of all planning for future development.
4. **Limit the scale of development until transit is in place with a phased development strategy.** Building car-oriented development today in anticipation of future transit promises years of overcrowded streets and increased pollution, and undermines the potential success of transit when it arrives.
5. **Articulate clear "step down" guidelines to limit the scale of development adjacent to residential neighborhoods.** The careful height guide lines which have been developed in areas all over the City through the recently enacted Quality of Life Zoning Ordinances, should be adopted for the Belt Line
6. **Incorporate a plan for needed traffic calming and pedestrian improvements to local streets which run alongside the Belt Line,** such as Monroe Drive and other similarly impacted avenues in the northeast quadrant. In order for the Belt Line to succeed, the surrounding neighborhoods must become havens for safe pedestrian travel. We must strive to create pedestrian oriented communities.

In conclusion, we must bear in mind that the Belt Line will take decades to fully realize, but its effects will last for generations.

As we implement and construct this monumental project, let us follow the original vision of the Belt Line.

Let us all leave this great linear park as our legacy to future generations.

Let this great greenway encircling Atlanta become our own "Emerald Necklace."

Thank you.

Written by David Rogers and James Strack