

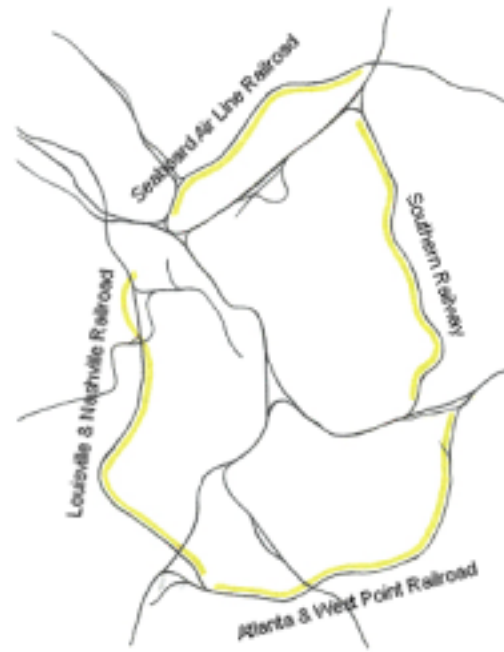
Transportation Alternatives for a Sustainable City

By: Atlanta City Council President Cathy Woolard
with Ryan Gravel, architect & planner

For: *The Southface Journal of the Southface Energy Institute*,
Spring 2002 issue

Over the last half century, metropolitan Atlanta overlooked neglected but valuable urban land in search of easy development in surrounding forests and farmland. More recently, the negative effects of urban sprawl have led to new development in intown Atlanta. But without providing an adequate transportation system for the increasing intown population, the resulting congestion and pollution are diminishing Atlanta's cherished quality of life. As local governments, companies and families begin to look toward Atlanta's future, a healthy regional discussion has emerged that examines how we can restructure the city so that it will continue to thrive in the twenty-first century. Much the same way as an infrastructure of highways led to suburban expansion and urban depopulation in the last forty years, an expansion of mass transit infrastructure will lead to both the revival of the inner city and the protection of our natural ecology and resources.

If the Atlanta region is going to experiment with transit-oriented development, there is no better place to begin than in the city's intown neighborhoods. These areas were built before the rise of automobiles by the extension of streetcars from the central city. That means they are well suited to transit because they were built at densities that support it. While the streetcars are gone, these historic communities are our model for smart growth, offering a mix of land uses, building types and family incomes, as well as schools, sidewalks and public parks.



Three of these four minor freight lines...



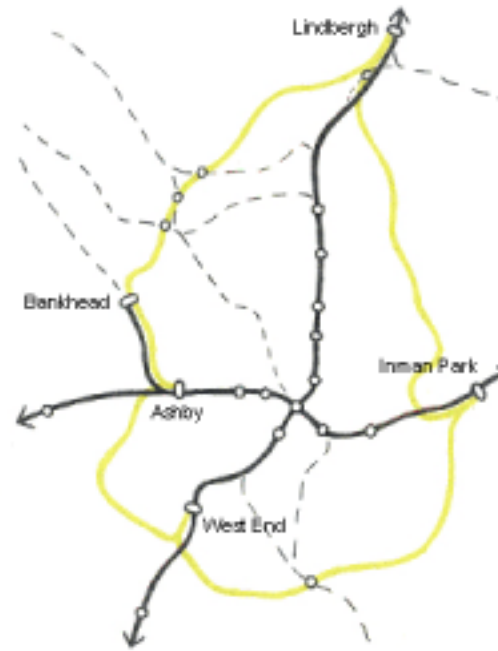
...are largely abandoned



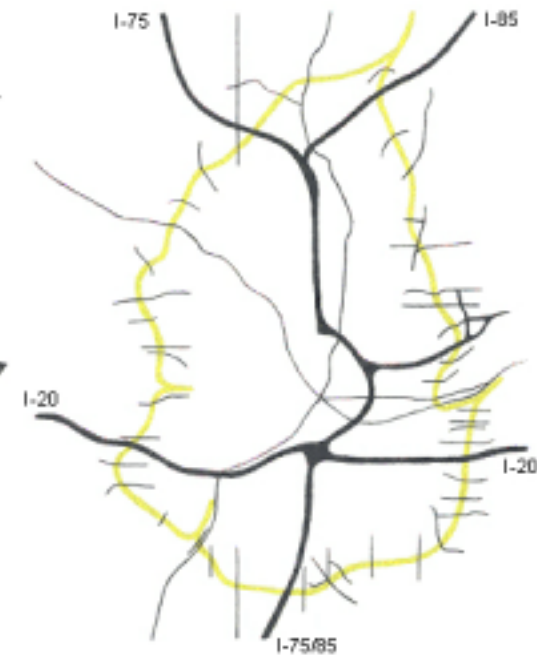
They also offer a sizable amount of underutilized urban land, which, because of its high dollar value will develop at greater densities than the single-family neighborhoods around them, making them particularly good locations for rail transit.

In fact, intown Atlanta has a tremendous amount of neglected urban land ready for reinvestment particularly on the city's south and west. Abandoned industrial land and obsolete commercial corridors dominate the public view, hiding attractive bungalow neighborhoods. The city also has a tremendous amount of urban redevelopment underway, increasing density and straining traffic, particularly on the city's north and east. On reclaimed industrial land and along renewed commercial corridors now stand tall condominiums, restaurants and grocery stores with limited transportation options in an auto-dominated landscape.

Perhaps too conveniently, many of these redevelopment sites (those under construction as well as those still in waiting) are strung together by several old "belt line" railroads. After the Civil War, these minor freight lines developed to serve the city's expanding industrial base, forming a rough six-mile loop around downtown. Since they preceded urban expansion, bungalow streetcar suburbs were nestled up against them. The railroads, therefore, tend not to cut through historic neighborhoods, but instead lie at the seam between them, making these in-between spaces ideal sites for urban redevelopment. Furthermore, the belt lines are associated with a considerable amount of industrial land and most of the industries that remain have abandoned the rail lines, shifting to truck-based freight. As industry has grown in scale, many companies have moved to bigger sites outside of town, leaving behind beautiful old buildings and large chunks of land.



Connections to MARTA



Street crossings



University Avenue Redevelopment Sites
Figure 52: Figure-ground - existing conditions

All of these factors lead to what is known as the "Cultural Loop" or "Belt Line" proposal, that envisions new light rail or bus transit lines woven through the city on these existing belt line railroad rights-of-way and connected to five MARTA stations - Lindbergh, Inman Park/Reynoldstown, West End, Ashby and Bankhead. At a length of 22 miles with 45 stations, the Belt Line loops around downtown and midtown Atlanta on an hour and a half journey through over 4,000 acres of redevelopment sites. With over half of that land suitable for residential and mixed-use development, between 60,000 to 100,000 future residents can be accommodated in new mixed-use, brownfield, transit-oriented districts. Furthermore, the Belt Line slides between 40 historic intown neighborhoods, which would be protected from high-density development through zoning, but reinvigorated with infill housing on vacant land and commercial and cultural districts in appropriate areas.

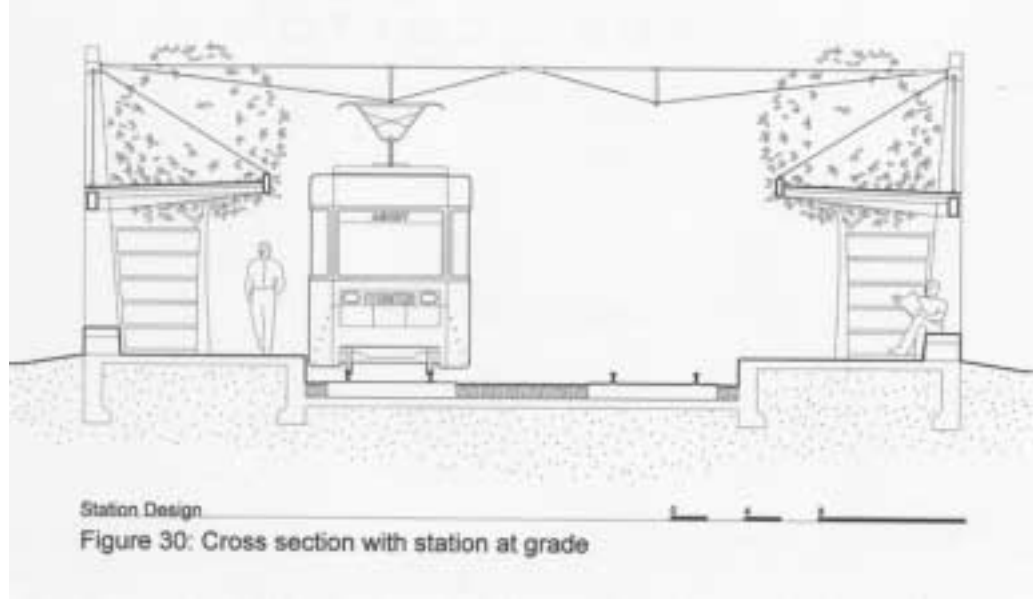
More than just an improved network of public transportation, however, the Belt Line is a transportation greenway, circling the central city as a linear park, connecting big city parks like Piedmont, Freedom, Grant, Perkinson and Maddox Parks and little neighborhood parks like Stanton, Adair, Washington and Tanyard Creek Parks. Bicycle and pedestrian paths join light rail transit, engaging parts of Atlanta as different as Brookwood Hills and Pittsburgh, Piedmont Hospital and Zoo Atlanta. It connects Ansley Mall to the King Plow Arts Center and City Hall East to the Wren's Nest in West End. Furthermore, with an influx of new residents moving closer into the city, the Belt Line accesses developable land and re-uses historic urban fabric in ways that contribute to the health of urban neighborhoods. In conjunction with other public policies, it provides transit-oriented sites for mixed land uses,



Points of interest



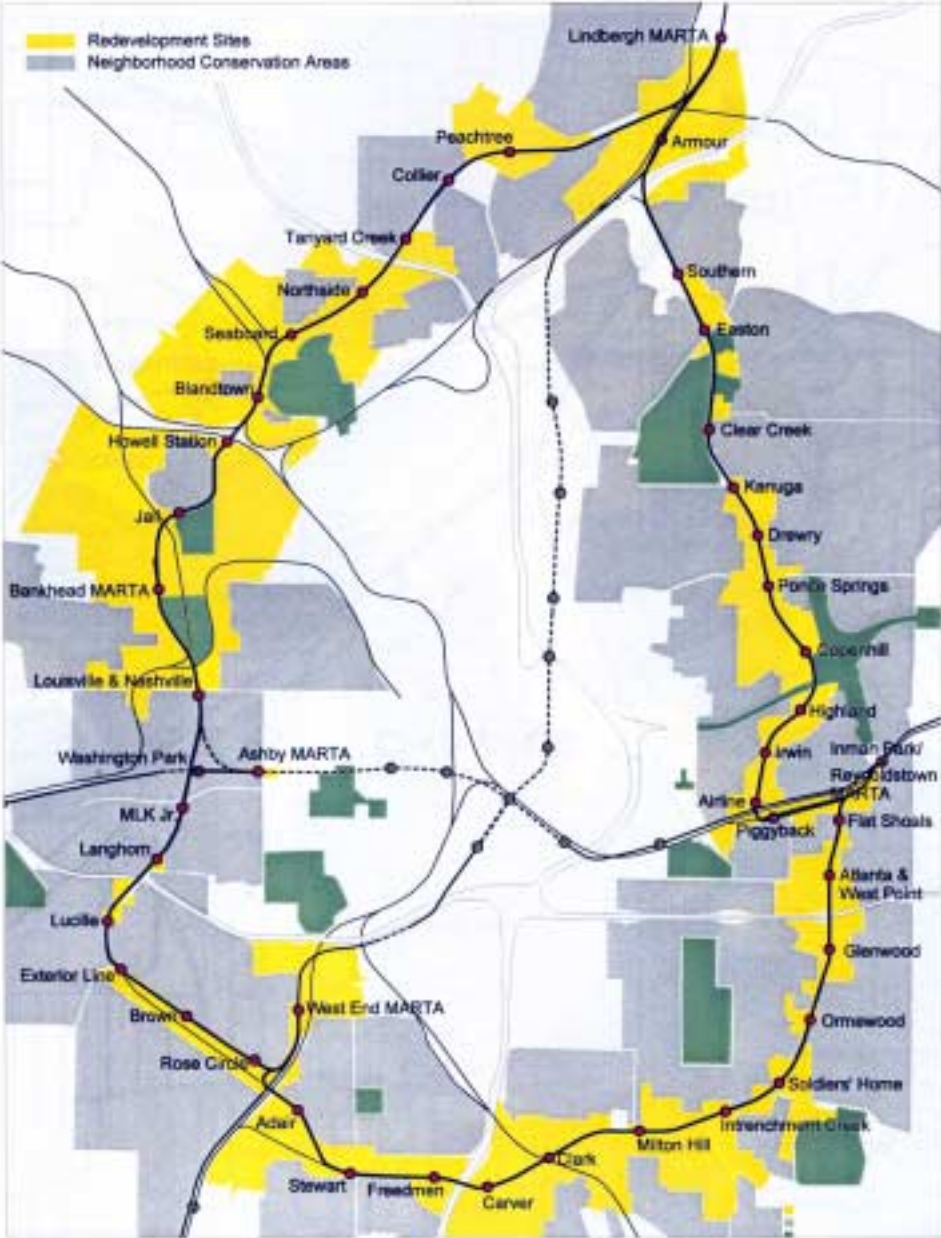
Adjacent historic neighborhoods



multiple housing types and a broad range of family incomes. Stations would be designed for neighbors and would more resemble bus stops than MARTA stations, eliminating elevated platforms, turnstiles, escalators and parking lots.

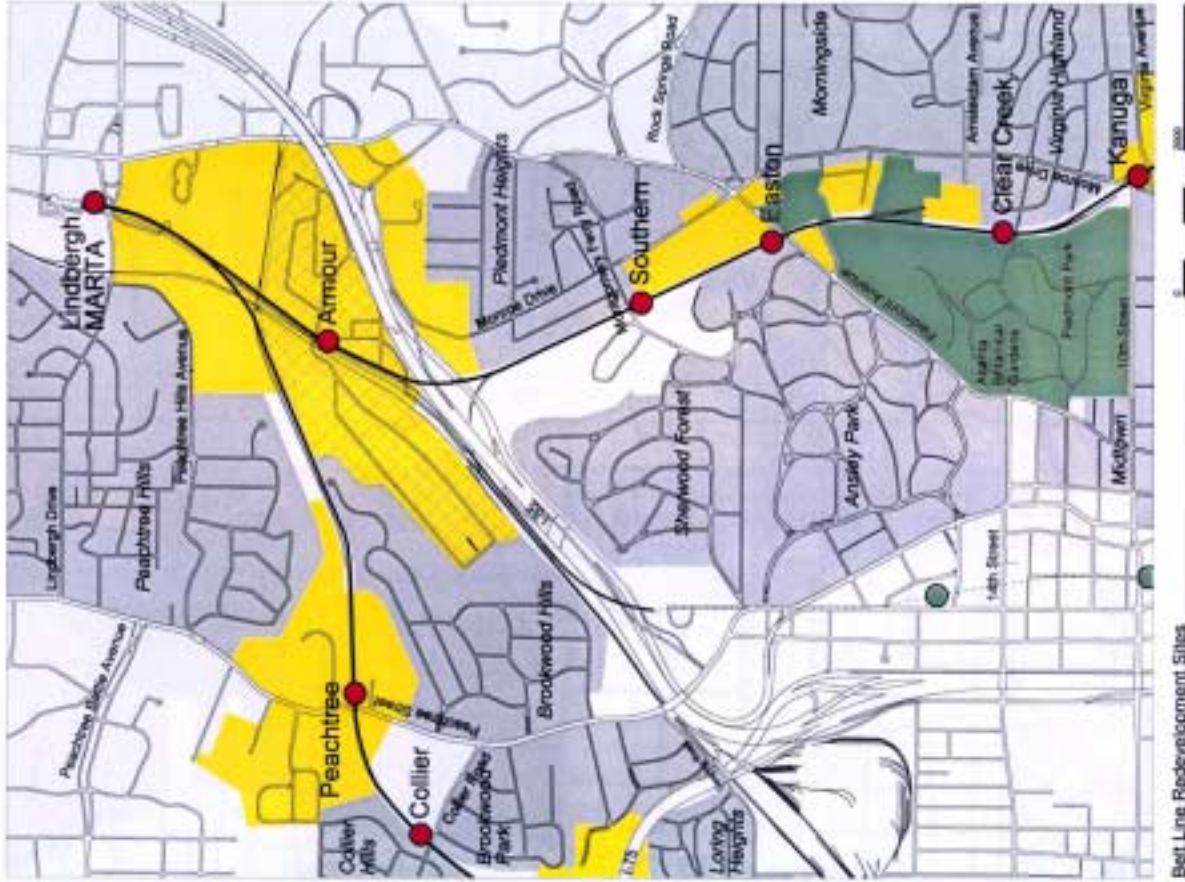
The Belt Line proposal was presented at a community town hall that I held last year as the District Six Councilmember, and I was greatly encouraged by the public interest in this transportation alternative. As Chair of the City Council Transportation Committee last year, I presented this proposal to the committee members, and this year, the City Council passed a resolution in support of having MARTA conduct a feasibility study for the belt line. Funding for that study, in conjunction with a study of a light rail line to connect downtown Atlanta with South DeKalb, was included in the 2003-2005 Transportation Improvement Program by the Atlanta Regional Commission.

This project is not the only answer to Atlanta’s problems. It lays out a strategy for building infrastructure in ways that accomplish public goals - such as renewed neighborhoods, clean air and multiple means of transportation. It envisions a complex network of infrastructure, connecting all parts of the region including new rail service to South DeKalb and Emory, not to mention possible further destinations. In order for Atlanta to grow sustainably and thrive in the twenty-first century, we must find better ways to grow. Growth is spurred in part by public policy and public investment in infrastructure. The kind of infrastructure we invest in is critical to the health of our economy, our communities and our families.



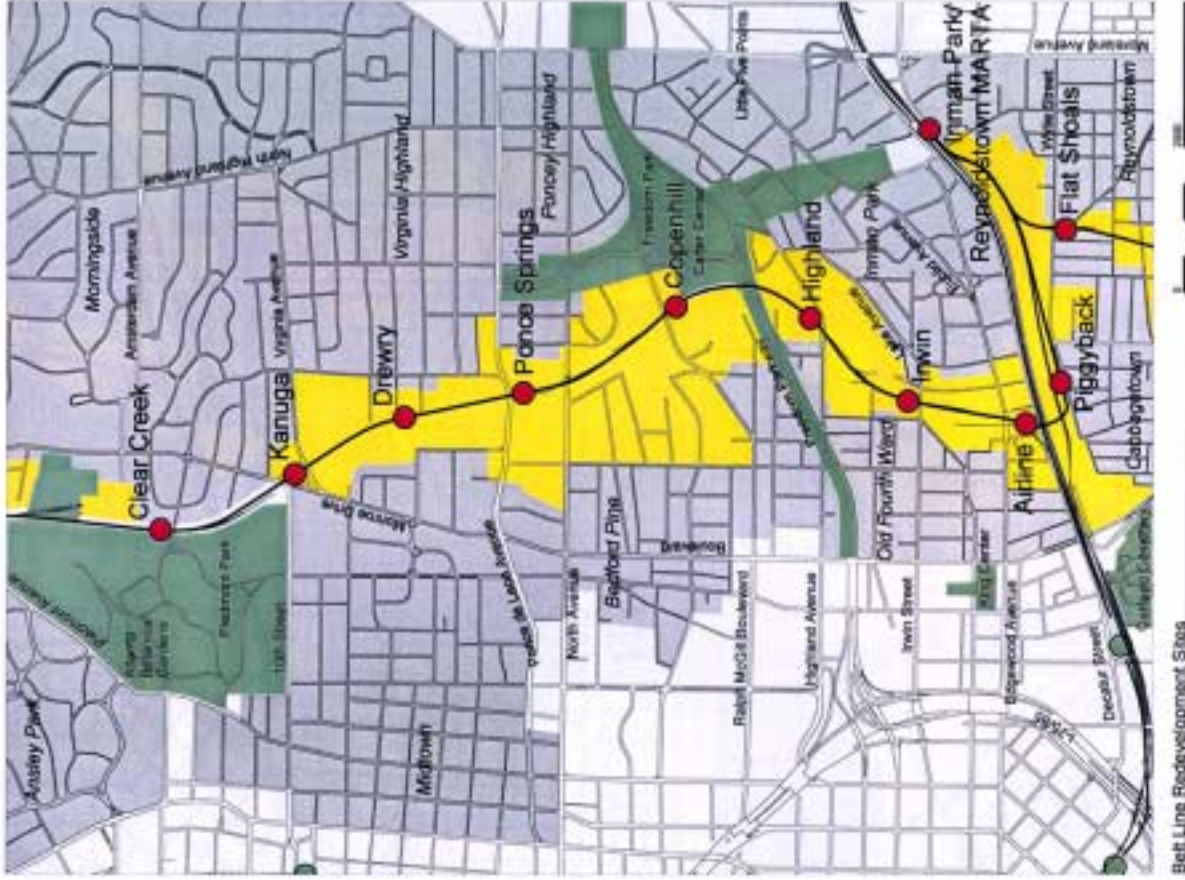
Belt Line Redevelopment Sites
 Figure 21: Belt Line route with redevelopment sites

The Belt Line proposal is based on a graduate thesis in Architecture and City Planning at Georgia Tech in 1999 by Ryan Gravel.



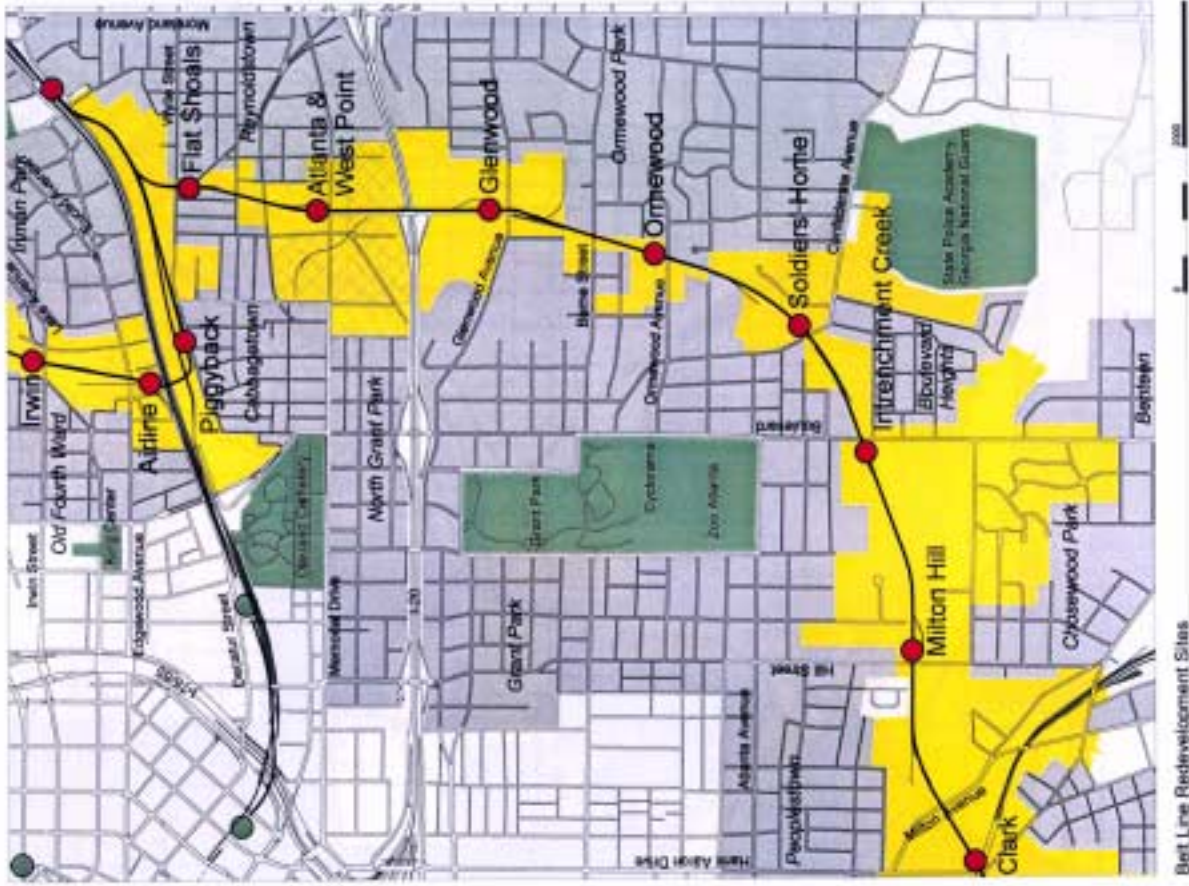
Belt Line Redevelopment Sites

Figure 22: Collier to Kanuga



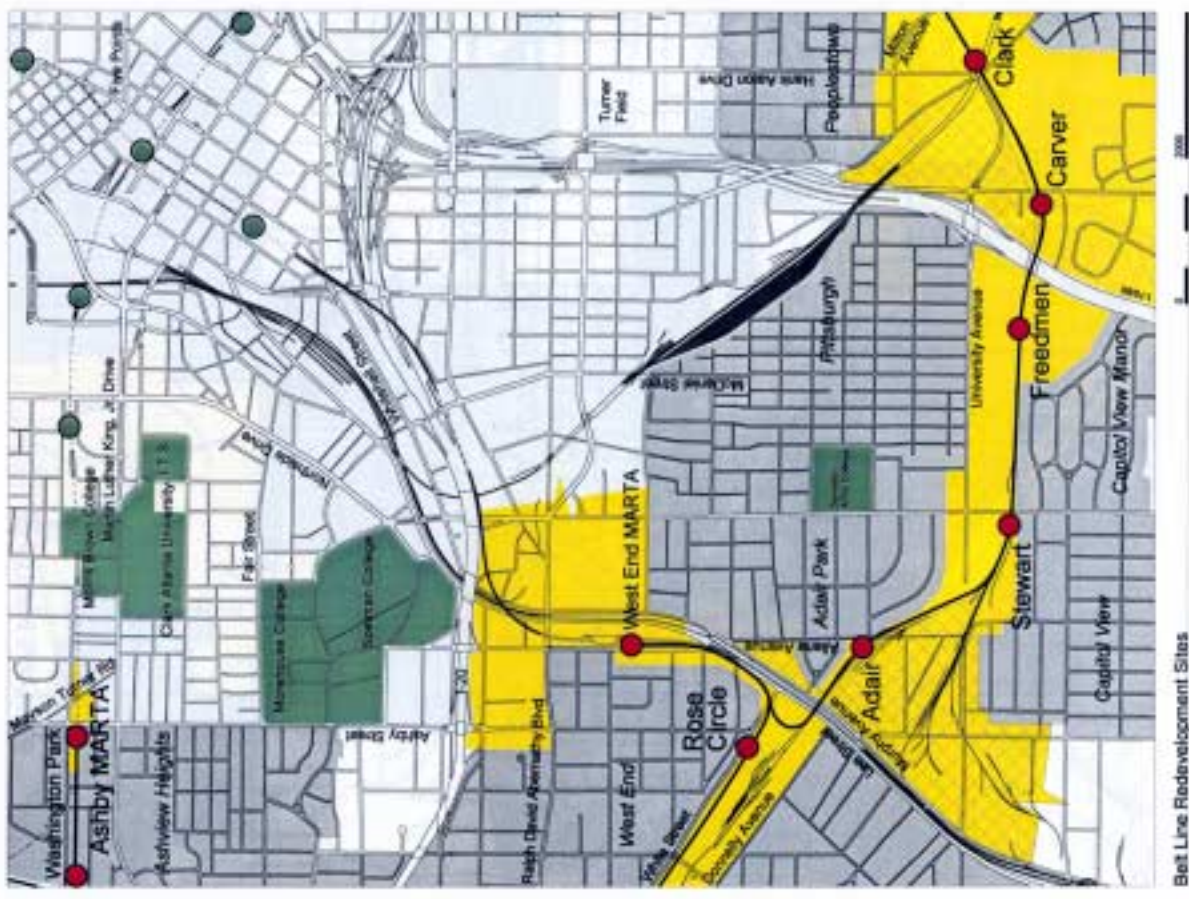
Belt Line Redevelopment Sites

Figure 23: Clear Creek to Flat Shoals



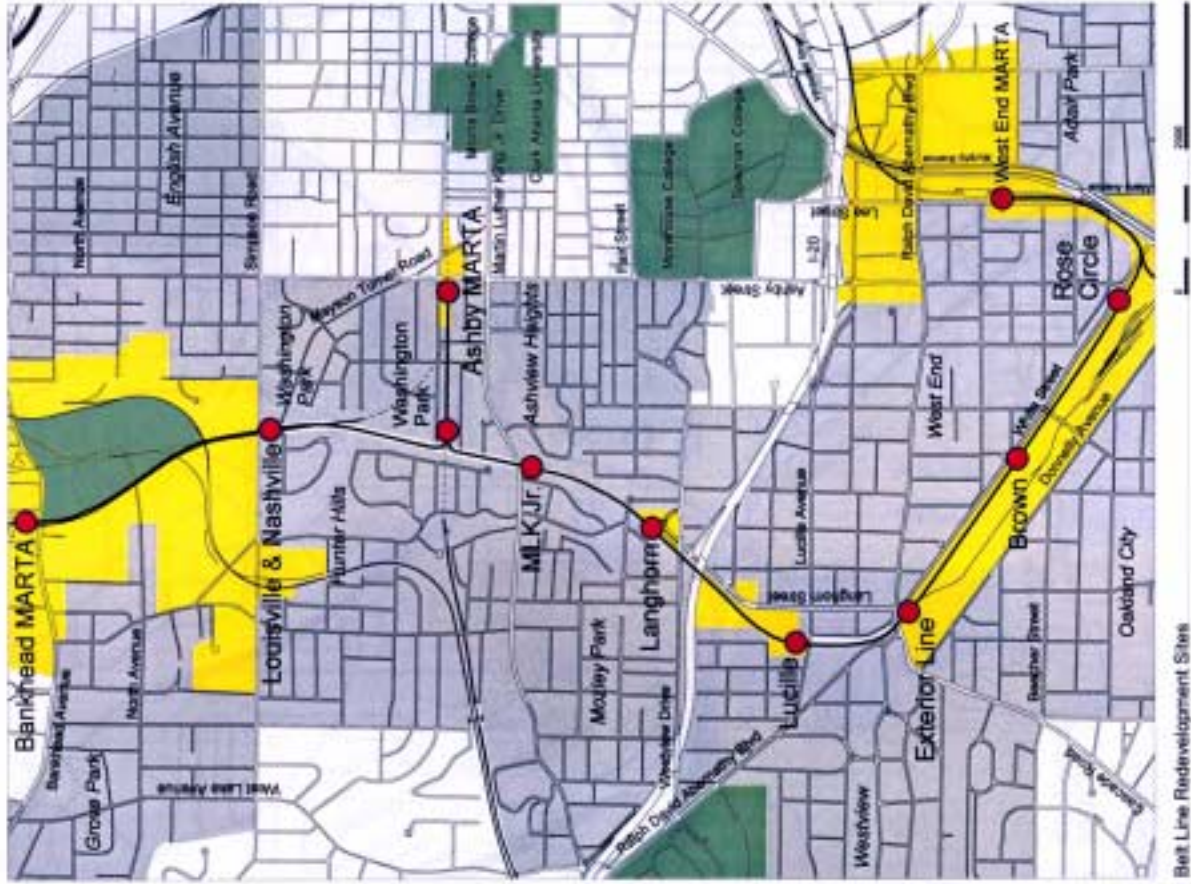
Belt Line Redevelopment Sites

Figure 24: Inwin to Clark



Belt Line Redevelopment Sites

Figure 25: Clark to Rose Circle



Belt Line Redevelopment Sites

Figure 26: West End to Bankhead



Belt Line Redevelopment Sites

Figure 27: Bankhead to Collier

Case Study: Portland's MAX line



Other technology will work, but a system like Portland's MAX line would be ideal for the reuse of Atlanta's belt lines.



Electrical service is overhead, so at-grade crossing is safe for cars and pedestrians.



In Portland, stations consist of simple platforms with shelters, signs and work by local artists.

New development contributes to urban neighborhoods, concentrating density at the transit stop.





Spectacular city views near Milton-Hill



Lofts on Ralph McGill



New construction near Ponce Springs

In some parts of Atlanta, redevelopment along the Belt Line is already underway. Other areas wait for reinvestment.



Condos at Copenhill



Loft potential at Sylvan and Murphy - half a block from the Belt Line

The next fifteen slides take you on a tour of the proposed Belt Line, starting at Peachtree and heading clockwise around the loop.

Each stop has listed adjacent streets, neighborhoods served and local points of interest.

1 Lindbergh MARTA

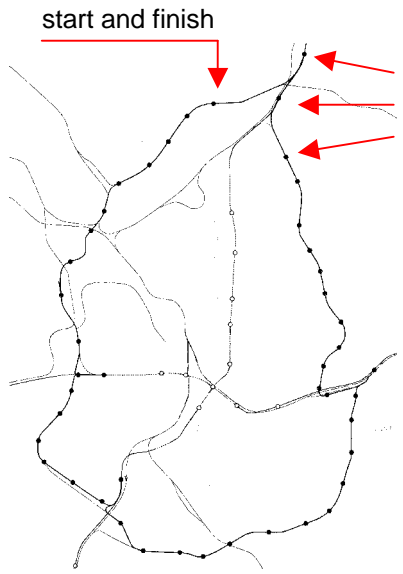
Lindbergh Drive/Piedmont Road
Peachtree Hills/Lindbergh-Morosgo
Lindbergh City Center business district

2 Armour

Mayson Street/I-85
Armour industrial district

3 Southern

Montgomery Ferry near Flagler Avenue
Sherwood Forest/Piedmont Heights
Ansley Golf Club



Looking west from Peachtree

Lindbergh MARTA Station



Looking north from Montgomery Ferry



4 Easton
Piedmont Avenue
Ansley Park/Morningside
Piedmont Park, Atlanta Botanical Garden,
Ansley Mall

5 Clear Creek
Park Drive
N. Boulevard Park/Virginia-Highland
Piedmont Park

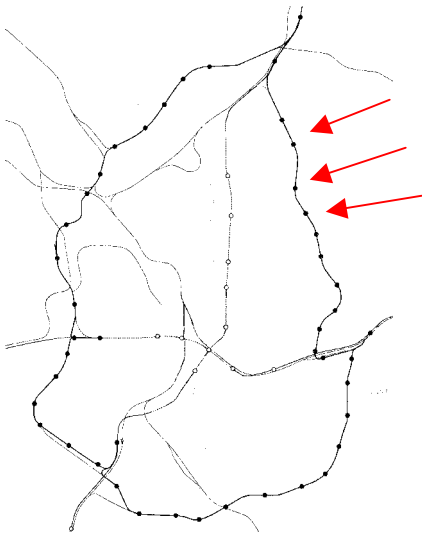
6 Kanuga
Monroe Drive/Virginia Avenue/Kanuga Street
Virginia-Highland/Midtown
Piedmont Park, Grady High, Inman Middle,
Va-Hi commercial district



Looking north from Piedmont



New development on Piedmont Park



Skirting the east side of the park

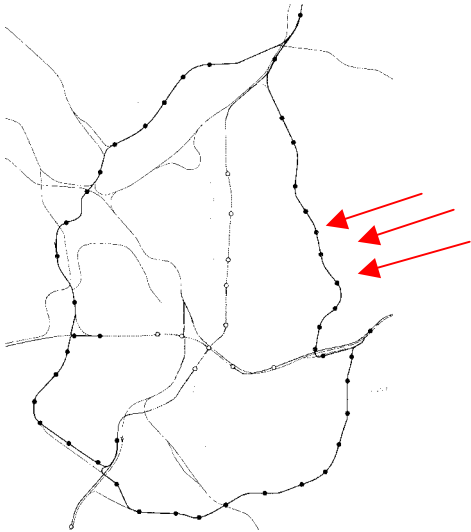
Looking south across Monroe to Virginia



- 7 Drewry**
Drewry Street/Greenwood Avenue
Virginia-Highland
- 8 Ponce Springs**
Ponce de Leon Avenue
Virginia-Highland/Poncey-Highland
City Hall East
- 9 Copenhill**
Ralph McGill Boulevard
Old Fourth Ward/Poncey-Highland
Carter Center & Freedom Park



Looking east along Ponce de Leon at the bridge and Ford Factory Lofts.



Looking south to Freedom Parkway

New development on Freedom Park



10 Highland

Highland Avenue
Old Fourth Ward/Inman Park
Atlanta Medical Center & Freedom Park

11 Irwin

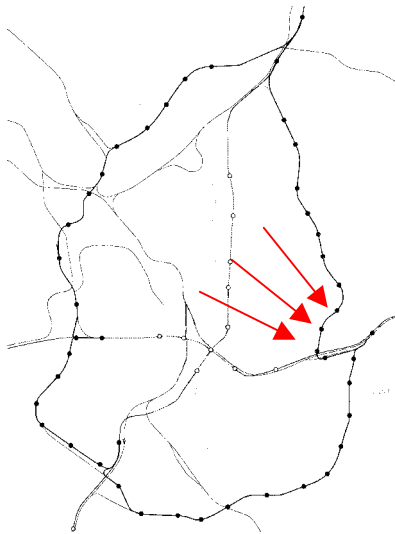
Irwin Street
Old Fourth Ward/Inman Park
M.L. King Center & loft district

12 Airline

Edgewood Ave./DeKalb Ave./Airline Street
Old Fourth Ward/Inman Park
loft district



Looking south from Irwin



New infill housing in the Old Fourth Ward



Studioplex on Auburn is just steps away

13 Piggyback

Wylie Street/Estoria Street
Cabbagetown

Fulton Cotton Mill Lofts, Cabbagetown
commercial district

14 Inman Park/Reynoldstown MARTA

DeKalb Avenue/Seaboard Avenue
Inman Park/Reynoldstown

Freedom Park, Little Five Points commercial
district

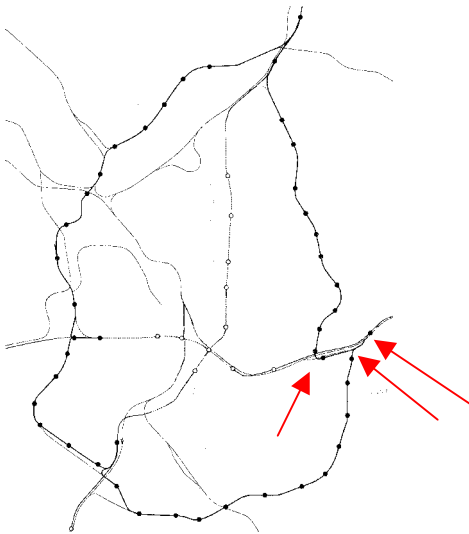
15 Flat Shoals

Wylie Street/Flat Shoals Avenue
Reynoldstown

Reynoldstown commercial district,
Lang Carson Community Center



Looking south from Kirkwood Avenue - new loft development on the right



New infill housing in Reynoldstown



Crossing Wylie at grade

16 Atlanta & West Point

Memorial Drive at Glenwood-Memorial Conn.
Reynoldstown
Loft district, Hubert Elementary

17 Glenwood

Glenwood Avenue at Glenwood-Memorial Conn.
Ormewood Park/Grant Park
Southside High

18 Ormewood

Ormewood Avenue
Ormewood Park/Grant Park
Beulah Heights Bible College, Grant Park,
West/Slaton Elementary



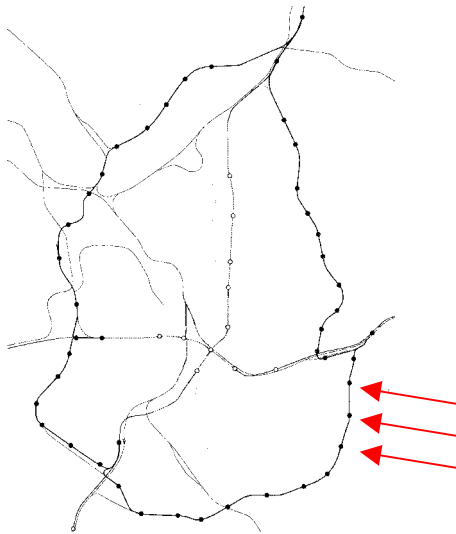
Old Atlanta & West Point freight depot on Memorial Drive



At Glenwood looking south



Crossing Ormewood into Grant Park



New townhouses - half a block from the rail line



New lofts on Memorial in Reynoldstown

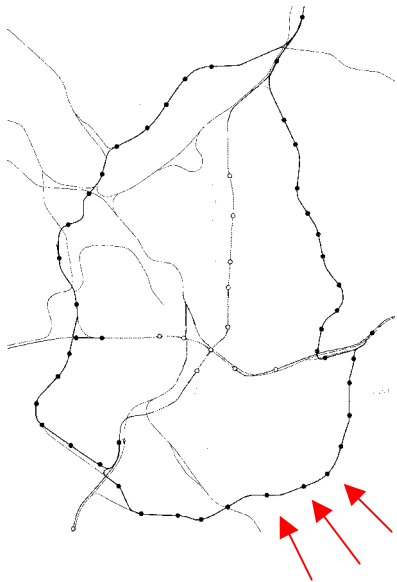
19 Soldiers' Home
Confederate Avenue
Ormewood Park/Grant Park/Boulevard Heights
State Police Academy/National Guard

20 Intrenchment Creek
Boulevard
Grant Park/Boulevard Heights
Grant Park, Cyclorama & Zoo Atlanta

21 Milton Hill
Hill Street
Peopletown/Grant Park/Chosewood Park
Stanton Park



Looking north along Hill



Vacant land at Boulevard just south of the Zoo



Looking west at Milton

Spectacular city views



22 Clark
McDonough Blvd./Hank Aaron Dr./University Ave.
Peopletown/South Atlanta/Carver Homes
Carver High

23 Carver
Pryor Road
High Point Estates/Carver Homes
Slater Elementary, shuttle to Lakewood Fairgrounds

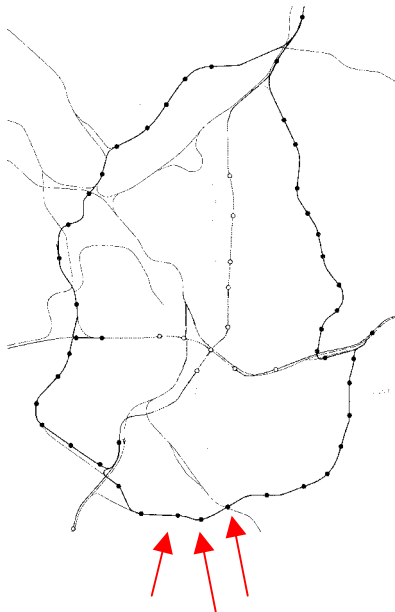
24 Freedmen
University Avenue near McDaniel Street
Pittsburgh/Capitol View Manor

Pryor Homes is redeveloped



Loft potential in Pittsburgh

The belt line tunnels under this main rail line at Clark



New houses on Pryor



25 Stewart

Metropolitan Parkway
Pittsburgh/Capitol View/Capitol View Manor/Adair Park
Atlanta Metro College, Atlanta Technical Institute,
Salvation Army College, Capitol View Elementary

26 Adair

Allene Avenue
Adair Park/Capitol View
Adair Park, Salvation Army College, industrial district

27 West End MARTA

Lee Street at Oglethorpe Avenue
West End/Adair Park
West End commercial district & West End Mall

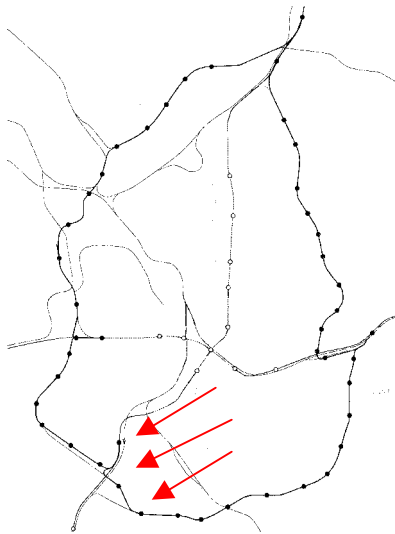


Bridge over Metropolitan



West End MARTA Station

Kudzu covered tracks at Murphy



The belt line tunnels under this main line going into downtown



28 Rose Circle

White Street at Ashby Street
West End/Oakland City
Rose Circle Park

29 Brown

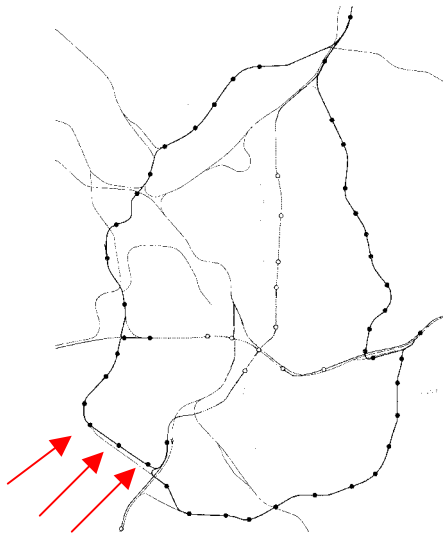
White Street at Lawton Street
West End/Oakland City
Wrens Nest, Brown Middle, Outdoor Activity Ctr.

30 Exterior Line

RDA Blvd./White St./Cascade Ave./Langhorn St.
West End/Oakland City/Westview
Gordon White Park, Cascade/RDA comm. district



Tunnels under RDA/Cascade at Langhorn

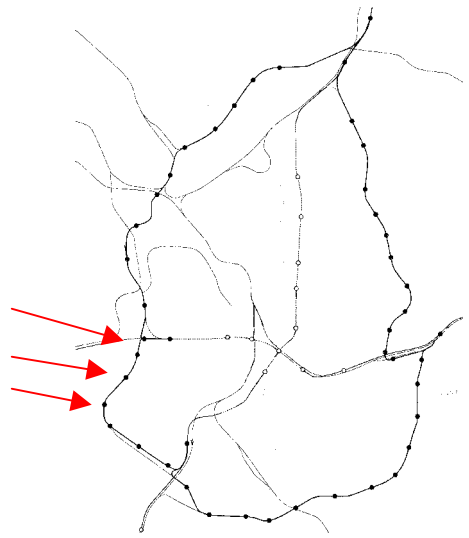


Looking southeast along White at Rose Circle Park

- 31 Lucile**
 Lucile Avenue at Muse Street
West End/Westview
 Westview Cemetery, Westview comm. district
- 32 Langhorn**
 Langhorn Street at I-20 and Westview Drive
Mozley Park/Ashview Heights
 AUC campus bus to Morehouse, Spelman
- 33 MLK, Jr.**
 MLK Jr. Drive
Mozley Park/Ashview Heights/Washington Park/
Hunter Hills
 Washington High



Strictly residential area at MLK Jr. Drive



Under I-20 at Westview



Kudzu valley north of Lucile

34 Washington Park

Lena Street
Washington Park
Washington Park

35 Ashby MARTA

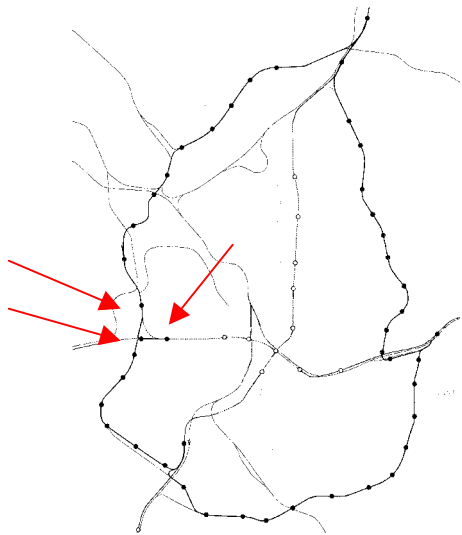
Lena Street/Ashby Street
Washington Park/Vine City
AUC campus bus/West Side Village comm. district

36 Louisville & Nashville (L & N)

Simpson Road/Mayson Turner Road
Washington Park/Hunter Hills
Herndon Elementary



Shares MARTA right-of-way at Simpson



New houses on Lena Street

Ashby MARTA Station



37 Bankhead MARTA

Bankhead Avenue
Bankhead/Grove Park
Maddox Park, Bankhead Crossing business center

38 Jail

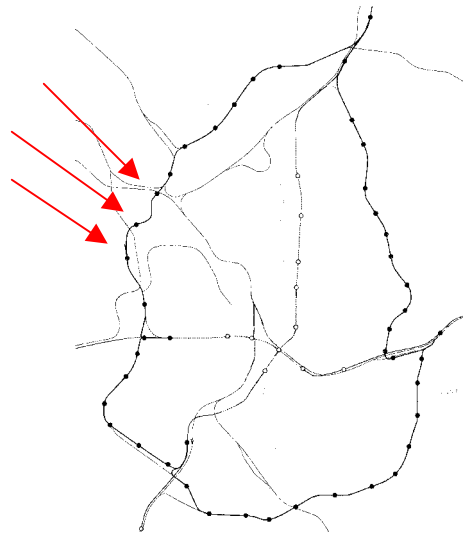
Marietta Boulevard
Howell Station
Fulton County Jail, Fulton County Animal Control

39 Howell Station

Marietta Street at Herndon Street
Howell Station
industrial district, King Plow Arts Center



Crosses Marietta near Inman Yard and King Plow arts center



Bankhead MARTA Station



Maddox Park

40 Blandtown

Huff Road

Blandtown

Hemphill Waterworks/Chattahoochee ind. district

41 Seaboard

Howell Mill Road

Berkeley Park, Underwood Hills

Chattahoochee industrial district

42 Northside

Northside Drive

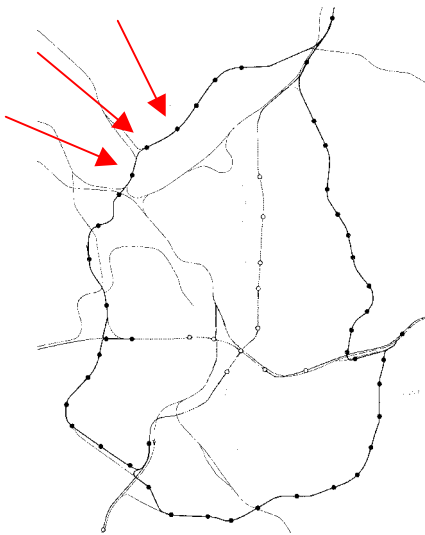
Berkeley Park, Loring Heights



Looking east from Howell Mill



Looking north from Huff in Blandtown



Looking north along Northside at Deering



43 Tanyard Creek

26th Street/I-75
Collier Hills, Brookwood Park
Tanyard Creek Park

44 Collier

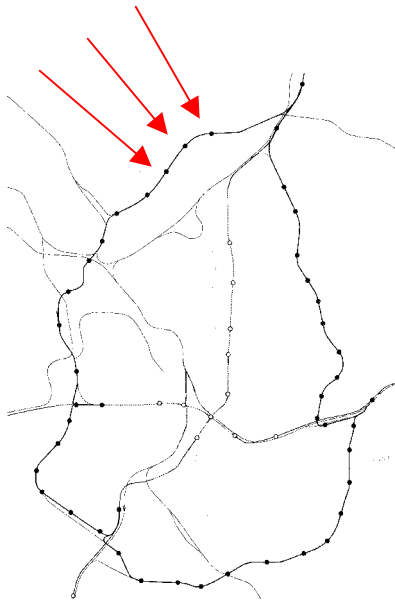
Collier Road near Dellwood Drive
Collier Hills, Brookwood Park
Tanyard Creek Park, Piedmont Hospital,
Bobby Jones Golf Course

45 Peachtree

Peachtree Street at Bennett Street
Brookwood Hills, Peachtree Hills
Brookwood commercial/medical district,
Bennett Street arts district



Looking south from Collier



Returns to Peachtree at bridge



Crosses under I-75

LIGHT RAIL

-Many cities in the United States and abroad use Light Rail technology.



Lyon



Portland



Los Angeles



Boston



New Orleans



Sacramento



San Diego

Light Rail

PORTLAND

- A model for the country of effective zoning combined with comprehensive affordable and accessible public transportation.
- The tracks are laid in the streets with the electrical feed located overhead.



Portland, OR

NEW ORLEANS

-Above ground street cars that operate on tracks in medians, both grass and concrete, in the center of the streets.

-The tracks are not electrified, the electrical feed is overhead, making the tracks safe for passengers to cross.



New Orleans

SEATTLE

-Above ground street cars that operate in the street.



Seattle

Los Angeles

-Above ground street cars



Los Angeles

EUROPE

-Light Rail is a common form of transit



Karlsruhe



Lyon



Zurich