

Frequently Asked Questions *about the Peachtree Corridor Project*



▲ A section of Sweet Auburn, part of Downtown / Circulator Loop route.

What is the Peachtree Corridor Partnership?

Formed in June at the request of Mayor Shirley Franklin, the Peachtree Corridor Partnership is a collaboration among the Atlanta Development Authority, the Atlanta Committee for Progress and the three community improvement districts operating along the Peachtree Corridor— Central Atlanta Progress/Downtown; Midtown Alliance; and the Buckhead Community Improvement District. The Partnership was formed to work with relevant property owners and neighborhood groups, members of Atlanta City Council and other interested parties to determine how to best implement the recommendations of the Peachtree Corridor Task Force, which were unveiled by Mayor Franklin in March 2007. In working with these key groups and a team of expert consultants, the Partnership has developed a plan for how the vision can begin being funded and implemented.

What is the vision for the Peachtree Corridor?

The Task Force recommended a 25-year, \$1 billion vision to transform the city's signature street into a world-class boulevard characterized by high quality streetscapes, including sidewalks, pocket parks and public spaces, consistent signage, attractive lighting, trees and flowers, and other elements. The Task Force also recommended development of a modern streetcar system to connect and unify the corridor. The Partnership's proposal is to implement a streetcar system in Downtown and Midtown first, while supporting efforts to implement streetscape and other improvements along the remaining segments of the corridor.

How long is the Peachtree Corridor and what are the boundaries?

The Corridor is 14.5 miles long and extends from the BeltLine crossing of Lee Street in the south to Club Drive and the city limits in the north. The initial phase of the streetcar system will also include a Downtown circulator route that will connect the major visitor attractions in that area.

How much will the initial plan cost and how will it be funded?

The total estimated capital cost for implementing the first phase of the streetcar system is approximately \$190 million. The Partnership is proposing that the City create a special assessment district along the Corridor in Downtown and Midtown to provide primary funding for capital investment through an increased property tax of no more than three mills. Additionally, a parking tax is recommended to fund operating expenses for the initial streetcar system and also allow for growth and expansions in the future.

Why doesn't the City pay for this out of the general fund budget, or obtain a grant from the federal government to cover the costs?

It is proposed that the City pay for a portion of the cost of the project out of general fund revenue, in addition to the revenues derived from the special assessment district. In this way, all city residents will ultimately contribute to the cost of a system that will benefit all of Atlanta.

While federal funding is desired, it is not considered realistic because of the limited federal budget for public transportation projects and the many cities already in line ahead of Atlanta to receive these funds. However, if Atlanta can build the first phase of this system using local dollars and demonstrate the viability of the streetcar, it would better position us for federal funds to help pay for future phases.

Will the streetcar run the full length of the Corridor?

Initially, the streetcar will run between Downtown and Midtown. In Downtown, the streetcar route will include the "Downtown Loop Circulator" connecting Auburn and Edgewood Avenues and Peachtree. It will connect with the BeltLine right-of-way and the MLK Historic Site on the east side of Downtown and will reach Centennial Park, the Georgia World Congress Center and the Georgia Aquarium on the west side. The Partnership believes that there are multiple opportunities for expanding the streetcar in future phases, both to the north and south along Peachtree, and to the east and west to connect Peachtree better with other neighborhoods east and west Atlanta.

Why is the vision only being implemented in Downtown and Midtown initially?

The 25-year vision for the Peachtree Corridor is large in scope and scale, and it is important to launch this first phase of the effort in the area where implementation is practical, ridership potential high, and financial feasibility most reasonable. The Downtown/Midtown areas are the best meet these criteria today.

What are the boundaries of the special assessment district?

The special assessment district will generally, but not precisely mirror the Downtown and Midtown Community Improvement District boundaries. The boundaries are approximately a one-quarter mile radius from the streetcar line, considered reasonable walking distance to the streetcar. The proposed district will exclude low-density neighborhoods with single-family, detached homes and does NOT include any property outside of the Downtown/Midtown area.

What will the special assessment district mean for my tax bill if I am a resident on the Corridor?

Assuming the current 44 mills, a home within the district valued at \$200,000 has an annual tax bill of \$3,520 (not factoring in homestead exemption). In this example, raising the tax approximately two mills would mean an annual tax bill increase of \$160, or a little over \$13 a month. Though residents will contribute, most of the cost of building and operating the system will be absorbed by owners and developers of commercial property as well as visitors, who will pay a surcharge to park and a fare to ride the system.

What exactly is a streetcar?

A streetcar can be broadly defined as any vehicle running on rails in city streets. For our purposes, a streetcar is an electrically-powered vehicle operating on rails in a street lane with other vehicles.

Why is a streetcar better for Peachtree than buses?

Streetcars function as a short transit shuttle or connector, in contrast to the longer-distance commuter services typically provided by bus operations. The modern streetcar has many positive features that buses sometimes lack – a smooth and comfortable riding experience, reliability, and the lack of emissions and noise. A streetcar on Peachtree would not necessarily be a replacement of the existing bus service. However, it would reduce the need for buses within the designated area and possibly allow for re-routing some existing bus routes to focus on trips to and from the corridor instead of within the corridor.

Why is a streetcar better for Peachtree than additional MARTA trains?

MARTA heavy rail trains have been designed to move people quickly around greater Atlanta. A modern-day Atlanta streetcar will focus on Atlanta's core street, providing shorter waiting times and with more frequent stops than is feasible for MARTA in the same corridor. The streetcar service will complement the existing MARTA rail service by providing a comfortable trip between MARTA stations along the streetcar route, as well as providing transit to the rider's final destination in many cases after they have departed a MARTA train or commuter bus.

Didn't Atlanta have streetcars before?

Yes, like virtually every city in the U.S. before World War II, Atlanta had a streetcar system. It was completely removed by 1949 and replaced with "trackless trolleys." These are what would be called electric buses today. What the Partnership is proposing today, however, is a modern streetcar system that is very different from the heritage systems from the early 1900's still in place in some cities.

How long will the plan take to implement?

From the time the funding is approved, it is expected that it will take approximately five years to build the streetcar system. Sections of the streetcar may open earlier, depending on the final planning decisions. It is important to note that one reason for the five-year timeline is the desire to use the approach of installing the system "block by block" in order to minimize traffic and business disruption. This approach was used in building the streetcar system in Portland, Oregon.

What economic impact can be predicted with the planned improvements?

Based on growth and development forecasts along the Corridor, the Task Force assessed financial impact to the City's general fund coffers to be between \$380 million and \$460 million over a period of 15 years, with primary sources being additional property taxes (separate from the increased special assessment), impact fees, and construction sales/use taxes. Studies by the Portland Development Commission indicate that property within 100 feet of the streetcar line increased in value at more than double the rate of other downtown properties for the first few years after streetcar implementation.

Is there a green component to the project?

In addition to providing an alternative to driving, the streetcar technology employs electric power, which is a greener alternative to gasoline fuel and creates zero emissions.

Who will operate the streetcars and govern the overall project?

No final decisions have been made about the operation or the governance of the streetcar system. In Portland, the governance organization contracts with the regional transit provider to provide drivers. It is certainly possible to envision MARTA providing drivers and other personnel for the streetcar operations here, but no decisions have been made by MARTA or the City on this issue.

What other cities have streetcars?

Almost 50 U.S. cities have existing, planned, or proposed streetcar systems. Cities with operational streetcar systems are Dallas, Little Rock, Memphis, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Portland, Tampa, San Francisco and Seattle. Cities with planned streetcars systems include Albuquerque, Charlotte, Miami, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C.

How much will fares be?

All but one of the 11 streetcar systems researched charge fares for their streetcar systems, ranging from \$0.25 to \$5.00 for a one-way trip, with an average fare of \$1.70. This is in line with the current MARTA fare of \$1.75 for one-way travel. The exact fare would be set based on estimated streetcar ridership and the availability of other funding sources and revenue to offset the capital, operations, and maintenance costs of the streetcar system.

How and when can I see the Peachtree Corridor plan?

The full report of recommendations and route map for the first phase is available on the web site, www.peachtreecorridor.org.

What happens next?

At the appropriate time, legislation will have to be introduced to the Atlanta City Council to create the special assessment district and the parking tax. Once the legislation is approved, implementation can begin.

What can I do to be involved?

- Sign up for e-mail updates at www.peachtreecorridor.org
- Attend planned public forums
- Invite the Partnership to speak at a meeting
- Voice your support for the vision to public officials and organizations
- Help spread the word to your neighbors and associates.

For more information, please visit www.peachtreecorridor.org.

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CORRIDOR**
PARTNERSHIP

191 Peachtree Street, 32ND FLOOR • Atlanta, GA 30303 • p) 404.736.3557 • f) 404.736.3607

www.peachtreecorridor.org