

A History of the Atlanta Beltline and its Associated Historic Resources



**Prepared By
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**Kadambari Badami
Janet Barrickman
Adam Cheren
Allison Combee
Savannah Ferguson
Thomas Frank
Andy Garner
Mary Anne Hawthorne**

**Hadley Howell
Carrie Hutcherson
Rebekah McElreath
Cherith Marshall
Rebekah Martin
Brandy Morrison
Bethany Serafine
Tiffany Tolbert**

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The United States has a rich history that shows the progress of its civilization through its settlement patterns, social, economic and cultural environments. These in turn have been influenced and molded by the innovations in technology that have affected commerce and transportation which have been key to the formation of many important cities in the country, including Atlanta. Atlanta took root because of the railway industry that formed the spine of the country's vast economic network and became one of the most important cities in the Southeast. The Beltline is a tangible reminder of this rich history. A study of the Beltline and its surrounding environment reveals Atlanta's transportation development, industrial growth, settlement patterns, and social and cultural evolution.



Murphy Triangle, Beltline tunnel, 2005

The Beltline began as a railroad bypass around the congested downtown railroads, similar to present-day I-285. The land it sits on was chosen because of its then-rural character, making it less expensive to purchase and easier to develop. It was developed by four separate railroad companies; the Southern Railway, the Atlanta and West Point Railroad, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and the Seaboard Air Line. Each segment was built by the railroad company for their own use, allowing their trains to quickly circumvent the City, as well as access their maintenance facilities on the outskirts of town. Construction began in 1871 and was completed around 1910, creating the Beltline that exists today.

The height of Beltline use was in the early 20th century, after its completion. During this period, manufacturing and warehousing facilities proliferated along its route. Major industries such as General Electric and Ford, as well as many local industries, located their factories beside it. By mid-century, however, the railroad industry was being replaced by truck traffic, due in part to the Interstate system. During this period, transfer facilities began to arise along the Beltline, transferring goods from trains to trucks and vice-versa. By the 1960s, the Beltline was largely abandoned, with only a fraction of its original use.



1390 Northside Drive

Today, the Beltline sits largely abandoned. As it winds its way through Atlanta, it passes through quiet residential neighborhoods, bustling commercial centers and stagnant industrial zones. While some of these areas are seeing positive growth and development, many are economically deprived and in need of revitalization.

The Beltline Redevelopment Plan was developed to revive this wonderful piece of Atlanta history. Its goal is the economic, cultural and social improvement of a large portion of the City. To this end, the Redevelopment Plan focused on 12 redevelopment nodes which were identified as ripe for redevelopment.

This project, developed by students at Georgia State University in conjunction with the Atlanta Urban Design Commission, is designed to highlight the history of the proposed redevelopment nodes along the Beltline. The goal is to show the significance of these resources and their links to Atlanta's history in order to better inform the development of the Beltline.

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