

0.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

0.1 Executive Summary

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), an administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), has prepared this Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Atlanta BeltLine in the City of Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia, in cooperation with the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), which operates and maintains bus and rail transit service in the Atlanta region.

The Atlanta BeltLine is a proposed fixed guideway transit and multi-use trails system with a corridor of approximately 22 miles encircling central Atlanta. The proposed transit and trails elements of the Atlanta BeltLine are part of a comprehensive economic development effort combining greenspace, trails, transit, and new development along historic rail segments that encircle central Atlanta. The combination of the following elements: transportation, affordable housing, Brownfield redevelopment, land use, historic preservation, parks and recreation, and economic development is intended to attract and organize some of the region's future growth around parks, transit, and trails. The Atlanta BeltLine is intended to help change the pattern of regional sprawl in the coming decades and lead to a livable Atlanta with an enhanced quality of life and sustained economic growth.

MARTA is working in partnership with Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (ABI) the City of Atlanta's implementation agent for the overall BeltLine project, to advance the transit component through this EIS.

0.1.1 Proposed Action

This Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) examines a proposal to provide both new transit and multi-use trails. Tiering will allow the FTA and MARTA to focus on those decisions that are ready for this level of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis to support future right-of-way (ROW) preservation. These decisions include:

- Selection of either Modern Streetcar (SC) or Light Rail Transit (LRT) technology as the transit mode;
- Selection of a general alignment of new transit and trails; and
- Establishment of the ROW needs.

Following these key decisions at the conclusion of the Tier 1 DEIS process, subsequent analysis in a Tier 2 process will identify and assess trail design elements, transit station locations, vehicle types, storage facilities, site-specific impacts, and mitigation measures for impacts that cannot be avoided. Future Tier 2 analysis activities will take place under a separate action.

0.1.2 Study Area Description

The Atlanta BeltLine study area is defined as the ¼-mile on each side of the five existing or former railroad corridors that, together, encircle central Atlanta: the Decatur Belt, the Atlanta and West Point Railroad (A&WP) BeltLine, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (L&N) BeltLine, the CSX Corridor, and the Norfolk Southern Corridor. Collectively, these railroad corridors form a circuit that intersects existing MARTA rail corridors near six

stations: Lindbergh Center, Inman Park/Reynoldstown, King Memorial, West End, Bankhead, and Ashby. The study area is made up of four geographic zones: northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest. Figure 0-1 illustrates the Atlanta BeltLine study area; the zones are distinguished by color shading.

0.1.3 Purpose and Need

0.1.3.1 Project Purpose

The purpose of the transportation elements of the Atlanta BeltLine project is to improve access and mobility for existing and future residents and workers by increasing in-city transit and bicycle/pedestrian options, and providing links in and between those networks.

In addition to its transportation purpose, the Atlanta BeltLine has a land use and economic development component that is intended to stimulate economic activity and structure growth.

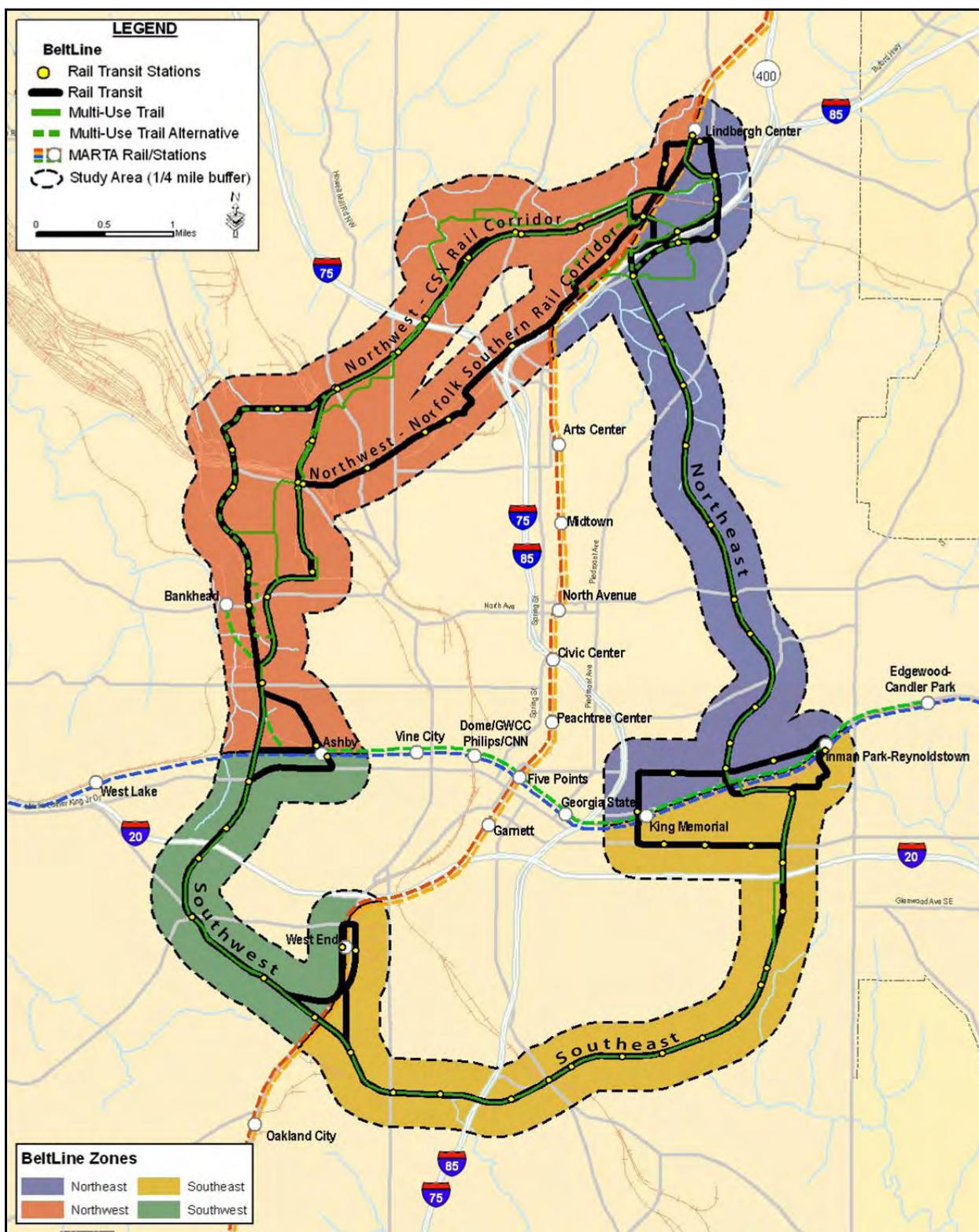
0.1.3.2 Need for the Project

The City of Atlanta is challenged to meet its mobility, housing, and economic development needs by its uneven and low-density growth patterns, a lack of affordable housing, deficiencies of transportation connectivity across all modes, underutilization of existing transportation resources, and limited transit, bicycle, and pedestrian options to address travel needs. Individually, each of these issues contributes to reduced quality of life, mobility, and economic competitiveness. Together, they are a severe impediment to creating sustainable growth and a vibrant livable community in the years to come. If the city is to address these problems proactively, a comprehensive and progressive solution is required to holistically integrate land use, economic development, social, and transportation needs.

Mobility and access in the study area are challenged by a fragmented and discontinuous transportation network and a lack of transit, bicycle, and pedestrian options as follows:

- The existing transportation network is frequently fragmented by major physical barriers including active and abandoned railroad lines and yards and interstate highways. It is also characterized by discontinuous local roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian networks and superblock development patterns. These deficiencies are particularly acute adjacent to the proposed Atlanta BeltLine railroad corridors, where the continuity of the transportation network is broken by: 1) the numerous large tracts of underutilized industrial land that lack an urban transportation grid; and 2) the high density of railroad right-of-way (ROW) and related facilities that have few existing crossings (Chapter 3.1).
- There is a lack of transit options and connections between those options in the study area. The existing rail and bus transit network provides limited coverage and connectivity in the study area and is focused primarily on providing service to the Central Business District rather than circulation within the study area or to other activity centers in the city (Chapter 3.1).
- Stops on the existing rail service are infrequent within the study area, forcing most study area residents to access rail via a bus transfer or walking (Chapter 3.1).

Figure 0-1: Atlanta BeltLine Study Area Map



Source: AECOM/JJG Joint Venture

- At the same time, non-motorized access options are also limited as a result of discontinuous or absent links in the city's pedestrian and bicycle network, making walk access to activity centers and the rail and bus system challenging (Chapter 3.1).

These transit and non-motorized conditions are particularly evident when travel between communities and neighborhoods within the city is attempted. These local trips are the dominant type of travel in the city, and are most often accomplished by personal automobile (Chapter 1.4.4).

Transportation-related problems caused by these deficiencies include limited access and mobility, increased travel times and roadway congestion (Chapter 1.4.4 and Chapter 3.1). These problems also contribute to a lack of social and economic opportunity at the individual, communitywide, and citywide levels (Chapters 3.2 and 3.4).

0.1.4 Alternatives Considered

The Atlanta BeltLine transit and trails project has its origins in City greenway plans from the early 1990's and a "Cultural Ring" concept that was refined by architect Ryan Gravel in his 1999 Master's thesis at the Georgia Institute of Technology titled, "Belt Line Atlanta, Design of Infrastructure as a Reflection of Public Policy," with transit supportive land use and pedestrian-oriented urban design principles. In March 2005, MARTA completed the *Atlanta Inner Core Transit Feasibility Study*. The study results indicated that a transit investment in the Inner Core area, inclusive of the Atlanta BeltLine study area, is feasible and could improve neighborhood connectivity, complement the existing MARTA rail system, support the redevelopment efforts within the study area, and capture new riders over the entire system.

In January 2007, MARTA completed the *Inner Core BeltLine Alternatives Analysis Detailed Screening Results* for the Atlanta BeltLine. At the conclusion of the analysis, the MARTA Board of Directors selected the B3 Alternative (Lindbergh-to-Lindbergh Loop via Inman Park/Reynoldstown) to advance to the Tier 1 DEIS.

Subsequent to completion of the initial screening phase, FTA and MARTA advanced the alternatives development and evaluation for the Atlanta BeltLine by initiating the NEPA process. MARTA is developing the project in partnership with ABI. The full range of alternatives that emerged from the Scoping phase of the NEPA process was subject to a feasibility screening to identify viable options for consideration in the Tier 1 DEIS and more detailed evaluations. The feasibility screening considered criteria such as potential physical constraints and constructability, operational constraints, ROW availability, potential for substantial negative environmental effects, and order of magnitude costs.

Additionally, ABI has been completing a series of subarea master plans for the areas around the Atlanta BeltLine to provide a framework for transit supportive land use, connectivity, and greenspace expansion.

0.1.4.1 Alternatives Carried Forward

The feasibility screening process, described in the previous subsections, yielded three transit and three trails alignment concepts and two transit technologies for advancement to the Tier 1 DEIS. For the purpose of the Tier 1 DEIS, the project sponsors examined the retained options in more detail and refined them.

In addition to the Build Alternatives, this Tier 1 DEIS assesses a No-Build Alternative. The No-Build Alternative is a future option without development of the Atlanta BeltLine.

Chapter 2.2 provides a detailed description of the No-Build Alternative, and Chapters 2.3 and 2.4 describes the Build Alternatives.

No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative is a baseline alternative retained in the Tier 1 DEIS in order to provide a basis of comparison with the Build Alternatives. This Alternative includes the following components:

- The existing transportation system including roadways, transit service, and trails;
- All programmed transportation projects in the Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC's) constrained *Envision6* Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) covering fiscal years 2008 through 2013, except for the Atlanta BeltLine transit and trails; and,
- The trail improvements that the City of Atlanta and ABI have already constructed or committed to be constructed, although some are elements of the Build Alternatives.

Build Alternatives

Build Alternatives represent proposed solutions to address the project need. The Build Alternatives described below are consistent with the Purpose and Need statement as well as stakeholder and public input.

The Build Alternatives consist of proposed alignments of transit and trails that are identical through the northeast, southeast, and southwest zones. In these zones, the proposed alignments are located adjacent to or within the same existing or former railroad corridors and have the same points of connection to existing MARTA rail stations. Alignment distinctions occur within the northwest zone.

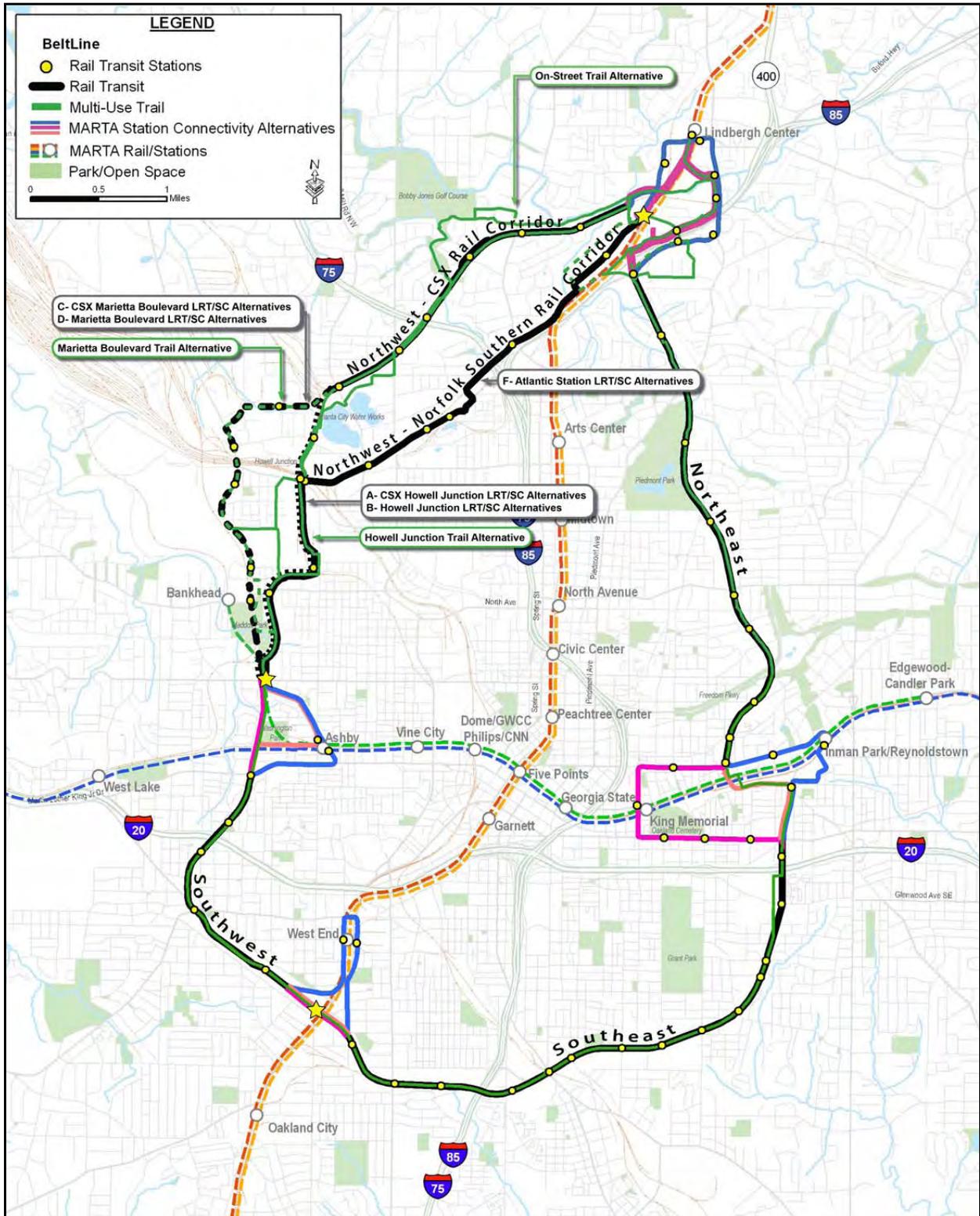
The initial screening analysis completed by MARTA in 2007 identified light rail transit (LRT) and modern streetcar (SC) as viable technologies. A more detailed discussion is contained in Chapter 2.0 of the Tier I EIS.

SC is a type of light rail vehicle, usually substantially smaller than vehicles used for most LRT services and generally operates within the street ROW in single car units. SC draws electric power from overhead wires and operates in both mixed traffic and reserved ROWs.

LRT is an electrically powered fixed-rail system operating with multiple cars on exclusive or shared ROWs. The vehicles are usually six-axle articulating vehicles with low floors to provide level station boardings. LRT vehicles look similar to SC, but are slightly larger.

The Transit Build Alternatives, shown in Figure 0-2, considered in this Tier 1 DEIS are designated A, B, C, D, and F; they are described in the following subsections. Each alternative is comprised of a transit alignment and an associated mode technology. The transit alternatives designated E- Norfolk Southern Alternatives, were eliminated from consideration after coordination with Norfolk Southern determined that potential use of Norfolk Southern ROW is infeasible.

Figure 0-2: Transit and Trail Build Alternatives



Source: AECOM 2011

Four Transit Build Alternatives would use portions of the existing CSX freight rail ROW in the northwest zone:

- A- CSX Howell Junction LRT Transit Alternative
- A- CSX Howell Junction SC Transit Alternative
- C- CSX Marietta Boulevard LRT Transit Alternative
- C- CSX Marietta Boulevard SC Transit Alternative

Four Transit Build Alternatives would be located adjacent to but outside the existing CSX freight rail ROW in the northwest zone:

- B- Howell Junction LRT Transit Alternative
- B- Howell Junction SC Transit Alternative
- D- Marietta Boulevard LRT Transit Alternative
- D- Marietta Boulevard SC Transit Alternative

Two Transit Build Alternatives would be located adjacent to but outside the existing Norfolk Southern freight rail corridor in the northwest zone:

- F- Atlantic Station LRT Transit Alternative
- F- Atlantic Station SC Transit Alternative

For the most part, the proposed alignments of the Trail Build Alternatives are adjacent to and in the same ROW as the Transit Build Alternatives. These locations relative to the Transit Alternatives reduce the potential for community and environmental disruption and would be the least costly. In locations where the transit and trails cannot use the same ROW, trail routes were developed separately from the transit alignments. Infeasible locations result from a lack of sufficient existing ROW, an engineering or access issue, or a need to provide a connection to a park that is not adjacent to the transit alignment. In general, the Trail Build Alternatives are alongside the Transit Build Alternatives in the northeast, southeast, and southwest zones. In the northwest zone there are three Trail Alternatives, – two parallel to the transit and one in a separate alignment:

- Howell Junction Trail Alternative
- Marietta Boulevard Trail Alternative
- On-Street Trail Alternative

No Trail Alternatives are proposed adjacent to the F- Atlantic Station Alternatives.

0.2 Evaluation of Alternatives

The No-Build and Build Alternatives were evaluated using performance measures associated with the project goals and objectives. The purpose of the evaluation process was to bring together the salient facts, both qualitative and quantitative, for each alternative so that their benefits, costs, and preliminary environmental consequences could be evaluated against the stated goals and objectives for the project.

Selection of a preferred alternative alignment and mode prior to completing the Tier 1 Final EIS will involve a balancing of the advantages and disadvantages of each of the

alternatives under consideration. Each member of the public and stakeholders participating in this Tier 1 EIS process will have an opportunity through the public comment period and hearing to provide input, value judgments, and a sense of priorities in light of the findings in this Tier 1 DEIS. The findings in this DEIS are intended to aid in that process by highlighting the factors considered to be of particular importance in making a broadly-based comparative assessment of the alternatives. Public and stakeholder input will be considered in determining a preferred alternative. MARTA in partnership with ABI will select their preferred alternative; the FTA will likewise review all inputs and findings of the EIS process to make their decision.

0.2.1 No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative does not support the purpose and need or the goals or objectives of the Atlanta BeltLine project. Compared to the Build Alternatives, it does not respond to the qualitative and quantitative performance measures structured around each goal.

0.2.2 Build Alternatives

The evaluation of alternatives in the Tier 1 EIS focused on those decisions that are ready for this level of Atlanta BeltLine analysis: transit mode technology, general alignment of transit and trails, and ROW needs.

0.2.2.1 Mode

The project sponsors performed conceptual engineering analyses to support the DEIS that took into consideration alignments within all four zones as well as MARTA Station Connectivity and Infill Station Alternative Area design considerations. The analysis examined transit geometry (curve radii, grades, and clearances), track configuration, and safety needs. The outcome of these analyses is that either mode can be accommodated throughout the corridor.

Further examination of mode performance in terms of system, vehicle and infrastructure characteristics as well as community desires determined that SC is better adapted to the Atlanta BeltLine project. As shown in Table 0-1, LRT and SC are equally adaptable in terms of conceptual design and ability to connect to other planned transit projects. However, SC can be implemented at a generally lower capital cost while its shorter vehicle lengths provide greater flexibility than LRT in navigating the constrained geometry of the alignments, and may result in fewer noise, vibration, and land use impacts. In addition, SC is better adapted to the Atlanta BeltLine operating plan that calls for frequent stops. For these reasons, SC is MARTA's recommended mode technology for the Atlanta BeltLine project.

Table 0-1: Mode Characteristics and Constraints as Applied to the Atlanta BeltLine Project

Mode Characteristics	Light Rail Transit (LRT)	Modern Streetcar (SC)
System		
Conceptual design for entire Atlanta Beltline project (main line and connectivity areas) can accommodate mode	✓	✓
Potentially higher operating speed	✓	
Ability to connect with other planned transit projects	✓	✓
Generally lower capital costs for systems		✓
Vehicle and Infrastructure		
Higher single vehicle capacity	✓	
Potentially smaller fleet (total number of vehicles)	✓	
Greater flexibility in constrained track geometry		✓
Generally lower capital costs per vehicle		✓
Community Desires		
Ability to make frequent stops (adaptable to operating plan and BeltLine economic development objectives)	✓	✓+
Lower potential for noise, vibration and visual impacts		✓
Small vehicle and infrastructure (potentially fewer land use impacts, appropriate scale and community fit)		✓

0.2.2.2 Alignment – Transit

Table 0-2 provides a comparison of the distinguishing characteristics and constraints of the alignment alternatives. Factors include engineering, operational, and environmental considerations as well as public observations. Some or all transit alternatives share certain characteristics, such as the need for coordination with the freight railroads; however, other characteristics or constraints, such as connections to key destinations or the amount of in-street running alignment, set the alternatives apart from one another.

0.2.2.3 Alignment – Trails

Table 0-3 provides a comparison of the distinguishing characteristics and constraints of the Trail Alternatives. Factors include engineering, operational, and environmental considerations as well as public observations. Some or all trail alternatives share certain characteristics, such as consistency with the Atlanta BeltLine vision; however, other characteristics or constraints, such as preserving the ability to keep transit and trails together, set the trail alternatives apart from each other.

Table 0-2: Transit Alternative Characteristics and Constraints in Northwest Zone

Transit Alignment Alternative	Required Agreements with Freight Railroads			Requires New Structure Across Howell Junction	Connections to Key Destinations				Northerly Access to Peachtree	In-street Running (Percent) ¹	Number of Parcels Potentially Impacted ²	SAC/TAC/Public Input			Other Key Differences ⁴
	Transit Corridor Inside Existing ROW	ROW as Needed for Construction or to Overcome Localized Spatial Constraint	Permission for Grade Separated Crossings		Bankhead MARTA rail station	Westside Park	Atlantic Station	Piedmont Hospital				Consistent with the project Vision ³	Reaches an Area Underserved by Rail Transit	Preserves Ability to Keep Transit and Trail Together	
A- CSX Howell Jct. Alternatives	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	0%	60	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High performing - connection to the TAD • Consistent with current plans 	
B- Howell Jct. Alternatives		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	0%	71	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High performing - connection to the TAD • Consistent with current plans 	
C- CSX Marietta Blvd. Alternatives	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	26%	61	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects to most neighborhoods and commercial facilities • Connects to most parks • Connects to other transit services • High performing - connection to the TAD • Consistent with current plans • Adds the least amount of runoff during a storm 	
D- Marietta Blvd. Alternatives		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	27%	68	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects to most neighborhoods and commercial facilities • Connects to most parks • Connects to other transit services • High performing - connection to the TAD • Consistent with current plans • Adds the least amount of runoff during a storm 	
F- Atlantic Station Alternatives		✓	✓	✓			✓		32%	56				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate performing - connection to the TAD • Low performing - potential impacts on cultural resources • High performing - low number of ecological impacts • High performing - low number of noise, vibration, and biological effects • Low performing - high number of at-grade crossings • Serves one less economic development focus area 	

¹ Percentages are of in-street running in the northwest zone only, excluding MARTA Connectivity Areas and Infill Station Alternatives which will be studied in future phases of analysis.

² Totals include the number of parcels in the northwest zone only, excluding MARTA Connectivity Areas and Infill Station Alternatives which will be studied in future phases of analysis; includes partial impacts and total impacts; calculations were obtained from the *Analysis of Potential Right-of-Way Needs Technical Memorandum*.

³ Consistency with the project vision includes location relative to the Atlanta Beltline Tax Allocation District (TAD) and proximity to areas of potential future development.

⁴ Supporting analysis results are presented in Chapter 7, Evaluation of Alternatives.

Table 0-3: Trail Alternative Characteristics and Constraints in Northwest Zone

Trail Alignment Alternative	Requires New Structure Across Howell Junction	Connections to Key Destinations				Northerly Access to Peachtree	Number of Parcels Potentially Impacted ¹	SAC/TAC/Public Input			Other Key Differences ⁴
		Bankhead MARTA rail station	Westside Park	Atlantic Station	Piedmont Hospital			Consistent with the project Vision ²	Reaches an Area Underserved by Rail	Transit Preserves Ability to Keep Transit and Trail Together	
Howell Jct. Alternative	✓				✓	84 ³	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High performing - community benefits • Low performing – low number of potential ecological impacts 	
Marietta Blvd. Alternative		✓	✓		✓	103 ³	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High performing - community benefits • Low performing – low number of potential ecological impacts • Low performing – low number of potential for hazardous waste effects 	
On-Street Alternative	✓				✓	69 ³	✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High performing - access to transit and other trails • Potentially adds one additional stream impact • Has the most runoff during a storm 	

¹ Totals include the number of parcels in the northwest zone only, excluding MARTA Connectivity Areas and Infill Station Alternatives which will be studied in future phases of analysis; includes partial impacts and total impacts; calculations were obtained from the *Analysis of Potential Right-of-Way Needs Technical Memorandum*.

² Consistency with the project vision includes location relative to the Atlanta Beltline Tax Allocation District (TAD) and proximity to areas of potential future development.

³ Totals include the number of parcels for transit and trail.

⁴ Supporting analysis results are presented in Chapter 7, Evaluation of Alternatives.

0.2.2.4 Alternative Right-of-Way Needs

The alternatives evaluations assumed wherever possible existing transportation ROW would be used. However, additional ROW may be necessary in several locations. Limitations on existing transportation ROW and/or the need to minimize effects on existing freight rail or other transportation operations could necessitate additional ROW acquisition as discussed in Chapter 3.2.

As reported in Table 3-13, other Transit and Trail Build Alternative ROW observations include:

- Each of the Transit Build Alternatives would require approximately 47 acres of ROW in the northeast, southeast, and southwest zones.
- In the northwest zone, the C- CSX Marietta Boulevard and D- Marietta Boulevard Alternatives would require the most ROW acreage (approximately 25 acres); other Transit Build Alternatives would require approximately 23 acres.
- Each Trail Build Alternative would require approximately 25 acres of ROW in the northeast, southeast, and southwest zones.

- In the northwest zone, the Howell Junction Trail Alternative would require the least ROW acreage (approximately 13 acres; the On-Street Trail Alternative would require the most ROW acreage (approximately 16 acres).
- The On-Street Trail Alternative may require additional ROW in order to provide linkages to parks and other destinations, as well as to connect with other trails and bicycle/pedestrian corridors.

In many cases, the preliminary ROW analyses identified only a small portion of additional land required. As the project advances, the Atlanta BeltLine sponsors will evaluate further the additional ROW needs striving to reduce or eliminate ROW needs through design refinements.

0.3 Public Involvement and Agency Coordination

A Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Plan (PIAC) (MARTA and ABI 2008) was developed and implemented in accordance with Section 6002 of Public Law 104-59 “Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users” (SAFETEA-LU) that mandates the development of a coordination plan for all projects for which an EIS is prepared under NEPA. It stipulates opportunity be provided for involvement by the public and agencies. The PIAC Plan is based on ABI's Community Engagement Framework (CEF) created by City of Atlanta Resolution 06-R-1576 and MARTA's Public Participation Plan.

Key public involvement activities are reported in Chapter 8.0 of the EIS. They included a NEPA-compliant Scoping process, public workshops, community group and organization meetings, and agency coordination in the forms of a Technical Advisory Committee, and Stakeholder Advisory Committee, and other agency meetings. In addition, the project sponsors have provided a website for the exchange of project-related information.

Key objectives of the public involvement efforts are to facilitate public understanding, to solicit input on the Atlanta BeltLine Corridor Transit and Multi-Use Trail Alternatives, and to identify potential consequences of alternative courses of action relative to the transportation, social, environmental, and economic context. Input received during the public involvement process has been considered during the development and evaluation of the alternatives in this Tier 1 DEIS.

Public involvement in the form of public and committee meetings, workshops, and the project website will continue through the Tier 1 DEIS process. In accord with NEPA, a public hearing will be held to obtain comments and feedback on the Tier 1 DEIS.