



**IN THE LOOP** *Tracking growth and opportunity along the BeltLine*  
By Tyler Wilkins | Reporter

**MOBILITY**

# South Downtown bound for transportation upgrades



BYRON E. SMALL | ABC

A series of transportation projects could improve mobility and pedestrian safety in South Downtown.

*Bike lanes, road diets are on their way*

Tech entrepreneur David Cummings is reviving a plan to transform Broad Street into a pedestrian-only corridor connected to two MARTA stations.

A southern stretch of Broad Street would be blocked off from vehicular traffic as part of a South Downtown revitalization by Cummings and Jon Birdsong, partners in Atlanta Ventures. The team plans to turn a massive real estate portfolio on the verge of foreclosure into a startup community with low-rise housing, restaurants, retail and a second location of entrepreneurship center Atlanta Tech Village.

Local leaders are working on a series of transit and mobility projects that

could help spur further reinvestment in the neighborhood. Here's an overview of major transportation projects in the area:

**MARTA Rapid Summerhill**

Construction is underway on the region's first bus rapid transit line. Buses will run in dedicated lanes with traffic signal prioritization and other features to mimic the speed of light rail. Expected to open in 2025, the route will run along Hank Aaron Drive, Capitol Avenue, MLK Jr. Drive and Mitchell Street with 14 stops. It will link South Downtown to Summerhill, Peoplestown and the BeltLine's Southside Trail with connections to the Five Points and Georgia State rail stations.

**MARTA Five Points redesign**

The exterior of the transfer station between the four heavy-rail lines is getting a facelift. The \$206 million project involves swapping out a brutalist canopy for an airy roof, reconnecting Broad Street for pedestrians and installing sawtooth bus bays along Forsyth and Alabama streets.

The redesign is controversial for sev-

eral reasons. Elected officials have questioned the design and whether the project is an immediate priority, given the limited funding available to expand MARTA's network. Plus, pedestrians will not be able to enter or exit the station for a year during construction.

MARTA plans to start construction after wrapping up an environmental review. The project could be completed by 2026, though it likely will not be done in time for the FIFA Men's World Cup.

### **Bike lanes and street enhancements**

An expanded bike network is being etched into Downtown streets. As part of a resurfacing project, Atlanta Department of Transportation recently installed bike lanes along Capitol Avenue, Central Avenue, Memorial Drive, MLK Jr. Drive, Trinity Avenue and Washington Street. Additional lanes are planned along Whitehall and Pryor streets.

A section of Peachtree Street between Trinity Avenue and Alabama Street will be placed on a road diet with work to begin in 2025. The four-lane road will be

reduced to two lanes of vehicular traffic, making room for wider sidewalks, seating and other features. By spring 2024, construction could start on bike lanes, dedicated bus lanes and traffic-calming features along Forsyth Street from Memorial Drive to Peachtree Street by spring 2024.

In a South Downtown transportation plan from summer 2023, Central Atlanta Progress proposes additional road diets, streetscape upgrades, intersection redesigns, pedestrian promenades, bus lanes and MARTA station improvements. Some of those projects could move forward in coming years.

### **► BIG NUMBER**

# 9,000

The number of residential units recently completed, under construction or planned within a 15-minute walk of Terminal South, the mixed-use project underway by Stafford Properties in Peoplestown. "You have this built-in yellow brick road," said Melissa Ahrendt, executive director of real estate at Stafford Properties. "Everyone wants to be on the BeltLine."

### **CONSTRUCTION**

## **PEOPLESTOWN IS GROWING SO FAST. HOW COME?**

Parallels can be drawn between the renter profile of Summerhill, Peoplestown and other burgeoning neighborhoods: young professionals on the hunt for attainable housing in a gritty, authentic and urban environment, said Ladson Haddow, managing partner at commercial real estate consulting firm Haddow & Co.

Rising housing costs are pushing some renters to look beyond Midtown, Old Fourth Ward and other pricy parts of Atlanta. Residential demand in Peoplestown and nearby neighborhoods is partially driven by affordability, though it is now more expensive to live in the area than in previous years.

The same is true for Downtown, where real estate firms and local leaders hope to funnel thousands of new market-rate and affordable units.

The confluence of trails and transit is another selling point for Peoplestown. A section of the Southside Trail could connect the historic Black neighborhood to the 22-mile BeltLine corridor by 2026.

The path will be accessible from MARTA's Rapid Summerhill line.

Stafford Properties plans to open Terminal South by winter 2024, which will add a food hall, offices, shops and more to Peoplestown. The BeltLine generates "automatic interest" among retailers and restaurateurs, Ahrendt said, translating into desirable amenities for residents.

The firm plans to fill a 3.7-acre lot in the area with hundreds of apartments, which could help drive traffic at adjacent businesses, she said.

Southeast Atlanta is sprinkled with vacant properties, which are usually cheaper to purchase than those in the city's core. Another benefit for multifamily developers: Former industrial sites are large enough to repurpose without having to assemble multiple parcels for a project.