



CITY OF ATLANTA

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MAYOR

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January 26, 2009

The Honorable John Lewis
U.S. House of Representatives
343 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1005

Dear Congressman Lewis:

I am writing to alert you to a very serious situation regarding the future of Atlanta, and to ask for your support of our actions to secure the Northeast Rail Corridor of the BeltLine. After three years working to establish the BeltLine Redevelopment Plan, two and a half years implementing that plan, investing tens of millions of dollars to secure the Northeast BeltLine Corridor, which sparked millions more of investment by the private sector, GDOT has acted to thwart the BeltLine and with it jeopardized Atlanta's ability to plan and accommodate the growth we know is coming in the next several decades.

As part of the normal BeltLine transit planning, at the city's request, Norfolk Southern sought the abandonment of the Northeast BeltLine Rail Corridor from the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB). This abandonment was slated to take effect on January 22. Recently, out of the clear blue sky, GDOT filed a Motion with the STB to halt this abandonment process, and enlisted the help of AMTRAK, which on January 21st took the brazen action of using its federal status to initiate condemnation proceedings on the corridor. I am dismayed and alarmed by these actions, which not only jeopardize BeltLine transit, but also our ability to compete for federal funds.

The BeltLine has achieved significant progress in the last three years, and its transit vision has been embraced by the city and the region as a forward-thinking transit plan for Georgia. It has garnered the support of the Atlanta Regional Commission, the Transportation Planning Board, MARTA, and many others, and is included in the regional transit vision, Concept Plan 3, which GDOT has approved. Concept 3 accommodates both the BeltLine and commuter rail, while GDOT and AMTRAK would now have us choose heavy rail at the expense of the BeltLine. However, the characteristics of AMTRAK's heavy rail operations (greater noise levels and air quality impact) are incompatible with and not sensitive to this rail corridor's existing environment, considering the immediate adjacency of residential neighborhoods and the gemstone of our park system – Piedmont Park. Furthermore, other options for Amtrak's station relocation and rail alignment have been formulated.

This region is begging for leadership on transportation and mobility. I worked to create the BeltLine Partnership and Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. to provide that missing leadership, and they have delivered. They have galvanized community support through hundreds of public meetings over the last four years, and the public and private sectors have both made significant investments in anticipation of the BeltLine being realized. Close to \$20 million in federal funding has already been allocated to the project, and dedicated local funding through the BeltLine Tax Allocation District will generate up to \$1.7 billion over the next 22 years. BeltLine implementation is well underway, with several land use master plans about to enter the formal adoption process.

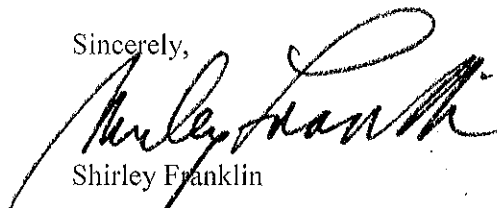
For a state agency (GDOT) to now flip-flop and at the last minute attempt to derail a well thought out and partially implemented plan is truly appalling. Sadly, from what I have witnessed over the years, GDOT's actions are consistent with its past behavior, and it is this behavior that has caused Georgia and Atlanta to lose out on millions in federal funding.

I grew up near the railroads in Philadelphia, and I know the value and importance of commuter rail in the life of a city. I am also an advocate of cooperation and collaboration to do what is best for the public. Time and again as the BeltLine has faced judicial, legislative and other challenges, grassroots Atlantans have risen up to ensure that the BeltLine vision moves forward. We have invested far too much in the BeltLine, and have seen too much growth and investment for it to be stymied by the actions of a state agency that does not have a viable plan or funding for commuter rail of the Northeast BeltLine Corridor, let alone funding for projects to which it has already committed.

I can assure you that GDOT has consistently been informed of plans for the BeltLine. We have briefed the prior and current Commissioner of GDOT as well as members of their board and staff. In addition, we have discussed with GDOT officials the Atlanta Connect Plan – the City's recently approved Transportation Plan – which includes the Beltline transit and offers an alternative to the AMTRAK station location, and have engaged them in the discussion of Concept 3, a regionally approved transit plan that fully supports the Beltline. Simply put, because of GDOT's boorish behavior and AMTRAK's willingness to play along, the future of the city of Atlanta is at stake.

I respectfully call upon you to support the BeltLine and oppose the actions of GDOT and AMTRAK so we can secure the abandonment of the Northeast BeltLine Rail Corridor and keep Atlanta moving. On behalf of the City of Atlanta, I am grateful for your leadership on this very important project. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shirley Franklin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S".

Shirley Franklin