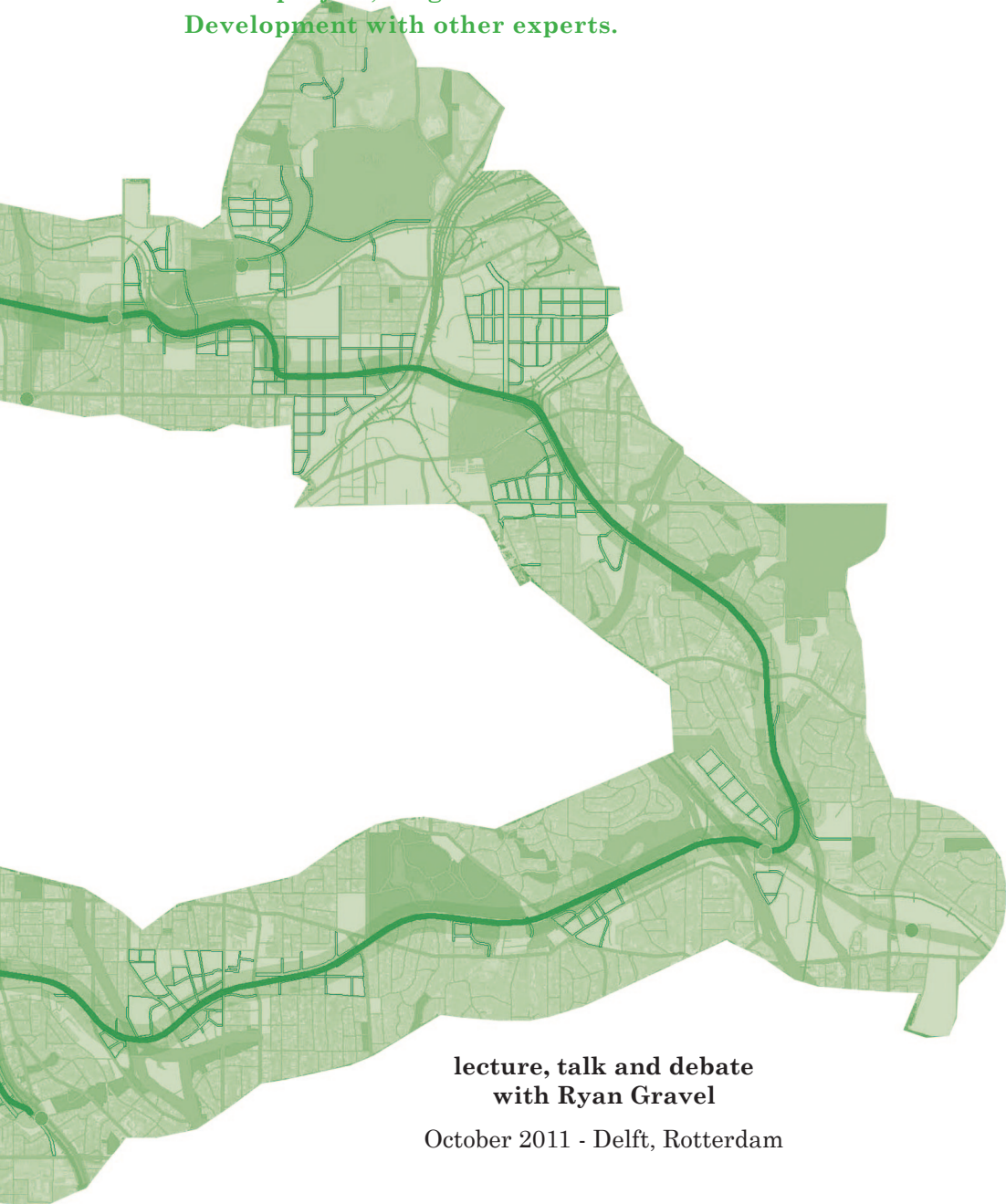


Atlanta BeltLine

The Atlanta BeltLine combines the development of a new lightrail connection on an abandoned cargo track with adjacent developments of housing, parks and public facilities. The Deltametropolis Association invited Ryan Gravel, initiator of the project, to give a lecture and discuss Transit Oriented Development with other experts.



**lecture, talk and debate
with Ryan Gravel**

October 2011 - Delft, Rotterdam

Prologue

What good ideas can bring!

Ryan Gravel's story is interesting for numerous reasons, but particularly not because it is literally applicable in the Netherlands. International comparisons are a well known and potent method to inspire and address. They offer a relatively easy way to show how others are dealing with similar challenges and opportunities. International comparisons can also be painful and often lead to the summing up of the many reasons why the comparison doesn't stick; with as a last resort pointing out that "this is not the way we do things here".

So perhaps the most interesting thing about the example of the Atlanta BeltLine is the comforting thought that good ideas do matter and can make a difference. Even though there is not a single kilometre of tracks realised in the Atlanta BeltLine project so far, the project has put into action numerous groups of people. A process resulting in all kinds of new developments: from community projects to new housing to landscaping, all anticipating the arrival of the new transit. These developments are based on a well developed central concept, but could also immediately be put into practice.

The importance of political leadership over funding is striking as well. The Atlanta BeltLine has shown that the embracement of the project - already locally rooted - by elected officials leveraged private investments. This kind of leadership is necessary to bring the project forward, even without redirecting large sums of public money towards it.

Towards a new Dutch TOD

In the Netherlands we are struggling with the complexity that Transit Oriented Development entails in an already widely urbanised area. We need to debate and reflect upon, and think through ideas, before putting them into practice. Initiatives, for example Stedenbaan, in the The Hague-Rotterdam area, have come a long way in generating a context to make Dutch TOD possible. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating and, while we struggle on the recipe, we might as well start testing and tasting. With the right political will and the right incentives, a project like Stedenbaan could be a testing ground in real life much more than just a promise, albeit an intricate one.

From the Deltametropolis perspective, we would like to continue on the endeavour of international comparisons. In 2012 the association will team up with universities and other organisations to discuss foreign examples, where mobility and spatial development meet. Likewise, we hope to discuss our Dutch practice in a wider context as well.

Paul Gerretsen (Deltametropolis Association), March 2012

Table of contents

Prologue

1. Introduction

Facts & figures

2. The Atlanta BeltLine – Ryan Gravel's story

3. Videodebate on TOD – Station to City

4. Lessons learnt

Acknowledgements

This PM, a pro memori, registers ideas and thoughts not be forgotten, and to be used.

Deltametropolis Association
 P.O. box 600
 3000AP Rotterdam, The Netherlands
 +31 10 204 1599
 www.sprintcity.nl
 sprintstad@deltametropolis.nl

1. Introduction



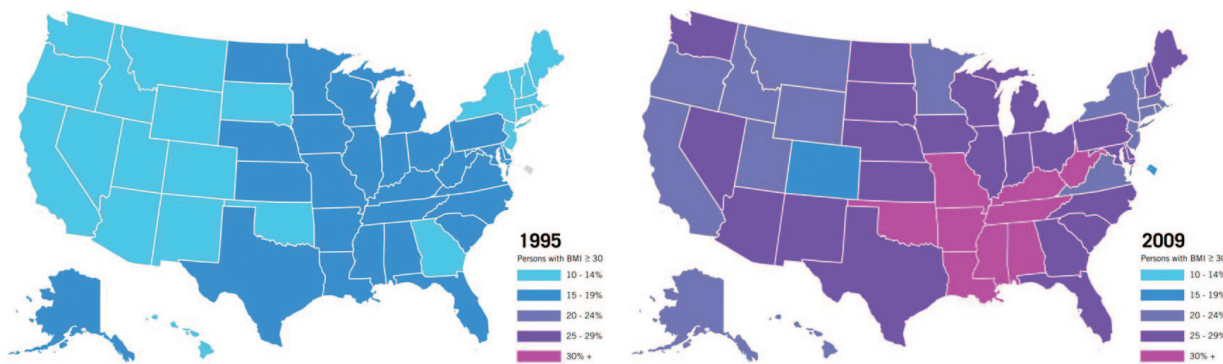
Atlanta (source: Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University)

What can we learn from Atlanta in terms of mobility and Transit Oriented Development (TOD)? At first glance, the American city of Atlanta, capital of the state Georgia, is a typical example of what NOT to do: it is an anti-utopia of uncontrolled suburbanisation, plagued by traffic congestion and a serious obesity problem - the illness of the sedentary lifestyle. The city of Charlotte, in the neighbouring state North-Carolina, even claims explicitly that it is learning from the poor examples and ‘transportation mistakes’ of Atlanta in its own urban growth and development. However, since 2005, Atlanta has been under the spell of a new public transport and urban redevelopment project, namely: the Atlanta BeltLine.

Like many other cities, Atlanta removed its tram tracks in the 1940’s, because it was believed that the future lay in individual road transport (automobiles). Until recently, little seemed to change this logic and even the 1996 Atlanta Olympics made little impact. However, in the last ten years, a slow reversal of thinking has taken place, with the redevelopment of the so-called BeltLine as a result. Apart from introducing a new ring-shaped light rail connection on an old abandoned freight track, this project also offers a new spatial axis for urban development. The BeltLine is a symbol for the return of inhabitants and investors to the city.

The project started in 1999 as a thesis project of (now) urban planner Ryan Gravel, who studied at the Georgia Institute of Technology. This project evolved from a thesis into a comprehensive story, then to a grassroots movement and finally to an actual project that is being implemented as we speak. Presently, in 2012, the BeltLine is the biggest investment project in Atlanta, with a price tag of over 2 billion dollars.

Intrigued by this project, the Deltametropolis Association invited Gravel to tell his story and give his vision on Transit Oriented Development in Randstad Holland. On the 6th of October 2011, he gave a lecture on the BeltLine, organised at Delft University of Technology. This lecture was followed by a discussion with Caroline Bos (UNStudio), Dominique Stead (OTB) and Paul Gerretsen (Deltametropolis Association). The following day Gravel participated in the videodebate ‘Station to City’ on international practices of TOD, at the Architecture Film Festival Rotterdam. It turned out there was a lot we could learn from Atlanta.



Prevalence of Obesity among adults 18 years and older in the USA (source: CDC)

Facts & figures

City of Atlanta

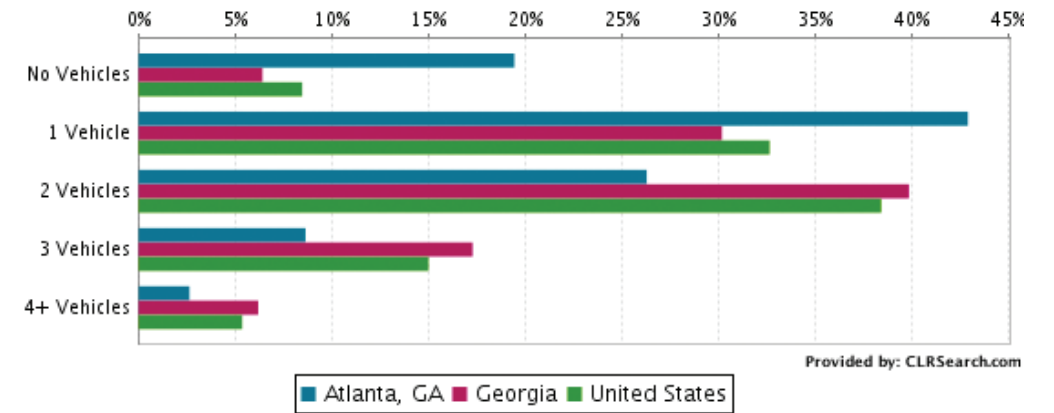
Population in 2010 | 420.000
 Population density in 2010 | 1.552 / km²
 Desired increase in density in 2030 | 30%
 Cars per household | 1,7 (median)
 Area | 343 km²

Metropolitan area of Atlanta

Population in 2010 | 5,3 million
 Ranking (population) | 9th Metro area in the USA
 Ranking (transit accessibility) | 91st of 100 Metro areas
 Population density in 2010 | 243 / km²
 Area | 21.690 km²
 Transit authority | MARTA (founded in 1971, 38 train stations, 77 km of rapid transit rail corridors, 4 rail lines and 132 bus lines, electronic Breeze Card implemented in 2006, total of 482.500 daily ridership in 2009)



The Atlanta BeltLine track (Perkins+Will)



Number of vehicles per household for Atlanta, Georgia (2010, CLRSearch.com)

BeltLine development

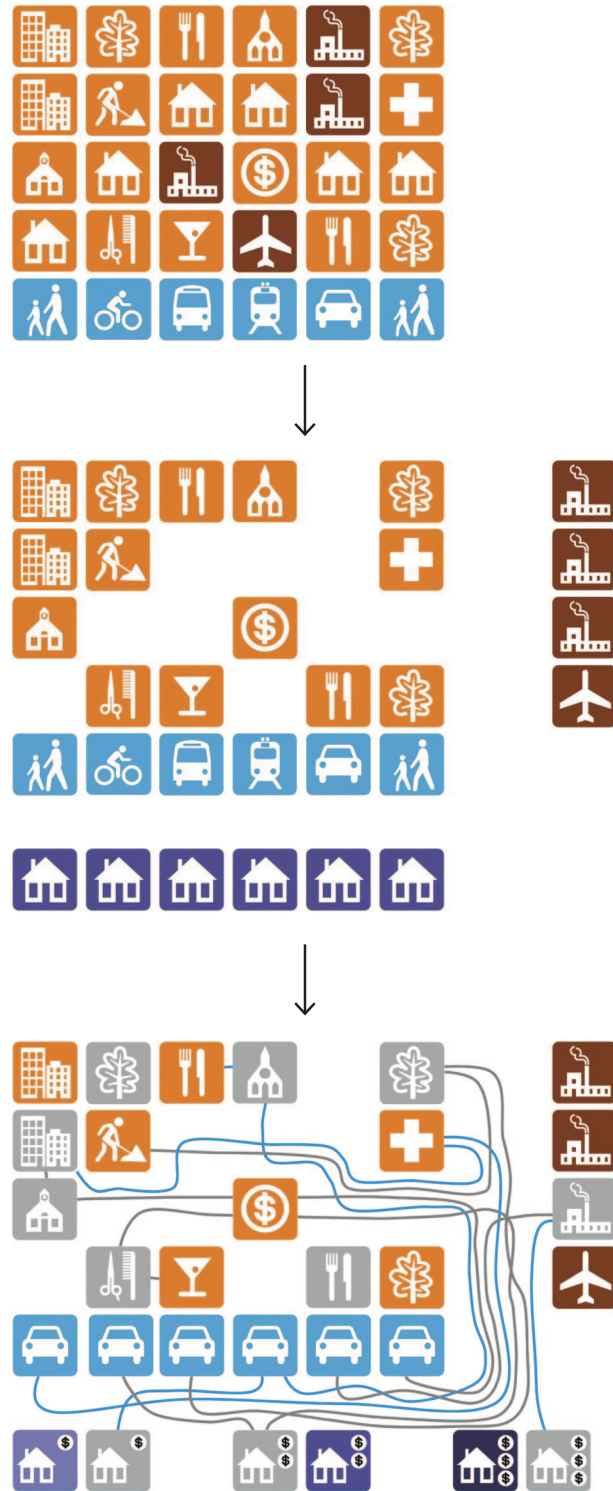
Length | 35 km
 Distance to city core | between 4 and 8 km
 Intersecting neighbourhoods | 45
 People within walking distance | 100.000
 Redevelopment area | 2.000 hectares
 Development of housing | 8.000 units since 2005
 Development of commercial space | 80.000 m² since 2005

BeltLine finance

Total project costs infrastructure | \$2,8 Billion
 Tax Allocation District (TAD) scope | 25 years
 Revenues of increased property tax | \$1,7 Billion
 (60% of project costs)
 Expected return on investment TAD | \$20 Billion

BeltLine timeline

BeltLine graduation project Ryan Gravel | 1999
 BeltLine adopted by Atlanta Mayor | 2004
 BeltLine development corporation founded | 2005
 First section of BeltLine park and trails opened | 2009
 Total transit infrastructure completed | 2030



Function separation in the modern city and the resulting sprawl and dependence on automobiles (Perkins+Will)

2. The Atlanta BeltLine Ryan Gravel's story

It looks like a poster story for bottom-up development and in this case, looks don't deceive! The Atlanta BeltLine has its origins in a joint thesis project in architecture and urban planning, so initially Gravel had no further ambition for it, besides to graduate. Together with one of his classmates he joked that if they would just talk about it enough, eventually people would think it was a real project and it would actually happen. Years after Gravel graduated in 1999, this is exactly what happened. Association Deltametropolis asked Gravel about his experiences with this special project, and what we could learn from it regarding bottom-up TOD in The Netherlands.

Lots of talking

From 2001 onwards Gravel talked to everybody and anybody who was willing to listen to the project ideas: neighbourhood committees, church groups, businesses, governments and different agencies at all levels. With time, they succeeded in creating a very public grassroots movement with people who really loved the project. From this point onwards, it started to take on a life of its own.

"Neighbourhoods especially loved the idea, which in turn drew the attention of regional planners and the transit authority." Many neighbourhoods that had experienced a decline saw the project as something that could contribute to their quality of life; they understood the need for development, for local grocery stores and access to transit. The BeltLine gave a vision they were excited about and wanted to participate in. So they did in all kinds of ways; by writing letters to newspapers, cleaning up the railroads and by flooding official meetings. This early involvement and enthusiasm was probably the key to the BeltLine's success. The economic development agency became involved, believing in its potential and the economic growth it could bring to the city.

From the beginning, the government played a supportive role. The Planning Department assessed whether re-zoning land use was appropriate; the Parks Department looked at the potential of connecting existing parks and building new ones; and the Transit Authority tested ridership models and alignment. In 2005, the city government took on a leadership role, as the project would not have survived as just a grassroots initiative.

More than just a TOD project

If Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is defined as the development of housing, retail and other programme along transit infrastructure, then the BeltLine is a very different kind of TOD project. According to Gravel: "Besides a transit project, it is a development project; and it's also a parks project. It's even a community redevelopment project and a public health project." Gravel explains that TOD in the USA is usually linked to specific buildings or a set of buildings that

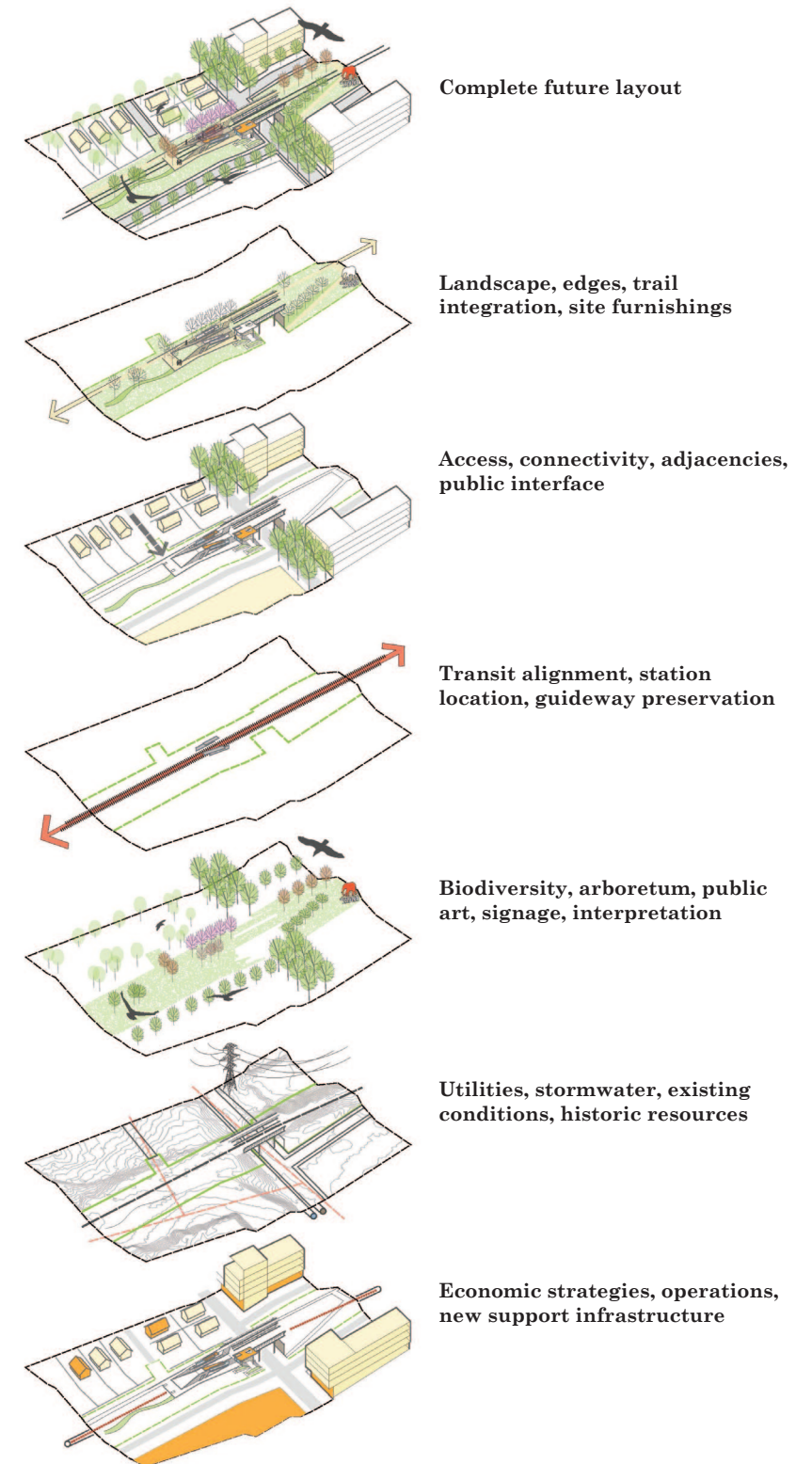
are located near a transit station, and not particularly a corridor that will include thousands of new housing units and square meters of retail in the future.

Even though the project could technically be built without the transit component, as just a greenway system, connecting parks and neighbourhoods with a pedestrian and bicycle trail for example, it would not really be a transformative project. The people in Atlanta specifically want transit. The neighbourhoods that lie along the railroad were built for a transit system that is no longer there: the extension of streetcars from downtown. Now, people are relocating to the city, traffic has become more congested and the majority of people are dependent on their cars. These people therefore want the growth: they want the density that will bring the shops closer to them, and live in a more walkable environment. Part of the attractiveness of the BeltLine is that it transforms the way the city grows physically, and also the way people think about how the city should grow.

Of course, there are other great transit systems, as well as greenways, that are being implemented all over the US. Many cities are even doing a better job than Atlanta does in any category that one can divide the BeltLine into. However, Gravel claims that he couldn't find a similar example that pulls all these things together in such an extensive way. The key to its uniqueness is the broad comprehensiveness of the project: "We are talking about transit and development as some of the core critical components. We could also have a discussion about the greenway system, the parks, the public spaces, public health, or about community stabilisation."



Atlanta BeltLine Corridor Design (Perkins+Will)



BeltLine Stacked Diagram (Perkins+Will)

From grassroots to institutions

When the project started, there was no deliberate strategy. The initiators just told a fairly consistent and broad story. Over time, they have talked about it as a city development, transit project, greenway development and parks project. “So the conversation may be weighed on one topic or the other, but the others were always there. And so a broad but constant group of stakeholders emerged behind the idea.”

From day one, different groups became involved; all with different interests and priorities. During transit planning, most of the talk was therefore directed at transit. But the green space people would then be at the table saying “Don’t forget about this, don’t forget about that”. And while talking about density and mixed land use, transit was needed there to make it happen. So the different topics always played off each other and prohibited things that could have derailed or significantly altered the project. Gravel explains that the fact that the public really believes in an idea, not only enables it to happen (because politicians want to be re-elected, and developers want to make a profit), it also protects the integrity of the project.

There were in essence three groups at the table and the core constituents of the group have never agreed on wanting the same thing. However, since the interests were managed by the public’s expectation to address them all, many conflicts were averted. He explains: “Community activists were up against developers trying to build suburban enclaves in the city. The environmental community was also challenging developers, but their interests were not necessarily in line with the communities. And then there were the developers, who saw money along the corridor, but are usually at odds with the communities.” Nevertheless, they were all at the same table because they all believed in the same idea. The developers knew that they would not be able to do everything they wanted without the support of the other groups. The community activists also knew that there was a limit to how far they could push the developers before they would stop investing in the project. The community wanted the project to materialise and knew it would only happen with the support of the developers. The environmentalists wanted the transit to happen in particular, and when they saw the overall benefit, they really supported the general project.

Economic and spatial development

Gravel says the project sometimes struggles with combining economic and spatial development, whilst simultaneously keeping the community happy. Initially, the grassroots entity was merely him and one of the city councillors, who leveraged her staff to create this movement. Later on, they created the group ‘Friends of the BeltLine’, which was a non-profit advocacy organisation that then merged with a new organisation called ‘the BeltLine Partnership’. They organise BeltLine tours, awareness campaigns, neighbourhood festivals and other events. So the grassroots entity still exists, although it is very different than it used to be. Gravel thinks the

project would benefit from an entity that really advocated the grassroots members, although this role is nowadays played on Facebook, through email, YouTube etc. So, if the city does something inconsistent with the vision, there is a whole informal network of people that will make this public.

He also thinks that, in this respect, the BeltLine is an exception: “You can’t have such grassroots movements related to all these little projects that you do.” The question then is: how do you ensure you have the right voices at the table and one right sense of public ownership in other projects? “I think that early on – if it had been the city government that would have said; ‘this is what we want to do’, it would have never happened. Similarly, if it had been the developers saying: ‘you should do this’, it would have never happened. The fact that it came from the people (more specifically that it was this kid from Georgia Institute of Technology) allowed people to test it as an idea without immediately seeing it as a threat.”

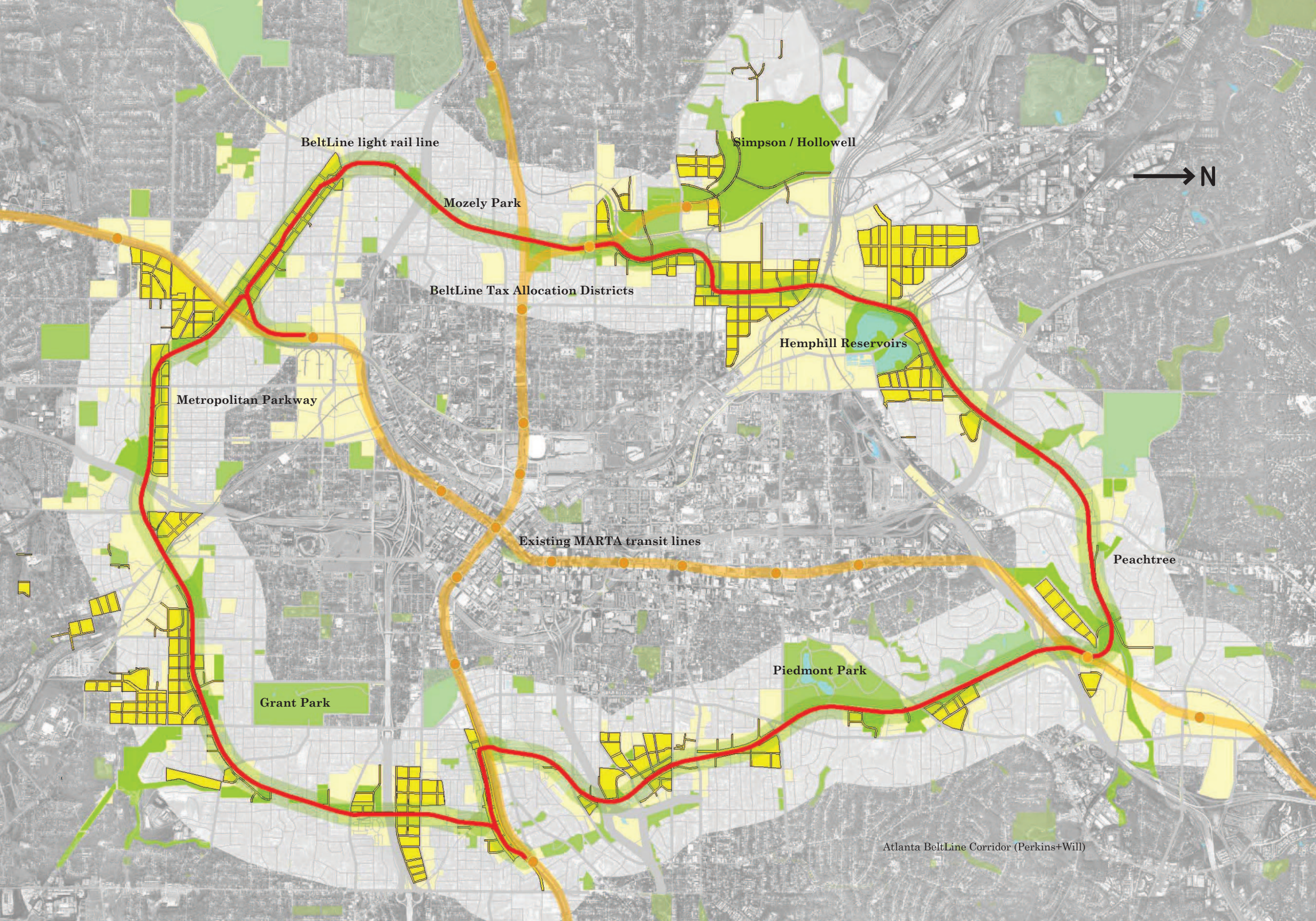
Gravel thinks that bottom-up projects like these are the future, since the internet allows people to engage more easily in urban processes. “When Haussmann did the boulevards in Paris, he just did it: he just ploughed through. In the western world of today, no one can plough. The question is how far you need to go with participation in that process and gaining trust, before the official entities take over. I think that turning point is different in each place.”

On the success of the project

Gravel already considers the BeltLine a success in the sense that it has completely changed the way people talk about the future of Atlanta. The city owns half of it now, so even if nothing else happens, it still has a significant opportunity to realise parts of it. Obviously, it can only really be rendered successful when you see the other half of it physically acquired, but Gravel doesn’t know if it’ll ever really be finished; “The BeltLine is so integrated, in the life of the city and all neighbourhoods, it is not a project around which you can draw a line and which you can see being finished one day.” He thinks it will be a milestone when the transit is running, at



Atlanta BeltLine Community Skatepark (Photo: Perkins+Will)



BeltLine light rail line

Simpson / Hollowell



Mozely Park

BeltLine Tax Allocation Districts

Hemphill Reservoirs

Metropolitan Parkway

Existing MARTA transit lines

Peachtree

Grant Park

Piedmont Park

least part of it, because of the cultural change it will bring around trains in the US and the expense of it. “I think that when we get it running and we do it right, the momentum will be significant.”

Gravel mentions several decisive moments during the project. They went through a process, creating a redevelopment plan, which allowed for the designation of the special tax allocation district. This was a reality check: from that point onwards, the government’s role became more formalised. The measure had to be approved by the property tax collectors: the city, the county and the Atlanta Public School Board of Education.

After approval, a semi-public entity had to be constructed to implement and build the project. This became the Atlanta BeltLine Inc., a subsidiary of the Atlanta Development Authority (the municipality’s economic development agency). Their board of members is made up of the mayor, city councillors and other private stakeholders. And they effectively represent the city’s public role. They also have a tax allocation district advisory committee, made up of citizens, which keeps oversight on the overall project.

Passing the tax allocation project was a big step in the process, as this construction covers 60% of the project costs. This public commitment gave the developers confidence to build there, which then paid for the consequential project. Another milestone was when the transit authority approved the ridership on the BeltLine’s light rail, proving that people would actually use it.

Lessons for Randstad Holland

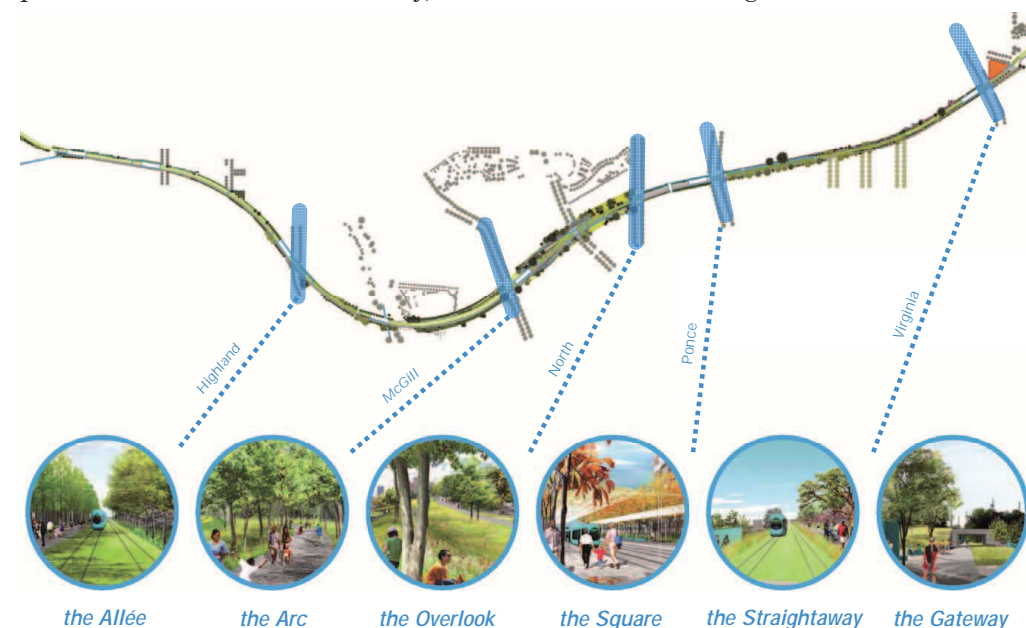
The challenge of getting projects built on available TOD sites is quite different for Randstad Holland; not because of differences in TOD sites or the transportation network, but because of differences in land development, especially in terms of housing. In America, almost anyone with access to financing can work through the process and make a project of any size happen. Progressive governments incentivise TOD through land leases, tax incentives, zoning density bonuses and other strategies. Non-progressive governments restrict TOD through outdated zoning, discouragement, or they actually disincentivise TOD by continuing to build roadway capacity and by building municipal facilities away from transit.

In the case of Atlanta, the relevance may not be in development per se, but rather in transportation, and more specifically: in lessons about what happens if you rely too heavily on automobile-oriented infrastructure as the tool for urban development. In his presentation in Delft, Gravel outlined some of the major implications of building a region so highly dependent on automobiles. The physical implications include incredible amounts of land consumption, long travel distances, long commuting times, inefficient or non-existent transit services, expensive long-term maintenance costs, harmful environmental impacts, degraded public health, increased costs for healthcare and municipal services, etc.

In addition, there are cultural and political implications. After six decades of urban sprawl, generations of Americans have a cultural expectation of urban growth, as a result, almost all policies and project funding criteria incentivise this growth pattern. Only recently have these expectations begun to change, largely in direct response to the negative consequences described above. This change is led by the public, not the government, but will eventually result in major changes in policy and project funding criteria. Gravel therefore thinks America is in the early stages of a major shift toward more sustainable lifestyles and urban policy. It is yet to be seen, however, how long it will take for these changes to take place.

Gravel believes that, compared to Atlanta, Randstad Holland needs a more aggressive strategy to ensure that the public’s expectations do not shift away from this transit-oriented country. The lesson Randstad Holland can learn from Atlanta is that the vision developed for the Atlanta BeltLine is not only changing the physical form of the city, but perhaps more importantly, it is changing the way citizens and planners think about how they build their city: it is changing the public’s cultural expectations about growth and city-building.

Another interesting aspect of the Atlanta BeltLine is its highly-engaged community process. Here, the city neighbourhood groups and advocacy organisations have embraced and expanded the vision for the BeltLine and created such a strong grassroots movement of support that the general public now demands its implementation. At the core of this community ownership and momentum, two points could be relevant. Firstly, Americans have a strong culture of community



Atlanta BeltLine Corridor Design (Perkins+Will)

activism, which often tends to be reactionary, e.g. people fighting against bad policies or unwanted highways. The City of Atlanta created a formal process for community input called 'Neighbourhood Planning Units' (NPU's). This is the lowest form of city government, and it has evolved into a fairly successful and empowering process, where communities make recommendations for city leaders, on everything ranging from land use changes to liquor licenses. This was a natural starting base to build the grassroots movement that pushed the Atlanta BeltLine project forward. Secondly, the BeltLine - rather than mobilising citizens to protest against something - provided a vision that they could fight for together. The project brings about a broad range of stakeholders, all working together towards a common goal because they understand that one part of the vision cannot survive without the other.

Application in other projects and areas

Not every city has a loop of old railroads, but to Gravel this shouldn't matter. It was the integrated approach behind the BeltLine that made the project a success. For example, not only is the BeltLine the largest affordable housing initiative the city has ever undertaken, but tools have also been developed to fight the negative consequences of gentrification.

Gravel has learned that adapting urban areas, reusing existing infrastructures and networks and not seeing them as separate entities, is crucial. The BeltLine project worked as a framework to tackle various problems. He is currently working on a proposal for Detroit which, since the city has shrunk dramatically, has a great amount of underutilised road infrastructure. The question is how that infrastructural network could be repurposed to actually improve people's quality of life.

Gravel is also currently involved in talking to people in Los Angeles about the LA River, a big 53 mile concrete canalised river. A grassroots movement there is trying to reclaim the river and surrounding area, which is now largely abandoned, to transform it back into a real river, with trails and parks, where people would like to stay and walk.



Abandoned infrastructure at the Atlanta BeltLine (left) and the Petite Ceinture in Paris (right)

3. Videodebate on TOD Station to City

Together with the Architecture Film Festival Rotterdam, SprintStad organised a video debate about 'transit oriented development' (TOD), with film fragments from three different continents. The event took place on the 7th of October 2011 and was sponsored by APPM, Movares, Next Generation Infrastructures, NS-Poort and StedenbaanPlus. The host and moderator was Joost Schrijnen. 'The American Way' was introduced by the keynote speaker Ryan Gravel; 'The Asian Way' by Slavis Poczebutas and 'The European Way' by Sebastiaan de Wilde. A few fragments:

The American Way

The term TOD was invented in America. There are examples of civic leadership, such as Portland, but also grassroots initiatives, like the Atlanta BeltLine. Cities in America are growing again. The growth is spurring on the need for a new type of urbanity, in which people are no longer dependent on automobiles. The younger generation sees the car as a hindrance (not a status symbol) and the proximity of services is perceived to be a real benefit. Due to the crisis, cities are now growing more organically and at a slower rate, which prevents problems of speculation and the negative aspects of gentrification.

Ryan Gravel (Perkins+Will)

'The adapted tax allocation along the Beltline was crucial. The government has started to co-finance public transport, but this only came about when the inhabitants and stakeholders made themselves heard.'

Herman Gelissen (StedenbaanPlus)

'Stedenbaan looks for the local energy in governments and stakeholders. Improved legislation can contribute to the implementation of TOD.'

Joost Schrijnen (Delft University of Technology)

'If TOD has to be implemented at a regional or local scale, then why doesn't The Netherlands offer the possibility of raising and allocating tax according to the specific scale level?'

Jeroen Haver (Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment)

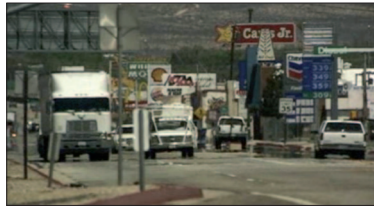
'Possibilities for decentralised solutions already exist in The Netherlands, like cutting back on the Valuation of Immovable Property Act (WOZ Tax). The instruments are waiting to be implemented.'

Wendy Tan (University of Amsterdam)

'In the USA, there is a lot of local energy for lobby groups. Informal parties play an important role in making these successful. In The Netherlands, these structures are often nonexistent.'

THE AMERICAN WAY

Creating pockets of urban areas with public transportation in a car oriented country



Portland, a Sense of Place (E2-PBS, 2008, 4 min)
Transit Oriented Development in Portland, Oregon.



Mind the Gap: Episode: Re-Thinking Transportation (4 min)
Regional vision on public transport in San Francisco.



Atlanta Beltline (4 min)
Introducing a project that provides a network of public parks, multi-use trails and transit along a historic 22-mile railroad corridor circling downtown Atlanta.

THE ASIAN WAY

Intense integration of urban development, lifestyle and public transport



Octopus Card (Richie Gelles, 2004, 4 min.)
Animation on the multiple uses of the Octopuscard in Hong Kong.



Tokyo Mobility Room with a View (Koen Klinkers, 6 min)
Traveling the Tokyo Yamanote-line.



My Tokyo (Alary Romain, 2009, 2 min.)
Poetic film about the dynamic life in Tokyo.

THE EUROPEAN WAY

New policies for increasing public transport use



Sweden Doubling Project (Mirakel Film, 2011, 7 min)
Doubling the use of Public Transport in Sweden within the next 10 years.



Zürich Hauptbahnhof (2 min)
The different face of Zürich Hauptbahnhof.



Moving Platforms (Paul Priestman, 2011, 3 min.)
An idea for a non-stop high speed train transfer.

The Asian Way

Asia has extreme forms of public tender, in which the infrastructure, development of station locations and the exploitation of train lines lies in the hands of one party. Out of these stem corridors of diverse usage, which are built up as a 'daily urban system'. There is a strong partnership between the public transport companies and the government. Lifestyle and mobility are strongly interwoven. Shopping centres, housing and universities are directly connected to the stations. The Octopus Card (public transport travel card) enables access to a life of mobility, convenience and consumption.

Slavis Poczebutas (OMA)

'In Hong Kong, urban convenience takes priority over urban quality. The benefits to such a system are the mix of high-density programmes and the exceptional accessibility range of the public transport system. The disadvantages lie in the overwhelming power of the real estate sector, mass housing construction and the commercialisation of the public domain.'

Paul Chorus (Provincial Government of North-Holland)

'In Tokyo, the station is both a service point and shopping centre. By using overhead infrastructures, the city functions well at ground level. The city directs its urbanisation along the corridors by setting minimum density concentrations.'

Menno Lipsius (Movares)

'We should build closer to the infrastructures in The Netherlands. This is often hindered by development plans and health and safety regulations. Pedestrians and urban quality are essential for TOD.'

The European Way

Since the 19th century, urbanisation has often been coupled with railways in traditional European cities. Currently, the emphasis lies in intensifying the use of the existing city and infrastructures, fed by increasing mobility levels and growing metropolitan regions. Intermodality is the motto. The challenge lies in breaking through the existing institutional structures and financial arrangements. Unlike in the USA, it is difficult to actively involve stakeholders and inhabitants in the institutionalised Europe.

Sebastiaan de Wilde (NS Poort)

'The Netherlands already has some excellent projects: Park and Ride (P+R), the High-Frequency Rail Transport Programme (PHS), the New Key Projects (Sleutelprojecten) and the public transport bicycles initiative (OV-fietsen). These should be brought forward!'

Pepijn van Wijmen (APPM)

'The Netherlands is missing a central player in the complex situation: someone with a public vision.'

Thomas Straatemeier (Goudappel Coffeng)

'We usually look at these issues from a technocratic planning perspective. What is missing is a clear political or social goal. In what kind of city do the Dutch want to live in the future?'

Wendy Tan (University of Amsterdam)

'In TOD-circles, we're always preaching for an own parish. But how can we also involve public officials and stakeholders in this debate?'

To read more about the 'Station to City' videodebate, and view a selection of the featured video's, access our website www.sprintcity.nl or scan this QR tag:





Station to City, debate on international TOD practices (Deltametropolis Association)



the Atlanta Beltline, lecture and discussion with Ryan Gravel (Deltametropolis Association)

To read more about Ryan Gravel's lecture and view it on video, access our website www.sprintcity.nl or scan this QR tag:



4. Lessons learnt

The lessons from the BeltLine project, highlighted below, are not only applicable to the specific situation in Atlanta, but could also be helpful to a wider range of TOD-related projects world-wide.



Lesson 1 – Telling the story

The BeltLine started as a bottom-up project: it literally started with a story that was told to anyone who was willing to listen. The story was comprehensive and offered a vision of the future that many people recognised and advocated, which is why it was received with enthusiasm and created its own ambassadors. The idea slowly gained momentum and storytellers, mobilising local stakeholders, inhabitants, companies and associations in its process. Only later, after it became a story that many people supported, was it adopted by institutions and formalised. The way in which this project was built therefore enabled a broad base of support and understanding of what the project was about.



Lesson 2 – Embedding the project

In the case of the BeltLine project, the TOD is embedded in a broad community-based discussion involving numerous topics, such as health, mobility, quality of the urban environment, the middle-class reclamation of the city etc. This makes it much more than 'just' a TOD project. The project therefore has the potential to appeal to more people and tie different stakeholders together. In essence, the BeltLine project is the answer to the common question: in what kind of city do we want to live in the future?



Lesson 3 – Smart financing

The state of Georgia isn't known for its spending drift on public transport. In Metropolitan Atlanta, the city of Atlanta accounts for only one (out of ten) votes, which makes it incredibly difficult to influence urban policy; even more so than in the Netherlands, the 'country' has quite a lot of power. However, to make the BeltLine really successful, transit was needed. Financing it was a challenge. The project succeeded in organising financial structures for light rail by making a tax allocation zone along the line for the next 25 years. Over this time, a leverage by city investment in light rail will finance the project, with matching funds from the federal government.



Lesson 4 – Organising governmental support

Although it started as a bottom-up project, a grassroots movement alone isn't enough to implement and ensure it becomes a success. At some point in time, you will need ambassadors for the project at a governmental level to scale up the project.

The BeltLine has been very successful in organising governmental support. Triggered by the public demand and buzz around the project, governmental institutions were interested and were quick to recognise the added value of the project. Implementation of the project was possible, because decision makers were the advocates and the stakeholders of the project.



Lesson 5 – Creating flexibility and binding stakeholders

The success of the BeltLine also lies in the fact that its story is flexible and multidimensional. It was easy to explain the story from different perspectives. It is a public transport story, as well as a recreational or greenways story, a housing story, a story about amenities and investments. The long-term vision of the BeltLine was used as a framework for all kinds of problems and solutions on different scales, so that all those different worlds could identify themselves within it. In this way, there was room for different stakeholders and interests, but the project still tied them all together.



Lesson 6 – Activating local history and local chances

The BeltLine is a wonderful example of revitalising local history in the wake of a future vision. The link to local history is very strong. Atlanta relives its past as a railroad junction: a place where trains were able to pass the ridges. However, the needs and demands that the project answers are very current and oriented towards the future. Now it is only logical that the image of Atlanta is reclaimed as a railroad city and to connect it with the wishes and needs of the future generations. In this way, Atlanta will once again be an open city with enough open space, a young population and young and creative companies. Making a link between the past and future makes the project stronger and easier to identify with for the overall population.

Acknowledgements

Lecture

Ryan Gravel (Perkins+Will)

Caroline Bos (UN Studio)

Paul Gerretsen (Deltametropolis Association)

Roberto Rocco (TUDelft)

Dominique Stead (OTB)

Video debate 'Station to City'

Ryan Gravel (Perkins+Will)

Sander van der Ham (Stipo)

Slavis Poczebutas (OMA)

Wies Sanders (AFFR)

Joost Schrijnen (TUDelft)

Sebastiaan de Wilde (NS Poort)

Project manager SprintCity

Merten Nefs (Deltametropolis Association)

Interview and booklet text

Mariana Faver Linhares (Deltametropolis Association)

Inge Hartkoorn (Deltametropolis Association)

Yvonne Rijpers (Deltametropolis Association)

Lecture video

Ronald Aarts (Deltametropolis Association)

David Dooghe (Deltametropolis Association)

Kito Samson (Deltametropolis Association)

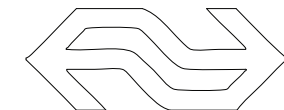
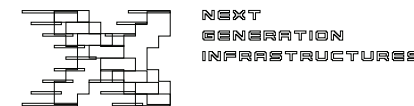
With thanks to

AFFR, APPM, Lantaren Venster, Movares, NS Dutch Railways, TUDelft Spatial Planning, Paul Chorus, Herman Gelissen, Menno Lipsius, Koenie Roorda-Van Veen, Thomas Straatemeier and Joost de Waal.

the 'Atlanta BeltLine' lecture by Ryan Gravel was made possible by

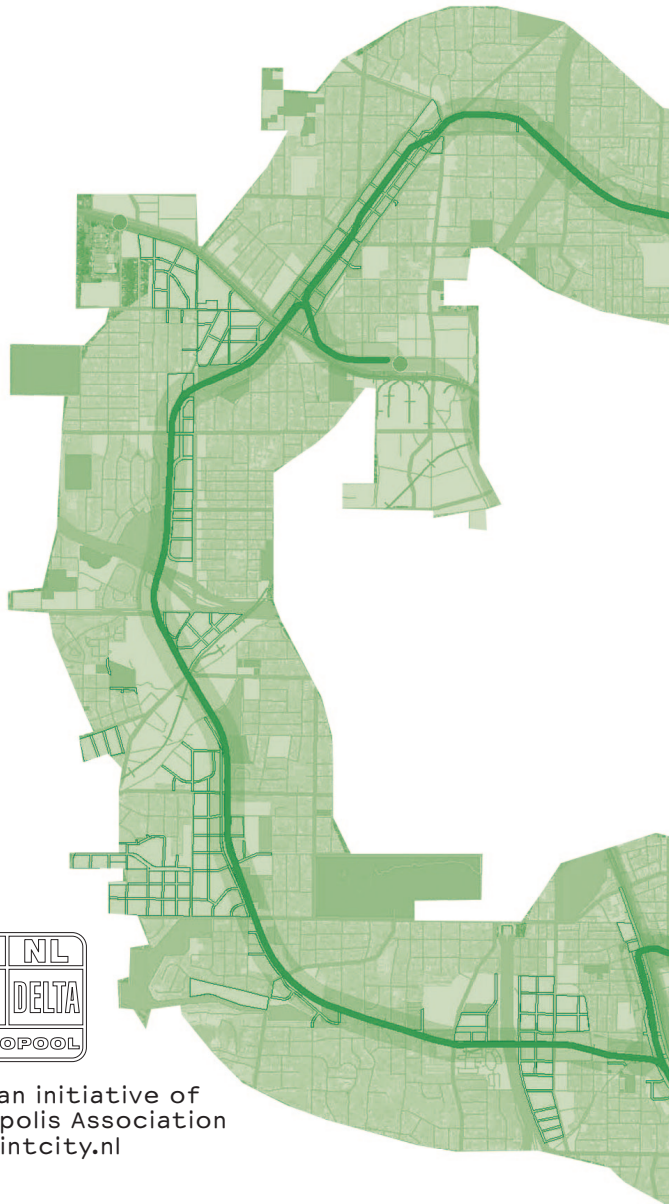


the video debate 'Station to City' was made possible by





Download this publication!



SprintCity is an initiative of
the Deltametropolis Association
www.sprintcity.nl