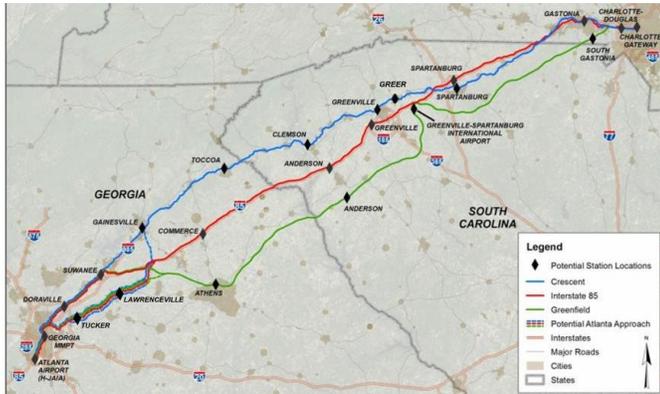




“second great railroad revolution,” Biden’s campaign website promised to “expand the Northeast Corridor to the fast-growing South,” which would seem to imply support for a high-speed extension from Washington to Charlotte, then eventually to Atlanta. The US High Speed Rail Association says ongoing projects in the Northeast Corridor, the Pacific Northwest, California, Texas and Florida should get top funding priority. But it lists Atlanta-Charlotte HSR among ten “second tier” priorities.

### THREE-DAY-A-WEEK CRESCENT

The Crescent may improve its on-time percentage over the next few months, but it will be running less frequently. Citing the coronavirus pandemic, Amtrak has reduced frequencies on most of its long-distance routes including the Crescent line, going from daily departures to three-days-a-week service. The northbound Crescent now stops in Atlanta only on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays while the southbound Crescent serves Atlanta only on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Mondays. Amtrak says it’s a temporary reaction to the covid travel slump. Just 168,100 passengers rode the Crescent during the fiscal year that ended Oct. 30, down from 295,200 during fiscal 2019, but critics call tri-weekly service an overreaction that has reduced supply below demand. A private room in a sleeper is one of the safest ways to travel in the covid era. But with the Crescent running just three days a week, a recent Trains magazine survey showed numerous Crescent trips sold out of sleeping car space weeks ahead of departure. Amtrak says it is committed to restoring daily service as the pandemic eases – possibly as early as next summer – but critics are skeptical.



After reviewing three possible routes for Atlanta-Charlotte high-speed rail, planners are recommending the “Greenfield” option (shown in green) via Athens, Anderson, SC and the Greenville-Spartanburg airport (Georgia Department of Transportation map).

### NEW RULE MAY GET TRAINS BACK ON TIME

Even as it looks ahead to high-speed passenger rail, Atlanta is hoping for improvements to its current train service. Amtrak’s Crescent, which runs from New Orleans to New York, is the only intercity passenger train serving Atlanta at the present time, and it posted a dismal on-time record of 28.9% during fiscal 2019, which ended in October. Amtrak blames the Norfolk Southern Railway, which owns the tracks between New Orleans and Washington, DC. Critics say NS and many other “host” railroads across the country delay Amtrak service by giving track priority to their own freight trains. Now, however, the Federal Railroad Administration has published new service standards that could lead to better timekeeping. They require host railroads to run Amtrak trains on schedule at least 80% on time, and they establish a process to resolve any disagreements. Amtrak calls the decision a victory for its passengers and “for anyone who believes people and communities across the country deserve a world-class passenger rail network with schedules that you can count on.”

### JUDGE UPHOLDS MARTA SERVICE CUTS

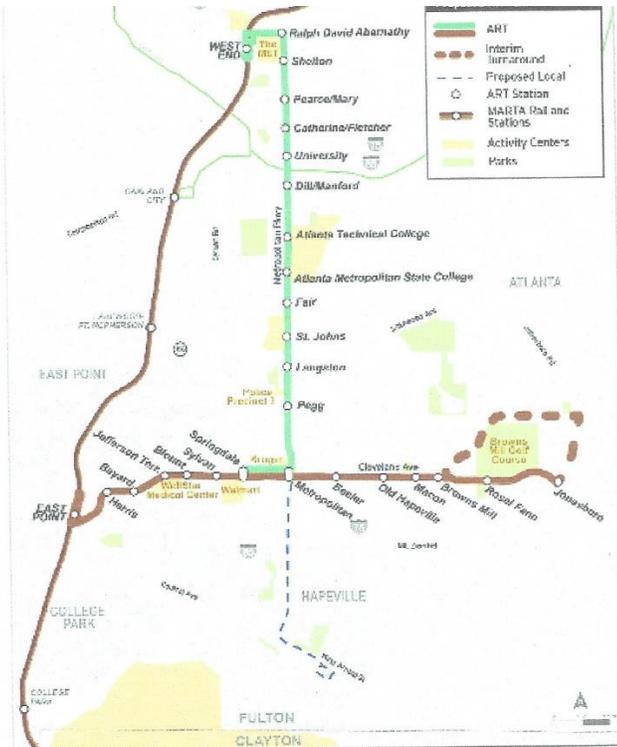
A Fulton County judge has ruled that MARTA’s decision to suspend service on dozens of bus routes earlier this year was a legitimate response to the covid pandemic. Critics arguing that the cuts had a disproportionate impact on low-income Atlantans filed suit to reverse the suspensions, but Judge Shakura Ingram Millender ruled that the cuts were lawful. Eight months into the pandemic, many of MARTA’S service suspensions remain in effect. Trains and streetcars still use weekend schedules on weekdays, and as of Nov. 9, MARTA was still operating only 51 of its 110 bus routes. Some service is gradually being restored. Route 66 Lyndhurst Drive/Princeton Lakes and Route 180 Roosevelt Highway will be reinstated on Dec. 5. And in a bid to help riders living along still-suspended routes, MARTA is now subsidizing Uber trips to nearby rail stations.

### BELTLINE RAIL ENGINEERING BEGINS

Four years after Atlanta voters approved the MARTA 2040 referendum, the engineering phase of the first major rail-based project is beginning. Crews have started surveys for a two-mile light-rail

extension of the Edgewood-Auburn streetcar route along the Eastside Beltline Trail between Irwin Street and Ponce de Leon Avenue. When completed in 2028, the extended line will link Centennial Olympic Park to Ponce City Market. But the project's modest aspirations are viewed with mixed emotions by Beltline transit supporters who want to see light rail along the entire Beltline loop by 2030. Beltline Rail Now is completing a white paper that will identify ways to fund the full project.

### GET READY FOR ARTERIAL RAPID TRANSIT



MARTA says its first arterial rapid transit lines will run along Cleveland Avenue (shown in green) and Metropolitan Parkway (shown in brown/MARTA map).

MARTA 2040 tax revenues are funding enhanced bus services, too. After earlier releasing plans for a Summerhill Bus Rapid Transit Line, MARTA is now sharing plans for its first arterial rapid transit routes. BRT and ART are similar services, both featuring frequent, limited-stop service and shelters with real-time arrival signs and other amenities. The main difference is that BRT generally runs in dedicated lanes while ART buses share lanes with other traffic. MARTA plans to convert Route 78 Cleveland Avenue and Route 95 Metropolitan Parkway into ART lines by 2024. The Cleveland Avenue line will start at the East Point MARTA Station and the Metropolitan Parkway line will start at the West End Station, with both lines meeting at

the intersection of their namesake streets. ART trips are expected to be 20% faster than the current service. Some of that will be because of faster boarding procedures and traffic signal priority, but much of it will come from eliminating about half of the current stops. MARTA says most riders will be unaffected, but up to 25% will have to walk three more minutes to reach the nearest remaining stop.

### ALL STOPS

A new survey conducted for the American Public Transportation Association shows 77% of Americans supporting emergency funding for transit agencies battling the covid crisis... Buffalo, NY has opened a new Amtrak station... Omaha, NE has launched its first bus rapid transit route... Albany, NY has launched its second BRT route... Capitol Metro has opened a new MetroRail station in downtown Austin, TX.... Ground has been broken for a 7.8-mile extension of northern Indiana's South Shore Line commuter railroad... The commission that runs Florida's SunRail commuter rail line has approved plans for a 12-mile extension to DeLand... Fare-free driverless vans are running along a route in St. Petersburg, FL as part of a three-month pilot project... Transit fares have been slashed 50% as part of a three-year pilot project in some Chicago suburbs... MARTA has extended the contract of CEO and General Manager Jeffrey Parker through 2026... Former MARTA CEO Beverly Scott has been inducted into the American Public Transit Association's Hall of Fame... MARTA plans to add flexibility to its Clayton County bus network with more transfer stations... MARTA and the City of Atlanta are working on a master plan for development around Lindbergh Center Station... MARTA is renovating its Airport Station with a second elevator, a new canopy and new artwork... Buses on MARTA Route 178 Empire Boulevard/Southside Industrial Park will stop using Astor Avenue on Dec. 5... ATL Xpress has upgraded the Cummings Park-and-Ride to improve accessibility for handicapped riders... The Macon-Bibb Transit Authority has taken delivery of its first pair of electric buses... Now that tempered-glass barriers have been installed to protect bus drivers from covid, Savannah's Chatham Area Transit will resume collecting fares in December... Augusta Transit has opened a new headquarters building and bus maintenance facility at the site of the old Regency Mall.