



The Atlanta Beltline

Southeast Quadrant

Rail Development

The southeast quadrant of the Atlanta Beltline has proven to be the hardest railroad section to research due to the lack of resources. The rail line in the Southeast quadrant was one of the last pieces of the puzzle that created the Atlanta Beltline. Begun in 1898, the tracks in this quad were finished by 1899. The only railroad that used this sector of the beltline was the Atlanta and West Point Railroad (A&WP), though the Georgia Railroad operated throughout the southeast quadrant. The construction of the southeast part of the Beltline was started by the Atlanta and West Point as a connection between Hulsey Yard and Oakland City. Hulsey Yard is located at the northern edge of the southeastern quadrant, and the rail yard was a main transfer point of rail traffic coming into Atlanta. Oakland City is located southwest of Atlanta and is a major rail yard slightly south of the Beltline. Hulsey Yard is located close to the central business district of Atlanta, and it expanded from the original terminals of the pioneer railroads of the city. (Stanley, 99) Three belt roads terminated at Hulsey Yard, those being the Atlanta and West Point belt line from Oakland City on the Southwest Approach, and the belt lines of both the Southern Railway System and the Seaboard Air Line Railroad from Howell Junction on the Northwest Approach. Those belt lines have facilitated interchange between Hulsey and other yards and have reduced the amount of traffic moving to and from the East Approach through the Central Intersection. (Stanley, 99-100)



Hulsey Yard, 1957

The southeast portion of the Beltline was historically used by trains (mainly those of the A&WP) as a way to circumvent the central business district of Atlanta. The southeastern part of the city has historically been, and continues to be, industrial in character. Today, many businesses revolving around the trucking industry are present within the quadrant and especially around each of the three nodes. Hulsey Yard, near the Memorial/Bill Kennedy node, is still functioning as a CSX Intermodal terminal, which utilizes both trains and trucks to transfer goods coming into the city. Hulsey Yard ranks 7th in freight volume for CSX and is the largest intermodal carrier in the United States.

Infrastructure

Information about the infrastructure in the southeast quadrant was virtually nonexistent. The Atlanta History Center's subject files, HPD's Identified Sites files, and the DOT's bridge survey were consulted, yet provided little to no information. We contacted the two major railroad companies that are in operation today for access to their archives. CSX never responded, and Norfolk Southern said they no longer had an archive.

The Atlanta & West Point Freight Depot, located at 904 Memorial Drive, is the only remaining depot along the 22-mile Beltline. Located within the Memorial Drive/Bill Kennedy Way node, this remarkable structure is perhaps the crown jewel of historic buildings along the Beltline. The structure was built around 1900, and the architect is unknown. The building is constructed of red brick and limestone with a red tile roof. The Atlanta Urban Design Commission, in its book *Atlanta's Lasting Landmarks*, classifies the building as having a 20th century eclectic style with a Georgian influence.¹ The building served as a freight depot until the early 1960s and was later used to store old railroad documents and records. The building has been vacant for over ten years and is in great need of rehabilitation.



Located within the Pryor and University node, a former Atlanta & West Point RR underpass crosses over Pryor Rd. This overpass is an example of one of the lasting marks that past railroads have made on Atlanta. Due to the construction style of the underpass, and knowing that the Atlanta and West Point railroad only started constructing their own tracks in 1889, it is reasonable to assume that the structure dates from the 1890s. The underpass is of steel construction and paint that is in need of a fresh coat proclaims that it is the property of the Atlanta and West Point Railroad. According to one of the pictures in

the Beltline Redevelopment Plan, this underpass is pictured as part of the Pryor Street redevelopment, yet the A&WP markings are gone and replaced with the word "Beltline." This repainting should be discouraged because it takes away part of Atlanta's connection to past railroads. If the A&WP rail line is still being used, it would make a bigger impact if the A&WP name was retained.

Also located within the Pryor and University node, an immense masonry tunnel crosses under McDonough Blvd. This tunnel is a remarkable piece of late 19th century railroad infrastructure. The date of construction is unknown; however, due to the size of the tunnel, it is likely that it is original to the construction of the Beltline, circa 1898-99. It is no longer actively used by any railroad company. Formed by brick construction, the tunnel is quite small in height and width and would not be able to accommodate today's trains. However, it could be utilized by the smaller, lighter trains that will run on the new Beltline.

A massive concrete underpass spans Ormewood Avenue, likely dating to the original construction of the Beltline, circa 1898-99. The underpass is of concrete and steel construction, and massive pilasters flank the arched openings. A piece of railroad infrastructure crossing over Confederate Avenue was stamped on the north side with its date of construction, 1914. The underpass is constructed of steel plate girders on steel piers.

The McDonough Blvd overpass likely dates from the 1910s. It consists of a pebbled concrete finish with orange brick inset panels. The bridge crosses over four railroad tracks, and each end of the bridge has an opening where light posts were previously located. The Hill St. Underpass was constructed in 1914. It is made up of steel brackets and columns with a concrete railroad abutment. The underpass is next to two tracks.

The Mauldin Rd. underpass was built in 1927 by the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company, according to a date stamped on the underside of the bridge. It is a riveted steel plate girder bridge with concrete wing abutments. It also has curved ends and the center of the bridge is concrete over arched steel decking. The Krog St. tunnel was built in 1912, and it has recently become an icon for the nearby Cabbagetown and Reynoldstown neighborhoods because of the graffiti art that adorns the inside of the tunnel. The tunnel is two lanes and is located under Hulsey Yard. The tunnel's lanes are divided by concrete piers, and walkways on either side of the lanes are also separated from the lanes by concrete piers as well.



Scattered around this stretch of the Beltline are numerous remnants of railroad switchgear and traffic signals. Most are presumed to date to the middle of the 20th century. A crossing signal exists at 95 Milton Avenue. The crossing signal has metal poles and cross arms with lights. On Delmar Avenue, a railroad switchgear box stands. Switchgears are mechanisms used to move the rails in order to reroute trains in different directions. Located within the Boulevard Crossing node, a railroad relay box remains. This railroad equipment is estimated to date from the 1940s. The box is made of iron and stands slightly less than 6 feet high. It is stamped with U.S. & S. Co. Swissvale, PA. Railroad relay boxes are used to house electrical equipment that activates line side signals and grade signals either for other trains or for pedestrians and other cars on the street.

Northeast Quadrant

Rail Development

The Northeast Quadrant of the Beltline contains what is likely the earliest "Beltline", with its initial segment dating to the 1870s. The line curves off to the northeast from the Georgia Railroad, near Oakland Cemetery/Hulsey Yard. On most maps the Northeast section of the belt is identified as the "Southern Railway" or "Southern Railroad". The Northeast Quadrant was ideal for railroad development because it was sparsely populated farmland, ripe for the development of new manufacturing and industry related business. This was the type of development that was desired and triumphed by the post-war New South movement. Car companies, mills, foundries, furniture and lumber companies developed quickly with the construction of the rail line in the Northeast quadrant. Residential communities developed later in the Northeast quadrant due to the proximity of industry and business or the later formation of the trolley system.

The first evidence of rail activity in the Northeast Quadrant was during the early to mid-1800s in the farm settlement at the intersection of Piedmont and 10th Street known as Easton. The residents of Easton began using the Air-Line Belle, a steam train that ran between Atlanta and Toccoa, in 1876. The line was in operation until 1918 and commuters boarded the train at a depot near what is currently Ansley Mall. By 1900, some Easton residents were commuting to Atlanta by this train.

The groundwork for the existing historic Beltline located in the Northeast Quadrant began to take shape with the charter of the Georgia Air-Line Railroad in 1856. The city of Atlanta bought \$100,000 worth of stock in the Georgia Air-Line Railroad, which was to run from Atlanta to Charlotte, North Carolina. The Civil War stopped all construction on the Georgia Air-Line Railroad but construction of the rail commenced after the war.

The next line to influence the quadrant was the Atlanta and Richmond Air-Line. The Atlanta and Richmond Air-Line was organized in North Carolina in 1870. It combined the Georgia Air-Line Railroad Company and the Air-Line Railroad Company of South Carolina. The line was designed to open Atlanta to southeastern Virginia and central North and South Carolina and would provide a crucial link in the Piedmont between New Orleans, Mobile, Montgomery, and Richmond. The Atlanta and Richmond Air-line was actually controlled by the Richmond and Danville Railroad, precursor of the Southern Railway. Both rail line names, the Atlanta and Richmond Air-Line and the Richmond and Danville Railway, are used as labels on maps used for research purposes. The Richmond and Danville Air-Line Railway had planned to build a line from Charlotte, North Carolina to Atlanta but could not do so under its own name due to limitations in its charter, thus the name Atlanta and Richmond Air-Line. By 1871, the first 53 miles from Atlanta were complete and the entire line was complete in September of 1873. An 1877 map shows the first spur of the Beltline extending from Hulsey Yard as far north as the Piedmont Park Exposition. (W.M. Scott & Co.'s Map of Atlanta, 1891) The line was sold in 1876 and reorganized as the Atlanta and Charlotte Air-Line Railway in February 1877. The Atlanta and Charlotte Air-Line Railway operated for five years and was leased back to the Richmond and Danville Air-Line in 1881.



The most notable consolidation of the Beltline through the Northeast quadrant was the result of the merger of various smaller lines, including the Richmond and Danville Air-Line, into Southern Railway. In 1894, Southern took control of the route between Charlotte and Atlanta absorbing the smaller lines operating in the Northeast. In 1913, the Southern Railway began a program of double-tracking the main line between Washington D.C. and Atlanta that was completed in 1919. In 1926, the Federal government condemned the Southern's headquarters building on Pennsylvania Avenue. This would eventually result in the company moving its accounting department to Atlanta. In 1980, Southern Railway and Norfolk and Western began a merger that would eventually become the Norfolk Southern Railway.

At present, Norfolk Southern and developer, Wayne Mason, own the Beltline track located in the Northeast quadrant. In December of 2004, Wayne Mason purchased approximately 70 acres of land, 5 miles in length stretching from Interstate 85 on the north to Decatur Street on the south. Mr. Mason's purchase represents 22% of the entire citywide Beltline length.

Infrastructure

The Northeast Quadrant possesses several good examples of turn of the century railroad infrastructure. The earliest surviving example is located in the Ansley node behind the current location of Ansley Mall. It is estimated that the wood trestle which spans Clear Creek was constructed some time between 1880 and 1890. The trestle is relatively intact and is an excellent example of late nineteenth century construction commonly used for railroad infrastructure during this period. The trestle is supported on six piers and is constructed of heavy timber and ballasted timber track. A similar trestle spans Clear Creek near Piedmont Park.



In addition to containing the oldest pieces of railroad infrastructure, this stretch of the Beltline also contains the most ornate. The Park Drive Bridge, crossing over the Beltline into Piedmont Park was constructed in 1916 as a part of the Olmsted brothers' master plan for the park. This exquisitely detailed bridge features intricate brickwork, tile inlay and molded concrete, and is truly one of the highlights along the Beltline.



Edgewood Avenue Overpass

Several rail underpasses and one overpass were constructed along the Northeast section of the Beltline around 1910. The majority of these were of concrete construction. The Krog Street Tunnel, located at the intersection of Krog and Wylie streets, was constructed in 1912 as evident by the date marker on the structure. The Krog Street Tunnel is constructed of concrete and operates as a two lane divided tunnel under Hulsey yards. The two lanes of traffic are separated by concrete piers and two sidewalks are located on either side of the traffic lanes, also separated by piers. The nearby Edgewood Avenue Overpass was also constructed around 1910 but has no date marker. The long overpass is constructed of concrete and is thickened at portions with pyramidal shaped decorative caps. Both of these structures are located within the Northeast node but do not fall within the node boundaries.

Although constructed at approximately the same time as the concrete structures, the Ralph McGill Underpass exhibits the use of steel a construction method of railroad construction in the early 20th century. The estimated construction date is around 1910. The Ralph McGill Underpass, located within the Ralph McGill node, is an excellent example of a steel plate girder bridge with steel cross bracing underneath, a wooden deck with outrigger railing support and concrete wing abutments. The Ponce de Leon Underpass represents a blend of the two construction materials. The Ponce de Leon Underpass was also constructed around 1910. The underpass has a riveted steel plate girder deck with concrete abutments and is also located within the Ralph McGill node.

The Northeast quadrant has one example of a traffic signal device and it is located in the 10th and Monroe node. The existing example of a steel signal is located at the intersection of the Beltline and Monroe and is estimated to have been implemented in the 1940s. The signal is currently covered in kudzu but at one time served to warn automobiles of approaching trains. The signal was determined to exist as a signal for automobiles because it is located on the left side of the track of a train heading south. Train signals were always located on the right side of the track facing the approaching train.

The other extant example of railroad infrastructure in the quadrant is located in the Ansley node at the intersection of Piedmont Avenue and the Beltline. The Piedmont Avenue Overpass was constructed in 1936. The structure features concrete abutments cut directly into rock with a pier panel system, and attached stone and split rail fence.

Northwest Quadrant

Rail Development

The Northwest quadrant contains the only one of the three approaches into Atlanta with an up-grade into the city and is today the most active. All railroads traveling north and west from Atlanta use that approach to and beyond the Chattahoochee River. The rail lines that compose the modern Beltline project in the northwest quadrant of Atlanta include the Louisville & Nashville Line, Southern Railroad, and the Seaboard Airline. Other rail lines in the quadrant that have effected growth, transportation, and the modern Beltline include the Atlanta, Birmingham & Coast Line, Southern Railroad, and the Western & Atlantic Line. Construction of rail lines in the northwest began with the Western & Atlantic in 1851. Lines of the modern Beltline, however, did not begin construction until 1902 and were completed by 1910.

The L&N Line of the Beltline creates the southernmost track of the northwest quadrant to service the Simpson Road area. The L&N connects with the AB&C Line at South Bellwood Junction and allows the Beltline to continue over Inman and Tilford Yards. From this point, the Beltline connects to the Southern RR and Seaboard Airline circle that exists at the northernmost portion of the northwest quadrant. Southern RR creates the southern arch and Seaboard AL creates the northern arch. This circle of railroads encompasses the Atlanta Waterworks, Northside Drive, and Peachtree Road.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure for the northwest quadrant consists of many overpass and underpass structures dating from 1900 up to the 1950s. The earliest example of railroad infrastructure dates to 1900 and is the North Avenue overpass. This single track bridge is of steel construction, typical of turn of the century construction materials, and is completely riveted. The Maddox Park Underpass also dates to the early 1900s and is a single track of steel construction. It contains large steel riveted panels and a concrete base and retaining wall. The Echo Street underpass dates to the 1910s-1920s. The bridge is actually missing, but the existing construction materials consist of concrete rail piers with heavy timber caps.



North Avenue Overpass



Hollowell Overpass

The 1930s and 1940s saw a few additional structures to help service the railroads. A relatively thin (3-4i) concrete bridge creates the Hollowell Parkway overpass. A wooden post sign with crossing arms is an existing railroad sign located at Marietta Boulevard dating to the 1930s or 1940s. The Hollowell overpass, located near the Hollowell and Echo Street intersection, is also a fine example of 1940s infrastructure. This is a concrete overpass with a large arched opening where board patterns can still be seen in the concrete. At grade level the concrete has a pebbled texture. The Collier Road overpass also exists from the 1940s.

The 1950s infrastructure constitutes the most prevalent amount of resources for the northwest quadrant. Concrete is a common building material for the structures including the Peachtree Creek overpass, Northside Drive overpass, and Simpson Road Bridge. The Peachtree Road overpass is also constructed of concrete but also exhibits decorative insets and pebbles inlaid in the concrete. Formed steel with decorative insets and steel railings describes the Peachtree Hills overpass. The final structure in the northwest quadrant dates to the 1950s and is the Northside Drive/Marietta intersection. This structure is constructed of a brick facade over concrete masonry units, has a brick foundation and has been heavily modified and accessorized.



Peachtree Road Overpass



Bellwood Tower

Railroad yards are also prevalent in this quadrant. Bellwood Yard, operating off of the Atlantic Coast Line formerly known as the AC&C Line, was closed in 1959. The Bellwood Tower was the AB&C's only separate interlocking tower. The brick structure with a typical red clay tile roof guarded the railroad's junction with the Southern and NC&StL lines to Atlanta's downtown passenger stations. Operations of the Bellwood Yard were moved to L&N's Tilford Yard and the railroad leased much of the yard area to warehouses and manufacturing plants. Tilford Yard was built in 1957 and incorporated much of the former NC&StL Hills Park Yard along with

Bellwood Yard. Tilford was expanded in 1964 and today is one of CSX's major hump terminals. Inman Yard, located just opposite Tilford Yard on the south, is located five miles from the city center. Being so located, these yards are beyond the built-up city so that expansion possibilities would be easily achieved. Each yard is located at the outer end of the industrial district served by the railroad companies. Howells Yard, located slightly northeast of Tilford, and Armour Yard, located on the southern arch of the Southern RR are also located within the quadrant.

Southwest Quadrant

Rail Development

Of the four quadrants, the Southwest was the last to develop its portion of the Beltline. The earliest evidence of construction in the Southwest quadrant was in 1905 when the Atlanta, Knoxville, and Northern Railway began construction of a rail yard in the upper portion of the quadrant. The AK & N by this time had been acquired and controlled by the Louisville and Nashville RR. (see Railroad Appendix for L&N) Also during this time the Louisville Property Company can be seen holding property in the Southwest quadrant. However it is unclear at this point whether the quadrant in fact had rail lines running or merely a right of way.

By 1908 the AK & N railroad can be seen on maps running in the upper portion of the quadrant. Also during this time the Atlanta, Birmingham, and Atlantic Railroad had tracks connected to the Beltline. (see Railroad Appendix for AB&A) The AB&A would later be restructured into the Atlanta, Birmingham, and Coast Railroad. By 1910 the Louisville and Nashville Belt Railroad could be identified on maps of the city in the Southwest quad. By 1926 this railroad would be controlled by the Atlantic Coast Line, a company that would eventually merge with the L&N forming what would later become CSX Transportation. CSX would also go on to control the Southeast portion of the Beltline when the Atlanta & West Point Railroad was merged into the Seaboard System Railroad.

Infrastructure

The Metropolitan Pkwy (Stewart Ave) overpass is a steel bridge with a rounded end steel plate girder running through it. It has stepped concrete wing abutments and has Atlanta & West Point painted on the side. Cascade Rd/Ralph David Abernathy underpass- Concrete bridge with two openings and rounded corners. There are a row of concrete columns through the center of the tunnel, where board formwork is still visible in the concrete. An iron fence runs on top of the bridge. The tunnel is angled in relation to the road. According to the 1925 Sanborn



Metropolitan Parkway Overpass



Ralph David Abernathy Overpass

Maps this bridge was originally a

wood structure making the current bridges construction date sometime after 1925. The entire structure has been consumed by kudzu.



Murphy Avenue/Lee Street Overpass

Murphy Ave/Lee St underpass- This is a Concrete bridge with three openings with rounded corners and a pebbled finish. The construction date on this bridge is sometime after 1925 based on the previously mentioned Sanborn. Lucille Ave underpass- This is a concrete bridge where the board formwork is still visible in the concrete and tall arched openings. Part of an iron fence can still be seen on top of the bridge. The bridge is overgrown with weeds. Construction date sometime in late 1920s or 1930s.

Martin Luther King Jr. drive overpass- This bridge has a plate girder and concrete u-abutments. Utility pipes can be seen running along the side of the bridge. Again this bridge is overgrown with kudzu. Date can not be ascertained at this time.

