Health and Revitalization of the Urban Core

The BeltLine Health Impact Assessment

Catherine Ross, PhD : Atlanta BeltLine Inc. : May 29, 2007
“From the beginning we’ve recognized the transformative nature of the BeltLine. If Atlanta is truly to be a “best in class” city, we must put the health of all residents first. Now with this study we realize it’s role to help overcome some of our most serious health epidemics—obesity, heart disease—for Atlantans.”

–Mayor Shirley Franklin
The BeltLine Numbers

**Parks:** 700 acres of park improvements and 1,300 acres of new greenspace and parks

**Trails:** 33 miles of new multi-use trails

**Transit:** 22 mile loop of transit service

**Redevelopment:** 6,500 acres of redevelopment, 10 redevelopment nodes
  - 29,000 housing units (5,600 affordable units)
  - 5.3 million square feet of office space
  - 1.3 million square feet of retail space
  - 5.2 million square feet of industrial
  - 407,000 square feet of institutional space
  - 30,000 new jobs

**Other improvements:** sidewalk, streetscape, road, and intersection improvements
The BeltLine: redevelopment

6,500 acre Tax Allocation District
What is a Health Impact Assessment?

A combination of procedures or methods by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to the effects it may have on the health of a population.

– Gothenburg Consensus

“Health impact assessments provide a tool for city planners and public health officials to work together... to help community design support good health.”

– Andrew L. Dannenberg, MD, MPH
Health is “a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

-1948 World Health Organization Constitution
## BeltLine Study Area Population

### Vulnerable Population Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-white</th>
<th>Under the Poverty Level</th>
<th>Aged 0–18</th>
<th>Aged 65+</th>
<th>Housing Units Without Motor Vehicle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>133,055</td>
<td>48,904</td>
<td>43,363</td>
<td>17,966</td>
<td>21,713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Total Study Area Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

213,920 people currently live in the study area

U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census.
## Health Disparities in Study Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease Category</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Death Rate</th>
<th>Morbidity Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Endocrine, Nutritional, Metabolic Diseases</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>190.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>519.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>210.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Cardiovascular Diseases</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>184.4</td>
<td>841.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>270.9</td>
<td>1,437.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>765.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respiratory Diseases</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>440.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>868.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>326.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Georgia Dept. of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, Office of Health Information & Policy. 2006.*
Overarching Issues

- **Timing of the BeltLine**
  Coordination of private & public development resources

- **A Well–Integrated BeltLine**
  Components work well together and are woven into the fabric of the region

- **People–Oriented Priorities**
  “Complete streets” emphasize mobility of people and automobiles
Overarching Issues

- **Designing for All Users**
  
  Universal Design Principles can guide development that serves all user needs

- **Involving All Stakeholders**
  
  Continuous public involvement, appropriate public involvement, and convenient access to information
  
  - CQGRD conducted a survey of those who live, work, and play near the BeltLine
BeltLine HIA: Key Findings

Access

11,000 people will have access to a park for the first time and 127,000 people will have access to proposed transit.

Potential Health Implications:
better access to employment opportunities, services, healthy foods, and recreational facilities.

Access: Recommendations

- Continue to add park acres to meet future population demands.
- Add trail spurs to create increased access from nearby, and especially underserved, neighborhoods.
- Ensure safe and convenient walking and biking routes to transit.
# Social Capital

Public participation increases social capital so a successful process could increase civic pride and involvement.

**Potential Health Implications:**
Creating social ties and emotional support; overall better physical and mental health.

Social capital is the collective value of a network whose purpose is to inspire trust in and provide support for other members of that community.
Social Capital: Recommendations

- Design environments that promote formal and informal social interaction.

- Preserve neighborhoods by working closely with a variety of local neighborhood groups.
**Physical Activity**

1,300 acres of parks, 33 miles of trails, $45 million in streetscape and intersection improvements, extension of transit system

**Potential Health Implications:**
reduced premature death and risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, and colon cancer; reduced feelings of depression/anxiety, helps control weight

The BeltLine creates an opportunity for vulnerable populations to become more physically active.

Physical Activity: Recommendations

- Provide a variety of park types and facilities to meet the needs of all users.

- Implement educational interventions to encourage physical activity.

- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of infrastructure investment.
BeltLine HIA: Key Findings

Air Quality

BeltLine may create several areas where people are living within 300 meters of high-volume roadways

Potential Health Implications:
Reduced lung functions and increased respiratory disease, especially asthma and bronchitis symptoms; children especially vulnerable
Air Quality: Recommendations

- Locate residential units, schools, senior centers, day care centers, and hospitals away from high volume road segments or mitigate air pollution.

- Monitor particulate matter in potentially affected “hot spot” areas.
Safety

New BeltLine facilities will not be used if crime or accidents remain a concern.

Potential Health Implications:
Increased stress, anxiety, and isolation; physical inactivity and resulting negative impacts

Safety: Recommendations

- Provide dedicated infrastructure for biking and walking and pay particular attention to crossings.

- Consider creating a BeltLine patrol or neighborhood watch to decrease crime and to build community stewardship.
Displacement

48,900 people live in poverty, most concentrated in 3 of 5 study area segments

Potential Health Implications:
loss of social cohesion, associated mental health and illness outcomes; reduced access to services, opportunities
Equity

While the BeltLine will improve overall access to parks, trails, transit, housing, and healthy food, not all resources are equitably distributed by socioeconomic status, race, or planning area.

Potential Health Implications:
continued disparities in physical health across study area; loss of social cohesion

The BeltLine can be a major force for promoting social equity and reducing health disparities in the Atlanta area. Southwest area is underserved by parks and trails in the current BeltLine plan.

**Recommendations:**
- Ensure sufficient provision of affordable housing
- Ensure that parks, trails, and redevelopment opportunities are distributed equitably
A Look Forward…

The BeltLine project provides an excellent opportunity for promoting healthy behaviors

**Recommendations:**
- Consider health impacts as project moves forward
- Look for health impacts beyond physical activity
- Move the BeltLine project in a shorter time frame so residents of all ages receive benefits

- trails, parks, transit, and redevelopment
  - promote physical activity
  - provide safer places to walk and bike
  - reduce air pollution
  - promote mental health
  - and promote social capital
Health benefits can be realized sooner.

**Recommendation:**
Consider expediting parts of the BeltLine redevelopment to coincide with park and trail construction.
“The Atlanta BeltLine is a **prototype** for other cities and communities nationally and internationally, demonstrating how to integrate health into revitalization.”

– Catherine Ross, PhD