



AJC CONTINUING COVERAGE

Step by step, metro Atlanta's paths are linking to create a network



This aerial photo shows a new segment of PATH400, which is nearly complete but still closed, along Ga. 400 southbound on Dec. 19, 2019. The PATH400 through Buckhead is broken into two pieces, but this new section slated to open early next year will connect them, completing the ride through one of the busiest parts of Atlanta. New links like this are being forged in broken paths across metro Atlanta to create a regional network that could serve as an alternative to roads. HYOSUB SHIN / HYOSUB.SHIN@AJC.COM

▼ More

By Ty Tagami

Dec 28, 2019



On a rainy December morning, Velvel Wayne took a stroll on the brand-new path behind his office, his face poking out from a jacket hood.

“Beautiful,” he said.

Advertisement

The [Peachtree Creek Greenway](#), named after the stream it follows, had [opened the day before](#). Lack of public awareness, plus the dismal weather probably explained why he apparently had it all to himself — that, and the fact that it doesn't really go anywhere.

Wayne, 53, said he would like to bicycle to work on this new path. His home is only 3 miles away, but the path does not go near his neighborhood and he fears riding on the roads that lead to it. He hopes that someday it will connect. “I don’t like having to drive,” he said.

Many share that sentiment. Many also have no other option. There are short stretches of orphaned path like this all over metro Atlanta. Zoom out on a map of them, and it’s easy to see the promise of a useful network, if only they could be connected.

In November, Douglas Hooker, executive director of the Atlanta Regional Commission, told about 1,500 people who assembled for the organization’s annual breakfast that that is exactly what is coming.

"In the very near future," he said, "we're going to have one of the nation's finest and largest regional trail networks."



By Delta Vacations

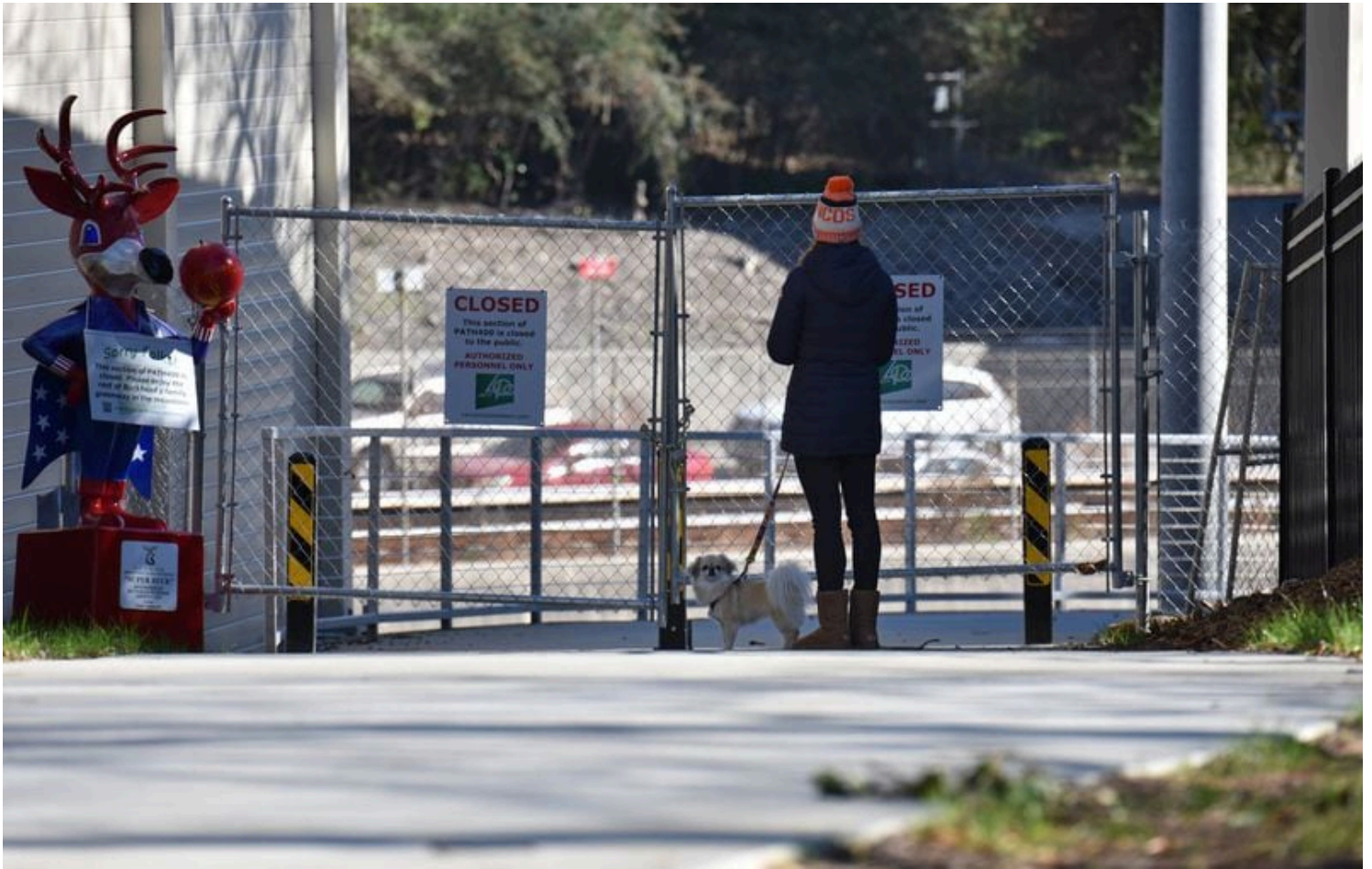
ADVERTISER CONTENT

With Delta Vacations you'll be on the 'Runway to Status'

Officials envision linking Conyers to Cumming, or even to Alabama via the Silver Comet Trail. These are distances few would tackle on a bike, but some might use portions as part of their daily routines, reducing the burden on the roads, in a metro region that is growing like an adolescent. Nearly 3 million newcomers are projected to raise the population to more than 8 million over the next three decades, according to the ARC.

Hooker's vision may seem optimistic, but so were the plans for the Beltline. Though still incomplete, portions of that loop around downtown Atlanta have proved wildly popular, driving property redevelopment.

Now, there is a clear sign of momentum to the north, along Ga. 400 where a multiuse trail called the PATH400 has been taking shape. Pieces of it have opened in recent years, but there has been a gap in the middle. Now, that link is nearing completion, expected to open early next year. That will establish a mostly car-free route through Buckhead, an area that is otherwise dangerous to navigate on a bike or on foot.



A resident stops at a new segment of PATH400, which is nearly complete but was still closed on Dec. 19, 2019. The PATH400 through Buckhead is broken into two pieces, but this new section slated to open early next year will connect them, completing the ride through one of the busiest parts of Atlanta. New links like this are being forged in broken paths across metro Atlanta to create a regional network that could serve as an alternative to roads. HYOSUB SHIN / HYOSUB.SHIN@AJC.COM

▼ More

Advertisement



This “Closed” sign was posted at the north end of a new segment of PATH 400, near the Gordon Bynum pedestrian bridge over Ga. 400, on Dec. 19, 2019. The PATH400 through Buckhead is broken into two pieces, but this new section slated to open early next year will connect them, completing the ride through one of the busiest parts of Atlanta. New links like this are being forged in broken paths across metro Atlanta to create a regional network that could serve as an alternative to roads. HYOSUB SHIN / HYOSUB.SHIN@AJC.COM

▼ More

The city of Sandy Springs, meanwhile, is poised to win federal funding that would cover most of the cost to carry the path farther north to the Perimeter, where the Georgia Department of Transportation is expected to build a connector to Dunwoody, which would then tie it to its own planned network of pedestrian and bike routes.

Sandy Springs plans to finish construction in 2023. Once complete, the north-south artery will be the bicycling equivalent of the Downtown Connector, a spine through the region that will serve as a linking hub for other paths, such as the Peachtree Creek Greenway.

There are about 400 miles of trail in the region, according to the ARC. Most are local but about 150 miles are considered regional, and the gaps between those add up to about 70 miles. In addition to the new and pending links of the PATH400, officials are gradually closing

the loop on the Beltline, with plans to tie its west side to the start of the 94.5-mile-long Silver Comet Trail in Cobb County.

“Two miles here and 2 miles there and, you know what, all of a sudden it’s going to be connected,” said Joe Secorder, who just won election to the Dunwoody City Council with a campaign that prioritized parks and trails. Surveys show growing support for such amenities, he said. The former board member of Georgia Bikes, a statewide advocacy group, played a key role in pushing GDOT to incorporate the PATH400 in its interchange design.

Normally, one would expect opposition when a trail is to be installed along backyards.

There was some of that at a Sandy Springs town hall meeting in November when officials unveiled updated plans for the PATH400. One man wondered whether people would be able to see him brushing his teeth. Others, such as Stephene Major, worried about intruders.

"My only concern is the security of it," said Major, who lives in the High Point neighborhood, on a crest above Ga. 400. Her neighbor, Lindsay Mullen, used a phone to play a video that their neighbor had shared from his security camera: An unknown man was wandering through his yard, apparently from a wooded area that the path would go by.

PATH400

One more segment of PATH400 is scheduled to open early next year.

Portions of the Beltline also are still under construction.





**Future link
to Beltline**

Beltline

78

75

75

85

Atlanta

20

N



2 miles

Source: maps4news.com/©HERE

STAFF

Like Major, Mullen worries the path could bring more unwanted visitors, but she also has friends in Atlanta who live near the Beltline. They told her it drove up the value of their home.

Advertisement

For her, the benefits outweigh the concerns.

“It’s going to be good for families,” Mullen said. “My kids are going to love it.”

Atlanta, Brookhaven and several organizations are considering ways to tie the Peachtree Creek Greenway and PATH400 into the Beltline, in what some have dubbed the Spaghetti Junction for bikes.



Brookhaven resident Richard Schepp walks his dog Jeter along the newly developed Peachtree Creek Greenway on Dec. 12, 2019. The mile-long stretch doesn't go anywhere right now, but could eventually link up with Atlanta's PATH400, another growing route that could someday connect the Greenway to the Beltline and to Dunwoody and points beyond. ALYSSA POINTER / ALYSSA.POINTER@AJC.COM

▼ More



Joggers on the mile-long stretch of Peachtree Creek Greenway in Brookhaven where it crosses the stream, on Dec. 24, 2019. The trail opened Dec. 12, 2019. It could eventually extend to Atlanta's PATH400, another growing route that could someday connect the Greenway to the Beltline and to Dunwoody and points beyond. TY TAGAMI / TY.TAGAMI@AJC.COM

▼ More

Advertisement



The mile-long stretch of Peachtree Creek Greenway that opened on Dec. 12, 2019, ends under North Druid Hills Road in Brookhaven (pictured Dec. 24, 2019). It could eventually extend to Atlanta's PATH400, another growing route that could someday connect the Greenway to the Beltline and to Dunwoody and points beyond. TY TAGAMI / TY.TAGAMI@AJC.COM

▼ More

It could one day connect to places few would imagine riding today.

“We all want to get on a bike and ride to the Braves game,” said Brookhaven Mayor John Ernst, who owns a bicycle assisted by an electric motor.

Ernst won his 2015 mayoral campaign promising a “Brookhaven Beltline.” There is “massive support” within his community to build an alternative transportation network, he said, and it’s an enthusiasm that has spread across the metro area. He chairs a group calling itself the “top end mayors,” comprising cities north of Atlanta with a shared agenda to build a regional trail network.

They are riding a wave of public fervor generated by the northeast portion of the Beltline, since it opened in 2012. It is routinely crowded and has spurred the creation of a new residential, commercial and entertainment district of Atlanta. It's driven up property values to the point that developers can justify massive projects, such as the renovation of an old Sears building now known as Ponce City Market. Apartments, breweries, restaurants and stores have swaddled the route.

Advertisement



Brookhaven is building its path network one property at a time by requiring developers to either build segments in front of their projects or pay into a fund, depending on whether they are building along a planned route. A jogger is on this new stretch on North Druid Hills Road on Dec. 24, 2019, near Briarwood Road. It's on the route the city will use to connect the Peachtree Creek Greenway at Briarwood to a MARTA station on Peachtree Road. TY TAGAMI / TY.TAGAMI@AJC.COM

▼ More



Brookhaven is building its path network one property at a time by requiring developers to either build segments in front of their projects or pay into a fund, depending on whether they are building along a planned route. This new segment is in front of a house on Caldwell Road near Brookhaven City Hall on Dec. 23, 2019. TY TAGAMI / TY.TAGAMI@AJC.COM

▼ More

Chamblee is part of the top end mayors consortium. “What the Beltline has done for us is allow people to see the economic benefit,” said that city’s mayor, R. Eric Clarkson.

When he grew up in Colorado in the 1980s, he saw paths and bicyclists crisscrossing Denver. Later, when he moved to Seattle, he saw “trails everywhere, and cops on bikes.” When he moved here, he encountered a place where few thought seriously about travel without four wheels and lots of metal.

“We were a very auto-centric country for 70 years, and we still are,” Clarkson said. “But I think people are realizing there are other ways to get around.” Chamblee is slated to extend the Peachtree Creek Greenway out from Brookhaven toward the Perimeter. Clarkson said people in Chamblee are “clamoring” for a local version of the Beltline and for a connection to the

actual one. "People want to ride their bikes. We've got to give them a safe way to do it," he said.

Advertisement

As with the neighbors in Sandy Springs, some who agree with the overarching goal are concerned by the change. Thomas Hyneman was a teenager when the Silver Comet Trail opened near his childhood home west of Atlanta. He remembers how drivers, including himself, were startled by bicyclists at the new trail crossings. It was a dangerous situation until blinking lights were added and drivers got used to watching for them, he said.

Other trails will undergo the same evolution, he suspects. The Beltline, which he still calls "a beautiful thing," was just over 3 years old when his daughter, Alexia, was struck and killed while crossing an intersection to it, on her way home from Grady High School. Hyneman, who recently founded the [Atlanta chapter](#) of Families for Safe Streets, said he has met many others who have been injured there.



Alexia Hyneman's friends and family gathered for a vigil in 2016 near the site of the crash that killed the Grady High School student. CARRIE TEEGARDIN / CARRIE.TEEGARDIN@AJC.COM

It will take time for drivers to become aware of all the new bicyclists and pedestrians, and some may be too quick to assume the routes are risk-free. Inattention could cause more casualties, especially where intersections are poorly designed, Hyneman said. Safety demands clear sight lines, which could mean something as simple as trimming hedges and installing big mirrors or a change as complex as realigning an intersection, he said. Every intersection is different, so studies must be done, and that takes time. He fears design could suffer in the race to build out a network.

“We need to encourage it, but we also have to caution safety,” he said. “We have to look at every single intersection.”

About the Author

Advertisement



Ty Tagami



Ty Tagami is a staff writer for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Since joining the newspaper in 2002, he has written about everything from hurricanes to homelessness. He has deep experience covering local government and education, and can often be found under the Gold Dome when lawmakers meet or in a school somewhere in the state.

The Latest



Gridlock Guy: Outsmarting GPS devices is no easy feat

Anne Sterchi, longtime Atlanta philanthropic leader, dies

Slight chance of rain, highs in the low 90s before drop in temperatures

Featured



Venezuelans in Atlanta rally after disputed vote

A father-son coaching matchup turns into a bonkers night

Georgia Republicans lay groundwork to oppose certifying presidential election



About

[Help Center](#)

[About the Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)

[Newsroom Ethics Code](#)

[Careers](#)

[Archive](#)

Contact Us

[Contact Us](#)

[Send a News Tip](#)

[Advertise](#)

[AJC Newsroom](#)

Our Products

[ePaper](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[All AJC Podcasts](#)

[AJC Events](#)

[Download iOS App](#)

[Download Android App](#)

Subscription

[Digital Subscription](#)

[Print Subscription](#)

[Manage Subscription](#)

[Group Subscriptions](#)

[Subscription Terms](#)

[NIE/Newspapers in Education](#)

Follow Us



© 2024 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. All Rights Reserved.

By using this website, you accept the terms of our [Terms of Use](#), [Privacy Policy](#), [CCPA](#), and understand your options regarding [Ad Choices](#).

[Learn about Careers at Cox Enterprises.](#)