

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF SGOLDMACHER@C21PR.COM

From the Atlanta Business Chronicle:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2021/08/13/public-transit-brt-malls.html>

'If we can do BRT, we should': How public transit could transform suburban Atlanta malls

Aug 13, 2021, 5:28pm EDT **Updated: Aug 13, 2021, 5:30pm EDT**

Two suburban mall owners are planning to make public transit a priority as they revitalize their retail properties.

The Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District is studying the possibility of turning the mall into a hub for a future bus rapid transit route on Satellite Boulevard. In Cobb County, bus rapid transit, or BRT, is being considered as an option around Cumberland Mall.

The potential BRT expansions come as malls around the country consider how to reshape dated retail into modern town centers.

Unlike a typical bus, BRT uses a dedicated lane, eliminating delays caused by congestion. BRT is also faster and cheaper than light rail, Ellen Dunham-Jones, director of Georgia Tech's Urban Design Program, said Thursday during a Defining Atlanta event about the



BYRON E. SMALL

Bus rapid transit service routes could one day serve retail districts around Gwinnett Place and Cumberland Mall.

The apartments will add density and preserve the value of the mall, said Ben Freeman, senior vice president of development at Brookfield. Connecting to transit also has the potential to bring jobs and investment to the retail giant's properties. At Brookfield's Perimeter Mall, a 16-story tower just sold for over \$500 per foot, shattering the record price for a suburban office property.

The Twelve24 office tower serves as the corporate headquarters for Insight Global and is connected to the Dunwoody MARTA station.

"If you can create a network that's efficient and reliable and safe — regardless of the mode — we want to be a part of that," Freeman said.

Public transit systems built on rail have attracted development especially around the stations, Dunham-Jones said. Investors tend to feel more confidence in funding development along heavy rail systems like MARTA because they feature permanent transit infrastructure.

Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, said BRT on Satellite Boulevard will include permanent stations and dedicated lanes.

"It's really going to be light rail but with rubber tires," he said.

Still, getting the general public excited about a bus can be challenging.

"Bus rapid transit can be great, but it's going to be a hard sell in the suburbs. We know that," Dunham-Jones said.

Voters in Cobb and Gwinnett opted out of MARTA at its inception and have shot down repeated referendums to join the regional transit system as recently as last year.

"If we can get transit to these malls, especially in suburban locations, then we increase our reach tremendously," said Nicolia



Allen says people in Gwinnett want to cut down the time spent in their cars and feel walkability is a priority. The Gwinnett Place CID area has added nearly 17 miles of sidewalks since its inception.

Gwinnett plans to expand existing trails in the county's parks to a 310-mile network that will link population centers and connect to Gwinnett Place and other retail destinations.

While expanding public transit options remains a challenge in some suburban areas, municipalities around metro Atlanta are throwing money and support behind ambitious trail projects.

"The suburbs can't get enough of them," Dunham-Jones said. "Metro Atlanta is a leader right now in the amount of new trail development, trail plans. Everybody is going crazy."

Grace Donnelly

Reporter

Atlanta Business Chronicle

