



Gwinnett rejected MARTA. Here's how the county is now expanding transit.

Dec 1, 2022, 11:37am EST



GWINNETT COUNTY

Gwinnett County plans to bring a major revamp to its transit center at Satellite Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road.

Gwinnett plans to beef up its bus network, as the suburban county continues to grow without direct access to MARTA's rail system.

The county is pumping millions into updating its main transit hub near Gwinnett Place Mall, exploring the possibility of running buses in dedicated lanes on traffic-choked corridors and rolling out new bus routes and on-demand shuttle service.

It's also [crafting a game plan for funding projects and using technology to improve the reach of transit](#).

The investment comes as county officials consider turning [Gwinnett Place Mall into a \\$1 billion walkable district](#) with apartments, offices, retail, greenspace and a cultural center.

"If we want to attract and keep young professionals, they're going to want something different than the two-car garage and minivan type of existence," said [Joe Allen](#),

executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District. “The motor vehicle will be part of our lives for years to come, but we are seeing more – especially young people – want a choice on how they get around.”

Gwinnett's transit upgrades

For now, the Gwinnett Transit Center is a small bus hub with seating on a star-shaped plaza off Satellite Boulevard.

The county plans to remodel the site with amenities for riders, a lounge for drivers and other uses.

Satellite Boulevard could be the first road in Gwinnett to be padded with bus rapid transit, which mimics rail by running buses in dedicated lanes and quickly moving them through traffic stops. The route would flow from Jimmy Carter Boulevard to Sugarloaf Mills with connections to the Gwinnett Transit Center and Gas South District.

Two new bus routes are set to run to the Amazon distribution center on West Park Place Boulevard. One of the routes will flow through downtown Snellville to MARTA's Indian Creek station, while the other will stretch from the Gwinnett Transit Center through Old Town Lilburn to Stone Mountain. An additional route will connect Buford to Sugarloaf Mills, with stops in downtown Suwanee, Mall of Georgia, Coolray Field and Exchange at Gwinnett.

The transit expansion will add several microtransit zones, in which on-demand shuttles transport riders to their destinations. Those shuttles could run in the Lawrenceville, Snellville, Dacula, Buford, Sugar Hill and Suwanee areas, according to a presentation delivered to the Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority. It's a similar model to the [Buc in Buckhead](#).

Transit challenges

Gwinnett residents have repeatedly voted down plans to link the county to MARTA's network, first in 1971 and most recently in 2020. The last referendum — which would have extended MARTA's gold line to Jimmy Carter Boulevard — failed by about 1,000 votes out of nearly 400,000 cast.

One of the plans voted upon in the 1990s called for building rail to Gwinnett Place. Had that happened, the area around the mall would likely look more like Perimeter Center than a sea of sprawling parking lots, Allen said. With or without MARTA, Gwinnett could still benefit from more robust connections to Atlanta, he said.

A referendum could resurface in a few years, given the narrow margin of the last vote. Ridership on local Gwinnett buses has declined by about 30% since the pandemic, leading the county to consider a new transit plan, [China Thomas](#), transit capital projects

director at the county's Department of Transportation, previously told *Atlanta Business Chronicle*.



Tyler Wilkins
Reporter
Atlanta Business Chronicle