

An Equitable TOD Typology for the Atlanta Region September 24, 2013

Introduction

The Atlanta TOD Collaborative is an 13 member partnership of non-profits and government agencies aimed at removing barriers to, and advancing incentives for, equitable transit-oriented development (TOD) in the Atlanta region, while increasing public understanding and awareness around the benefits of TOD. Member organizations of the Collaborative include the Atlanta Housing Association and Neighborhood-based Developers (AHAND), the Atlanta Land Trust Collaborative (ALTC), the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), Enterprise Community Partners, the Fulton County/Atlanta Land Bank Authority (FCALBA), Georgia STAND-UP, The Urban Land Institute, and the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE). Together, these organizations are working to leverage and organize their joint resources to ensure that metro Atlanta capitalizes on the community building potential of its existing transit investments to better connect low and moderate-income people to economic opportunity and improve their quality of life. By optimizing the existing transit system better, the Atlanta TOD Collaborative believes the region can better make the case for new transit investments that help build upon these goals.

Through the work of the Atlanta TOD Collaborative, the ultimate goal is to help the region realize high-quality, walkable, equitable, mixed-use development in and around its transit station areas. To assist the Atlanta TOD Collaborative with their activities such as advocating for more affordable housing creation and preservation, identifying pilot sites for TOD with MARTA, and creating more TOD supportive policies, Reconnecting America has developed this regional transit-oriented development (TOD) typology. The regional TOD Typology evaluates TOD opportunities through a social equity lens to better understand the vulnerability of communities around the transit system and help identify context-sensitive strategies and investments that will improve the community fabric while better connecting people to the regional economy.

Project Overview

Reconnecting America developed an equitable TOD typology for the Atlanta region, which classifies Atlanta's transit stations into a series of place types based on market strength and social equity characteristics used to define vulnerability.

The purpose of the typology is to provide a framework for understanding what types of implementation strategies are needed in Atlanta's transit station areas, where the TOD Collaborative can leverage the greatest economic potential, and how certain activities can be funded and implemented. Each station area has its own set of implementation needs, and the typology offers a basic framework for prioritizing and understanding these needs at a glance. To summarize, the goals of this typology are:

- Tell the story about the Atlanta transit system and its communities
- Identify station areas that are potentially vulnerable to displacement pressures
- Identify where the production and preservation of affordable housing are needed
- Understand TOD interventions needed for equitable TOD
- Catalyze TOD in communities where the market is primed to respond to TOD investments.

- Identify where and what type of infrastructure improvements are needed to support equitable TOD

The typology will help local practitioners, decision makers, elected officials and community-based groups understand the assets and vulnerabilities of the populations living near transit, and how each transit station area fits within the regional context. When viewed as a whole, there are visible linkages and connections between transit stations when it comes to opportunity, community assets and relative vulnerability. This typology shows that there is no one-size-fits-all transit station area, and that increasing access to opportunity involves a multifaceted approach with different implementation strategies for different place types.

Geography

The typology is focused on the 37 existing MARTA stations. While other areas were considered, including the BeltLine station areas, streetcar stops and high frequency bus routes, the full set of data was not available for all of these areas, and some of these alignments are uncertain or, in the case of bus routes, shift from time to time. Thus, to be consistent, we chose to limit the analysis to the MARTA network. Some of the implementation strategies call for improving last mile connections, investment in transit-supportive infrastructure and better connecting workers to jobs, which inherently factor in these other transit systems in the Atlanta region.

Methodology

The typology framework has two primary components: vulnerability and market strength. Vulnerability is on the x-axis and market strength is on the y-axis.

Vulnerability (x-axis): The vulnerability component shows how ‘transit oriented’ a station area’s residents are. Because they are more dependent on non-auto mobility, they are also more likely to be vulnerable and more affected by displacement. The vulnerability index looks at four factors that determine transit orientation or transit dependence of residents. The index consists of the following four variables taken at the half mile radius from a station’s location from the TOD database:

- Median Household Income
- Percentage of Zero-Car Households
- Percent Renters
- Percent Walk, Bike, and Transit Commuters (combined)

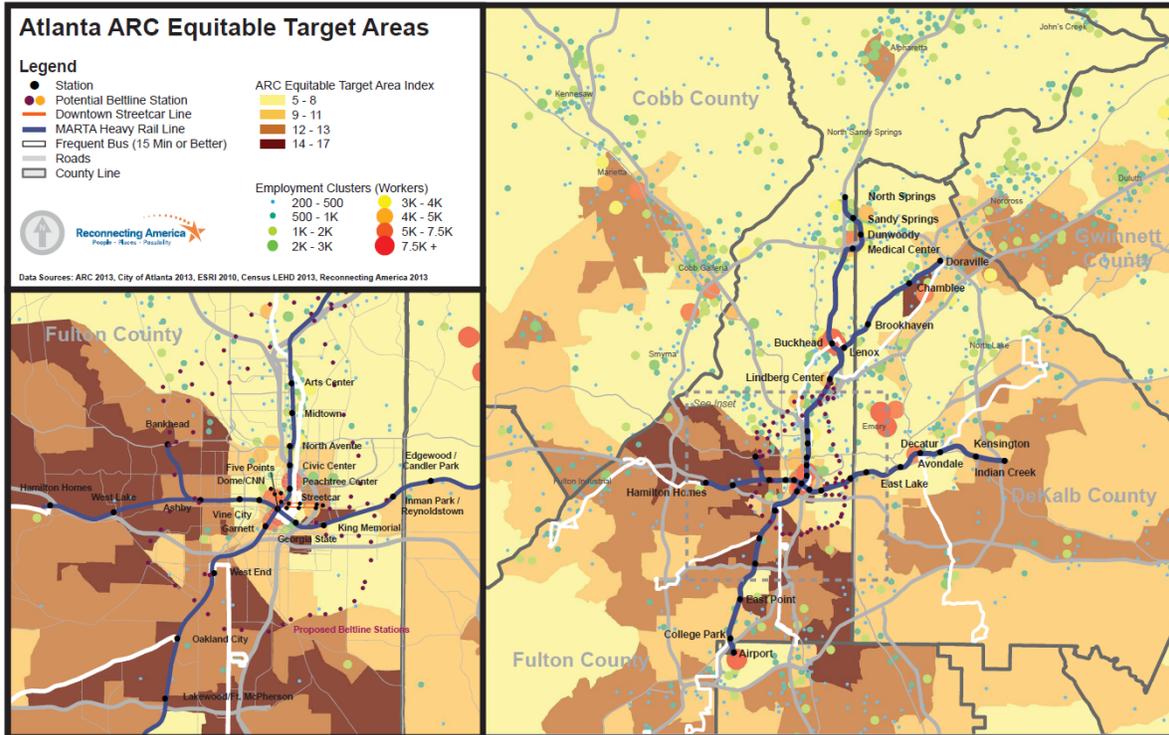
Each of the variables was used in a scoring system that gave points based on each of these factors. The points were then added up to create an index that is used in the X axis of the typology.

Stations were then scored and grouped into three categories:

- **High Vulnerability:** Areas with a high percentage of low-income and transit oriented vulnerable populations
- **Moderate Vulnerability:** Areas with a mix of incomes and a moderate percentage of transit oriented vulnerable populations
- **Low Vulnerability:** Areas with a low percentage of low-income and transit oriented vulnerable populations

The Atlanta Regional Commission has created a measure for environmental justice called Equitable Target Areas (ETAs). Because of the focus on transit orientation, this index was not used as the metric for vulnerability. However as a part of the decision making process for funding projects and assessing environmental justice concerns, it is important to see these target areas as a guide as well as understand their importance to regional planning and policy.

Figure 1: Atlanta Regional Commission’s Equitable Target Areas Should Also be Seen as a Guide¹



Market Strength & TOD Suitability (y-axis): Market data has been provided in a report done by Bleakley & Associates for the Atlanta Regional Commission in all 37 MARTA stations from their *Transit Oriented Development Strategic Implementation Assistance* report.² The Bleakley market analysis analyzed the MARTA stations on five dimensions:

- **TOD Demographics**
 - Housing Density per Acre
 - Percent Population Change, 2000-2012
 - Percent of Population aged 18-34 (Generation Y/Millennial)
 - Percent of Singles Population
 - Median Household Income
- **Employment Characteristics**
 - Employment Density (Jobs per Acre)
 - Percent of Employees Earning More Than \$3,333 Per Month
- **Commercial Characteristics**
 - Total Office Square Feet (Office Inventory)
 - Average Office Rents (\$)
 - Total Retail Square Feet (Retail Inventory)

¹ <http://www.atlantaregional.com/transportation/community-engagement/social-equity-advisory-committee>

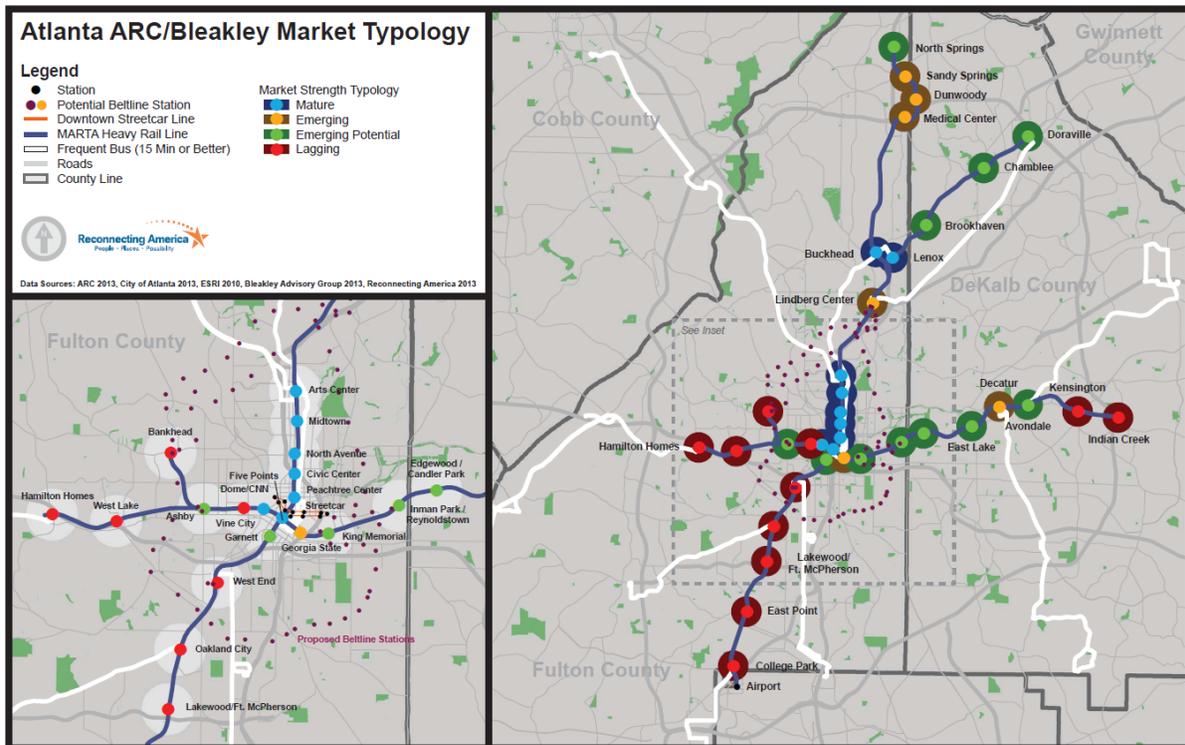
² http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Land%20Use/TOD/lu_tod_acquisitionfundmtg_bleakly.pdf

- Average Retail Rents (\$)
- Residential Characteristics
 - Percentage of Housing Built Since 2000
 - Average Apartment Rents (within 1 mile) (\$)
 - 2012 Number of New Homes Sold (within 1 mile)
 - 2012 New Average Sales Price (within 1 mile) (\$)
- Physical Characteristics
 - Walk Score
 - Nearby Barriers
 - MARTA TOD Land
 - Nearby Development Land

The station areas were then scored and indexed into four categories of TOD Suitability:

- **Mature:** These are station areas in Atlanta’s most urban locations, with a wide range of high-density uses over the decades. Transit adds to development potential but is not necessarily a catalyst.
- **Emerging:** These station areas have developed urban attributes, and future real estate development will capitalize on transit access to further aid in urban infill.
- **Emerging Potential:** These station areas are positioned to benefit from TOD but are lacking attributes to attract large amounts of mixed-uses to date.
- **Lagging:** These station areas currently lack the attributes that are likely to attract developers looking for acceptable returns in a market-rate environment.

Figure 2: TOD Suitability Typology (Atlanta Regional Commission, Bleakley Advisory Group)

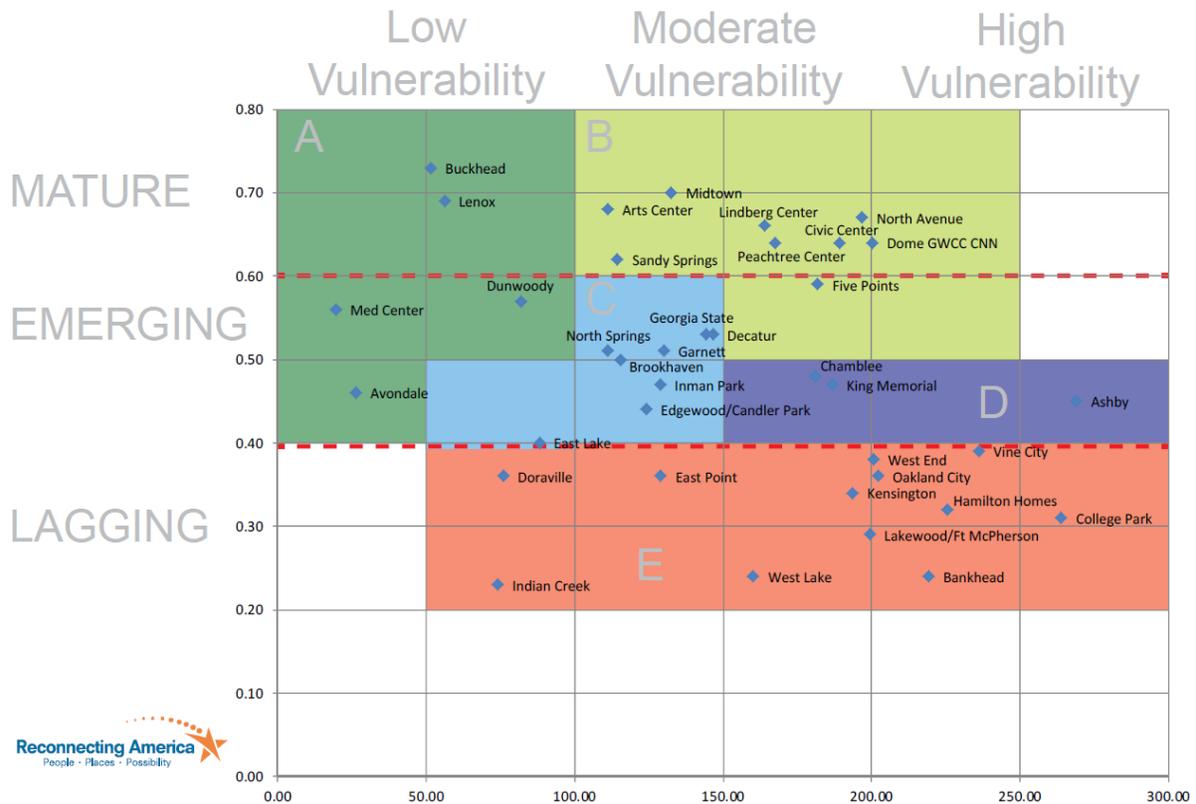


Typology Groupings/Place Types

Figure 3 shows the combined vulnerability and market data on one graph. The station areas are grouped into five place types based on where they fall on the graph:

- Type A: Affluent + Emerging/Strong Market (dark green):** These stations score low on vulnerability and emerging/high on market strength. They are mostly concentrated in the northern suburbs, which are relatively affluent areas with strong real estate markets.
- Type B: Mixed-Income + Strong Market (olive green):** These station areas score moderate or high on vulnerability and high on market strength. These station areas are concentrated just north of downtown Atlanta and its northern neighborhoods.
- Type C: Mixed-Income + Emerging Market (light blue):** These areas score moderately on vulnerability and have emerging real estate markets. They are primarily to the east and north of downtown Atlanta.
- Type D: Low-Income + Emerging Market (dark blue):** These station areas score towards the high side on vulnerability and have emerging markets for TOD. Two of these stations are near downtown Atlanta, while the other one (Chamblee) is in the far north.
- Type E: Low-Income + Weak Market (red):** These station areas score moderate to high on vulnerability but are lagging in market strength. They are concentrated to the west and south.

Figure 3: Typology Matrix

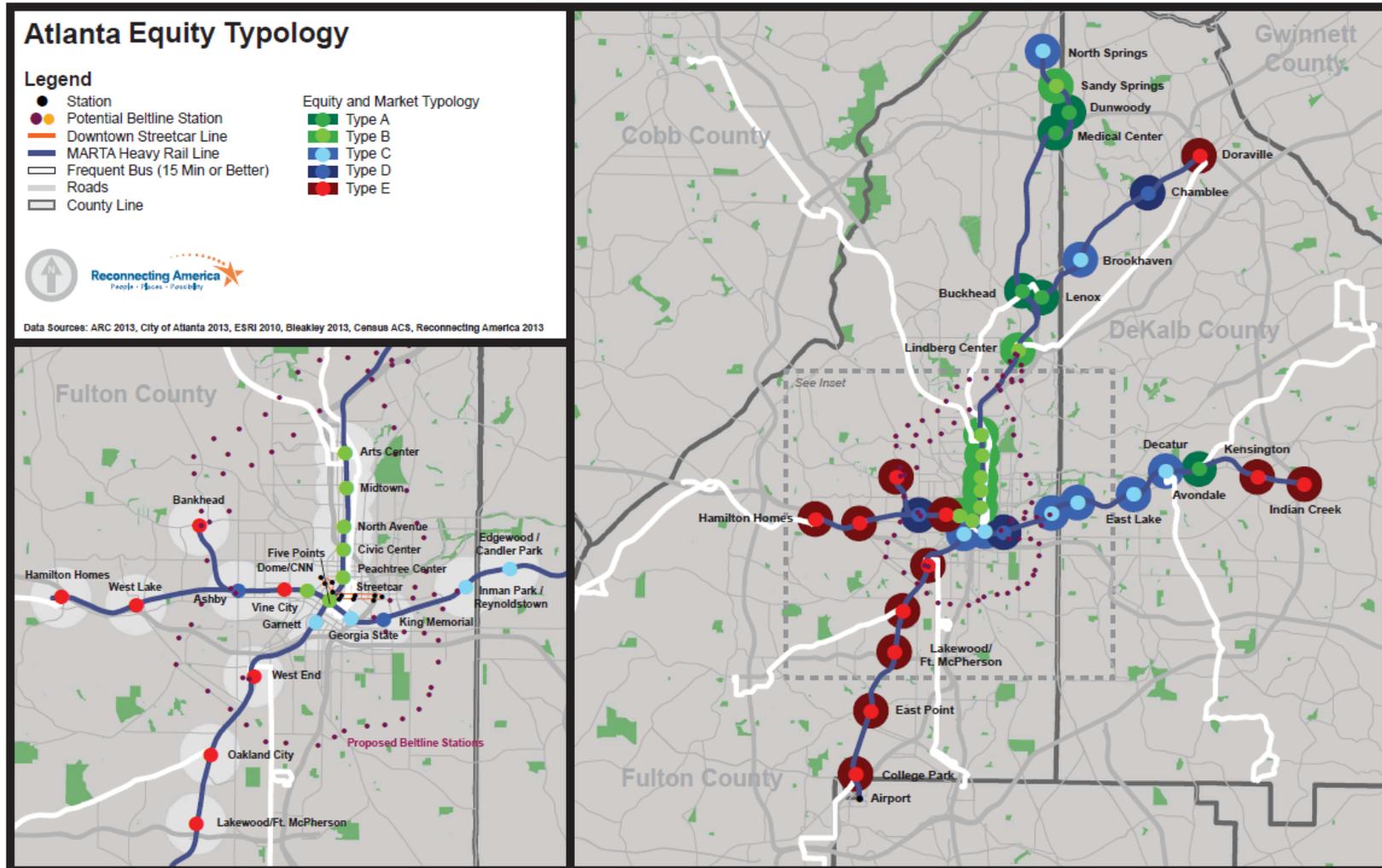


The following table and map display the station areas that fall into each grouping. Figure 3 above displays the vulnerability and market strength scores for these five place types.

Figure 4: Typology Groupings by Station Area

Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D	Type E
Low Vulnerability Emerging Mature Market	Moderate/High Vulnerability Emerging Mature Market	Moderate Vulnerability Emerging Market	Moderate/High Vulnerability Emerging Market	High Vulnerability Lagging Market
Avondale	Arts Center	Brookhaven	Ashby	Bankhead
Buckhead	Civic Center	Decatur	Chamblee	College Park
Dunwoody	Dome GWCC CNN	Edgewood/Candler Park	King Memorial	Hamilton Holmes
Lenox	Five Points	Gamett		Kensington
Med Center	Lindberg Center	Georgia State		Lakewood/Ft. McPherson
	Midtown	Inman Park		Oakland City
	North Avenue	North Springs		Vine City
	Peachtree Center	East Lake		West End
	Sandy Springs			West Lake
				Doraville
				Indian Creek
				East Point

Figure 5: Atlanta Equity Typology

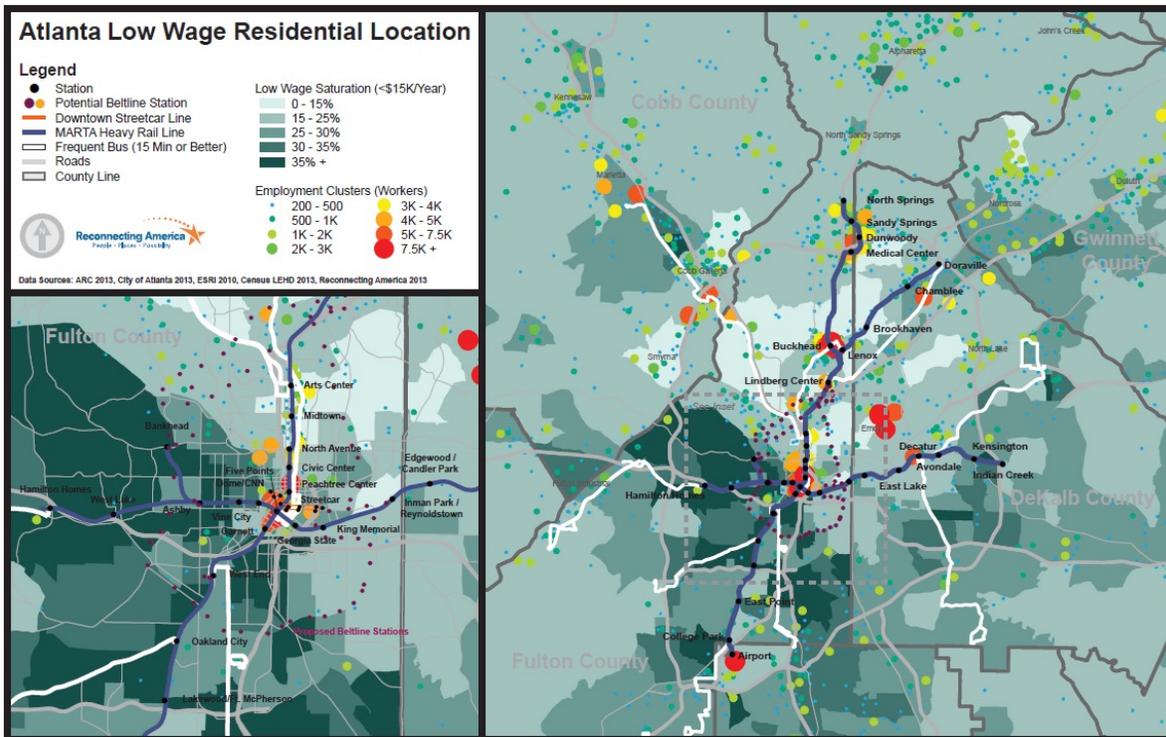


Key Findings

After completing the typology we wanted to look at how jobs were distributed throughout the region in order to understand how the transit system serves employment and residents in each of the station areas. The following findings are likely known to planners who have been working on these issues for a long time, however we have chosen to show these maps to talk about how these issues of employment overlap with transit orientation of residents who live along transit lines, and how each station area can be the focus for activities that will support their economy and usage:

There is a disconnect between where low-income and communities of color live and where the jobs are. Station areas that score high on vulnerability are concentrated on the western and southern lines of the MARTA system, while most job opportunities are in downtown Atlanta and the northern lines of the region. There are fewer affordable housing options where the jobs are, so low- and middle- wage workers are enduring long commutes to get to work

Figure 6: Residential and Employment Location of Low Wage Workers (Income Less Than \$15,000 Per Year)



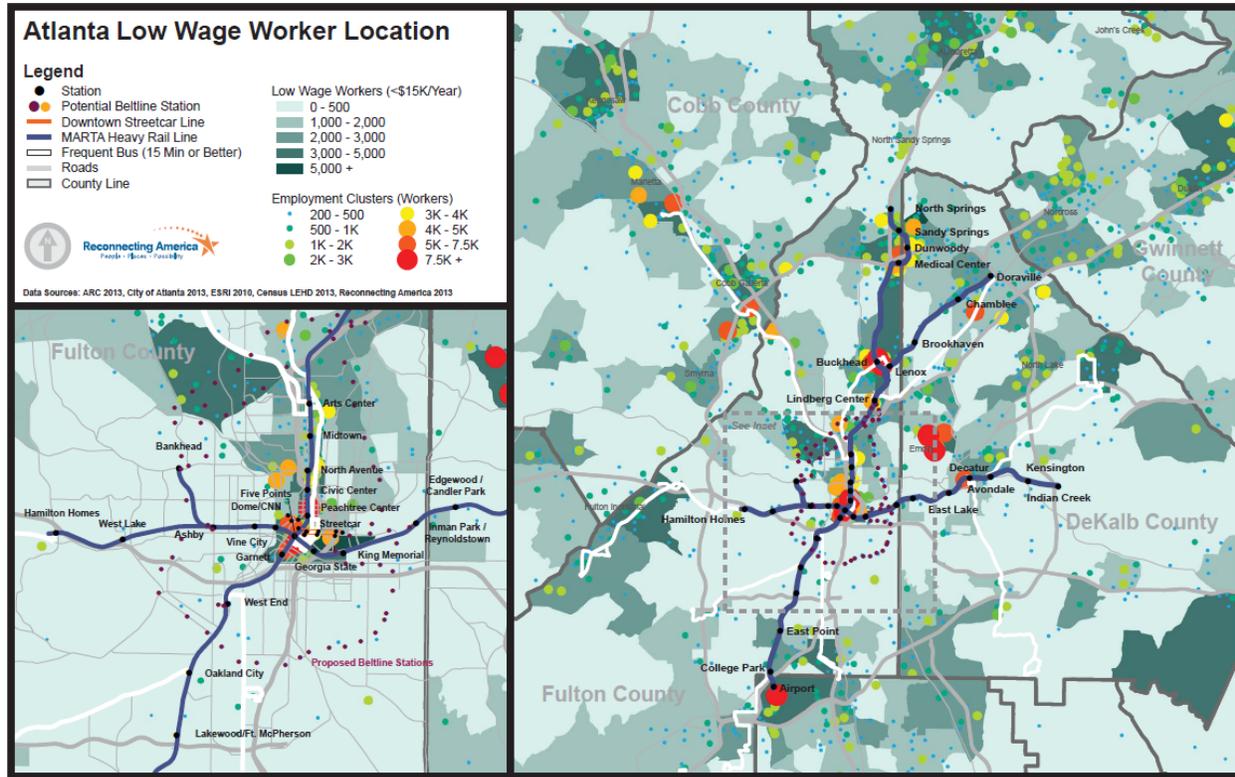
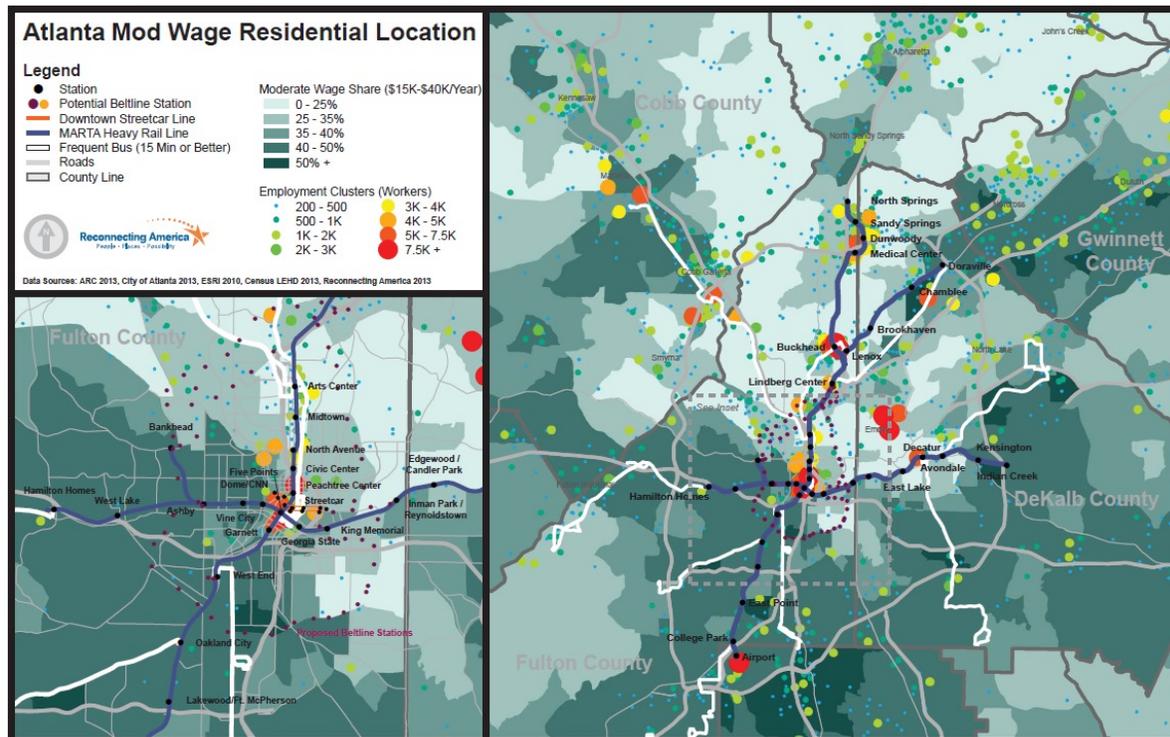


Figure 7: Residential and Worker Location of Moderate Wage Workers (Income Between \$15,000 to \$40,000 Per Year)



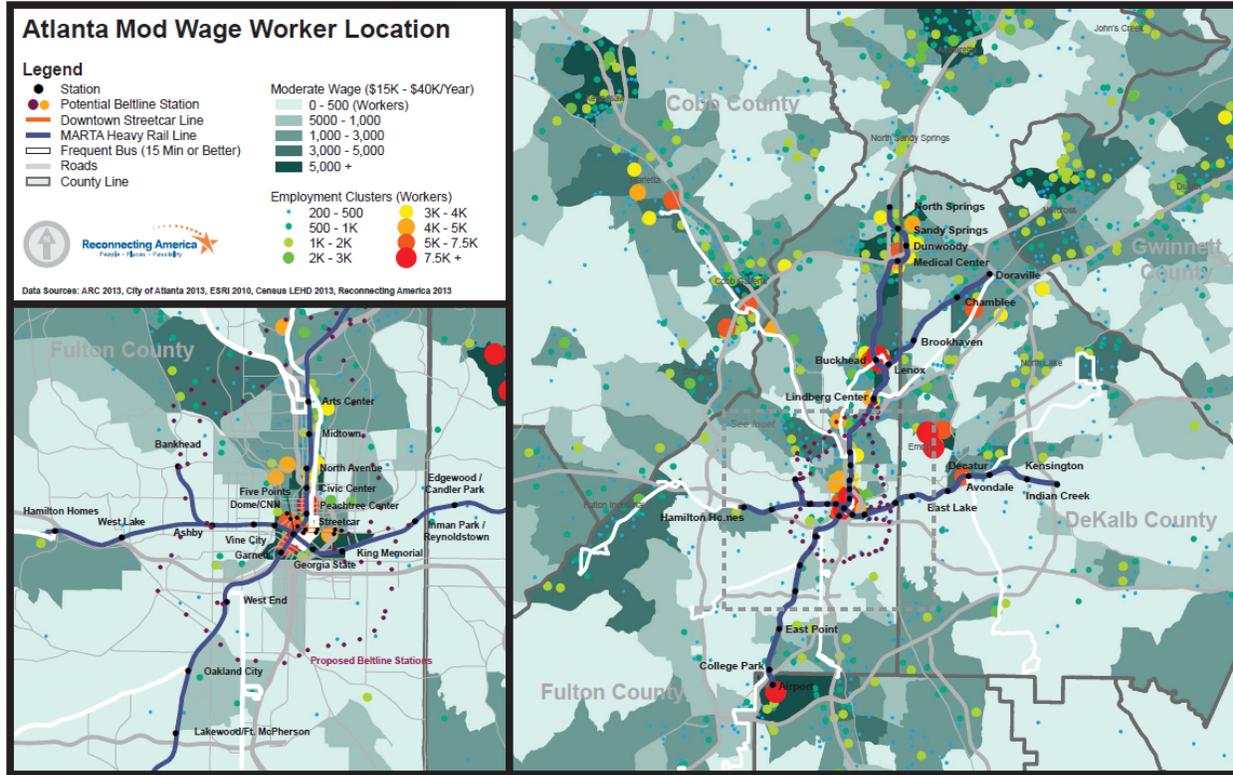
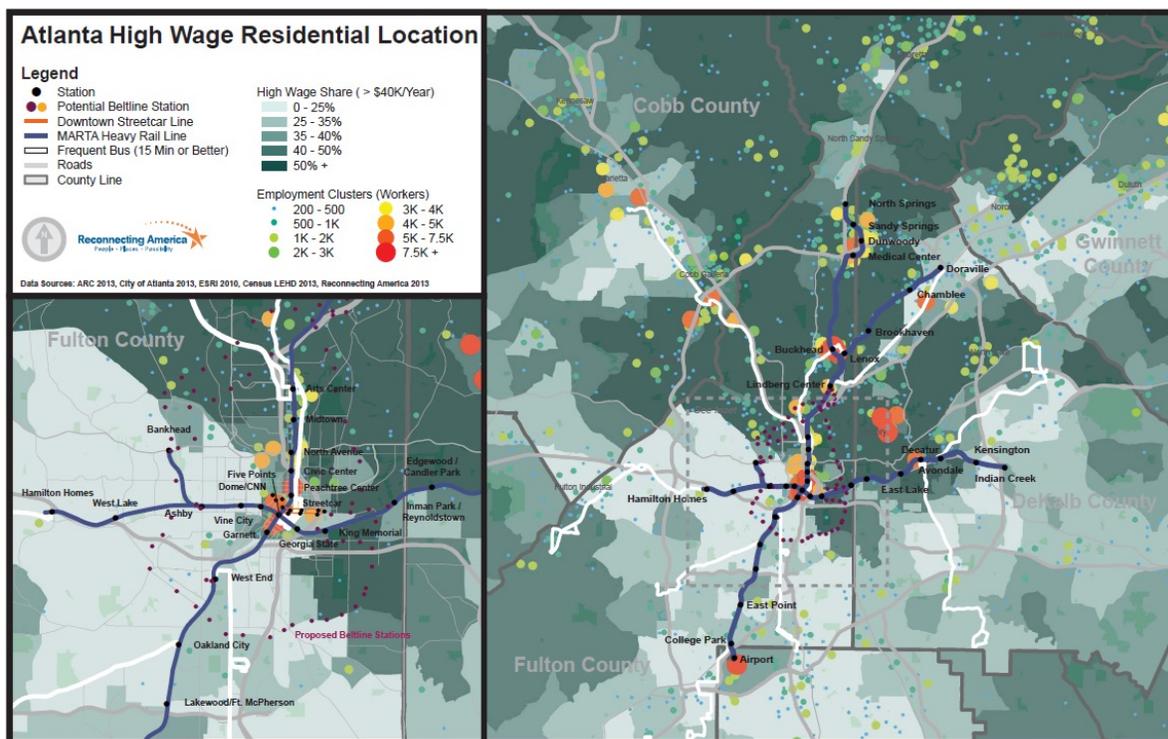
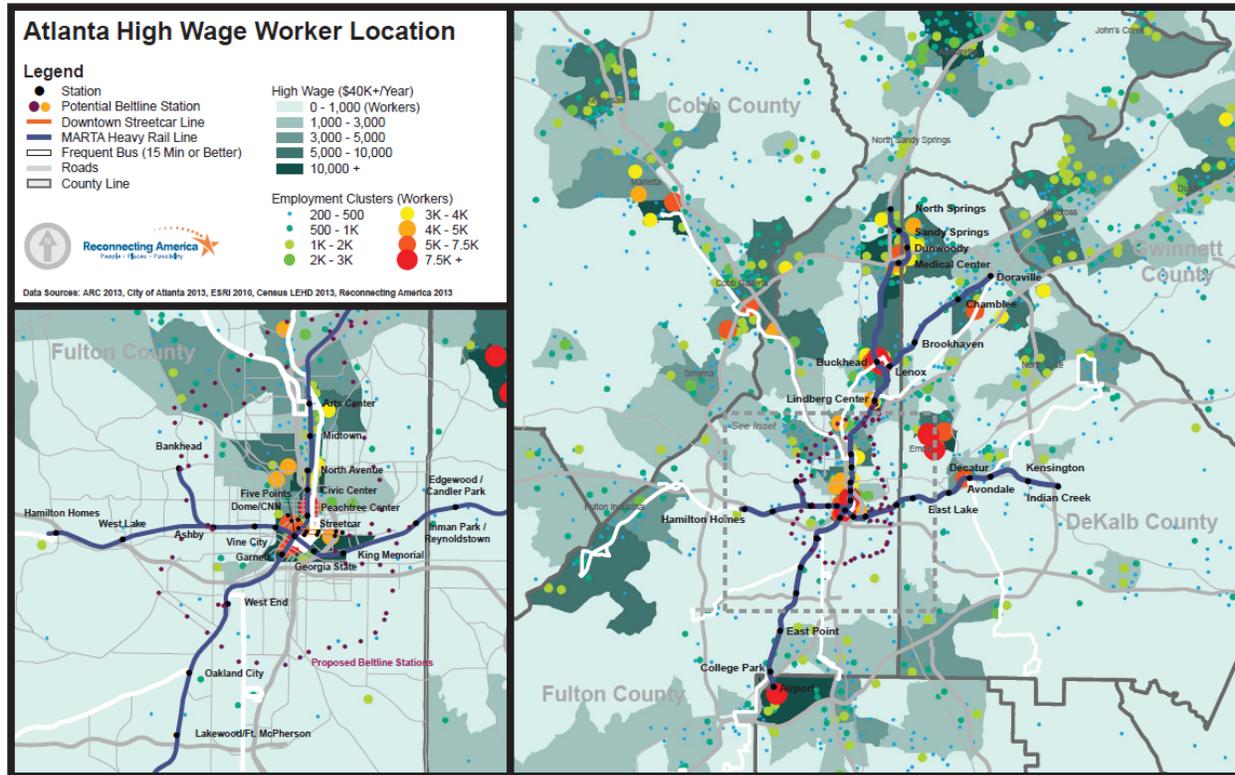


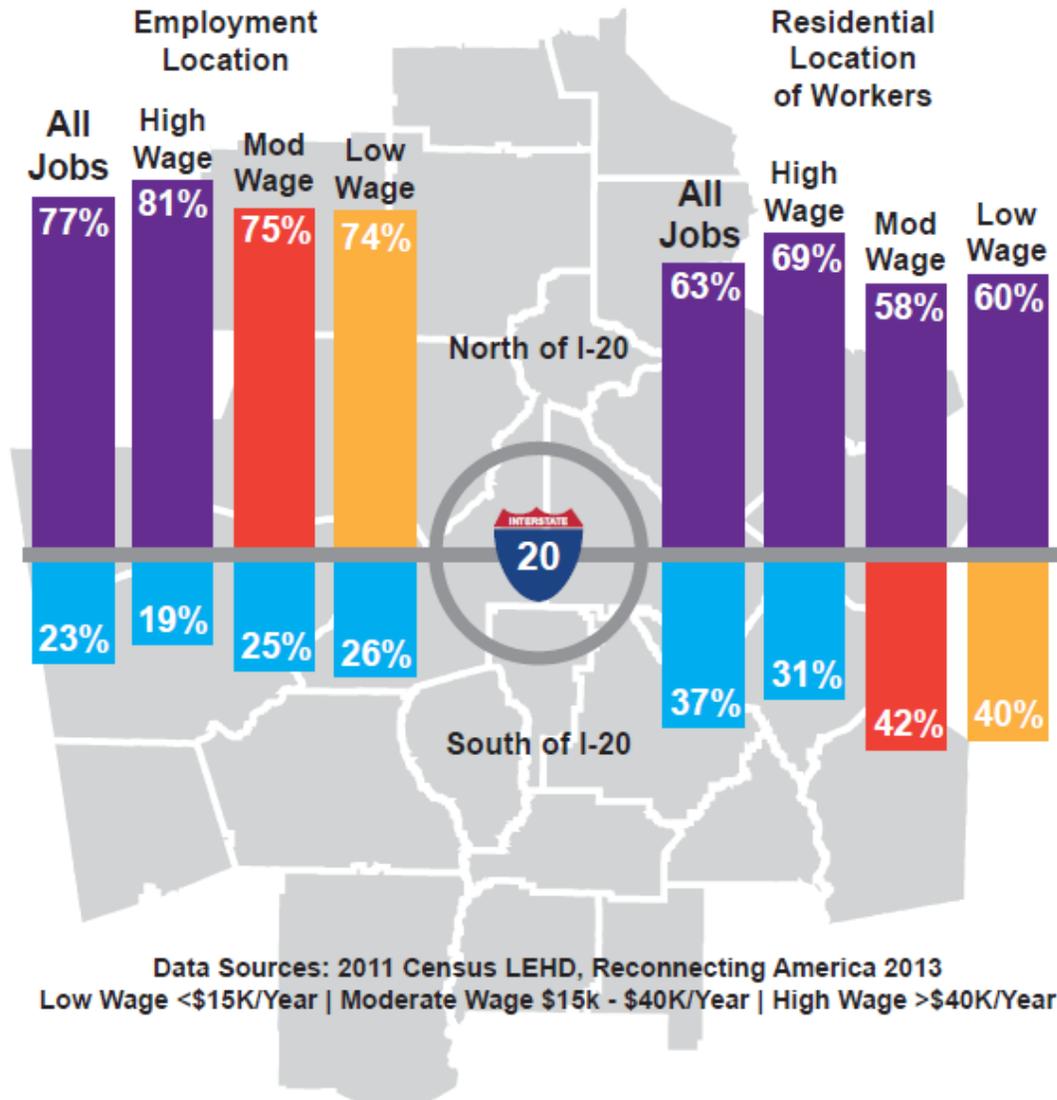
Figure 8: Residential and Worker Location of High Wage Workers (Income Greater Than \$40,000 Per Year)





The real estate market and TOD demand is stronger in more affluent areas, which is also where most jobs are. Station areas that score high on market strength are concentrated on the northern and eastern lines of the MARTA system, and station areas with emerging market strength are those closest to downtown Atlanta. These are also the station areas that contain the most jobs in the region, but also the station areas with the highest median incomes. Because many low- and middle-wage workers live in the western and southern parts of the Atlanta region, there is a disconnect between where the jobs are for many low-income workers and where they live. In fact, 40% of low and moderate wage workers live below Interstate 20. But 75% of low and moderate wage jobs are located north of Interstate 20.

Atlanta Regional Employment Distribution



The real estate market is weakest in low-income communities to the west and south.

Areas that score high on vulnerability and low on market strength are primarily in the western and southern parts of the region. The current suitability for TOD is low in these areas, yet these communities are far from job opportunities and other major destinations in the region..

Emerging real estate markets in communities proximate to downtown presents a risk of displacement. Areas that score moderately on vulnerability and market strength are primarily those near downtown or on the eastern line of the MARTA system. These communities are the most vulnerable to change and will need affordable housing strategies and other interventions to stabilize these communities. They are also closer to job opportunities, so increasing the supply of housing for all income levels is critical, so that low- and middle-wage workers can continue or choose to live in areas close to where they work.

Currently, affordable housing locations are dispersed. Below are maps of the housing units affordable to below 50% and 80% of area median income (AMI). For a family of four this means \$57,400 for 80% and \$35,900 for 50%. The inset maps show that areas proximate to downtown provide affordable housing opportunities, but MARTA doesn't serve all of them. The access created by good transportation has the possibility of pushing prices up on that housing.

Figure 9: Housing Units Affordable to Households Making at least 50% of Area Median Income

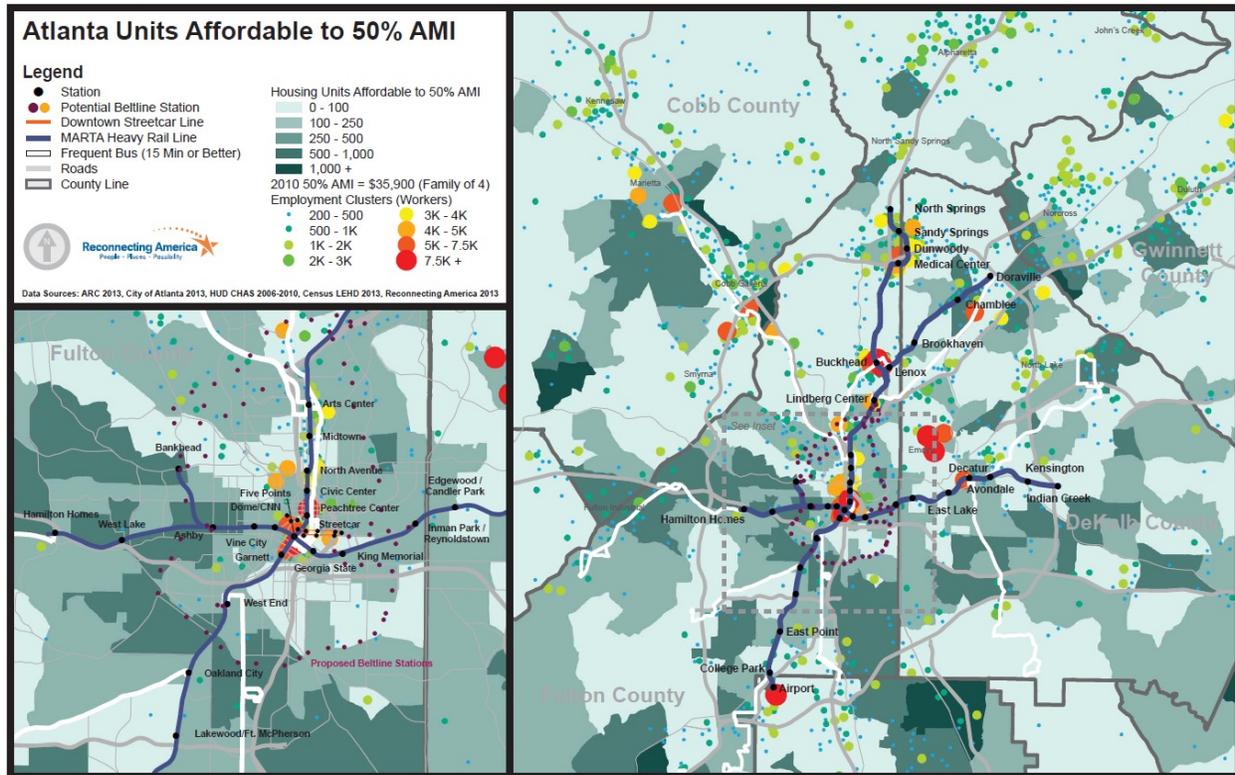
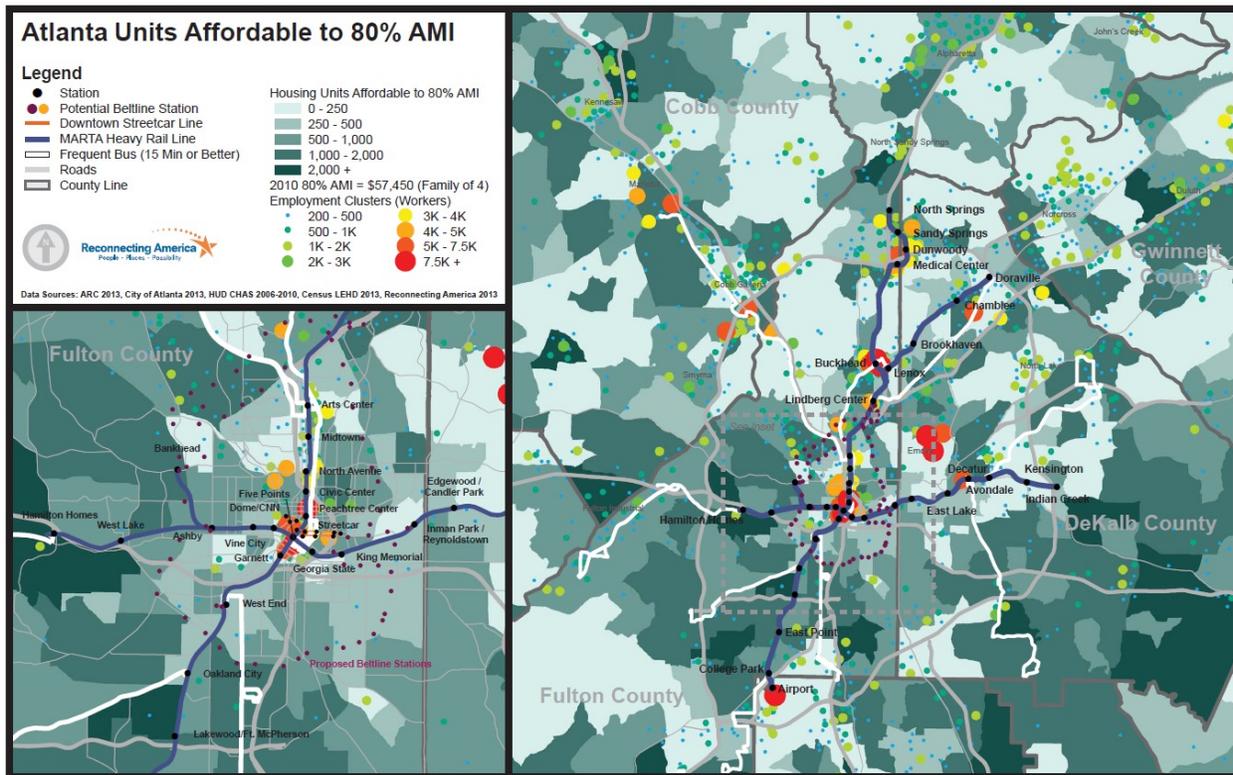


Figure 10: Housing Units Affordable to Households Making at least 80% of Area Median Income



The western and southern communities need better regional access to employment centers via transit. Station areas that score high on vulnerability and low on market strength are not likely to see significant investment in TOD and have a history of underinvestment unless local investments in these areas are prioritized. However, improving access to MARTA and other transit networks can help improve quality of life by making access to jobs, schools, grocery stores and community facilities less costly and more convenient. This can include place-based community development strategies such as new investments in infrastructure within these station areas, improved access to MARTA stations, and addressing last mile connections for pedestrians, bicyclists, bus riders and other users whose origins and destinations are not adjacent to the transit station.

Recommendations

Achieving equitable TOD in the Atlanta region will require a multifaceted approach, and the typology can provide a useful framework that informs where and how to prioritize investments to support a range of goals such as better weaving together the fabric of communities, improving access to transit and expanding mobility options, and providing a range of housing choices for people and families of different incomes. The following recommendations provide guidance on what the TOD Collaborative can do to proactively address issues faced by communities vulnerable to market pressures and what the strategies and priorities should be in community.

System-wide Recommendations

The strength of the market will dictate TOD in certain station areas. Given market realities in the Atlanta region, TOD is likely to happen sooner in certain parts of the region, primarily the northern and eastern areas. In some station areas the market is so strong that intervening to preserve or create new affordable housing, or provide other community facilities for lower income populations, is critical. Station areas proximate to hot market areas should also be noted as the proximity could drive some spillover. These are excellent opportunities to focus on affordable housing and preservation.

Other areas with emerging markets need careful planning to ensure that vulnerable populations are protected once the market heats up and the pressure to raise rents becomes imminent and that these communities have advocates to ensure the investments taking place serve to improve their quality of life over time. In weaker market areas, subsidies will be needed to develop TOD in the short-term, and planning and visioning will be needed to define the opportunities and challenges these communities may face in the long-term.

Vulnerability concerns will require equitable TOD strategies in certain station areas. As mentioned above, without intervention, some station areas with strong markets will develop TOD that is primarily catered to higher income populations who can afford it and are moving there for lifestyle reasons rather than dependence on transit. Yet these are the same station areas that have the highest concentration of job opportunities in the region, so it is a missed opportunity to not push for more community value to be created from their investments.

Improving transit access from lower income station areas is critical, as is finding ways to build affordable housing closer to these station areas, if not within them. Emerging markets like those to the north and east of downtown Atlanta are at risk of displacement, and thus there is a need for planning and visioning, as well as a push to reallocate infrastructure and community development resources to these station areas now before the market heats up. Low income station areas to the west and south need strong investment if they are to see any type of new development, as well as place-based strategies to improve access to jobs in other transit station areas while also investing in job growth locally. Dual strategies of connectivity and focused investment locally in small businesses can help station areas meet their potential and create a return on the initial transit investment.

The region needs to continue pushing for affordable housing strategies for major job centers on the MARTA system and move forward with transportation strategies for those employment centers that are not on the MARTA system. The Atlanta Regional Commission's Livable Centers Initiative focuses funding on helping employment centers grapple with planning for affordable housing and employment growth. Given the huge disparity between where low- and middle-wage workers live and where the majority of job opportunities are, the region needs to prioritize coordinated investments in affordable housing in the northern and eastern parts of the MARTA system, as well as near downtown, to provide affordable housing opportunities closer to jobs.

Additionally, Plan 2040 and Concept III have laid out a transportation plan for how to connect some of the major employment centers in the region with transit. After the failure of TSPLOST, continued education on the importance and value of connecting employment to workers through transit will be an important strategy going forward. Much of the news coverage of transit

focuses on the “economic development” benefits but it never gets more specific and a concerted education effort could go a long way.

A recent study by researchers at Harvard University and the University of California Berkeley, The Equality of Opportunity Project, highlighted the Atlanta region’s limited economic mobility, finding that Atlanta is one of the most difficult regions in the United States for low-income households to rise into the middle class and beyond.³

Additionally, they found that economic mobility was highly correlated with progressivity of state income taxes and the amount of taxes that are exempted such as the mortgage interest deduction. They also found high correlations in economic mobility with racial and residential segregation, K-12 school quality, and family structure. In particular, areas with a smaller middle class had lower rates of upward mobility.

When asking people about mobility in Atlanta, the New York Times received responses related to physical mobility, touching an issue that we see in the maps above. Low and moderate wage workers are separated geographically from the jobs rich parts of the region, and transportation alternatives that lower income residents depend on is not connecting people with employment opportunities so they can be economically mobile. In fact, **77% of jobs** in the counties that make up the Atlanta region are north of I-20, while higher concentrations of low and moderate wage workers live on the south side.

Improving the economic mobility of the region’s low and moderate-income households will require not only improving their access to employment through better transportation and local economic development investments, but also building and preserving more affordable housing in closer proximity to major job centers and frequent transit in the northern and eastern parts of the Atlanta region.

Incentivize Jobs Linked to Transit Access. Other places such as New Jersey have tax credits for locating near transit hubs and other regions have benefits related to zoning but encouraging new employment development near transit could open up opportunities in less invested and lower market areas.

Recommendations by Place Type

Type A: Affluent + Emerging/Strong Market

Type A stations have relatively high incomes and a strong real estate market. There are **five** station areas within this category:

- Avondale
- Buckhead
- Dunwoody
- Lenox
- Med Center

These station areas are also within or near major job centers in the Atlanta region, making them attractive for TOD and other types of real estate development. Building new affordable housing

³ Chetty, Raj. et al. *The Equality of Opportunity Project*. Available at <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/>. See also Leonhardt, D. In Climbing Income Ladder, Location Matters, *New York Times*, 22 July 2013. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/22/business/in-climbing-income-ladder-location-matters.html?_r=0.

is difficult in these areas given the strong market, affluent population and lack of existing options, so the best strategy might be to improve job access to these station areas from other parts of the region. This could include investments in infrastructure near the station such as sidewalks, bicycle facilities and improved signage and wayfinding at the station itself. Opportunities to build new affordable housing or diversify the housing stock should also be explored, but given the strength of the market and the likelihood of community resistance, resources may be better used in other station areas, especially those two or three stops down the line where the market and community support may be more supportive of affordable housing and the spillover effects can be felt.

Type B: Mixed-Income + Strong Market

Type B stations have a mix of incomes and a strong real estate market. There are **nine** station areas in this category:

- Arts Center
- Civic Center
- Dome GWCC CNN
- Five Points
- Lindberg Center
- Midtown
- North Avenue
- Peachtree Center
- Sandy Springs

Unlike Type A stations, there is a greater mix of incomes in these station areas. Yet the strong real estate market also makes existing low- and middle-income populations susceptible to displacement. These areas are most in need of affordable housing preservation and rent stabilization strategies to ensure current residents can continue to live there as the market heats up and new development is built. Introducing new, compact development housing types can also help increase the supply of housing for all income types. Moreover, because these areas are close to downtown Atlanta and major job centers in the northern part of the region, making infrastructure investments that increase job access to these and other station areas is important.

Type C: Mixed-Income + Emerging Market

Type C stations have a mix of incomes and an emerging real estate market. There are **eight** stations in this category:

- Brookhaven
- Decatur
- East Lake
- Edgewood/Candler Park
- Garnett
- Georgia State
- Inman Park
- North Springs

Compared to Type B stations, the market in these station areas is not as strong, but is heating up. Therefore, there is an immediate need for affordable housing creation and preservation strategies. These station areas can also benefit from planning and visioning exercises focused on equitable TOD and community development investments. Immediate or short-term

investments in community assets like parks, libraries, grocery stores and childcare facilities will also help make these areas more attractive and convenient for low- and middle-income populations.

Type D: Low-Income + Emerging Market

Type D stations have a high percentage of low-income populations and an emerging real estate market. There are **three** stations within this category:

- Ashby
- Chamblee
- King Memorial

The real estate market is moving in these station areas, unlike in the Type E station areas. Right now is a prime opportunity to start planning and visioning for equitable TOD, and also addressing the need to preserve affordable housing and stabilize rents while also thinking about local economic development strategies and incentives for new and small businesses. These areas can also benefit from infrastructure and community development investments that make these communities safer and more convenient places to live, as well as increasing access to jobs via transit in other parts of the region.

Type E: Low-Income + Weak Market

Type E station areas have a high percentage of low-income populations and a weak real estate market. There are **twelve** station areas in this category:

- Bankhead
- College Park
- Doraville
- Hamilton Holmes
- Kensington
- Lakewood/Ft. McPherson
- Oakland City
- Vine City
- West End
- West Lake
- East Point
- Indian Creek

Like Type D station areas, there is not likely to be any short-term market based investment in new housing, jobs or community resources in these station areas. Targeted investments from the city and region will be required and plans should focus on community needs and opportunities. Given the market reality, these station areas could benefit the most from improved access to jobs and other destinations via transit during planning for increased community investment. Improving access to these transit stations from surrounding communities, including infrastructure investments and the strengthening of community assets, are most appropriate.

Recommendations Matrix

Figure 13, below, shows broadly how these implementation strategies could be prioritized in the different place types based on whether they would be more or less able to leverage significant

change. **Note that this list is a working document and the list is not exhaustive of all recommendations at this point**

Figure 11: Recommendations by Place Type

Type	Affordable Housing Strategies	Diversify Housing Stock	Improve Job Access	Infrastructure Improvements	Strengthen Community Assets	Planning/ Visioning
A	Short-Term	X	Within station areas	X	X	
B	Short-Term	X	Within station areas		X	
C	Immediate	X	Within station areas		X	X
D	Immediate	X	To other station areas	X	X	X
E	Long-Term		To other station areas	X	X	