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From the Atlanta Business Chronicle:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2020/07/17/aerotropolis-atlanta-cids-studying-prt-system.html>

Aerotropolis Atlanta CIDs study system of 'podcars' for better airport area mobility

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Visitors and workers in the growing area around Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in future could have a new high-tech means of getting around. The choice will no longer be limited to trains and buses or personal cars; instead, tiny self-driving vehicles could whisk travelers around the area.

Personal Rapid Transit, or PRT, uses small modes called podcars to transport passengers between designated locations on dedicated guideways.

"We saw that (PRT) provided two major features that we thought could be a solution, not only for the airport area, but the region as well," said Aerotropolis Atlanta Community Improvement Districts Executive Director [Gerald McDowell](#). "It costs significantly less than heavy rail and light rail, and even costs less than bus rapid transit to build and construct."

PRT routes can be built for about \$10 million to \$20 million a mile compared to \$300 million or more a mile for high-speed rail. It's also flexible. The system only deploys the number of podcars needed to meet immediate demand. There's no empty cars traveling between routes, according to McDowell.

The push for PRT came after a year-long transit feasibility study commissioned by the CIDs.

"One of the first recommendations was that we conduct a micro transit pilot, which we are in the final phases of launching," McDowell said. "We're hoping to have that pilot launched by the end of this year where there will be a micro transit service that will be available to those who have worked in the mobility district. We're evaluating two companies and we will be selecting one of those companies to run that pilot for us over 12 months, throughout 2021."

The study focused on routes. A proposed transit service including bus and PRT would run from the airport's domestic terminal to College Park, Hapeville, and Mountain View, and then to the international terminal. The service, dubbed the corporate crescent, would provide on-demand transit for moving passengers from the airport to corporate destinations such as Delta Air Lines Inc., Porsche Car North America, the Wells Fargo operations center, and other stops.

As part of the study, the CIDs also staged a summit to bring together transit solution providers, including PRT operators, to acquaint locals officials and residents with the technology.



AEROTROPOLIS ATLANTA COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

"That gave us an opportunity to see some of the innovative solutions that are out in the marketplace and helped us to evaluate those systems," McDowell said.

Local officials traveled to Europe to see firsthand how a PRT system at London Heathrow Airport got people around the busy airport. The airport uses a personal rapid transit system developed by the British engineering company Ultra Global PRT. The system was opened in 2011, deploying 21 podcars to transport passengers along a roughly 2.4-mile route connecting the terminal to parking lots north of the airport.

"We rode that system and met with the PRT operator," McDowell said. They also saw similar systems in Amsterdam, he added.

While there are still relatively few PRT systems in use, the concept has been around a long time. Personal rapid transit was originally developed in the 1950s to move commuters in areas with densities too low to pay for the construction of a conventional metro system. Amusement parks have used small podcars to transport guests for years.

The oldest PRT system is in Morgantown, West Virginia. Launched in 1975, it connects the three Morgantown campuses of West Virginia University and the city's downtown area.

Officials see PRT as one component of a transportation system that includes MARTA rail, buses, bus rapid transit, and other existing modes of transit. The overarching goal is to serve many different types of passengers entering and leaving the district as well those who need to get around within it.

"It's a pretty diverse area where people are largely dependent on their automobiles (to get around within the area)," said Jeffrey Parker, executive director of MARTA. "The MARTA bus system is trying to bring people into the rail system, not moving people around that Aerotropolis area."

Much of the traffic will continue to be driven by airport arrivals and departures.

"It's the busiest airport in the world and has a lot of people coming and leaving daily, and not only that, but the whole area is growing," said John Orr, manager of the Atlanta Regional Commission's Transportation Access and Mobility Group.

The CIDs' mobility planners are also proposing the construction of two intermodal transit centers. One would be located west of the airport near the domestic terminal or the College Park Marta station, while the other would be on the east side in the Mountain View area. They will serve as the primary transfer points between rail, bus and the proposed PRT system.

Planners are considering how new technologies like PRT could fit into the larger transit programs that include big-ticket items like heavy rail, buses, and highways for cars.

Work is now underway on improvements to the Camp Creek Parkway and I-285 interchange to help traffic flow easier and faster.

"The biggest focus has been, how do we maintain and improve traffic flow?" Orr said.

While the recent pandemic reduced the number of vehicles on the highways dramatically, in recent weeks traffic levels have started to return to pre-pandemic levels.

"The challenges are curbing congestion throughout metro Atlanta," said Chris Tomlinson, executive director of The ATL, short for the Atlanta Region Transit Link Authority, the metro Atlanta's regional transit planning agency. "That's in regards to getting to the airport and the airport area and getting in and out of there."

In addition to move passengers to and from the airport, transit planners have to focus on getting workers to various corporate campuses such as Delta, Porsche, United Parcel Service Inc. and others, as well as within the surrounding

cities of Hapeville, College Park and East Point.

“One of the benefits from it is that certainly with all the evolution of technology, it's possible to have these autonomous [vehicles],” said Orr. “You can, depending on the type of technology, not have a driver. Ultimately that means you can have a lower operating cost and even increased frequency as well.”

The implementation of these developments, including PRT, rests on securing money through either state or federal transportation funds.

The cost of public transit

High speed Rail (HRT) - \$300 Million/Mile

Light Rail (LRT) - \$150 Million/Mile

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) - \$30-\$50 Million/Mile

Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) - \$10-\$20 Million/Mile

Source: Aerotropolis Atlanta CIDs

Randy Southerland

Contributing Writer

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