



Reimagining the Scarborough RT: Insights from North American Transit Repurposing Projects

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**Prepared by Rachel Hooley, Alexander
Ling, Julia Oliveira, and Sabrina Shahidan**

University of Toronto

in collaboration with the Institute for Inclusive
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**Institute for Inclusive Economies
and Sustainable Livelihoods**

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Introduction

Topic Description

The July 2023 derailing and subsequent decommissioning of the Scarborough Rapid Transit Line (SRT) marked the end of public rail transit in Scarborough for several years. However, this does not need to be the end of its service to this part of Toronto. Changing land use opens opportunities to build new social infrastructure to help bridge social inequities, build community, and create economic opportunity while remaining environmentally conscious. Transit infrastructure repurposing projects have accomplished these goals in many cities worldwide and might inform a similar project in Scarborough. The Toronto City Council has called for research into potential uses for the remaining SRT infrastructure (City of Toronto, 2024). This project is intended to help the Institute for Inclusive Economies & Sustainable Livelihoods (IIESL) with meeting that request and informing the Scarborough community about the potential future of such a fundamental part of their district.



October 8th Case Study Presentation

Image: Sergio Montero

Goals

The main purpose of this report is to investigate the potential of an SRT repurposing project to promote inclusive economies and sustainable livelihoods in Scarborough and to provide recommendations to help make such a project a reality.

The evidence to support this goal will be drawn from:

1. An in-depth analysis of North American transit repurposing projects shows how they contribute to their communities and the barriers and enablers to achieving their successes.
2. Reports about Scarborough's needs and context to tailor the recommendations.
3. Ideas and expertise from the Scarborough community and transit repurposing experts.

The city council may decide to prevent or limit the possibility of a repurposed SRT, however, it will not change Scarborough's need for a project to address its longstanding need for more mobility options and a greater focus on sustainability. The recommendations in this paper were constructed with these concerns in mind to help support the IIESL and the Scarborough community by addressing those concerns with a different project.

Methodology



Literature Review:
What can transit repurposing projects teach us?



Scarborough's Context:
How do the other projects compare?



Stakeholder Engagement:
what might lived experience and expertise reveal?

Literature Review of Transit Repurposing Case Studies

To gather inspiration and lessons for a potential SRT repurposing project, several North American examples of transit infrastructure repurposing were gathered and analyzed as case studies. These include the New York City Highline, Atlanta's BeltLine, 11th Street Bridge Park, Cuernavaca Park, the Cape Cod Rail Trail, and the Bentway. Some of these case studies were selected by the IIESL and others were chosen to address specific gaps and issues faced by Scarborough that had not yet been covered by previously chosen case studies such as the Canadian winter. For the conclusions drawn from the case study research to be specific to Scarborough and its needs, in-depth research into Scarborough's context was also conducted.

Analytical Framework: Thematic Lenses

These case studies were examined through themes provided by the IIESL to provide context for the potential SRT repurposing project. The recommendations at the end of this report are drawn from both Scarborough's context and the case study literature review.

Stakeholder Engagement: Community Meeting and Interviews

To supplement the data gathered from the case studies and Scarborough research, the advice and opinions of several stakeholders and experts were included. In the IIESL's October 2024 SRT repurposing meeting, they attempted to inform and solicit the opinions of several stakeholders and interested groups such as student groups at UTSC, the Scarborough Community Renewal Organization, and a representative for a city councillor in the SRT's area.

Several experts in some of the case studies included in this paper also generously gave their time to enrich this report. In our first interview, Scott Kraz, the 11th Street Bridge Director, discussed his transit repurposing project and highlighted the danger of gentrification. In the second interview, Darnel Haris, a director of city policy and planning working for the office of Councillor Jamaal Myers in Scarborough, and Diana Guzman, a sociologist based in Mexico City, revealed some of the social impacts of Cuernavaca Park and their implications for Scarborough. The template we used for these interviews can be found in the appendix.

Selected Case Studies



Atlanta BeltLine

The Atlanta BeltLine is a **22-mile multi-use trail loop** encircling Atlanta's core, repurposing abandoned freight rail into a vibrant system of trails and parks. The project was **initiated in 2006** with **full completion expected by 2030**. In connecting 45 neighborhoods, the project boasts an estimated 2 million annual users including tourists, with an estimated cost of **\$4.8 billion USD** (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2024).

Image: Discover Atlanta



Cuernavaca Park

The Parque Lineal Ferrocarril de Cuernavaca is a **2.8-mile-long linear urban forest** in Mexico City, repurposing the abandoned Cuernavaca Railway into a park. The project was **initiated in August 2016** and **completed in December 2017**, connecting 22 neighborhoods. The project was developed with a **\$100,000 prize and a 20 million MXD contract**, attracting an estimated **50,000 annual visitors** (GSA, n.d., SDUV, 2016).

Image: urbanNext Lexicon



New York City High Line

The High Line is a **1.45-mile-long elevated linear park**, greenway, and rail trail created on the abandoned, southern viaduct section of the NYC Railroad's West Side Line. The park **opened in phases from 2009 to 2023** and boasts an estimated **9 million annual visitors**. The project approximately costs **\$238.5 million USD** and serves as both a public space and a major tourist destination (theHighLine, n.d.).

Image: Timothy Schenck



11th Street Bridge Park

The 11th Street Bridge Park is a **quarter mile park** spanning the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. and repurposing a vehicular bridge. The project **began in 2014, with an anticipated opening by 2027**. With a total cost of **\$92 million**, the park will serve as both a pedestrian thoroughfare and a community gathering place, potentially attracting up to **1.2 million annual visitors** (Building Bridges Across Rivers, n.d.).

Image: OMA & OLIN

Additional Case Studies

The two case studies below were selected to assess the unique technical considerations of an SRT repurposing project: **elevation** and **winter maintenance**, as suggested by Scarborough community members at the IIESL's October 2024 SRT repurposing meeting. These projects provide valuable insights into how similar challenges have been addressed. Below is a broad overview of the two projects; a detailed assessment of their unique technical considerations presented later in the report.



The Bentway

The Bentway is a **10-acre public space** in Toronto that utilizes the underside of the Gardiner Expressway. The project was initiated in 2015 and completed in **2018**. Highlighted by an initial donation of 25 million CAD for project initiation, the project boasts an estimated **250,000 users annually** (The Bentway, 2024).

Image: The Bentway



Cape Cod Rail Trail

The Cape Cod Rail Trail is a **25-mile multi-use pathway** in Massachusetts, repurposing a railroad corridor into an extensive recreation and transportation corridor. The trail provides direct access to the picturesque scenery of several Cape Cod towns, offering access to beaches, state parks, and local businesses. Thus, designed primarily for summertime biking and tourism, **usage of the trail peaks during the summer months**. The trail attracts families, cyclists, and nature enthusiasts, making it a key asset for the tourism-driven economy of Cape Cod (Mass.Gov, 2024).

Image: Mass Trails

Governance, Funding & Project Initiation

Governance, funding, and project initiation are pivotal in the successful repurposing of infrastructure. From identifying ownership and jurisdictional authority to innovating funding mechanisms and grassroots advocacy, these elements ensure projects support long-term sustainability and community needs.

Atlanta BeltLine

The Atlanta BeltLine was initiated through Ryan Gravel's 1999 master's thesis at Georgia Tech, which envisioned repurposing abandoned railroad tracks into a loop of multi-use trails and transit around Atlanta's core (Gravel, 1999). Gravel gained early support for his vision from Atlanta City Council member Cathy Woolard. Together, they formed the Friends of the BeltLine group, which attracted partnerships with organizations specializing in urban development. These partnerships expanded the project's scope and momentum, leading to the formation of the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership in 2005 with support from Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin. The partnership secured public-private funding and philanthropic donations, and established a Tax Allocation District to finance the project (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2024).

While BeltLine's funding strategy enabled swift project development, a key criticism lies in the limited community influence during its initiation (Roy, 2015). Additionally, the project's neoliberal planning approach has been critiqued for prioritizing economic growth over community health and quality of life (Roy, 2015). Ultimately, the BeltLine highlights that the challenges of project initiation were not in the vision of the concept itself but rather in navigating political connections and partnerships while failing to sufficiently integrate community input.

Cuernavaca Park

In 2016, the government of Mexico City, the College of Architects of Mexico, and others hosted an international competition to turn part of the Cuernavaca railway into a park (SDUV, 2016). In addition to encouraging the development of hundreds of plans and creative uses for the park space (urbanNext, n.d.; GSA, n.d.), the competition helped endow the plan with a sense of legitimacy in several ways (D. Guzman, personal communication, Nov 2024). First, since everyone theoretically had equal opportunity to compete, all residents who would use the space could have their opinions represented with a project. Secondly, the clear and mostly transparent plans for the competition kept the residents informed and engaged in the process of selecting a winner. Finally, the main host of the competition was the College of Architects of Mexico, an institution that has a reputation for ensuring their projects are respectful of the community their projects will serve (D. Guzman and D. Haris, personal communication, Nov 2024).

Another advantage of the competition format was its rapid completion. It was announced in mid-2016 and was completed in the same year (SDUV, 2016). The community engagement practices may not have been as rigorous as in other case studies in this report, but it was among the quickest to finish its planning process.

New York City High Line

The High Line project was created by the non-profit organization *Friends of the Highline*. The organization was founded when there were motions in place to demolish the deserted railway that ran through the Meatpacking District of Manhattan (theHighLine, n.d.). There were several queries and debates over what could be done with the deserted line but after the organization took over responsibility for its operation, it became clear that the line was here to stay. The next issue that came to light surrounded what was to be done with the line. To solve this issue, *Friends of the Highline* hosted a worldwide competition where participants could propose design ideas on what could be done with the space (theHighLine, n.d.).

While *Friends of the Highline* is responsible for the maintenance and functioning of the park, the City of New York owns the land (the HighLine, n.d.). Additionally, the park is licensed by the city's Parks Organization (NYCGovParks, n.d.). The governance model follows a top-down approach, largely due to its size and multiple actors being involved (Blewett et al., 2023).

The current operation of the High Line is funded almost completely by donations, with the initial funding for the creation of the project coming from the federal, state, and municipal governments (Columbia University, n.d.).

11th Street Bridge Park

The 11th Street Bridge Park began in 2011 when D.C. planning director Harriet Tregoning, envisioned repurposing the unused piers from the dismantled highway bridge into a community space. Partnering with Scott Kratz, the project gained momentum through over 200 meetings with civic associations, business owners, and local residents to gauge interest (Pipkin, 2023).

Building Bridge Across the River (BBAR), a Ward 8 nonprofit with a history of managing large-scale community projects, became the project steward. Their involvement was critical due to their physical location on the east of the Anacostia River and offered the venture a credible fiscal footing. This was demonstrated when BBAR raised \$1 million in 2014 for the initiation of hiring staff, created a dedicated website, and initiated a competitive design process (Urban Institute, 2016). By October 2014, the Oversight Design Committee Advisory (comprising of community residents, park administrators, representatives from the Anacostia Watershed Society and the National Capital Planning Commission) along with a formal selection jury finalized the design by the urban design firm OMA and the landscape architecture firm OLIN (Urban Institute, 2021). The design selection process featured public livestreams where design teams showcased and revised their built proposals in real-time, (Next City, 2015; FWA, 2013), a method Scott Kratz confirmed effectively incorporated community feedback (Kratz, personal communication, 2024).

Ownership of the bridge is shared: the District manages the structural components of the bridge (piers, pilings, and the deck) while BBAR oversees programming and maintenance above the deck. This arrangement was formalized through a public space permit issued in perpetuity that eliminates any monetary exchange between the two entities, and streamlines management and operational autonomy (HillRag, 2023).

Scarborough Context

The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) retains ownership of the Line 3 SRT corridor's current infrastructure (rail lines, stations, and maintenance facilities) especially with the advancing plans for a busway along the SRT route until the Scarborough Subway Extension (SSE) is complete by 2030, with funds approved by the Toronto City Council (TTC, 2021). This current management indicates that the land has not been subdivided or transferred to other organizations or institutions. Councillor Jamal Myers of Scarborough North introduced a motion to explore adaptive repurposing of the corridor, which was approved by Toronto City Council in early 2024 to conduct a feasibility study (CBC, 2024).

Drawing inspiration from Toronto-based repurposing initiatives like the Bentway, the underpass park originated from Toronto urban planner Judy Matthews, with the City of Toronto Mayor John Tory approved the park initiative, and a \$25 million donation was funneled through the Judy and Wilmot Matthews Foundation for the park. The project received approval and support from the Toronto Council, Waterfront Toronto, and Councillor Joe Cressy (then-Ward 10 councillor) (Keenan, 2023). If the SRT corridor is to be repurposed, there must be coordination of the Toronto Transit Commission with integrated municipal planning. The City Planning Division (Scarborough District Office) would oversee the rezoning or redesignation process (City of Toronto Planning Division, 2017) in maintaining a potential multi-modal accessibility redevelopment of the decommissioned corridor. Public-private partnerships as demonstrated by the case studies could enhance the scope of the project.

Conclusion

The most notable takeaway from these case studies is the project stewardship undertaken by a formed organization or a recognized local non-profit. The involvement of these organizations with shared values was especially critical in gaining momentum among residents, and fostering trust during the early stages of these projects. Unlike the BeltLine, where land acquisition was a significant hurdle, Scarborough benefits from the TTC's current ownership of the RT corridor. Leveraging public-private partnerships and philanthropic support, with continuous community engagement to ensure the infrastructure equitably serves the residents, could provide the continual financial stability necessary without undue reliance on one source and the foundation for wider buy-in.

Transportation & Accessibility

Transportation and Accessibility are essential aspects of transit redevelopment projects. Many act as connectors to nearby public transport stations, enhancing the infrastructure's purpose. Ensuring the community's accessibility needs are a priority will guarantee the project is as inclusive as possible.

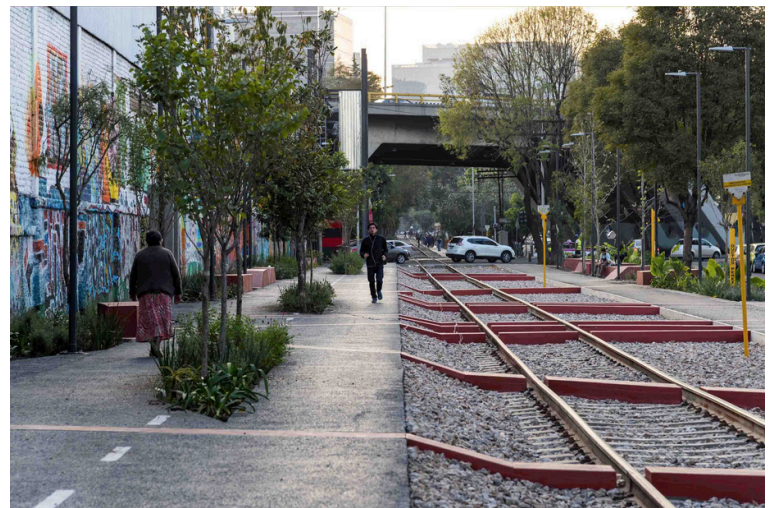
Atlanta BeltLine

Currently, the BeltLine is a strong example of a canvas for active transportation. The stable climate of Atlanta allows community members and tourists alike to use the trail for travel or transportation year-round. However, the reliance on active transportation along the BeltLine has fueled a debate on the need for a light rail transit line along the BeltLine (Bagby, 2023; Green, 2024). Advocates like Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens and the BeltLine CEO Clyde Higgs argue that transit is integral to the BeltLine's ability to improve accessibility and connect communities (Green, 2024). Importantly, in 2016, more than 70% of Atlanta residents voted to approve the expansion of MARTA, the Atlanta Public Transit System on the BeltLine (Council for Quality Growth, 2023). Supporters of the expansion suggest the transit would limit traffic and support the exploding Atlanta population (Bagby, 2023; Green, 2024).

However, opponents of the transit expansion mostly cite the high cost, aesthetics, and overall irony of developing transit alongside active transportation (Bagby, 2023; Green, 2024). Despite the controversy, transit development doesn't aim to replace existing active transportation, but to complement it, offering more transportation options that increase accessibility for a booming population.

Cuernavaca Park

For many years before becoming a park, the Cuernavaca Railway had been used by pedestrians rather than trains (urbanNext, n.d.; GSA, n.d.). It provided an informal corridor that reached into the affluent Polanco district from its surrounding neighborhoods. However, the space was unsafe and was not designed for pedestrian use. The park now provides residents with a way to make the trip safely surrounded by several amenities and greenspace. In addition to providing a safe way to get to work in the Polanco district for many of the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods (D. Guzman, personal communication, Nov 2024) it connects sports parks, community event areas, two museums, a subway stop and is part of a larger bikeway that crosses the city (Buratti & Merino-Pérez, 2023; GSA, n.d.).



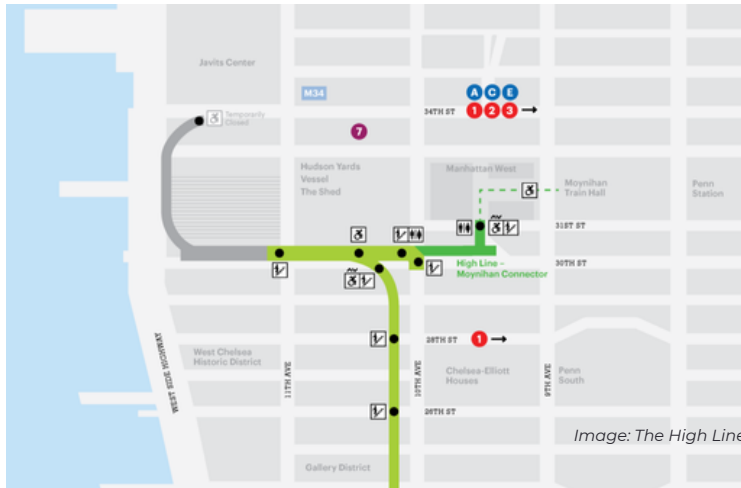
Pedestrian Pathway Next to Train Tracks Image: Landuurn

New York City High Line

The elevated park is mostly used as a short walking trail to get a break from the chaotic city life beneath. With the park being free and for public utility, it is easily accessible and sees around 8 million visitors a year (dsrny, n.d.).

The High Line is connected to Penn Station, a major train station in the city (theHighLine, n.d.). Being connected to this major station encourages commuters to take a walk in the elevated park to get to and from work, as well as tourists traveling through the station. The design of the High Line is aimed at connecting several areas of the city, promoting walking, and providing green space in the urban jungle that is New York City (theHighLine, n.d.).

There are few access points to the street below, emphasizing its space as a break from the city, but also limiting access (theHighLine, n.d.).



Map Showing the High Line's Connection to Local Transit

11th Street Bridge

The location itself presents both opportunities and challenges. Accessibility is not as seamless; a 2013 study showed only 2% of residents east of the river walk to work, and less than 1% cycle, compared to 15% and 4% respectively on the west side (Doumi et al., 2013).

This disparity reflects broader gaps in transportation infrastructure compounded by the park's distance from major transit hubs.



Trails by the 11th Street Bridge Park

Image: OMA+OLIN

The closest Metro stations, Anacostia and Eastern Market are over a mile away (20-minute walk), and bus stops are a third of a mile from the entrances (Virginia Tech, 2013; Urban Places and Spaces, 2024) which may pose challenges for individuals with mobility issues or those less inclined to walk longer distances. To address these gaps, shuttle bus services have been proposed as a short-term solution, while longer-term transit and infrastructure improvements remain in discussion (Urban Places and Spaces, 2024).

On the north side, the bridge connects near the Navy Yard and the existing Anacostia Riverwalk Trail, while on the south side, paths and ramps provide access to Anacostia Drive, Good Hope Road, and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (The Wash Cycle, 2020). This allows park users to access nearby site attractions within an integrated street and trail network. The activity-based design of the park, however, brings concerns of conflict in use between cyclists and pedestrians, but the National Capital Planning Commission has recently approved a wayfinding package to help visitors navigate the park safely. (NCPC, 2022)

Scarborough Context

Scarborough is cited to be one of the most poorly served areas by rapid transit, and the underway Scarborough Subway extension on the Bloor-Danforth line is reported to only possibly be accessible by fewer potential riders from the surrounding neighborhoods (less than 11,000 of the total population within walking distance of transit stops) (Sorensen et. al, 2015). Scarborough's current transit infrastructure reflects decades of underinvestment and city planning that is heavily focused on car dependency. For most residents, these modes of transport are neither safe nor viable, with 69% of short trips under 5km conducted by car due to the lack of active transportation alternatives at these distances (Mitra et al., 2016; Ledsham & Verlinden, 2019.)

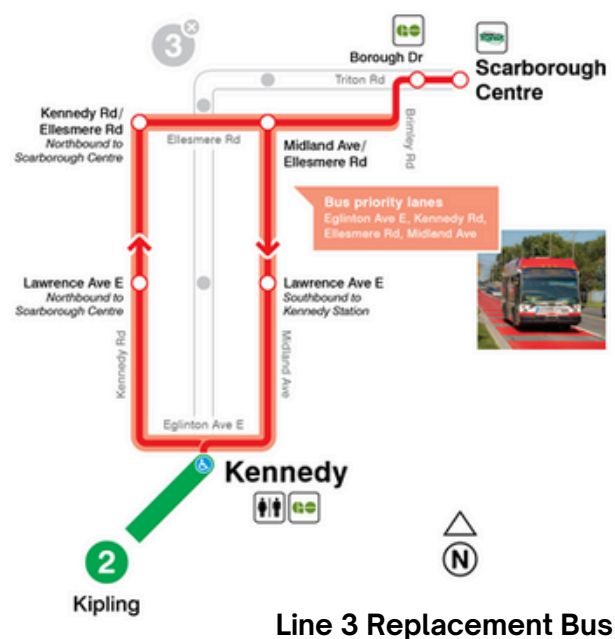
In a TTCRider survey conducted in 2021, 91% of 300 Scarborough transit user respondents communicated their support for keeping the SRT corridor for bus travel and other community users. There is a high need for a cycle track to be integrated alongside the bus replacement service in the SRT corridor. (TTCRider, 2022)

It is important to note that some areas of Scarborough are composed of low-income, ethnoracialized residents who lack access to cost-effective transit systems, and this is further compounded by the nature of precarious workers (Teelucksingh, 2007). With the decommissioning of Line 3, residents will endure at least seven years of replacement buses between Scarborough Town Centre (STC) and Kennedy Station, a solution described by Cycle Toronto's Kevin Rupasinghe as "unfair and unacceptable" (TTCRiders, 2022).

Scarborough's built form, of large lots, low-density housing, and arterial grids designed around 18th-century farmland, poses unique challenges for high-capacity transit (Sorensen et. al, 2015). In Choices for Scarborough (2015), the authors further suggest that the SRT corridor already runs through key east-west arterials, such as Eglinton and Sheppard, that were identified as prime candidates for intensification.

Conclusion

These case studies highlight the value of linking community parks to major transit hubs. Ensuring accessible routes for commuting workers like the Cuernavaca Railway Park would ensure transit improvement prioritized undeserved areas, especially Scarborough's low-income and ethnoracialized communities. While transportation is traditionally seen as a means to get from point A to point B, it is essential to reframe it as a gateway to wider economic opportunities. Infrastructure like the SRT corridor can go beyond simply connecting destinations—it can connect people to jobs, education, and essential services, all of which are critical for upward mobility and community well-being.



Line 3 Replacement Bus

Image: TTC, 2024

Economic Development and Equity

Economic development in repurposed infrastructure projects often navigates a delicate balance between fostering prosperity and mitigating displacement. By examining initiatives like equitable housing, small business supports, and targeted community investments, these projects can drive inclusive growth while addressing systemic inequities.

Atlanta BeltLine

The BeltLine transforms an underutilized corridor into an extensive system of economic development, with over \$3 billion in private investment spurred by the project (Immergluck & Balan, 2018). However, its economic impacts have also raised significant concerns for surrounding residents. For example, between 2011 and 2015, housing prices within half a mile of the BeltLine rose by 17.9% to 26.6%, depending on the area (Immergluck & Balan, 2018). This reflects clear evidence of gentrification where low-income and predominantly Black communities were displaced (Weber et al., 2017).

Further compounding gentrification is the failed affordable housing promises. The BeltLine originally aimed to deliver 5,600 affordable units but only around 1,000 units have been completed (Immergluck & Balan, 2018). This leaves vulnerable residents without viable housing options, forced to move out of their communities, while richer homeowners move in further emphasizing inequities. While efforts such as the Atlanta Land Trust have fought to preserve home affordability, their efforts remain insufficient given the scale of displacement (Weber et al., 2017). Notably, the resignation of Ryan Gravel, the original visionary for the BeltLine, and Nathaniel Smith from the Atlanta BeltLine Incorporation are the most alarming of these equity concerns (Saporta, 2016). Overall, the BeltLine demonstrates the need for strong proactive policies to ensure that urban development projects do not further inequality but instead foster community growth and benefits altogether.

New York City High Line

Researchers hold varying opinions surrounding the economic contributions of the High Line to the surrounding community. The project has brought economic prosperity to the local community, driving up the amount of tourists that come to the area and engage with local businesses (Stewart and Green, 2024). This resulted in the creation of new jobs and new businesses entering the local neighborhood (Stewart and Green, 2024).

However, with this new economic prosperity, the cost of living in the surrounding area has drastically increased (Stewart and Green, 2024). As a result, many families have been forced out of the area due to a lack of affordability, with new wealthier families coming in (Stewart and Green, 2024). Public services, such as public schools, have been closed down and replaced by private schools that are inaccessible to low-income families that previously attended public schools (Stewart and Green, 2024).

11th Street Bridge Park

BBAR aims to directly address the entrenched economic disparity of Anacostia River's east side residents who continuously experience legacies of disinvestment. In 2023, the median household income in Ward 6 was \$129,000, while in Anacostia and Congress Heights, this figure hovered at \$45,000 (Pipkin, 2023).

"We are investing more into the community, than we are in the bricks and mortar of the project", Kratz emphasized (Scott Kratz, personal communication, 2024). This foundational ideology was evident in 2015 through multiple stakeholder meetings involving over 60 local nonprofits, housing and workforce experts, and the public. With significant funds and staff capacity investment from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC D.C.) (Urban Institute, 2016), community feedback was combined with baseline economic data to form the four pillars of the 2016 Equitable Development Plan: affordable housing, workforce development, small businesses, and arts and culture (Urban Institute, 2016).

Key outcomes include a community land trust with 238 units of permanently affordable housing and programs like the Ward 8 Homebuyers Club have supported 122 renters in becoming homeowners--both inspired by civil rights-era land trusts (Groundwork NWA, 2023) to foster multigenerational wealth. A Booz Allen Hamilton partnership provided \$50,000 in assistance and \$8,000 grants to support 10 Black-owned businesses on Good Hope Road for marketing, financial management, and grant applications (Bloomberg, 2022) to ensure they thrive alongside the park's incoming development. The Equitable Development Task Force has set up measurable targets of chronologically implemented strategies; affordable housing was addressed immediately while small business development and other goals were aligned with the park's construction timeline (Urban Institute, 2021). In 2018, enough data had been collected to begin studying the park's impact on the four key facets (Next City, 2016); a model that may not be as evident with the other case studies.

Scarborough Context

Scarborough's socioeconomic landscape reveals both significant challenges and opportunities for development. In 2014, the City of Toronto identified eight Scarborough neighborhoods as Neighborhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), where these areas reflect a 21.4% incidence of low-income residents compared to 13% in Scarborough overall with a reported labor force unemployment rate of 16.1% (City of Toronto, 2024). While the median household income in Scarborough was slightly above the city-wide average of \$52,833 in 2005, a quarter of residents still lived below the low-income cut-off (Allen & Farber, 2019). These neighborhoods have borne the brunt of post-amalgamation neoliberal urban restructuring, marked by disinvestment and asymmetrical power dynamics as theorized by Fraser and Honneth (2003). With low social assistance rates to raise households above the poverty line, amidst skyrocketing costs of living (CBC, 2024), this context further underscores the critical need for targeted investments in these historically underserved communities.

Conclusion

Transit repurposing projects with an emphasis on equity, present unique opportunities to address historical legacies of disinvestment within marginalized communities. Coupling infrastructure development with strong community engagement could ensure economic opportunities are accessible to long-standing residents, rather than exclusively to incoming wealthier populations through transparent planning, robust partnerships, and phased implementation.

Recreation, Community & Culture

This theme seeks to discover how transit repurposing projects influence and are influenced by their communities. It discusses topics such as community engagement during project planning, empowering minorities, and providing recreational services.

Atlanta BeltLine

Focusing on the community usage and benefits of the BeltLine, the project has created extensive opportunities for community engagement and cultural expression. Along the multi-use trail system, art installations, parks, and urban green spaces serve as accessible hubs for recreation and social interaction, free of cost (CNBC, 2022). A particularly admirable aspect of the BeltLine is its role in fostering “whole communities,” where residents can access essential amenities like schools, grocery stores, healthcare facilities, and recreation within walking distance of the trail (CNBC, 2022). This not only enhances convenience but also promotes a sense of local identity and pride.

Additionally, the BeltLine's ability to empower residents both socially and psychologically has been a key factor in garnering support for the project. Palardy et al. (2018) show that greenways like the BeltLine foster a sense of community pride and cohesion with increased opportunities for social interactions and connections in the community. Furthermore, the economic benefits generated by the BeltLine, such as the establishment of small businesses and increased property values, further strengthen community ties and engagement (Palardy et al., 2018). This holistic, community-driven approach not only enhances residents' quality of life but also celebrates Atlanta's rich culture, making the BeltLine a model for other transit repurposing projects.

Cuernavaca Park

The key to Cuernavaca Park's success as a social infrastructure is its focus on addressing the needs of the community it serves (GSA, n.d.; SDUV, 2016). Only after receiving community approval was the project initiated and during the competition, community dialog sessions helped inform the jury that selected the winner of the community's concerns and community representatives helped advise the jury just before the final vote. The result of the competition was a park that provides a safe space for active transportation, sports, and play. It accomplishes this with its wide sidewalks, soccer, tennis, and skateboard parks, ample seating and tables, and a pleasant and shady environment from its urban forest and policing. Making space for recreation and other social events encourages community building (D. Guzman and D. Haris, personal communication, Nov 2024).

Additionally, the winning design chose to create a visual symbol of inclusion through a bold red line that crisscrosses the entire park (GSAs, n.d.). The line was intended to symbolize inclusion by appearing to sew the halves of the neighborhoods divided by the train tracks back together (GSA, n.d.).

New York City High Line

The High Line is geared towards being a space to be used by the community. Through implementing inclusive programs, the High Line is an inclusive project that aims to better lives for free.

Programs are available for school-aged children and provide interactive lessons to enhance their learning (theHighLine, n.d.). Free tours are available to better educate tourists on the various usages of the park, as well as local history (theHighline, n.d.). Local artists can use the park as a platform by being provided opportunities to showcase their art and performances (theHighline, n.d.).

The location of the park is in a popular neighborhood with the Chelsea food hall close by. Its location being in a prime area enhances the usage of the structure. It offers new views of the city and offers unique greenery in a busy city with skyscrapers at every corner.

11th Street Bridge Park

The 11th Street Bridge Park is characterized to be more than just a bridge; the incorporated design is aimed at bringing people together. At its heart lies the Mussel Beach Play Space, an 11,000-square-foot intergenerational area where families can gather and are surrounded by a central plaza, hammock grove, and community meeting spaces (HillRag, 2023) that invite connection and conversation. Separate from this play area is the amphitheater which is a dedicated space for cultural events and performances (Capps, 2022), which reinforces the park's mission to serve as an engagement hub.

BBAR's cultural programming reflects a deep commitment to honoring local history; the Lantern Walk in 2016, is rooted in the late 19th-century history of African Americans who built homes near Anacostia by candlelight and offer craft activities, musical performances, and commemorations led by local leaders and pastors to honor early residents (LISC DC, 2016). The Anacostia River Festival is another example of an annual event that draws over 9,000 attendees to celebrate the region's cultural assets (Building Bridges DC, n.d.).



Community-Driven Design of the 11th Street Bridge Park

Image: BBAR, 2024

Scarborough Context

Political scientist Robert Putnam (2001) conceptualizes social capital as the accumulation of networks and norms of reciprocity that underpin community cohesion. This dynamic is further enriched by Alejandro Portes' (2009) observation that social capital resides in the structure of relationships, manifesting through formal and informal interactions. Scarborough's residents experience this through neighborhood associations, community gardens, and social hubs such as community centers. (Basu & Fielder, 2017). Social capital has been proven to increase work performance, overall happiness, and life satisfaction in the context of well-being (Uphoff & Wijayaratna, 2000).

However, structural inequities and a legacy of suburban sprawl continue to impede Scarborough's potential for centralized community development. Popenoe (1979) argues that car-oriented infrastructure and disconnected public spaces generally isolate residents from social interaction. Further compounding these challenges, public discourse from the late 20th century has racialized Scarborough's identity by focusing on crime and aesthetics rather than addressing the structural barriers rooted in historical disinvestment (Anderson, 2010; Basu & Fielder, 2017).

Conclusion

By providing a free, public space that welcomes all members of the community and respects their needs, these projects have greatly contributed to building community bonds and wellness. All of the projects host or encourage events and programs that bring people together. Some specific contributions were the BeltLine's creation of economic opportunity to empower locals, Cuernavaca Park's recreational activities, the High Line's focus on art, and the 11th Street Bridge's commitment to its history.

Tourism and Identity

Tourism and project identity are key metrics for evaluating the success of a transit redevelopment project. Strong tourist attraction not only boosts usage, funding, and potential project development but can also promote local community and cultural expression if the project maintains a strong community-focused identity. Examining how various case studies balance tourism and community needs highlights how projects can form an inclusive and sustainable project.

Atlanta BeltLine

The BeltLine offers various attractions for visitors, such as bike and arboretum tours (Atlanta BeltLine Inc., 2024). A significant strength of the project is its free access, allowing tourists to explore local businesses, green spaces, and art installations along the trail. Visitors use the BeltLine not only as a means of transportation but also as a recreational space, making it appealing for both practical and leisure purposes. Ultimately, with the extensive array of attractions near the BeltLine, tourists have the flexibility to visit their most desired attraction and then seamlessly transition to explore other attractions.

However, a notable flaw of the BeltLine is its limited direct integration with MARTA, Atlanta's public transit system. While some portions of the trail are near MARTA stations, the overall connectivity could be improved to better serve visitors from downtown Atlanta and other parts of the city. This lack of public transit accessibility often forces visitors to rely on driving. The BeltLine has mitigated this issue by dividing the loop into sections with accessible parking at major trailheads, providing a partial solution (Weber et al., 2017).

Overall, the BeltLine is a valuable example of how tourism and community identity can coexist within a project.



A BeltLine Arboretum Tour

Image: Trees Atlanta

Cuernavaca Park

This park is an example of a repurposing project made to improve the day-to-day lives of residents as examined in the previous themes. It is open to the public and so might be used by tourists, but tourism was not a goal of the project (SDUV, 2016).

New York City High Line

The High Line project has increased tourism in the surrounding neighborhood. It is a popular tourist attraction, largely due to its history and its location. Scholars claim it symbolizes how cities approach urban renewal projects by prioritizing tourism and attempting to showcase how nature and greenery are incorporated into cityscapes (Blewett et al., 2023). The structures' uniqueness in being an elevated greenscape in the heart of the downtown center of New York City increases its popularity.

However, due to the influx of around 8 million visitors using the High Line annually, there have been rising costs in the neighborhood with the local neighborhood becoming an iconic destination (dsrny, n.d.).

The park's features encourage visitors to spend time in their day, with walking tours available to learn about the projects' history before construction (theHighLine, n.d.). The structures' various programs and experiences offer visitors a taste of what the city has to offer in an iconic historic location (theHighLine, n.d.).

11th Street Bridge

The Park aims to redefine the Anacostia River as not just a natural resource, but a cultural and social landmark, in transforming the once-neglected waterway into a symbol of unity for Washington, D.C. As the city's first elevated park built atop of an abandoned highway, its striking X-shaped design and proximity to landmarks like the Navy Yard and Anacostia Park position it to become a new icon for the city (Building Bridges Across the River, n.d.).

While it is deeply rooted in community engagement and adjacent development (for the residents) such as seen by Cuernavaca Park, the bridge park also aspires to be a destination where visitors can experience a blend of recreation, education, and cultural programming like the New York City's High Line. Successful past events like the Anacostia River Festival (drew over 8,000 attendees) (Capps, 2022), signify the park's potential to bring diverse groups together.



The Highline on a busy summer day, filled with tourists.

Image: pisaphotography

Scarborough Context

Tourism provides a significant portion of Toronto's GDP, roughly 3.5 billion in 2022 despite the pandemic (City of Toronto, 2022). Tourism in Scarborough typically involves nature escapes and related activities such as the Scarborough Bluffs and the Toronto Zoo (Destination Toronto, n.d.) The dependence on cars and other road vehicles identified in the transportation section is also a barrier to tourism in Scarborough. Supplementing the district's bike network might alleviate some of the strain on other transportation methods while providing eco-tourists a new destination much like Scarborough's Meadoway (Hynes, 2022).

Conclusion

In the SRT's redevelopment, tourism and identity could draw from these examples to balance local community needs with tourism goals. The BeltLine demonstrates how local businesses can be built in a project to attract visitors. The High Line emphasizes the importance of maintaining neighborhood appeal to tourists in an extensive, overwhelming city. Cuernavaca Park shows that projects don't have to prioritize tourism to succeed. At the same time, the 11th Street Bridge highlights how events and programming can attract visitors without altering a project's core community focus.



The Scarborough Bluffs

Image: Laslovarga

Sustainability and Health

A project's sustainability includes the way it was designed as well as how it currently functions. Further ensuring the project positively contributes to a community's health and wellbeing is an important aspect to consider when planning a repurposing project.

Atlanta BeltLine

The BeltLine emphasizes sustainability not only through its promotion of active transportation but also through the creation and maintenance of extensive urban green spaces, most notably the Atlanta BeltLine Arboretum (Trees Atlanta, 2024). Managed by Trees Atlanta, the arboretum encompasses 85 acres of urban green space, including 46 acres of planted areas and 39 acres undergoing natural restoration (Trees Atlanta, 2024). The Arboretum hosts over 9,000 plants, featuring 369 unique tree and shrub species, as well as meadows of native grasses and wildflowers (Trees Atlanta, 2024). Furthermore, these green spaces provide critical ecosystem services such as improved air quality, recreational opportunities, and environmental education (Immergluck & Balan, 2018).

Perhaps most importantly, the partnership between Trees Atlanta, a nonprofit, community-focused organization, and Atlanta BeltLine Inc. is a strong model of successful community engagement. This partnership demonstrates how involving community members in sustainable action backed by science can enhance urban health and help build a connection between residents and their environment.

Cuernavaca Park

One of the goals of the park was to provide greenspace in a city that has very little available (SDUV, 2016). This took the form of water reservoirs displayed prominently along the park intended to celebrate the conservation and sustainable use of

water (GSA, n.d.). Wastewater is captured and cleaned to support a small urban forest. This visual of reusing and storing water for something publicly available and beautiful can be seen as a way to help normalize sustainable practices. The park was intended to serve the local community, and these symbols were enshrined in the park for the community.

New York City High Line

Sustainability is a core aspect of the High Line. The operation of activities that take place is designed to be as sustainable as possible, with the local community being a priority (theHighLine, n.d.). With greenery being a core element of the park, the maintenance team ensures the species included in the project will thrive in the climate and are grown locally (theHighLine, n.d.). Any chemicals that are used on the High Line are not harmful to local species in the park, and if deemed necessary, snow and pests will be removed manually (theHighLine, n.d.). The park attempts to thrive off the land by recycling any nutrients to benefit multiple plants at a time (theHighLine, n.d.). The park's sustainability is a stand-out feature as it is in the core area of a busy and polluted city.

11th Street Bridge

The Park is a driver of environmental stewardship embedded within dynamic community programming. At the end of 2023, stakeholders revealed plans for an Environmental Education Center that will be operated by the Anacostia Watershed Society in hosting exhibitions, facilitating school group visits, and outdoor demonstrations. An adjacent kayak launch will allow visitors to engage with river and wetland restoration efforts, all supported by a \$6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce (Capps, 2022). The park also bolsters food access by community-supported agriculture through the Building Bridges Initiative, with over 20,000 pounds of produce and a generation of \$20,000 in income for community farmers at the THEARC Farm and six Bridge Park plots.

The efforts were channeled to 366 local families who received subsidized shares of fresh fruits and vegetables for a span of six or more weeks (Building Bridges Across the River, n.d.) which serves as a testament to the park's commitment to promoting resilient local food systems.

Scarborough Context

The walkability of a neighborhood has been linked with the overall health of its residents (Baobeid et al., 2021). The SRT would help with three components of walkability: the number of essential services within walking distance, the proximity to public transit, and the amount of green space available. Active transport in Scarborough is not well supported and has the highest per capita rates of pedestrian fatalities from vehicle collisions in the city (Sorensen et al., 2021). Additionally, about a quarter of Scarborough households are unable to drive. These issues are barriers to attaining Toronto's Vision Zero, a pledge to end traffic injuries (CT, n.d.)



The Meadoway Project, Scarborough

Image: The Meadoway

Conclusion

Many of these case studies maintenance and operation heavily considered sustainable and responsible water management. Furthermore, projects aim to provide the local communities with a green space that offers a break from the hectic urban life the communities are located in. Researching species of plants and other greenery, to ensure they will thrive in the local environment and are not invasive is an important step to consider.

Technical Considerations

The potential redevelopment of the SRT presents unique technical considerations, particularly in terms of its **elevated structure** and **winter climate**. Drawing from case studies like the New York City High Line, Toronto Bentway, and Cape Cod Rail Trail, this section examines how elevation and winter maintenance are addressed in other urban repurposing projects to inform practical management and design recommendations for a potential SRT repurposing project.

The structure of the section that follows is organized by technical considerations with Scarborough context integrated into the subsections, as the case study findings are closely tied to the context of Scarborough.

Elevation

The elevated nature of the SRT corridor offers both opportunities and challenges for its redevelopment. The **New York City High Line** demonstrates how an elevated structure can be successfully transformed into a vibrant urban greenway. Its elevation provides unique perspectives of the city. This transformation highlights the potential for an SRT repurposing project to be built on the elevated infrastructure that would provide a unique view of Scarborough, while still maintaining the infrastructure below.

In contrast, the **Toronto Bentway** utilizes the space beneath an elevated highway, offering a different perspective on how to maximize city infrastructure and land area (The Bentway, 2024). The Bentway area uses the natural sheltered area below to provide year-round programming that mitigates the heat of the summer and the effect of winter snow, ice, and wind.

Both approaches demonstrate how elevated infrastructure can maximize urban space by maintaining functional systems both above and below. These examples suggest that the SRT's elevated design could support a combination of vibrant community programming above the structure while potentially activating spaces beneath elevated segments to enhance accessibility and functionality.

Winter Maintenance

Winter usability is a critical technical consideration for the SRT, given Scarborough's long, harsh winter. The **Toronto Bentway** offers a successful model for winter-specific public activities, notably through its popular ice skating trail. Managed by the Bentway Conservancy, this attraction not only attracts visitors during the winter but also ensures consistent usage of the space year-round (The Bentway, 2024). The integration of seasonal amenities like skating or winter markets could similarly enhance the appeal and functionality of the SRT during winter (The Bentway, 2024).

In contrast, the **Cape Cod Rail Trail** adopts a low-maintenance approach during the winter months. Instead of plowing or deicing, the trail is left for informal community uses like cross-country skiing or snowshoeing (Dartnell et al., 2021; Mass.Gov, 2024). This cost-effective management aligns with the trail's primary focus on summertime tourism and biking activity.

For a potential SRT repurposing project it will be essential to assess (1) the economic and space constraints of winter programming and (2) the public demand for winter amenities, especially given the potential disparity in summertime and winter usage.

Recommendations

Project Buy-In

Gain support from high-trust organizations and/or experienced city planners. They can bridge the gap between residents and the government by advocating for resident needs and gaining project momentum.

Leverage design competitions. Competitions have the potential to bring in creative ideas that combine both technical expertise and community input. However, without enough transparency, they can create the illusion of community involvement instead.

Form a full-time coalition working on the project. Dedicated coalitions of local organizations such as charities with shared community-oriented ideals can steward large-scale initiatives, without straining the city's resources.

Emphasize equitable community engagement early on. Transit repurposing projects can lead to gentrification and other forms of inequality. Through community engagement, park leaders can act on residential concerns for the project's concept while holding space for conversations on mitigating displacement.

Define equity measures by engaging with thought partners early on. Planning early to involve experts in planning, development, labor markets, and community building to fully understand key equity measures within the project's impact area.

Make the project more than just a mode of transportation. Repurposing projects can be more than a way to enhance mobility. They can help form social bonds, celebrate culture, and contribute to inclusive economic development.

Project Maintenance

Tourist attraction and project identity should center the project around the community. By promoting small businesses, local artists, and cultural events, both locals and tourists have a way to engage with the space meaningfully and not conflictually.

Form partnerships with specialized organizations focusing on specific project aspects. Transit repurposing projects involve managing many aspects like economic development, environmental sustainability, and community concerns. City collaboration would help ensure targeted, effective solutions in project management.

Forge strategic collaborations with organizations to build capacity and attract public-private investments. Public-private funding mechanisms are key to the project's development and long-term maintenance, including philanthropic donations, grants, and municipal support.

Ensure public transparency with robust metrics tracking and annual reports of key indicators. A transparent, data-driven framework of an actionable wishlist through a public website ensures accountability on equitable initiatives such as grants disbursed to local businesses, demographic impact of workforce programs, or affordable housing initiatives.

Keep community at the heart of the project. A small-scale project design providing space for active transport and recreation is also a possible direction for the SRT.

Conclusion

We believe Scarborough has the potential for a repurposing project that can address its need for better active transport networks. It can also be a tool to help bridge equity gaps, showcase local culture, create inclusive economic opportunity and celebrate the district's natural beauty.

Limitations

There are some important limitations of this research project to take note before using this report to inform decisions.

It is important to note that no author of this report resides in Scarborough. Despite conducting research and engaging in conversations to better understand the topic at hand, the authors lack the necessary lived experiences to best comprehend what is wanted. This project does not solely focus on the student demographic as this course requests. Moreover, it is important to note that many conditions in these case studies differ from Scarborough, especially socioeconomic factors and weather conditions. Lastly, it has been challenging to get in contact with the organizers of some projects, leaving gaps in information in some case studies compared to the ones we were able to conduct interviews.

Next Steps

The selected case studies primarily serve pedestrians and cyclists, offering green spaces and recreational areas. Notably, they do not incorporate dedicated bus lanes alongside these pathways but are designed to prioritize non-motorized transportation.

With the interim operation of the Busway 3 until the opening of the Scarborough Subway Extension (SSE), a more notable case study would be Bogotá's TransMilenio, where they dedicate urban road space to Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alongside pedestrian and cyclist facilities. If the Scarborough Line 3 RT corridor were redeveloped with similar principles, it could become North America's first flagship model for an integrated multi-modal transportation.

The repurposing of Scarborough's SRT corridor represents an unprecedented opportunity to address long-standing socioeconomic and infrastructure disparities within the region. By adopting an inclusive economic development approach, this project can create sustainable pathways for workforce development, support local businesses, and foster meaningful community benefits. Programs that prioritize the involvement of Black and diverse youth, with partnerships with local social enterprises, and investments in local procurement of skilled employment will maximize the socioeconomic impact of the initiative.

Whether through workforce programs, affordable housing initiatives, or community-focused design, these repurposing projects demonstrate that transit infrastructure can be a catalyst for inclusive growth. Scarborough's unique context demands a tailored approach that addresses local needs, especially in providing economic opportunities and diversifying transit nodes.

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Appendix: Interview Template

Question	Candidates' Response	Notes
Context		
Talk about our project and ask for advice: Focusing on the early stage of development and getting it from the ground up.		
Governance and Community Buy-In		
How did the project secure buy-in from both the community and government in its early stages? How did you convince the community the project should be built?		
How did you approach potential partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, or private entities?		
How did you manage the permitting, approvals, and regulatory processes?		
Early Funding and Partnerships		
What sources of initial funding were pursued? Any specific strategies to appeal to funders?		
Was there any philanthropic or grant support in the beginning?		
Community Engagement		
What community engagement tactics did you find were most effective in building trust and ensuring the project reflected residents' needs?		
Iconic Destination		
What was the attractive point to get community traction/user rate up?		