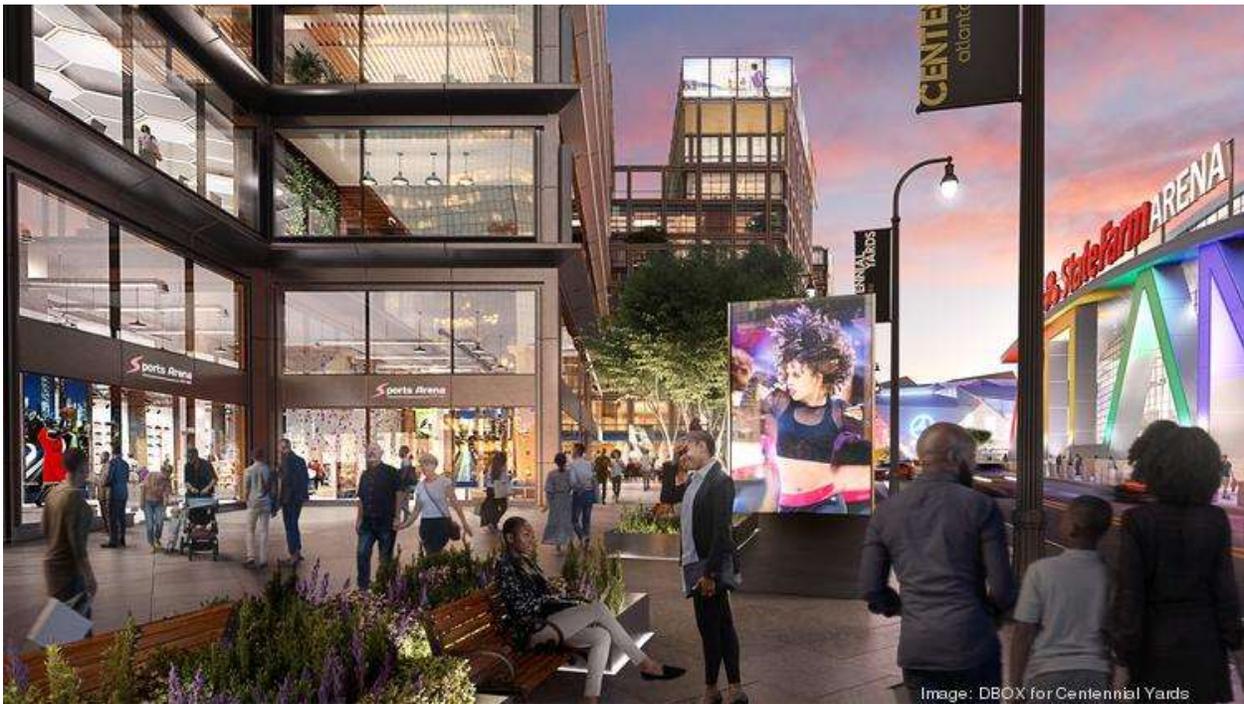


# ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE

## 'Revisit our city's history': Could Amtrak bolster Downtown Atlanta?



*A rendering for Centennial Yards.*



By Tyler Wilkins – Reporter, Atlanta Business Chronicle - May 24, 2022

A local official is calling for restoring Downtown Atlanta's status as a railroad hub, a move that could heighten interest in the central business district.

Atlanta City Councilmember Jason Dozier has introduced a resolution urging passenger train company Amtrak to locate a hub at The Gulch. For decades, the 50-acre site once set aside for railroad tracks has consisted of surface parking in the shadow of the city's premiere sporting arenas.

“Atlanta has always been a railroad town,” Dozier told Atlanta Business Chronicle. “We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to revisit our city's history in a way that we unfortunately destroyed in the ‘60s and ‘70s.”

## **Downtown's development potential**

The councilmember envisions the transit hub as part of CIM Group's plan to turn The Gulch into Centennial Yards. The developer hopes to create a lively district that incorporates restaurants, retail and residential spaces near State Farm Arena and Mercedes Benz Stadium, similar to The Battery development around Truist Park in Cobb County.

The \$5 billion development is expected to act as a catalyst for reenergizing South Downtown — now home to tourist attractions, aging office buildings and government facilities — by bringing residents into the district.

An Amtrak hub could enhance the desirability of developing in South Downtown, said John Boyd, a site selection expert with Boyd & Company Inc. The introduction of new transit systems often spurs mixed-use projects with affordable housing, he said, referencing the Brightline and Tri-Rail networks in Florida.

South Downtown was once home to Terminal Station — one of Atlanta's main train stations that connected passengers to other cities across Georgia and the Southeast. The Richard B. Russell Federal Building now sits on the site of the former station, which was demolished in the 1970s.

## **Attracting companies to Downtown**

Economic development officials often tout robust transportation systems when competing for corporate relocations. An Amtrack hub could bolster the efforts of attracting new companies to Centennial Yards.

Brian McGowan, president of CIM Group's Centennial Yards Co., sees the area as a site for a potential corporate tech expansion, similar in scale to Microsoft Corp.'s incoming Grove Park campus, which could house up to 15,000 employees.

As a way to attract and retain young talent, companies often view transit as a box to check when looking for new office space. For example, Microsoft's planned campus is near a MARTA station. Uptown Atlanta, a development in south Buckhead, is seeing growing interest, in part because of its future BeltLine connections and proximity to MARTA.

So far, Midtown has scored many of the city's major corporate relocations in the past few years. It's one of the most highly sought after neighborhoods for young professionals moving to the area.

“I see South Downtown as being the next frontier in that type of investment,” Dozier said. “A federal investment through Amtrak would help provide even a stronger signal that we’re here to stay.”

An Amtrak connection could be especially important to professionals relocating to Atlanta from major metro areas like New York and New Jersey that already have efficient regional transit systems, Boyd said.

“The zeitgeist of the nation is with mass transit, given record-high gas prices, inflation and ESG (environmental, social and governance) initiatives,” Boyd said. “A lot of companies, particularly in the tech sector, are prioritizing and incentivizing workers to use mass transit.”

### **Amtrak's nationwide expansion**

About a year ago, Amtrak released its preliminary vision for expanding service across the U.S. over the next 15 years. The \$75 billion plan, requiring federal funding, would include 39 new routes and 25 enhanced routes.

The agency foresees Atlanta becoming a transit hub to connect other major Southeastern cities, such as Chattanooga, Nashville, Charlotte and Birmingham. It’d also link the state capital to other Georgia cities, including Macon and Savannah.

Amtrak operates a station on Peachtree Road between Buckhead and Midtown, though it offers few direct connections to other major Southeastern cities. Neither Amtrak nor CIM Group responded to Atlanta Business Chronicle’s requests for comment on the resolution.