NORTHERN BELTLINE FACTS

- The proposed Northern Beltline north and west of Birmingham has raised serious questions from local communities, taxpayers, and conservation groups about whether this project is best for greater Birmingham, from an environmental, economic, and transportation perspective. The 52-mile, 6-lane highway will cost taxpayers $5.342 Billion, or $102.7 Million per mile. It will be the most expensive road project in the history of Alabama, and one of the most expensive (per mile) ever built in the nation.

- The road will cross and permanently alter Black Warrior and Cahaba river tributaries in 90 places and wetlands in 35 places (including impacts to 2 major sources of drinking water). It will destroy 3,078 football fields’ worth of forest. This route is the most ecologically destructive of the 7 routes initially considered by the Alabama Department of Transportation. (See Map #1)

- If completed, the road would only relieve 1-3% of traffic on I-20/59 through downtown Birmingham, and it will not reroute significant truck traffic. In fact, traffic will increase on the heavily-congested section of I-59 through Trussville and Argo.

- Construction of the Northern Beltline has been ranked 36th in priority by the Regional Planning Commission, yet it is being prioritized by ALDOT and the Birmingham Business Alliance over much-needed fixes for current traffic, safety, and maintenance problems.

- As a result of the 2012 federal transportation bill known as MAP-21, potential future funding considered for this road can now be spent on other road and bridge projects around Birmingham, and throughout the state, that are critically needed. Map #2 shows a sample of unfunded projects in metro Birmingham that could all be completed for over $1 billion less than the cost of the Northern Beltline. These 63 projects include widening I-65, improving Hwy. 280, widening I-59/20, and completing all 50 of the Regional Planning Commission’s visionary projects in the region. All of these other projects will generate jobs and long-term economic health, and they now compete directly with the Beltline for limited federal funding.

- According to the Congressional Budget Office, the federal Highway Trust Fund, which provides money for most major transportation projects throughout Alabama, is “unsustainable.” “Starting in fiscal year 2015, the trust fund will have insufficient amounts to meet all of its obligations, resulting in steadily accumulating shortfalls.” Even without pursuing the $5.342 billion Beltline, ALDOT already currently has a backlog of traffic, safety, and maintenance projects. The Beltline will make it harder to meet these ongoing needs.

- Public mass transit infrastructure can be funded with future would-be Beltline dollars according to the new federal transportation bill. Pursuing this missing transportation link in the greater Birmingham area may be a better investment for the region.

- To improve regional connectivity for Jefferson County and create jobs, ALDOT should consider more functional alternatives like extending Corridor X beyond I-65 and Hwy. 31 to I-59, instead of sinking well over $5 billion into the Beltline.

- Any development that occurs along the Beltline route will likely not be “new” growth, but rather a redistribution of growth, capital, and jobs from older developed areas, producing empty homes, storefronts, and blight as has already occurred in parts of the Birmingham region. Even ALDOT has predicted that the road, if completed over three decades from now, will only attract 2,200 residents and 2,800 permanent jobs in the vicinity of the 52-mile corridor.

- A small handful of corporate landowners in the path of the road stand to gain financially. They, along with road building, mining, development, and utility interests, are driving the support for this $5.342 billion project along this chosen route, which has little transportation benefit for the region. (See Map #3 produced by The Birmingham News).

- The large price tag of the road does not take into account the significant extra cost of sewer and other infrastructure that must be installed for the area to be developed. (See Map #4 – Jefferson County’s Sewer Infrastructure). The major costs of extending water lines, power lines, local roads, public safety services, and schools have yet to be factored into the Beltline’s overall price.

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2 FHWA, ALDOT, Final Environmental Impact Statement (June 26, 1997).
7 ALDOT, FHWA, Final Environmental Impact Statement Reevaluation, March 2012, Appendix L.
Aquatic Environmental Impacts
Northern Beltline - Proposed Route

All mapped intersections fall within a 300ft. route corridor. Intersected aquatic areas are represented with points and have been moved slightly to avoid label overlap.

GIS Data Sources:
- Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
- US Census Bureau, National Wetlands Inventory (USFWS)
- National Hydrography Dataset (USGS)
- Tele Atlas

Legend:
- Stream Impact
- Wetland/Pond Impact
- Stream Name
- 300ft Corridor Analyzed
- Highlighted Route
- River
- Lake/Reservoir/Pond

Last updated: December 11, 2013 | Created by Jovian Sackett
Sampling of Birmingham-area Transportation Projects Now Competing with the $5.342 Billion Northern Beltline for Limited Federal Funding

Map created by Jovian Sackett. Updated by Shannon Groff. Last updated: December 09, 2015
Data Sources: Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham; USGS; Tele Atlas; & US Census Bureau
While still a steelmaker, much of the company’s recent activity here has been residential and commercial development. Examples include Trace Crossings, Ross Bridge and The Preserve in Hoover and Grand River in Leeds.

With one active mine left in Jefferson County, Drummond is also in the real estate business, at Liberty Park on I-459. Bruce Windom, the company’s vice president for government affairs, said the company supports the beltline project for the improvements it would make to the road network. He said Drummond doesn’t have any immediate plans for land it owns near the beltline.

Gene Taylor, the chairman of Alawest and owner of Warrior Tractor and Equipment Co. in Northport, said Alawest land is being managed for timber and the company has a small coal mining operation.

Walter, which is moving its headquarters to Birmingham, holds current and former mining land in the county and supports the beltline.

The nearly 6,000 acres near Gardendale owned by the McDonald family was offered for sale to Forever Wild for a nature preserve. Forever Wild declined. A family representative said there are no particular plans for the forested acres.

A subsidiary of Cliffs Natural Resources Inc., Oak Grove mines high-grade coal that is used in the steel-making process.

The international chemical and materials company.

Land amassed by the Walker family of northeast Jefferson County. Used for recreation and timber. Family members said they have no development plans.

Tracts owned by members of the Tutwiler family, which historically was involved in mining and industry.
Proposed Northern Beltline and Existing Sewer Infrastructure in Jefferson County, AL

Legend:
- Jefferson County Sewer System Service Area
- Northern Beltline
- County Boundary

Jefferson County Sewer Service Area map layer was created by digitizing polygons around existing sewer infrastructure shown on a georeferenced TIFF of the map, Jefferson County Sanitary Sewers & Basins. This map layer is a generalization of true sewer service area, based on the best available data provided to SELC by Jefferson County, AL. Northern Beltline proposed route GIS data is derived from Birmingham MPO maps and Regional Planning Commission data, and is not a substitute for survey data. Additional GIS data sources include Bing Maps Road basemap layer via ArcGIS Online.

Disclaimer:
This map is intended for illustrative purposes only.
Last updated: April 17, 2012

Southern Environmental Law Center