

ONLY ON AJC: TORPY AT LARGE

## TORPY: Bikes, scooters and walkers collide in Beltline free-for-all

Safety on a crowded Beltline “takes a tremendous amount of consideration for other people. And we as Americans aren’t considerate of others.”



An afternoon in March 2020 with walkers and riders competing for limited path space on the Atlanta Beltline. (Curtis Compton/AJC)



It was a pleasant evening in late March, and Patrisiya Rumyantseva was walking the Beltline near Piedmont Park to blow off workday stress.

As she strolled on the right edge of the pavement, she noticed a blur, then a green basket slamming into her gut. It was a Lime e-bike, a 70-pound contraption with a grown man atop speeding directly into her.

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The impact drove her to the concrete and she hit her head.

Rumyantseva, a 22-year-old Georgia Tech computer science student, said details are blurry after that. A group of people gathered; she was crying and embarrassed at the attention and waved off the bystanders. The e-bike rider said something about trying to avoid a person walking a dog.

She told those around her she was OK and started walking home. A couple blocks later, she had to sit down against a tree and call her mother. They drove to Grady Hospital.

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Credit: Bill Torpy

Patrisiya Rumyantseva takes a look at the Atlanta Beltline's rules. She was struck by a Lime e-bike a month earlier and knocked to the pavement, where she hit her head. (Bill Torpy/AJC)

Her mother said her daughter's mistake was to not get names of the witnesses and the Lime rider. But, remember, she took a hard knock to the head and wasn't thinking clearly.

There is seemingly no data for such incidents. But her injury isn't uncommon. While researching this, I've heard of a broken pelvis and a broken arm in other accidents.

Out on the wild and woolly Beltline, it's every pedestrian for him or her self.

"You can see, I'm 6 feet and a muscular person," Rumyantseva told me. "If this happened to someone small or older, this could be fatal."

Those riding Lime scooters and e-bikes get liability insurance with their rental. And that's not a bad idea because many of those atop a scooter or e-bike have no clue what they're doing.



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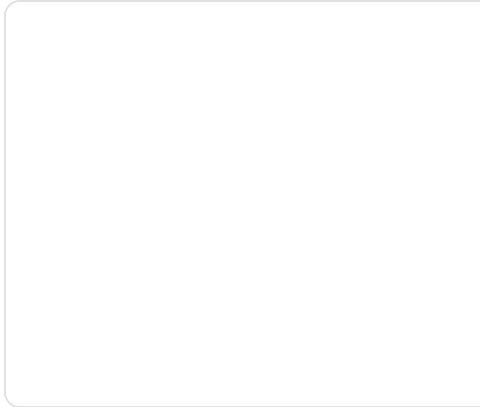
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injured in accidents, rarely takes cases from the Beltline. A bike rider himself, he says there are too many variables about who's at fault or questions about insurance. If a car is involved, insurance is more clear-cut. But there are no cars — or motorbikes — on the Beltline.

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There is every other kind of wheeled device, however: bicycles, e-bikes, scooters, skate boards, roller blades, etc. And that's mixed with thousands and thousands of pedestrians of all kinds — and attention spans.

While waiting to talk with Rumyantseva on the trail one evening, I stood at a spot on the busy Eastside Beltline not far from where she was struck and counted more than 180 people afoot and about 80 folks on wheels. And that was in just 20 minutes.

As it was constructed, designers of the 22-mile Beltline have set aside a 40-foot right away for a light rail line to be built. That sits next to the well-used bike and walking path, which is 14 feet wide, with asphalt extensions on each side.





Credit: Courtesy

Attorney Bruce Hagen does a lot of business in the bicycle accident business. He says he gets calls about mishaps on the Beltline but rarely takes them because liability is harder to prove and insurance is iffy. (Courtesy)

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Recently, [Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens](#) tiptoed away from starting with a rail line on the Eastside trail, saying he wants to put it on the Beltline's Southside trail, which is closer to



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to add a second path for a couple miles on the popular Eastside path between DeKalb Avenue and Piedmont Park. This would separate the “wheels,” as they say, from the “heels,” and make everyone happy. (Except, of course, fans of rail.)

Hagen recently rode that congested two-mile stretch on a Sunday afternoon.

“It was like (the game) Frogger. You’re trying to find a lane. You’re slowing down, saying, ‘On your left. On your left.’ People are walking three across. There’s double strollers. People are walking dogs with retractable leashes. People are wearing headphones.”

Granted, some bicycle riders can be obnoxious. But walkers are often clueless, zigzagging, stopping suddenly and walking three or four abreast. And like Hagen said — those retractable dog leashes are an absolute menace.

Safety on a crowded Beltline, he said, “takes a tremendous amount of consideration for other people. And we as Americans aren’t considerate of others.”

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No, we are not.

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Commissioner George Dusenbury works on trimming bushes during a community service project, which was a part of then-Mayor Kasim Reed's inauguration schedule of events, at Washington Park in Atlanta on Jan. 4, 2014. (Courtesy)

George Dusenbury, once Atlanta's park commissioner and now the Georgia director of Trust for Public Land, [was an early backer of the Beltline 20-plus years ago.](#)

He says installing a second parallel trail, especially with the mayor dropping the Eastside light rail plan, would be a good idea — even on an interim basis.

“We have seen conflict between people who want to go fast and others who don’t,” he said. “The Beltline really has become that defining space in Atlanta. We want it to continue in that function.”

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Beltline CEO Clyde Higgs says there are signs along the way spelling out “trail etiquette.” He also is sticking with some form of transit on the trail.

“The number of people who use the trail also underscores the need for transit,” he said in a statement. “We need to preserve the right of way on the corridor for a transit solution that will ensure there’s enough space for all of us on the trail — those on foot, on wheels and on future transit.”

Beltline rail backers say a second path for bikes would add more concrete and that plans for the light rail envision the tracks running on manicured grass. But with Atlanta’s scorching summers and the city’s maintenance regime, I see it quickly turning into a dusty path.

I’d say go ahead and build a second trail and make it the best linear park it can be. Make it better for those already enjoying it.

*That* would be public service.

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**Editor’s Note:** *This story has been updated to reflect that Beltline officials want some sort of transit on the trail, but not necessarily light rail.*



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Bill Torpy, who writes about metro Atlanta for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, joined the newspaper in 1990.

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