



I-20 EAST TRANSIT INITIATIVE

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: What is the I-20 East Transit Initiative?

A: The I-20 East Transit Initiative is a two-part analysis and evaluation of proposed alternatives and potential environmental impacts associated with the development of high-capacity transit service from downtown Atlanta to the Mall at Stonecrest in southeastern DeKalb County. The first part of the Initiative began in 2010 with the initiation of a detailed corridor analysis (DCA) which narrowed a number of modal and alignment options in the I-20 corridor to eight viable alternatives. These eight alternatives were subsequently evaluated against a series of corridor goals and objectives, resulting in the selection and adoption by the MARTA Board of Directors of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) in April 2012. The second part of the I-20 East Transit Initiative is a federally-sponsored environmental review of the LPA. This review is ongoing.

Q: What is the “Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)?”

A: The LPA represents the option most supported by the local community. The adopted LPA consists of two projects: 1) new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service operating between the MARTA Five Points rail station along I-20 HOV lanes to a new transit station at Wesley Chapel Road; and 2) a 12-mile extension of the MARTA heavy rail transit (HRT) line from the Indian Creek station south to Wesley Chapel Road and east to a new station at the Mall at Stonecrest. MARTA intends to implement the LPA in phases, with BRT constructed first followed by the HRT extension project.

Q: How was the LPA selected?

A: Eight transit alternatives were considered in the DCA. The alternatives were evaluated against a set of detailed measures of effectiveness, reflecting six goals identified for a transit improvement in the I-20 East corridor:

1. Increase Mobility and Accessibility
2. Improve Transit Service
3. Support Land Use and Development
4. Promote Cost Effective Investments
5. Preserve the Natural and Build Environment
6. Achieve a High Level of Community Support

Of the eight alternatives considered, the adopted LPA was found to best meet these goals. The LPA is intended to improve east-west mobility and accessibility to jobs and housing by providing a high-capacity transit alternative in the I-20 East corridor. In addition, the project will provide opportunities for economic development and support revitalization efforts as planning partners in the corridor, including the City of Atlanta and Fulton and DeKalb Counties, prepare for anticipated future growth.

Q: What is BRT?

A: BRT is a high-capacity, reliable, and safe public transit service that uses modern buses on roadways or dedicated lanes to quickly and efficiently transport passengers to their destinations. BRT combines the reliability, comfort, and amenities of rail transit with the flexibility and comparatively lower cost of bus service. BRT systems typically take advantage of either dedicated or managed lanes to achieve higher speeds and reliability, or general purpose lanes complemented by operational features like traffic signal prioritization (TSP) - which extends green lights and shortens red lights for buses on roadways - or “queue jumper” lanes which give buses the ability to bypass regular vehicular traffic at intersections. Other featured amenities include enhanced passenger waiting facilities with real time (“next bus”) information systems, off-board fare collection, and “branded” vehicles which distinguish the BRT system from other regional bus services.



Q: Why does the LPA consist of two completely different projects?

A: The LPA addresses the need for implementing safe and reliable rapid transit in the I-20 East corridor with a minimal number of impacts and at as low a cost as possible. While the DCA considered several new “fixed guideway” rail and bus options inside the Perimeter (I-285), they were deemed to have significant environmental impacts on adjacent communities, not to mention carry high capital costs. On the other hand, new BRT service taking advantage of the existing I-20 HOV lane delivered many of the benefits of these guideway alternatives with fewer impacts and at a lower cost. BRT running on I-20 further provides for a new premium transit mode in a portion of DeKalb County with few public transportation options.

Because no HOV lanes exist (or are planned) east of I-285, construction of a new transit guideway will be required outside of the Perimeter. By extending the MARTA Blue Line to the Mall at Stonecrest, the HRT component of the LPA provides a direct one-seat ride from southern DeKalb County to downtown Atlanta. The proposed HRT alignment is designed to minimize impacts to surrounding areas, although some will occur and are being addressed in the current environmental review.

Q: What are the next steps in advancing the LPA?

A: The BRT and HRT components of the LPA are being evaluated in separate environmental studies, sponsored by MARTA in partnership with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). An Environmental Assessment is being prepared for the BRT project, and an Environmental Impact Statement is being prepared for the HRT project. It is anticipated that these documents will be shared with the public for their review in the Spring of 2015. Public outreach meetings will be held at this time to describe the results of the evaluation and provide an opportunity for public comment.

Q: What are an Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Statement? Why are they necessary?

A: The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that any federally-funded infrastructure project be subject to an analysis of its impacts to the human and natural environment. NEPA further requires that federal agencies disclose the results of such analyses and solicit comments on the proposed project from interested and affected parties. The NEPA process and its associated documentation provides for complete disclosure of a project’s anticipated benefits and environmental impacts; allows the public an opportunity to provide input and comment on the proposed project and its impacts; and provides the appropriate information for decision-making to select a reasoned choice among alternatives.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared for projects in which the significance of environmental impacts is not clearly established. An EA document includes brief discussions of the need for the project, alternatives considered, and the environmental impacts of the proposed project and alternatives. Should the environmental analysis, public comment on the analysis, and interagency review throughout the EA process find a project to have no significant impacts on the quality of the environment, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is issued by the lead federal agency (in this case FTA) to conclude the process.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared for proposed infrastructure projects where it is expected that significant impacts will occur to the human and natural environment. An EIS is a document that details the process through which a transportation project was developed, including an analysis of potential impacts resulting from the project. Where significant impacts are found, they must be disclosed, and, to the extent possible, the project sponsors must commit to the implementation of measures which mitigate them. An EIS provides for ample public and community participation throughout the study process. After extensive opportunities for public review and comment, the process concludes with a Record of Decision (ROD) outlining project impacts and mitigation measures.



Q: What impacts are being examined during the environmental studies?

A: Impacts examined during the environmental review process include transportation, land use, aesthetic, historic, cultural, economic, social, and a range of natural resources (for example, air quality, wildlife, soils, and geology), whether direct, indirect, or cumulative. Direct effects are caused by a project and occur at the same time and place. Indirect effects are caused by a project later in time but are still reasonably foreseeable. Cumulative effects result from the incremental impact of a project when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Q: How will the LPA be funded?

A: MARTA intends to seek funding for 50 percent of the capital costs of the project through FTA's Capital Investment Grant program. MARTA is also exploring additional revenue sources including the potential for funding through public-private partnerships and other alternative finance and project delivery methods.

Q: When will the LPA be constructed?

A: Following completion of the federal environmental review process, MARTA must identify and secure sufficient funding for the design, construction and operation of the BRT and HRT projects. The timing of these key financial decisions is unknown at this time. Accordingly, a schedule for construction of the projects has not yet been established. It is assumed that BRT will be constructed first, followed by the implementation of the HRT extension in two phases (the first to Wesley Chapel Road, followed by a second extension to the Mall at Stonecrest).

Q: What happens after the conclusion of the current environmental review process?

A: MARTA will advance the level of engineering and design needed to refine the project scopes and capital cost estimates, as well as continue with the aforementioned analysis of potential funding sources. This technical work also supports the development of specific criteria that FTA uses to evaluate the merits of transit projects pursuing Federal discretionary funding. MARTA intends to keep the public informed of the progress of the projects as they advance in the Federal funding pipeline.

Q: How can I find out more about the I-20 East Transit Initiative?

A: There are many ways to learn more about the I-20 East Transit Initiative.

- ▶ Contact Janide Sidifall, the MARTA Project Manager, at (404) 848-5828 or email the project team at i-20east@itsmarta.com.
- ▶ Continue to visit the project website (<http://www.itsmarta.com/i20-east-corr.aspx>) for updates and relevant documents.
- ▶ Become a fan of the project Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/I20EastTransitInitiative>)