

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



CLIFTON CORRIDOR
TRANSIT INITIATIVE

Q: What is the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative?

A: The Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative began in 2009 as a partnership of MARTA and the Clifton Corridor Transportation Management Association (CCTMA) to identify ways to enhance transportation choices and transit for employees and residents in the corridor. Between 2009 and 2012, a comprehensive alternatives analysis (AA) was completed. More than 30 alternatives that considered bus, light rail transit (LRT), bus rapid transit (BRT) or heavy rail were evaluated. Based on screening results and public support, the MARTA board adopted light rail transit (LRT) from the Lindbergh MARTA station to the Avondale MARTA station as the locally preferred alternative (LPA) in 2012.

Q: What does LPA stand for?

A: LPA stands for Locally Preferred Alternative. The LPA represents the option most supported by the local community.

Q: This corridor has been studied previously. What is different about the current effort?

A: This study initiates the federal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process which must be completed for project to be considered for federal funding. Previous studies were conducted to identify and evaluate alternatives and to select those meeting community needs. The alternatives most likely to be approved in the federal process are being addressed in this EIS study.

Q: Why are we looking at alternatives again since MARTA already adopted an LPA? Why is the LPA called Alternative 1 and how did we come up with an Alternative 2?

A: MARTA completed a comprehensive analysis of transit types, including bus, light rail, MARTA heavy rail and bus rapid transit in coordination with neighborhoods and businesses. This resulted in the selection of the LPA. During the pre-environmental study conducted in 2013, a lower-cost alternative with benefits similar to the LPA was identified. This alternative is proposed as a street-level (at-grade) alignment. The LPA will be evaluated in the EIS along with the lower cost alternative with similar benefits. For the EIS, the LPA is now designated Alternative 1 and the lower cost alternative as Alternative 2.

Q: How is the 2013 Pre-Environmental study different from this effort?

A: The 2013 study focused on updates and revisions related to engineering, bus routes, traffic, tunnel locations, and cost estimates. In general, the 2013 study provided the background information needed for the EIS. The EIS will focus on natural environment, wildlife, neighborhoods, cultural resources, roadways and traffic, and transit. Throughout the study, we will coordinate with the public, agencies, and stakeholders.

Q: What is NEPA?

A: NEPA is the National Environmental Policy Act, a federal bill that outlines all the tasks a project sponsor must complete before the project can be approved. The NEPA process is designed to protect the environment, residents and businesses. Impacts must be evaluated and when necessary, mitigation must be identified.

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Q: What is Scoping?

A: Scoping is the official beginning of the NEPA process. It is a period of 60 to 120 days when the public and interested agencies are invited to review project information and provide input and suggestions on alternatives that will be evaluated in the EIS.

Q: Shouldn't MARTA construct tunnels throughout the corridor to avoid property impacts or property acquisition?

A: There are pros and cons to utilizing tunnel segments within a project. Under some circumstances, tunnels help to avoid areas of high congestion or where major property impacts could occur. On the other hand, tunnel segments are typically avoided due to their high costs. Tunnels, aerial and ground level options will be evaluated and compared in areas where there could be major impacts to property or where heavy traffic exists.

Q: Can MARTA use the existing freight rail track for the Clifton Corridor Light Rail line?

A: Freight railroad tracks cannot be used without the approval of the freight railroad company. MARTA is currently coordinating with CSX Corporation to explore the possibility of utilizing part of the freight railroad right-of-way (ROW), specifically for Alternative 2 (the at-grade alignment option).

Q: To help minimize property impacts, could the Clifton LRT use a single track?

A: Short segments of single-track may be a possible solution. Single-track operation will be addressed in the environmental process. Single-track segments may, however, lead to less reliable LRT service.

Q: If the Clifton Corridor Project impacts my property, what are the formal procedures or laws addressing this?

A: Both federal law and local guidelines will be followed. If property must be acquired to build the Clifton Project that will receive federal funds, the Uniform Relocation and Real Property Acquisition Act (Uniform Act) will be followed. The Uniform Act defines the process to acquire property and compensate land owners. More information can be found at: http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/FTA_Trifold.pdf

Q: How will MARTA fit LRT on already crowded road segments such as Clifton, N. Decatur, and other streets?

A: Placing a light rail alignment within roadways requires a careful evaluation of traffic, rail operations and signals. We will develop an alignment and roadway configuration that allows both traffic and rail to move efficiently. LRT can operate in the same lanes as other traffic. In some locations, the street can be widened or lane configuration can be changed.

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Q: Is LRT safe for pedestrians and vehicles that would be on the roadways?

A: Safety is a primary goal for MARTA. The guidelines for light rail design assure a safe operating environment for transit users and pedestrians, vehicular and non-vehicular traffic including bicycles, and for rail along roadways and in exclusive right-of-way. Design guidelines also cover safe crossings, sight distance at intersections, and stop location and configuration.

Q: Instead of using light rail, would Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) work for Clifton?

A: During the Alternatives Analysis study, BRT was eliminated due to the significant number of properties that would be affected along roadways. As a result, BRT was not selected by the public as a preferred transit mode. Under the current Federal Transit Administration guidelines, a project qualifies as BRT only if at least 50 percent of the alignment operates in bus only lanes.

Q: Wasn't the Clifton Corridor included on the failed T-SPLOST referendum?

A: Only a portion of the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative was placed on the T-SPLOST list. The current EIS will address long-term funding and operating cost for the entire corridor to determine if the project may qualify for federal funding. Project planning, analysis, design can continue. However, alternative sources of local funding still must be identified in order to apply for federal funding.

Q: How likely is it that this project will be built?

A: Completing the EIS is the first step in the process to determine if a project would be eligible for federal funding under the New Starts program. However, based on projects built within the last several years, the federal share of project cost has declined. A project sponsor should not expect more than 50 percent of the project cost from the federal government. The remaining cost must come from local sources. The Clifton project needs a stable and ongoing source of funds – even to be eligible for federal funding.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: We will address comments and suggestions from Scoping meetings, complete environmental analysis and report findings in public meetings. We will develop more details regarding track and station locations, traffic signals, bike lanes and sidewalks, bus route connections, and the cost to build, operate and maintain the system. We will hold meetings at key milestones to discuss findings and to get public input.

Q: What is the schedule?

A: We must complete the environmental process within two years. The final EIS will be completed in late 2016. In the meantime, the draft EIS will be prepared and a public hearing will be held to allow for input.

Q: How can I stay informed?

A: There are a number of ways to stay up to date with the latest project information. We encourage everyone to visit the project website at <http://www.itsmarta.com/Clifton-Corr.aspx>. Or, you can find information on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Clifton-Corridor-Transit-Initiative/154114080040>. And, if you need more detail on a specific topic, please contact MARTA by email at Clifton@itsmarta.com.