



# GEORGIA 400 CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

## Early Scoping Report

**Prepared for:**  
**Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority**

**Prepared by:**  
**Parsons Brinckerhoff**  
**and**  
**AECOM/Jacobs-JJG Joint Venture**

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## 0.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) has undertaken this study, the Georgia 400 Corridor Transit Initiative, to identify potential and feasible transit alternatives in the Georgia State Route 400 (GA 400) corridor. The GA 400 corridor is the transportation spine of northern Fulton County and one of the fastest growing sub-regions in the metropolitan Atlanta region.

This Early Scoping Report provides a summary of the following for the GA 400 study:

- Purpose, need, goals, and objective
- Alternatives identification and evaluation process
- Key themes including challenges, benefits, study area trends, and transit-oriented development potential
- Overview of the Early Scoping activities and planned next steps for the GA 400 study

The Early Scoping Report also provides an Appendix summarizing study area trends, transit oriented development potential, and public and agency outreach conducted during the project, including Early Scoping. The Appendix also contains evidence of the outreach, including comment forms, meeting summaries, presentation materials, notices and announcements.

### Overview of the Project

The GA 400 study area extends north along GA 400 from I-285 to the Fulton – Forsyth County line, a distance of approximately 15 miles. The purpose of the project is to provide reliable, convenient, efficient, and sustainable transit service in the GA 400 corridor study area by:

- Providing high capacity transit (bus and/or rail) through the GA 400 corridor study area;
- Improving transit linkages and coverage to communities within the study area; and,
- Enhancing mobility and accessibility to, from, and within the study area by providing a more robust transit network that offers an alternative to automobile travel.

### Alternatives Evaluation Process

The goals and objectives of the GA 400 Corridor Alternatives Analysis (AA) are:

1. Improve mobility and access
2. Support land use planning and economic development
3. Provide cost-effective transit service
4. Minimize environmental impacts

The universe of transit alternatives was narrowed down to a small subset of viable alternatives through a three-stage screening process that applied an increasingly detailed and comprehensive set of performance measures to a decreasing number of alternatives. Each step in the evaluation process was designed to focus the analysis on progressively fewer alternatives with higher levels of scrutiny. With each subsequent step, more quantitative measures and fewer qualitative measures were applied.

The following three levels of evaluation were used to define and screen alternatives to begin to identify a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the GA 400 corridor:

- *Fatal Flaw Analysis* – Identify a ‘universe of alternatives’ for Screen 1 analysis. Three transit technologies were identified as most appropriate – Light Rail Transit (LRT), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and Heavy Rail Transit (BRT). Nine geographic alignments were identified along GA 400 and Roswell Road / State Route (SR) 9. The six best alternatives (transit type + alignment) were advanced to Screen 1.
- *Screen 1* – Compare and select most appropriate alternatives for further evaluation in Screen 2. The six alternatives were further developed and evaluated in greater detail in Screen 1. Quantitative and qualitative performance measures were applied to compare and select the most appropriate alternatives for advancement into Screen 2.
- *Screen 2*– Apply more detailed evaluation and select final alternatives for further scoping and environmental review. Screen 1 resulted in the three best alternatives to move to Screen 2 for further evaluation. Alternatives were further refined and a larger set of performance metrics was applied to identify the alternatives that best met the goals and objectives of the study. Based on the Screen 2 analysis, the three technology alternatives were carried to the public and stakeholders for review and comment during Early Scoping Phase 1.

## Results of Screening

HRT along GA 400 was the highest performing alignment and technology alternative in the Screen 2 analysis. This alternative was also most preferred by the Project Steering Committee and public through the outreach process (detailed in Section 4 of this report).

## Challenges and Benefits

Not unlike many transit projects, the GA 400 project must overcome two key challenges to meet the outlined goals and objectives, and ultimately, provide a successful transportation service for the region.

- Encourage higher density, less auto-oriented development
- Overcome funding challenges for capital and system operations

The benefits of the project can be categorized into three key themes: travel improvements, economic improvements, and community impacts. This project aims to provide these benefits by:

- Improving commute times
- Reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and air pollutant emissions
- Reducing vehicular crashes
- Increasing employment and future development density
- Increasing property values around station areas
- Reducing impact to environment and community resources using Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Right-of-Way (ROW) as much as possible

## Early Scoping

Early Scoping is an optional early step in the environmental review process to fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that precedes NEPA

scoping. NEPA Scoping begins when the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the grant applicant publish a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Early Scoping can serve not only to streamline the NEPA process, but also to firmly link transportation system planning and NEPA; making sure that the public and interested agencies are given the opportunity to review and provide comments on the results of planning activities and studies that can then be used to inform the NEPA process.

Early Scoping allows the scoping process to begin as soon as there is enough information to describe the proposal so that the public and relevant agencies can participate effectively. Early Scoping for the GA 400 Transit Initiative was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 was initiated on August 28, 2013 and concluded on October 28, 2013. A second phase was added in response to the public's desire for broader outreach in the study area and more opportunities to provide feedback. Phase 2 was initiated on June 23, 2014 and concluded on August 8, 2014. During both phases, the public and stakeholders were invited to review and provide input on the GA 400 study, including review of the:

- Purpose and need,
- Proposed alternatives, and
- Potential environmental, transportation, and community impacts and benefits to consider during the NEPA process.

### **Next Steps**

Based on stakeholder and public input received during Early Scoping Phase Two, MARTA has decided to conduct additional conceptual analysis for bus rapid transit (BRT) and heavy rail transit (HRT) concept alignments and station locations, typical sections, interchange details, and operating plans to inform the development of capital and operating cost estimates and preliminary environmental impact analysis. This analysis will assist in the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the GA 400 corridor. With input from the study's Project Steering Committee (PSC), MARTA staff will present the findings to the MARTA Board of Directors and make a recommendation regarding the alternatives to move forward in the Federal environmental process. Following this recommendation, MARTA and FTA are expected to issue a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS, and public and agency scoping will begin. This will be followed by further analysis and refinement of the alternatives, environmental analysis, and public involvement.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the GA 400 Transit Initiative AA process leading up to Early Scoping. The Project Overview section (1.1) provides the purpose and need of the GA 400 study, the study's goals and objectives, and the evaluation framework for assessing potential transit solutions. The Alternatives Identification & Evaluation Process section (1.2) discusses how a universe of potential transit alternatives was selected, evaluated and then narrowed down through a screening process. Section 1.2.2 describes the transit technology types that were evaluated for the Build Alternatives.

MARTA shared the results of the Screening process with the public and stakeholders during Early Scoping Phase 1, conducted between August 28 and October 28, 2013. A second phase of Early Scoping was added in response to the public's desire for broader outreach in the study area and more opportunities to provide feedback. Phase 2 was initiated on June 23, 2014 and concluded on August 8, 2014. During both phases, the public and agency stakeholders were invited to review and provide input on planning activities for the GA 400 study. Section 4.0 of this report describes the two-phased Early Scoping process conducted for this project.

This project was initiated under the previous federal transportation act, Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users or SAFETEA-LU. SAFETEA-LU required that an alternatives analysis (AA) be completed before a project sponsor could apply to the FTA Capital Investment Grant program. The 2013 transportation act, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century or MAP-21, eliminates the stand-alone AA requirement and instead relies on the evaluation of options that may occur during the metropolitan planning process. Thus, while the AA process is not longer required, MARTA has determined that the planning for this project is best served the completion of AA process.

### 1.1 Project Overview

The Project Overview section describes the purpose and need of the Georgia 400 Transit Initiative, the goals and objectives of the project, and the framework for evaluating potential transit solutions (alternatives).

#### 1.1.1 Purpose and Need of the Project

The purpose of the project is to provide reliable, convenient, efficient, and sustainable transit service in the GA 400 corridor study area by:

- Providing high capacity transit (bus and/or rail) through the GA 400 corridor study area;
- Improving transit linkages and coverage to communities within the study area; and
- Enhancing mobility and accessibility to and within the study area by providing a more robust transit network that offers an alternative to automobile travel.

Through the assessment of travel conditions and public engagement in the corridor, the following themes emerged that reinforce the need for transportation improvements:

- Travel demand - Increased travel demand and traffic congestion are expected within the study area due to growth in population, employment, and households. Specifically, anticipated large increases in jobs, increases in the elderly population,



and an increased percentage of minority, low-income, and zero-car households will likely have a significant impact on the travel patterns;

- Transit mobility - There is inadequate transit connectivity between northern Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Cobb counties. In particular, there is a general lack of transit availability for east-west travel across GA 400 and north-south travel across the Chattahoochee River;
- Transit travel times – Current transit travel times are not competitive with auto travel times for trips within the study area or for trips with origins and destinations outside the study area;
- Economic development - Traffic congestion caused by insufficient transportation system capacity affects both personal travel and goods movement, which constrains economic development opportunities; and
- Air quality - The continued growth of vehicular travel will negatively affect air quality in the study area and the region.

### 1.1.2 Goals and Objectives

In accordance with the FTA New Starts process under SAFETEA-LU, an AA served to identify a series of goals and related objectives that the potential transit investment would fulfill. The GA 400 corridor AA goals and objectives were developed to address the mobility and accessibility challenges identified in the problem statement and the associated purpose and need statement. These goals and objectives also reflect input received from the general public and the PSC, which is the advisory committee established to guide the study process. The PSC comprises members of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The SAC includes key members of the community, elected officials, residents and area employers to provide community insight and input. The TAC is made up of representatives from state, local, and federal agencies that are responsible for providing input on the technical and policy framework. The goals and objectives of the GA 400 corridor AA are presented in Table 1-1.

**Table 1-1: GA 400 Corridor AA Goals and Objectives**

Goal 1: Improve Mobility and Access	
Challenge	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of roadway congestion are forecast to increase along the corridor</li> <li>• Transit mobility options are limited</li> <li>• Transit travel times are not competitive with auto travel times in the corridor</li> <li>• Travel demands are increasing</li> </ul>	Improve transit access and connectivity to employment, education, residential, and activity centers within the study area and the region
	Increase transit ridership and capacity
	Improve transit travel times and reliability for all trip purposes
	Improve multimodal connections and access to the existing and future transit, bicycle, highway and pedestrian systems
Goal 2: Support Land Use and Economic Development Planning	
Challenge	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic development is constrained</li> </ul>	Ensure consistency with land use plans of study area jurisdictions
	Support planned and potential economic development
	Provide opportunities for compact land development that supports transit ridership

**Table 1 1: GA 400 Corridor AA Goals and Objectives, continued**

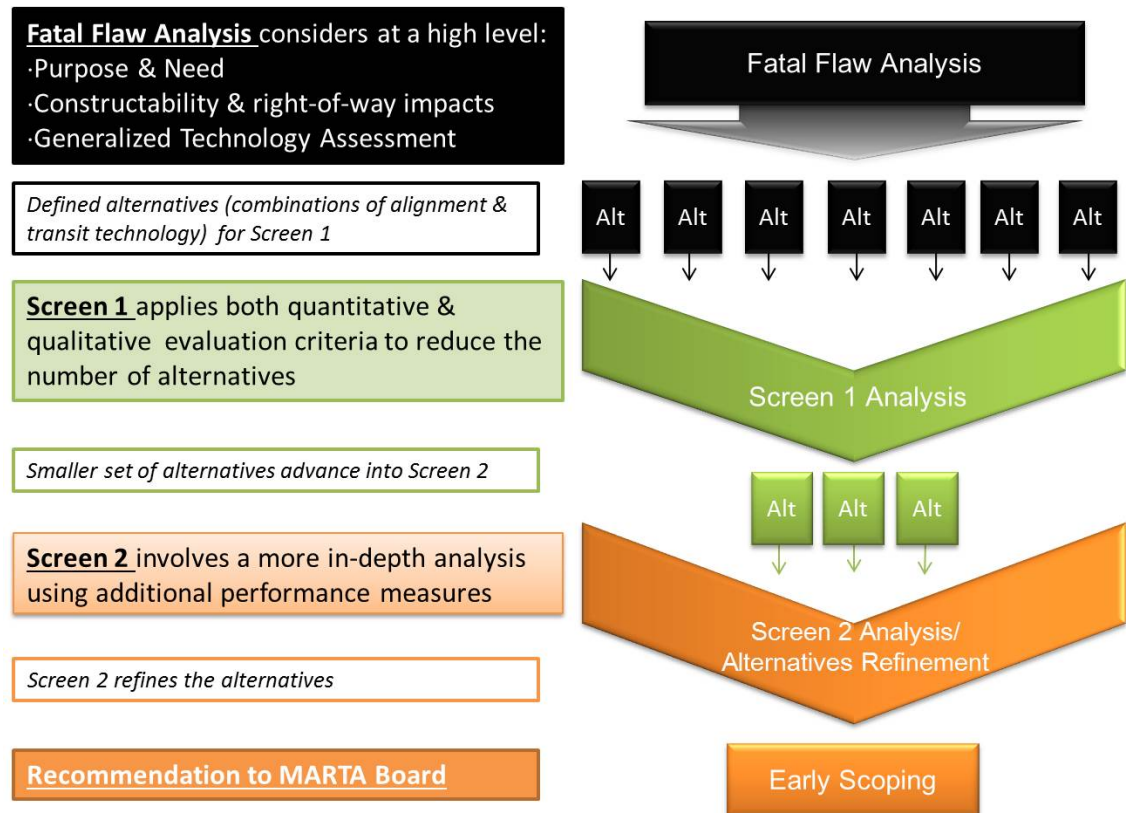
<b>Goal 3: Provide Cost-Effective Transit Service</b>	
<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A funding shortfall slows the construction of transportation improvements</li> </ul>	Maximize operating and cost-efficiency <sup>1</sup>
	Match the transportation investment to the study area's level of travel demand
	Provide a cost-effective transit system
<b>Goal 4: Minimize Environmental Impacts</b>	
<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued growth of vehicular traffic will negatively affect the study area's environment</li> </ul>	Avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to cultural, historic, and environmentally sensitive areas
	Avoid, minimize, and mitigate negative impacts on the surrounding community including parks

## 1.2 Alternatives Identification and Evaluation Process

The evaluation process shown below in Figure 1-1 was used to identify and evaluate transit alternatives for the GA 400 corridor, and was generally characterized by the application of an increasingly detailed and comprehensive set of performance measures to a decreasing number of alternatives. Each step in the evaluation process was designed to focus the analysis on progressively fewer alternatives with higher levels of scrutiny. As the screening process progressed, more quantitative measures and fewer qualitative measures were applied, from Fatal Flaw Analysis through Screens 1 and 2, culminating in the final alternatives that will be refined and evaluated in the environmental review process.

<sup>1</sup> Maximize in this objective refers to the optimization of operating and maintenance costs.

**Figure 1-1: Alternatives Evaluation Process**



### 1.2.1 Evaluation Framework Matrix

Evaluation criteria and performance measures were used to examine how well the proposed alternatives would meet the project's purpose and need, and associated goals and objectives. The measures were both quantitative and qualitative to allow for a comparison of the order of magnitude benefits and impacts of the proposed alternatives. In certain cases, one performance measure correlates to multiple project objectives, and certain objectives were measured by more than one performance measure. It is important to note that care has been taken to include measures that would be effective in demonstrating the relative differences in alternatives. Table 1-2 shows the framework used in Screen 1 and Screen 2 of the AA process.

**Table 1-2: Evaluation Framework Matrix**

Transportation Challenges	Evaluation Framework					
	Goals and Objectives	Evaluation Criteria	Performance Measures	Fatal Flaw	Screen 1	Screen 2
Goal 1: Improve Mobility and Access						
Levels of roadway congestion are forecasted to increase along the corridor.	Increase north-south and east-west transportation capacity	Mobility	Total daily project transit boardings			X
			New transit riders			X
			Number of transfers per linked trip			X
	Increase transit ridership		Total passengers miles			X
			Potential impacts to roadway capacity	X	X	X
			Annual corridor crash reductions			X
Transit mobility options are limited.	Improve transit travel times and reliability for all trip purposes	Travel Times	Transit travel time savings			X
Transit travel times are not competitive with auto travel times in the corridor.	Improve transit access and connectivity to employment, education, residential, and activity centers within the study area and the region		Differences in transit and auto travel times between various origins and destinations in the study area			X
		Accessibility and Connectivity	Projected population, household, and employment within a 10 minute walk and drive of stations		X	X
Major trip generators/activity centers within a 10 minute walk and drive of stations			X	X	X	
Low-income, minority, elderly and zero-car populations/households within a 10 minute walk of stations				X	X	
Interface with existing transit and future Concept 3 rapid transit service				X	X	
Travel demands are increasing.	Improve multimodal connections and access to the existing transit systems		Maximize walking and bicycling accessibility to stations			X
Goal 2: Support Land Use and Economic Development Planning						
Economic development is constrained.	Ensure consistency with land use plans of study area jurisdictions	Land Use and Development	Consistency with adopted local and regional plans		X	X
	Support planned and potential economic development		Acres of land with economic development incentives within ½ mile of stations			X
	Provide opportunities for compact land development that supports transit ridership	Potential for TOD	Projected population and employment densities within ½ mile of stations		X	X
			Acres of transit-supportive future land uses and zoning within ½ mile of stations		X	X
			Acres of vacant or underutilized land within ½ mile of stations			X

**Table 1-2: Evaluation Framework Matrix (continued)**

Transportation Challenges	Evaluation Framework					
	Goals and Objectives	Evaluation Criteria	Performance Measures		Screen 1	Screen 2
Goal 3: Provide Cost-Effective Transit Service						
There is a funding shortfall to construct transportation improvements	Maximize operating and cost-efficiency	Costs	Annual Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Costs		X	X
	Match the transportation investment to the study area’s level of travel demand		Construction Capital Costs	X	X	X
			Right of Way Costs	X		X
	Provide a cost-effective transit system	Cost Effectiveness	Cost Effectiveness Index (incremental costs divided by transportation system user benefit)			X
			Incremental cost per new rider			X
Goal 4: Minimize Environmental Impacts						
Continued growth of vehicular travel will negatively affect the study area’s environment.	Avoid, minimize, and mitigate impact to cultural, historic, and environmentally sensitive areas	Environmental Quality	Acres of potentially impacted wetlands and waterbodies within 500 feet of alignments and ½ mile of stations		X	X
			Number of potentially impacted historic resources within 500 feet of alignments and ½ mile of stations		X	X
			Acres of noise sensitive land uses within 700 (HRT), 350 (LRT), or 200 (BRT) feet of alignments			X
			Number of contaminated and hazardous material sites within ¼ mile of alignments			X
		Air Quality	Change in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)			X
			Change in daily emissions of air quality pollutants (CO, NOx, PM2.5, PM10)			X
	Avoid, minimize, and mitigate negative impacts on the surrounding community including parks	Community Impact	Low-income, minority, elderly and zero-car populations/households within 500 feet of alignments			X
			Estimated community impacts/disruptions and number of displacements	X	X	X

### 1.2.2 Fatal Flaw Analysis

The Fatal Flaw Analysis was a three-part process:

1. **Step 1** provided an independent review of six different transit technology types and recommended the three most appropriate to advance – bus rapid transit (BRT), light rail transit/streetcar (LRT), and heavy rail (HRT);
2. **Step 2** paired those transit technologies with nine proposed geographic alignments along GA 400 and SR 9, to form the universe of alternatives for advancement through the Screen 1 analysis;
3. **Step 3** provided a high-level evaluation of each technology-alignment pairing for its constructability and its support of the project's purpose and need. The evaluation provided a reduced set of best-qualified alternatives to advance through the Screen 2 analysis.

#### Technology Options for Build Alternatives

The Fatal Flaw Analysis provided an independent review of six different transit technology types – HRT, LRT, BRT, standard bus service, diesel multiple unit, and automated guideway transit (includes Maglev and monorail systems). HRT, LRT and BRT were identified as the most appropriate modes, based on factors such as system capacity, costs, constructability and operability in terms of compatibility with existing infrastructure. These three technologies were carried forward through the screening process for further evaluation.

Table 1-3 provides a general description and comparison of the three transit technology types further evaluated in the AA.

#### Alignment Options for Build Alternatives

Nine potential alignments were identified initially based on travel patterns, connectivity to destinations, and stakeholder input. They generally follow the roadway in the GA 400 and Roswell Road/SR 9 corridors.



**Table 1-3: Comparison of Technology Types Evaluated for GA 400 Corridor**

	Description	Operating Area/ROW	Vehicle Size	Capacity
<b>Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)</b>	BRT is a form of rapid transit that uses a system of rubber-tired vehicles operating either in dedicated rights-of-way or in mixed traffic on ordinary streets. BRT systems average 30-55 miles per hour in exclusive guideways.	Vehicles operate on roadways and do not require tracks or other guideway technology. Typically operate in 11-12' travel lanes.	Varies, but typical range is between 40' to 60' long and 10' to 15' high.	Vehicle capacities range from approximately 60 to 120 passengers per vehicle, based on a combination of seated and standing passengers.
<b>Light Rail Transit (LRT)</b>	LRT consists of rail vehicles either running in their own reserved right-of-way or mixed with automobile traffic. LRT technology encompasses a range of vehicles with varying characteristics, from small "heritage" trolleys and modern streetcars to multiple-car street-running trains. LRT can travel up to 65 miles per hour.	Vehicles run on standard-gauge track and typically receive power from an overhead electric wire. Typical systems require 12' to 14' right-of-way per track, but some systems operate on lanes as narrow as 11' in mixed traffic	Individual streetcars are typically 30' long. Light rail cars are up to 100' long, 8' to 10' wide, and 8' to 12' feet high (not including connections to overhead wires).	Vehicle capacity can be up to 200 passengers (combination of seated and standing passengers), though streetcars are typically smaller. Vehicles can be linked to form multi-car trains.
<b>Heavy Rail Transit (HRT)</b>	HRT vehicles are designed to operate on an exclusive guideway at speeds of up to 70 miles per hour.	Vehicles are electrically powered and usually rely on a power source adjacent to the tracks (an electrified "third rail"). They are designed for fare collection prior to boarding and most stations have fare collection barriers to separate paid passengers from those who have not yet paid.	Most HRT vehicles range from 45' to 85' long and are not articulated. HRT vehicles have steel wheels and high floors, but have level boarding because their stations have high level platforms	Between 85 and 200 passengers per vehicle (counting both seated and standing passengers), with up to 2,000 or more passengers with a multi-car train and a single operator. Some vehicles provide seating only for special needs riders, while others offer seating for the majority of riders.

### 1.2.3 Screen 1 Evaluation

Based on the results of the Fatal Flaw Analysis and recommendations from the TAC, six alternatives were advanced for further evaluation in the Screen 1 phase. The six alternatives (a combination of technologies and alignments) are described in Table 1-4. In order to address the issue of alignment redundancy, the initially considered GA 400-2, GA 400-4, and GA 400-5 alignments were combined and will be regarded as design options of a broader concept of GA 400-1. These options will be further investigated in the next stages of project development. In addition, an alignment on Encore Parkway via a new transit ramp will be considered as another design option of GA 400-1.

The Screen 1 analysis involved evaluating each alternative with added detail for typical cross sections, general station locations, and order of magnitude cost estimates. The

alternatives were compared to each other in a single-step process of evaluating, scoring, and ranking the alternatives using a set of quantitative and qualitative performance measures generated from the goals and objectives of the project, including: mobility, travel times, accessibility, connectivity, land use and development, potential for transit oriented development (TOD), costs, environmental impacts, and community impacts.

**Table 1-4: GA 400 Screen 1 Alternatives**

Corridor	Alignment Name	Alignment Description	Technology
GA 400	GA 400 - 1	North Springs MARTA Station - GA 400 - Windward Parkway with the following design options between Mansell Road and Windward Parkway: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A – GA 400</li> <li>• B – Mansell Road - North Point Parkway – Haynes Bridge Road - GA 400</li> <li>• C –Mansell Road - North Point Parkway</li> <li>• D – New transit interchange at Encore Parkway</li> </ul>	BRT
			LRT
			HRT
	GA 400 - 3	North Springs MARTA Station - GA 400 - Holcomb Bridge Road - SR 9 - Mansell Road - North Point Parkway - Windward Parkway	BRT
	GA 400 - 6	North Springs MARTA Station - GA 400 - Holcomb Bridge Road - SR 9 - Windward Parkway	BRT
SR 9	SR 9 - 2	Dunwoody MARTA Station (potential tie-in to Revive 285) - Hammond Drive- SR 9 - Mansell Road - North Point Parkway - Windward Parkway	BRT

### Screen 1 Results

Alternatives GA 400-1A LRT/BRT and GA 400-1A HRT were the two highest rated alternatives in the Screen 1 analysis, followed by GA 400-6, SR 9-2, and GA 400-3. GA 400-6 and SR 9-2 were eliminated because of engineering constraints and high potential to affect the surrounding communities along the route. GA 400-3 was also eliminated because of the additional travel time resulting from using Holcomb Bridge Road and Mansell Road as part of the routes, as well as potential community impacts along those roadways. Public input also indicated a preference for the GA 400-1 routes, particularly with HRT. The Screen 1 process, evaluation and results are documented in detail in the *Definition of Alternatives Report*.



## 1.2.4 Screen 2 Evaluation

Based on the Screen 1 analysis and public input, the following alternatives advanced to Screen 2 for further analysis (Table 1-5):

**Table 1-5: GA 400 Screen 2 Alternatives**

Alternative	Transit Type	Alignment Route	Number of Stations	Proposed Stations
<b>GA 400-1</b>	Heavy Rail Transit (HRT)	GA 400 right-of-way from North Springs MARTA Station to Woodward Parkway (11.9 miles)	5	Northridge, Holcomb Bridge, Mansell, North Point, Woodward
<b>GA 400-1A</b>	Light Rail (LRT), or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)	GA 400 right-of-way from North Springs MARTA Station to Woodward Parkway (11.9 miles)	6	Northridge, Holcomb Bridge, Mansell, North Point, <b>Old Milton</b> , Woodward

The Screen 2 analysis involved a similar single-step process to evaluate, score and rank the remaining alternatives. The alternatives were compared to each other using similar criteria as Screen 1, but at a greater depth, using the entirety of the performance measures. In addition, the alternatives were evaluated against refinements to the alignments and changes in proposed station locations. The rating and scoring for the Screen 2 analysis is displayed in Table 1-6.

The rating of alternatives across performance measures was a high-medium-low score based on the relative performance of all three alternatives. The highest scoring alternative received a score of '2' for each measure, and the other alternatives were scored based on differentiation from the highest performing. Little or no difference (10% difference or less) also resulted in a 'high' score or 2 points. Between 10% and 20% difference was considered 'medium' with a score of 1 point. Greater than 20% difference was rated 'low' and received 0 points for the measure.

**Table 1-6: Screen 2 Rating and Scoring**

Rating	Deviation from Highest Performing	Scoring
<b>High</b>	<b>0 to 10%</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Medium</b>	<b>10 to 20%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Low</b>	<b>Greater Than 20%</b>	<b>0</b>

## Screen 2 Results

GA 400-1 (HRT) was the highest performing alternative in Screen 2. GA 400-1A (LRT) was the lowest scoring alternative. Table 1-7 summarizes the Screen 2 results based on the 29 'distinguishing measures' – the measure where there was a differentiation of scores between alternatives. Of the 29 distinguishing measures GA400-1 HRT rated 'high' on 20 of the 29 distinguishing measures, and only rated 'low' for 7 of those measures. The Screen 2 evaluation process and results are also documented in the *Definition of Alternatives Report*.

**Table 1-7: Screen 2 Results (Distinguishing Measures)**

	Total Measures/Score	GA400-1 HRT	GA4001-A LRT	GA400-1A BRT
Number of 'High' ratings (score of 2)	29	20	3	9
Number of 'Low' ratings (score of 0)	29	7	16	10

**The HRT alternative scored highest for Goal 1 – Improving Mobility & Access.** HRT was shown to produce the highest number of daily transit boardings, new transit riders, daily travel time savings, and greatest reduction in vehicular crashes.

**Light rail (LRT) scored highest for Goal 2 – Support Land Use & Economic Development.** However, all three alternatives scored similarly.

**Bus rapid transit (BRT) scored highest for Goal 3 – Provide Cost-Effective Transit Service.** BRT had the lowest estimated capital construction costs, lowest annual operating and maintenance costs, and lowest cost per transit trip.

**HRT scored highest for Goal 4 – Minimize Environmental Impacts.** HRT was estimated to provide the greatest reduction in VMT and air pollutants. BRT would provide the least impact on noise-sensitive land uses.

## 2.0 TECHNOLOGIES AND ALIGNMENTS EMERGING FROM EARLY SCOPING

As a result of Early Scoping Phase 1 and public and stakeholder feedback received in 2014, the preliminary GA 400-1 and GA 400-1A alternatives were split into three different alternatives (HRT, LRT and BRT, each with six preliminary station locations. The alternatives expected to move forward to the NEPA process are described in Table 2-1. These alternatives would provide approximately 11.9 miles of service along the Georgia 400 corridor within existing ROW, from the existing North Springs Station to Windward Parkway.

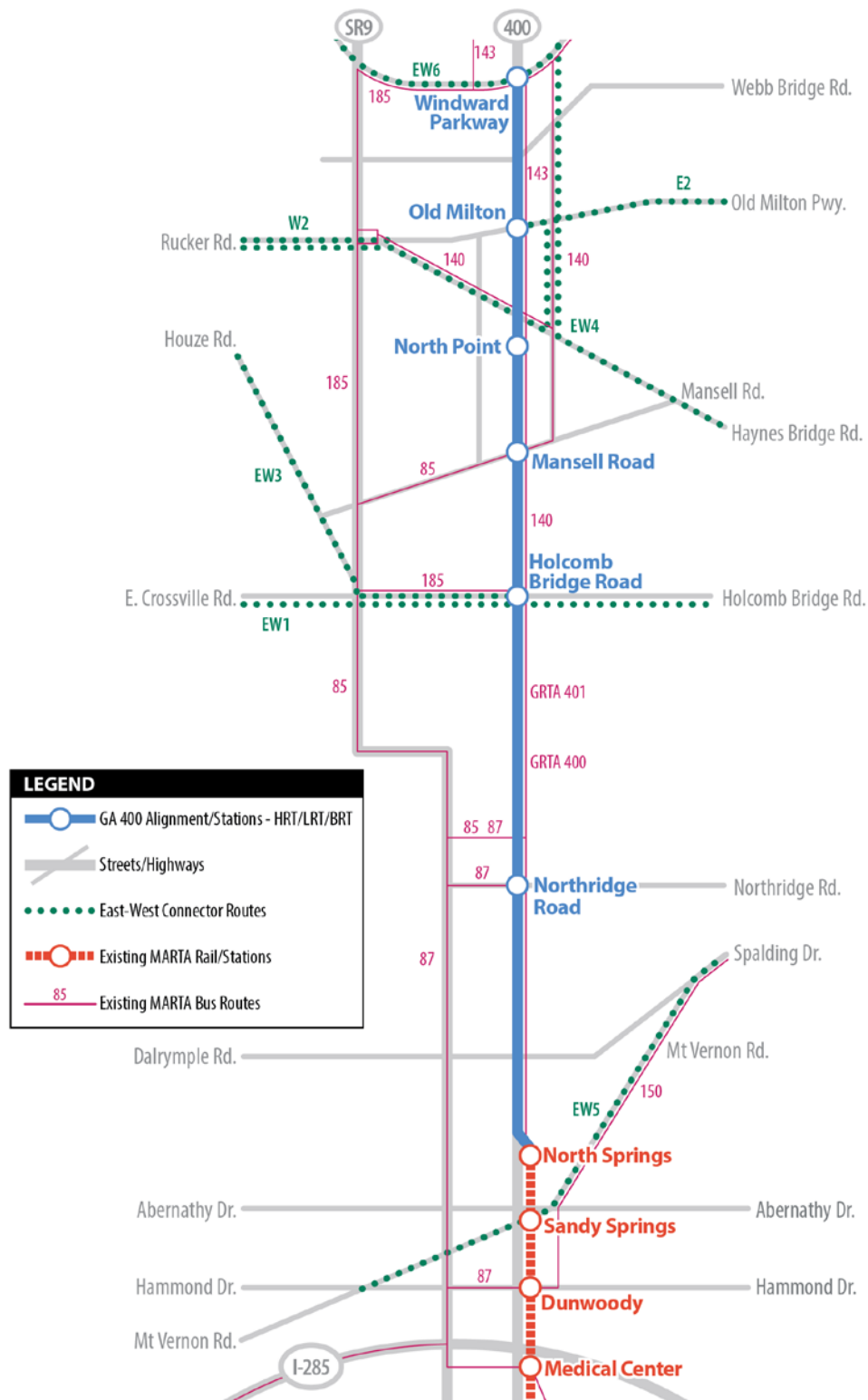
The revised GA 400 HRT alternative now includes six stations, with the addition of an Old Milton Parkway location. This addition came about from comments received during Early Scoping Phase 1; several commenters supported adding an Old Milton HRT station to serve the Avalon development, Gwinnett Tech and Georgia State Alpharetta campus.

**Table 2-1: Refined Alternatives**

Alternative	Transit Type	Number of Stations	Proposed Stations
GA 400 HRT	HRT	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Northridge</li> <li>Holcomb Bridge</li> <li>Mansell</li> <li>North Point</li> <li>Old Milton</li> <li>Windward</li> </ul>
GA 400 LRT	LRT		
GA 400 BRT	BRT		

Figure 2-1 is a conceptual graphic of the alignment, stations and potential east-west connecting MARTA bus routes to the alternatives currently under consideration. These east-west routes were established through review of the present and future travel trends, stakeholder input during PSC meetings, and public input. The routes are important to the project, as they will serve to help alleviate traffic along the heavily traveled corridors serving the potential station areas.

Figure 2-1: Proposed Alignment and Station Locations with Potential East-West Routes



## 3.0 CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS

The project team, stakeholders, and the community identified several challenges and benefits. The benefits section includes a high-level economic and real estate analysis for the study area, the Build Alternatives, and the proposed station areas. TOD potential for each geographic area was analyzed as well.

### 3.1 Project Key Themes

#### 3.1.1 Challenges

Not unlike many transit projects, the GA 400 Transit Initiative must overcome two key challenges in order to meet the outlined goals and objectives, and ultimately, provide a successful transportation service for the region.

- Encourage higher density, less auto-oriented development
- Overcome funding challenges for capital and system operations

#### 3.1.2 Benefits

The benefits of the project can be categorized into three key themes: travel improvements, economic improvements, and community impacts. The project aims to provide these benefits by

- Improving commute times
- Reducing VMT and air pollutant emissions
- Minimizing vehicular crashes
- Increasing employment and future development density
- Increasing property values around station areas
- Reducing impact to environment and community resources using GA 400 ROW as much as possible

These benefits are all interrelated and important to the success of the project. The following sections summarize land use and economic impacts, as they relates to the study area, potential alternatives, and station areas. See the 2013 *Economic Trends Technical Report* on the project's webpage for more details.

##### 3.1.2.1 Land Use

In the study area, employment growth is expected to outpace population growth. The GA 400 corridor study area and the broader north Fulton housing market are strong, with above-average prices and steady sale volumes. Demand for rental units may not be sufficiently met by the supply of new apartments, and demand will likely shift outside of the GA 400 corridor study area. For commercial and office, per-capita retail spending, when applied to new household and population growth in the Georgia 400 study area, will generate an additional \$52 to \$72 million in retail spending annually over the next 30 years. This additional spending could reasonably support 200,000 to 300,000 square feet (SF) of new retail space in the GA 400 corridor study area annually, over the next 30

years. See the 2013 *Economic Trends Technical Report* on the project's webpage for more details<sup>2</sup>.

The GA 400 corridor study area has great potential as a location for TOD. Local authorities working with the private real estate sector can develop guidelines and standards that support TOD, both in regards to new green-field development and the redevelopment and retro-fitting of existing properties. All of the city centers in the GA 400 study area have embraced planning concepts such as the Atlanta Regional Commission's Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program to enhance their city centers, therefore returning to many classic tenets of TOD. In the GA 400 corridor study area, the proposed development plans for Avalon, a major mixed-used development at GA 400 and Old Milton Parkway, shows that walkable, mixed-use development concepts are being embraced by the development community.

### 3.1.2.2 Economic Impacts

The economic impacts identified related to property premiums and tax base, population and employment densities, and compact development.

Property values within a ¼- and ½-mile radius of the transit stations are expected to increase due to the improved access provided by a transit station and a more walkable community. A ¼-mile and a ½-mile radius were chosen based on empirical evidence in previous studies, which found that property values within this distance are the most greatly impacted by the presence of a rail transit station. BRT and LRT would impact a total of 344 parcels within ¼ mile of the transit stations. Using the conservative estimates of 3% appreciation rate for BRT and 4% for LRT, the total appreciation of property values surrounding the stations would be approximately \$3.9 million for BRT and \$5.2 million for LRT in 2013 dollars within ¼ mile over the first three years of operation. HRT would impact a total of 249 parcels within ¼ mile of the transit. Using the conservative estimate of 10% appreciation rate, the total appreciation of property values surrounding the stations would be about \$11.9 million in 2013 dollars. The premiums within ¼ mile were chosen based on property premiums previously seen in comparable locations for the same transit mode at the same radius (source: *Making the Case for Transit: WMATA Regional Benefits of Transit*, AECOM November 2011).

The existence of a new transit mode along the Georgia 400 Corridor is expected to increase the population and employment densities in the immediately surrounding area. Density projections for the areas around proposed LRT and BRT stations are less than that of HRT. It is assumed that the ratio of increased density for an area surrounding an LRT station will only be 75% of the ratio for HRT, based on lower ridership capacity for LRT. The ratio for increased density in an area surrounding a BRT station is assumed to be 50% of the ratio for LRT due to perceived lack of permanence of the transit mode. (See Table 3-1 and Table 3-2 for the increased population and employment density ratios, respectively.)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.itsmarta.com/north-line-400-corr.aspx>

**Table 3-1: Increased Population Density Attributed to Georgia 400**

Alternative	Magnitude of Density Increase in 2040	
	Quarter-mile Radius	Half-mile Radius
No Build	0%	0%
HRT	112.8%	73.1%
LRT (75% of HRT ratio)	84.6%	58.9%
BRT (50% of LRT ratio)	42.3%	27.4%

**Table 3-2: Increased Employment Density Attributed to Georgia 400**

Alternative	Magnitude of Density Increase in 2040	
	Quarter-mile Radius	Half-mile Radius
No Build	0%	0%
HRT	175.9%	124.0%
LRT (75% of HRT ratio)	131.9%	93.0%
BRT (50% of LRT ratio)	66.0%	46.5%

In addition to density gains, the Georgia 400 Project is expected to encourage compact development around stations making the corridor more walkable and the nearby commercial opportunities more accessible. Compact development not only offers denser residential and commercial development, but also includes a greater mix of development (residential, office, and retail) in a pedestrian and transit friendly environment. One of the key findings of the emerging “local accessibility” research is that “accessibility is a function of both proximity and connectivity.”<sup>3</sup> Portland, Oregon has coined the name “20-minute neighborhood” for such areas: places with 1) a walkable environment, 2) destinations that support a range of daily needs (shop, parks, jobs), and 3) residential density. Collectively, these attributes reduce the need for car trips for a share of a typical household’s trips.<sup>4</sup>

More detail on the preliminary economic analysis and references is included in the 2013 *Economic Trends Technical Report* on the project’s webpage.

### 3.1.2.3 Station Area Development Potential

Generally, the GA 400 corridor and its six proposed station areas have substantial land availability, especially if the expanse of surface parking associated with virtually all its

<sup>3</sup> Pivo, G. and Fisher, J. D., *The Walkability Premium in Commercial Real Estate Investments*. Real Estate Economics, 39: 185–219, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, Status Report: Twenty-minute Neighborhoods, May 2009.

existing office and retail development is taken into account. When land values associated with redevelopment surpass the cost of building structured parking, the market will eventually respond. The office vacancy rate in the GA 400 corridor is far below the metro average and new development activity delayed by the recession is resuming. The comprehensive plans of the potential station's host cities (Sandy Springs, Roswell, and Alpharetta) call for intensification, mixed uses, and enhanced connectivity in all six of the proposed station areas. There are challenges, as a traditional suburban roadway pattern connects the interchanges and arterials to mostly single-use development. Only a handful of non-interchange roads cross the expressway.

At the macro level, the transit investment needs to enhance the corridor's value by connecting it to the region's key employment and activity centers, such as Buckhead, Midtown, downtown Atlanta, and the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. At the micro level, the transit investment needs to connect, efficiently and attractively, with the developable areas around its stations—in this case, to overcome the challenges presented by the existing traditional suburban patterns.



## **4.0 EARLY SCOPING**

### **4.1 Purpose of Early Scoping**

The Early Scoping process is an optional step in the NEPA process. It is intended to support both the AA and a future NEPA scoping process and will help streamline the future development of an EIS. Early Scoping is intended to generate public and agency review and comments on the scope of a planning effort within a defined transportation corridor, which helps the agency to determine which particular alignment variations, should receive more focused study and development to streamline the NEPA process.

MARTA initiated Early Scoping in fall 2013 to evaluate further the feasibility of transit expansion into northern Fulton County and the potential for high-capacity transit project implementation. The findings from the 2013 Early Scoping process (hereafter referred to as Early Scoping Phase 2) resulted from community outreach in 2013 via public meetings, open house displays, City Council briefings and project steering committee meetings.

Following the conclusion of the first phase of Early Scoping, MARTA determined the need to explore further the transit desires of area residents and employees before making a decision on the LPA. This need was identified due to additional public and stakeholder interest and a desire for supplemental, broader reaching outreach. In spring 2014, MARTA initiated community outreach through a second phase of Early Scoping (referred to as Early Scoping Phase 2). Outreach was conducted via public meetings, project steering committee meetings, meetings with community groups, and briefings to City Councils, as well as a public opinion survey.

### **4.2 Early Scoping Phase 1**

#### **4.2.1 Public Notices**

A Notice of Intent for Early Scoping was published in the Federal Register on August 28, 2013. The notice provided information about the GA 400 study, the date and time of the public meeting, how to learn more about the projects, and how to provide comment during the Early Scoping period, which ended on October 28, 2013. A copy of this notice is located in Attachment A-1 of the Appendix.

In addition, MARTA submitted a press release (in English and Spanish) on September 9, 2013, which provided information on the September 26 public meeting and how to provide comment during the Early Scoping process. Additionally, flyers were sent to various civic and business locations throughout the study area. This information can also be found in Attachment A-1 of the Appendix.

#### **4.2.2 Opportunities for Public and Stakeholders to Comment**

##### **4.2.2.1 Public Meeting**

As part of the Early Scoping process, a public meeting was held on September 26, 2013 at the Alpharetta City Hall, 2 Main Street, Alpharetta, GA 30009. The purpose was to provide information, such as projected ridership and costs, on the final set of alternatives, as identified through the AA screening process as well as previous public and stakeholders meetings. More than 100 people participated in the meeting. Several questions were proposed to the attendees. Some key questions, comments, answers provided by MARTA from this meeting are listed below.

***What are your thoughts in general concerning the implementation of high capacity transit?***

- A majority (approximately ¾ of comments received) support extension of high capacity transit in the GA 400 corridor; however this support comes with concerns about phasing, costs, station locations, and traffic/community impacts that may be generated from the extension.

***What technology options are most appropriate and why?***

- The majority of those supporting extension of high-capacity transit prefer heavy rail because of the time savings and ease of a commute without having to change modes. BRT is seen as favourable by a few because it may be quicker/easier/cheaper to implement.

***When phasing, what technology should be implemented first? Second?***

- The preference is for heavy rail, but it is recognized that funding and implementation will take a long time and solutions are needed now. BRT and other express buses could be implemented more quickly as initial phases.

***What east-west connections are most important?***

- Interest in reinstating the 140 bus route to Milton Parkway east of GA 400 to Hwy 141 (including connection to Georgia State's campus)
- Old Milton Parkway west to Avalon and connecting to State Route 9
- Windward Parkway, from State Route 9 to McGinnis Ferry Road
- Milton Parkway from 120 to Broadwell/Crabapple
- McFarland Parkway
- Holcomb Bridge
- Old Milton Parkway (traffic concerns)

**Station Comments**

- Several comments support an Old Milton HRT station. Reasons given include servicing the Avalon development, Gwinnett Tech and Georgia State Alpharetta campus. Two comments stated Old Milton should not be included because it could increase existing east-west traffic.
- Comments were received stating there should not be a station at Northridge Road, especially if it would be built on the east side, because it is already close enough to North Springs station, the area is low-density, and it would bring unwanted traffic to the area.
- Some desire shown for stations further north in Forsyth County.

**Other Frequent Comments:**

- Solutions to east-west traffic are needed.
- Negative community impacts if the transit extension is put on the east side of the GA 400 ROW.

- Extend transit to McFarland or McGinnis Ferry in Forsyth County, along with an east-west transit route.
- A station on Old Milton Parkway would exacerbate existing east-west traffic on Old Milton.
- Taxation concerns, including:
  - North Fulton County residents already pay taxes without having transit, and would be concerned they may have to pay more if transit is extended to their area.
    - If transit is extended to Windward, it will be heavily used by Forsyth County residents and they won't have to fund it through taxes.
    - What would happen to the existing tax if north Fulton becomes Milton County?
- Density is not high enough to support transit, and concerned with the high-densities that would be needed (and resulting traffic).
- Implementation would not necessarily result in ridership.
- Traffic on 400 will not improve as a result of transit.
- Traffic on GA 400 is worse with general traffic permitted in the shoulders.
- Solutions to GA 400 commuting traffic are needed now.
- Express train is desired between north Fulton and downtown Atlanta.
- Public survey/input results based on too few responses.
- More express buses are needed to downtown/midtown Atlanta, airport.
- Embrace TOD.

The proceedings of this meeting are included in Attachment A-2 of the Appendix.

#### **4.2.3 Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting**

On October 17, 2013, a PSC meeting was held at the Sandy Springs Public Library to provide committee members a summary of the Early Scoping public meeting and garner additional input on the project before moving further into the environmental process. A summary of the meeting is included in Attachment A-3 of the Appendix.

#### **4.2.4 City Council Meetings**

The project team visited the cities of Sandy Springs, Roswell, Alpharetta, and Milton to present the GA 400 study to their respective City Council representatives during the Early Scoping period. The dates for each meeting were:

- Sandy Springs – October 1, 2013
- Roswell – September 30, 2013
- Alpharetta – September 16, 2013
- Milton – October 14, 2013

A summary of the proceedings, questions, and comments is provided in Attachment A-4 of the Appendix.

#### **4.2.5 Other input**

In addition to the public and council meetings, MARTA accepted comments by U.S. mail to Janide Sidifall, Office of Transit Systems Planning, MARTA, 2424 Piedmont Road, NE, Atlanta, GA 30324, by email to [Connect400@itsmarta.com](mailto:Connect400@itsmarta.com), and via the project Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Connect400>.

Project-related articles appearing in print and electronic media during the Early Scoping Phase 1 period are in Attachment A-5 of the Appendix.

### **4.3 Early Scoping Phase Two**

As a part of Early Scoping Phase 2, MARTA continued to engage the public and stakeholders through a variety of opportunities including public and stakeholder meetings, attendance at study area events, social media, public meetings, newsletters and surveys. Additionally, the process included ongoing coordination and briefings with local elected officials at key milestones to ensure they are informed and to share feedback received from the public.

The following activities highlight the Early Scoping Phase 2 outreach activities conducted to obtain opinions and feedback from study area residents and stakeholders.

#### **4.3.1 Public Opinion Surveys**

In March 2014, MARTA commissioned a statistically valid public opinion survey of residents and employees in the corridor; the survey was conducted by the Kennesaw State University (KSU) A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research. The purpose of the survey was to determine levels of support for a potential expansion of MARTA service through north Fulton County to the Forsyth County line and other related issues. KSU's survey consisted of two main focuses; the first was a telephone survey of North Fulton residents, and the second was an on-line survey of employees within a 1-mile buffer of the GA 400 highway corridor on the east and west sides. A total of 612 residents and 463 employees participated in the survey.

Key findings from the two surveys were.

- Majority of residents believe traffic congestion is a real problem.
- Almost 80% of respondents agree that a better public transportation system is needed.
- Over 60% of all respondents indicate they would use public transportation more often if it could get them to places they need to go.
- Almost 60 % of respondents generally agree that improving the local roadways is the best way to solve the area's traffic problems.
- Almost 80% of respondents indicate they either strongly approve or approve of expansion of MARTA up GA-400 to the Forsyth County line.
- Heavy rail is preferred by 40% of respondents.
- Light rail is preferred by 37%.
- BRT in HOT/HOV lanes is preferred by 11%; fixed guideway by 6%.

The KSU report is included in Attachment B-1 of the Appendix.

### 4.3.2 Public Notices

On June 23, 2014, the FTA published a notice in the *Federal Register* to announce the reopening of Early Scoping with additional Scoping meetings and an extended comment period. The notice provided information about the GA 400 study, the dates and times of the three public meetings, and how to provide comments during Early Scoping Phase 2, which ended on August 8, 2014. A copy of the Federal Register notice is in Appendix B-2 to this report.

MARTA issued a press release in June 2014 to announce the reopening of Early Scoping and the dates of the public meetings to let people know how they could find out more information about the project, and to provide contact information. MARTA also distributed flyers announcing the additional meetings to the project's database of names from Early Scoping Phase 1, and to various civic and business locations throughout the study area. Copies of the press release and the flyer are including in Attachment B-2.

Table 4-1 summarizes the methods used to announce the initiation of Early Scoping Phase 2 and the July 2014 public meetings.

**Table 4-1: Announcement of Early Scoping Phase 2 Meetings**

Notification	Distribution	Number Distributed
Notice of intent to extend public involvement	<i>Federal Register</i>	1
Meeting announcement (hard copy flyer) *	Direct Mail Malls Employment Centers Places of Worship Parks Colleges MARTA Stations/Buses	2,500
Email announcement	Names in Project Database	800
Press release	Print media (Atlanta Journal and Constitution; Dunwoody Crier; Alpharetta-Roswell Revue and News; Reporter Newspapers – Sandy Springs and Dunwoody)	17
	Television	2
	Radio	2
	MARTA Website	5

\* The list of locations where the meeting announcement flyers were distributed is included in Attachment B-2 of the Appendix.

### 4.3.3 Opportunities for Public and Stakeholder to Comment

#### 4.3.3.1 Public Meetings

MARTA conducted three public meetings within the study area on July 8, 10 and 17, 2014. Three meetings maximized opportunities for participation and were geographically

distributed in the southern, middle and northern portions of the GA 400 study area. The purpose of the meetings was to present a summary of public input to date, including results of the KSU public opinion survey, as well as explore potential expansion alternatives. In addition, MARTA also updated the audiences on the progress of other Early Scoping activities, such as a preliminary New Starts evaluation and development of the EIS and other elements required to enter into Project Development. Meeting materials are included in Attachment B-3 of the Appendix.

Two hundred people attended the three public meetings, as shown in Table 4-2.

**Table 4-2: Early Scoping Phase 2 Public Meetings**

Date*	Location	Number of Attendees
July 8, 2014	Johns Creek Environmental Campus 8100 Holcomb Bridge Road, Roswell, GA	59
July 10, 2014	Georgia State University Alpharetta Center 3775 Brookside Pkwy, Alpharetta, GA	52
July 17, 2014	Hampton Inn Atlanta – Perimeter Center 769 Hammond Drive, Atlanta, GA	89

\* Each meeting used the same materials, presentation and was held from 6:30 pm to 8 pm.

Several questions were posed to the attendees via the comment form and shown below:

***Do you agree with MARTA's proposal to extend high capacity transit service up the GA 400 Corridor to the Forsyth County line?***

- The majority (85%) of those responding agree with this question. The majority of those in agreement believe that extending service would greatly relieve traffic congestion in the corridor. Those who disagree generally feel that extending service would not increase ridership.

***Which transit technology option should MARTA use in the GA 400 Corridor?***

- Of those responding, about 80% prefer HRT as the technology option. Twelve percent expressed a preference for BRT and 8% for LRT. Those preferring HRT believe that keeping the same technology would be more efficient in the long run and provide greater capacity and speed. Respondents preferring LRT suggest the technology would have lower community impacts and those with a preference for BRT like the flexibility it provides as well as the lower cost to implement.

***Potential locations for new MARTA stations include interchanges along GA-400 at Northridge Road, Holcomb Bridge Road, Mansell Road, North Point Mall, Old Milton Parkway and Windward Parkway. Please indicate your preference for station locations.***

- The top three station location preferences are Holcomb Bridge, North Point and Windward Parkway. Respondents also suggest that station locations be appropriately spaced (not too close together) and serve areas with current and projected employment and retail centers.

**Which of these items are most important to you)?**

Item of Importance
Operating in next 5 to 7 years
Low cost to build and operate
One seat ride (no transfer to existing MARTA system)
Low level of impact to communities
High ridership
Significant travel time savings
Development around stations
Reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
Fundability

The top four items identified by respondents are:

- Significant travel time savings
- Low community impact
- Reduction in VMT
- Operating in 5 to 7 Years

**Other Comments**

- Respondents feel strongly that extending transit service in the corridor would significantly reduce traffic congestion.
- Provide feeder buses to serve neighborhoods to the east and west of the corridor.
- Many respondents, especially within the Sandy Springs and Dunwoody communities, prefer the west side of the corridor for extended service.
- Many respondents expressed support for identifying additional funding to implement the service.
- Respondents would like to see service connect to the current and emerging development occurring in the corridor, including a number of satellite school locations.

Copies of the comments submitted are included in Attachment B-4 in the Appendix.

**4.3.3.2 Project Steering Committee Meetings**

A meeting of the PSC was held on June 12, 2014 to inform PSC members of the project status and the purpose of Early Scoping Phase 2. At that meeting, MARTA shared the preliminary results from the KSU public opinion survey and the dates for three July 2014 public meetings for the project. A copy of the presentation and a summary of the meeting are included in Attachment B-5 of the Appendix.

**4.3.3.3 Elected Officials Briefings**

Project status briefings were provided to elected officials in the project's affected jurisdictions. The briefings included presentations consisting of an overview of the current project status, a discussion of public feedback and next steps in the process.



MARTA staff also fielded questions from the elected officials and the public (if present) at those meetings. The dates of the briefing were:

- Fulton County Commissioner Liz Hausmann – June 30, 2014
- Milton – July 14, 2014
- Johns Creek – August 4, 2014
- Roswell – August 11, 2014
- Sandy Springs – August 19, 2014
- Dunwoody – August 25, 2014

Common themes expressed during the briefings were:

- What role will local funding play in the decision of the LPA?
- Why is LRT more expensive?
- What is the impact of the potential expansion to Clayton County?
- Concerns over east versus west side of GA 400.

A summary of the proceedings, questions, and comments is provided in Attachment B-6 of the Appendix.

#### **4.3.3.4 Neighborhood Meetings**

To maximize opportunities for public feedback, the project team made themselves available to present project information to interested groups within the study area. The Northridge Community, generally situated around the Northridge Road interchange at GA 400 in the City of Sandy Springs, is made up of several subdivisions. Representatives of the homeowners in the area expressed an early interest in the continuation of Early Scoping. With initiation of Early Scoping Phase 2, MARTA was invited to a meeting of the Northridge Community Association on June 12, 2014 to discuss the project, the process underway, and their concerns. Approximately 80 people attended. MARTA staff made a presentation and afforded attendees the opportunity to make comments and ask questions. Display boards were set up containing historical study information related to suggested alignments and stations. Chief among their concerns was the potential community impacts of a high capacity transit alignment east of GA 400.

Subsequent to the June 12 meeting, the Northridge Community continued providing input by conducting outreach to their residents through a series of surveys. Approximately 575 Northridge Community residents provided feedback during the 45-day comment period. Nearly 70 percent of the persons polled support the extension of MARTA to Windward Parkway, but the vast majority (93%) would not support the project if it is on the east side of GA 400 through the Northridge area of Sandy Springs. While the vast majority do not support a new station at Northridge on the east side of GA 400, only a slim majority (54%) would support a Northridge station on the west side. Their feedback was compiled and is included in Attachment B-7 the Appendix.

The Northridge Community Association also invited MARTA staff on a neighborhood tour on July 26, 2014 to observe locations within their neighborhood in proximity of GA 400. The tour included five subdivisions with visits to individual homes near the east side of GA 400 and two elementary schools. The group provided MARTA with data on the



subdivisions and schools in the area. This data is included in Attachment B-7 in the Appendix.

#### **4.3.3.5 Frequently Asked Questions**

A set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) was developed prior to the Early Scoping Phase 2 meetings and distributed to attendees. The FAQs were also handed out at community meetings, city council briefings, and events at employment centers. The 2014 FAQ is in Attachment B-8 of the Appendix.

#### **4.3.3.6 Employment Centers Events**

MARTA reached out to a number of malls and shopping centers to have an event to provide information on the project. To date, MARTA has held one event at the Northwinds office park near Haynes Bridge Road; the event was held from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm on Thursday, August 21, 2014. Display boards that outline the study process and other materials were set up to encourage interactive input regarding station type and alignment preferences. Other materials included information from the KSU survey and updated FAQs. Approximately 50 people participated in the event. Five persons submitted comments; all agreed with the proposal to extend high capacity transit service up the GA 400 corridor to the county line. Each person stated that HRT should be extended although one person admitted to be open to new ideas such as BRT, and each person agreed with the concept of building a shorter section first.

#### **4.3.3.7 Other Ways to Provide Early Scoping Feedback**

In addition to the public, neighborhood and elected officials meetings, MARTA accepted comments by the following methods:

- Contacting Mark Eatman, Project Manager, Office of Transit Systems Planning, (404) 848-4494
- Email to [Connect400@itsmarta.com](mailto:Connect400@itsmarta.com)
- [The Connect 400 Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Connect400) (<https://www.facebook.com/Connect400>)
- Via the project webpage - <http://www.itsmarta.com/northline-contact-us.aspx>

While the official comment period for Early Scoping Phase 2 ended on August 8, 2014, MARTA continued to accept comments on the project alternatives.

Between June 23, and September 19, 2014 MARTA received about 120 comments on the project via e-mail. Key themes of the email comments were:

- Reduce traffic congestion/improve commute times.
- Prefer the alignment on the west side of the corridor.
- Provide better accessibility (to Downtown, airport, inner-city events, suburb jobs).
- Encourage density/TOD near proposed stations.
- Add an HRT station at Old Milton Parkway (at the new Avalon development).
- Opposition to a station location at the Northridge interchange by the public living in Sandy Springs and Dunwoody.

- Transit will improve property values.
- Focus on in-town transportation options instead of or before GA 400 expansion.

The anonymized email comments received are included in Attachment B-9 of the Appendix.

#### **4.3.3.8 Media Coverage**

The outreach activities conducted during the second phase of Early Scoping gained substantial coverage from the local media through news articles, interviews with MARTA staff, television reports and radio news (See Table 4-1 in Section 4.3.2 Public Notes). Copies of the published articles during this period are included in Attachment B-10 of the Appendix.

### **4.3.4 Common Themes**

Throughout Early Scoping Phase 2, significant feedback was received from participants. The following common themes were compiled from input received, and are representative of the most frequently offered opinions on the following topics.

#### **4.3.4.1 Project Support**

- Comments received suggest overwhelming support for extended transit service in the corridor to relieve congestion.
- A small number of respondents feel additional service is not warranted based on observation of empty buses and rail cars.
- The majority of Northridge community members who participated favor the project only if it is on the west side of GA 400.

#### **4.3.4.2 Project Alignment**

- Strong support was shown for the alignment to be located on the west side of the corridor to avoid impacts to local communities in the southern portion of the project area.
- Residents and businesses expressed support for alignments that serve major employment and retail centers in the corridor.
- Comments suggest a review of future land use and new developments to ensure alignment considerations are reflective of future growth.

#### **4.3.4.3 Technology Considerations**

- Comments received suggest that respondents are divided over the type of technology with some support for all three technologies. The majority of support was for HRT. There was also interest in BRT or combined BRT with HRT as a phased option.
- Many did not believe LRT was feasible given the cost.
- There is general support for phasing of the technologies over time.

#### **4.3.4.4 Funding**

- Respondents had varying opinions on fundability:
  - Some suggested that federal funding would not likely occur for the more expensive alternatives such as LRT.
  - Others stated unwillingness to pay additional taxes at the local level for the extended service.
  - Still others believed that other counties who use the system, especially Cobb and Forsyth Counties, should have to bear some of the cost burden.

#### **4.3.4.5 Station Design/Location**

- Support was generally strong for the location of stations at the suggested stops, although some respondents thought the number of stations around Sandy Springs was excessive.
- The top preferences for station locations were Holcomb Bridge, North Point and Windward Parkway. There were suggestions of combining the proposed stations at Holcomb Bridge Road and Mansell Road and combining the stations at Old Milton Parkway and Windward Parkway.
- Residents in the Northridge Community somewhat oppose a station at Northridge and GA 400, particularly on the east side of GA 400.
- A few respondents wanted to see stations all the way up to the Forsyth County line.

#### **4.3.4.6 Phasing**

- Respondents generally support phasing of construction if it will lead to more immediate service.
- Some commenters suggested implementing expanded BRT initially, then adding HRT.

The table in Attachment B-11 of the Appendix summarizes the common themes raised in comments received and shows the number of comments for and against the overall project. Approximately 188 total comments were received, with almost 94% indicating support for the project.

## 5.0 NEXT STEPS IN THE FEDERAL PROCESS

Based on stakeholder and public input received during Early Scoping Phase 2, MARTA has decided to conduct additional conceptual analysis for BRT and HRT alignments and station locations, typical sections, interchange details, and operating plans to inform the development of capital and operating cost estimates and preliminary environmental impact analysis. This analysis will assist in the selection of a LPA for the GA 400 corridor. Once completed, MARTA staff will present the findings to the MARTA Board of Directors and make a recommendation regarding the alternatives to move forward in the Federal environmental process. Following this recommendation, MARTA and FTA are expected to issue a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS, and public and agency scoping will begin. Then MARTA will conduct further analysis and refinement of the alternatives, environmental analysis, and public involvement.

Figure 5-1 illustrates the phases in the federal project development process. The project is currently in systems planning, with the EIS expected to begin in early 2015.

**Figure 5-1: Project Development Process**

