



3.0 REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

This section of the Purpose and Need Report highlights the significant features from previous plans and studies that could impact the development of the I-20 East Transit Initiative. Much of the background data presented in this report is from a number of previous plans and studies such as regional initiatives, transit studies, locally initiated plans, and Livable Centers Initiatives (LCIs), as well as additional studies identified through public and stakeholder efforts. While this section includes only summary reviews of prior plans and studies, it provides important data for the formulation of Purpose and Need Report. **Table 3-1** below identifies the previous plans and studies that are relevant to the I-20 East Transit Initiative.

Table 3-1: Previous Plans and Studies

| Plan/Study | Year | Agency |
|--|------|--------------------------|
| South DeKalb-Lindbergh Corridor Major Investment Study | 2000 | MARTA |
| Regional Transit Action Plan | 2003 | GRTA |
| Atlanta BeltLine | 2003 | City of Atlanta |
| I-20 East Corridor Study – Alternatives Analysis | 2004 | MARTA |
| The DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan 2005-2025 | 2005 | DeKalb County |
| Envision6 2030 Regional Transportation Plan | 2005 | ARC |
| I-20 East Corridor Study - Modified LPA Report | 2006 | MARTA |
| DeKalb County Comprehensive Transportation Plan | 2006 | DeKalb County |
| Transportation Planning Board Final Report | 2007 | MARTA/GRTA |
| Candler Road/Flat Shoals Parkway LCI Study | 2007 | DeKalb County |
| Connect Atlanta | 2008 | City of Atlanta |
| Atlanta Strategic Action Plan | 2008 | City of Atlanta |
| Rockdale County Transportation Plan | 2009 | Rockdale County |
| Imagine Downtown | 2009 | Central Atlanta Progress |
| DRAFT Wesley Chapel LCI Study | 2011 | ARC |
| MMPT Conceptual Design | 2010 | GDOT |
| Plan 2040 | 2011 | ARC |

3.1 Summary of Previous Plans and Studies

3.1.1 South DeKalb – Lindbergh Corridor Major Investment Study

To explore the need for transit improvements in South DeKalb County and to meet the requirements from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, a Major Investment Study (MIS) was completed in June 2000. Travel time delay and congestion that stemmed from the large number of residents and the numerous employment and activity centers present in South DeKalb County, seemed to warrant a new, direct connection with both the highway and transit systems. The overall purpose of the MIS was to determine the need, extent and nature of potential transit service improvements in the area southeast of I-285 to the Lindbergh Center. The study took into account needs and issues such as mobility, environmental, economic, educational, and cultural resources to develop the necessary measures to address the study area. Another important aspect of the MIS was that the evaluation framework incorporated the



Section 5309 Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Starts Criteria. This MIS lead to a decision by the MARTA board to focus on the I-20 East Corridor for transit investment.

3.1.2 Regional Transit Action Plan

The *Regional Transit Action Plan* (RTAP) was completed by the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) in 2003. The goal was to produce a long-range transit action plan for the 13-county air quality non-attainment area in metro Atlanta. The RTAP contained a Draft Concept Plan that describes a proposed public transportation network in the Atlanta region. The recommendations include improvements to operations, infrastructure, and development of new routes to fill in gaps and extend services to other areas in the region. Relative to the I-20 East Transit Initiative study area, the RTAP specifically recommends a high speed BRT line along I-20 from Downtown Atlanta through the Mall at Stonecrest to Conyers. It also recommends a regional BRT network linking suburban areas with existing transit. A number of the recommended BRT corridors would affect the study area. These include Candler Road (City of Decatur to I-285), Memorial Drive (Stone Mountain to the Garnett MARTA station), and Moreland Avenue/Briarcliff Road (I-285 South to North Druid Hills Road).

3.1.3 Atlanta BeltLine Project

The Atlanta BeltLine project is a major transportation and land redevelopment project intended to influence the future growth of the Atlanta region. The project provides a network of transit, multi-use trails and public parks along a 22-mile railroad corridor circling central Atlanta and connecting 45 neighborhoods directly. Once completed, the Atlanta BeltLine could be the most comprehensive economic development effort ever undertaken in the city and one of the largest in the country. The Atlanta BeltLine is relevant to the I-20 East Transit Initiative based on its close proximity of the western end of the study area. Further, the BeltLine has the potential to be a transfer point at possible linkages such as Bill Kennedy Way and the Memorial Glenwood Connector.

The transit portion of the BeltLine is supported by several planning studies. MARTA performed the *Inner Core Feasibility Study* and *Inner Core Alternatives Assessment* in 2005, and the *Detailed Technical Screening and Selection of Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)* in January 2007. The selected LPA consisted of light rail technology along a corridor that intersects with the I-20 East study area. Based on this recommendation, MARTA has completed the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement. Public hearings were held in August 2011, and a Record of Decision from the FTA is anticipated.

3.1.4 I-20 East Corridor Study – Alternatives Analysis

Completed in 2004, this study resulted in the MARTA Board approving the staff recommendation for selection of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) 4 Alternative as the LPA. The LPA extends from Downtown Atlanta (Five Points to Capitol Avenue) to the Mall at Stonecrest. The alignment is located along I-20 in the segment west of Moreland Avenue, where it transitions to a new guideway located on the south side of I-20 for the remainder of the alignment to the east. The issues, needs and goals/objectives identified in the Alternatives Analysis are similar to, and form the basis of, the analysis to be conducted in the I-20 East Transit Initiative.

3.1.5 Envision6 2030 Regional Transportation Plan

Envision6 is the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) approved by Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) in September of 2007. The RTP addresses regional planning challenges such as rapid growth, financial constraints, congestion, and provision of travel



options. The goals of the RTP are to improve accessibility and mobility for all people and freight; encourage and promote safe, secure, and efficient development, management, and operation of the surface transportation system; protect and improve the environment and quality of life; and support economic growth and development. The projects in the RTP also are included in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and are identified either as long range or as programmed when they become financially constrained. In Section 3.2.1.4 the study area transit projects included in the RTP are discussed. Construction of the I-20 East Transit Initiative is shown as a long-range project.

3.1.6 I-20 East Corridor Study - Modified LPA Report

This report, completed in 2006, documented subsequent modifications to the previous I-20 East Corridor Study – Alternatives Analysis. After the completion of the Alternatives Analysis, and the MARTA Board of Directors' recommendation to approve the LPA, modifications to the LPA were made that included the modification to planned station location from Miller Road to Panola Road, revision of the alignment in Downtown Atlanta, and revision to the capital cost and project phasing estimates. The study effort and resulting report informs the I-20 East Transit Initiative to additional issues that were analyzed relative to transit station locations, downtown transit alignments and project phasing related transit services in the corridor. Neither this report nor its results were brought before the MARTA Board of Directors for approval.

3.1.7 DeKalb County Comprehensive Transportation Plan

The *DeKalb County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP)* was completed in 2006, but has not been officially adopted by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners. The CTP provides an overview of existing and forecasted travel conditions and lists recommended transportation investments in the county. As with the ARC's Envision6 process, the CTP incorporates land use scenario projects to predict transportation demand. As a result, the county's proposed land use and transportation policies have relevance affecting future transportation investments in the county.

The I-20 East Corridor runs through the southern part of DeKalb County and includes portions of the subareas of the SE and SW quadrants used in that plan. The CTP identified the southeast quadrant as deficient in transit service for both residents and employment centers and the southwest quadrant as deficient for employment transit service.

The DeKalb County CTP is relevant to the I-20 East Transit Initiative in that it recommends short-range (2006–2011), mid-range (2012–2020), and long-range (2012–2030) transportation projects within study area. Short range recommendations include an increase in transit service, especially in the southeastern area of the county, mainly around Lithonia, the Mall at Stonecrest and the Panola Road area, and throughout the study area during off peak hours. Relevant mid-range recommendations include widening Covington Highway from four to six lanes between Memorial Drive and Lithonia. Long range recommendations include widening I-20 from six lanes to eight lanes; a BRT along I-20 from the Mall at Stonecrest to Downtown Atlanta in an exclusive Right-of-Way (ROW); and widening SR 212 from two lanes to four lanes from Snapfinger Road to the DeKalb County line.

3.1.8 Connect Atlanta

Connect Atlanta, completed in 2008 is the City of Atlanta's first ever Comprehensive Transportation Plan. The goal of the plan was to meet the needs of commuters and their varied trips to, from, and within the City of Atlanta. The plan evaluated all modes of transportation and promoted policies and resources that, among other things, connected



transportation infrastructure evaluation to job locations, land use types and recreation amenities; created an affordable and walkable city; enhanced mobility within the city; supported regional connectivity; and maintained and optimized the city's existing transportation systems. The *Connect Atlanta Plan* was adopted by the Atlanta City Council in December of 2008. The relevance of Connect Atlanta to the I-20 East Transit Initiative is that this plan recommends the reconfiguration of the Moreland Ave at the I-20 interchange and proposes new transit lines along the BeltLine, both of which are in the western end of the I-20 East corridor study area.

3.1.9 Transit Planning Board Final Report

The Transit Planning Board (TPB) is a joint commission of the ARC, GRTA and MARTA developed to establish and maintain a seamless, integrated transit network for the Atlanta region. In 2008 it developed a regional transit plan, known as *Concept 3*, with a comprehensive financial plan, which worked to improve service coordination between transit systems, developed performance measures and advocated for increased federal funding for the Atlanta region. After the approval of *Concept 3* by the ARC, GRTA, and MARTA, the TPB became the Transit Implementation Board (TIB) and continued to support the plan and regional transit.

In its final report, the TPB recommended a light rail alignment along I-20 from Downtown to the Mall at Stonecrest, as well as a commuter rail line from Downtown Atlanta through Decatur and Stone Mountain to Lithonia and Conyers. Other recommendations included a BRT line along Memorial Drive from Downtown Atlanta to Stone Mountain and Snellville, the Atlanta BeltLine project, the Moreland Ave BRT, and the Candler Rd BRT.

3.1.10 Rockdale County Transportation Plan

Completed in 2009, this plan assessed the needs for transportation improvements and identified multi-modal transportation improvement opportunities to help Rockdale County address transportation issues through 2030. The goal of the plan was to identify existing and future operating conditions for the multi-modal transportation system (roadways, bridges, bike and pedestrian facilities, transit and aviation) within Rockdale County and use that information to identify improvements and prioritize projects for implementation.

Since Rockdale County and the City of Conyers comprise the eastern end of the I-20 East Transit Initiative study area, the transit-related recommendations of the Rockdale County CTP are relevant to this study. The CTP notes that GRTA and Rockdale County are exploring options to expand services in the county and have plans and funding for a second permanent park and ride lot that would replace the leased lot at the Church in the Now.

Additionally, there is a proposed, unfunded, intercity rail service between Atlanta, Madison and Augusta that would pass through Rockdale County and the City of Conyers, which could provide key connections between Rockdale County and the rest of the state. The CTP recommends the incorporation of this rail service into County and City transit planning initiatives and the development of feeder routes or other connections to this rail service upon implementation.

3.1.11 IMAGINE Downtown

The *Imagine Downtown: ENCORE* study was completed in 2009 by Central Atlanta Progress. It seeks to affirm and refine recent Downtown Atlanta master plans through input from local residents and businesses. The study recommends a streetcar system in Downtown Atlanta with service along Peachtree Street, Auburn Avenue and Edgewood Avenue to the Atlanta



BeltLine and the Centennial Olympic Park area. The study also recommends a light rail line from Garnett Station out the I-20 East Corridor.

3.1.12 Multi-Modal Transportation Passenger Terminal (MMPT) Conceptual Design

Completed in July 2010, this study was intended to help procure a Master Developer for the MMPT in downtown Atlanta to serve as a hub for existing MARTA heavy rail service; planned passenger rail operations; planned streetcar operations; intercity, local, and express bus operations; and new private development to stimulate economic growth in the vicinity. The MMPT would be located adjacent to the MARTA Five Points Station.

The technical memorandum documented potential operator requirements and facility needs such as freight rail, passenger rail, bus operations and vehicles for hire. Circulation plans including pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile access were also included. It advised that the MMPT should be designed to ultimately accommodate existing and future intercity express and local bus services, while providing spaces for taxicab, shuttle, and car-sharing operations. Also, future commuter rail, high-speed rail (HSR), light rail, and streetcar services would also be located at the MMPT.

Once funded, the MMPT could serve as the western terminus of the study and possible connection point to other local and regional travel modes. Enhanced pedestrian access between the MMPT and Five Points Station are also planned.

3.1.13 Plan 2040

Completed by the ARC staff and adopted July 27, 2011 by the ARC Board, PLAN 2040 is the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for the 18-county ARC MPO region as well as the Regional Agenda for the 10-county ARC Regional Commission study area. The RTP examines the region's transportation needs through the year 2040 and provides a framework to address anticipated growth through systems and policies. PLAN 2040 provides a comprehensive statement of the regional future transportation needs as identified by local jurisdictions, the State and other stakeholder agencies. It contains strategies aimed at improving mobility and access, and defines both short- and long-term transportation strategies and investments to improve the region's transportation system.

Plan 2040 also includes the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is the program for funding and implementation of the near-term years of projects in the adopted long-range Regional Transportation Plan. Under SAFETEA-LU requirements, the TIP must cover a minimum of four fiscal years. The Atlanta region's TIP covers six fiscal years, FY 2012 through FY 2017.

Plan 2040 includes transit improvements in the I-20 East Corridor from downtown Atlanta to the Stonecrest Mall area in DeKalb County in its constrained plan. The constrained plan also includes an Alternatives Analysis study for Cobb and Gwinnett transit, the Multimodal Passenger Terminal in Atlanta, transit improvements in the Clifton Corridor from Lindbergh to Emory to Decatur, transit improvements on the Atlanta BeltLine and Streetcars in Atlanta. I-20 interchanges at I-285 east and Panola Road are included for funding in the TIP. The constrained plan and TIP include I-20 East managed lanes west of I-285. Managed lanes east of I-285 on I-20 East are in the aspirations plan.

3.1.14 Other Land Use and Redevelopment Plans

There are some land use and redevelopment plans that contribute to the current and future conditions within the corridor and, subsequently, to the purpose and need of this I-20 East



Transit Initiative. Summaries of these relevant land use plans can be found in the land use analysis in Section 4. These include:

- Wesley Chapel LCI (2011)
- Candler Road/Flat Shoals Parkway LCI (2007)
- The DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan 2005-2025
- Atlanta Strategic Action Plan (2008)
- Various LCI Studies

3.2 Major Findings

- The previous studies of transportation needs in the I-20 East corridor have clearly established the need for high capacity transit service.
- Studies starting with the *South DeKalb/Lindbergh Study* have consistently shown transit demand for a fixed guideway investment in the I-20 East Corridor between South DeKalb and Central Atlanta. Local jurisdictions including the City of Atlanta and the Counties of DeKalb and Rockdale have recently completed CTPs that contain many recommendations, strategies and other elements that apply to the study area and have some similar goals and objectives.
- There are regional transportation plans that establish frameworks for future transit operations, infrastructure and development as well as regional goals for mobility, safety and the environment. These regional efforts include improved transit service in the I-20 East Transit Initiative study area.
- There are land use and redevelopment plans and zoning ordinances in the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County, as well as from LCIs that support and encourage transit oriented development, a goal of the I-20 East Transit Initiative.