



I-20 East Corridor

Making the Case for the Locally Preferred Alternative

The I-20 East Corridor has experienced significant population and employment growth over the past several decades. These trends are expected to continue over the next 25 years. The transportation system within this corridor has been unable to keep pace with the demands placed on it by this growth. As congestion has steadily increased, mobility has worsened, creating longer travel times for commuters and reducing access to residential and employment centers.

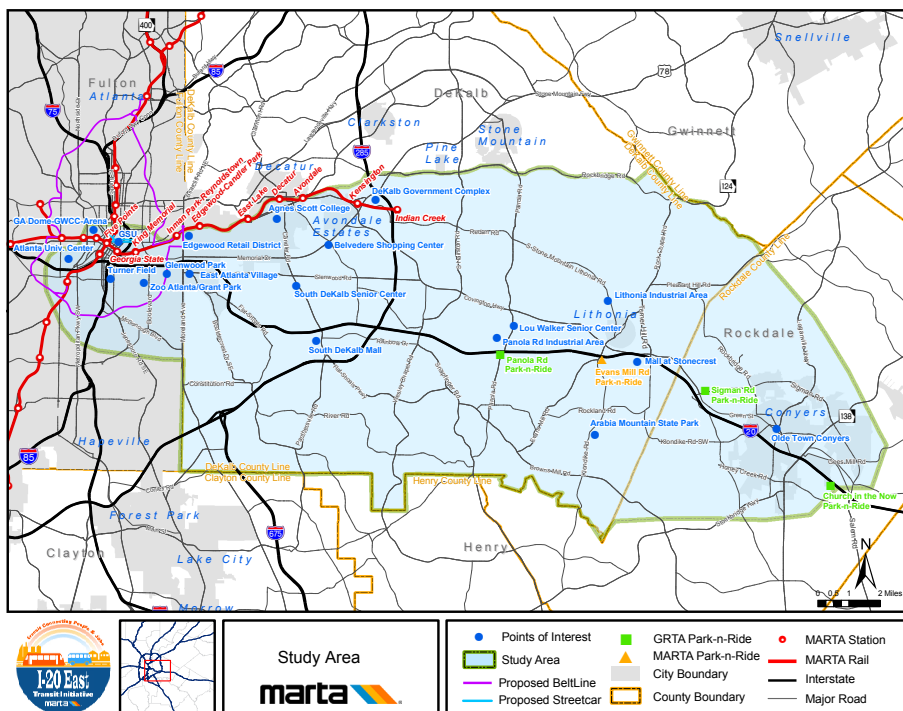
The I-20 East Transit Initiative was initiated by MARTA to identify transit investments that would improve east-west mobility and accessibility to jobs and housing within the corridor, provide convenient and efficient transit service to accommodate the increasing transit demands within the corridor, and support corridor economic development and revitalization.

The Transportation Problem

The I-20 East Corridor between the central Atlanta and eastern DeKalb County faces several major challenges. East-west travel is the predominant travel pattern within the corridor and there are limited roadway options – I-20 is the only real choice. The lack of east-west movement is projected to remain an issue as planned and programmed roadway capacity projects are focused on north-south roadways. Also, there are no projects planned to add general use lanes or HOV/managed lanes to I-20 by 2030. With an estimated 3.5 million daily person trips originating and terminating within the corridor by 2030, congestion is expected to increase, causing mobility and access to decrease. The eastern portion of the study area is the most mobility and access constrained. By 2030, the average automobile travel times to and from Downtown and Midtown Atlanta, which represent the largest concentrated destination for travel within the corridor, are expected to be greater than one hour for those residents living east of I-285.

Significant increases in ridership have occurred on local and express bus services that travel on I-20 East over the past five to ten years. Despite the congested roadway conditions, transit travel is expected to continue to increase. In 2005, there were 143,700 daily transit trips in the I-20 East Corridor. By 2030, it is projected that there will be 253,000 daily transit trips, a 77 % increase from 2005. An estimated 49% of these transit trips originating in the corridor will be destined for Downtown and Midtown Atlanta. By 2030, local and express bus service in much of the eastern portion of the corridor is expected to experience considerably longer travel times.

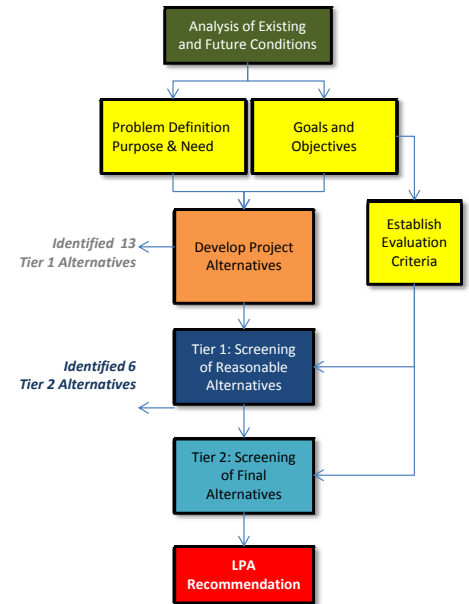
Redevelopment and reinvestment is a major identified need in the corridor. There are land use plans, redevelopment plans, and zoning ordinances in the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County, as well as from Livable Centers Initiatives (LCIs), that support and encourage transit-oriented development. Additional premium transit service in the corridor would represent a major new investment in the area and would have the potential to catalyze new development in these areas.



Alternatives Analysis Process

The I-20 East Transit Initiative has followed a structured process outlined by Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) that begins with the identification of transportation needs, proceeds through the development and evaluation of transit alternatives that address the identified needs, and concludes with the recommendation of the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). In this process, stakeholders were tasked with helping to identify a broad range of alternatives for new transit service in the I-20 East Corridor. This involved an assessment of transit technologies including Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Light Rail Transit (LRT) and Heavy Rail Transit (HRT), coupled with various alignment options for providing a transit connection between the Mall at Stonecrest and central Atlanta. Over the course of the project, the set of feasible alternatives were reduced through a two-tiered screening process that included significant public input. The result of the Tier 1 Screening was a set of feasible transit alignments that would connect activity centers along the I-20 East Corridor with central Atlanta and the existing MARTA heavy rail system. The Tier 2 Screening paired these alignments with compatible transit technologies, or modes, to identify a final set of transit alternatives that were subject to a more detailed evaluation to select an LPA.

I-20 East Alternatives Analysis Process

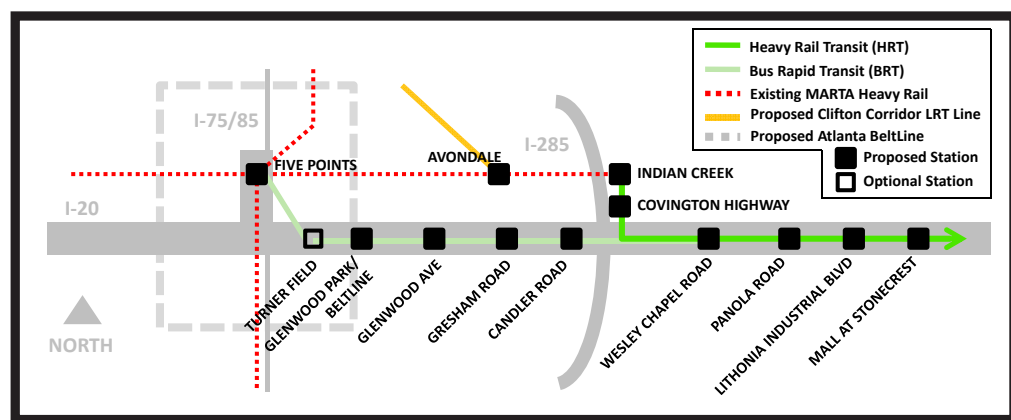


I-20 East Corridor LPA

The LPA is the project alternative that would most effectively address the transportation challenges in the corridor and fulfill the goals and objectives identified by stakeholders for new transit service in the I-20 East Corridor. The recommended LPA for the I-20 East Corridor is the 12-mile extension of the existing MARTA east-west heavy rail line from the Indian Creek Station. The line would extend south parallel with I-285, then east parallel with I-20 to the Mall at Stonecrest in eastern DeKalb County. This extension would provide fast and reliable transit service for commuters traveling to and from central Atlanta along this heavily congested section of the I-20. In addition to providing improved east-west mobility and access to jobs and housing in the corridor, the LPA would provide rapid transit service to a population currently only served by bus, and support corridor economic development and revitalization. As shown below, the LPA would also provide bus rapid transit (BRT) service along I-20 inside the Perimeter.

The LPA would extend MARTA's existing Green Line to provide new service in the I-20 East Corridor. The extended Green Line would serve all new heavy rail stations as shown in the figure to the right, and then operate as an express service along the existing east line, serving only select stations in order to minimize travel times between Mall at Stonecrest and the Five Points Station. The Blue Line service would remain unchanged, providing local service to all existing stations between Indian Creek and Five Points Station.

I-20 East LPA



The BRT service proposed as part of the LPA would originate at the Five Points Station and serve all proposed stations along I-20 within the Perimeter. It would then connect with the proposed heavy rail station at Wesley Chapel Road to provide connectivity with the heavy rail service along I-20 outside the Perimeter. This BRT service would provide all-day express service with, at a minimum, premium, low-floor buses with level platform boarding and fixed-route, branded, high-frequency service, utilizing transit stations rather than typical bus stops, HOV/HOT lanes, and transit-only interchanges.

Reasons for Selection of the LPA

Of the six final alternatives considered, the adopted LPA is the alternative that would most effectively address the stakeholder-identified needs of the corridor and goals and objectives of the project. The following table details the reasons why the adopted LPA (HRT3) would best address each of these goals and objectives.

Project Goal	Reason for Selection of LPA – HRT3
Increase Mobility and Accessibility	<p>Fast Travel Times and High Ridership: HRT3 would provide significant travel times savings for commuters in the corridor. Additionally, HRT3 is expected to attract 28,700 daily riders.</p> <p>Transit Access to Decatur and proposed Clifton Corridor LRT line: HRT3 is the only alternative that would provide a direct connection to both the City of Atlanta and the City of Decatur, the DeKalb County seat. HRT3 would also provide a connection to the proposed Clifton Corridor light rail line, which would provide direct service to the employment center containing Emory University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).</p>
Provide Improved Transit Service in the Corridor	<p>Would serve heavily congested areas of corridor with first phase of implementation: While all alternatives would need to be constructed in multiple phases due to funding and construction limitations, HRT3 is the only alternative that would serve the most congested areas east of I-285 in the first phase of implementation.</p> <p>Ease of implementation: There are no major construction issues associated with the implementation of HRT3. However, the other alternatives would require very complicated and expensive bridges in the median of I-20 to avoid impacts to historic neighborhoods or tunneling under multiple historic neighborhoods.</p>
Support Land Use and Development Goals	<p>Supportive of Economic Development: In addition to being consistent with existing and future land use plans, approximately 900 acres of underutilized or vacant land is located within ½ mile of HRT3 stations. Therefore, this alternative would provide significant opportunity for transit-oriented development and redevelopment in the corridor.</p>
Promote Cost Effective Transit Investments	<p>Lowest cost alternative: At \$2.04B, HRT3 has the lowest total cost of all alternatives and is projected to cost over one billion dollars less than the most expensive alternative (HRT1). Furthermore, HRT3 is \$73.7M less expensive than the next lowest cost alternative (BRT1).</p> <p>Utilizes existing infrastructure: HRT3 would utilize existing MARTA East-West line to provide a direct transit connection into downtown Atlanta. By utilizing the existing transit investment, HRT3 avoids the construction of an expensive and complicated connection into downtown Atlanta. HRT3 would also allow for the use of existing MARTA rail maintenance facilities rather than the construction of new facilities in the corridor.</p>
Preserve Natural and Built Environment	<p>Lowest number of displacements: With an expected 13 displacements, HRT3 would have significantly fewer residential or commercial displacements than all other alternatives. The property impacts of the other alternatives range from 35 to 47 potential displacements.</p>
Achieve a High Level of Community Support	<p>Strong Public Support: HRT3 received strong public support, especially from those residents from the heavily congested portion of the corridor east of I-285. In a rating of the six Tier 2 Alternatives, 30 percent of all survey respondents rated HRT3 as “most appropriate for the I-20 East Corridor,” as did 51 percent of those respondents who lived east of I-285 (or outside the Perimeter).</p>

Benefits of the Project

The recommended LPA is expected to carry almost 4.7 million riders annually with 1.6 million of these being new riders. The implementation of HRT3 would reduce the annual automobile miles driven in the corridor by more than 21 million miles and total automobile commute time by more than 2 million hours. This reduction in vehicular travel would reduce pollutants in the Atlanta region by 21 tons annually and fuel consumption by over 800,000 gallons.

The proposed heavy rail extension of the recommended LPA would enable passengers to travel from the Mall at Stonecrest to Downtown Atlanta without having to transfer and provide an estimated travel time savings of more than 20 minutes over the automobile by 2030. It would have the capacity to accommodate more than 5,000 passengers per hour, both east- and westbound, between downtown Atlanta and the Mall at Stonecrest, which is the equivalent of more than two Interstate lanes of additional capacity in each direction. However, unlike additional Interstate lanes, travel along this proposed transit extension would not be hindered by traffic congestion.

The adopted LPA would also support emerging growth and improve the link between the communities and employment centers along the I-20 corridor. The LPA is consistent with, and supportive of, local future land use plans, which call for nodal mixed-use development at areas around the Mall at Stonecrest, Panola Road, Wesley Chapel Road, Candler Road, Gresham Road, Turner Field, and Bill Kennedy Way Stations. By 2030, HRT3 implementation would increase access and mobility for almost 165,000 persons living within two miles of proposed transit stations that are not within 2 miles of an existing MARTA rail station. An estimated 61,300 additional jobs would be located within two miles of a proposed LPA transit stations, which would significantly increase access to employment within the corridor.

Moving Forward: Challenges and Opportunities to Implementing the LPA

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires transportation investments receiving federal funding to fully consider the environmental, cultural and social impacts of projects. The potential impacts stemming from the extension of MARTA HRT will be investigated in an EIS, while those associated with new BRT service along I-20 will be documented in an EA. The following challenges and opportunities will face MARTA as the project moves forward through the project development process:

- **Refinement of Station Locations:** Although all stations areas have been presented to the public, it is anticipated that refinement of the station location, size, access points, parking facilities, and layout will be required. This will involve outreach efforts to business owners, residents, jurisdictional staff, and elected officials.
- **Continued Public Involvement:** Public, stakeholder, and agency outreach must continue throughout the life of this project in order to educate the public, identify local issues, and build support. One key issue that arose during public engagement in the fall of 2011 was concern regarding BRT service inside the I-285 Perimeter. HRT3 had overwhelming support from residents outside Perimeter, but residents within the Perimeter voiced concern that they would not be served by rail transit.
- **Refinement of Project Costs:** It is anticipated that capital, right-of-way, and O&M costs will be adjusted as more detail regarding the transit alignments, operations, and station locations is prepared. It is assumed that all new HRT stations would be smaller, simpler stations that will cost less than traditional MARTA HRT stations.
- **Coordination with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT):** Since much of the LPA HRT alignment is proposed within or partially within GDOT right-of-way, close coordination is necessary. MARTA has engaged GDOT throughout the study process to ensure the protection of a transit corridor within GDOT right-of-way where possible. As a result, the GDOT Board recently adopted a resolution that guides cooperation between the two agencies with regard to implementation of transit initiatives in corridors designated for managed lane projects. The intent of the resolution is to foster thoughtful utilization of existing and planned assets for both highway and transit modes. An MOU will be developed to outline specific commitments for the I-20 East Corridor.
- **Identification of Project Funding:** The identification of possible funding sources is essential to the implementation of the I-20 East project. One possible funding source is the FTA New Starts program, which is the federal government's primary financial resource for supporting major transit investments. This highly competitive program evaluates potential New Starts projects based on mobility improvements, cost effectiveness, local financial commitments, and other criteria.