

LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE REPORT



ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS/DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority

August 2004



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Prepared for: Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority

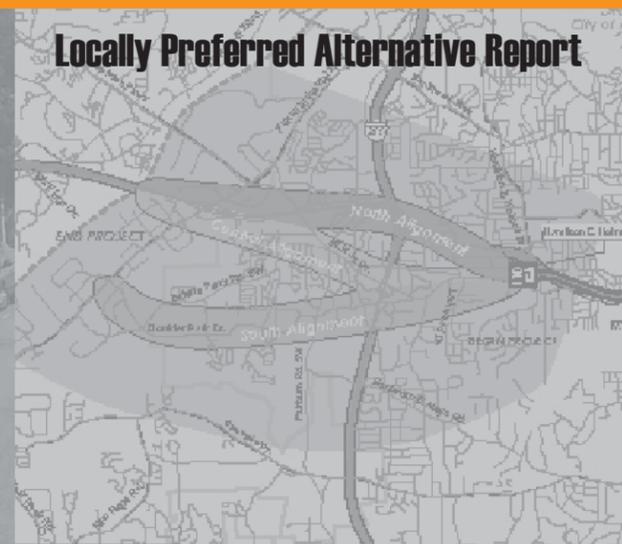
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION



Locally Preferred Alternative Report

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The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) has identified the expansion of transit service along the West Line as a top priority for meeting travel needs. In an effort to examine current travel needs and meet future travel demands, MARTA is currently conducting both an Alternatives Analysis (AA) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This process includes evaluating the universe of potential expansion alternatives, selecting a locally preferred alternative (LPA), and documenting possible environmental impacts and mitigation strategies. The intent of this document is to detail the AA process leading to the selection of the LPA.

1.1 Project Development Process

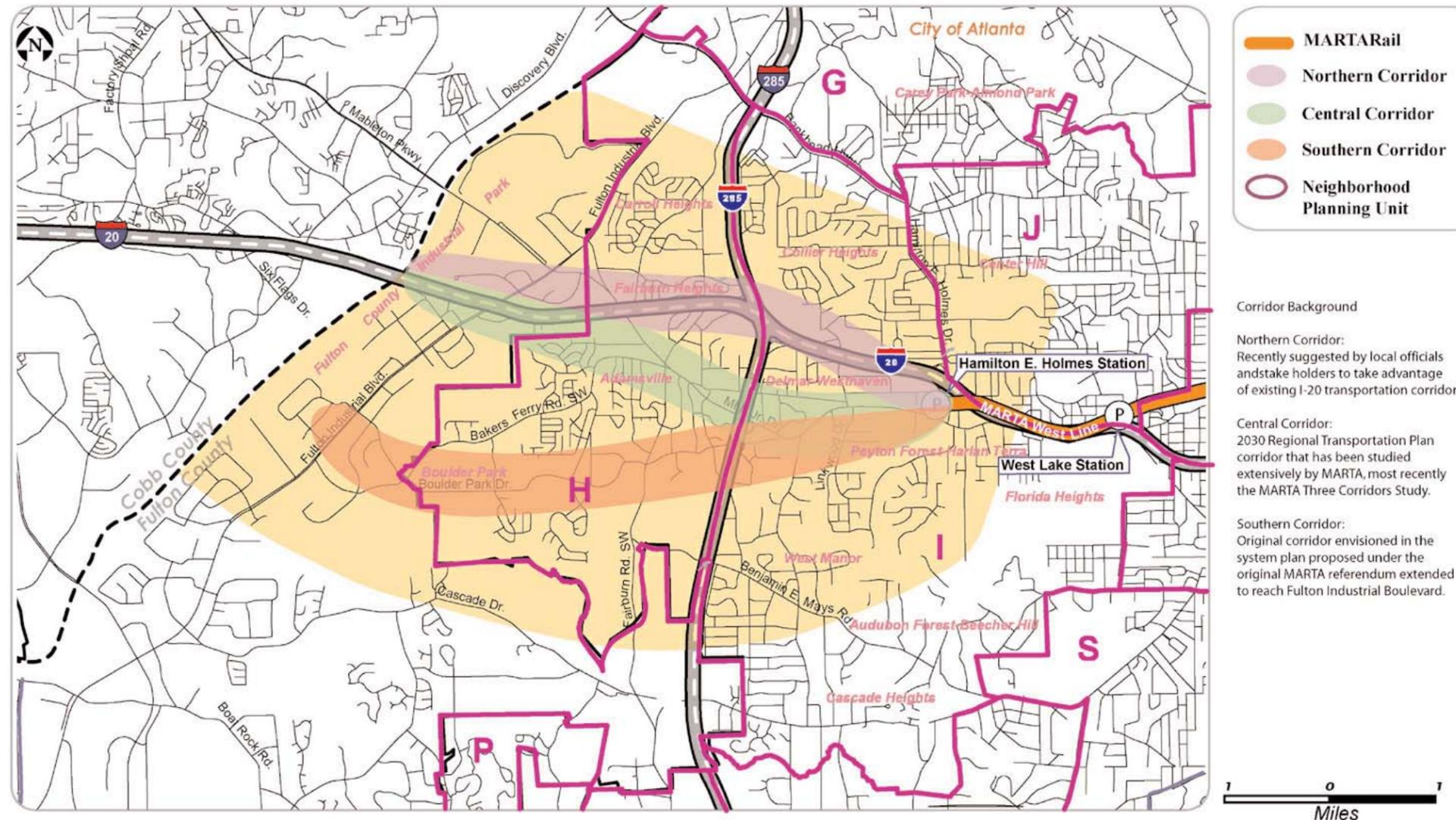
The West Line AA/DEIS follows federal guidelines for projects seeking Section 5309 New Starts funds for construction. The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21)/Federal Transit Act 49 USC 5300 requires that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approves the advancement of all projects pursuing New Starts funding into both the preliminary engineering and final design

stages of project development. FTA reviews the public involvement process to verify adequate consideration of public input and requires a sound project management plan. The project development process is managed at the local level to support local decision making, which provides the forum for developing not only “competitive” New Starts projects, but projects which best meet local goals and objectives for transit service. This process begins with 2 components: an AA and a DEIS. The purpose of the AA is to develop consensus on a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) specifying alignment, potential station locations, and transit technology. In the DEIS, the LPA is conceptually engineered and analyzed to identify environmental impacts and mitigation plans.

1.2 Study Area Description

The study area is located in the City of Atlanta and Fulton County approximately five miles west of Downtown Atlanta and is bounded by the Chattahoochee River (Cobb County line) to the west,

Figure 1.1: Study Area Map





Bankhead Highway (SR 78) to the north, Hamilton E. Holmes Drive to the east and Cascade Road to the south. Encompassing more than 11,000 acres, the study area includes a population of approximately 35,000 within 6 City of Atlanta Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU): G, J, H, I, S, and P. The study area also includes a portion of the Fulton Industrial Boulevard Business District, home to 30,000 jobs. Figure 1.1 provides a graphical representation of the study area.

1.3 Review of Previous Studies

It is important to recognize planning activities and studies that are completed or ongoing that relate to the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS. The West Line expansion was identified as the top priority corridor by the MARTA board as a result of the MARTA Three Corridors Feasibility Study completed by MARTA in 1998. Since then, the West Line and more specifically the I-20 corridor west of I-285, has become a high priority corridor for transit expansion at the regional level. Heavy rail service to Six Flags in Cobb County currently appears in the fiscally constrained 2025 Regional Transportation Plan for the Atlanta Region and Surface Transportation Program funds are programmed for the AA/DEIS in the current Regional Transportation Improvement Program 2003-05. There are also several studies, smaller in scope, the outcomes of which will affect the analysis of transit service expansion in the West Line study area. Coordination with these efforts is critical to the development of transportation infrastructure that meets future travel demand within the study area and regionally and serves as a primary objective of the West Line AA/DEIS.

1.3.1 MARTA Three Corridors Feasibility Study

In 1998, MARTA initiated the Three Corridors Feasibility Study to compare 3 areas for potential heavy rail line extensions, as well as determine prioritization of these alternatives. Proposed corridor extensions included the:

- North Line: along GA 400 to Windward Parkway;
- West Line: from Hamilton E. Holmes Station to Fulton Industrial Boulevard; and
- Hapeville Branch: extending from the East Point Station on the South Line to the City of Hapeville.

The West Line extension was proposed to address 3 overlying concerns: mobility and accessibility, air quality, and transit-oriented development (TOD). The study found that Mobility improvements within the corridor are warranted, because peak period congestion and bus based transit services limit accessibility for persons traveling to and from the corridor via personal and public transportation. In particular, travelers with work based trips to the corridor from DeKalb County and other areas to the east need improved accessibility to the Fulton Industrial Boulevard area. Many of the workers are transit dependent and would be better served by additional transit services.

In relation to air quality, the study found that a strategically placed station along I-20, to the west of the interchange with I-285, serving as a park and ride facility would attract a substantial number of travelers currently using I-20, thereby reducing vehicle emissions.

The study also showed development opportunities at Hamilton E. Holmes Station and a potential intermediate station near Martin Luther King Drive at Fairburn Road.

As a result of these findings, the MARTA Board adopted the West Line as the first priority for heavy

rail extension, with the North and East Lines adopted as “equally important” secondary priorities. MARTA then introduced the West Line extension to its regional partners and the project was incorporated into the 2025 Regional Transportation Plan.

1.3.2 Atlanta 2025 Regional Transportation Plan

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) developed by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the federally recognized document that specifies a financially constrained list of transportation projects to be built over 25-30 years in the region. Several projects in the RTP have a direct impact on the I-20 West corridor including freeway capacity additions, major interchange improvements, and roadway capacity additions. In addition, the RTP also includes \$497 million in funds for construction of the West Line extension and stipulates an opening to service by 2010. This AA/DEIS is one of the first steps in the process of planning for the West Line project identified in the RTP. The RTP is scheduled for an update in FY 2005 by ARC.

1.4 Report Organization

This report is divided into nine sections summarized below:

Section 1: Introduction

This section presents the purpose and organization of the report.

Section 2: Basis for Project Alternatives

This section details the methodology utilized to evaluate the study alternatives and select the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). Study goals and objectives are also identified in this section.

Section 3: Identification and Development of Alternatives

The identification process and advancement of study alternatives are discussed in detail within this section. Conceptual drawings, potential placement of station locations, and operating plans of each of the build alternatives, are also provided.

Section 4: Evaluation Methodology for Environmental Measures

This section identifies environmental measures used to evaluate the study alternatives with a description of how each alternative performed.

Section 5: Evaluation of Economic Development and Land Use Measures

This section identifies the economic development and land use measures used to evaluate the study alternatives and describes the performance of each alternative.

Section 6: Evaluation Methodology for Mobility-Related Measures

This section identifies mobility related measures used to evaluate study alternatives, as well as, provides an assessment of the performance of each alternative.

Section 7: Evaluation Methodology for Cost and Cost Effectiveness Measures

The cost methodology, evaluation measures, and performance of each alternative are detailed in this section.

Section 8: Public Involvement

Public outreach methods and input received from each approach are discussed in this section.

Section 9: Alternative Analysis Results & Recommendations

The overall evaluation results and recommended LPA are presented in this section.