

- Today, MARTA is considering the Street Car East Extension LPA, another step on a bureaucratic process to meet the expectations of supporters of BeltLine rail transit.
- The adoption of the LPA doesn't advance the feasibility of the project, resolve weak ridership, or address the adverse impact that such intrusive infrastructure will have on what has become the most successful park-driven economic development success story in Atlanta's history.
- It does further entrench the expectations of rail advocates for the implementation of a system that not only includes the SCE extension to Ponce City Market, but also anticipates rail transit throughout the BeltLine alignment - an impossibly tall order, given the reality of transit demand in that corridor.
- It is the effect of those entrenched expectations I want to highlight, given my experience as a DeKalb County Commissioner for 16 years prior to my retirement last year.
- Harold Buckley, Sr. was appointed by DeKalb to the MARTA board in 1985 and served 30 years until his death in 2016.
- From day one, he relentlessly, pursued his vision – a heavy rail transit extension to Stonecrest Mall.
- In 2008, coincident with DeKalb approval of the 13th amendment of the RTCAA, MARTA committed to including heavy rail to Stonecrest in the engineering report, which defines MARTA's capital expansion plans.
- MARTA included the Stonecrest extension not because analysis confirmed its feasibility, but instead, in order to gain approval for a sales tax extension to support the continued issuance of long term debt.
- MARTA has adopted two LPAs for Stonecrest HRT, embarked on a suspended NEPA process, and is now in the process of considering another LPA. All these actions have not changed the infeasibility of the project, and in these intervening 17 years, the cost of that decision has become clear.
- Because of the empty commitment to Stonecrest HRT, transit development in Dekalb is frozen, and with it additional local funding for MARTA's expansion in DeKalb, until Stonecrest HRT somehow comes off the table.

MARTA Board Public Comments of Jeff Rader, April 13, 2023

- That means the Top End BRT project that you're considering can't count on sales tax from DeKalb.
 - It also means that the Clifton Corridor line can't rely on DeKalb sales tax funding to extend beyond Atlanta city limits to a logical terminus.
 - In short, MARTA's expedient decision to validate Mr. Buckley's infeasible vision for a transit project has destroyed MARTA's credibility and the potential for expansion in DeKalb.
 - In 1999, a Georgia Tech masters degree student articulated a vision of rail transit on the BeltLine. The vision was, and is not supported by credible ridership to make it competitive for federal funding, and its implementation will greatly diminish the BeltLine's successful function as a Linear Park.
 - MARTA's continued practice of kicking the can down the road through the bureaucratic process will similarly undermine MARTA's credibility in Atlanta, precipitating the same kind of impasse now faced in DeKalb.
 - The More MARTA tax won't support the diminished project list now on the table, and reliance on 100% local funding for the Street Car East extension is a flashing danger sign.
 - Since Mr. Buckley and Mr. Gravel began to pursue their personal visions, MARTA has gone from sole direct recipient of federal transit funds in the region, to a subsidiary role with the ATL, GRTA, and other mechanisms eroding MARTA's once preeminent place in regional transit.
 - I would argue that it is through decisions like the one you are considering today that MARTA has lost that role, and that the expedient of mollifying the persistent visionary will further impede the process of effective transit expansion in the region.
 - Take a step back on the Street Car East LPA.
 - Tell the truth about the project, its feasibility, and the impact it will have on the Linear Park, and on adjacent development.
 - Offer realistic alternatives that serve real people today not one man's fever vision of a retro transit utopia.
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