

Is MARTA Upholding the Highest Standards?

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The board should ensure that MARTA upholds high technical, economic, and administrative standards, especially for the streetcar extension. Without federal funding, MARTA may not be required to uphold the high standards that attach to federal support. Nonetheless it should uphold such standards.

As far as I can determine, MARTA has not conducted rigorous analysis of (some or all of) these issues:

1. **Ridership Study.** What is the current demand for transit, and what is the projected demand? Has there been a rigorous study done of ridership?
2. **Operating Costs.** Once the streetcar is deployed, what will be its operating costs, and what will be the source of funds to cover those costs?
3. **Visual Presentation.** What will the Beltline look like once the streetcar is deployed? It seems that the streetcar will eliminate the Beltline park experience. This is a crucial question that needs up-front presentation.
4. **Construction Duration and Impact.** When will construction begin, how will it affect current usage patterns, and how long will it last? It is not satisfactory to say, "MARTA does not know yet because design is on-going."
5. **Alternatives Analysis.** Transit technology, ridership patterns, and urban land use have changed dramatically since Beltline rail was proposed. Has there been a rigorous analysis of how these new alternatives affect the original plan?
6. **Capital Budget Analysis.** Does the More MARTA sales tax provide sufficient funds for the streetcar extension (and the other projects)? What plans exist for adjusting deployments if those funding falls short (which seems likely)?

It is not impossible that:

1. Ridership of the streetcar stays at its low, unsatisfactory levels.
2. Operating costs create a permanent heavy burden on MARTA.
3. The Beltline Park experience is permanently destroyed
4. Construction of the streetcar generates enormous public outcry (just in time for elections)
5. New trends in transport reveal fixed rail to be outdated
6. Capital funding is exhausted before project completion
7. The Federal Transit Administration refuses to support the streetcar in the future, because it did not uphold federal standards.

Like the MARTA board, I support transit in Atlanta, but Atlanta must do it well. I urge the board ensure that MARTA upholds the highest standards in analysis and planning.

MARTA's analyses should, of course, be made publicly available on its web site.

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