

Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative

Virtual Public Meeting #1 Q&A

Date: July 19, 2022

Location: Zoom

Alternative Impacts

“You mentioned LRT-3 is the current Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), how much will be at-grade along roadway and under the influence of the ephemeral traffic congestions throughout the day?”

LRT-3 along Clifton Road was envisioned as an underground alignment in key congested segments. Underground has a much higher capital cost than at-grade (ground level) or elevated. The alternatives using part of the CSX rail right-of-way have been developed since the underground alignment was first identified. The CSX configurations would perform similarly to underground and avoid traffic impacts, with a lower capital cost than underground.

“Please explain route options around Maediris Dr.”

There are three route options around Maediris Dr:

1. Along Clairemont Avenue at-grade or underground options.
2. Pass through YMCA parking lot either elevated or underground.
3. Along Maediris Dr. at-grade, on mix-traffic, or widen Maediris ROW for dedicated lane.

The Project Team has received several comments about historic resources along Clairemont (the Decatur alternatives) and the transitions between the CSX right-of-way and either eastern branch option. We have received several comments of support for the Avondale alternatives, in part to avoid community impacts along Clairemont.

“Has there been consideration of tying this into Beltline transit once it is constructed?”

With current understanding, Lindbergh station will be a transfer station for Beltline and Clifton.

“Can DeKalb Farmer's Market be included as a stop on BRT-1?”

It's a major destination, and there are lots of transit-oriented development (TOD) opportunities nearby if MARTA can partner with property owners.

The alternatives can be modified as we move into the next phase of the Alternatives Analysis. MARTA will consider this option.

“If the Avondale route is selected, is it possible to have connection points between Decatur and Avondale, especially since MARTA indicated more low-income residents along the Decatur line?”

There may be a possibility to extend the Avondale route to connect to Decatur station. This is something we can consider in the future. MARTA riders could also use the existing blue line to connect between the Avondale and Decatur station.

“Have you done traffic studies along Maediris to see the impact to rail along Maediris?”

An initial traffic analysis was performed recently. Traffic considerations will be part of the future environmental work as the project progresses into the federal environmental review process.

“On the Decatur route would that include taking some of the residential property in the section from Clifton Rd to Clairmont Rd?”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“I disagree with the assessment that there is low to moderate TOD around North Decatur/Clairemont intersection. That would be prime for redevelopment.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“I'm from Avondale and very excited about Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or Light Rail Transit (LRT)! BRT is flexible, and as long as electric buses are in use, good for the environment. LRT-3 or BRT-1 from Avondale are great because you have Dekalb Farmers Market, the health corridor on N Decatur, the commerce and high-density apartments on N Decatur all along that route. Also, we already have a pretty good bus line along Clairemont with Marta route 23 and the CCT buses from Emory.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“Avondale would allow serving the new N Dekalb mall housing/retail/hotel center that is going to be constructed soon. The Clairemont /Decatur route leaves those folks out. Also, Avondale and Kensington have 2 regional centers declared by Dekalb County, so getting closer to those would be excellent.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“Decatur folks can ride 1 stop to join the Avondale alternatives, while the people at N Dekalb Mall development, and Memorial Drive redevelopment would be totally left out of the Decatur alternatives.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“Will the CSX rail need to be widened to be used for BRT or LRT, and what impacts would residential areas along the existing rail line see?”

MARTA is not anticipating the need to acquire additional property along the CSX right-of-way. However, there may be temporary construction impacts to nearby properties. Potential impacts will be studied in the environmental review process.

Competitiveness & Federal Funding

“How will BRT compete with car traffic due to population increases in DeKalb County, and the need to encourage people to work along the Emory corridor?”

Both BRT and LRT would be primarily separated from other traffic. The level of separation is expected to be comparable for both modes.

“What is MARTA's preferred option LRT or BRT, Avondale or Decatur?”

MARTA will select the preferred alternative after public outreach, additional detailed analysis and review for competitiveness will be determined in the coming months.

“Can MARTA make these decisions faster?”

MARTA has to go through the Alternatives Analysis process and evaluate each alternative against the criteria to ensure that the most appropriate route and mode are selected. These decisions take time to ensure that MARTA chooses the best alternative for the community while being financially responsible. MARTA is also coordinating with stakeholders like local jurisdictions and institutions, and following the federal environmental review process.

Design

“What is the difference in width between LRT lanes (placed where roads currently sit) and dedicated BRT lanes?”

LRT lanes = 29' typical

BRT lanes = 28' typical

“The maps shown for LRT only show routes, but do not show cut/cover, elevated, or at grade along roadways - please update the maps indicate this detail.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

Environmental Considerations

“What is the long-term environmental impact of each system vs cost?”

This will be determined in upcoming phases of the project, through a federal Environment Review process.

“Planting new trees to replace old growth trees and the full tree canopy on Clairmont Road or anywhere is not an equal swap. New trees would take decades to grow as large if they even

could do that after their soil has been disturbed and compacted by construction. And planting trees in a different area does not address the degradation of the historic corridor.”

A full analysis of trees and their cultural significance will take place during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental phase of the project. Discussions with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and local groups will occur during this time. All efforts will be made to preserve trees in place. Other mitigations regarding trees will be evaluated to minimize the elimination of old growth trees.

“I agree with the comment about the tree canopy. It is NOT an equal swap to plant trees to replace trees that are decades old and even, in some cases, as old as 100 years. Trees planted "elsewhere" means that the character of the original location of trees is permanently altered.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“Given the impact of changes in climate, we need to address the type of trees that will survive with increased heat, etc. Some of our trees are near replacement and we have a need to select new growth trees for future generation.”

An assessment of trees throughout the corridor will occur as part of the NEPA (environmental) assessment. A landscape expert will be consulted regarding the assessment of trees, potential replacement, and/or selection of new trees.

“If MARTA widens the road for BRT and LRT, how will they plan to adhere to the historical conservation of the trees along Claremont?”

If this option is selected, an environmental mitigation plan will be developed in coordination with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and SHPO. Mitigation strategies may include replacement of trees on site or off-site.

Implementation Timeline

“Would either or both options be opened all at once, or could they be opened in stages as the systems are built out?”

The project objective is to connect the full corridor, but MARTA will consider a phased approach if there are funding constraints. These services can potentially be extended in the future as part of an expanded network.

“Why does it take 5-7 years to implement a bus?”

BRT systems involve much more planning and infrastructure than typical local bus routes. The dedicated transitway will need to be acquired from CSX, which would require shifting the existing track and building a new transitway, stations, and access points. Outside of CSX, additional infrastructure requirements could be stations, streetscapes, signal modifications, bridge modifications, roadway widening, restriping, and more. This all requires time to allow for planning, coordination, engineering/design, and construction.

Operating Costs

“Would the combination of LRT and BRT be a financially feasible option?”

The key is to establish a dedicated transitway that can work for either.

“With ridership currently at 55-60% of pre-COVID ridership, what does MARTA expect the net operating cost of BRT or LRT to be?”

The operating cost of the BRT alternatives is expected to range from \$4.7 to \$9.5 million dollars per year. The operating cost of LRT alternatives is \$14.7 to \$28.4 millions dollars per year. All estimates are provided in 2031 dollars. More detailed figures will be provided after performing a ridership analysis in Fall 2022.

Operations

“When you say BRT would follow the CSX corridor does that mean the BRT would be off-road, on, or aside the rail tracks in that area?”

The transitway for LRT or BRT will be configured parallel to the freight rail tracks primarily within the railroad right-of-way.

“LRT would definitely have more ridership and rider satisfaction. Also, less impact on local car traffic.”

Both LRT and BRT would be primarily separated from other traffic. We will evaluate ridership projections for both in the next phase of the project.

“How will either the BRT or LRT routes be screened/separated from the residential neighborhoods along the CSX ROW, and how would BRT fit along that ROW to begin with?”

The transitway for LRT or BRT will be configured parallel to the freight rail tracks primarily within the current railroad right-of-way by shifting existing CSX track to accommodate the BRT or LRT. The BRT or LRT will be screened/separated from the residential neighborhoods by landscaping, fencing or barriers.

“Are the BRT routes along Clairemont Ave planned to be shared lanes with existing traffic, or is the consideration included to add ROW for dedicated bus lanes? Also, for North Decatur Road BRT, would there be additional BRT ROW? That corridor tends to be very congested

during some periods of time and shared travel lanes with traffic would negatively affect travel times.”

Currently, it is planned to be dedicated lanes along Clairmont Ave by either added ROW or road diet (road re-channelization/road conversion) which will be decided after further traffic study. Should the Avondale alternative advance, this does not preclude shared-lane transit connections along Clairmont between Decatur and the CSX right-of-way (ROW).

“Could you describe exactly how and where a BRT line would be ramped back up from the CSX line up to N. Decatur, and would there be an added lane on N. Decatur from Clairmont to DeKalb Industrial?”

BRT line will be ramped up west of the Belt Junction and will remain elevated south along CSX to N. Decatur Road which will either be elevated, crossing through the shopping mall at North West Corner of N. Decatur/Clairmont Road intersection, then ramp down to at-grade at median of Clairmont after passing N. Decatur Road, or, remain elevated over N. Decatur Road going south along CSX which will be turn east at YMCA/Maederis Dr area.

Currently, we are considering a dedicated BRT lane along N. Decatur, or road diet (narrowing of the road) which will be decided after a further traffic study. Should the Avondale alternative advance, this does not preclude shared-lane transit connections along N. Decatur between Dekalb Industrial and CSX corridor.

“Could MARTA share the variety of alternatives from CSX that runs underneath North Decatur up to the street level?”

BRT line will be ramped up at west of the Belt Junction and will remain elevated south along CSX to N. Decatur Road which will be either elevated and cross through the shopping mall at North West Corner of N. Decatur/Clairmont Road intersection then ramp down to at-grade at median of Clairmont after passing N. Decatur Road, or keep stay elevated over N. Decatur Road going south along CSX which will be turn east at YMCA/Maederis Dr area.

Currently, we are considering a dedicated BRT lane along N. Decatur or road diet (road narrowing) which will be decided after further traffic study. Should the Avondale alternative advance, this does not preclude shared-lane transit connections along N. Decatur between Dekalb Industrial and CSX corridor.

“Are there plans to have dedicated lanes for either mode outside of the CSX ROW?”

Yes, currently MARTA is planning to have dedicated lanes for both BRT and LRT outside of CSX ROW up to more than 70% of the total length for BRT and up to 100% for LRT.

“There are only 3 main roads into the Emory are - Houston mills, north Decatur, and Briarcliff - with any accident on any of the 3 the traffic is either stopped or severely limited for that duration and side effects the congestion of the other two routes. How will bussing solution be successful if it is also entrapped in this traffic with limited route connectivity?”

BRT is not a local bus in shared lanes. The majority of this project would be completely removed from local streets. Dedicated transit lanes are proposed on city streets where transit operates within streets.

Traffic and other environmental considerations will be evaluated in upcoming phases of the project and influences the recommended alternative.

“What would be the plan for the Lenox road crossover that handles existing car traffic, where the CSX line currently runs across Lenox road?”

The planning is at grade crossing for both BRT/LRT with signalized with barrier for LRT and signalized for BRT.

“Are there plans to consider how the new line can create more neighborhood and park connectivity, as well as connectivity to the nearest stations? For example, how foot or bike paths could be created between Zonolite park and Morningside nature park (along the development) or how could dead ends nearest to new stations or ones that run up into the CSX line in nearby neighborhoods along the route be used for paths to bring residents to and from the newest station.”

The South Fork Conservancy is planning an extended pedestrian trail to connect the BeltLine with Emory University along South Fork Peachtree Creek. MARTA will work with nearby neighborhoods and stakeholders to promote safe pedestrian and bicycle access to new stations.

“Please clarify how Maediris would be used in the options that use that street (such as when connecting to CSX or making use of YMCA parking lot area).”

One BRT alternative would travel along CSX right-of-way and turn east to Maediris Dr at-grade in mixed traffic then turn south to Clairemont Avenue.

One LRT alternative would travel along CSX right-of-way and turn east to Maediris Dr at-grade in dedicated lane then turn south to Clairemont Avenue.

“Personally, I would ride MARTA much more if the #6 line were not still running a weekend schedule. Once MARTA is able to staff this line I think ridership will jump back up to fund this transit option. My concern is that this project seems to ‘promise’ service every X minutes when the current solution has been cut as much as it has with many trips cut every day.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“I don't think there's a pedestrian friendly path from Irvin Way to Dekalb Farmer's Market.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“What is the change in MARTA ridership pre-COVID and currently?”

Like most transit systems nationwide, MARTA continues to see reduced ridership since COVID. While ridership is slowly recovering, it remains at roughly 60% of pre-COVID ridership.

Planning

“Is MARTA under the assumption that transit riders would take the bus from Irvin Way to Dekalb Farmer's Market?”

Yes. While the existing roadways do not facilitate walking from Irvin Way to MARTA's Clifton route to Avondale Station, after finalization of the corridor, MARTA will develop individual station area plans that will create or propose connectivity to allow this type of trip.

Stakeholder Engagement

“With the changes in the corridor, what has Emory done in the way of development that has changed or compromised the earlier LPA?”

The 2012-adopted LPA has not been compromised. However, other alternatives are now under consideration on their own merit. The CSX right-of-way alternatives were not under consideration when the previous LPA was selected. Bus Rapid Transit has also been effectively demonstrated as a high-capacity, rapid transit mode.

“What is the link to the public comment survey?”

www.connectclifton.com

“Would Emory discontinue the Cliff shuttle from Decatur to Emory?”

Emory shuttles will continue to operate in the corridor along with MARTA's enhanced service, but will likely be modified to maximize benefits to both riders. The decision to continue or modify service from Decatur to Emory will be made after the MARTA service is defined.

“What does the abbreviation "LPA" stand for?”

LPA = Locally Preferred Alternative. It's the mode of transit (bus, train, etc.) and route for a project that is chosen by the transit agency and the community.

“What do the abbreviations "BRT" and "LRT" stand for?”

Bus Rapid Transit, Light Rail Transit

“Whitney and Bryan, could you please share the name of your employer so we can know if you are MARTA employees or consultants?”

Bryan Hobbs, MARTA, is the Project Manager. Whitney Fuller is a project consultant with Contente Consulting.

“What does the abbreviation "TOD" stand for?”

TOD stands for Transit-Oriented Development. MARTA has its own TOD program to develop mixed use communities with affordable housing on its own property. In addition, for all future transit projects we study and support local jurisdictions in planning for development that helps support ridership and their community goals along the route. TOD potential is also evaluated by the Federal Transit Administration when ranking projects.



“As a resident on the corridor who uses public transit, this is a great project and I hope it gets built. Getting more people commuting by public transit instead of by car will have a big positive impact on the environment and will far outweigh any short-term detriments to tree canopies/existing development.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“Off topic - but for ticketing - the QR-code app is a bit clumsy for use. Will (and if yes) when will MARTA adopt NFC payment through turnstiles with Apple and Android.”

Thank you for your comments. We look forward to your continued engagement with the Clifton Corridor Transit Initiative.

“What developments have changed that have compromised the routes MARTA is considering, did Emory play a part in this?”

Emory University did not lead to any routes being compromised. The changes since the last round of public engagement are related to new technologies, consideration of an east terminal at Decatur station, and positive discussions with CSX regarding a shared right-of-way.