



## New rail lines among proposed MARTA projects

By Ariel Hart  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

6:48 p.m. Monday, March 28, 2011

After a brutal year of getting smaller, MARTA is starting to think big.

New rail lines, bus lanes on highways, and new train and bus stations are among the things MARTA's board want from a 2012 transportation referendum. That summer, metro Atlanta voters will go to the polls to consider a list of transportation projects that would be funded from a 1 percent sales tax to run 10 years.

If MARTA gets everything it wants from the referendum -- and it likely won't -- passengers would be able to ride:

A new rail line from Lindbergh Station to Emory University. Cost: \$685 million

An extension of the gold line train from the Doraville Station outside I-285 to Oakcliff Road and New Peachtree Road, nearly to the border with Gwinnett County. Cost: \$145 million

An extension of the blue line from Hamilton E. Holmes Station to a new station near I-285 and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. Cost: \$582 million

An extension of the blue line from Indian Creek Station along I-285 to Wesley Chapel Road and I-20. Cost: \$522 million

Construction of a mass transit lane, bus or rail, along eastern I-20 from central Atlanta to Candler Road. Cost: \$1 billion

All costs are approximate and would include operation and maintenance expense for 20 years, MARTA planners said at a Monday board meeting. Even if the projects are selected, planning and construction will take several years to complete.

In addition to \$4 billion worth of expansion projects, MARTA also will request funds for capital upgrades such as train control systems, and rehabilitating everything from escalators to electrical wiring.

Samuel Sykes, a Johns Creek resident who lives on the border of Fulton and Gwinnett counties, welcomes the idea of an expanded gold line line, though he's not a commuter. If MARTA went north on Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, he said he'd ride it regularly.

"Especially with the gas prices rising," Sykes said. "All people talk about is the traffic, how they're not going anywhere."

MARTA approved these projects while it restored the Atlanta Braves shuttle to the current transit schedule, a decision suburbanites like Sykes gladly endorse. Although the shuttle vote makes the case for MARTA's regional impact, the paired vote was coincidental, MARTA board chairman Jim Durrett said.

"It's an accident of timing," Durrett said. "My hope is that everything we do when we provide services to the public is a sales job. If people like what they experience then they're going to be more inclined to say, 'Hey we should be putting resources into this.'"

Wednesday is the deadline for MARTA, the Atlanta region's 10 counties and its cities and towns to get their desired projects to the state. The state Department of Transportation's director of planning next will assemble them into one regional wish list, and this summer 21 elected officials will winnow the list to fit the \$8 billion or so expected from the 10-year tax.

Durrett and other officials will start advocating for particular projects at that time. He said the MARTA board hasn't set its priorities yet.

In addition to the projects MARTA is putting forth, other jurisdictions are asking for transit needs, too. Requests from the city of Atlanta, and Gwinnett and Cobb counties are expected to include additional rail lines, and the city of Sandy Springs is asking for a dedicated bus lane on I-285 and Roswell Road.

Even while in the initial stage, the possibilities are exciting, Durrett said.

"Here we have a chance to do even more than just put back service that we've had to take away," Durrett said. "So it's very gratifying."

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