
Leaders to mull MARTA

12/15/2006 -

By Arielle Kass
Staff Writer
arielle.kass@gwinnettdailypost.com

LAWRENCEVILLE - Local business leaders approved a plan Thursday to spend up to \$50,000 to study the possibility of extending a MARTA rail line into Gwinnett.

The funds will be matched by the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority.

The Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District decision comes a week after MARTA board members voted to explore extending rail into the county at the request of revitalization leaders. County residents voted against a MARTA expansion into Gwinnett 16 years ago.

Chuck Warbington, the CID's executive director, said the community is losing redevelopment opportunities in the area because it lacks MARTA access.

Bruce Le'Veil, Gwinnett's representative on the MARTA board and a member of the CID's board of directors, requested the study.

Le'Veil said since the 1990 rejection, Gwinnett's character and population have changed dramatically. He thinks with more traffic and people in the area, residents will now embrace the public transportation option.

Indeed, the idea has been popular at community meetings, where local residents have drawn rail tracks on maps next to sidewalks and green ways. "I've heard all positive comments," Warbington said. "I didn't hear anything negative there. Everyone's on board."

The 46-mile MARTA system runs in the urban counties of Fulton and DeKalb. Last month, suburban Cobb County agreed to run bus service year-round. Warbington said the feasibility study will explore where the train would go and is just one of many transportation options on the table, including the proposed Brain Train from Athens to Atlanta.

According to the original plan, the line would extend northeast from the Doraville station and have stops in Norcross, on Indian Trail Road and at Gwinnett Place Mall. But because so much time has passed since the last proposal, that may no longer be the best route, Warbington said. Members of the CID hope to walk the 1990 route with MARTA representatives before the end of the year, he said.

According to the 1990 plan, MARTA executives expected between 43,000 and

49,000 daily entries and exits on trains in the county in 2000, with the Indian Trail station being the busiest. By 2010, they expected between 54,000 and 60,000 daily trips.

Bus service would also have been part of the plan, with routes between Lawrenceville and Gwinnett Place, Buford Highway and Doraville and Lilburn and Peachtree Corners, among others.

That plan would have been funded with a 1 percent MARTA sales tax, but Warbington said other funding options, including a public-private partnership, would be considered as the feasibility study goes forward.

The Gwinnett Place CID will also be considered in the study, Warbington said, but its board members delayed a vote on funding until January.

When it is complete, possibly in the spring, Le'Veil said the study will be presented to the Norcross City Council and Gwinnett Board of Commissioners.