

MEDIA BACKGROUND
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Clayton County Poised to be the “Little Engine That Could” by Investing \$1.5 Billion in Transit

The Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club is eagerly anticipating the Tuesday night results in Clayton County, where voters will either support or reject a proposal for the county to join MARTA as a full partner. The agreement will mean a one-cent sales tax for 33 years, generating an expected \$45 million annually and will be the largest commitment to new transportation in the Metro Atlanta region since MARTA began in 1971. This investment will mean [restoration and expansion of bus service that was cut in 2010 with the end of C-Tran as well as the first commuter rail line in Georgia](#).

Since the defeat of the 2012 T-SPLOST, grassroots groups like the Sierra Club have been diligently working within existing laws to build support for transit expansion that is equitable, provides travelers options and is developed through good public process. Voters demand their public officials to be transparent as well as responsive to and engaging of the people who will be paying for and using the service.

In August 2012 runoffs, Clayton County voters elected two new pro-transit County Commissioners, turning out the Commissioners who did not respond to their pleas to keep local C-Tran bus service. With new Clayton County leadership and vision in place, a 2014 Clayton County MARTA referendum became a real possibility. Commissioners and their constituents' concern that Clayton sales tax receipts would be used elsewhere in the MARTA system were addressed by adding a provision to the contract that Clayton taxes will only be spent in Clayton until the commuter rail project is complete. This assurance paved the way for the Commission's 3-1 vote to put the referendum on the November 4 ballot.

New leadership also dramatically improved fortunes at MARTA during the last two years. At the time of the 2012 vote, MARTA was in no shape for expansion. The agency was [running an annual structural deficit in the tens of millions of dollars](#), and existing bus and rail service had been cut to skeletal levels. The agency was known for a lack of transparency and was among the last major transit agencies in the U.S. to open its schedule data for app developers. In the two years since, we have seen a remarkable turnaround at MARTA. With strong support from transit advocates, [the agency hired Keith Parker](#), a reform-minded outsider, as its new general manager in October 2012. Under Parker's leadership, MARTA has closed its annual operating deficit and [improved its credit rating](#). It has fully embraced the open government movement, [releasing its schedule and real-time arrival data](#) and participating in local civic technology initiatives such as TransportationCamp and Govathon. It has implemented [the first major service restoration in over a decade](#). Finally, MARTA has

seen markedly improved relations with the state; the chairman of the legislature's MARTA oversight committee, which has traditionally had a chilly relationship with the agency, [recently stated](#) that Parker is "making progress where progress desperately needs to be made." The transformed culture at MARTA provides the necessary foundation for jurisdictional expansion of the agency, both in Clayton County this year and potentially others in the future.

Voters have clearly demonstrated their preference for more travel options, not continued investments in roads. In November 2010, Clayton voters overwhelmingly approved a non-binding referendum to join MARTA. In July of 2012, only 46% of Clayton voters said yes to the one-cent transportation sales tax which would have funded a "super-arterial" project for Tara Boulevard to the tune of \$140 million and other road expansion projects while shortchanging transit.

TIMELINE

March 31, 2010 - Clayton County's previous public transit system, C-Tran, operates its last day of service. The dismantling of C-Tran, which was approved by County Commissioners the previous year, leaves county residents without any local transit service for the first time in nearly a decade.

November 2, 2010 - A non-binding ballot question on whether voters would support joining MARTA appears on the 2010 general election ballot in Clayton. [Voters say "yes" by a two-to-one margin \(67 percent to 33 percent\).](#)

July 31, 2012 - The T-SPLOST, a proposal for a 10-year sales tax to fund a mixture of road and transit projects, fails resoundingly in the metro Atlanta region. In Clayton County, where the bulk of revenues would have funded road projects, voters reject the proposal (46 percent "yes" vs. 54 percent "no").

August 20, 2012 - Democratic Primary Runoff in the Clayton County Board of Commissioners race. Former Police Chief Jeff Turner defeats Eldrin Bell for Clayton County Commission Chair. Attorney Shana Rooks defeats Wole Ralph, who led the charge to end the C-Tran bus service in 2009. [Both Turner and Rooks run on pro-transit platforms, setting up a real chance for a MARTA referendum.](#)

September 14, 2012 - [MARTA Announces five finalists to replace outgoing general manager Beverly Scott. Sierra Club and others lobby for more transparency in the search and in favor of reform candidate Keith Parker.](#)

October 5, 2012 - MARTA announces selection of Keith Parker as CEO. Parker quickly opened system data, got rid of waste, balanced the budget and [pledged to ride the system](#). These changes were a breath of fresh air that caught the attention of daily riders and legislators alike.

June 9, 2013 - [MARTA adopts its FY2014 budget, the first of Parker's tenure, and a 5-year financial stabilization plan](#), providing for the elimination of MARTA's previous operating deficit and eventual restoration of bus and rail service lost during earlier service cuts.

February 18, 2014 - Clayton County Commission hires consultants Tindale Oliver to conduct a transit feasibility study, which is expected to take about six months to complete.
<http://www.news-daily.com/news/2014/feb/20/transit-study-gets-green-light-from-boc/>

March 20, 2014 - HB 1009 passed on the last day of the legislature, lifting the local sales tax cap for Clayton County to be able to join MARTA. The deadline for calling the referendum is 120 days before the election, or July 7th.

April - June, 2014 - Dozens of community meetings, town halls, bus tours and other outreach to education Clayton County residents on the opportunity to join MARTA.

May/June, 2014 - [MARTA adopts its FY2015 budget](#), which includes major service restoration well ahead of the previously anticipated schedule. [Moody's upgrades MARTA's credit rating](#).

July 1, 2014 - Clayton County Commission rejects the full-penny MARTA contract by a vote of 2 to 3, and passes a half-penny contract that would have only provided bus service.

July 2, 2014 - MARTA Board of Directors rejects the Clayton County half-penny contract, passes a fully penny contract.

July 5, 2014 - Clayton County Commission adopts the full-penny contract 3-1, setting up the November 4th vote.

July - November, 2014 - Voter education and outreach.

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