

NEWS RELEASE
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Clayton County MARTA Expansion a Victory for Transit, People and Connected Communities

[Riverdale, GA] On Tuesday, the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club applauded as Clayton County voters overwhelmingly supported a one-cent sales tax to join MARTA as a full partner. The sales tax will generate at least \$45 million annually for 33 years, making this the largest new funding commitment to transportation in the Metro Atlanta region since MARTA was first approved in 1971.

“The best thing about Atlanta is that there is always a way forward,” said Colleen Kiernan, Georgia Chapter Director for the Sierra Club. “Often the best ideas come from the ground up.”

This investment will mean restoration and expansion of bus service that was cut in 2010, with annual local funding for buses increasing from about \$8 million under C-Tran to about \$22 million under MARTA. The first routes will start running in March 2015, with ten expected by the end of the year, significantly increasing the ability of Clayton County residents to get to jobs, school, medical services and shopping.

“We have had an amazing coalition working together to make this happen,” said Brionte McCorkle, Transportation Organizer for the Georgia Sierra Club. “And at the end of the day it was the people of Clayton County who were able to embrace their own future by saying ‘yes.’”

Even more exciting for rail advocates, passage of the Clayton referendum sets the stage for the first commuter rail service in Georgia. If negotiations with Norfolk Southern are successful, MARTA anticipates having the line to Jonesboro operating by 2022 and to Lovejoy by 2025.

People in the Metro Atlanta region are demanding more efficient, accessible ways to travel, and this vote is a solid endorsement of the reforms made at MARTA over the last two years, which have closed budget deficits, restored service, and increased transparency. The progress at MARTA lays the foundation not just for expansion to Clayton, but to other suburban counties as well.

Cobb County has been debating a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project that was stripped from the SPLOST project list voters [approved/disapproved] on November 4. Cobb County Commissioners could benefit from initiating a transparent process and considering whether a 2016 MARTA referendum would be the best way to move transit forward in Cobb County. A one-cent sales tax in Cobb County would generate approximately \$125 million annually.

In Gwinnett County, the business community recognizes that bringing rail service to Gwinnett is critical to maintaining regional competitiveness, and the Gwinnett Village CID and the Gwinnett Place CID have already conducted an alternatives analysis for rail expansion into the County. A one-cent sales tax in Gwinnett would generate approximately \$166 million annually.

When MARTA first went before the region's voters in 1968 and 1971, it was soundly rejected in the suburban counties; in Clayton, only 21 percent voted in favor of joining in 1971. Tuesday's vote in Clayton is a clear sign that attitudes toward transit have shifted dramatically in the suburbs. "MARTA is now clearly positioned as the vehicle for regional transit expansion in Metro Atlanta," said Kiernan. "With Clayton having secured a robust transit future, it's time for the rest of the region to consider the same opportunity."

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