

Summary and Highlights



Artist's sketch of the MARTA transit vehicle

- The original impetus behind Atlanta's rapid transit system came from downtown-oriented business interests and forward-looking regional planners. Planners believed a transit system would relieve highway congestion and help shape future growth. Businessmen saw transit as a way to reinforce Atlanta's bid to become the regional center of the Southeast.
- Thus, from the beginning support for transit was derived from the desire to promote Atlanta's growth. This fact led to a sophisticated appreciation of the relationship of transit to land use planning, and to a tradition of cooperation between transportation and land use planners.
- Atlanta's forum for transportation planning, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), institutionalizes this pattern of cooperation by bringing regional land use planning and transportation planning under a single organizational roof. The ARC structure allows the responsibilities of the various agencies to be clearly delineated while encouraging integration of land use and transportation planning.
- Atlanta's transit planning history reflects little overt rivalry between the region's two modal agencies, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT, the highway-planning agency). However, underlying the appearance of cooperation has been a tendency for the two modal agencies to negotiate decisions out of public view.
- On the other hand, the Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Overview Committee, created by the Georgia State Assembly to monitor MARTA's activities, brings a degree of public accountability and visibility to the Atlanta process.

- . Although originally transit decision-making was dominated by business interests, MARTA had made significant improvements in involving citizens in the planning process by 1971, when the decisive protransit referendum was held. Since then, as the plan becomes reality, more complaints are heard from affected citizens.
- . The quality of the technical work in Atlanta is generally regarded as having been excellent for its time. Yet, the information often came too early or too late to be optimally useful in guiding decisionmaking.
- In addition, political considerations influenced the information made available to the public and decisionmakers. The only rigorous evaluation of transportation alternatives in Atlanta concluded that a predominantly bus transit system would attract as much patronage as the proposed rail system—and at less cost. In the end these findings were modified due to the political inadvisability of serving only part of the community with rail while offering less desirable express bus service to other parts of the region.
- . When the transit bond issue was passed in 1971, local supporters were relying on the Federal Government to finance two-thirds of the cost of the entire system. Since then, the estimated cost of constructing the system has grown from \$1.3 billion to over \$2 billion while the Federal share for capital assistance has risen to 80 percent. When UMTA recently pledged \$800 million—10 percent of its total capital budget—to support the MARTA system, some transit advocates felt shortchanged because the sum will buy only 13.7 miles of rapid transit.