

Critical History of Transit Planning and Decisionmaking

The following history covers the decisionmaking process for Atlanta's rapid transit system from its beginnings in post-World War II highway needs studies to the present day. The discussion is organized around five major phases of the planning and decisionmaking process: (1) early interest in rapid transit, culminating in the decision of the State legislature to create the Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Study Commission in 1962; (2) efforts leading to the establishment in 1965 of a regional transit planning, construction, and operating agency; (3) initial transit system planning and the defeat of the rapid rail proposal in the referendum of 1968; (4) subsequent replanning and the approval of the 61-mile rapid rail-busway system in 1971; (5) the period since 1971 of system design, neighborhood impact study, and financial decision-making. The historical narrative is intended to provide a framework for the discussions that follow of the institutional structure and technical process. The history is summarized in a chronological listing in the following section (see page 23).

DECISION TO STUDY TRANSIT

Early support for rapid rail transit in Atlanta grew out of a creative alliance between regional planners and downtown civic and business leaders. The first official mention of the need for rapid transit came in a series of regional planning reports in the 1950's. The idea caught on with a core group of businessmen interested in establishing downtown Atlanta as a commercial center of national and even international importance. They were able to persuade the State legislature to sponsor the first full-scale transit planning study in 1962.⁶

⁶ A particularly valuable source of information about and analysis of the evolution of MARTA and early transit planning in Atlanta is provided by Julian Rodney Johnson's "MARTA: The Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Authority, a Brief History," History Honors Paper, Emory University, Atlanta, 1970.

The Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC)⁷ began to explore the idea of rapid transit in two reports it prepared in 1950 and 1954. The first, entitled *Up Ahead*, was a regional plan that envisioned a freeway system with a loop around the city. The second was an update called *Now for Tomorrow*. Although both reports dealt primarily with freeways, they mentioned the long-range need for rapid transit.

MPC took another, closer look at the regional highway network after 1954. In two reports, *Access to Central Atlanta* and *Crosstown and Bypass Expressways*, MPC analyzed the existing and projected capacity of the highway network and concluded that increased highway construction alone would not be adequate to meet transportation needs. The reports suggested that rapid transit was needed to solve the problem and that work to plan a system should begin immediately.

MPC'S recommendations were not welcomed by the Georgia State Highway Department. The highway agency believed highways could be an adequate solution and therefore disputed the MPC conclusions. The highway planners also had a stake in protecting their highway appropriations from the possibility of encroachment by transit builders. However, the argument between the highway and transit factions never developed into a public battle in Atlanta the way it did in Washington, D. C., whose early transit planning occurred during the same years. The MPC reports instead lay the groundwork for subsequent steps in the transit planning process.

The movement behind rapid transit began to gather momentum in 1960. Three reports were published in 1960 and 1961 dealing directly with the subject of rapid transit.

⁷ The Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) was Atlanta's regional planning agency at that time. MPC had a two-county scope. Its successor, the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission, was created in 1970 and had a five-county membership.

Two of the reports were products of the new Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission (ARMPC). One of them was a discussion called "What You Should Know About Rapid Transit" (September 1960). The other report was an element of the first Atlanta area regional comprehensive plan. This second report, *Atlanta Region comprehensive Plan: Rapid Transit*, was issued in June 1961. It called for 60 miles of high-speed rapid rail transit serving five counties at a roughly estimated cost of between \$200 million and \$215 million.

The central assumptions in the ARMPC plan illustrate the close connection the planners drew between the regional pattern of land use and rapid transit. Transit was viewed as a means for shaping and planning the future of the region. It would foster the vitality of the central business district and Atlanta's continued health as a regional center in the southeast.

The third report during this period preceded publication of the other two and was more effective in spearheading the civic campaign for rapid transit. This document was called *Rapid Atlanta*. It was published not by a public agency but by Atlanta Transit Systems, the city's privately owned bus company. Prepared by Simpson and Curtin, an engineering consultant firm from Philadelphia, *Rapid Byways* proposed a \$59 million first phase of a rapid transit system. The proposal called for 16 miles of rapid rail using existing rail rights-of-way and a downtown conveyor-type, second-level distribution system. The recommendations strongly influenced the Planning Commission's 1961 proposal.

The effectiveness of *Rapid Atlanta* was due in large part to its roots in the business community. With the publication of *Rapid Atlanta* in 1960, Atlanta's core of civic-minded businessmen took the lead in organizing support for rapid transit. The individual behind the *Rapid Atlanta* plan was Robert Somerville, president of the Atlanta Transit System. Somerville was also a member of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. In early 1961 the new president of the Chamber of Commerce, Ivan Allen, named a rapid transit steering committee to begin pushing for transit. The committee was headed by Richard Rich, a former Chamber president, and its membership included Robert Somerville. Allen himself would continue his role in transit promotion as Mayor of Atlanta, a post he held from early 1962 through the end of the decade.

Rich would later become chairman of the MARTA board. The Chamber worked in close coordination with the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission (ARMPC). ARMPC sent speakers to civic organizations and business groups throughout the region during 1961. A frequent speaker was Glenn Bennett, who had been named executive director of the newly reorganized Commission in 1960. Bennett was a tireless influential supporter of the transit idea and held important posts on all the pre-MARTA organizations.

The real action, however, occurred outside the politically and financially weak regional planning agency. Two events heralded the evolution of political support for rapid transit in 1961. In July, Atlanta Mayor William Hartsfield appointed a four-member aldermanic steering committee to guide rapid transit policy. This committee formed the nucleus of a group of committees from the various jurisdictions in the region which, with ARMPC, began to lobby members of the Georgia General Assembly to look favorably on rapid transit. Efforts solidified in November 1961 when Governor Ernest Vandiver held a regional conference of civic and elected leaders.

The conference participants resolved to establish a regional Rapid Transit Steering Committee comprised of the chairmen of the five county commissions, the Mayor of Atlanta, and Atlanta's aldermanic steering committee. The explicit purpose of the organization was to promote the enactment of mutually acceptable legislation in the 1962 session of the Georgia General Assembly.

The lobbying bore fruit in March 1962 when the legislature created the Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Study Commission to begin full-scale technical planning for a transit system. Actually, this represented a compromise from the goal of the Chamber to see legislation authorizing a regional transit authority approved in 1962. The factors behind this development are discussed in the next section.

DECISION TO CREATE A REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Seeking legislative approval for a regional transit agency was a logical first step for Atlanta's transit advocates.

⁵Johnson, op. cit.

advocates. Under the Georgia State Constitution, a constitutional amendment was necessary before a regional transit agency could be established. The transit supporters wanted to take a legislatively ratified blueprint for a transit agency to the polls so the region could pursue transit planning immediately. Although planning did begin on schedule in 1962, the 3-year delay in putting MARTA together meant no action could be taken to implement the first plan. By the time MARTA came into being in 1966, the technical planning essentially had to begin over again.

Before they could unite behind a transit agency plan in late 1961 and early 1962, the members of the Rapid Transit Steering Committee had to resolve the touchy question of representation—how should the positions on the agency's board be divided among the participating local governments. Atlanta, particularly lame-duck Mayor Hartsfield, wanted more control than the outlying counties were willing to part with. The referendum language that finally passed the General Assembly and went to the polls in November 1962 did not specify the composition of the agency. It merely laid out in general terms the nature of the powers—taxing, eminent domain, expenditure of public funds and the like—that the State would be permitted to delegate to a lesser jurisdiction for the purpose of transit planning and implementation.

In spite of attempts to solidify support for the enabling amendment, the measure met defeat at the polls. The referendum was put to the statewide electorate. Most analysts agree the issue failed to win the support of rural voters who mistakenly thought they were committing themselves to pay for a transit system for Atlanta. Opposition was voiced also by the trucking industry in defense of highway funds. The timing of the referendum also was an issue. State constitutional amendments could be placed before the electorate only every 2 years. Transit promoters thought a delay until 1964 would be undesirable. Furthermore, they wanted to make certain Atlanta would be qualified to receive the new Federal capital assistance for transit improvements that was being debated in the U.S. Congress in 1962. As it turned out, the UMTA bill did not pass Congress that year.

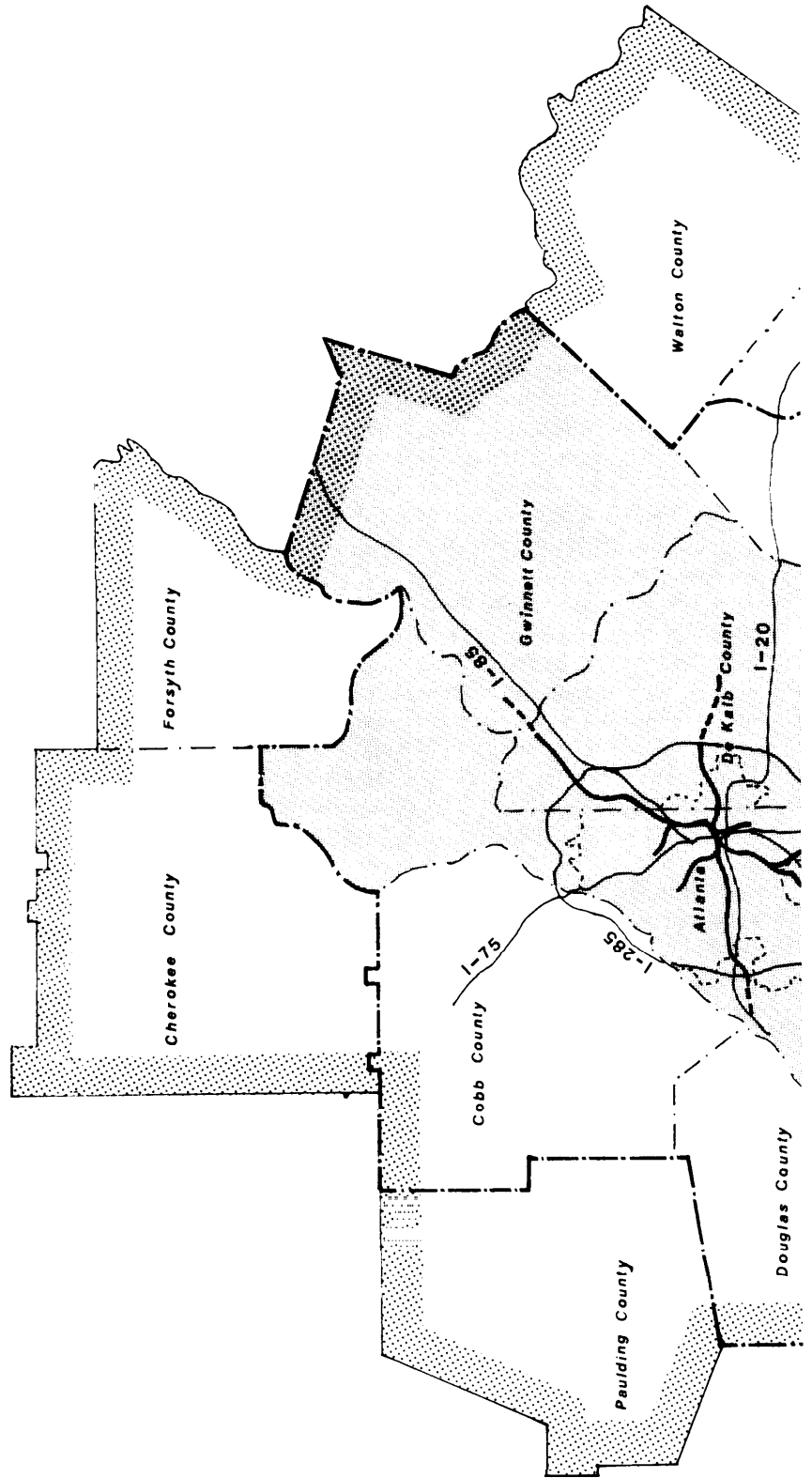
After the referendum defeat, the transit supporters in Atlanta immediately began preparing for 1964, when the transit enabling amendment next would be eligible for the ballot. Within weeks of the referendum vote the Metropolitan Atlanta Transit

Study Commission resolved to form the organization that came to be known as the Rapid Transit Committee of 100. The Committee's members and its 12-person executive committee were appointed from the public by city and county executives. It was conceived as a strategy for financing and publicizing the rapid transit campaign. A full-time public relations staff was hired and a consultant engaged to advise it. Local governments agreed to finance the actual referendum campaign. The committee's executive body included ex-Governor Vandiver as chairman and Planning Commission director Glenn Bennett as secretary. Atlanta Transit System president Robert Somerville also was a member. In the secretarial post Glenn Bennett helped coordinate the civic campaign for transit with the efforts of his regional planning council. The role was familiar to him. Bennett had served as secretary to the Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Study Commission, and he would perform the same function for MARTA in 1966.

In March 1963 the Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Study Commission was dissolved. Soon afterward a second group was created by the legislature called the Georgia State Study Commission. Its 11-person membership included eight State senators and three citizens, among whom were Atlanta Mayor Ivan Allen and ex-Governor Vandiver. The Study Commission reviewed and approved its predecessor's transit plan. It also helped the Chamber of Commerce and the other Atlanta transit supporters convince the entire Georgia delegation to the U.S. Congress to support the UMTA legislation, which finally was enacted in 1964.

The extensive campaigning by regional and local groups led to approval of the second transit enabling referendum in the fall of 1964. Arguments in favor of the measure cited the need to qualify for the limited Federal funds that the new UMTA act would make available and the opportunity for each jurisdiction to withdraw before a transit program would be implemented. Instead of being presented as a statewide issue as in 1962, the proposition appeared on the ballots of only five metropolitan Atlanta counties in 1964. Approval from each county was necessary. It came, but barely. The margin was a slim 403 votes in Cobb County.

The passage of the referendum set the stage in the General Assembly for legislation to create a regional transit authority. As in 1962, the major issues were representation on the governing board



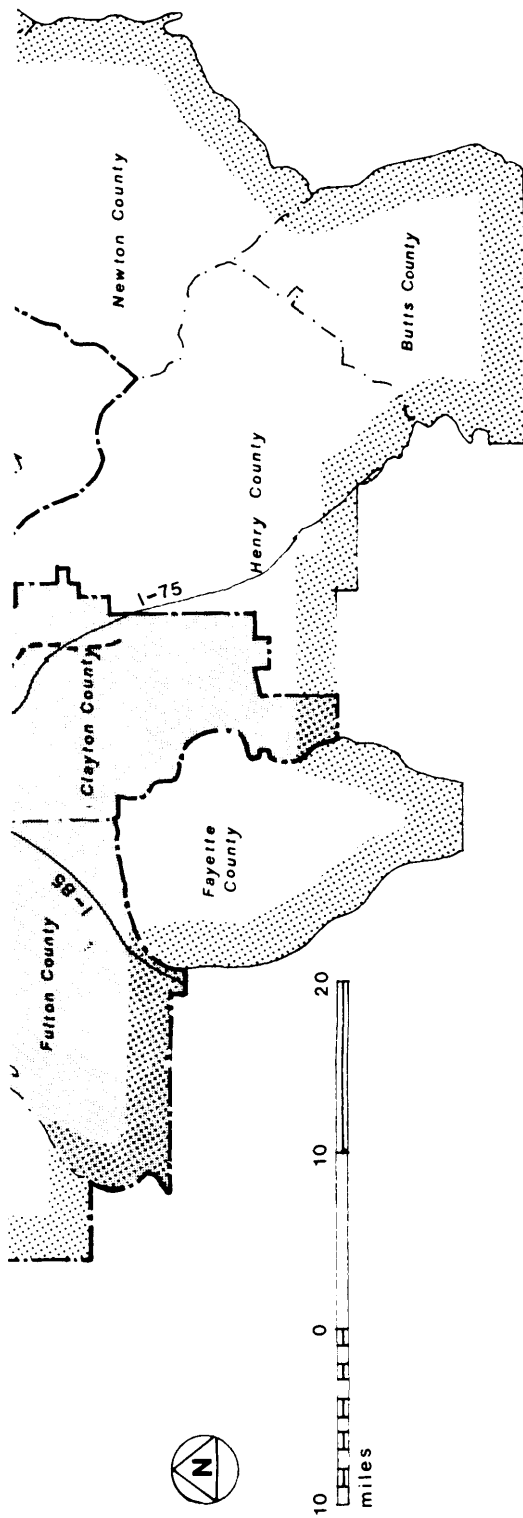



FIGURE 1: ATLANTA METROPOLITAN AREA

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|---|--|---|--|
|  | Atlanta Regional Commission |  | County Boundary |
|  | SMSA Boundary |  | Adopted Rapid Rail System |
|  | Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority |  | Proposed Extensions of Rapid Rail System |

A Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) includes one or more center cities - each with a population of at least 50,000 within its political boundaries -- plus adjacent counties that are metropolitan in character and are economically and socially integrated with the center city.

and the powers local jurisdictions would be willing to give up to the new agency of government. A compromise was reached in which the City of Atlanta relinquished some control on the board but could remain the dominating presence. The agency could sell bonds and operate a transit system but had neither taxing authority nor the power of eminent domain. Under these terms the Assembly approved the MARTA bill in March 1966.

Another referendum was required for counties to ratify participation in the new agency. The Committee of 100 was reconstituted to help the Planning Commission and the Chamber of Commerce with promotion. Voters were reassured that joining MARTA would not entail a long-term financial obligation. The MARTA charter required counties to hold public referenda before they could levy a tax to support a MARTA project. Four counties — De Kalb, Fulton, Clayton and Gwinnett—voted to participate in MARTA. Cobb County was the only jurisdiction to bow out.

The reasons for Cobb county's negative vote in this referendum, as in its 1964 predecessor, foreshadowed some of the objections that would defeat the proposed rapid rail system in 1968. Recent migrants to Cobb County from the city feared that rapid transit would hasten the movement of city blacks into the suburbs. The rural populace expressed a general unwillingness to contribute to a system they felt would not benefit them directly. In addition, there was an ideological conservative objection to what was judged to be excessive governmental spending.

To summarize, three characteristics of the campaign to create MARTA help illuminate subsequent aspects of the transit planning process in Atlanta. First, the need for Federal aid was always in view. The availability of Federal financing is still an issue today. Second, the same nucleus of civic and political leaders shepherded the MARTA proposition from beginning to end. Their support continued to be an important factor in Atlanta's transit planning. Finally, the opposition to MARTA voiced during the mid-60's hinted at problems the transit plan would encounter at the polls in 1968.

DECISION TO REJECT THE RAIL Rapid Transit Proposal in 1968

After MARTA was established, Atlanta could turn its attention once more to technical planning.

⁹Johnson, *op. cit.*

In short order the consultants updated the 1962 plan and adopted a 40-mile system to present at the polls in 1968. However, adverse study findings in addition to shortcomings in MARTA's campaign led to defeat of the MARTA proposal. This section details the events leading up to that defeat.¹⁰

The first task MARTA faced after it was established was a review of the plan developed in 1962 for the Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Study Commission. The Commission had hired the firm of Parsons, Brinkerhoff, Quade and Douglas (PBQD) on the basis of its work for the New York subway system and, in San Francisco, for BART. PBQD prepared a detailed engineering study proposing a 66-mile five-county rapid rail system projected to cost \$292 million. The Stanford Research Institute, also involved in BART planning, followed this study with an implementation strategy.

In 1967 MARTA, working as before through the staff of the Planning Commission, hired Parsons, Brinkerhoff-Tudor-Bechtel to update the 1962 study in light of the Planning Commission's new population and employment forecasts. The PB-T-B consortium had first joined forces as the principal engineering consultants for BART; their work for MARTA was supported by a financial analysis prepared by Hammer, Greene, Siler, Inc.. Few significant changes were made in the alignment and extent of the 1962 transit plan. The most important difference between the 1962 and 1967 proposals was cost. The 1967 report proposed a 54-mile four-county system, 12 miles shorter than its predecessor but some \$190 million more expensive. The addition of an 11-mile segment in Cobb County (which was beyond MARTA's jurisdiction) would have raised the total to over half a billion dollars.

Conservative fears about the cost of the transit proposal were behind a report called *Rapid Busways* that challenged the ARMPC/MARTA plan. The report was commissioned by Robert Somerville of Atlanta Transit System (ATS) and prepared by Simpson & Curtin, the same consultants who developed the ATS 1960 plan, *Rapid Atlanta*. *Rapid Busways* called for a 32-mile network of exclusive busways, at a projected cost of \$52 million, as an "interim" approach to Atlanta's transit needs.

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of these events and the 1968 bond vote, see Transportation Politics in Atlanta: *The Mass Transit Bond Referendum of 1968*, Matthew Coogan et. al., Cambridge, Mass. 1970.

Busways were to be built on existing railroad rights-of-way in a number of MARTA corridors. Although the report did project that the busways could be converted to rapid rail, it built a case for busways as a permanent solution. Some observers speculate that ATS was guarding its own interests in two ways: by asserting the superior service characteristics of busways versus a predominantly rail system, and by arguing for action that would increase its assets in preparation for the inevitable takeover of the private bus company by MARTA.

Regardless of the motives behind the report *Rapid Busways* initiated a substantial controversy. MARTA rejected its conclusions after a hasty 3-week review. In December 1967 a faction of the Board of Aldermen led by conservative Everett Millikin called for a comparative study to lay the issue to rest. Soon afterward, the policy committee of the Atlanta Area Transportation Study, made up of the Georgia State Highway Department, the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Agency, and MARTA, decided to study busways in the context of preparing a balanced, long-range transportation plan for the region.

Pressure from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) was another factor contributing to the decision to begin the multimodal review. One of UMTA'S guidelines for capital grant applicants required transit proposals to be part of long-range, areawide transportation planning covering both transit and highways. The Atlanta Area Transportation Study (AATS) theoretically was responsible for highway-transit coordination, but in fact AATS dealt primarily with highways while MARTA focused exclusively on transit.

To meet the UMTA requirement and to resolve the busway-rail controversy, the AATS policy committee hired Alan M. Voorhees & Associates in February 1968. The Voorhees recommendations were not ready in time for the 1968 referendum, although a preliminary report stated that the annual costs of a rapid rail system and a busways system were not much different. The incomplete status of the Voorhees study was a major plank in the campaign by MARTA critics to defeat the 1968 transit proposal in the referendum.

In the meantime MARTA had published another study, a major analysis of the effects on land use of the creation of a rapid transit system. This study, called *The impact of Rapid Transit on Metropolitan Atlanta*, analyzed the system's effects on community

facilities, the low-income population, displacement of families and businesses, and the existing metropolitan circulation system. The report, the first UMTA-sponsored study of its type, was prepared by Eric Hill Associates of Atlanta and Winston-Salem, N. C., and was released in March 1968.

The transit impact report listed ways MARTA could use its power to bring about a major improvement in the environment of Atlanta. It recommended undertaking a broad analysis of the system's benefits, the preparation of development plans for each of the stations, and close coordination of the rapid transit system planning with the city's urban renewal program. The report also suggested extending the system to serve low-income neighborhoods. The impact study laid the groundwork for the station area development impact studies and plans that began after 1971.

As work progressed on the impact study and the Voorhees transportation study, MARTA took steps toward selecting a system to bring to public referendum. After the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission transmitted the 1967 64-mile system to MARTA, the transit agency chose a 44-mile portion for preliminary engineering. Subsequently, in light of public hearings, the plan was modified and a 40.3-mile system adopted.

The report outlining this 40-mile system was not published until September 1968. At that time, the decision on whether or not to go to the polls was further complicated by a last-minute revision of the financing plan, adjusting cost estimates upward according to a more conservative inflation estimate. This revision combined with disagreements between Atlanta and suburban jurisdictions over apportionment of the costs to delay the formal decision to take the transit proposal to the voters until the beginning of October—little more than a month before election day.

The defeat of the MARTA bond issue by a narrow margin in 1968 involved complex reactions of different political groups. One important element was the decision by local transit unions and labor leaders in general to campaign against MARTA's proposal because it did not cite collective bargaining provisions included in Federal law. In addition, there were other political problems with other groups. Conservatives called the plan fiscally irresponsible. Opposition to the use of the property tax was strong among lower-income as well as

suburban homeowners. Voters in outlying jurisdictions felt that the City of Atlanta would get the lion's share of the benefits from the system. Atlanta's black community complained it had not been involved in the planning and would not receive adequate service. Some analysts also argue that local officials from the metropolitan area were not adequately involved and that the publicity campaign for transit was handled poorly.

The fragmentation of support in City Hall and the Chamber of Commerce had been perhaps the most telling harbinger of the defeat to come. Robert Sommerfield had been solidly behind Atlanta's transit plans prior to commissioning *Rapid Busways*. The dispute created by this report, and the unfinished status of the Voorhees study that was designed to resolve that dispute, raised doubts among some public officials who had once been strong supporters. Alderman Everett Millikin was a member of the early Rapid Transit Steering Committee, but he vigorously opposed the transit proposal in 1968 and financed an advertising campaign against it.¹¹ Perhaps the most critical loss was Ivan Allen, Atlanta's mayor and one of the initiators of rapid transit planning in Atlanta. Allen did not directly oppose the referendum proposition, but his campaigning was unenthusiastic.

MARTA had fared poorly in the General Assembly during this same period. A bill containing a number of amendments to the MARTA Act was tabled in 1967 on the strength of opposition from Fulton County and Atlanta delegates. This "omnibus bill" would have granted to MARTA the power of eminent domain and a range of additional advantages. The bill's foes argued chiefly that MARTA had not included local governments in drafting the proposals.

In trying to rectify this shortcoming in 1968, MARTA found it could not gain Alderman Millikin's support for the omnibus legislation until the eminent domain clause had been withdrawn. Negotiation proved futile; in the end Governor Lester Maddox vetoed the bill on the grounds that it was fiscally irresponsible.

The fact that there was a debate at all in the General Assembly was more important than the arguments that were raised. The publicity helped reinforce the doubts that were already being heard

closer to home and, indirectly, contributed to the defeat of the MARTA proposals in referendum.

DECISION TO APPROVE THE RAPID RAIL TRANSIT PROPOSAL IN 1971

Between 1968 and 1971 MARTA applied some of the lessons of the first referendum failure. Changes in the planning process and the transit program combined with changes in the political context in Atlanta to lead to victory when the transit issue was returned for a new referendum vote in November 1971.

In an important step, MARTA enlisted the support of labor by amending the MARTA legislation with collective bargaining provisions. In addition, Atlanta's Mayor Massell appointed the chairman of the central labor council to be vice chairman of the MARTA board. The conciliations to labor were an important factor in the success of the transit proposal in the 1971 election.

Another significant factor was the strong campaign MARTA mounted to draw both blacks and public officials into the planning process after 1968. A third black was appointed to MARTA's board in 1971, when the replanning program began in earnest. The black representation on the MARTA Citizen Advisory Council also was increased. MARTA conducted special meetings for officials from participating governments. A series of public meetings and hearings also were held to determine community needs and expectations. Some observers have argued that the involvement of citizens and local officials was more cosmetic than substantive, although the meetings did lead to modifications in the proposed system. The new approach achieved MARTA's goal—it helped swing black communities and suburban officials to support of the rapid rail proposal.

MARTA also agreed to improve transit service to black neighborhoods. The Voorhees study for the Atlanta Area Transportation Study concluded that service should be provided to Model Cities housing at Perry Homes via the Proctor Creek spur off the west line. (The Proctor Creek route had first been officially proposed by the impact study in 1968.) The Voorhees cost analysis showed that express bus in the east-west and Proctor Creek corridors would provide equivalent service at a total price somewhat less than rapid rail. However, bus

¹¹ Millikin was a retired oil company executive, and critics alleged his anti MARTA campaign was financed by oil money.

service was widely regarded by the public to be second rate. In the face of charges that it would be providing second-class service for second-class citizens—the blacks and poor—MARTA made a political decision to go to rail in the east-west corridor.¹² PB-T-B's preliminary engineering studies showed that express bus costs would match rail if greater right-of-way and construction standards were assumed. This language was incorporated in the final Voorhees report published in January 1971.

The best selling points in the transit package presented to voters in 1971 were not the rapid rail proposals. The plan called for short-range bus service improvements in addition to the long-range rapid rail scheme. Instead of the unpopular property tax, a sales tax was to be used for financing the local contribution toward the cost of implementing the plan. One of the key provisions in these efforts to get black support for the system despite the regressive character of the sales tax was to peg the fares of the bus system at 15 cents for 7 years.¹³

The 15-cent fare illustrates better than any other part of MARTA's 1971 transit package the changing balance of power within Atlanta's political community. The election of 1969 installed the first mayor in decades who was not part of Atlanta's business-oriented power structure. Sam Massell, the new mayor, was Jewish, and his vice-mayor, Maynard Jackson, was a black. Massell's predecessor, Ivan Allen, had been an important figure in the transit effort since his days as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and his subsequent election to mayor in 1961. As a businessman, Allen had strengthened the base of support for transit by building ties with the business leaders. At the same time, his position among the power elite was reflected in a transit program that alienated the blacks and inner city Atlantans. The new liberal leadership in 1971 backed a transit improvement program tailored to benefit lower-income communities as well as suburban commuters and shoppers, who were the main concerns of the businessmen. As a result, a new list of community organizations joined the

traditional civic groups—the Chamber of Commerce, Central Atlanta Progress, and other business/civic organizations—in support of a rapid rail system for Atlanta.

The plan MARTA sent to the polls in November 1971 showed 56.2 miles of rapid rail routes in four counties and 14.4 miles of dual lane busway. Voters in Clayton and Gwinnett counties defeated the proposition soundly. They may have been reacting to the fact that only 9 miles of the rapid rail transit would have served these two suburban counties. Affluent De Kalb County voted in favor. In Fulton County a recount showed the margin of approval to be a bare 400 votes.¹⁴ It was a narrowly won victory. Had either Fulton or De Kalb county turned the proposition down, the rail transit plan would have been doomed.

The 1971 vote of support represented a triumph for Atlanta city interests. In fact, the way the ballots were tabulated favored the city vote. In 1968 the returns from Fulton and De Kalb counties were counted in three groups: residents of the city proper, residents of Fulton County outside the city, and residents of De Kalb County outside the city. In 1971 the tabulation followed county lines only, and the city vote was counted in the totals for Fulton and De Kalb counties. This accounting allowed yes votes from Atlanta proper, most of which is in Fulton County, to be tabulated against no votes from the suburban part of Fulton County. As it turned out, the change in the tabulation procedure may have been the key to the transit victory. Residents of the older parts of Fulton County outside the center city opposed the issue, while the strongest support came from the city itself.¹⁵

¹⁴ Results of the 1971 transit referendum in Atlanta (prior to the Fulton County recount, which narrowed the margin of victory to 400 votes):

| County | Yes | No | Percent |
|--------------------|--------|--------|---------|
| | | | Yes |
| Fulton | 55,736 | 53,725 | 51 |
| De Kalb | 39,441 | 36,100 | 52 |
| Clayton | 3,300 | 11,147 | 23 |
| Gwinnett | 2,500 | 9,506 | 21 |

Source: Malcolm Getz, *The Incidence of Urban Transit in Atlanta*, UMTA-sponsored urban transportation and urban affairs project, Atlanta University School of Business Administration, 1973.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹² The Proctor "Street line remained a busway proposal until after the 1968 referendum, when public pressure succeeded in convincing MARTA to change to rail.

¹³ The plan permitted fares to be raised 5 cents per year to a X-cent maximum after 7 years. In 1981 the sales tax would drop to ½ cent, and fares would be set at a rate that would cover half of the operating expenses.

PROGRESS TOWARD IMPLEMENTING THE RAPID TRANSIT PLAN

After citizens voted approval in the 1971 referendum, MARTA turned its attention to readying the transit system for construction. In the course of this period of final design, MARTA has experienced a variety of problems, most of which are related to finances and to acceptance of the system plans at the neighborhood level.

Many of the issues have been addressed by the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Overview Committee (MARTOC). MARTOC was created by the Georgia General Assembly in June 1973 to monitor MARTA's fiscal activities. The joint legislative committee has sponsored legislation considered to be in MARTA's interest and thus is an active participant in MARTA matters as well as a relatively objective observer.

The most critical issue facing MARTA involved obtaining the Federal share for construction of the rail transit system. Since the referendum, the construction cost has risen from \$1.3 billion to over \$2 billion as a result of delays and costly additions to the system made since the 1971 vote. The expected figure for Federal assistance has risen with the rise in the estimated cost and as the ceiling on the Federal share went from 66-2/3 percent to 80 percent.

As of now, Atlanta has received \$200 million from UMTA and in May 1975 was promised an additional \$600 million. Although this represents over 10 percent of the total UMTA budget for capital assistance, it is considerably less than the full Federal support Atlanta has counted on since the earliest days of planning, an assumption based on alleged promises from John Volpe while he was Secretary of Transportation. Therefore, many Atlantans have been surprised and distressed at the \$800 million ceiling UMTA has now set; this is enough money to build only 13.7 miles of the proposed 54-mile system approved in referendum in 1971 (assuming an 80 percent Federal-local share ratio). An additional disappointment came on the heels of UMTA'S first announcement when the Federal agency turned down MARTA's request for an extra \$200 million to add 4.7 miles to the 13.7-mile segment.

Publicly MARTA has welcomed the smaller level of Federal aid, saying that half a loaf is better than

none (13.7 miles is slightly more than half the length of the 26-mile system MARTA previously had identified as a core system). MARTA figures that 10 percent of the total UMTA assistance to U.S. cities is a fairly hefty share, even if it will buy only 13.7 miles of rapid transit. However, reaction in Atlanta has been strong. One publisher whose papers strongly supported MARTA in the 1971 referendum said, "I am just discouraged by the slowness and the increased cost. I think a referendum on MARTA today would fail 2 to 1. I feel guilty because [my newspapers] supported MARTA. We would still support it, but we would not take the leading position we did."¹⁶

MARTA's financial woes are compounded by the weakness of its local financing. The revenues from the 1 percent sales tax in the last fiscal year rose less than 1 percent, whereas MARTA had budgeted for a 10 percent increase. And MARTA has hinted that it might be forced to raise the 15-cent bus fare. MARTA's general manager Alan Kiepper said, "If we are faced with a situation where we have to make a choice between reducing service and raising the fare, it would seem to me that the only choice would be to raise the fare."¹⁷

In the meantime, MARTA has been making progress toward construction. Land has been acquired and construction has been scheduled along much of the east-west corridor between Hightower and Avondale. The plans have received a mixed welcome at the neighborhood level. After the referendum MARTA commissioned an assessment of the environmental impact of the rail transit system. Following this step MARTA, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC),¹⁸ and the City of Atlanta began to collaborate on a procedure for making station area development plans. The station area planning process has been more successful at some sites than at others. In some areas citizens have taken MARTA to court to demand environmental impact reviews where station plans have been changed since the referendum.

MARTA hopes to have service on the east line of the rapid rail system by 1979. However, MARTA still faces severe problems ahead as it tries to match inelastic Federal funds with spiraling costs. One current dispute centers around the length of time

¹⁶ "Atlanta's Transit Trauma," *Business Week*, August 18, 1975.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ In 1971 the Atlanta Regional Commission was created to replace the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission.

that transit construction will disrupt traffic on the main business street, Peachtree Street. MARTA always has planned to use a “cut-and-cover” method of construction. There has been an uproar, however, since the business community found that some sections of Peachtree Street would not be covered for up to 2-1/2 years, and therefore would be

closed to business. This issue has not been resolved. MARTA points out that its proposed method is the cheapest available, while some elements of the business community predict widespread bankruptcy of downtown businesses unless an expensive tunneling technique is used instead of cut-and-cover construction.