



*Supporting Quality Public Transit in Atlanta*

## July 2018 Newsletter

[www.cfpt.org](http://www.cfpt.org)

### MARTA TAKES OVER ATLANTA STREETCAR, \$1 FARE WILL CONTINUE

The City of Atlanta officially turned its Edgewood-Auburn streetcar line over to MARTA July 1. But in a last-minute departure from previously announced plans, MARTA's Board of Directors voted to continue the \$1 fare blamed for a deep drop in ridership when it was initiated back in 2016. MARTA Police Chief Wanda Dunham argued that charging a fare makes it easier to prevent loitering on the streetcars, and she promised to step up security. Security, however, isn't the issue hurting streetcar patronage; it's the fact that the current line – basically a 2.7-mile loop between Centennial Olympic Park and the Martin Luther King Jr. Historical District – is too short to justify the \$1 fare. Now that the Atlanta Streetcar is an official part of the MARTA system, the first step toward correcting this problem

should be obvious: streetcar rides should be included in the basic MARTA fare. Riders getting off MARTA trains or buses should be able to transfer to the streetcar to complete their trips without paying another fare, and similarly, riders starting their trips on the streetcar should be able to travel anywhere on the MARTA system without additional expense. After that's taken care of, there's a second step: the streetcar line needs to become part of a longer route. There's hope for that, in the form of a recently proposed blueprint for spending money from the "More MARTA" sales tax. If the current plan wins Atlanta City Council approval, the streetcar will become the center link of a light-rail route stretching from Campbellton Road on the southwest side to Lindbergh Center on the northeast side. CfPT proposes a contraflow system along Edgewood and Auburn avenues to avoid delays on the streetcar portion of the route. With contraflow lanes – already used along short portions of the line (see photo above) -- streetcars operate in one direction, with cars and trucks driving the other way in a separate lane. This is a system that would work well connecting with any of the light-rail routes currently being proposed.



An Atlanta streetcar passes cars heading in the opposite direction on Ellis Street. CfPT recommends similar contraflow systems on Edgewood and Auburn avenues (photo by Lee Biola).

## ARC GRANTS TO EXPAND SUBURBAN BUS SERVICE

Douglas County will get its first fixed-route bus service, and Cobb and Gwinnett counties will be able to expand their current bus systems, thanks to new federal funding awarded by the Atlanta Regional Commission. Douglas County already runs a dial-a-ride service, but \$4.8 million in ARC funds and a \$1.2 million local match will allow the county to operate



regularly scheduled bus service for the first time. Route and schedule plans are still being worked out. Other ARC funding will allow Gwinnett County

Transit to provide every-30-minute service on local bus routes and run weeknight buses until after midnight. And ARC funding also will let Cobb County's CobbLinc establish Sunday service and increase Saturday service. Grants also will help the Xpress regional commuter bus system step up service along I-75 and I-575, and ARC also will participate in funding MARTA's plans for Arterial Rapid Transit bus service on Cascade Road, Cleveland Avenue, Metropolitan Parkway and Peachtree Road. Grants are also going to pedestrian and bicycle projects, including preliminary engineering for two segments of the Atlanta Beltline Trail.

## BOND MONEY TO GO FOR GA 400 BUS SERVICE

Three months after the state legislature approved issuing bonds to raise \$100 million for transit construction, Gov. Nathan Deal announced that the money will be used in north Fulton County, to facilitate MARTA bus service on toll lanes planned for Georgia 400. Four bus-only interchanges will be built along a 16-mile stretch of the highway between the I-285 interchange and Alpharetta. Bus service details have not yet been released, and there's no word yet on exactly where the interchanges will be located.



Gov. Nathan Deal

## MACON TRANSIT SURVIVES FUNDING CUT

Macon Transit's 3,000 daily riders got a huge scare late last month, when the Bibb County Commission cut funding out of its fiscal 2019 budget. There were fears buses might stop rolling when the new fiscal year began July 1, but the transit agency dipped into emergency funds to offer temporary limited service. Amid concerns that an eventual complete shutdown would prevent workers from



getting to jobs and dialysis patients from getting to treatments, the commission relented July 3, approving \$2.3 million in funding. Appropriately enough, the Georgia House panel that laid the groundwork for this year's Atlanta Transit Link legislation is now turning its attention to transit in other parts of the state. Chairman Kevin Tanner (R-Dawsonville) told the Dalton Citizen, "The challenges in rural transit are much different than the challenges in metro transit."



Under the current Gwinnett County transit expansion proposal, MARTA heavy rail service would be extended 11 miles into the country in about 2050 (photo by Jim Dexter).

## A LONGER RUN IN THE LONGER RUN?

Gwinnett County planners have expanded their proposed transit blueprint to include additional heavy rail, but don't expect to be climbing aboard any trains anytime soon. While an earlier version of the plan included a four-mile extension of MARTA's Gold Line to Norcross, the revised plan envisions an additional seven-mile extension beyond Norcross to the Gwinnett Place Mall area.

There's one big hitch: that second expansion wouldn't happen for at least 30 years. And neither the



original plan nor the revised plan have been approved yet. The Gwinnett County Commission is still reviewing its options, but if it had hoped to put a MARTA referendum on the November general election ballot, it appears to be just about out of time. While County Chairman Charlotte Nash says the county could wait until October to act, other readings of the law suggest that after July 9, scheduling a November referendum would be very difficult. Assuming there's no November vote, the county will have to sit tight until after the new ATL transit authority is operating, and that could delay any referendum for one or two years.



**427,000 passengers road state-funded Amtrak trains in North Carolina last year (North Carolina Department of Transportation photo).**

## A FASTER PATH TO REGIONAL RAIL

Georgia transportation planners have long expressed interest in regional passenger rail, but while the Peach State has conducted seemingly never-ending studies on the prospects for high-speed trains, one of our neighbor states has been making more practical progress. North Carolina has launched a fourth daily round-trip on its state-funded Amtrak line running from Charlotte to Raleigh, where trains start stopping this month at a brand-new station. North Carolina has committed itself to an incremental approach toward high-speed rail, by slowly but steadily increasing frequencies and improving infrastructure on an existing 79-mph line. The strategy is paying off. The three round-trips running last year carried 427,000 passengers, suggesting that the fourth round-trip will push ridership above the half-million mark. Georgia's progress has been much less impressive. Back in 2015, the Georgia Department of Transportation issued a report identifying three possible routes for an Atlanta-Charlotte high-speed passenger rail line, and it promised a draft environmental impact statement by the first quarter of 2017. We're now in the third quarter of 2018, but there is no report, and little sign of any progress. If Georgia is really interested in regional passenger rail, it may want to start negotiations with North Carolina about extending at least one of the Raleigh-Charlotte trains to Atlanta.

## ALL STOPS

Chicago has given high-tech innovator Elon Musk the go-ahead to build a high-speed hyperloop subway line that would whisk riders to O'Hare Airport in 18 minutes; critics say the technology is unproven... Connecticut has launched new rail passenger service between New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, MA, with 34 daily trains running at speeds of up to 110 mph... Hopes for Amtrak service between New Orleans and Mobile have been sidetracked, after Mississippi and Alabama decided against providing funds... Preparing for the establishment of the ATL regional transit network, the Xpress commuter bus system will start using Breeze cards next year... After less than a year in the job, Atlanta Beltline CEO Brian McGowan is leaving to take a job in Seattle... The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the death of a maintenance contractor who was struck by a

MARTA train near the Medical Center Station; ironically, the accident occurred just days before MARTA won a Gold Award for Safety from the American Public Transportation Association... Gwinnett County is buying 5.8 acres of land to expand its transit center near Gwinnett Place Mall... Gwinnett County Transit Route 45 buses are now serving Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville... Under an expanded schedule, Savannah's free downtown shuttle buses will operate until midnight Monday through Saturday, and until 9 p.m. on Sunday... The West Japan Railway is launching a "Hello Kitty"-themed bullet train decorated in a pink kittenish motif!

**Citizens for Progressive Transit**

**Box 5366, Atlanta GA 30343**

[info@cfpt.org](mailto:info@cfpt.org)

**Follow us on Twitter and Facebook!**

**For every \$1**   
communities invest in public transportation,  
**approximately \$4**  
is generated in economic returns.

WHERE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION GOES  
**COMMUNITY GROWS**

[publictransportation.org](http://publictransportation.org)