



CHAPTER EIGHT: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT



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In October of 2003, MARTA began an extensive public involvement process designed to raise awareness of the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS project in the community and to create inclusive channels of two-way information exchange between MARTA and citizens. The public process was intended to provide information, generate feedback, and build consensus in the community toward a LPA for the possible expansion of the West Line from the current terminus at Hamilton E. Holmes Station to Fulton Industrial Boulevard. The MARTA West Line AA/DEIS public involvement process was instrumental in shaping the LPA. Feedback gathered throughout the public process had a direct impact on the project goals and objectives, the identification of alternatives considered in the analysis, and the refinement of alternatives that ultimately resulted in the identification of the LPA.

The purpose of this section is to describe the MARTA West Line public involvement process and how the input gathered from outreach activities helped to shape the LPA selection process. The section will specifically address the following topics:

- Outreach techniques;
- Stakeholder perspectives; and
- Impact on the technical evaluation.

For a more detailed look at materials related to the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS public involvement process including meeting and interview proceedings, community and agency participants, survey results, and public comments, see the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS Scoping Summary Document and Appendices dated January 2003.

8.1 Outreach Techniques

A variety of outreach techniques were utilized to generate feedback, facilitate discussion, and build consensus toward a LPA. Descriptions of the techniques utilized are provided in this section. The MARTA West Line Public Involvement Plan dated October 2002 provides additional detail of the overall strategy for encouraging public involvement across all segments of the population.

8.1.1 Stakeholder Interviews

Approximately 60 interviews were conducted with community leaders, elected officials, and business leaders identified as key stakeholders in the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS project during early stages of the study. Interviews were designed to brief stakeholders on the project, identify issues and concerns, and obtain information to make the public involvement process more effective. Common issues and concerns voiced include:

- Keeping the extension away from neighborhoods;
- The need to make special efforts to communicate with seniors in the study area;
- Keeping elected officials and NPU leaders abreast of study updates;
- Utilizing the project as means to stimulate economic development in the corridor and improve access to jobs at Fulton Industrial Boulevard; and
- Coordinating with existing projects.

Overall, the stakeholders were highly supportive of the project. Many believed transit expansion within the corridor was long overdue. Stakeholders expressed the desire to work with the study team to ensure the project is a success.

8.1.2 Corridor Advisory Committee

A Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC) comprised of representatives from businesses, neighborhood groups, and special interest groups in the study area was assembled to advise the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS process by providing feedback at key milestones during the project. The CAC convened five times during the Alternatives Analysis Phase and provided a continuous source of citizen feedback during the study process.



CAC activities included the refinement of project goals and objectives, identification of community resources, and detailed review of technical analysis results. CAC members also assisted in notifying the community of public meetings and project related events. Meetings were held within the study area at the Georgia Department of Transportation Office of Environment and Location at the Fulton County Airport.

8.1.3 Project Advisory Committee

A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of MARTA's federal, state and local planning partners was designed to serve as an advisory body to the technical process. The PAC also served to promote interagency coordination between MARTA and other agencies in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The PAC met 5 times during the alternatives analysis process to review and provide feedback on key technical findings. Meetings were held at offices of MARTA or MARTA's General Planning Consultant, URS Corporation.

8.1.4 Public Meetings

Four rounds of public meetings were held to provide a public information forum and an opportunity to gather feedback from the public. All meetings were publicized in local newspapers, the MARTA Website, flyers distributed in the study area, and mailed to individuals on the project database. Each round of meetings is described below:



First Round

The initial round of public meetings consisted of three meetings conducted on November 19th and November 21, 2002. In an effort to accommodate variety in schedules, evening meetings were held on two different





weeknights and a daytime meeting was held in order to reach the business population and large employment base on Fulton Industrial Boulevard. In an effort to ensure an opportunity for input across the study area, the meetings were held in 2 different locations.

This round of meetings was conducted to explain the history of the study, introduce the study process and schedule and discuss major outreach activities in which the public can participate. Each meeting was conducted in an open house format with a brief presentation and question and answer period. Material was presented in accordance with federal requirements for the NEPA Scoping Process. Citizens were afforded the opportunity to submit written comments at the meeting and via e-mail or fax. The intent of the meeting was also to gather community input on project goals and objectives, and to begin the development and refinement of alternatives. The audience was introduced to the evaluation methodology and encouraged to comment on the process.

Second Round

The second round of 3 public meetings took place on February 11 and 13, 2003. One daytime meeting and two evening meetings were held at 2 different locations in the study area. The goal of the second round of MARTA West Line AA/DEIS public meetings was to move toward community consensus on a locally preferred alternative by gathering feedback regarding important community resources, potential alignments, and potential station locations. Meetings were held in an open house format made up of five display stations designed to provide information and encourage public feedback. An interactive station was included to solicit citizen input on the general alignment of alternatives. Citizens were given markers and a study area map and instructed to draw the route they believed was best for the transit alternative. This information was later used to help identify additional alternatives.

Third Round

A third round of public meetings was conducted on March 11 and 13, 2003. A series of 3 meetings, 2 evening meetings and 1 daytime meeting, were held to address a variety of study area residents. The March 11, 2003 evening meeting was held in partnership with NPU-H, the City of Atlanta Neighborhood Planning Unit responsible for a portion of the West Line Study Area. As a response to feedback received during the second round of meetings, meetings included both a formal presentation and an open house of 6 stations. The purpose of the third round of meetings was to report on public outreach and input to date, present information on technologies and alignments, receive input from the community, and explain the detailed evaluation process. More than 200 citizens attended the 3 meetings.

Fourth Round

The fourth round of meetings were held on May 13, 2003. One daytime and 1 evening meeting were conducted to allow both employees and residents the opportunity to hear study updates and ask questions. The meetings began with an open house format followed by a presentation and question and answer period. The meetings were primarily intended to introduce and gather feedback on the remaining alternatives and present evaluation results. Generally, the combined alternative was well received. Meeting attendees did express concerns regarding station designs, pedestrian connectivity, community and business impacts, and parking. Approximately 120 people attended the 2 meetings.

8.1.5 Leadership Briefings

Two leadership briefings were convened during the course of the study to bring together key study area leadership, including business leaders, community leaders, and elected officials. Briefings were designed to provide a project status update and to create a forum for informal discussions between parties with differing stakeholder perspectives. This type of exchange provided positive movement toward consensus on community needs, concerns and eventually on the LPA by facilitating an informational exchange of perspectives between groups that had not come into contact at other points during the study.

8.1.6 Speaker's Bureau

Project staff attended meetings and responded to requests for presentations or special meetings regarding the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS for interested community and business groups within the study area. The meetings were specifically centered around issues and concerns pertaining to a particular area. The meetings were generally informal with a brief discussion about the study process and a small number of display boards presenting significant study area information. Approximately 35 meetings were conducted.



8.1.7 Information Kiosks

Informational displays staffed by project team members were used at several points in the study process to provide information and gather feedback. In January of 2003, a kiosk was used to gather public input at Hamilton E. Holmes MARTA Station during peak travel times. The Station kiosks included a survey designed to gauge public sentiment towards the potential expansion of the MARTA West Line. In early March of 2003, informational kiosks were staffed on senior citizens day and over the weekend at 2 neighborhood grocery stores in order to publicize the third round of public meetings and encourage participation in the public process. Kiosks were also used in conjunction with the display of the Civis bus (IRISbus Technology) within the study area in order to educate residents on BRT technology.

8.1.8 Website

The MARTA website (www.itsmarta.com) provided information to the public regarding the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS study including project documentation and upcoming meeting dates. The public could also submit comments by sending an email to westline.comments@itsmarta.com.

8.1.9 Hotline

A project hotline was established at (404) 589-9101. The hotline was available to anyone with access to a telephone and provided an opportunity to receive general information, make comments or ask questions regarding the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS. The project hotline was staffed by an answering service with basic project information, including the dates, times and locations of public meetings. The hotline number was included on all project documentation distributed to the public including meeting flyers, fact sheets and newsletters.

8.1.10 Newsletters/Fact Sheets

A Scoping Information Booklet, Project Newsletters, and Project Fact Sheets were produced and distributed to provide information and build community awareness of the study. A project database and mailing list with an initial 700 names grew in excess of 1,000 names during the course of the project. The mailing list received project newsletters, as well as flyers publicizing upcoming events.



8.2 Stakeholder Perspectives

Feedback collected during the public involvement process represented varied stakeholder interests including elected officials, special interest groups, the business community, senior citizens, current transit system users, and neighborhood residents and groups. Input received from the business community focused on the project goals of job access and economic development and reflected support for heavy rail alternatives. Current transit system users supported the extension of the MARTA West Line and felt the project would improve mobility and help to encourage reinvestment in the community.

Generally, community residents expressed concern regarding impacts to neighborhoods. Concern came from a number of groups regarding the potential displacement of senior citizens who may own their homes and do not see a direct benefit from the project. Many stakeholders also expressed concern that the project might benefit residents in non-MARTA counties.

8.3 Impact on the Technical Evaluation

Information gathered during the various stages of public outreach helped to guide the technical evaluation process by offering perspectives on which evaluation measures were most important to the members of the public. The most notable impacts of public involvement on the alternative selection process were in the areas of goals and objectives, identification of alternatives, and refinement of alternatives.

8.3.1 Goals and Objectives

The community identified the goals and objectives of the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS in the initial stages of the study process. Due to public feedback and established priorities, measures developed for the basic technical screening process reflected a natural weighting toward economic development and community preservation related measures. Of the 14 measures developed for the basic screening analysis, 8 were related to economic development and community preservation, while 6 addressed mobility and cost. This weighting had a direct influence on which alternatives scored high enough in technical analysis to move forward into the detailed screening and which fell out of the analysis early. The proposed Southern Corridor was eliminated from further review early in the process due to the number of potential impacts it posed to the community.

8.3.2 Identification of Alternatives

During the stakeholder interviews conducted at project outset, several key stakeholders and public officials suggested the I-20 corridor as a potential alternative for consideration in the study. Previous West Line studies had not considered an alternative of this nature. The I-20 corridor was added as the northern corridor and advanced into the final stages of technical analysis.

Additionally, discussions with the CAC raised the possibility of an alternative that relocated the existing Hamilton E. Holmes Station to the north side of I-20 in order to avoid potential community impacts created by extending rail from the existing Hamilton E. Holmes Station into the I-20 corridor. This alternative was added into the basic screening process for technical consideration as a result of public feedback.

8.3.3 Refinement of Alternatives

The public was instrumental in refining alternatives for the MARTA West Line AA/DEIS detailed screening process. Public input helped to develop sub-alternatives during concept engineering and the detailed screening process.

The combined BRT/HRT alternative to be introduced in Chapter 9, was also developed as a response to public input. This alternative balances concerns of the business community and existing riders regarding economic development and job access, with the main concern of neighborhood residents which is to minimize impacts. The BRT along I-20 provides significant improvements in access to jobs along Fulton Industrial Boulevard while bypassing residential neighborhoods, due to its utilization of an existing transportation corridor. Similarly a truncated HRT alternative along the CSX rail line and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive would improve access to transit for existing riders and provide economic development potential with even less impacts than it already presented as the alternative with the least neighborhood impacts. The resulting combination does not have any impacts on single-family residences, a main concern of local residents and neighborhood groups.