



DeKalb County Government

1300 Commerce Drive
Decatur, Georgia 30030

Minutes

PWI-Public Works & Infrastructure Committee

Tuesday, September 28, 2021

2:00 PM

Special Called Meeting

*This meeting will be conducted via teleconference (Zoom). Simultaneous public access to the meeting will be available
(1) via live stream on DCTV's webpage,
(2) on DCTVChannel23.TV*

Meeting Started At: 2:00 PM

Attendees: Commissioner Cochran-Johnson, Patrick, Terry, Davis Johnson, Bradshaw, Rader

Present 3 - Commissioner Lorraine Cochran-Johnson, Commissioner Robert Patrick, and Commissioner Ted Terry

I. DISCUSSION

County Rail Improvements

Proposals for Rail in DeKalb

-Information presented by Jeffery Parker, Manjeet Ranu of MARTA and Grady Smith, MARTA Consultant

-Parker: We are going to cover Updates to Federal Transportation Funding, summary of projects we've agreed to through the 15th amendment, which enacts the one cent sales tax, Mr. Grady will go over 1-20 East Rail Alternatives. What we are hoping for is a transportation reauthorization bill and supplemental infrastructure funding. HR 3684 provides 4.68 Billion per year under the FAST ACT, includes advance appropriations through Federal FY2026, vote for this bill is expected this Thursday (9/30/2021), we are hoping this funding will help provide additional funding to our larger projects under the 15th Amendment.

Grady: We are expecting a lot of changes in the 1-20 east corridor, we expect trends of population, in terms of gentrification, median income likely to increase. Stonecrest has become the largest city of jurisdiction in DeKalb County, We want to align transit development with the county's economic development projects

Since 2000 there have been a significant amount of study activity in the area, highlighting 2000 South DeKalb/Lindbergh Corridor Investment study, 2004 1-20 East corridor Study, 2012 1-20 East Transit initiative and locally preferred alternative, 2019 1-20 East TOD Strategic plan and development of Transit Master Plan (2018-2019) and different investment opportunities with half a cent and one cent sales tax.

-Question Cochran-Johnson: As it relates to HB930, does that bill not give DeKalb County the authority to leverage the referendum and control and create programs for the development of it's own rail?

-Smith: That is correct, there are two parts, yes the county has the authority to leverage up to a full penny of sales tax which could be used to build out a transit system and secondly, if the project is heavy rail transit Cochran-Johnson: Thank you for that response I want to recognize Congressman Hank Johnson has joined us

Federal Transportation Funding

-Overview of information presented by Congressman Hank Johnson:

-Congressman Johnson: I want to give you all a brief update on my thinking about building heavy rail in south DeKalb. We've been paying sales tax since 1979 to support MARTA and since then there has been no real progress. I support expanding MARTA's heavy rail transit in our Community, to help reduce pollution and the emission of greenhouse gasses. Heavy rail is also necessary can help support people have access to jobs and essential services.

The Biden administration has shifted invested priorities from roads to public transition including biking and passenger rail. This includes increasing the federal share on projects, if this bill become law communities like south DeKalb could be exposed to billions of federal funds for new transit, this includes investment for capital investment grants including the 1 trillion dollar infrastructure bill and Build Back Better which is 3.5 Trillion. Bipartisan bill includes 6.4 billion in carbon reduction and 250 million for congestion relief programs, alone could provide Georgia with 210 Billion between FY22 through FY26 and 7.5 billion local and regional assistance program.

-Question Cochran-Johnson: This is going to take a unified effort, I'm asking the administration have we updated our tags and our codes, are they in progress by the Administration, where are we to make this application to use ARP funds discussed today

-COO Williams: We have not sought any additional allocations, we have had conversations with Congressman Johnson's office any others were other funding points have been identified

-Question Cochran-Johnson: when you say not made applications beyond those familiar with, are you referring to the 15th amendment by MARTA and the expansion of Transit hubs?

COO Williams: The transit hubs, as part of the Transit Master Plan, have been approved by the board, in regards to seeking additional funds there have not been any applications for additional funds, I'm not sure if any have become available.

-Question Cochran-Johnson: Congressman Johnson, do we have the ability to make an application to additional funds or is this a period of preparation?

- Congressman Johnson: I don't believe ARP Funds can be used about the topics spoken about today, in order to this begin the first step is an update to the locally preferred alternative, once the process does start it will take somewhere between 12-18 months to conclude. When that is under process we will need DeKalb County to advocate that heavy rail to Stonecrest is the locally preferred project.
- Question Cochran-Johnson: Most areas have been moving to light rail because of costs, but I am not married to either, Can anyone shed light on which option best?
- Jeffery Parker: One thing that is key is we need to have our local funding sources in alignment with our needs and that will put us in a position to better seek federal fund. What I'd like to offer to the group, MARTA is advancing our study that will lead to a locally preferred alternative, in conjunction with the administration and the congressman, we can layout all funding sources. Chairwoman, you asked, what is the best alternative, that is what our current study is looking at, study the options, make a recommendation and layout how we came to our decision.
- Question Cochran-Johnson: regarding the light verse heavy rail, Mr. Williams from the side of the administration, has any of those discussions begun? Where are we if anywhere in this determination?
- Parker: Regarding advancing the preferred local alternative Manjeet Ranu will be responsible for delivering that, when we executed the 15th amendment, one thing we identified and agreed too is advancing the early phases of DeKalb transit plan. We are committed to assisting and the County on the Plan/Projects you have identified forward from concepts to early phases of planning. Manjeet will be hiring a consultant who will ultimately deliver to MARTA and the County which will be presented to the MARTA Board as the locally preferred alternative.
- Question Cochran-Johnson: Is there a timeline?
- Ranu: the process is 12-18 months beginning at the new year, we have to develop a scope of work. I anticipate a highly public process with public engagement and stakeholders.
- Question Terry: I want to clarify, the timeline for completing the study was 12-18 months?
- Cochran-Johnson: That is correct, as of January 2022,
- Question Terry: The Congressman is urging us to move forward if the Build Back Agenda Passes but what I'm also hearing is we can't move forward until our plan is developed, which would push us back to 2024, is that correct?
- Cochran-Johnson: There are two separate processes that work together when completed to move us forward
- COO Williams: As relates to transit master plan, that was approved and adopted by the board in fall of 2019, what is showed was several local preferred alternatives but not one is voted on indivual. I think what the conversation is evolving too is we have reason to anticipate additional funding will become available. Local Funds, as Parker discussed that needs to be put into context that the playing field has shifted to the better. There will need to be some level matching funds, but the work that needs to be done is updating locally preferred alternatives discussion within the scope of available funds
- Congressman Johnson: Yes, we are in the process of voting it will probably be less than 3.5 trillion. We need to see the soft infrastructure bill approved to our programs, regarding Commissioner Terry Question, as MARTA goes through its process to determine the local preferred alternative, DeKalb County will be updating its Transit Master plan, working with ARC and ATL.
- Terry: I'm still unclear of where we are going, I get nervous when administrations say "We can talk about it later", this is the first meeting I've heard regarding this discussion. I really don't like the precedent of having secret meetings with certain Commissioners with the exclusion of others; I wish there was more transparency as to where we are at. We need to pass the full penny referendum on the ballot. If we delay we will miss this opportunity for funding.
- Cochran-Johnson: Let me just say, I was the only commissioner here to vote against the 15th amendment because I believe we needed to go back to the original agreement to move forward. - I agree with you we need to be forthright and transparent, that is why I brought this discussion to committee. Two things have to happen simultaneously, we are in control of the Transit Master Plan and We've agreed that the preferred alternative would be derived by MARTA.
- COO Williams: Based on my conversations with the CEO he would want what is occurring today, a briefing of options and input, to help frame the discussion but it is time for us to determine the preferred alternative
- Cochran-Johnson: I would think once we have a locally preferred alternative and have an update of the transit master plan the body would make an informed decision
- Parker: I want to add just a couple of things. The decision to have a referendum is absolutely a political decision, MARTA supports the County making that decision, if it passes, that money is in control of the County and what we would want to do is go into an agreement between MARTA and the County on how to execute and delivery transit projects. A referenced would not be viewed as the existing one cent sales tax, we would have to produce a specific agreement for that funding source.

-Two things MARTA needs is consensus on the project so we can go to the FDA with our study and determination. We need to be able to tell the FDA there is a reasonable financial plan for the project. The bill expected to pass this week is a six year period to access those funds. Timing is critical but we don't have to have the solution today.

-Cochran-Johnson: You've made two things clear, out of that penny the cost of administration and good repair, I think as a body we have to move forward on research necessary for the locally preferred alternative. I have some concerns of your control of the study but I think that merits additional discussion.

-Terry: I think there are several 'what ifs' still involved regarding this funding. However, transit is the equitable investment of our generation, so if we are serious about equity we won't marry ourselves to having everything exactly accurate, we can decide as BOC, after this referendum in 2022 to implement on our own the LPA the Master Plan without committing ourselves to spending it. We do not have to have a perfectly laid out plan. I disagree with the administration kicking this can down the road.

-Cochran-Johnson: I agree with your sentiments but where I differ is because of our previous experience with MARTA we need to have a very firm plan.

-Davis-Johnson: I do want to identify additional funding from other programs, I would like to yield my time to Scott Goldstein, Congressman Johnsons COS

Goldstein: Thank you, to reiterate some additional sources, there is the Capital Investment Grant, Carbon Reduction formula program, Climate Challenge incentive Grant and a congestion program, these can supplement federal investment grant. Congressman Johnson: I just want to clarify there have been no secret meetings, I've met with Commissioner Larry Johnson and CEO this issue early on, then this meeting. It would probably be premature to do a referendum at this time not knowing the results of the processes and the local preferred alternative as well as the amendment to the mast plan .

Patrick: I wanted to say thank you to Congressman Johnson , I believe these discussions regarding I-20 are critical. My suggestion would be to involve congresswoman McBath in these conversations as well.

-Congressman Johnson: May I weight in I just saw the proposed redistricting map from the Senate that takes in the part of DeKalb in the 6th district to the 5th.

Cochran-Johnson: Thank you all for your time, I am going to schedule another special call meeting to continue this discussion.

Meeting Ended At: 3:40 PM

MOTION was made by Robert Patrick, seconded by Ted Terry, that this agenda item be adjourned meeting. The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 3 - Commissioner Cochran-Johnson, Commissioner Patrick, and Commissioner Terry

Barbara H. Sanders-Norwood CCC, CMC