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**Work Session Meeting of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on Tuesday, October 1, 2013, at 7:27 p.m., Mayor Eva Galambos presiding.**

**Councilmembers present:** Councilmember John Paulson, Councilmember Dianne Fries, Councilmember Chip Collins, Councilmember Gabriel Sterling, Councilmember Tibby DeJulio, and Councilmember Karen Meinzen McEnery.

**STAFF DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**Public Works**

1. MARTA Connect 400 – GA 400 Transit Initiative Presentation

**Transportation Planner Kristen Westcott** stated there are representatives from MARTA in attendance this evening to discuss the MARTA Connect 400 study. The study, which was initiated in late 2011, investigates extending the MARTA Redline north. In August 2013, there was early scoping notification in the federal register. There currently is a public comment period that will be finished at the end of October. Last week a public information meeting was held in Alpharetta. In attendance this evening are: Leeshu Kennedy, MARTA Government Affairs Officer; Janide Sidifall, Project Manager for the Connect 400 Study; and Cheryl L. King, AICP, Assistant General Manager.

**Janide Sidifall, Project Manager for Connect 400 Study**, thanked the Mayor and Council for their time and attention regarding possible plans in the GA 400 corridor. The meeting in Alpharetta last week had standing room only with about 150 people in attendance. Last night she presented this plan to the City of Roswell. The GA 400 Transit Initiative presentation is one of four initiatives that MARTA is conducting. One of the others is the I-20 east corridor and another is in the Clifton corridor. Both of those initiatives have locally preferred alternatives. MARTA is now trying to determine what the locally preferred alternatives will be for GA 400. She will present where MARTA is with the study, what has been heard when speaking to the various communities, how the alternatives have been evaluated, and where the plan may go from here. The Connect 400 study was intended to evaluate the feasibility of increased transit service in the GA 400 corridor. There are various options to extend from the current North Springs MARTA station up to Windward Parkway. This study was performed in 2003, but at that time the regional model showed that the land uses, density, and current patterns were not very transit supportive. Since the last study there have been demographic changes, mixed used developments implemented and planned, and a dramatic increase in employment in the corridor. With a planning horizon of thirty years to 2040, if the trends continue, there will be the makings of a good solid high capacity investment. In 2011, an existing conditions assessment was done that looked at current land uses and demographics and development patterns. Goals, objectives, and a purpose and need were developed to drive the project. Goals and objectives were developed to achieve that purpose and need along with performance measures. MARTA discussed the alternatives with stakeholders and the public. The alternatives include about twenty different ways to get from the North Springs station to Windward Parkway. These options were narrowed down to what is in the presentation this evening. The plan is now in the early scoping stage, which is a new element for federal planning. This stage allows for earlier input into the refinement of alternatives and the decision for a locally preferred alternative. Information will be gathered before a recommendation is made to the MARTA board. Stakeholder interviews were held with all elected officials, and a technical advisory committee was developed along with a stakeholder advisory committee. There was also a project steering committee that provides guidance. Meetings were held with these various groups along with public meetings. There was also outreach to the minority groups in the corridor. Over the December 2012 holiday period a survey was conducted. A more formalized statistically valid survey will be done as part of the early scoping exercise. What was heard at the meetings was concern for the lack of transportation funding. There is acknowledgement of the need for

“last mile” circulation, which includes the amenities that support and connect to the high capacity transit investment. There is a need for a feeder system to the 400 transit. There is not only a lot of north/south traffic, but also east/west traffic. The questions are how the east/west commutes could be feed into the north/south transit investment. The public desires to preserve the visual aesthetics of the area. There is no reverse commute on GA 400, so the traffic is bad no matter what time of day it is. The public prefers the GA 400 corridor for the alignment. Some other alignments that were looked at were along State Route 9. Constraints of historical properties and narrow right-of-ways are challenges along State Route 9. Due to the challenges, GA 400 is the best option for heavy rail transit implementation. She referenced one alternative alignment that would extend from the North Springs MARTA station to Windward Parkway. The three technology options are bus rapid transit, light rail transit, and heavy rail transit. For the light rail and bus rapid transit options, there is consideration for adding six stations. This includes a station at Old Milton Parkway. Currently, for the heavy rail option, no station is being looked at, but the community wants to have a station at Old Milton, so that is now being considered. For the Sandy Springs area there is a potential for stations at Northridge Road, Holcomb Bridge, Mansell Road, North Point Parkway, and Windward Parkway.

**Councilmember Karen Meinzen McEnerny** asked what type of station is anticipated at Northridge.

Ms. Sidifall stated any of the three options would have a station at Northridge. This plan is at a very high conceptual level. When she references a station location, she is speaking in the general area of that location. Once a locally preferred alternative is chosen, MARTA will work with community planning and public works to determine where the community would most like to see the station located. MARTA is considering the southeast quadrant of Northridge near Roberts Drive. This would be a community type station which would have a smaller footprint. The proposed station would be something citizens could drive, walk, or bike to.

Councilmember Meinzen McEnerny stated one of the Councilmembers lives right near Northridge Road.

Ms. Sidifall stated the Northridge station would be a community type station. The alignment would be on the east side of GA 400. The alignment may have to be refined when moving forward into the environmental, preliminary engineering and final design. Currently, the North Springs station is on the east side and the proposed plan would continue the transit line up the east side of GA 400. The evaluation of alternatives summary results in terms of mobility and access goal is that HRT provides greater ridership. The details are included in the newsletter that was given to Council. The HRT option provides about 22,000 daily boardings. In terms of the ridership numbers, HRT performs the best. In term of transit benefits and reduction in vehicular traffic it performs the best. In terms of land use and economic development, all three alternatives perform basically the same, although light rail out performs slightly. For cost effective service, the BRT is much cheaper at \$460 million where the heavy rail option costs about \$1.6 billion and the light rail cost is at \$1.8 billion. The cost difference in heavy and light rail is due to the introduction of new technology. This would require new vehicles and a maintenance facility to be built. She referenced the second page of the newsletter where the performance measures of each transit option have been included. For the environment/community impact, the HRT presents the least environmental impact and provides the most benefits in terms of reducing vehicle miles travelled and air pollutants. Whichever option is looked at will be in the GA 400 right-of-way. MARTA has been working closely with GDOT as this and other studies have been conducted. MARTA has an agreement with GDOT to where they will accommodate a transit investment within their right-of-ways. GDOT has agreed to give MARTA 60-80 feet of right-of-way where possible. The next step includes more discussions from the community and extending the early scoping further than October 28<sup>th</sup> until the end of the year. Part of the efforts will also include a statistically valid survey to get a good sampling of the options across the entire corridor. A recommendation will be made to the MARTA board before moving into the environmental review phase.

**Councilmember John Paulson** stated he spent over two years in 1988 and 1989 on a committee with MARTA looking at this exact same proposed plan of the rail extending along the east side of GA 400. There is a school along the east side and an office building at Northridge and Roberts Drive. All of the east side of GA 400 is residential and the one office building is the only commercial building on the east side highway. He is against extending the transit up the east side of GA 400 and his neighbors are also against it. The decision in 1988 was to extend the rail across to the west side of GA 400, where there is more commercial property south of Spalding Drive. By doing this it will avoid the school and the National Park. That report seems to have been misplaced. A lot of effort was put into that report and it seems as if it has been ignored looking at this proposed plan twenty-five years later. The west side route for the transit is the preferred route due to it being less intrusive and less of an impact. One of the challenges with the Northridge intersection is there is no way to get there. Northridge Road ends at Roswell Road to the west and ends at Roberts Drive to the east. This as a feeder location would be a nightmare. A bridge is being installed at Northridge Road to improve traffic in the area, but fundamentally there is not enough room in that area. To attract more traffic to Northridge Road and GA 400 does not make any sense.

Ms. Sidifall asked what Councilmember Paulson thinks about a station being located at Northridge Road versus Pitts Road. The Pitts Road location is another area that was looked at.

Councilmember Paulson stated there is some land at Pitts Road, but he is not sure a station located at Pitts would be easier for drivers to access. A station at this location may attract citizens from Spalding Drive, since Spalding is not that far. Spalding runs east west for some distance, as opposed to Northridge.

Councilmember Meinzen McEnery stated the Pitts station would be convenient to Roswell Road on the west side.

Councilmember Paulson stated the extended transit cannot go on the east side of GA400, but instead should be located on the west side. He likes the idea of rapid transit extending further north from this area. Northridge is a tough intersection and that location would be very close to the current North Springs station. If a station is not located at Northridge or Pitts, the next station would be at Holcomb Bridge. One issue travelling from north to south is there are too many stops and the riders have to get across the river. There is a huge MARTA parking lot north of the river that is on the west side. That would be a great place for something of this nature.

**Mayor Eva Galambos** stated that many MARTA stations are not needed.

Ms. Sidifall asked if the Northridge station was eliminated from the plan, would Council agree to that.

There was a consensus of Council to eliminate the Northridge station from the proposed plan.

**Councilmember Dianne Fries** stated the tough thing is getting across the river. The next station should be on the other side of the river. Using the parking lot at Mansell Road makes sense.

Mayor Galambos asked where the money would come from to fund this project.

Ms. Sidifall stated MARTA is working on securing the funds. Concurrently with this proposed plan MARTA is doing a financial planning exercise to look at various options. MARTA could probably qualify for "New Starts", which would give MARTA up to 50% of the funds needed for the project. New Starts funding is federal money that funds transit projects.

Mayor Galambos asked if those funds were included in the federal budget cut.

Ms. Sidifall stated the federal funds are pretty competitive, but MARTA has a two year bill. Hopefully, with the next two year bill there will be increased funding.

**Councilmember Tibby DeJulio** asked what the cost of the system is.

Ms. Sidifall stated depending on the technology, the cost ranges from \$460 million to \$1.8 billion. MARTA is working on identifying what the new sources of funding could be. The next step would be to start discussions with local governments, the business community, the private sector, and the State on how to proceed.

**Councilmember Chip Collins** stated the cost was just reduced by eliminating a station.

Ms. Sidifall stated MARTA cannot receive an environmental document without a financial plan.

Mayor Galambos asked if there is enough density for heavy rail.

Ms. Sidifall stated looking at the current situation, maybe not right now. The trends show there is more employment and activity being attracted to the corridor. The trend is employment growth will outpace population growth. We need to think of ways to get people out of their automobiles.

Councilmember Meinzen McEnery stated she agrees that Northridge on the east side is not an acceptable area for the station to be located for all the reasons listed, but the City would be giving up a huge tax base for the future if the City decided not to have a MARTA station on the west side of GA 400. One of MARTA's themes is transit oriented development. There could be a Hammond Drive/GA 400 type density at Northridge on the west side. She would not give up the wonderful opportunity to expand the Perimeter Center area which would help the community, if it were not too high density.

Ms. Sidifall stated density would be defined at the local level and not up to MARTA to determine the City's density level. MARTA will be working on this plan very closely with the local government.

Councilmember Sterling stated under the existing conditions Northridge does not make sense, but it could make sense on the west side twenty years from now.

Councilmember Fries stated Councilmember Sterling is correct, but also the City's Comprehensive Land Use Plan needs to be used.

Councilmember Sterling stated this all goes into the land use planning part of the project and the funding. He spoke to GRTA this morning at the PCID event and he is very excited about the new GRTA Manager Keith Parker who is doing very good things. He thanked Ms. Sidifall for the work on the proposed plan.

Councilmember DeJulio stated the chart shows the cost per transit trip is \$8 to \$22. He asked if every time he takes MARTA to the airport from his office it costs MARTA \$22 to get him there.

Ms. Sidifall stated that amount is pretty accurate. There is no transit authority that makes money. Transit is not in the business of making money.

Councilmember DeJulio asked if MARTA is losing \$11.50 every time he goes to the airport.

Ms. Sidifall stated these amounts are estimates that are based on a formula that FTA uses for this type of planning and not necessarily for actual operations.

Councilmember Sterling stated he hopes that MARTA moves to variable rate pricing. When he lived in Washington, D.C. taking mass transit for two stops cost a customer \$1.25. Traveling from Maryland to Virginia the cost was \$8.

Ms. Sidifall stated this initiative is not underway, but is something that is on the table and something that MARTA is looking at.

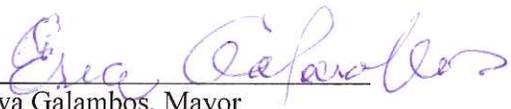
Mayor Galambos stated this is something the Sandy Springs community has advocated for.

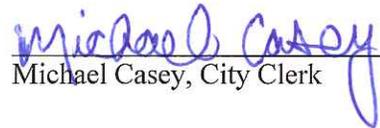
Ms. Sidifall stated MARTA is considering this very cautiously, because, as with most things, there are advantages and disadvantages. The last thing MARTA wants to do is implement something that hurts ridership.

Mayor Galambos thanked Ms. Sidifall for the presentation.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Date Approved: October 15, 2013

  
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Eva Galambos, Mayor

  
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Michael Casey, City Clerk